

The Blue Cultural Fix: Water-Spirits and World-Ecology in Jorge Amado's *Mar Morto* and Pepetela's *O Desejo de Kianda*

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Abstract: Putting Blue Humanities scholarship in critical dialogue with recent research on the 'cultural fix' and 'fixed labour-power', this article offers a comparative reading of two Portuguese-language novels in which the figure of the female water-spirit features as an index for two contrasting modes of knowing the ocean. In Jorge Amado's *Mar Morto* (1936), the water-spirit is registered as a passive and incomprehensible extra-human entity that looms over the poverty of the text's working-class community of dockworkers with an ominous and mysterious edge. By contrast, the water-spirit in Pepetela's novel *O Desejo de Kianda* (1995) is angry, active and only too immediate, seeking revenge for the extractivist violence carried out in the name of neoliberalism. Activating a broadly hydro-materialist framework, I argue that these differing conceptions of the water-spirit carry with them very different socio-ecological implications, and directly intersect with contemporary debates over hydrological crisis, the privatisation of the oceans and the enclosure of the water commons.

Keywords: world literature; world-ecology; blue humanities; cultural fix; Jorge Amado; Pepetela

1. Introduction

This article takes its point of departure from recent developments in world-literary studies that propose to read world literature under the sign of the capitalist world-ecology. 'World-ecology' is a term associated with the work of environmental historian Jason W. Moore, who uses it not to denote 'the ecology of the world, but a patterned history of power, capital and nature, dialectically joined' (Moore 2015, p. 8). Over the past two decades, Moore's work has synthesised Marxian ecology and world-systems analysis to arrive at a 'unified theory of capital accumulation and the production of nature' (Moore 2011, p. 126). The core argument of this theory is that capitalism does not act upon nature, but rather through it, unfolding within 'the creative, historical, and dialectical relation between [...] human and extra-human natures' (Moore 2015, p. 35). Moore's 'patterned history' is therefore concerned to track the succession of world-historical hegemonies through 'great ecological revolutions': the cheap timber behind the Dutch shipbuilding and cartographic revolutions of the sixteenth century; the switch to coal, steam power and plantation regimes during British imperialism; the oil frontiers and industrialised agriculture of North American twentieth-century hegemony (Moore 2010, p. 393; 2011, p. 125). In recent years, world-literary scholars have brought Moore's work to bear on discussions of world literature by exploring the correspondence between literary production and the sort of socio-ecological transformations that Moore is interested in. In a paper entitled 'World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature' (2012), for example, Michael Niblett suggests that 'world literature will necessarily register ecological regimes and revolutions [...] since these organize in fundamental ways the material conditions, social modalities, and areas of experience upon which literary form works' (Niblett 2012, p. 20). In a similar vein, Sharae Deckard has called for a 'study of

literature in which the horizon of the world-ecology is critically or consciously mediated, and in which the cyclical rise and fall of ecological regimes and commodity chains might be registered with peculiar salience' (Deckard 2015, p. 1). Anchored in collaborative initiatives such as the World-Ecology Research Network and the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), this school of thought conceives of systemic cycles of ecological transformation as the determining preconditions for any act of literary signification

This world-ecological approach to world literature has much to offer the emerging research agendas of the 'Blue Humanities' (Mentz 2015) and 'critical ocean studies' (DeLoughrey 2017), for it opens up discussion of the ways in which particular hydrological regimes—their technics of accumulation, structures of feeling and forms of commodity fetishism—might begin to be registered by texts from distinct geo-temporal positions of the world-system at the level of both form and content. Michael Paye, for instance, has used a world-ecology perspective to compare world-literary depictions of North Atlantic fishery collapse over the *longue durée* in Ireland and Canada, suggesting that a world-ecological approach to the Blue Humanities might help to 'broaden the oceanic conversation towards new comparisons, geographies, and modes of interdisciplinary critique' (Paye 2018, p. 525; 2019, p. 119). Sharae Deckard has similarly drawn from Moore's work in her analysis of neoliberal 'water shock' to examine how Chinese and Latin American hydrofictions 'anticipate intensified enclosure of water commons in key semiperipheries of the world-ecology at the moment of peak appropriation' (Deckard 2019a, p. 111). What has yet to be studied through a world-ecological framework, however, is the relationship between the enclosure and appropriation of aquatic resources and literary figurations of water-spirits. World-literary scholars have recently repositioned the appearance of spirit-beings, magico-religious traditions, folk beliefs and native cosmologies in literary texts as both 'a means to critique the forms of uneven and combined development through which capitalism manifests itself' and an index for moments of marked socio-ecological upheaval (Niblett 2019a, p. 325; 2019b). Yet despite its implications for the cultural registration of maritime commerce and forms of hydrological crisis, such scholarship has remained relatively detached from recent Blue interventions that seek to 'put the ocean's agitation and historicity back onto our mental map and into the study of literature' (Yaeger 2010, p. 538). This article is an attempt to remedy this disconnect through a world-ecological comparison of the oceanic water-spirit as it is figured in two Portuguese-language novels from opposite sides of the South Atlantic. Using the concept of the 'cultural fix', I demonstrate how these contrasting figurations of the water-spirit imply very different socio-ecological relations, and directly intersect with contemporary debates around neoliberal extractivism, the privatisation of the oceans and the enclosure of the water commons.

