The anatomy of failure

Transcolonial approaches to (not quite) decolonial past from Filinto de Barros' *Kikia Matcho* to Tony Tcheka's *Quando os cravos vermelhos cruzaram o Geba*

Ewa A. Łukaszyk

The article presents a comparative reading of two books referring to Guinea-Bissau's post-independence history: Filinto de Barros' novel *Kikia Matcho* (1997) and Tony Tcheka's sequence of four short stories *Quando os cravos vermelhos cruzaram o Geba* (2020). The analysis is based on the notion of transcoloniality understood here as a concept of literary criticism referring to the transformative aspect of the literary work in a society struggling to heal its wounds, achieve reconciliation, and overcome postcolonial stagnation. Across an interval of almost a quarter of a century, the two books analysed inquire about the causes of the collective and individual failure in the early postcolonial period. This generalised failure involves not only the ex-combatants of the anticolonial war, unable to rebuild their lives in peacetime, but also the next generation, grappling with circumstances such as migration and deficient education. The West African decolonial conundrum involves tribal identities at odds with the dominant postcolonial nation-building utopia and the revival of traditions at odds with modernity. Finally, in Tcheka's approach, the vision of Africa marked by developmental impasses reaches a transcolonial stage as he gives voice to the marginalised Guinean destinies, offering a fuller account of social complexity, internal contradictions, and zones of silence.

Keywords: Guinea-Bissau, transcoloniality, failed state, tribal identities, masculinity.

1. Introduction: an unsolved decolonial conundrum[1]

In recent years, there has been a new lease of life in Guinean literature, contrasting with its state of suspension during the decades of political upheaval and economic misery. In the last quarter of a century, Guinea-Bissau has gained a reputation for persistent democratic instability. Frequent coups

[1] This paper is the result of a research project financed by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, realized in Lisbon in 2024-2025. The author expresses her gratitude to the Foundation for their generous support, which made this study possible.

have led to its characterisation as a 'fragile' or 'nearly failed' democracy, displaying traits commonly associated with the concept of a 'failed state' (Helman and Ratner 1993): political instability, severe economic decline, repeated humanitarian crises or almost continuous nutritional insecurity, the central government's loss of monopoly on violence, etc. Finally, after a series of coups that filled the period stretching from the civil war in 1998-1999 up to the mid-2010s, the country has recently benefited from a period of relative socio-political peace and stability.

Certainly, Guinea-Bissau is still a land of frustration. Half a century of independence did not bring its people to economic prosperity, true liberty or unhindered democracy. When the first enthusiasm for the victory of the anticolonial fight vanished, bitter disappointment came quickly to the fore. What is more, the memory of the glorious fight for liberation was partially obliterated by more recent, quite inglorious conflicts leading to the civil war of 1998 and beyond. No wonder postcolonial Guinean literature was born bitter and seemed to grow bitterer and bitterer during the last quarter of a century. Nonetheless, Afro-pessimism, which seems omnipresent in the literature of Guinea-Bissau, does not exclude the essential Afrocentricity, recently defined by the Mozambican thinker Ergimino Pedro Mucale as an attitude of 'pro-Africanability' and 'Afrophilia' transforming the Africans into the 'gravitational centres' of the discourses referring to themselves (Mucale 2023: 17).

Filinto de Barros' novel *Kikia Matcho* marks an important point, often treated as the beginning of the process of Afro-pessimist exploration. Published in 1997, it constitutes, together with Abdulai Sila's trilogy *Mistida*, the birth of the Guinean novel. Those early narrative texts did not prevail over the vein of Kriol- and Portuguese-speaking poetry that predominated in the country's emergent literature but they established a crucial field of discussion and transvaluation of the decolonial ideals that stood in the centre of the armed resistance against the Portuguese colonial empire. Barros' text, bearing, in the metropolitan Caminho edition in 1999, the subtitle *o desalento do combatente* ('the combatant's dismay'), marked the postcolonial era with the seeds of disillusioned interrogation concerning the ways of definitely closing the vitiated cycle of colonial—decolonial—postcolonial becoming leading to the perpetuation of violence, marginalisation, and material shortages. The novel shows former anticolonial revolutionaries suffering a poignant personal failure despite the apparent victory of their cause. The male owl (*kikia*) that appears in the title of the novel marks the return of the spirit of the dead that fails to transmit to the living a new lease of hope. On the contrary, the insight that this not quite Hegelian bird brings about concerns the full extent of failure, its profundity, dimensions, and reasons. Certainly, this new awareness is an important step on the way toward a difficult maturation; in fact, the Kriol expression *campu quenti* that reappears as a leitmotiv of the text means precisely 'difficulties,' 'predicaments.' The decolonial cycle cannot thus be closed; new forms of life fail to

