

## "After the End of the World: Utopian Thought in João Almino's Literary Brasília"

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This presentation contains a portion of my research for my dissertation "Cities of Dreams and Despair: Utopia and Dystopia in Contemporary Brazilian Literature and Cinema." Using a theoretical framework informed primarily by utopian studies, I interpret and analyze the role of utopian and dystopian thought in a wide range of prose, poetry and film centered on the cities of Brasília, São Paulo, and Recife. Throughout, I identify points of connection and divergence between the respective roles of utopianism in the included works and highlight the way that the depicted aspirations, frustrations, and criticism interact with urban space. My presentation today centers on two novels by João Almino, *Idéias para onde passar o fim do mundo* (1987) and *As cinco estações do amor* (2001), each a part of the author's "Brasília quintet." After a brief overview of key theory and sociohistorical context, I will analyze the ambiguous and surprising influence of the capital's legacy of utopian thought in each novel.

### **Framework: Thinking About Utopia**

Utopia's multiple meanings and connotations provide a notorious challenge for critics; depending on one's temporal, social, and political position, utopia can signify concepts as diverse as perfection, hopeful thinking, unrealistic aspiration, or depravity. The interdisciplinary field of utopian studies strives to move past this impasse by studying the defining aspects and major functions of utopia in the 500 years since Thomas More coined the term. Critics identify a constructive, aspirational nature common to all but the most extreme cases of utopian thinking when an overly prescriptive, Manichean worldview promotes oppression in the name of utopia.

In his monograph on the concept, Gregory Claeys proposes that utopia encompasses three domains: utopian thought, utopian literature, and utopian communities (*Searching for Utopia* 11). The concept of utopianism, synonymous with utopian thought, has proven particularly salient in the contemporary period. While a singular definition remains elusive, Lyman Tower Sargent's understanding of the concept as "social dreaming," that is, "the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives," effectively unites utopia across historical eras and academic disciplines ("The Three Faces" 3). Utopian thought, fueled by hopefulness, imagines societal improvements in the form of artistic representations, non-fictional planning, or political action. The nightmares mentioned by Sargent are more typical of dystopian thinking, a process that exaggerates problems within the contemporary *status quo*. Leomir Cardoso Hilário calls dystopia a "fire alarm, which . . . seeks to draw attention so that a dangerous event can be controlled and its effects, already underway, can be minimized" (202). Dystopian thought functions as a negative for utopian thought, emphasizing or exaggerating undesirable social realities that require utopian solutions.

The work of Marxist theorist Ernst Bloch serves as a guide for interpreting the myriad forms of utopian and dystopian thought. Bloch's *magnum opus*, the three-volume *The Principle of Hope* (1954-1959), analyzes manifestations of a universal, utopian impulse in a wide range of social and cultural forms including daydreams, fairy tales, literature, philosophy, and religion.<sup>1</sup> Bloch's hermeneutic approach strives to identify and interpret individual and collective desires for positive change that provide insight into the wider arc of Marxist teleological utopia. For critic Douglas Kellner, this mapping of this inherent, human impulse redefines utopia as a

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<sup>1</sup> The delay between the publication of *The Principle of Hope* and its penetration in wider academic circles is explained by the lack of an English translation until 1986 and what Wayne Hudson calls Bloch's preference for implicit responses to the central questions of his work (25).

“paradigm of ‘intra-historical transcendence’” oriented towards improving the social, cultural, and political reality of a given place and time (95). Even without considering the universal ramifications of a cultural artifact, then, a utopian hermeneutic provides considerable insight into the state of utopianism in the creator’s society.

### ***Overcoming Apathy: Contemporary Trends in Utopian Thought***

To properly interpret the role of utopianism in Almino’s novels, it is necessary to understand both the global anti-utopian bias of the late twentieth century and Brasília’s specific history with utopian aspiration. The dominance of what Russell Jacoby calls the “liberal anti-utopian critique” following World War II marks the historical nadir of utopianism. Based on the work of authors like Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and Hannah Arendt, this philosophy inextricably associates utopia totalitarian oppression or rampant violence (81). Anti-utopianism remained hegemonic under neoliberalism, as exemplified by Margaret Thatcher’s maxim that “there is no alternative” to expanding capitalism and Francis Fukuyama’s influential *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). While this school of thought remains influential, a countercurrent of intellectuals inspired by Bloch have catalyzed a partial renaissance of utopianism.

Fredric Jameson’s writings on utopia exemplify the contemporary push for re-engagement with radical utopian thought. For Jameson, the consensus that there are no viable alternatives to neoliberalism makes the revival of utopianism particularly necessary:

What is crippling is not the presence of an enemy but rather the universal belief . . . that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible and that no other socioeconomic system is conceivable, let alone practically available. . . one cannot

imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off

Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet. (*Archaeologies* xii)

Utopian thought functions as critical tool, generator of better alternatives, and agent of change.