Jorge Amado's *Mar Morto* (Amado [1936] 2005), the first of these novels, takes place among a coastal community of sailors and fishermen in the *Recôncavo* of Bahia, northeastern Brazil. Battling against structural underdevelopment in the form of insufficient healthcare and education services, low incomes and precarious living conditions, the local women and men of this peripheralised community turn to the sea as both a source of livelihood and an outlet for their mounting social frustrations. True to the popular mythology of the region, the text equates the ocean with the Afro-Brazilian water-spirit *Iemanjá*, who accordingly becomes the cultural repository for a mix of emotions ranging from reverence to fear, anger to desire, love to despair. As the novel's title—'sea of death'—suggests, the ocean is here figured as something incapable of being fully comprehended, as fundamentally other; a position that is made clear in the opening pages of the text, where the narrator claims that '*o mar é mistério que nem os velhos marinheiros entendem*' [the sea is a mystery that not even the old sailors understand] (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 1). *Iemanjá* thus comes to occupy several contradictory meanings for the characters of the novel: she is ominous, ever-present and capable of inflicting senseless harm at a moment's notice, but at the same time suggestively passive and receptive, waiting to be mastered by the text's exclusively male cast of dockworkers. In contrast to Amado's conception of the sea as an other-worldly *aqua nullius*, Angolan author Pepetela's novel *O Desejo de Kianda* (Pepetela [1995] 2008) mobilises the female water-spirit in order to arrive at a wholly different means of thinking about the ocean. Translated into English as *The Return of the Water Spirit* (2002), this text casts water as a conscious,

living entity that seeks revenge for the extractivist violence carried out in the name of neoliberalism. Making buildings collapse and children disappear, the water-spirit Kianda infuses the novel with a sense of panic and anxiety that undercuts the logic of commodity exchange pervading the rest of the text. She is active, angry and stages an extra-human protest when the great lake of Luanda's Kinaxixi district is replaced with towering apartment blocks: 'Kianda se sentia abafar, com todo aquele peso em cima, não conseguia nadar, e finalmente revoltou' [Kianda felt asphyxiated, with all that weight on top of her, she was unable to swim, and so finally she revolted] (Pepetela [1995] 2008, p. 108). Written at the time of accelerated privatisation and financial deregulation that characterised the neoliberal turn in Angola, *O Desejo de Kianda* anticipates the rise of neoliberal hydroculture in its preoccupation with such issues as the extinction of local sea life, the commercialisation of fishing industries and the intensification of import trade across the oceans. The figure of the water-spirit in Pepetela's novel thus functions as a formal device that critiques this sort of exhaustive relationship with the world's oceans, while at the same time tying the text to a local Angolan cultural imaginary.

Whereas in *Mar Morto* the water-spirit is figured as a passive and incomprehensible extra-human entity, in Pepetela's novel, she is active, unavoidable and only too immediate. If cultural exchange and economic activity are to be thought as two mutually constitutive social practices that co-create world-ecological commodity frontiers through regimes of symbolic praxis (Moore 2015, p. 193), then these differing representations of the female water-spirit should be interrogated for the ways in which they imply equally contrastive approaches to the ocean as a resource that is appropriated and made to work on the cheap. Overlooking the ecological significance of *Mar Morto*'s ambivalent figuration of the water-spirit, however, critics have overwhelmingly read *Iemanjá* in Amado's text through the prism of cultural hybridity, where the fusion of Afro-Brazilian cultural figures with contemporary forms of prose narrative is seen to recreate Yoruba mythology by investing it with a new language and inscribing it within a new narrative mode (i.e., the novel) (Adolfo 2000; Santos 2013; Godoy and Ponce 2014). Similarly, in spite of the preponderance of ecological sensibility in *O Desejo de Kianda*, Pepetela's text has hitherto eluded extended engagement from either green or blue literary scholars.¹ Inocência Mata has pointed to the ways in which the text resorts to Kimbundu spirit mythology in order to impose some sort of order on the chaos of the neoliberalising present (Mata 1999, p. 252), while Zuleide Duarte and Izabel Cristina Oliveira Martins have highlighted the redemptive potential of Pepetela's dystopia and the reconstructive possibilities implied by its overtones of destruction (Duarte and Martins 2018, pp. 44–45), but the world-ecological implications of these readings have yet to be properly worked out. In my own comparative reading, I want to develop a broadly hydro-materialist approach to these world-literary water-spirits that brings together insights from the Blue Humanities and world-ecology studies, thereby contributing to what is a vitally understudied area in the critical reception of the two texts.

In the first section of this article, I explore the material implications for cultural configurations of the ocean by highlighting the co-productive role of artistic production in the capitalist world-ecology. Putting Blue Humanities scholarship in critical dialogue with recent research on the 'cultural fix' and 'fixed labour-power' (Shapiro 2014, 2020), I aim to establish an analytical framework through which to read world-literary hydrofictions as historical agents in environment-making. The following sections then carry forward these arguments into a reading of the water-spirit as it appears in *Mar Morto* and *O Desejo de Kianda*, with the aim of drawing some conclusions as to the emancipatory power of extra-human natures and the literary possibilities for imaginings of post-capitalist futurity.

