

Artigo Original

AFTER UTOPIA: NEGOTIATING HOPE AND FATALISM IN JOÃO ALMINO'S LITERARY BRASÍLIA

APÓS A UTOPIA: A NEGOCIAÇÃO DE ESPERANÇA E FATALISMO NA BRASÍLIA LITERÁRIA DE JOÃO ALMINO

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Abstract: This article examines João Almino's novels *Idéias para onde passar o fim do mundo* (1987) and *As cinco estações do amor* (2001), considering how the author refuses the anti-utopian consensus that defined criticism of Brasília in the late twentieth century. In both works, the Federal District's legacy of utopian projection is understood to have failed. This same legacy, however, continues to resonate, counterbalancing individual and collective disillusionment. The article argues that Almino's nuanced, ambiguous portrait of utopianism represents a post-utopian approach to social change that nonetheless meaningfully defies prevailing disregard for utopia at the time of the novels' publication.

Key Words: Apocalypse, Brasília, Literature, Millennium, Utopianism.

Resumo: Este artigo aborda dois romances de João Almino, *Idéias para onde passar o fim do mundo* (1987) e *As cinco estações do amor* (2001), para examinar como o autor rejeita o consenso anti-utópico respeito a Brasília no final do século XX. Nas duas obras, o legado de projeção utópica no Distrito Federal se entende como falido, porém ainda ressoa e contrabalança a desilusão individual e coletiva. O artigo argumenta que este retrato matizado e ambíguo do utopianismo representa uma abordagem pós-utópica da transformação social que, não obstante, desafia significativamente o desprezo prevalecente para a utopia na época da publicação dos romances.

Palavras-chave: Apocalipse, Brasília, Literatura, Milênio, Utopia.

Contours of a Failed Utopian City

Brasília existed as the object of utopian dreams well before its

inauguration in 1960. The capital's realization further fortified this legacy, with the new city designed to herald a newly modern and increasingly cohesive national identity. Beginning with Brasília's construction, however, reality contradicted hopeful visions of the metropolis as an agent of social transformation. Contractors routinely exploited the migrant workers known as *candangos*, who were forcefully segregated into satellite cities far from the high modernist center.¹ This tactic, defined as apartheid by urbanist Luiz Alberto de Campos Gouvêa (2005, p. 347), spans periods of democracy and authoritarian rule, creating a baseline of continual inequality that subverts Brasília's foundational utopian aims. Anthropologist James Holston's influential 1989 work *The Modernist City*, translated to Portuguese in 1993, further consolidated a consensus view of a stratified, alienating capital whose reality betrayed its idealized origins.²

Alongside academics, cultural producers have been among Brasília's harshest detractors. Sophia Beal (2020, p. 1) opens her monograph on contemporary art from the Federal District by affirming, "the city has been dismissed as emotionally cold, boring, hostile, vacuous, artificial, calculated, and inhumane" by foreign and Brazilian critics and artists. However, a diverse group of writers, filmmakers, poets, visual artists, and musicians active in the twenty-first century have successfully contested this fatalistic view of the capital as an unchanging site of oppression (BEAL, 2020, p. 3). Among those analyzed in the monograph is novelist and diplomat João Almino,³ who "put the capital on the literary map as a place where award-winning and widely translated novels are written" through a quintet of novels set in the Brasília (BEAL, 2020, p. 69)⁴. The author's close attention to the Federal District's history,

1 Following James C. Scott (1998, p. 5), I prefer "high modernism" to differentiate from modernisms in other fields.

2 Sophia Beal (2020, p. 7) calls Holston's monograph "...by far the most influential scholarly text of Brasília, presenting the capital as a social catastrophe".

3 Born in Mossoró, Rio Grande do Norte, Almino moved to Brasília in 1970 to prepare for his career as a diplomat. He has published nonfictional texts on politics, literary criticism, and Thomas More's *Utopia* alongside eight novels. In 2017, the author secured a prestigious chair in the Academia Brasileira de Letras. Almino has won multiple major literary prizes and many of his novels have been published in translation.