Without utopia, the problems in the contemporary *status quo* remain uncriticized and uncontested. Other thinkers, however, argue for a less radical version of utopianism that seeks reform rather than revolution. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, proposes realistic utopianism as a way to identify neoliberal doxa and propose counteractions for the system's gravest flaws (21-22).<sup>2</sup> While comparatively conservative, realistic utopianism offers a model of cautious optimism and practicable action within a socioeconomic model that devalues utopia.

For a Brazilian literary scholar like Almino, realistic utopianism inevitably recalls the theory of post-utopianism outlined in Haroldo de Campos's 1984 essay "Poesia e modernidade: da morte da arte à constelação. O poema pós-utópico."<sup>3</sup> For Campos, post-utopia signifies a re-engagement with utopianism after the disillusionment of the late 1960s and 1970. Distancing himself from the revolutionary aspirations of his earlier work, Campos now argues for poetry directly engaged with everyday reality (268). While critics continue to debate the value of such a perspective in poetry, Diana Junckes Bueno Martha argues that post-utopia is a productive reframing of utopianism: "a pós-utopia . . . não tem nada do ceticismo de um olhar para o presente, de desespero ou desilusão, não é refém da crise, mas responde a ela, criticamente" (168). Like realistic utopia, post-utopia accepts the unlikelihood of wholesale change while remaining critical and promoting constructive action on a limited scale.

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<sup>2</sup> In *The Law of the People* (1999), John Rawls suggests realistic utopia as a way to prevent the realization of humanity's worst impulses, a role that more closely aligns with dystopian thought (in Young 390-391).

<sup>3</sup> Developed since 1979, the most complete version of Campos's theory of post-utopia is found in 1997's *O arco-íris branco*.

## **Brasília's Foundational Aspirations: Political, Mystical, and High Modernist Utopianism**

The utopian aspirations that led to Brasília's construction are notoriously grand. Though politicians and intellectuals intermittently argued for an interior capital for two centuries, Juscelino Kubitschek (JK) made the issue central to his presidential campaign and, after his election, oversaw Brasília's construction from 1956-1960.<sup>4</sup> JK saw the city as the crown jewel of his national developmentalist project promising "50 years of progress in 5." Brasília would symbolize the creation of a historical *tabula rasa*, positioning Brazil as a modern nation and confining the nation's colonial history to oblivion. The ambitions of urban planner Lúcio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer, charged with designing Brasília's central Plano Piloto, tied JK's political utopian project with high modernist utopianism.<sup>5</sup> This school pioneered by Le Corbusier sought to impose a radically improved vision of urban life by negating existing social and material conditions. In Brasília, this meant a radically different urban plan intended to establish a socially egalitarian city free of poverty and class conflict. A final, influential strain of utopianism was mystical yearning informed by the vision of Dom Bosco. In 1883, this saint recorded his dream of a heavenly city in Brasília's current location. Bosco is now the city's patron saint with several monuments and many businesses bearing his name. The *mélange* of political, high modernist, and mystical utopianism remain an indelible part of Brasília's legacy.

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<sup>4</sup> Francisco Leitão and Sylvia Ficher list the following thinkers as also having referenced a centralized capital: Italian cartographer Francisco Tossi Colombina in 1750, the Marquês de Pombal in 1761, the Inconfidentes Mineiros in 1798, Almirante Pitt in 1806, Hipólito José da Costa in 1810, the Portuguese Emperor D. Pedro I in 1821, congressman José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva in 1822, and the historian and viscount Francisco Adolpho de Varnhagen in 1877 (99).

<sup>5</sup> I use James C. Scott's term "high modernism" to differentiate from modernisms in other fields, and from architectural and modernist urbanisms less dependent on the role of the urban planner.

## Segregation and Violence in the Real Brasília

Despite the symbolic power of utopian thought in Brasília, the contemporary city falls well short of its foundational aspirations. The city did not consolidate a new historical area, instead repeating the colonial pattern of exploitation, violence, and segregation that lends itself to a dystopian aesthetic. As James Holston argues, Brasília underwent a process of Brazilianization that defied Costa and Niemeyer's plans even before the capital's inauguration (*The Modernist City* 24). The *candangos*, poor workers who flocked to the Central Plateau to work as contractors, were largely confined to the so-called satellite cities of the unplanned periphery. In the Plano Piloto, the privatization of property quickly undercut the *superquadra* system designed to end discriminatory housing practices. The abuse of laborers by police, including the 1959 massacre of protesting laborers during Carnival, rapidly established a pattern of official repression that continued apace after the 1964 *coup d'état*.

