

# The Cassandra Project

## Goals and Perspectives

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### **1. Introduction**

The name Cassandra is programmatic, the code for our behaviour. More specifically, for one of our largest behavioural faults —our inability / unwillingness to seriously observe true and valid warnings. Why else would this somewhat tragic-seeming character find inclusion in a pivotal position of the Iliad, the fundamental tale of an emerging Europe? Cassandra is a seer who detects impending danger, whom no one listens to or believes. Despite her urgent warnings, the Trojans open the gates and, with their own hands, pull the death-bringing horse into the city.

Although she has since retained her reputation as a notorious prophet of doom and messenger of ruin, we have named our project —our conception— after her. For she is done injustice by this reputation: her predictions were correct —our behaviour was wrong, her only error was merely that no one believed or wanted to believe her. In short: it is time that Cassandra's curse finally be broken and for our perception sensorium to be newly calibrated!

Prognosis, prevention and foresight are the orders of the day, and we as literary scholars can contribute to this comprehensive turning point in strategy. For literature can do much more than entertain — it is the primary source needed to reach that which is so often slain and buried under numbers, dates, and facts— the human factor, the individual. To take literature seriously is to take people, singular beings seriously, and to include them, without the immediate invocation of the enormous term that is humanism...

We have shown that literature can accomplish this and more in the study project “Early Crisis Detection through Literary Analysis”, published three years ago and supported financially by the German Federal Ministry of Defence.

My team, the Cassandra Project, accomplished much over the course of the last three years regarding methodology and work in texts, yet remains removed from the ability to operationally implement this knowledge. For this gap to be bridged, an expanded and stronger network of European institutions would be necessary, institutions willing and able to receive recommendations and communicatively act upon them.

The thesis of this model is that literary texts are able to identify latent tensions and potentials for violence years in advance. They are authentic evidence, the footprints of a cultural genome. If read correctly, one can discover important tracks. But what do I mean by “read correctly”?

I naturally do not seek to argue that threatening conflicts could be —clairvoyantly— depicted many years early. Nor that concrete indications for escalation must follow after so many years at this or that location. It is less about the flat predictions of facts than it is about a fathoming of possibilities. Of a Something, caught up in a story without the author necessarily even acknowledging it: gradually building social anxiety and insecurity, social tensions and irritations, manipulative tendencies, etc... All this translated concretely into characters and situations. Literary texts are unsparing protocols of reality and therefore invaluable sources.

## 2. Approach and Methods

This is the essential nature of the project: reading and analysing texts for their potential to change. Exploring the conditions of popular sentiment, uncovering the hidden, searching for tracks, identifying structures. Reading such texts correctly shows in what direction the path could lead. Literary texts can accomplish this because they are an archive, storage for the collective experiences of a culture, unspoken, revealing in great detail not only the state of mind but also the mentality of class, of region, and place.

And since literature knows past history, it is able to anticipate coming developments, to see coming dangers and crises, and at times even to prophesize. Utopian and dystopian novels do just this—the former in their depictions of the best possible future result, the latter in their depictions of the worst, both cast in concrete pictures and symbols. For that matter, there may be a “tectonic” shift in the sector of the social, economic, ecological, or the political / military.

We know very well that in this moment the field of prognostics has a general bend towards AI and Big Data. This is, however, not necessarily a disadvantage for our approach. “Cassandra” could be an important supplement to quantitative approaches. Not only in that our approach can decipher difficult codes (that the image of the “green bird” in the language of Islamists stands for assassins / martyrs is not something readily available to mechanical readings), but more importantly in that we are, by way of the specific sensibilities of authors, able to come closer to the often-ignored area of emotions, and followingly to scientifically apprehend its nuances. The “Cassandra-Method” makes it possible not only to read the thoughts and feelings of people (as certain strands of AI are also currently attempting), but also to decipher them—even and especially those thoughts and feelings that don’t readily reveal themselves, yet in the long-term lead to escalation and violence.

Rather than tediously reconstructing the prehistory of a calamitous event, we propose the opposite, running through possible developments pre-emptively. Literature is a simulation medium in its absolute... it plays through the scenario, up close and personal, yet without consequence. Precisely this earnest grappling with reality fascinates the reader and (in the case of film and theatre) viewer. In the framework of Project Cassandra, we too seek to document and categorize the respective findings.

Parameters such as emotionalization, manipulation, demonization, mythologization, and symbolic violence are picked out, evaluated, and given a score. Through this evaluation, indicators are developed to identify current thematic and emotional trends as well as potential (violence) dynamics. The regional focalizations of this model were and are up to now European and non-European fault lines —Kosovo / Serbia and Algeria (Maghreb) and Boko Haram and IS-torn Nigeria. Wole Soyinka is our Cassandra there. We need hundreds of them to decode and interpret the usual tactics (threatening by way of demonization, the verbal dehumanization of the enemy, the use of vague neologisms, mimicry, twisting truth and falsity, fake sympathies...). And all of these signs are clearly decipherable —it is up to us to do so and to respond accordingly.