2. The Blue Cultural Fix

If the world's oceans are routinely mapped, strategised and quantified in the service of technoscience and transoceanic militarism (DeLoughrey 2019), then why do cultural narratives

¹ A brief ecocritical discussion of the text can be found in (Deckard 2010, pp. 128–29).

proliferate portraying them as sublime spaces existing outside the realm of human comprehension? '[O]ceans are mediums, not metaphors', writes Rachel Price, and yet such a framing of the seas' materiality cannot explain why 'an aesthetics of the oceans so often turn[s] to metaphor, allegory and mimesis' (Price 2017, p. 51), nor does it cast light on the cultural tendency to think the ocean as an endless resource 'tap' or bottomless waste 'sink' that knows no limits to appropriation. In recent years, environmental critics have sought to resolve this contradiction by positing a generative relationship between cultural production and the appropriation of oceanic resources. Patricia Yaeger, for example, suggests that while '[t]he sea functions in literature and culture as a trope instead of a biotic world or swarm of agencies', it nevertheless has 'real-world consequences', and that '[f]igures of the boundless sea or oceanic sublime encourage humans to treat it as an inexhaustible storehouse of goods' (Yaeger 2010, p. 535). Along similar lines, Alexandra Campbell has argued that the exploitative practices of offshore extractivism actually feed off of 'cultural conceptions of the ocean as a mysterious, infinite or resilient space that supposedly exists outside the bounds of human knowledge' (Campbell 2019, p. 2). Stacey Alaimo, likewise, has described efforts to map the extent of oceanic degradation as perennially plagued by '[t]he persistent (and convenient) conception of the ocean as so vast and powerful that anything dumped into it will be dispersed into oblivion' (Alaimo 2012, p. 477). This emphasis on the focal role of artistic production in socio-ecological relations is also at the core of what Stephen Shapiro has called the 'cultural fix' (Shapiro 2014, 2020). Similar to David Harvey's notion of the 'spatial fix', cultural fixes are 'necessary to establish durable class relations and a longer-lasting reserve of identities and subjectivities' that allow capitalism to perpetuate exhaustive ecological regimes by reproducing the conditions for wage-labour exchange over multiple turnover cycles of capital (Shapiro 2014, p. 1262). As Claire Westall explains, the cultural fix captures 'how culture is required to uphold neoliberal capital by normalizing increasingly flexible and invasive forms of energetic extraction' (Westall 2017, p. 272), while Daniel Hartley similarly takes up the term for its focus on culture as 'a materially constitutive and productive moment in capitalist value relations' (Hartley 2016, p. 162, emphasis original). Due to its centrality to world-ecological approaches to cultural production, not to mention its far-reaching but as yet undeveloped implications for the programme of the Blue Humanities, it is worth briefly reviewing the theoretical origins of the cultural fix here with a view to establishing a critical framework through which to read Pepetela's and Jorge Amado's world-literary hydrofictions.

The concept of the cultural fix originates from Shapiro's re-reading of *Capital*, volume 2, in which he posits a missing but logically inferable category in Marx's argument. Whereas *Capital*, volume 1 considers the conflict between wage-labourer and capitalist through a relatively simplified and concentrated discussion of capitalist production, volume 2 moves to an examination of the circuit of capital in its expanded form and thus requires Marx to employ a different set of analytical tools than he had done in the previous volume. Instead of viewing the commodity in terms of its value features of constant and variable capital, Marx now focuses on the antecedent commodities required for its production: labour-power (LP) and the means of production (MP). In order to capture the perspective of temporality through which capitalists experience competition, Marx introduces the distinction between fixed and fluid capital. While the former of these categories refers to that part of the capital value which 'continues to perform the same functions over a shorter or longer period, in a series of repeated labour processes', such as factory buildings and machines; the latter alludes to those means of production that 'are completely consumed in every labour process that they enter into, and therefore, with each new labour process [...] must be completely replaced by new items of the same kind', like energy inputs and the wages paid for labour-power (Marx [1885] 1992, pp. 237–38). In order to conceptualise these subdivisions, Marx uses the terms fixed means of production (FMP), fluid means of production (FIMP) and fluid labour-power (FILP). However, given Marx's tendency to work through binary oppositions (absolute/relative surplus-value, constant/variable capital, formal/real subsumption), Shapiro argues that there should be a fourth category here which would complete the

double set of paired terms but which is nevertheless absent from Marx's analysis: 'fixed labour-power' (Shapiro 2014, p. 1261; 2020, p. 95).

Just as fixed means of production serve continuously throughout multiple turnover circuits and thus introduce a consideration of capital's differential time scales, fixed labour-power designates the process by which the conditions are prepared for labour-power 'to be called upon beyond the duration of a single cycle or encounter between capital and worker' (Shapiro 2020, p. 95). But for this category to make sense, Shapiro argues that a further distinction needs to be made between absolute fixed labour-power, which includes the more fundamental requirements for the worker's reproduction beyond the singular moment of wage-exchange (food, clothing, housing, hygiene, shelter, healthcare, basic education); and relative fixed labour-power, which refers to 'the existence of persistent social and cultural forms, realignments, and modes of expression that creates both simple and expanded reproduction' (Shapiro 2020, pp. 95–96). This latter subcategory is the realm of the cultural fix, for it includes those forms of cultural production that facilitate the expanded reproduction of capital by legitimising regimes of appropriation and exploitation.² Conceiving of cultural production in this way, as a resource of fixed labour-power, thus enables a way out of the limitations of earlier variants of cultural materialism that had relied too heavily on a vertical and overly linear base-superstructure model, for here cultural forms are considered not as reflective or simply representational, but as co-productive elements of capitalism in the web of life (Shapiro 2020, pp. 91–92, 102). Shapiro uses the example of petroculture to depict such a co-production of elements, where fixed labor-power is relationally activated with regards to an energy resource, a means of production that has forms of fixity (in the extraction industry) and fluidity (in the car's gas tank)' (Shapiro 2020, p. 97). For the purposes of the present investigation, however, a similar case can be made for hydroculture, as well. According to this line of argument, resources of fixed labour-power such as cultural or artistic productions can be understood as embedded in a co-productive relationship with water as both a fixed means of production (e.g., in the form of groundwater aquifers or ocean fisheries) and a fluid one (e.g., for cash crop cultivation or livestock production). Using Shapiro's relational matrix, the sorts of mysterious and sublime configurations of the ocean to which Yaeger et al. alluded can thus be reframed as cultural fixes in the sense that they actively shore up an exhaustive, extractivist relationship with the world's aquatic resources. To this extent, as Deckard has argued, world-literary hydrofictions function as "cultural fixes" with diagnostic or subversive functions within the capitalist world-ecology: anticipating, stabilizing, or contesting its dominant epistemes and technics' (Deckard 2016, p. 6).