4 In chapter 3 of *The Art of Brasília*, Beal (2020, p. 73-84) analyzes 2010's *Cidade livre*, which interrogates official narratives of *brasiliense* history. For the critic, the text's self-referentiality and interest in the *candangos* effectively illustrates the Federal District's inequalities and comments on the challenges faced by marginalized cultural producers. However, the text suggests that generational trauma cannot be overcome, thus standing in contrast to the delicate

present, and possible futures approximate his literary project with the national historical, sociological, or anthropological analyses known as “interpretações do Brasil,” defined by José Carlos Reis (2006, p. 15) as “sínteses [que] têm um duplo objetivo: criar uma representação global do Brasil... [e] ‘refigurar’ o presente e imaginar um futuro possível, uma utopia realizável” . These texts, translated into multiple languages, have indeed spread awareness of Brasília’s history and culture both domestically and internationally. Almino likewise insists on contemplating constructive social transformation, defying the anti-utopian zeitgeist of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries and the critical consensus that Brasília was a failed experiment. Given the city’s close associations with national cohesion, power, and the public sphere, Almino’s portraits of *brasiliense* society and identity also reflect upon the state of the Brazilian nation (BEAL, 2020, p. 8-9). Still, the specificity of the geography, history, and aspirations on display confirm the primacy of the local in the author’s early works.

This article investigates the representation of utopianism in Almino’s first and third novels: *Idéias para onde passar o fim do mundo* (1987) [*Idéias*] and *As cinco estações do amor* (2001) [*As cinco*]⁵. The fantastical, narratively fractured *Idéias* and the realist, memorialist *As cinco* each integrate a profound interest in Brasília’s history that likewise characterizes much of Almino’s non-fictional production. The essay “Brasília, o mito; anotações para um ideário estético-literário,” for instance, recounts the Federal District’s history as a repository of utopian desire before asking: “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” (ALMINO, 2008, p. 10). Almino’s understanding of utopianism in the capital is complex. While fully conscious of the city’s failed foundational aspirations, the author nonetheless believes that Brasília can inspire renewed utopian thought: “...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, 2008, p.19). This irrepressible hopefulness does not override the undesirable aspects of life in the capital, but rather informs a critical perspective that refuses anti-utopian resignation. The grandiose goals of Brasília’s origins recurrently inspire elite and working-class

balance of hope and despair in Almino’s earlier works.

5 Almino has maintained the spelling “idéias” throughout his oeuvre even after the accent was removed by the Portuguese Language Orthographic Agreement of 1990.

characters alike, inspiring unexpected hopefulness in their darkest moments.

To better analyze Almino's nuanced treatment of these themes, this article will review Brasília's legacy of utopianism and relevant theory from the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies prior to examining *Idéias* and *As cinco* in detail. The historical overview will further illuminate the references to various varieties of utopian aspiration in the two novels, while utopian studies critics will elucidate the differences and consistencies that mark these two novels and inform consideration of Almino's delicate balance between a clear-eyed view of the city's failures and ongoing belief in its potential as a site of social transformation.

In 1883, the Italian priest Giovanni Bosco (known as Dom Bosco in Brazil) recorded a mystical dream of a grand city in a "Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey" in Brasília's approximate location (apud HOLSTON, 1989, p. 16). Dom Bosco, who appears briefly in *Idéias*, remains a potent symbol of the capital's radical promise. The priest's heavenly metropolis in the Planalto Central aligned with aspirations for a centralized Brazilian capital that united ideologically diverse thinkers in both the colonial and independent periods. While not mystical, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century proposals for a new capital remain utopian in their desire for near-instantaneous demographic expansion, greater resource extraction, and economic integration across the Brazilian landmass. As Darlene Sadlier (2008, p. 197) describes, this imagined city's location in the sparsely populated *cerrado* added symbolic weight to fantastical and pragmatic visions alike: "The utopian city in the wilderness also reflected the Edenic motif that had been associated with the newly discovered Brazil". Such a grand, isolated capital would at once emulate the bounty of Brazilian nature and mark the sudden passage into a more advanced stage of civilizational progress.

The history of Brasília's construction confirms its bona fides as a symbol of national modernization. Despite the central capital's approval in the Republican Constitution of 1891, Getúlio Vargas's "Marcha para o oeste" initiative, and the construction of Goiânia in the 1930s, logistical challenges continued to preclude mass migration to the Planalto Central. In the 1950s, the area now delineated as the Federal District consisted of ranches and a few, small settlements. The spark needed to finally make Brasília a reality came from the national developmentalist platform of Juscelino Kubitschek's victorious 1955 presidential campaign. Famously

promising “50 years of progress in 5,” JK associated a new capital with a belated national leap into modernity. Urbanist Lúcio Costa’s high modernist Master Plan proposed an egalitarian city that would model a more just society. Chief architect Oscar Niemeyer’s striking aesthetic further connoted the desire for a postcolonial, modern identity.