The described literary analysis is furthermore visually displayed in a “Conflict and Emotion Map” based on a text database. The Emotion Map shows the emotional forces which are hidden and slumbering within a group of people on a map-like overview. Indicators are to be taken from genres and subgenres such as historical novels, crime novels, satires, dystopian / utopian novels and science-fiction. The aggrandized appearances of certain themes in relation to specific reception patterns (local literature prizes, large print runs and scandals) as well as specific narrative strategies (such as dehumanization or demonization) are depicted. All taken together, they are signs of a dangerous escalation and manipulative actions.

As past case studies have shown that not only negative developments but also positive developments (in the sense of a strengthening

of resilience) can be observed through literary analysis and literary phenomena, the scale additionally acts as a conductor for the asseration of indicators such as dialogicity, multi-perspective narration / remembrance, openings for multiple languages, growth and diversity in the publishing house landscape and the promotion of translations.

What is more, the “map” can function as a basis for establishing counter-narratives for crisis prevention and reconciliation. At times, this happens in the form of a point that explodes the inflated claims of ideology. In the context of the Balkan wars (1992) it was common to mark all buildings of public authority with patriotic denominations: “Serbia is here”. A sly graffiti artist sprayed below: “Idiot, this is the post office” and put things straight with a few words. Who, if not authors, could be more versed in the development of counter-narratives for their own cultures?

We have discovered that the Cassandra Project has a positive reputation amongst the writers of the world, as it bolsters the prevention of violence, as it actively includes the writers in the process of securing peace. Without profit, without employment, without some furthered personal use, the authors feel... summoned, worldwide, to point out emotional movements in their respective populations, especially in the case of violence-pushing narratives, stories, and pictures. This cooperation, this permanent exchange allows for swift, profound insights into the respective motivations of the people and decision-makers, even outside of present crisis regions. The author networks could additionally be conducive as an “inoculation” for societies against extremism and terrorism.

Literature runs through all possibilities in advance. It makes the subject well-versed, resilient through simulation. To paraphrase Hertha Müller, one learns to preserve one’s own mental space, even under totalitarian conditions, while Israeli author David Grossman puts it more simply: it becomes more difficult to be made a victim.

### 3. First Conclusion and Results Thus Far

The prognosis model is suitable in application in the early comprehension of emotional movements and especially crises and conflicts. The model is excellent for use in conjunction with all other crisis prevention mechanisms as it is applicable in other spheres of life and can be supported by civil society. It can thus support institutions, departments, and parliaments, synthesizing their activities. It ushers the user out of the passive role of the crier and into that of the proactive actor and agent. An entity that identifies, acts, reacts, *before* a conflict escalates —if possible, extinguishing with little effort a fire that has not yet become unmanageable, and if not, aiding in finding compromise.

I hope that I have been able to communicate to you in these few pages that, if everything goes well, we will be able to deliver the difficult to name, an emotion-based missing link of the overall picture, and will offer an ideal complement to digital and political analysis-based approaches.

There are, however, conditions. The Cassandra-Project identifies itself in this sense as cooperative and seeks to be a partner, so it too needs partners that are able to live up to the same aspirations. Ultimately, we are to combat a weakness of human nature: in Max Frisch's play *The Fire Raisers* (1962) it is brought to our attention how and why we fall into the "Cassandra Trap" time and again —a complex mix of lethargy, hope, vanity, and cowardice are the source. A supposedly "professional" attitude that allows us, as long as is possible, to remain passive, to risk nothing, to act only in the last possible moment.

Today, we are as informed, if not over-informed, as never before —we are drowning in facts. But how and when are we to bring order to this flood of information, how are we to differentiate the important from the irrelevant, how are we to bring knowledge into decisions and procedures? How can we suppress the reflex to dismiss

Cassandra's prognoses, and rather take them as seriously as they need to be taken? My answer: this is only possible in our attempts to comprehend these phenomena in correlation, in context. We need a holistic method geared towards encompassing the entirety of reality. All ideologies must be subject to scrutiny.