emerge, and what is more, the soul of the dead combatant cannot find its way to the afterlife. Bogged in *campu quenti* (literally, a 'hot field'), the Guinean affairs are suspended in a state of economic, social, and spiritual misery.

As I have suggested, this Afro-pessimistic vision became central rather than marginal in Guinean literature. The texts of other authors, such as Abdulai Sila, form a tightly knitted context of similar ideas. His *Memórias SOMânticas* (2016), a novel narrated from a first-person perspective by a Guinean nurse, tells a story of a personal failure accompanying the loss of faith in decolonial ideals, much akin to *Kikia Matcho*'s character of Joana. On the other hand, Fernando Perdigão's *O Retorno dos 'Gans'* (2013) depicts the dissonance between the new, educated and westernised generation, akin to *Kikia Matcho*'s protagonist Benaf, and the world of ancestral traditions. However, the tradition of 'Gans' evoked in the title, referring to ancient family structure with its moralising and regulating functions, is almost inexistent, while various nefarious customs and usages—such as female genital mutilation or expensive *toca-tchur* ceremony, elevating the cost of funerary rituals to a level that results ruinous for many families—persist and remain unchallenged (Augel 2019: 101). Those multiple affinities and intertextual resonances between Guinean texts put Filinto de Barros' novel in the position of a central problematic node of the country's emergent literature, an early classic, explicitly or implicitly treated as a starting point in subsequent literary projects.

Almost a quarter of a century after Barros' pessimistic diagnosis, in 2020, Tony Tcheka's sequence of four short stories *Quando os cravos vermelhos cruzaram o Geba* is an example of such a new literary project that, without mentioning Barros explicitly, strives to overcome the state of awareness explored in the classical text. The new book revisits the central topic of *Kikia Matcho*, i.e. the personal failure of the combatants of the anticolonial war, reverting, so to speak, the pattern of light and shade in the original novel. Barros centred his narration on the figures of anticolonial rebels, initially occupying high ranks in the new independent state only to fall into oblivion after the political turn of 1980 (the end of one-party system); Tcheka focuses on the hitherto marginalised figures of those Guineans who, for different reasons and in different ways, tried to remain faithful to the Portuguese empire. In fact, *Kikia Matcho* introduced some characters representing those Guineans who fought on the opposite side of the anticolonial war (i.e. the commandos and 'auxiliary troops' recruited by the Portuguese among the local population), yet it served only to provide a contrasting background for the 'true heroes' bitter failure. Reclaiming the same topic after two decades, Tony Tcheka refines the portraying of divergent identity choices and attitudes. He voices the awkward truth that the Guinean society shaped by Portuguese colonial action, a mosaic of tribal and *assimilado* identities, was far from sharing universally the decolonial ideals. This act of putting in the limelight the formerly marginalised figures and letting

their peculiar reasons to be voiced marks a stage of healing and new balance, in which awareness and acceptance of pluralism in Guinea-Bissau find their place. The country shows signs of cultural evolution beyond the postcolonial stagnation, so persuasively depicted by Filinto de Barros. What is significant, Tcheka's recent book differs from Barros' inaugural novel for its generally humorous tone and, as we will see, the bitter-sweet ending that I interpret as an Afro-optimistic conclusion bringing cautious hope that was missing in *Kikia Matcho*.