This hydro-materialist approach to cultural production enables an approach to world-literary representations of water-spirits that is directly linked to the capitalist depletion of the oceans. As Michael Niblett has demonstrated, local and indigenous modes of knowing water often emerge in opposition to core-zone economic capital, and this is due in part to the fact that the cultural hold of spirit mythology is most pronounced in those regions of the world-system where ecological violence is felt most acutely (Niblett 2019b). Reading images of water-spirits in literature from West Africa and the Caribbean, for example, Niblett finds that the water-spirit motif 'functions to register and contest the violence entailed by capitalism's periodic reconfigurations of human and extra-human nature', and he proceeds to trace out a direct correspondence between proliferating Mami Wata narratives and hyper-commodity fetishism in local economies based on the extraction of a single material resource (oil, in the Nigerian case) (Niblett 2019b, pp. 90–91). However, because water-spirits invariably exist at the fringes of human comprehension, there is a danger that they might ironically serve to promote the type of neo-extractivist mentality to which they implicitly provide an opposition. If mysterious, passive or sublime figurations

² To illustrate the role of fixed labour-power as a constituent part of capitalist commodity production, Shapiro uses the diagrammatic form of the 'commodity cloverleaf' (Shapiro 2020, p. 97), which supplements the expanded version of the circuit of money capital outlined in *Capital* volume 2 with the three subdivisions used by Marx in his discussion of fixed and fluid capital (FMP, FILP and FIMP), as well as the missing fourth term posited by Shapiro himself (fixed labour-power, or FLP).

of the ocean can work as cultural fixes that normalise hydrological regimes of appropriation, then the other-worldly or supernatural aspects of water-spirit mythology are exactly the type of cultural forms that should be parsed out and evaluated for their critical potentialities. In what follows, I attempt to advance just this sort of criticality in a comparison of the oceanic water-spirit as it appears in *Mar Morto* and *O Desejo de Kianda*.

3. *Mar Morto*

Jorge Amado's *Mar Morto* has had the odd twin fates of being both one of its author's most widely read pieces of work and one of his least popular among literary critics. Eduardo de Assis Duarte, for example, in his major study of the author (Duarte 1996), omits all mention of *Mar Morto*, and yet this is a novel that, by 1994, had reached sixty-eight editions in Brazil, been translated into at least twelve languages other than English, and in 2001 was successfully adapted into a Brazilian telenovela by the name of *Porto dos Milagres* (Souza 2004). Celso Lemos de Oliveira speculates that it is the novel's 'lyricism' that has prevented it from scoring more highly among critics. The frequency of poetic descriptions of moonlight shimmering on the ocean surface, or of 'gemidos de amor' [groans of love] resounding through the salty seaside air, has the effect, she suggests, of romanticising the otherwise very real poverty of the text's working-class community and thereby nullifying its social critique (Oliveira 2001, p. 167). However, as Bobby J. Chamberlain notes, *Mar Morto* bears the same class consciousness and political commitment of the other, more well-received proletarian novels from Amado's early period (*Cacau* [1933], *Suor* [1934], *Jubiabá* [1935]), with its rugged working-class hero Guma and its politicised group of dockworkers that strike in the face of miserable working conditions both combining to critique the structural unevenness of 1930s Brazilian society (Chamberlain 2001, pp. 31–32). Rather than separate the novel's 'lyricism' from its socially critical perspective as a secondary or incidental stylistic quirk, I would therefore argue that *Mar Morto*'s fluid mode of narration is in fact the aesthetic form most suited to the thematic horizon underpinning all of the text's social concerns: the ocean.

In her reading of cacao aesthetics in Amado's novel *Terras do Sem Fim* (1943), Deckard finds that 'tropes of blood-soaked profundity' such as the text's 'blood-soaked moon' and its landscape fertilised by the blood of the workers function to register 'the myriad forms of dispossession, violence and coercive labour entailed in the bloody period of primitive accumulation during which the plantation system was constructed' and the cacao regimes were set up (Deckard 2017, pp. 348–49). While *Mar Morto*'s social critique is certainly not as visceral as *Terras*, its use of narrative techniques and devices that conjure up the social modalities of water nevertheless establishes a mode of hydro-aesthetics that works to comment on the overbearing presence of the ocean in the lives of its characters, much as blood-soaked tropes respond to the violence of cacao land enclosures in Amado's later novel. *Mar Morto*'s tendency towards circular narration, its fluent shifts between plot lines and perspective, and its frequent resort to the flowing melodies of popular seafaring songs or chants, for example, all call to mind the sensual effects of watery phenomena such as turning tides, lapping waves, whirlpools and coursing rivers. The narrative repeatedly doubles back on itself with recurrent descriptions of the same pivotal events, such as the death of Guma's father and aunt in a storm at sea (Amado [1936] 2005, pp. 21–23, 40); it often returns to the same metaphors as in a circular incantation, like when the sailors Chico Tristeza and João Pequeno are both described as journeying with Iemanjá towards the 'terras do sem fim' [infinite lands] to signify their death at sea (Amado [1936] 2005, pp. 40, 55); and its cascading style of prose incorporates long paragraphs and punctual breaks that tumble down the page and pull the pace of reading into its slipstream. In one scene where Guma and Master Manuel enter into a sea race against each other for the benefit of the gamblers on the pier, Manuel's wife Maria Clara sings a chant of encouragement and the lyrics then filter into the narrative as a rhythmic, undulating form of punctuation that calls to mind the rushing smoothness of running water:

Mestre Manuel ia um pouco na frente, Maria Clara cantava, Guma sentia os braços cansados, o corpo cansado. Lúvia veio e se deitou ao lado dele. O vento levava a voz de Maria Clara:

Corre, corre meu saveiro,

Corre, corre com o vento.