To reality. Back to the present. What have we achieved in concrete terms? Here is a selection of examples:

1. We have established reliable links at the cultural level between almost all Maghreb and Levantine countries. We observe and name the respective threat status in these regions.
2. We keep an eye on the Balkan region and its various countries. We are constantly warning of explosive developments in Kosovo and Albania. We are successfully maintaining this dialogue, despite extremely strong distrust among the partners themselves and towards the outside world. Any mediatory intervention from the outside (the EU) can only be successful if one country is not privileged from the point of view of the others.
3. Together with (exiled) writers from Armenia, we warned many months ago of steadily increasing tensions in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This was done on the basis of literary analyses. Books by authors who argued in favour of cultural mixing disappeared from the market during this period. In totalitarian systems in particular, the treatment of "nest-destroyers" is significant.
4. Warnings were issued about attacks by Boko Haram and other threats in parts of Nigeria, often several weeks before new attacks.
5. It is also and especially important to keep an eye on such latency phases of transition and to perceive seemingly minor changes as indicators. All concepts that are suitable for

raising awareness and reducing emotional and social pressure must therefore be considered, developed, and expanded.

6. Over the course of recent months, on-the-ground investigation no longer refers only to topographically localizable fields of conflict, but also to those that can be located technologically rather than topographically: the threats posed by climate change, new technologies such as AI, genetic engineering, pandemics, and bioweapons...

It is necessary to situate the consequences of technological development, untarnished by individual interest, and to create space for controversy to take place. Contemporary experience in Germany shows that feelings of not being recognized, of not being heard, are intertwined with the strongest factors of aggression —whether it involves the ideologically charged tool that is vaccination or the application of genetic scissors.

Highly sensitive potential war zones have been clearly illustrated by works of classic modernity such as George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which are both almost 100 years old, and by modern authors such as Juli Zeh, who already 15 years ago identified the dangers of the much-discussed "Health Dictatorship" (*Corpus Delicti*, 2009). This too is the case with the powerful consequences of the "energy revolution", which confronted those living in the East as well as the West with new challenges (Max von der Grün, Maximilian Zech, Frank Goosen).

So too could the constitutional state system, the heart of democracy, have its profile and credibility bolstered by an intensive exchange with the insights of literature. Not only when pushed to the limits of its resilience or cast into major doubt through contact with another culture or value system.

The promises and dangers that grow with the application of artificial intelligence (Stanislaw Lem, Frank Schätzing, Marc-Uwe Kling, Ian Russell McEwan...) could be placed under a similar lens. Authors like these do not tell abstruse horror stories, but rather sound out



possibilities that often enough in a short amount of time are to become realities. The pious story of an artificial intelligence ever under the watchful control of man has several weaknesses that must be discussed, as it involves the existence or non-existence of the “individual” in its current form. Life plans, family models, questions of coexistence...

And not only discussion —now the moment has come to make concrete decisions, or to at least not consider the instrument of criticism merely as a factor of inconvenient interference. Something that in the current situation of polarization and party mentality is no simple task.

It is not the first time that we find ourselves living in an epoch of rhetorical warfare, but we do perhaps find ourselves amongst its highest peaks, and one of our primary goals should be in combating this toxic tendency with stronger corresponding narratives. The means of divisive war rhetoric are limited —the means of an appropriate counter-narrative are however nearly without limit. It should be possible to win back our supremacy over language in this most decisive area, and to unseat the simple, yet effective strategies of the enemy.

#### **4. Next Steps**

In consideration of the outlined framework, we summarily put forward the following guiding principles for the time frame of the upcoming 3-5 years.

1. Furthered development and broadening of the already-existing literary networks beyond their current geographical scope (the Mediterranean Sea and Baltic areas).
2. Variable and permanent observation of trouble areas.

3. Reflection on events in the context of Germany's intentions within Europe.
4. The systematic territorial and temporal development of the emotional map (Maghreb / Balkans / Baltics..., external borders; The Americas, Africa, China...).
5. Expansion of communicative reach: media-actors.
6. Focalization on questions regarding combating root causes.
7. Expansion of the research spectrum to include technology, economy, and other international institutions.
8. A change in strategy: it is no longer only about fighting and isolating the manipulators and beneficiaries, but more and more about making their addressees and victims more resilient.
9. Regarding the operationalization and practical execution of all this: science, media, institutions must work together to fill the gaps between information, interpretation, and action. We can, in all cases, offer ideas and impulses.

We can:

- Pre-emptively localize narratives in their emergence as well as the formations of political and ideological programs.
- Obtain insights into the communicative, cultural, and emotional inner lives of particular regions.
- Make developments in the areas of literary and cultural infrastructure (censorship, control of discourse) evaluable.
- Support the construction of civil networks of culture creators as disseminators in crisis and conflict regions. Culture creators often have very exact and deep knowledge of their countries and regions at their disposal, in particular regarding informal rules and laws as well as social conventions. In

the development of this network, trust-building measures in the area of activity and between conflict parties can be supported.

In addition, the project could be operationalized to protect and support culture creators as “inoculation” against extremism and terrorism. Culture creators are often hallmarked by political independence and neutrality and by their stances for stronger democracy, human rights, and diversity. Here, cooperation with the Goethe-Institutes would be feasible, for example.