Both the novel and the collection of short stories deal with gender identity, yet this is by no means a vision of Afro-feminism. On the contrary, it is the male condition that forms the problematic core of Guinean culture. As Joacine Katar Moreira has brilliantly shown in her work (2020), *matchundadi*—a construct of aggressive hyper-masculinity dominating Guinean politics as well as other spheres of life—could be identified as the central factor of destabilization and backwardness during the first decades of the new century. On the opposite pole, another problematic factor is the weakness of the failed men, those who passively stand the abuse of the preponderant *omi matcho* (the 'male' man). As they do not follow any longer the military or paramilitary command, they remain in the margin of peacetime life, unable to build up a sphere of self-sufficiency and independent, transformative action.

Both types of gender identity are derived from the circumstances of the anticolonial fight just as much as they are a refraction of the colonial patterns of clientelism and subalternity. In his socio-political analysis, David Fistein (2011) concluded that the persistent trouble with the state-building process and democratisation that could be observed in the country in the first half of the decade of the 2010s paradoxically resulted from the successful social revolution. Unfortunately, the figure of a revolutionary hero, originally impersonated by Amílcar Cabral, degenerated into what the scholar calls the 'great leader' syndrome. The literary diagnosis provided by Filinto de Barros narrates the suspended biographies of lesser participants of the anticolonial fight who, away from the 'great leader's' splendour, proved unable to reinvent themselves after the end of hostilities. The national independence, the victory of their cause, became for them a challenge they did not manage to handle as they were not able to transcend the subaltern condition of those merely trained to follow their commanders (who in the novel fail to appear for the ex-combatant burial ceremony).

Quite in parallel to Barros' strategy of presenting a plurality of failed characters, Tony Tcheka uses the formula of the cycle of short stories to sketch a gallery of male biographies, illustrating multiple ways of getting derailed on the historical turning point. All of them exchange colonial subalternity for postcolonial powerlessness and marginalisation, yet the distanced perspective showing them as comical or even childish figures (eternal sons dominated by their oppressive fathers) opens a space for the transformative value of the literary text as a trigger of positive socio-cultural change. In many

ways, Tcheka's book completes the task that could already be identified in *Kikia Matcho*, i.e. formulates a symbolical closure of the colonial–decolonial–postcolonial cycle understood as a vicious circle of violence, incapacity, and failure. Both books analyse the aftermath of the armed conflict, in which the glory of warriors was rapidly tarnished and new opportunities, even such as education that could be achieved abroad, proved to be insufficient to grant to those victorious—yet only apparently victorious—males any satisfying place in the stagnant Guinean world. As the years go by (and the passage of time is thematised and accentuated in various moments of Tcheka's narration), the decolonial conundrum becomes progressively more and more distant, calling for a transcolonial reconfiguration of the cultural and mental state that the postcolonial decades perpetuated rather than improved or healed.

2. What is transcoloniality? An ongoing debate

Barros and Tcheka provide with their narratives an excellent exemplification of what Obi Oguejiofor called 'the African predicament,' resuming in a single concept a range of issues—cultural, political, economic, religious, historical, and psychological—that have historically hindered the continent's development and continue to impact its progress (2001). Oguejiofor emphasizes that while external factors such as colonialism and imperialism have significantly contributed to Africa's challenges, internal factors, including leadership crises and identity struggles, also play a crucial role. The Guinean authors use the specific tools of fictional writing to analyse the impact of the unresolved colonial—decolonial—postcolonial cycle upon individual lives. They work towards the liberation from both external and internal constraints that prevent the Guinean men, once victorious in the anticolonial struggle, from assuming transformative agency in peacetime. The utmost aim of the literary revisitation of the decolonial, 'bitterly successful' failure is thus to provide a definitive closure of the cultural cycle initiated with the Portuguese colonisation, involving the ideological conundrum, armed conflict, and its postcolonial sequels, such as the civil war of 1998-1999 and various military coups destabilising the country.