Lívia cantou também. Só a música compra o vento e o mar. E eram vozes belas, vozes do cais que se ofertavam a ele. Lívia cantava:

Corre, corre meu saveiro,

Corre, corre mais que o vento.

[Master Manuel pushed on ahead, Maria Clara was singing, Guma could feel his tired arms, his tired body. Lívia came and lied down next to him. The wind carried the voice of Maria Clara:

Go, go my sailor,

Go, go fast like the wind.

Lívia sang as well. Only the music could win over the wind and the sea. And they were beautiful voices, voices from the pier that offered themselves to him. Lívia sang:

Go, go my sailor,

Go, go faster than the wind] (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 151).

Not only does the patterned break in the narrative create a typographical stream that visually meanders down the page, but the flow between characters—Manuel, then Maria Clara, then Guma, then Lívia—and the repeated repetition of the verb ‘correr’ (to go, rush, run, race or stream) further produce a swirling sense of movement that adds to the maritime content of the passage a finished and distinctive hydro-aesthetic.

Though while the sea runs through the formal register of *Mar Morto* as a watery cadence and the tendency towards fluvial narrative constructions, it is the socio-ecological implications of the novel’s figuration of the ocean that are most relevant here. As mentioned before, the text equates the sea with the Afro-Brazilian water-goddess *lemanjá*, who is known for her ability ‘to dominate natural phenomena, especially aquatic zones of communication, trade, and transportation such as oceans, rivers and lagoons’ (Otero and Falola 2013, p. xix). In *Mar Morto*, *lemanjá* accordingly presides over the small Bahian port community with an ominous and imperious edge, inspiring a strange mix of respect and fascination in the male dockworkers and provoking hatred or dread from the female characters, who are subjected to a sexual division of labour that only enhances the destructive presence of the ocean in their lives (Godoy and Ponce 2014, pp. 199–200). As she is described as at once a mother-lover to the male sailors (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 31), and as a sort of grim reaper that also escorts them to their deaths (p. 55), *lemanjá* emerges as a shadowy synonym for both sides of the circle of life, with the novel’s mantra—‘É doce morrer no mar’ [it’s sweet to die in the ocean] (p. 14, *passim*)—further working to consolidate an image of the water-spirit as a sort of metaphysical wastebasket for those sailors who perish at sea. This process of othering is then at the core of the novel’s problematic relation to aquatic ecosystems and forms of hydrological appropriation, for by textually encoding *lemanjá* as ominous and ever-present, but nonetheless passive and impervious to harm, the text promotes a cultural conception of the ocean as a site waiting to be used and/or abused by an all-powerful ‘Humanity’. The very title of Amado’s novel indicates the extent to which it is internally marked by this type of thinking, since insofar as the sea is cast as non-living, unknowable, a sprawling graveyard that consumes the lives of male sailors without any discernible logic, the text regulates practices of marine extractivism much in the manner of the cultural fix. While Bahia’s bustling port cities had long been a driving force in the industrialisation of Brazil, giving rise to a

prominent class of import-export merchants and facilitating the transfer of modernising influences from abroad, at the time of *Mar Morto*'s publication in the 1930s, the northeast was still reeling from the puncturing of the 1920s cacao boom and suffering from declining terms of trade as a result of the economic effects of the Great Depression (Ridings 1973, p. 335; Borges 1992, p. 44). Dain Borges argues that this economic crisis was experienced most acutely in cities like Salvador, 'where much employment revolved around the commercial activities of the seaport', as those merchants who had become so central to the economic development of Brazil now had their credit cut off by bankrupt European partners and local capitalists were lumped with stores of unsaleable inventories (Borges 1992, p. 44). *Mar Morto*'s ambivalent figuration of the ocean as a sublime space that flits between munificence and destruction can thus be read as a cultural anxiety over Depression-era market volatilities and the waning of this once thriving hub of maritime commerce. But insofar as the sea is rendered by Amado as a passive and indomitable proxy for the water-deity Iemanjá, *Mar Morto* ultimately seems to long for a situation in which these economic doldrums might be overcome and the circuit of capital set in motion anew through a final subjection of the ocean to the mastery of the anthropos, attempting to 'fix' the crisis in maritime economy by promoting an extractivist relationship with the world's oceans abstracted from both consequences and limits.