Forging such a new ideal of cohesive nationhood also entailed a process of destruction. The new capital’s conception as a utopian *tabula rasa* for Brazilian society required a degree of collective amnesia. As Filipe Manzoni (2018, p. 91) describes:

O mito do novo mundo faz da pedra fundamental de Brasília . . . a base de uma nova sociedade e, ao mesmo tempo, uma espécie de kolossós da antiga, isto é, uma pedra tumular que encerraria a imagem do Brasil pré-moderno como quem cumpre um rito funerário.⁶

Theoretically, Brasília’s construction would inter the unsavory aspects of Brazilian history as the nation entered a period of prosperity. Instead, the Federal District defied the utopian desires of its planners and retained the inequality and authoritarianism typical of the nation’s past. Elite inhabitants of privileged areas, like the protagonist of *As cinco*, remain isolated from the travails of the Federal District’s working-class residents. The Plano Piloto, guaranteed preservation by UNESCO in 1987, visually signifies a false degree of accomplishment that obscures the Federal District’s history of violence and segregation.

Brasília’s legacy of grand aspiration and subsequent disillusionment makes it an ideal location to consider the idea of utopianism. Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) gave name to this concept and provided a blueprint for the utopian literary genre, yet utopia’s shifting meanings and connotations in the centuries since have provided 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 totalitarian depravity. As seen in his fiction and prose, including essays on *Utopia*, Almino is well versed in the concept’s complexity, its relevance to Brasília, and the anti-utopianism typical of the late twentieth century. Although a singular definition

6 Drawing from Jean-Pierre Vernant, Manzoni (2018, p. 91) describes a kolossós as a marker of Ancient Greek funereal rights meant to prevent the deceased spirit from returning to the realm of the living.

of utopianism 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 thus provides a useful baseline for analyzing Almino's novels (SARGENT, 1994, p. 3).

This interpretation of utopia draws on the work of Marxist scholar Ernst Bloch, who conceived of utopian thought as a universal impulse to transcend one's material and historical circumstances. His three-volume *The Principle of Hope* (1954-1959) analyzes manifestations of this inherent drive in a wide range of social and cultural forms including daydreams, popular culture, literature, and philosophy. For Douglas Kellner (2012, p. 95), the critic's mapping of aspiration positions utopia as a "paradigm of 'intra-historical transcendence,'" connecting desire across time and place: "utopian elements are grounded in a cultural tradition and historical situation, and thus point to a better future in which long-held wishes and dreams for freedom, happiness, and justice can be realized". As creators and interpreters of cultural artifacts study this common impulse, they attain "educated hope," which reveals the fallacy of viewing the sociopolitical status quo as immutable and the importance of working towards constructive transformation (BLOCH, 1986, p. 7).

Despite the utility of Bloch's theory for interpreting works of cultural production like Almino's novels, faith in utopianism dimmed by end of the twentieth century. In the wake of World War II, liberal thinkers including Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, and Isaiah Berlin fueled a growing association between utopia and prescriptive, coercive oppression (JACOBY, 2005, p. xii; 50). In a 2005 monograph, intellectual historian Russell Jacoby (2005, p. 81) describes how, "The anti-utopian ethos has swept all intellectual quarters. Utopia has lost its ties with alluring visions of harmony and has turned into a threat. Conventional and scholarly wisdom associates utopian ideas with violence and dictatorship". As exemplified by Margaret Thatcher's maxim that "there is no alternative" (TINA) and the hegemony of liberal democracy heralded by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), conventional thinking in the twentieth century's latter decades identified radical visions of social change with futility or potential disaster. As exemplified by characters discussing the unlikelihood of social transformation on the symbolic night of January 31st, 1999 in *As cinco*, Almino's characters are not immune from this consensus. And yet, both this novel and *Idéias* propose engagement with historical utopianism as a counterbalance to purely pessimistic views of

Brasília's present and future.

This cautious form of hopefulness parallels the concepts of realistic utopianism or post-utopianism. Portuguese philosopher Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002, p. 34) argues for the redoubled importance of localized aspiration that resists resigned acceptance of an unequal status quo:

A esperança não reside num princípio geral que providencia um futuro geral. Reside na possibilidade de criar campos de experimentação social onde seja possível resistir localmente às evidências da inevitabilidade... É este realismo utópico que preside as iniciativas dos grupos oprimidos que, num mundo onde parece ter desaparecido a alternativa, vão construindo um pouco, por toda parte, alternativas locais que tornam possíveis uma vida digna e decente.

Such “utopian realism” reacts to the disillusionment of TINA via a focus on concrete change in the near-term. Rather than hoping that a universal utopian impulse will eventually create widespread change, utopian alternatives to present conditions must be conceived and enacted locally.