The military dictatorship created a second wave of satellite cities in the western Federal District, forcefully resettling poor squatters residing in the central city. This continued paradigm of segregation led Luiz Alberto de Campos Gouvêa to term the Federal District's segregation a social *apartheid* (Gouvêa, "A violência estrutural" 347). While Brazil's redemocratization allowed for renewed utopianism in Brasília, Gouvêa affirms that little changed ("Brasília: A capital da segregação" 140). While the economic situation in satellite cities has improved, Kohlsdorf et al. describe the twenty-first century capital as highly divided. Central areas and the shore of Lake Paranoá remain almost exclusively the domain of upper-class citizens, while the Federal District's working population lives almost entirely in the satellite cities west and south of the Plano Piloto (61).

### **Literature in Brasília: A Brief Overview**

Unlike the earliest literary depictions of the city, contemporary literature centered on Brasília adopts a critical view of the city's foundational utopian aspirations. For Eloísa Pereira Barroso, the last few decades are marked by literature focusing on the dual problems of economic oppression and degraded social space (60-68).<sup>6</sup> Still, as Sophia Beal demonstrates, the city's unique origin story remains a relevant theme ("Brasília's Literature" 397). While conscious of the city's considerable flaws, relatively few contemporary texts depict a purely utopian or dystopian vision of life in Brasília. More salient are works directly or indirectly inspired by Clarice Lispector's ambiguous visions of the capital. While the city unquestionably failed in its various aims to inaugurate a more advanced, just, or heavenly society, these initial ambitions continue to inspire dreamers through their surprising symbolic power. Nonetheless, these ambitions exist in a diminished form as authors like Almino considering Brasília with a mix of cautious optimism, frustration, and targeted criticism.

### **João Almino: A Chronicler of Futures Lost and Found**

Born in Rio Grande do Norte, João Almino arrived in Brasília in 1970 to begin his ongoing career in the Brazilian foreign service. As an author, Almino has published seven novels alongside nonfictional texts on politics and literature (including criticism of More's *Utopia*). His novels have routinely competed for major national prizes, with many translated into English and Spanish. In 2017, Almino secured a prestigious chair in the Academia Brasileira de Letras ("João Almino: Biography"). He is, without a doubt, the foremost literary chronicler of Brasília, with

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<sup>6</sup> Barroso includes Daniel Mota, Paulo Kauim, and João Almino as representative of this group.

his first five novels referenced as the “Brasília quintet.” Although his last two novels primarily take place elsewhere, each spends several chapters in the capital.

All of the novels of the “Brasília quintet” reference political, high modernist, and mystical utopianism in the capital while considering the value of utopian thought in the current democratic era. *Idéias*, published only two years after redemocratization and before the first direct elections, reflects the wide range of intellectual responses to the end of the military dictatorship noted by Christopher Dunn in his study of the period (202-203). Comprised of two narrators’ memories and written in the referential, experimental style emblematic of 1980s Brazilian post-modernism, the novel largely portrays a recognizable vision of Brasília and Brazilian politics. While the inauguration of a democratically elected president structures much of the plot, the legacy of the military dictatorship also looms large in the novel through the repeated incorporation of dystopian tropes that M. Elizabeth Ginway characterizes as typical of literature during the most repressive years of the military regime (14).

*As cinco estações*, while also memorialist, conforms with a realist aesthetic more typical of the turn of the twenty-first century. Located in the same fictional universe as *Idéias* (as well as 1994’s *Samba-enredo* and 2008’s *O livro das emoções*), this novel traces the psychological journey of the young retiree Ana while interweaving consistent references to politics and Brasília’s legacy of utopian thought. The political concerns of *As cinco estações* deal less with dictatorship than the relatively new neoliberal consensus typical of Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s presidency. Despite the relative economic and political stability of the this period, Almino does not fail to reference the ongoing socioeconomic inequality that fueled violence in Brazil’s cities throughout the 1990s.