Yet the central contradiction of Amado's novel is that while it might shore up this exhaustive relationship with the world's oceans by repeatedly casting the sea as a zone beyond harm and outside human comprehension, it also provides the means by which to debunk its own sea epistemology. Although the ocean is described with cautious mysticism by the text's third-person narrator—'O mar é senhor de vidas, o mar é terrível e é misterioso [...] Tudo que vive no mar é cercado de mistério' [The sea is the master of life, the sea is terrifying and mysterious [...] Everything that lives in the sea is shrouded in mystery] (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 139)—it is also routinely de-mystified by passages which portray the sea as a means of subsistence and site of economic exchange. Andre Gunder Frank, in his seminal work of dependency theory *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (Frank [1969] 1971), singled out the northeast of Brazil as a paradigm case for what he felicitously called 'the development of underdevelopment', pointing out that regions like Bahia worked to generate revenue 'which is spent for the capitalization and welfare of other regions', thereby resulting in a situation of 'simultaneous development of unequal wealth and poverty' within a singular Brazilian national space (pp. 273–74). Amado, writing his novel in the 1930s under the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945), whose own vision of economic growth rested on the pump-priming of coffee exports in the south-east and a price-control programme which consolidated the type of underdevelopment to which Frank alludes (Hilton 1975, pp. 759–760), registers the human results of these uneven social phenomena in *Mar Morto* with regular scenes of destitution and precarious living. The community's local teacher, for example, continually battles with an under-funded education system and children who are taken to work on the docks at an age before they have learned basic literacy skills (pp. 36–38); widows of dockworkers are placed in precarious situations by a government that cuts the pensions to which they are entitled and cites vague 'economic problems' as a justification (p. 55); and despite the sea being held up as a space of liberating exploration, the characters of *Mar Morto* are nevertheless described as 'acorrentados ao mar [...] presos como escravos' [chained to the sea, imprisoned like slaves] (p. 38). Here the ocean is not the mystical domain of Iemanjá but rather an increasingly precarious source of subsistence. These sorts of social contradictions are neatly telescoped in a scene in which Guma sits on his boat at night contemplating the disparity between the ocean and the buzzing metropolis in the distance:

Lá havia mulheres lindas, coisas diferentes, cinema e teatro, botequins e muita gente. No mar nada disso havia. A música do mar era triste e falava em morte e em amor perdido. Na cidade tudo era claro e sem mistério como a luz das lâmpadas. No mar tudo era mistério como a luz das estrelas.

[Over there were nice girls, different things, cinema and theatre, bars and lots of people. In the sea there was none of that. The music of the sea was sad and spoke of death and lost love.

In the city, everything was clear and without mystery like the light from light bulbs. In the sea, everything was mysterious like the light from the stars] (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 41).

The sea is here quite literally figured as *aqua nullius*, as a space of lack, and directly counterposed to the material signifiers of modernity: cinema, electricity, urbanised populations. The water-spirit is then the fictional device that consecrates this othering. Iemanjá is 'a mãe-d'água' [the water-mother] and 'a dona do mar' [the mistress of the sea], but at the same time '[e]la nunca se mostra aos homens a não ser quando eles morrem' [she only shows herself to men after they die] (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 15). Because Iemanjá occupies a place at the fringes of human comprehension, Guma struggles to make the connection between the lived experience of uneven development and the ocean as a material resource. Ironically, then, the novel's conception of the ocean as *res extensa* directly corresponds to the sort of modernising logic that Guma appears to be unable to ascribe to the vast water-scape unfolding before him, since, in the logic of industrialisation, the ocean, too, figures as 'something inert to be dominated' (Dalla Costa and Chilese 2014, p. 19). The ocean in *Mar Morto* is thus riddled with contradictions, its socio-ecological agency only thinly comprehended by the novel's characters. These sorts of contradictions are, however, forcefully resolved in Pepetela's novel, *O Desejo de Kianda*.

4. *O Desejo de Kianda*

O Desejo de Kianda restores a sense of extra-human agency to the oceanic imaginary. The plot of the novel hinges on an unexplained series of events in which the tower blocks of Luanda's Kinaxixi district begin to spontaneously crumble and collapse, to the large-scale bemusement of engineers, scientists and politicians. As news of the self-destructing buildings travels across the world, the city becomes a hotbed for tourists and international news agencies who quickly dub the phenomenon the 'síndrome de Luanda' [Luanda syndrome]. Unfolding in the midst of this dystopian milieu is the ideological trajectory of a young politician, Carmina Cara de Cu (referred to in the text as CCC), from Marxist partisanship to the adoption of an emergent neoliberal consumerism, as she attempts to work her way up the party ranks of Angola's leadership. The character development of CCC in this way mirrors the broader transition from Marxist-Leninist planned economy to free-market, neoliberal capitalism in which the Luanda of the text is chaotically embroiled, and her burgeoning entrepreneurship accordingly appears as the personal enactment of the asset-stripping, privatisation and deregulation that go in to form the novel's socio-economic *mise-en-scène*. Drawing these two plot lines together, Laura Cavalcante Padilha has convincingly argued that *O Desejo de Kianda*'s collapsing buildings function as a metaphor for the collapse of Angola's 'political-ideological project' (Padilha 2002, p. 41), and Grant Hamilton, echoing this sentiment, has characterised the text as 'an exemplification of the corruption of the socialist principles that underscored Angola's Marxist-led anti-colonial revolution of 1975' (Hamilton 2013, p. 345). According to this line of argument, the novel's atmosphere of architectural destruction and socio-ideological transition indicates the literary registration of Angola's demise from Marxist-Leninist utopian ideals to the dystopian present of concentrated wealth, rampant poverty and the unimpeded penetration of the local market by global capitalist elites.