Brazilian poet and critic Haroldo de Campos's theory of post-utopia adopts a similarly cautious approach to social dreaming that has proven salient in national literature since the 1980s. For this critic and co-founder of the concrete poetry movement, post-utopia signifies a re-engagement with utopian thought after two decades of military dictatorship⁷. Distancing himself from the single-minded futurity typical of his earlier work, Campos (1996, p. 268) now argues for artists to engage directly with everyday reality: “Ao projeto totalizador da vanguarda, que, no limite, só a utopia redentora pode sustentar, sucede a pluralização das poéticas possíveis. Ao *princípio-esperança*, voltado para o futuro, sucede o *princípio-realidade*, fundamento ancorado no presente”. While still hopeful for future change on a large scale, post-utopianism prioritizes a critical response to pressing issues in the present. Disavowing revolutionary utopianism seeking a sociopolitical tabula rasa, Almino's characters generally adopt the geographically and temporally limited vein of social dreaming described by Sousa Santos and Campos. And yet, in an ambiguous gesture, this cautious hopefulness often draws inspiration from the radical hopes of Brasília's prehistory.

7 Developed since 1979, this article cites the version of Campos's theory of post-utopia from 1997's *O arco-íris branco*.

Dystopian thinking likewise influences Almino's complex depictions of aspiration in Brasília. Whereas utopian representation presents improved or neutral sociopolitical alternatives, dystopian narratives inspire social dreaming by highlighting or exaggerating existing problems in either the fantastical or realist modes. Brazilian scholar Leomir Cardoso Hilário (2013, p. 202) concisely contours this dynamic by naming the concept an “*aviso de incêndio*, o qual, como todo recurso de emergência, busca chamar a atenção para que o acontecimento perigoso seja controlado, e seus efeitos, embora já em curso, sejam inibidos.” Dystopia thus functions as a negative of utopian thought, reacting to nightmarish visions of society rather than directly presenting better alternatives.

In both *Idéias* and *As cinco*, dystopian elements often appear intertwined with apocalyptic rhetoric or imagery. As utopian studies scholars Joe Trotta and Houman Sadri (2019, p. 2) explain, dystopian and apocalyptic literature indeed share, “similar ways of engaging readers as they generally make use of problematic issues that are recognizable in our contemporary condition . . . as a basis for their troubled and troubling conceptions of a future world that could arise from the present”. Apocalypse, whose etymology means unveiling or revelation, maintains a didactic impulse alongside its popular association with the end of the world. While apocalypticism generally foregrounds destruction, critics like Claire P. Curtis (2010, p. 4-7) and Annette M. Magid (2015, p. 226) each affirm that popular, post-apocalyptic narratives often incorporate hope for social renewal. Despite the pessimism about the capital prevalent at the time, Almino's invocation of apocalypse in Brasília at once imagines the city's destruction and suggests the prospect of a twenty-first century renaissance.

The apocalyptic speculation in *As cinco* dialogues explicitly with the approaching end of the second millennium. The novel's New Year's Eve party scene reflects what Louis Parkinson Zamora (1989, p. 1) identifies as international interest in apocalypse prior to the calendrical shift from 1999 to 2000. Dionísio Vila Maior (2001, p. 192) notes that, during this period, “tornou-se normal relacionar o fim de milênio com cataclismos e catástrofes... esta **visão catastrofista** perdura com alguma teimosia no **final do século XX / final do segundo milênio** (emphasis in original). Brasília's imagined destruction in *Idéias* reflects this zeitgeist yet also inverts the rapid creation of the new capital in the near-uninhabited Planalto Central. Further, Beal (2020, p. 13) argues that literary fantasies of the capital's annihilation

“...elevat[e] Brasília to the status of an artistic city... by presenting it as a place worthy of having its imagined loss be recorded”.⁸ Indeed, analysis of *Idéias* and *As cinco* confirms that the city’s possible destruction is not a denouncement but rather one element of a critique that tentatively validates the city’s potentiality as a site of constructive transformation.

Resilient Hope and Paradoxical Inspiration in *Idéias*

The capital of *Idéias* is explicitly introduced as a space of disillusionment, yet Brasília’s foundational ambitions continue to spark hopefulness. The novel’s narrative arcs eschew straightforward resolution, instead coalescing in a complex portrait of utopianism, fatalism, and apocalyptic prediction. As Beatriz Resende (2003) suggests in the preface to the second edition of *Idéias*, the novel’s Brasília reflects the author’s hopes and fears about Brazil’s return to democracy after two decades of dictatorship. Almino incorporates politics through events relating to Paulo Antônio Fernandes, Brazil’s first Black president, whose inauguration and tragic death bookend the novel. While Fernandes’s fate suggests deep skepticism about the permanence of Brazilian democracy, Almino avoids fatalism in his appraisal of both national society and Brasília.