### *The End of the World or A New Beginning: Paradoxical Inspiration in Almino's Début*

As suggested by Beatriz Resende in the preface to the second edition of *Idéias*, the novel's structural and metafictional innovation convey Almino's hopes and fears about Brazil's return to democracy. The novel's occasionally intersecting narrative arcs repeatedly reference the diverse concepts that Almino associates with the city of Brasília in an essay of self-criticism: "E o que Brasília simboliza? A democracia. A racionalidade. A nação. O moderno. O futuro. E também, claro, o poder, a alienação, o encastelamento, a corrupção, o autoritarismo, o misticismo e a irracionalidade" ("Brasília" 10). Though aesthetically and philosophically complex, the novel resists anti-utopianism. Instead, *Idéias* largely confirms the author's counterintuitive faith in the city's origins to inspire contemporary utopianism: "...é possível extrair um resto de esperança, a constante lembrança de seus mitos e utopia e a insatisfação com a realidade que alimenta a boa leitura" (Almino, "Brasília" 19). The vision of Brasília in *Idéias* is far removed from the paradigm-shifting hopes tied to the capital's construction, yet Almino convincingly portrays Brasília as a place where utopian thought remains an influential force.

The aspiring filmmaker Mário Camargo de Castro, now deceased, narrates the first thirteen chapters of the novel from beyond the grave largely in the form of an unfinished film script. Mário's friend Silvinha, the daughter of Brazil's first black president, narrates the last two, outlining her own hopes for Brasília's future in a more straightforward tone. Among the characters whose stories Mário narrates, three stand out for their ties to utopianism: Berenice, Eva, and Íris. The migrant Berenice experiences segregation and disillusionment yet continues to draw paradoxical inspiration from the capital. The mystic Íris and her multiple apocalyptic visions underline the resiliency of mystical utopianism in Brasília. Finally, Eva's descent into hopelessness and, eventually, suicide, marks a rare case of unredeemed despair in Almino's

oeuvre. Though total loss of faith is possible, Brasília's foundational aspirations remain powerful, if paradoxical, sources of inspiration.

The opening chapter demonstrates Almino's profound interest in the city's history as the object of utopian desire. He quotes from Dom Bosco's dream and Lúcio Costa's master plan while referencing early politicians who dreamed of a central capital (though not JK) (20). Mário admits that, "A Cidade pertencia cada vez mais a um Brasil sem sonhos e desiludido," yet describes that, with the recent presidential election, "a utopia do desprezo complete pelo poder ganhava força" (20, 18). The myth of Brazil as the land of the future remains powerful, but, "Na realidade, o país entrava num jogo de possíveis, que ia da[r] felicidade ao desespero" (18). This early foregrounding of utopianism undeniably draws from the reality of Brazil during the redemocratization process. The novel's Brasília condenses the doubt, disillusionment, and continued hope, using its own legacy of aspiration and failure to reflect on the possibility of change upon returning to democracy.

In the same chapter, Almino uses satire to remind the reader of the city's place within the history of utopianism in Brazil. Mário describes the opening of his film in an epic style that emphasizes the abuse of laborers during the capital's construction: "No começo uma mistura de Eisenstein com Cecil B. de Mille, Brasília em grande angular. Ao som do Guarani, prédios euforicamente construindo-se por escravos voluntários e modernos, operários voltados para o futuro da humanidade" (15). Almino thus foregrounds the city's original sin that undercut its various aspirations: a utopian era disconnected from colonial oppression cannot be built by mistreated workers. Still, as the various character arcs reveal, this legacy of disingenuous utopianism does not fully invalidate the utility of utopian thought in the contemporary period.

In the same chapter Almino describes his characters as realistic utopians, describing how the capital's history of unfulfilled aspiration does not prevent his characters from continuing to dream: "Queriam encher o ar e o espaço do Planalto com seus sonhos e respirar essência de flores secas. Queriam amar de novo e diferente. Buscavam viver a realidade que haviam inventado: eram realistas utópicos" (24-25). The novel's characters do not desire instant, wholesale improvement, instead dreaming within the confines of their reality. This initial consideration foreshadows the novel's argument that despite the compounded failures marking Brasília's history, cautious optimism remains preferable to apathy or nihilism. Still, few if any character trajectories embody the contemporary definition of realistic utopianism theorized after the novel's publication.

Berenice's trajectory depicts utopianism rooted in Brasília's origins as an unexpected counterbalance even for those who experience the dystopian aspects of life in the Federal District firsthand. A migrant from the *sertão*, Berenice struggles to find her footing in Brasília. She experiences the estrangement known colloquially as *brasilite* while working in the Plano Piloto and becomes increasingly hopeless after moving to the satellite city of Gama: "Brasília e seus arredores haviam se tornado inabitáveis . . . Estava desiludida. Sabia que melhorar de condição seria difícil. Sua vida no Gama só tenderia a piorar e seu destino seria voltar a ser o que era na Varzinha [her hometown]" (60). Berenice leaves Brasília with little hope, yet she later adopts a balanced view of the city that recognizes the ongoing power of the city's foundational aspirations alongside its oppressive characteristics:

No regresso ao sertão, Brasília ficou na cabeça de Berenice como o símbolo do moderno, do belo, do limpo, do civilizado, do culto, e também da violência, do poder. Brasília ficou em sua cabeça como sonho de liberdade, pesadelo de castigo, intervalo para viver,

lembrança de Zé Maria. Brasília era, para Berenice, só uma ponte de fuga de si mesma e de regresso a si mesma. (71)

While this symbolic power does not lead to the targeted action generally associated with realistic utopia, it does connote a surprising degree of hopefulness given Berenice's compounded disappointments in Brasília. Despite the dystopian events that characterize the character's arc, Brasília's legacy of utopian aspiration prevents Berenice from succumbing to despair.