Instead of closing words—a dream—a reality-based daydream: Cassandra, the Cassandra Principle, as a building block within the information puzzle of intelligence pools from which the institutions and Strasbourg and Brussels draw to make their decisions. Forward-facing decisions. As a hub between the departments, the member countries. As an ever-activatable element of inquiry. No Delphic oracle—but a dependable source of information that delivers something beyond just “facts”: relationships and contexts.

## **5. The Case of Latin America**

A note that points beyond the narrower scope of our mandate: Already in the course of 2019 or earlier, long months before the outbreak and onset of the pandemic, there was a multiplication and realignment of threatening situations worldwide. The range of conflicts, which cannot be predicted in the usual sense, extends from Europe to the African continent to South and Central America and Asia. This is a task that exceeds the mandate of the Cassandra Project on the one hand, but on the other hand, in a globalized world, we cannot pretend that none of this concerns us just because it has not been the focus of the project brief thus far.

Up to this very moment, we unfortunately do not have enough financial resources to cover these large areas. South America is a

region of an enormous literary density and intensity. What worked for Russia and Ukraine should also work for Chile, Columbia, Brazil, or Bolivia. Especially if we consider the prognostic potential in terms of self-fulfilling prophecies in Latin American literature. Just remember Úrsula Iguarán, or Aureliano Buendía, who deciphers an old manuscript containing the story of his own life in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez, 1972). Not to mention *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981) —a work that reads like a blueprint of our Cassandra project. An event predetermined down to the last detail simply takes place because half a dozen warning signals are passed over with eyes wide-open.

Thus, the literary text is a strong appeal to finally break the curse of Cassandra. I repeat: literature is a huge scanner of everything that is going on in us. All of history's traumas are stored in it —whoever ignores them commits a serious mistake. A process is reflected therein, visualized sensually and intellectually, which is in principle relevant for every process of encounter and appropriation of another culture, but in the case of Latin America has a specific meaning.

Europe and Asia are ultimately the story of failed invasions and counter-invasions, from the myth of the Crusades to the horror story of Operation Desert Storm. Europe and the USA: an asymmetrical family history in which the weights have shifted dramatically over time. The relationship between Europe and Russia is underpinned by an air of poisoned suspicious intimacy. The origin of the European-Latin American relationship has been different from the outset: the near absolute surrender without a fight of an advanced civilization to a handful of money-hungry, mission-addicted desperados. The ruthless exposure and plundering of a foreign world.

It is the story of colonial rape and profit-oriented oppression, the story of lost innocence and at the same time of the search for it. It is the story of transfiguration and craven possession of the tropics. Europe and Latin America: this is the story of a grotesque whose entire monstrosity Werner Herzog expressed in his film *Aguirre or the Wrath of God* (1972). The conquerors, wandering between Andean

canyons and giant rivers, concoct their dream of El Dorado. The story of the successful rape of a giant by a tiny one. Thereafter follows a near genocide, then the long phase of slavish imitation of the European system of thought and rule by the disenfranchised culture, now convinced of its own worthlessness. Bizarre consequences of this domestication ritual: European opera houses, European cities, European schools, books, curricula, universities, European army commands and salons, bureaucracies —and European values. As if Madrid, Paris, London were at home in Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Bogotá. The European metropolises as models of rule and tradition, as the schools of dictators, as cues and catchphrases, as suppliers of ideas, and as importers *en gros* and *en detail* of freedom, loyalty, independence, sovereignty, national honour, sacred principles, legitimate rights, civic spirit, sense of tradition, historical task, patriotic duties, etcetera.

This is how the dictator in Alejo Carpentier's brilliant political novel *Reasons of State* (1974) sums up this dubious import, which, however, was already beginning to become obsolete and rotten in the 1960s. The sacred European values are worn out, hackneyed, meaningless, sapless and sterile, discarded and exchanged as relics of an outlived culture. Ideal counterfeit money to be exchanged for genuine-sounding conceptual coin. In this novel, the dictator's rival has apparently already found the new language, put on a feigned Teutonic, heroic larva. But after a few hours of reading, thinking, searching, the great dictator, for his part, also has a rhetorical answer ready: *Carajo*, a Latin-tropical, Catholic-Indian mythology was to be created. The synthesis particles patter and merge into a new imagery:

To say *Latinity* was to say mixed blood, and in Latin America we are all mestizos; all of us have some negro or Indian, Phoenician, Moorish, Celtiberian blood, or the blood of Cádiz —and there's always Walker Lotion, or something of the sort, to smooth our hair, hidden

away in the family medicine chest. We are all mestizos, and should be honoured that it is so! (Carpentier, 2013, p. 133)

The new rhetoric is as phony as the old, and no less obsolete. An artificial, strategic paradigm shift in which Caesar, the Marcomanni, Hercules are replaced and exchanged for Galvan, Uahibos and Mandingas, and tropical jungle goddesses take the place of the Virgin Mary, merging with them to some extent, much as can still be seen in Brazilian churches today. The poet and politician Carpentier, washed in the waters of the European university, knew this. And he also knew that in the end he would have no chance against the new ideologists. By “new” ideology, of course, neither communism nor socialism nor any of the other economic theories and practices can be meant, all of which are also products of European idea laboratories.