The aspiring filmmaker Mário Camargo de Castro, now deceased, narrates the first thirteen chapters of *Idéias* from beyond the grave. This figure, an obvious allusion to Machado de Assis’s Brás Cubas, combines memories of an unfinished film script with narratives recounting the stories of various characters who appear in a photograph taken in the Praça dos Três Poderes during Fernandes’s inauguration. Silvinha, the president’s daughter, narrates the final two chapters, questioning Mário’s version of events and outlining her own aspirations for Brasília. Alongside these narrator’s perspectives, three characters’ arcs exemplify the novel’s nuanced view of late-twentieth-century utopianism: Berenice, Íris, and Eva. The Northeastern migrant Berenice’s journey towards disillusionment concludes with unforeseen optimism. The mystic Íris and her multiple apocalyptic visions underline the resiliency of mystical utopianism in Brasília. Finally, Eva’s descent into hopelessness marks a rare case of unredeemed despair

8 Alongside Almino, poet Nicolas Behr, filmmaker Adirley Queirós, and playwright Alexandre Ribondi have imagined Brasília’s destruction (BEAL, 2020, p. 13).

in Almino's oeuvre. Though total loss of faith is possible, Brasília's foundational aspirations remain a powerful, if unlikely, source of post-utopian inspiration.

The opening chapter, "Fantasia para o Plano Piloto," sets the stage for these considerations by foregrounding Brasília's history as an object of utopian desire. Almino quotes from Dom Bosco's dream and Lúcio Costa's urban plan while referencing early political dreams of a central capital (ALMINO, 1987, p. 20). And yet, Mário admits that, "A cidade pertencia cada vez mais a um Brasil sem sonhos e desiludido" despite the tentative hopes generated by Fernandes's election (ALMINO, 1987, p. 20). The myth of Brazil as the land of the future retains influence, but, "Na realidade, o país entrava num jogo de possíveis, que ia da felicidade ao desespero" (ALMINO, 1987, p. 18). Almino's characters react to this unknown future not through resignation but rather continued aspiration: "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" (ALMINO, 1987, p. 24-25). These limited aims reflect what Fernando Arenas (2004, p. xx) describes as "the shift from grand utopian visions to small utopian imaginings with regard to a possible better society" typical of the final decades of the twentieth century. At times, Almino's characters conform with the localized utopias of "solidarity, love, and ethical commitment vis-à-vis the other" that Arenas identifies in Brazilian literature from the late 1970s through the 1990s (ARENAS, p. xx). However, the resonance of the grand narratives associated with Brasília's creation in *Idéias* represents a point of divergence between Almino and his contemporaries. While radical dreams remain discredited in the author's Federal District, his "realistic utopian" characters engage in sociohistorical critique in a manner that recalls Campos's post-utopia.

Berenice's arc posits utopianism rooted in Brasília's origins as an unexpected counterbalance for the disillusionment experienced by those exploited in the Federal District. A migrant from the *sertão*, Berenice grows 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]" (ALMINO, 1987, p. 60). The character eventually leaves Brasília with little

hope, yet later adopts a surprisingly balanced view of the capital that reflects the ongoing inspirational capacity of the city's foundational aspirations:

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 (ALMINO, 1987, p. 71).

In Berenice's case, this symbolic power does not lead to the targeted action generally associated with realistic utopia. Nonetheless, this ambiguous description of the capital suggests the city continues to symbolize the worthy goal of collective and individual liberation. Despite the anti-utopian rhetoric of her earlier frustrations, the capital's legacy of utopianism unexpectedly prevents Berenice from succumbing to despair.

Íris's complex trajectory demonstrates the continued relevance of mystical utopianism in the capital more than a century after Dom Bosco's dream. Despite becoming disillusioned in the aftermath of an early apocalyptic vision, this medium and prophetess finds reason to hope anew following a tortuous series of events invoking mystical, science fictional, and religious imagery (ALMINO, 1987, p. 129). At her spiritual nadir, Íris recalls a past vision of Dom Bosco at a *candomblé* ceremony in Salvador when the priest "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" (ALMINO, 1987, p. 132). Nihilism and radical utopianism remain in a state of tension throughout Íris's journey. Though she continually searches for salvation, which inspires her to create the Jardim da Salvação religious compound, despair consistently looms on the horizon (ALMINO, 1987. P. 137-143).⁹

After Íris constructs the Jardim da Salvação's pyramidal temple, kidnappers abduct the President and war (apparently) breaks out in Brasília. Again reflecting on the figure of Dom Bosco, Íris wonders if the paradisiacal city he prophesized in the region might finally come to fruition following

⁹ The fictional Jardim da Salvação recurs throughout Almino's oeuvre and shares many characteristics with the Vale do Amanhacer religious community.