Íris's complex narrative arc reveals the continued impact of Brasília's mystical strain of utopianism. Though originally disillusioned in the aftermath of an early apocalyptic vision, the medium and prophetess Íris finds reason to hope anew following a tortuous series of events invoking mystical, science fictional, and religious imagery tied to utopianism and dystopia (129). At her spiritual nadir, Íris recalls a past vision of Dom Bosco at a *candomblé* ceremony in Salvador, "...[Dom Bosco] a aconselhava a abrir-se, pôr-se para fora, viver para os outros. Dizia-lhe que ela tinha uma missão a cumprir: salvar-se a si própria e ao mundo. Deveria rumar para o Planalto Central para ajudar a criar a nova civilização" (132). This juxtaposition of apocalyptic nihilism and mystical utopianism recurs throughout Íris's journey, as she searches for salvation in multiple sequences heavily inspired by João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande sertão: veredas* (1956) and founds her own religious compound, the Jardim da Salvação (137-139, 143).<sup>7</sup>

After Íris constructs her own pyramidal temple in the Jardim da Salvação, kidnappers abduct the President and war (apparently) breaks out in Brasília.<sup>8</sup> Again reflecting on the figure of Dom Bosco, Íris wonders if the paradisiacal city he prophesized in the region might finally

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<sup>7</sup> While fictional, the Jardim da Salvação community, which recurs throughout Almino's oeuvre, shares many characteristics with the Vale do Amanhacer in the eastern Federal District.

<sup>8</sup> The motif of pyramids reflects the (pre-)urban legend that JK was the reincarnation of the builder pharaoh Akhenaton (Sagnes and Viala 367).

come to fruition following nuclear bombardment, "...ela guardava a esperança de que, da anarquia e do caos reordenados, nasceria tudo de novo . . . E os sobreviventes mergulhariam numa nova região do espaço e do tempo" (147, 152). Hope and despair remain paired throughout this tortuous emotional and intellectual journey, demonstrating the resilience of utopianism despite Íris's conviction that the apocalypse is actively occurring. Íris's labyrinthine trajectory comes to an uncertain conclusion as she returns to the Jardim da Salvação following a visit to the Veredas-Mortas crossroads from *Grande sertão: veredas*:

Agora, que suas crenças já não existiam, que chave podia ela deter dos mistérios do mundo? Ela não tinha a solução para nada.

Olhou no horizonte o claro difuso para os lados de Brasília e ainda se permitiu mais esta iluminação: a de que aquela cidade era como uma droga, ou seja, uma cidade sem conteúdo, que podia ser o que ela bem imaginasse... (171)

Hope and despair are nearly inseparable in Brasília; disillusionment and the loss of faith counterintuitively spur new belief in the possibility of reshaping the capital through utopian thought.

Unlike the ambiguous trajectories of Berenice and Íris, Eva's suicide embodies a rare, definitive triumph of despair over hope in Almino's Brasília. Though she first claims to believe in a brighter future for the world if not for Brazil, Eva eventually abandons: "Melhorar, como ato de vontade, lhe parecia forçado. E, por isso, preferia acreditar mesmo no beco sem saída. Já não tinha futuro. Apenas o passado. Não fazia mais planos. A esperança era a simples crença no acaso . . . Não acreditava mais em vitórias ou redenções." (102, 104-105). Eva's aversion to utopianism is crystalline; she sees no possibility of the future improving on the tragic present. Unable to move past her pessimistic, anti-utopian belief that assumes Brazil is on a course of

unstoppable decadence and declaring that the country is too large to ever escape, she takes her own life (120-121).<sup>9</sup> While Eva's death acknowledges that nihilism is a possible response to Brasília's *status quo*, her tragic arc further underscores the paradoxical hope experienced by the novel's other characters.