No, it is about something else, something coming from within, from Latin America itself. Something that defends itself against European culture. If necessary, by devouring and digesting it in the manner of cannibals. In the *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928), a kind of literary cannibalism program by Osvaldo de Andrade, this process is illustrated physically. A manifesto without the usual European academic familiarity and bloodlessness:

*Tupi or not tupi that is the question.*

[...]

I am interested only in what is not mine. Law of man. Law of the cannibal.

[...]

Sons of the sun, mother of the living. Found and fiercely loved, with all the hypocrisy of nostalgia, by the immigrants, by those who were trafficked, and by the *touristes*. In the land of the big snake.

[...]

Against all importers of canned consciousness. The palpable existence of life. And pre-logical mentality [...].

\*

We want the Caraïba revolution. Greater than the French Revolution. The unification of all man's efficient uprisings. Without us Europe would not have had even its sorry declaration of the rights of man. (Andrade, 1999, p. 92)

Over this reckoning with Europe, which is entirely and no longer worthy of veneration, the author of the manifesto goes into a veritable frenzy of words, devouring the old and spewing forth a new, his own Caribbean identity:

We were never catechised. We live by somnambulistic right. We brought about the birth of Christ in Bahia. Or in Belem do Para.

[...]

We can only answer to the oracular world.

\*

We had justice, the codification of revenge. Science, the codification of Magic. Cannibalism. The permanent transformation of totem into Taboo.

[...]

Against the truth of missionary peoples [...].

\*

But it wasn't crusaders who came. It was fugitives from a civilisation we are now eating, for we are strong and vengeful like the Jabuti.

\*

We didn't have speculation. But we had guesswork. We had Politics, which is the science of distribution. And a worldwide social system.

\*

Before the Portuguese discovered Brazil, Brazil had discovered happiness.

\*

The acid test is joy.

[...]

Against Goethe, the mother of the Gracchi, and the court of Don Joao VI [...].

(Andrade, 1999, pp. 93-95)

Further, the manifesto is signed, “In Piratininga, 374th year of the deglutition of Bishop Sardinha” (Andrade, 1999, p. 95).

Europe’s condemnation of indigenous peoples, its serious questioning of their right to exist and live, based on considerations of whether there were any differences at all between these “people” and animals, has been embedded into the minds of American mestizos. With the liberator Simon Bolivar, they questioned it. At least, they began to ask. Who are we, ourselves? You? Nobody? Who are we, if we are neither Europeans nor “Indians”, but something in between the natives and the Spaniards? And they give a first, approximate answer: “We are those who are no longer what they were, without ever having become what we could or wanted to be”.

In his ravishing book, *Utopia Selvagem* (1982), Brazilian author and scholar Darcy Ribeiro describes such an odyssey of individuation based on missed, false possibilities. At the side of the Portuguese-born Lieutenant Caraval, officer of the glorious army, kidnapped and raped by the austere, vital, Amazonian monster muses of the tropical forests, we witness the first humiliation of the hitherto triumphant European way of life. Long ago the balance of power has been reversed, the observer has been degraded to the “insemination faggot” of power-robbing, flesh-eating, consuming, insensitive ladies.

When he is finally released by them, drained, he immediately falls into the hands of another, no less alienating society, the “Indians”. The acute cannibalistic threat disappears here, but the identity problems are more urgent than ever. This time it is not lustful warrior



women but demure nuns who prevent an attempt at assimilation. And it is above all the insurmountable intercultural borders that make the integration of the exiled European without a fixed identity seem impossible.

Soon Pitun realized that there is an order in this confusion. The most admirable thing, however, is the always gentle, Christian coexistence of this pagan Indian horde. This could even be a recommendable lifestyle, were it not for the Indian idleness incompatible with progress, thinks the black man. (Ribeiro, 1982, p. 89)

But that is only one, the dreary possibility. The other is of startling variety. Even as he speaks and observes, a pandemonium of cultural and intercultural liabilities and potentialities emerges. Horizons blur, territories thought secure are transformed back into abstruse imaginative topographies; multiple continents emerge; hybrid worlds. Just between us, dear reader, the narrator continues,

the conciliatory conclusion that can be drawn from this is that everything that exists and exists simultaneously and in such different forms, in truth neither exists nor matters. [...] As you see, dear reader, [...] only [this] reality is real and relevant for us, all other realities are illusory. (Ribeiro, 1982, p. 97f.)