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” (ALMINO, 1987, p. 152). Hope and resignation remain inseparable, demonstrating the resilience of utopianism despite Íris’s conviction that the apocalypse is actively occurring. If the end of the world has arrived, it may still be reborn, with the post-apocalyptic period belatedly fulfilling Brasília’s utopian aims.

Eva’s suicide represents a rare, definitive triumph of despair in Almino’s Brasília that throws the nuanced utopianism of Berenice and Íris’s respective trajectories into further relief. Though she first claims to believe in a brighter future for the world, Eva eventually abandons all hope: “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 acas. . . Não acreditava mais em vitórias ou redensões” (ALMINO, 1987, p. 104-105). The character’s aversion to utopianism is undeniable; she sees no possibility of the future improving on the tragic present. Unable to move past her exemplary anti-utopian belief that Brazil is on a course of unstoppable decadence, she takes her own life (ALMINO, 1987, p. 120-121). While Eva’s death acknowledges that nihilism is a possible response to Brasília’s status quo, such fatalism remains rare within Almino’s oeuvre.

Silvinha’s narration during the final chapters exemplifies another ambiguous vision of post-utopian hope. For this character, the capital inherently pushes its inhabitants towards continual imagination and, thus, some degree of engagement with utopianism (ALMINO, 1987, p. 193). In the final chapter, Silvinha embodies this tendency, imagining 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” (ALMINO, 1987, p. 204). The accompanying sunset, she declares, belongs to the end of the world, begging the question of whether the characters are marching towards a utopian future or apocalypse (ALMINO, 1987, p. 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” (ALMINO, 1987, p. 205-206). Despite its alienating characteristics,

however, the capital's symbolic legacy continues to stimulate imaginative aspiration and unforeseen hopefulness. Brasília's potent combination of history, geography, and urbanism generates irrepressible, if cautious, optimism even in a moment of widespread disillusionment. Still, this hope remains inextricable from the doubt occasioned by the failures of its initial objectives. All dreams remain paired with disenchantment.

Second Spring: A Return to Aspiration in *As cinco*

As cinco initiates a less aesthetically experimental stage of Almino's production that nonetheless maintains a memorialist framing and interest in Brasília's legacy as a utopian space. The novel relates the protagonist Ana Kaufman's memories over roughly fifteen months in 1999 and 2000. A wealthy, fifty-five-year-old retired professor and recent divorcee, Ana at first finds herself emotionally adrift to the point that she creates a strident, internal alter-ego named Diana who occasionally guides the protagonist's actions and speech. As the new millennium approaches, Ana experiences both despair and renewed hope. Though she feels optimistic after the return of Berta, a member of the *inúteis* friends' group from their youth, this transgender character is murdered in a hate crime on New Year's Eve. The protagonist subsequently attempts suicide only to be saved by her widower neighbor Carlos. After a convalescing in her hometown in Minas Gerais, Ana accepts Carlos's proposal of marriage and draws inspiration from Brasília while committing to a post-utopian outlook.

Throughout the novel, both Ana and Diana discuss the theory of *instantaneísmo*, a philosophy indissociable from utopianism. At its core, *instantaneísmo* is a philosophy of complete and total focus on the present moment. As first presented by Ana, the theory represents anti-utopian disregard for the future disguised as self-preservation: "Deixarei de lado o futuro, para não construir ilusões e nem prever desastres, o que, em vez de evitá-los, talvez os acelere" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 50). In a later scene parodying the rigid conventions of academia, Diana unleashes an outburst that revises the *instantaneísmo* to incorporate hopeful futurity without abandoning its core principal of accepting the inertia of the present moment: "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"

(ALMINO, 2001, p. 95). Despite Diana's comparative optimism, both versions of *instantaneísmo* share the implication that the present is unaffected by utopian thinking. In his essay on Almino's first four novels, Pedro Meira Monteiro (2012, p. 68) describes this belief system as 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 futuro que com o compromisso profundo diante daquilo que se passa agora mesmo diante de seus olhos.¹⁰

Meira Monteiro correctly identifies the aversion to grand utopian ambition in Almino's oeuvre while noting the potential utility of deeper engagement with the present. Still, Ana's reassessment of *instantaneísmo* in the concluding section of *As cinco* breaks meaningfully with these earlier descriptions of the philosophy and confirms the character's cautious re-engagement with utopianism.