Yet while convincing, it strikes me that these readings miss the basic ecological thrust of the novel, which is centrally concerned with the role of water in social formations abruptly subjected to the relations of commodity exchange and the logic of the value form. For interspersed among the chaos of economic transition are seemingly incongruous descriptions of mysterious happenings associated with Kianda, the Kimbundu water-spirit, whose dominion extends across Angola's rivers, lakes and the salt waters extending along the coast of the Angolan Atlantic (Seljan 1967, p. 32). Transcribed in italics, these descriptions centre on a particularly desolate area of the city which was once a great lake but which has been filled in and replaced with towering flat blocks as part of the urbanisation process. As a child goes missing while playing at the edge of the meagre and green-looking remains of this great lake, only to reappear years later in a different place, it becomes clear that Kianda is exacting some sort of revenge for the ecological violence carried out in the name of neoliberalism, and that it is she who is responsible for the phenomenon of the falling buildings. Rather than rehearse

the sort of politically deterministic reading that Padilha and Hamilton propose, in which *O Desejo de Kianda*'s dystopia functions merely to reflect its socio-economic context and validate political conclusions made in advance of the reading, I am more interested in teasing out the novel's productive relation to the ecological implications of Angola's neoliberal turn, which are powerfully telescoped in the figure of the active water-spirit. As Deckard argues, '[c]ultural forms are historical agents in environment-making, not merely reflective of re-organizations of capitalist nature, but co-productive of them' (Deckard 2019a, p. 111, italics original).

So with its scattered allusions to the extinction of local sea-life, the commercialisation of fishing industries and the intensification of import-trade across the oceans, *O Desejo de Kianda*'s tale of peripheral neoliberalisation can be seen to respond to the various forms of hydrological enclosure and appropriation associated with neoliberal 'water shock'. In one of the novel's many nested subplots and anecdotes—the oral quality of which is consistent with the centrality of orature within the Angolan literary canon more generally (Leite 1996, p. 140)—an Angolan artillery officer acquires an old military naval ship, sells its cannons and ammunition to a group of arms-traders in Rwanda, and installs, in their place, a laser-guided harpoon-system which is subsequently used to extinguish 'as últimas baleias dos oceanos' [the last whales of the oceans]. In a darkly comic twist, the officer's attempts at commercial fishing, far from securing the catch he had hoped for, only leave the ocean surface littered with the vaporised and bloody remains of porgies and groupers (Pepetela [1995] 2008, pp. 19–20), in what manifests as a satirical comment on the rising organic composition of capital and the neoliberal drive to privatise and deregulate industry. Alongside this episode, we find a host of other references to the privatisation of the oceans, such as CCC's import-export business which is based on shipping products 'de um lado para o outro do mar' [to and fro across the ocean] (p. 30), or the science professor who publicly laments the ruthless hunting of the shells of endangered tortoises for use in artisan production (p. 35). In this way, the ocean in *O Desejo de Kianda* emerges as a nodal point that indexes the disruption and depletion of aquatic eco-systems while highlighting a more fundamental anxiety as to the precarious position of these forms of (re)production within neoliberalism's exhaustive and expansive organisation of nature.

But if this sort of extractivism might be seen to take to its logical extreme Mar Morto's figuration of the ocean as a limitless and magnanimous other-worldly frontier, then the moments at which the water-spirit actively intervenes in the unfolding of events point directly to the historical agency of extra-human natures in the world-ecology's matrix of relations. At the time of the novel's publication in 1995, Angola was still mired in a decades-long civil war and suffering from a debt-imposed structural adjustment programme which brought about the advent of neoliberal politics in the country. Where the civil war contributed to the displacement of 30% of the population, most of whom subsequently fled to Luanda and set up in the musseques [shanty towns], often never to return home; the adoption of a neoliberal political-economic agenda meant that in 1998 the Angolan government spent only 1% of its budget on social welfare, and in 2001, evicted 10,000 families from the Boavista slum on Luanda bay to make way for luxury housing developments (Davis 2006, pp. 48–49, 103; Hodges 2004, pp. 22, 30–31). This is then the historical and social conjuncture out of which Pepetela is writing, and it goes some way to explaining the prominence of themes of accommodation and homelessness in the text, which are intimately bound up with its environmental and hydrological anxieties. The episodes dealing with the water-spirit Kianda, for example, are located amid the detritus of an abandoned construction site in the heart of Kinaxixi. Due to 'a falta constante de moradias' [the constant lack of accommodation] (Pepetela [1995] 2008, p. 13), the site is overwhelmed by an influx of homeless persons who use the dilapidated and unfinished construction works as a temporary residence. As this impromptu settlement increases in number, the construction site is pervaded by a disembodied chanting, and a supernatural set of events begin to occur:

Um cântico suave, doloroso, ia nascendo no meio das águas verdes e putrefactas que durante os anos se foram formando ao lado dum edifício em construção no Kinaxixi. [...] Primeiro era uma poça, parecia de cano de esgoto, no meio dos ferros das fundações ao lado do prédio. Aí nasceram girinos, depois

rãs. A poça foi crescendo, verde pelas plantas que irrompiam das águas. Apareceram peixes. E as crianças iam nadar. De vez em quando, havia notícia duma criança que desaparecera quando brincava na borda da lagoa ou no prédio incompleto e de lá caía. Acontecia também uma criança sumida nas águas aparecer anos depois em outro sítio, sem memória do seu trajecto. Vinha a notícia no jornal e era esquecida em seguida. O cântico era demasiado suave, ninguém ouvia.

[A soft, painful chant was emerging from among the green and rotting waters that for years had been forming by the side of an unfinished building in Kinaxixi. Initially it seemed like a puddle had formed from a leaking sewage pipe, but then tadpoles and frogs started to appear. The puddle started growing, its green colour taken from the plants erupting in its waters. Fish appeared, and then children started swimming there. From time to time, there was news of a child that had gone missing while playing at the lake's edge or that had fallen from the unfinished building. It also occurred that a child had entered the waters only to appear years later in a different place, with no memory of what had happened. It was reported in the newspaper at the time but then quickly forgotten. The chant was too soft, no one heard it] (Pepetela [1995] 2008, p. 13).