With this concept of reality, of the synchrony of the most diverse multiple realities, without one being more important than another, the novel and its author once again shake the foundations of a European model of thought —hierarchy, order, linearity, binary criteria of distinction, and a sure sense of what is important and what is less important become almost ineffective here. Additionally, the juxtaposition of things that have nothing to do with each other is the only form of writing and perception that seems legitimate here.

That is why Darcy Ribeiro's novel is riddled with entire catalogues of the most diverse elements and possible models of the state. The alternatives range from burning down the jungle to the ecological movement, from industrial pollution to apparent paradoxes like

“civilian militarism” or “authoritarian democratization”. Other elements from this catalogue of a contradictorily iridescent “Brazil”, a cipher for all the countries of the Latin American continent, are: feminism and sexual autarky, machismo and flourishing homosexuality, a devastated and burned Amazon jungle in all its glory, women who are supposed to be Amazons who disappeared centuries ago, Guyanese wars that, if they exist at all, take place in another world. And a large number of -isms and systems that begin to circulate in the minds of the characters to the point of complete confusion.

Pitum, after several shifts of identity and worldview, is only certain of one thing: that this world is enchanted, bewitched; that it is indeterminate, featureless, and polyvalent. This world, these are worlds. Constructs of possible worlds, inhabited by beings built for these worlds, by madmen as witnesses to the impossible. The set of rules of these worlds is arbitrary. If the Amazons were characterized by dull, elemental sexuality, the Indian inhabitants of this America are of rigid abstinence, which is no less alienating to our witnesses of the impossible. The sexual system of the Indians, in turn, provides for a strict bisection of human beings into strangers, sexless, and relatives, tabooed.

Among other things, this leads to grotesque consequences, such as the fact that adultery is only permitted with relatives of one’s own wife. Correspondingly grotesque, of course, are the behavioural schemes of the so-called and self-proclaimed civilizers. They still believe that they can proceed under the auspices of Christian Western European culture and rationality, true to the ideas that the Indians are like children, malleable wax, made for Christian forms. But the reformers reach their limits. The old, well-suited missionary model comes to an end. The tropical children have long since become emancipated technocratic monsters, prosperous Prospero adepts with high-tech visions of absolute obsolete utopias.

Towards the end of Darcy Ribeiro’s book, excerpts are quoted from KGB or CIA or Cuban agents’ papers, in which the model of a possible power and pleasure structure of the Southern Hemisphere,

one by all means not only applicable to Brazil, is perfected. A state system that aims at a kind of “multinational bourgeois utopia”, a flawless model empire led by mega-impresario Prospero.

Unlike all other ideal state models in the European tradition, from Hobbes and Locke to Machiavelli, Campanella, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, however, the text of this ambiguous political preamble bristles with playful provocation and anti-Enlightenment ribaldry. In the literary context, the Latin American models of the state must be denied all seriousness, and this is precisely their strength. Here, then, we witness the perversion of an ideal state which, using the European-born figure of Prospero, has taken it upon itself to maintain a certain saturated dullness and unreflective hedonism of human nature instead of exorcizing it:

The mass of people, who are ultimately the same and similar to each other, revolve without end around the single goal of satisfying the simple-minded and vulgar lusts that fill their lives [...]. Each lives for himself, knows nothing of the fate of others, is with them without seeing them, touches them without feeling them, lives only for himself.

[...]

Above all this rises a necessary protective power, whose sole task is to guarantee their pleasures and watch over their destiny. This power is Prospero. Absolute, exact, regular, provident, calm. He would seem downright paternalistic if he had the goal of preparing people for adulthood, but no, on the contrary, he tries to keep them irrevocably in innocence. He maintains their security, provides for their needs, conducts their important business, directs their urges, regulates demand, distributes their inheritance, oh, if only he could also free people from the discomfort of thought and the pain of life. (Ribeiro, 1982, p. 148)

The power of this utopian ideal is symbolized in the sanctified person of the immaculate emperor, who vouches for the happiness of the citizens, and embodied in the power of Prospero, who is responsible

for corporate prosperity. Prospero is on earth what God is on high. Noncommittal literary spin? Not at all. The author delights in adding documents and records, system programs, and secret cash registers. All this stands to prove: the fulfilment of all European state utopia models can be expected in Latin America. Only there is the potential available to create something absolute, end-utopian, by means of strong emotional batteries through the dismantling and reassembly of archaic man, through the marriage of genetic technology and frenetic cybernetics. From this marriage, Ribeiro continues on to phantasmagorise, eventually emerges “homo cyberneticus” who, psychologically, made with nerves of steel and Dralon muscles, will realize a supreme multinational utopia of humanity.