Silvinha's narration during the final chapters forms the novel's most cohesive endorsement of cautious hope in Brasília. For Silvinha, the capital inherently pushes its inhabitants towards continual imagination and, thus, some degree of engagement with utopianism (193). Silvinha reveals her own affinity for utopian dreaming in the final chapter. She imagines the novel's characters on an enormous stage on the Esplanada dos Ministérios. After a time, they descend: "Desciam por eixos largos e compridos, que levavam a horizontes abertos e infinitos. A realidade criava seus sonhos nesses espaços do puro, etéreo nada, encerrada no centro do Brasil" (204). The narrator describes the accompanying sunset as belonging to the end of the world, obscuring whether the characters march towards a utopian future or the apocalypse (204). Silvinha herself does not know, asking, "Haverá esperança?" and declaring on the novel's final page that, "...não houve história. Brasília era demasiado artificial. Era apenas sonho ou pesadelo de uma época. Imagem do céu e do inferno" (205, 206). Through some combination of geography, urbanism, and the legacy of utopian dreaming in the city, the Brasília of *Idéias* stimulates utopian thought. This hope, though, is inextricable from the doubt occasioned by the failures of its initial objectives. All dreams remain paired with disillusionment.

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<sup>9</sup> In contrast to both his own phantasmagorical return and the multiple possible endings for Berenice's story he suggests, Mário's quick abandonment of Eva's story at the end of her chapter connotes an unmistakable sense of finality regarding her suicide, "...tive que sair rápido de Eva, para não morrer por uma segunda vez" (121).

## Second Spring: Post-utopianism in *As cinco estações do amor*

*As cinco estações do amor*, initiates a less aesthetically experimental stage of Almino's *oeuvre* that nonetheless maintains a keen interest in utopianism. The novel relates Ana Kaufman's memories over roughly 15 months in 1999 and 2000 in straightforward, emotionally resonant prose.<sup>10</sup> Ana, a 55-year-old divorcee, feels both despair and renewed hope as the new millennium approaches. Though she feels optimistic after the return of Berta, a member of the *inúteis* friends' group from their youth, her friend is murdered on New Year's Eve. Ana subsequently attempts suicide, but her widower neighbor Carlos saves her. After a brief return to her hometown in Minas Gerais, Ana accepts Carlos's proposal of marriage and returns to Brasília to begin a new, hopeful chapter of her life.

Two key aspects of the novel that call the reader's attention to utopian thought are Ana's theory of *instanteísmo* and the urban landscape's reflection of the narrator's relative degree of hopefulness. *Instanteísmo*, a philosophy of complete and total focus on the present moment, at first seems to indicate an anti-utopian disregard for the future. In his essay on Almino's first four novels, Pedro Meira Monteiro argues that this belief system is the only possible source of solace in a Brasília otherwise marked by failure and ruin:

...o instante é nossa única morada possível, o lugar fugitivo a que pertencemos sem pertencer, espaço exíguo em que o tempo se condensa e o sujeito descobre que sua liberdade talvez tenha menos a ver com os desenhos avidamente projetados sobre o

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<sup>10</sup> Kaufman first appears in *Samba-enredo*, exemplifying the frequent reappearance of characters throughout Almino's first four novels. Íris is the lone character from to recur in his subsequent work, making appearances in *Cidade livre* and *Enigmas da primavera*.

futuro que com o compromisso profundo diante daquilo que se passa agora mesmo diante de seus olhos.<sup>11</sup> (68)

Monteiro is undeniably correct about the impossibility of a return to grand utopian ambition in Almino's oeuvre. Still, Ana's reassessment and revision of *instanteísmo* in the concluding section of *As cinco estações* appears to signal a cautious re-engagement with utopianism rather than an anti-utopian position.

Ana's descriptions of Brasília's landscape reflect a similar return to post-utopian aspiration. Denilson Lopes connects Ana's journey closely with titular seasons, "A paisagem de Brasília é toda afetiva, um mistério em meio ao excesso de luz nas suas quatro estações, e mais uma, como um presente, uma conquista" (128).<sup>12</sup> Ana largely describes Brasília as vaguely dystopian due to a combination of violence and personal frustration. As in *Idéias*, though, such incidents cannot overwhelm Brasília's unexpected tendency to inspire renewed hopefulness. The inclusion of a fifth chapter after Ana's personal nadir signifies a move away from her earlier flirtation with anti-utopianism. As the new millennium begins, Brasília reflects the protagonist's vague optimism as she chooses to re-engage with the future.

Almino bookends Ana's journey with the appearance of emotionally charged, question-mark shaped clouds. In the opening chapter, these clouds appear as Ana drives to visit Chicão, the *inútil* with whom she remains closest (13). The protagonist first associates the symbol with her personal loss of faith in Brasília's foundational aims: "Brasília era 'a cidade moderna e o futuro do mundo', como papai dizia. . . O Plano Piloto não era bem uma cidade. Era uma idéia – idéia de moderno, de futuro, minha idéia de Brasil" (17). Looking at the contemporary city from

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<sup>11</sup> This quotation is excluded from the revised version of the article translated into English.