Italicised in the text, this passage appears interspersed among the narration of the protagonist CCC's upward mobility within Angola's ruling party ranks. As she cashes in on her mounting social capital and party privileges, CCC obtains such benefits as a state-sponsored wedding, a complementary car with the mark of a uence, clientelist donations of expensive foods from successful businesses: in short, '[q]uantidades de produtos sem limites e a preços simbólicos' [unlimited quantities of products at purely symbolic prices] (Pepetela [1995] 2008, pp. 7, 11–12). This account of corruption and consumerism is then abruptly cut short by the switch to the narrative segment quoted above, and the reader is therefore encouraged to read the events in the abandoned building works as the dialectical complement to CCC's political manoeuvrings, with the wretched state of the construction site functioning as a sort of dark mirror in which are reflected the protagonist's opportunism and political success. 'There must be something rotten at the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery', wrote Marx (1980, p. 488), and indeed here the putrefact waters by the side of the unfinished building works would seem to point to the rotten character of an Angolan society which facilitates a lavish way of life for the political elite at the same time as it creates a class of citizens effectively 'trapped in poverty' (Tvedten and Lázaro 2016, p. 4).

This fluid narrative and typographical back-and-forth between episodes of neoliberal consumerism and semantically loaded descriptions of environmental destitution—itself a mode of hydro-aesthetics—can then be seen to register, at the level of literary form, the world-ecology's dialectical relation between species and environment, in which resources like water figure as 'real historical actors' (Moore 2015, p. 36). This pattern of narrative development is reproduced right up to the novel's final pages, establishing a formal interplay between human activity and the extra-human resources from which it draws its lifeblood. While CCC plans to profit from the newly deregulated economy by supplementing her political commitments with a shady import-export business, Kianda's chanting rises in pitch, and a growth in the size of the rotting waters coincides with a proliferation of flora and aquatic life as a rich ecosystem begins to develop in the most unlikely of places (pp. 32–33, 54). The textual animity of Kianda's soft and painful chanting with the upsurge in illegal residence and urban ecology—which takes place outside the reproductive circuits of capital—would here appear to launch a protest against the social effects of Angola's transition to a structurally adjusted market economy. Significantly, 'ecology' was one of Raymond Williams' keywords, and due to its Greek roots—which are shared by the Portuguese 'ecologia'—it originally carried the sense of 'household' or 'habitat' before eventually gaining much broader social implications as 'the doctrine of the influence of physical surroundings on development' and the attendant associations with other species and life-systems (Williams [1976] 2015, pp. 70–71). The construction site's network of inter-species cohabitation, which joins the homeless and internally displaced to fish and urban vegetation, therefore indicates the depth

of the novel's ecological sensibility, and the crescendo of Kianda's moans accordingly functions as a mouthpiece for those natures excluded from the local acceleration of capitalist development.

In contrast to the figure of Iemanjá in Amado's novel, the water-spirit in *O Desejo de Kianda* is then used as a fictional device that contests capital's technics of appropriation and the creatively destructive logic of capitalist modernity. During the course of Pepetela's text, Kianda becomes a vehicle for the determining force of extra-human nature and the centrality of water in all ecological regimes, as when the source of the falling buildings is finally made clear towards the end of the narrative:

Se tratava dum lamento de Kianda [...] que queixava de ter vivido durante séculos em perfeita felicidade na sua lagoa, até que os homens resolveram aterrar a lagoa e puseram cimento e terra e alcatrão por cima, construíram o largo e os edifícios todos à volta. Kianda se sentia abafar, com todo aquele peso em cima, não conseguia nadar, e finalmente se revoltou. E cantou, cantou, até que os prédios caíssem todos, um a um, devagarinho, era esse o desejo de Kianda.

[Kianda's lament complained of having lived in her lake for centuries in perfect happiness until the humans decided to fill it in with cement and earth and tarmac, building a square and buildings and everything around it. Kianda felt asphyxiated, with all that weight on top of her, she was unable to swim, and so finally she revolted. She sung, sung, until all the buildings fell down, one by one, this was the desire of Kianda] (Pepetela [1995] 2008, p. 108).

There is an element of revenge here as Kianda rises up against a society that has deformed the local environment and endangered its ecosystems with an urbanisation process geared towards providing houses for private investors and the governmental elite, while the majority of the population are imprisoned in poverty. In *Mar Morto*, Iemanjá only made her presence clear to the sailors after they had died at sea (Amado [1936] 2005, p. 15), but here, the water-spirit asserts herself in life as a force to be reckoned with, inflicting damage and destruction in a most visible way on a society whose environmental depredations so often go unseen or ignored: the social modalities of which Rob Nixon has memorably termed 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011). The figuration of the female water-spirit in these two texts then differs where one relegates the role of water to the level of socio-material backdrop, and the other promotes it as a site of extra-human protest and class conflict. The tsunami of *O Desejo de Kianda*'s final act is the vehicle which delivers this emancipatory message of the water-spirit's uprising, and through its literary marshalling of marginalised natures it invokes a powerfully synthesised 'ecology of revolution' that 'can speak "yes" to revolt' and not merely founder on a negation of capitalist logic or stop at a materialisation of the limits to capital (Deckard 2019b, p. 173). Whereas *Mar Morto* can be seen to stabilise or regulate exhaustive regimes of hydrological appropriation with its internally conflicted meditation on the ocean as a space of resilience and submission, 'fixing' the crisis of maritime commerce in 1930s Brazil, Pepetela's text actively contests the reproduction of capital by confronting neoliberalism's extractivist ecology with images of nature-in-revolt, mobilising a metaphysics of storm-events to broach the possibility of creating alternative hydro-futures.

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