The synthesis of tropical scent, jungle nudity, archaic cultural remains, and feedback channel, of electronic entertainment and data highways seems to have succeeded. Neither the oracle world authenticated by the Jemania cult nor the televisual supervision in the style of Orwell is missing. Yes, it is perhaps this synthesis of the Orwellian horror scenario with light-hearted subversive humour that makes this political spectacle so fascinating. All this is grotesquely heightened and accompanied by the mega-instance staging of Prospero-Pontifex and his vassals, this mockery of the dirt, and pain, and glamour of European thought, which is beginning to get lost in the mangrove swamps.

The time has come to refer to the tradition of the political novel in Latin American countries. It is certainly not an exaggeration to say that Latin American literature is genuinely politically oriented, although the understanding of politics is different from the one Europeans are familiar with.

The fragility of the political palimpsests and despoilings of Latin American catastrophe scenarios, of the mechanisms and rituals of dictatorship and coup d'état, are only at first glance suitable for providing contrastive support to European arrogance. A second look, and this is what García Márquez conveys in his Nobel Prize speech, makes the arrogance of the European perspective transparent:

It is understandable that [the Europeans] insist on measuring us with the same yardstick they use to measure themselves, not remembering that the ravages of life are not the same for everyone, and that the search for identity is as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them. The interpretation of our reality using foreign systems only contributes to making us more and more unknown, less and less free, more and more solitary. Perhaps venerable Europe would be more understanding if it tried to see us in its own past. (García Márquez, 2019, p. 31)

García Márquez's admonition not to interpret the Latin American reality with foreign schemata is thus to be read with a twofold perspective. On the one hand, the specificity of the living situation there must be taken into account, and on the other hand, this must be done in a way that makes clear that the same brutality lies hidden under the paper-thin crust of civilization of the European self-image (García Márquez tactfully does not even mention the worst genocides). Only on the basis of this double view does the breadth of dictatorship and terror become perceptible, especially for Europeans—and not just interesting as an exotic phenomenon.

All in all, it is time to remember García Márquez's demand for a second chance on earth and, by taking this other area of life seriously, to finally give into it. In other words: to recognize the independence and essential difference as equal, and not consider them as the objects of a latently continuing missionary program under the auspices of the market economy, democracy, rationalism, individual philosophy, and psychology.

Curt Meyer-Clason is one of the most important translators of South American literature in Germany. His experience can help us in our search for a grammar of the tropics. Using the language of João Guimarães Rosa, he explains:

What is psychology with us, namely that of being on the spot, is physiognomics with Rosa. He starts from the comprehensible, the visible, the tangible. What is analysis with us is synthesis with him.

Where we subordinate the proposition, i.e., we separate it through an unbearable series of subordinate clauses, he coordinates, that is, the main proposition drives the main proposition ahead, into the future. The conception, the attitude to life of these people is as far away from ours as the zenith is from the nadir. One only has to take the word at its word, then one feels that immediately. (cf. Ette and Soethe, 2020)

How different the Latin American attitudes to life and models of behaviour are, is made clear by looking at those figures that stand next to the sombre role of the dictator as representative of the cultures — namely not those of heroes, intelligence, virtue, power, politics, not those of men of character and stature— but those figures without any character. A striking example of this is Mário de Andrade’s novel *Macunaíma, o herói sem nenhum caráter*. Macunaíma, the hero without any character, is the name of the irreverent figure of the “savage”, who sees himself in everything as an antithesis to the European system.

This lack of character, however, is not reflected and celebrated as a confounding deficit in the European Musilian sense of a man without qualities, but provocatively unfolds as a quality of its own against the European system, which was also ominously present here in the 1920s. The answer to the trauma of Europe. An answer bursting with cheerful vitality. I am afraid that European civilization will spoil my character’s integrity, fears its author Mário de Andrade, one of the progenitors of *Modernismo Brasileiro*. And as a vacation book among mangos, pineapples and cicadas, he creates the rhapsodic, novel-like romance *Macunaíma*. Its protagonist impresses with immaturity, lack of a closed world view, of coherent attitudes. Because:

O brasileiro não tem caráter porque não possui nem civilização própria nem consciência tradicional. [...] [Está que nem o rapaz de vinte anos: a gente mais ou menos pode perceber tendências gerais, mas ainda não é tempo de afirmar coisa nenhuma. Dessa falta de caráter psicológico creio otimistamente, deriva a nossa falta de caráter moral. Daí nossa gatunagem sem esperteza, (a honradez elástica /

a elasticidade da nossa honradez), o despreço à cultura verdadeira, o improviso, a falta de senso étnico nas famílias. (Andrade, 2013, pp. 210-211)

Mário de Andrade's hero Macunaíma is evil and good at the same time. Actually, beyond good and evil, sly, *safadu*, and good-natured, gullible and mendacious, cowardly and brave, a comic, a parodic protagonist. Macunaíma is the *molleque*, the rascal, the *molacagens*, the *malandru*, the crook who operates *malanargens*. He is portrayed sympathetically, according to the motto: one manages a coup, the other remains an ass. And so he bites, beats, and sleeps his way through Mato Grosso as through the jungle of the metropolises and succeeds. Macunaíma transcends space and time.