Whereas *instantaneísmo* reflects the ambiguous temporality of a city conceived of over centuries and constructed in a mere five years, Almino creates a straightforward association between Brasília's landscapes and Ana's emotional state. While the narrator consistently associates the city with the hopelessness (or a lack thereof) that she feels in a given moment, several passages belie her professed disregard for the future and past. Denilson Lopes (2006, p. 128) connects Ana's journey closely with the titular cycle of 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". The capital of *As cinco* reflects a wide range of aspirations and disillusionments as Ana confronts personal frustrations, the general ennui shared by her peers, and incidents of random violence. Still, the decision to include a fifth season after Ana's attempted suicide signifies a move away from anti-utopianism as the new millennium begins.

Almino bookends Ana's journey with the appearance of emotionally charged, question-mark-shaped clouds. In the opening chapter, the protagonist associates this cloud formation with her personal loss of

¹⁰ The revised version of Meira's article translated into English excludes this quotation.

faith in the capital'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" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 17). Looking at the contemporary city from the central Eixo Monumental, however, Ana acutely senses her own lack of direction alongside the social failures that have defined Brasília's history. Foremost among these is the dictatorship, which quashed the unbridled utopianism that united the *inúteis* in the 1960s: "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 caretice" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 19). The policies of segregation and censorship violently enforced 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 (ALMINO, 2001, p. 21-22).

Initially, at least, Ana reacts to the capital's dystopian characteristics with resignation rather than critical engagement. In 1999, Ana's youthful 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" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 40). Even as Ana feels renewed hope after Berta's arrival, the impending arrival of the new millennium exaggerates these feelings of disappointment. When the *inúteis* unite for a New Year's party, the protagonist declares that "É o medo o que está marcando o fim do milênio," while other friends remark that "Todos vivemos na merda," and "A gente achava que o mundo ia ser outro em trinta anos, né" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 147; 146; 147). The *inúteis'* explicitly pessimistic dialogues leave no doubt as to their generation's deep skepticism about social or personal renewal in twenty-first century Brasília. The millennium's apocalyptic associations hew firmly towards catastrophe and irredeemable loss.

The next morning, Ana describes how the party's lack of any epiphany makes her feel hopeless, as if all good things in her life have already passed

(ALMINO, 2001, p. 158). And yet, such pure despair remains fleeting in Almino's capital, as Ana sees an "esperança" cricket that she interprets as a hopeful sign: "Esta esperança deve ter um significado para mim, neste primeiro dia do milênio. Por pequena que seja, por mais que tente negá-la e a reconheça como pura ilusão, a esperança teima em sobreviver. Sem ela, qual presente seria possível suportar?" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 159). Despite her prior insistence on the sovereignty of the present moment, Ana recognizes the importance of hopeful aspiration. The calendrical turn, represented only pages prior as the culmination of an inexorable process of disillusionment, now conveys the possibility of renaissance.

This recognition is short-lived, however, once Ana discovers Berta was murdered the night before. The protagonist becomes obsessed with death and associates Brasília's design with the futility of personal aspiration: "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" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 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" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 170). This nihilistic, destructive apocalyptic rhetoric marks the protagonist's nadir. Convinced that both she and Brasília are irredeemable failures, she sets fire to her house and shoots herself.

As Ana convalesces, her friend Marcelo outlines a fundamental principle of Almino's Brasília: "Está errado dizer que a esperança é a última que morre. Ela não morre nunca" (ALMINO, 2001, p. 175). The protagonist's reengagement with hopefulness begins via an unlikely connection to Brasília's mystical utopian origins. When visiting the ruins of her house, Ana discovers a vial of dirt collected with the *inúteis* at the Jardim da Salvação compound in their youth (ALMINO, 2001, p. 179). This physical symbol of both Ana and Brasília's history of grand ambition does not instigate an instantaneous return to uninhibited social dreaming but does foreshadow her unlikely turn to post-utopianism in the new millennium.

Back in Brasília after a brief stay in her hometown, Ana revises *instantaneísmo* for the final time. In a major departure, the protagonist accepts a hopeful perspective on the future that recognizes the importance

of learning from the failed utopias of decades past:

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. . . . 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. (ALMINO, 2001, p. 188-189)

The radical vision of Brasília as a paradisiacal, revolutionary city will never come to pass. Still, Ana will strive to draw from these failed ambitions as she seeks personal and social improvement in the near future. Instead of hoping in vain for a utopian tabula rasa in her own life, Ana commits to critically assessing her past and present and seeking post-utopian improvement.