<sup>12</sup> Cruz also notes Ana's emotional relationship with landscape in her review of the novel (159).

the central Eixo Monumental, however, Ana acutely senses her own lack of direction alongside the city's failures.

Ana's initial disillusionment is rooted in the dictatorship period. During the *anos de chumbo* she recalls the dissolution of the idealized utopianism that bound together the *inúteis*: "...não era sucesso, poder ou dinheiro o que queríamos. Era mudar a sociedade, a política, o país, o mundo . . . o futuro era nosso. Éramos companheiros de uma viagem de prazer; construíamos uma nova era, contra o egoísmo e a carece" (19). The policies of segregation and violence reinforced by the military regime, however, quickly curtailed the friends' aspirations: "As cidades adquirem o ar dos tempos por que passam. Brasília, que tinha sido promessa de socialismo e, para mim pessoalmente, de liberdade, não usava mais disfarce. A desolação de suas cidades-satélites já a asfixiava. Respirávamos vinte e quatro horas por dia o ar envenenado da ditadura militar" (21-22). As her awareness of the dystopian aspects of the capital's social and political organization grows, Ana abandons her belief in Brasília's ability to incite or host radical utopian change. While she is not totally hopeless, Ana finds little reason to believe in an improved future for herself or her adopted city.

In 1999, Ana's past hopefulness remains a distant memory, "Minha juventude está perdida. A Brasília do meu sonho de futuro está morta. Reconheço-me nas fachadas de seus prédios precocemente envelhecidos, na sua modernidade precária e decadente" (40). Her first presentation of *instanteísmo* further confirms the protagonist's resignation to a life without aspiration. Reality does not exist beyond the present moment, she declares, therefore, "Deixarei de lado o futuro, para não construir ilusões e nem prever desastres, o que, em vez de evitá-los, talvez os acelere" (50). For Ana, the side effects of utopianism and dystopian thought invalidate their usefulness. While not strictly nihilist, *instantaneísmo* resigns the character to a life without

hope. Decades after bearing witness to the failures of Brasília's utopian aims, Ana remains socially disengaged.

Despite her stated disavowal of utopianism, Ana feels renewed hope when Berta returns to Brasília. Although Ana has few expectations of bonding with a friend who spent decades outside of Brazil and transitioned from male to female, she quickly finds Berta to be a much-needed confidant. Berta's positive influence sparks the novel's first, limited reconsideration of *instantaneísmo* in which Ana acknowledges the resiliency of utopian aspiration: "Nenhuma realidade é imutável, todas as idéias podem renascer, os homens podem aspirar a melhores formas de viver, mesmo quando piores vão surgindo, o mundo muda instantaneamente para melhor e para pior ao mesmo tempo" (95). Though Ana still believes an immutable equilibrium stymies the impact of hopeful thinking, this reflection marks a tentative step towards re-engagement with her community. Berta's death, however, pushes Ana towards complete despair.

Devastated by her friend's murder on New Year's Eve, Ana becomes obsessed with death. She abandons all belief in the validity of hope while associating Brasília's design with her personal failures: "Por um instante ainda penso na aventura que me trouxe ao Planalto Central, como para cumprir uma missão. Logo me ocorre que, desde o começo, a estrutura monumental de Brasília traçava os limites daquela minha aventura" (169). Feeling powerless in the grand scale of the Plano Piloto, Ana's past resentments resurge. She angrily describes destroying Brasília, "Esta é minha revolta, minha revolução. Chega de sobrevida medíocre e acomodada. Tivesse uma bomba aqui, explodia a casa, Brasília, o mundo, esta obra de um Deus mal-humorado" (170). This confluence of personal despair and anti-utopianism marks the protagonist's nadir. Convinced that both she and Brasília are irredeemable failures, Ana lights fire to her house and shoots herself.

As Ana convalesces, Chicão's husband Marcelo outlines a fundamental truth of Almino's Brasília: "Está errado dizer que a esperança é a última que morre. Ela não morre nunca" (175). Ana indeed finds unexpected cause for hope through an unlikely connection to Brasília's mystical utopian origins. When visiting the ruins of her house, she discovers a vial of dirt collected with the *inúteis* at the Jardim da Salvação compound in their youth (179). This physical symbol of Ana's past utopian desires does not instigate a return to uninhibited social dreaming. Nonetheless, Brasília's foundational utopian aspirations again spark renewed hopefulness, or at least prevent a slide into nihilism.