His dimensions go beyond reality. He cannot have a character because he is not subject to any limitations. And it is precisely the lack of character that gives him the character of the superhuman. In the tumult of his apparent lack of restraint, the elemental energies are reflected. Macunaíma laughs at truth and error, skips over all standards. The gimmick is Brazil, the hero of the gimmick can only be Brazilian.

The poet of the Brazilian northeast, Joaquim Cardoso from Pernambuco, does not see Macunaíma as a desolate, vanquished, humiliated figure à la Don Quixote, but as continually active and victorious despite immoderate laziness, even if his way of acting remains impassive and fruitless, his victories inconsequential. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in one, and a dozen other characters together make up this unlimited, unidentifiable hero. The author, Andrade, freely confesses in the book's second preface:

Ora este livro que não passou dum jeito pensativo e gozado de descansar umas férias, relumeante de pesquisas e intenções, muitas das quais só se tornavam conscientes no nascer da escrita, me parece que vale um bocado como sintoma de cultura nacional. Me parece que os melhores elementos duma cultura nacional aparecem nele. Possui psicologia própria e maneira de expressão própria. Possui uma

filosofia aplicada entre otimismo ao excesso e pessimismo ao excesso dum país bem onde o praxeano considera a Providência como sendo brasileira e o homem da terra pita o conceito da pachorra mais que fumo. [...] O próprio herói do livro que tirei do alemão de Koch-Grünberg, nem se pode falar que é do Brasil. É tão ou mais venezuelano como da gente e desconhece a estupidez dos limites pra parar na “terra dos ingleses” como ele chama a Guiana Inglesa. Essa circunstância do herói do livro não ser absolutamente brasileiro me agrada. (Andrade, 2013, p. 217)

It seems that we have lost sight of all the securities and liabilities of Europe, but at the same time we have sharpened our view of its shortcomings and weaknesses. Even the hallowed concept of the sovereign individual, of identity, has become obsolete. But it seems that even Europe has become more sensitive and receptive to this message of the tropics. The concepts and value categories have become too much of a problem to themselves to be used in full. The diagnosis of cultural analyst Sérgio Buarque de Holanda conveys a way of life that is not backward but, on the contrary, could become a model for Europe and North America. Precisely because categories such as linearity, order of discourse, and clear differentiability are suspended. In this sense, literature, and almost only literature, could be a compass on the way to the future. Whoever leaves it out of the equation is making a mistake—a political one.

## **6. Final Remarks**

The new uprisings—despite their different causes and enormously different modalities in performance—have a common origin that distinguishes them from many of the previous clashes. Whether in Hong Kong, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, or Algeria, the core of the revolts is always resistance against encrusted, dogmatic systems with strong authoritarian features and a lack of prospects for the future.



In this respect, the conflicts are different from those that have been observed in Europe so far, for example in Bosnia, Catalonia, Ukraine, or Northern Ireland. Here, it was and is a matter of strongly ideologically-shaped conflicts between ethnically or historically differently coded systems. Unlike in these cases, the struggle of the insurgents in the above-mentioned countries and regions is primarily directed against autocratic rulers and vehemently advocates more democracy. A classification by means of categories such as “right-wing” and “left-wing” is only of limited help here. In addition to economic and social injustices, those of indigenous affiliation and the defence of autonomy also play an important role.

In the future, the overall global system of socialization and co-responsibility will no longer permit political neutrality or political abstinence in these cases. The diplomacy of tactical non-interference is no longer appropriate. Global interdependence necessarily means global co-responsibility.

Of course, this does not mean that a country like Germany or a continent like Europe should intervene directly by military means, but it does mean that both are obliged to provide and develop structures for mediation and de-escalation that go far beyond what has been practiced so far: negotiation platforms, spaces for dialogue, tri-ologue. And, as far as possible, in advance and preventively. In addition to dialogue platforms, early logistical support is also available for setting up and designing protection and buffer zones, camps, escape corridors and recreation rooms. To be “surprised” again and again by things that have long been apparent is, in the long run, somewhat humiliating to our own self-image.

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