Almino challenges even this cautious optimism when Ana survives an attempted murder. Although the protagonist initially feels distraught, she avoids spiraling into renewed fatalism. 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 artificios 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. (ALMINO, 2001, p. 202-203)

Having failed to consolidate wholesale utopian change, Almino's Brasília reflects the hopes and disappointments of its residents. As Ana realizes that the capital will never reshape its subjects into an idealized society, she at last internalizes her responsibility to continue seeking realistic utopian improvement.

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 (ALMINO, 2001, p. 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: Balance and Breakthrough

The tension between the flawed Brasília that Almino's characters experience firsthand and the idealized city they cannot help but recall fuels each novel's consideration of utopian thought. On the one hand, the capital's complex history of grand aspiration serves as a source of inspiration even in periods of deep disillusionment and skepticism towards utopia. On the other, deep engagement with social dreaming can appear foolish in a city so defined by the failure of grand desire. If the confluence of mystical belief, political power, and revolutionary urbanism ultimately created another segregated, violent Brazilian city, what can contemporary dreamers possibly contribute? Almino repeatedly acknowledges the validity of such uncertainty. Still, the characters of *Idéias* and *As cinco* find themselves enticed towards hopefulness by the city's associations with radical utopian thought. Poised between this ubiquitous inspiration and the anti-utopian consensus that led to widespread condemnation of the capital by the late twentieth century, Almino's *brasilienses* struggle to engage productively with utopian aspiration.

The characters in each novel primarily interpret utopianism through the lens of both Brasília's creation and the generational aspirations of those who came of age in the 1960s. For Meira Monteiro (2012, p. 61): "*Almino sounds out the legacy of the 1960s, suggesting that its libertarian impulses define a whole generation of Brazilians, who nevertheless see themselves, by the end of the dictatorship, oscillating between a most promising utopia and the helpless failure of all dreams* (italics in original). Among the key motivations for these young Brazilians were sexual liberation, the pursuit of pleasure, and the ideology Marcelo Ridenti (2014, p. 55-57) calls "romanticismo revolucionário," which combined cultural nationalism with anti-capitalism. However, these desires were frustrated as the dictatorship reinforced capitalist hegemony

and cracked down on civil liberties after 1968. The consequent uncertainty in the wake of redemocratization is only compounded by the perceived breakdown of grand utopian narratives and the seeming impossibility of fundamental social change.

Despite recall to the exuberant social dreams of the 1960s, Almino's novels reflect the challenges of utopianism in the comparatively depoliticized period of their publication. Still, his commitment to crafting nuanced depictions of Brasília as a site of social dreaming defies the negative view of the capital prominent at the time. This ambiguous depiction in both novels thus serves as a bulwark against passively accepting the capital as condemned to apartheid and alienation. Almino is undeniably among the "well-healed [sic], white, male, heterosexual artists who lived in the Plano Piloto" that dominated *brasiliense* art in the twentieth century, while most of his characters are from a similar social milieu (BEAL, 2020, p. 18). Still, the author's refusal to accept the anti-utopian status quo creates a throughline between his early novels and a subsequent generation of diverse artists who engage the capital's legacy of utopian aspiration to contest socioeconomic inequality in the Federal District. Almino's critique may seem bloodless compared to the radical vision of filmmaker Adirley Queirós's *Branco sai, preto fica* (2014), for instance, yet the author's inconformity with the fatalistic vogue of decades prior conveys a belief in Brasília's transformation that continues to resonate among younger artists in the new millennium.¹¹

Almino's vision of utopian thought as inextricable from doubt represents a productive response to a historical zeitgeist defined by resignation to the status quo. By acknowledging that utopianism is an ambiguous, rather than binary, phenomenon, Almino conveys belief in constructive reform, however unlikely. The capital will never be as heavenly as Dom Bosco's dream nor initiate a new era of social egalitarianism, yet its history of social dreaming need not be disregarded as naïve. Almino reframes the debate about Brasília's legacy as a utopian city by recognizing the validity of these inspirations alongside credulity in their continued relevance. By tracing the trajectories of characters who re-engage with utopian thought despite full awareness of the city's flaws, both *Idéias* and *As cinco* illustrate productive post-utopianism inspired by the city's failed, radical utopian origins.

11 Unlike the imagined destruction of the Plano Piloto in *Idéias* and *As cinco*, Queirós's impoverished, Afro-Brazilian characters from the satellite city of Ceilândia successfully avenge police violence by annihilating the Plano Piloto with a sonic bomb.

Negotiating disillusionment will always be part of social dreaming in Brasília, yet previous failures should not permanently negate the city's historical strains of utopianism.

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