Back in Brasília after a brief stay in her hometown, Ana again revises *instantaneísmo*. In a major departure, the protagonist accepts a post-utopian, cautiously hopeful perspective on the future that recognizes, instead of denying, her past failures:

Não acredito mais em aproveitar o instante para negar o fluxo do tempo. Prefiro uma acomodação emocionada, uma negociação sofrida com a adversariedade, a coragem de continuar abrindo picadas pelos cerrados da existência, em vez de abandonar tudo com a esperança de encontrar o paraíso. Pois o paraíso foi esfacelado e seus restos estão perdidos na poeira do tempo, apenas topamos com migalhas dele aqui e ali, que podemos coletar, como *objets trouvés* . . . Quero abraçar cada fragmento da existência e não um todo vazio, descobrir a possibilidade que se esconde em cada coisa inerte, em cada vida, em cada movimento, possibilidade de construir e reconstruir com o que está aqui, em vez de procurar pelo que não existe nem pode existir. (188-189)

Her belief in Brasília as a potential paradise is extinct, as are her earlier hopes for uncompromised revolution. Still, Ana renews her focus on the possibility of constructing a better

future at a small scale. Instead of hoping in vain for a utopian *tabula rasa* in her own life, Ana must critically approach her past and present while striving for post-utopian improvement.

Almino challenges even this cautious optimism, as Ana survives an attempted murder soon after returning to Brasília. While Ana understandably feels renewed despair after killing the disarmed assassin, she reiterates her new, more hopeful version of *instantaneísmo* and avoids spiraling into renewed nihilism. Gazing at Brasília for a final time, Ana identifies the city as a space of hope despite its failures:

Tenho outros olhos e outro coração para as paisagens de sempre. A cidade já não me assombra, e as esperanças que à minha revelia, me gera estão ao alcance da minha mão. . . Brasília deixou de ser minha prisão voluntária. É a cidade de Diana, caçadora de ilusões; de sonhos perdidos entre paisagens de desolação. Porque amo amar, quero viver neste espaço em que a visão do futuro foi preservada entre fósseis e artifícios deste novo milênio. Construir uma cidade do nada é uma aposta pela vida. Quero viver na fronteira que avança sobre o imenso vazio. Reconstruir-me pelas cinzas. (202-203)

Despite having failed to consolidate wholesale utopian change, Almino's Brasília reflects the hopes and disappointments of its subjects. As Ana realizes that the capital will never reshape its subjects into an idealized society she at last understands her responsibility to strive for post-utopian change.

The question mark-shaped cloud formation returns in the novel's penultimate paragraph, at once highlighting Ana's renewed sense of optimism and casting this engagement into doubt (203). Though Ana has recommitted to utopian thinking, she is pursued by a question mark overhead. Will her newfound hopefulness last? Almino provides no firm answer, yet Ana's self-criticism and revised, post-utopian *instantaneísmo* augur well for her future. Utopian thinking is

never free of doubt and disillusionment in Almino's Brasília, but for the moment, at least, Ana remains cautiously hopeful.

### **Conclusion**

Brasília's unique legacy as a symbol of utopianism unavoidably affects contemporary forms of utopian thought in the city. The imagined emblem of political progress, high modernist egalitarianism, or mystical paradise never came to fruition, yet all retain considerable symbolic power. The dissonance caused by the juxtaposition of this lasting memory of Brasília's foundational aspirations and the city's obvious flaws is fruitful ground for exploration. This dynamic is further complicated by an official mythology that, when convenient, suggests the city has largely fulfilled its initial promises. This ideological reinforcement of a highly unequal *status quo* suppresses dystopian thought as well as new forms of utopian thought targeted at reapproximating the socialist-inspired egalitarianism desired by Costa and Niemeyer.

In his literary depictions of the city, João Almino skillfully reveals how characters internalize this complex and contradictory matrix of utopianism. The tension between the flawed city they experience firsthand and the utopian city they imagine represents a continual challenge. On the one hand, many characters find real inspiration in the city's historical association with utopian thought. Even those who experience considerable trauma or witness the city's most dystopian aspects firsthand rarely maintain a wholly anti-utopian posture. On the other, unbridled, hopeful aspiration seems foolish in the context of a city so deeply marked by the failure of grand utopian schemes. If the confluence of political power, skilled design, and saintly belief ultimately created another segregated, violent Brazilian city, what can contemporary dreamers possibly contribute? Almino offers no formula for success nor specific solutions. Still,

amidst the turbulent politics of late twentieth century Brazil and hegemonic global anti-utopianism, Almino's characters rarely abandon hope for themselves and their city despite full consciousness of the city's flaws.

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