The concept of transcoloniality, currently under debate in various West and South African academic centres, is a crossroad of ideas accentuating the positive outcome of the historical cycle, in which the cultures bearing wounds inflicted by symbolic violence may achieve a stage of healing. Such a vision of transcolonial Afrotopia is supposed to go 'beyond' decolonial African philosophy (Agbakoba *et al.* 2024) in such a way that it abandons the confrontational attitude inscribed in—and historically justified by—the context of anticolonial conflicts in different parts of Africa. As some of the scholars involved expect, the new, positive, non-confrontational African philosophy may be based on

traditional concepts such as *Ubuntu* (resuming the supposed communality inscribed in the African world-view), or the Igbo ideas of *Igwebuike* and *Ibunanyindanda* (accentuating relationality and complementarity among human beings). Meanwhile, other thinkers stress the inoperativeness of those notions outside the traditional, tribal contexts and ways of life, voicing the necessity of new philosophical insight taking full account of current social realities in Africa.[2] In my own line of reflection (Łukaszyk 2020, 2024), I accentuate the transformative role of literature as a field of shaping new relational models in which horizontal patterns (networks of partnerships) should replace the former vertical structures: the notions of subalternity, dominance, hierarchy, and dependence. Although such transformation may be hindered by low literacy and readership rates in such countries as Guinea-Bissau, the patrimonialisation of literature (its transformation into preserved legacy, its sustained circulation across time, cultures and territories in Africa, as well as its inclusion in new educational contexts) makes of fictional narrations an important tool of transcolonial reshaping of mentalities.

Post-independence Guinea-Bissau has been transformed into a space of fractal proliferation of violence and dominance, often reiterated in micro-scale, such as the oppression of the preponderant *omi matcho* against women and other men. The reproductive mechanism of violence leads to the emergence of multiple failures, refractions of colonial subalternity, chains of command during the anticolonial conflict, and postcolonial clientelism. The memory of recent history is transmitted as a painful awareness of being diminished and marginalised in contexts that are no longer strictly colonial. Dangerously, anger and aggressive frustration grows on the fertile ground of the formerly created patterns of resistance against the coloniser. This is why Barros' and Tcheka's texts should be seen as an exhortation to transcoloniality, understood as the ultimate resolution of the enduring consequences of the colonial past, those fractal refractions of violence and oppression. The writers seek to transform the deep-seated mental structures, particularly the foundational patterns of dependence and subordination (including the basic pattern of gender relations: the subordination of women to men, the patriarchal dependence of sons on fathers, weaker men on the prepotent *omi matcho*).

The understanding of transcoloniality I have previously proposed in an analysis of a new African text based on the transformative exploration of a postcolonial classic (Ondjaki's treatment of Honwana's short story) implies a "process of overcoming both the colonial and the postcolonial mental

[2] Such developments, among other occasions, were proposed during further works of the research group gathered around Joseph C. A. Agbakoba, counting with the participation of Bernard Matolino, Idachaba Philip Adah, Jeremiah Chidozie, and many other scholars working in such geographical and cultural contexts as Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa; a new volume of studies, *Transcoloniality and Positive Justice for Development in Africa*, is currently under editorial elaboration (Ajah *et al.* 2026).

frameworks" (Łukaszyk 2020: 174). Instead of reinforcing hierarchical relationships between patrons and clients or commanders and subaltern combatants, transcoloniality promotes the ability and willingness to establish cooperative, egalitarian partnerships based on mutual respect and equality. As I explain, transcolonial theory "concerns the future of the postcolonial—not as a method, but in the first place as a [textual] matter to analyse. With the years passing by, the postcolonial becomes a part of history, a heritage, a legacy, not only for a new generation of scholars, but first of all for a new generation of culture users" (Łukaszyk 2020: 179). The same transcolonial mechanism may be detected in the formation of the Guinean literary system, i.e. a network of intertextual resonances in which new texts creatively respond to the earlier ones, filling their gaps, zones of silence, or detecting insufficiently exploited aspects. Such is the relation between Barros' and Tcheka' texts analysed here. The new sequence of narrations published by Tcheka puts on the stage the types of characters that were altogether omitted or remained in the shadow in Barros' classical text. In this way, it builds a more complete and encompassing vision of the anticolonial struggle, which includes the figures that, for different reasons, happened to take the side of the colonisers. The aim of this literary project is not to justify them or give relevance to their reasons, but to eliminate a zone of silencing in which diverse forms of postcolonial oppression, marginalisation, and even physical elimination could thrive.

As I argue, Barros' and Tcheka's texts reflect the sustained will of providing a definitive cure to historical wounds that linger in Guinean mentality, making possible the long-awaited advent of development and prosperity. As this will finds intertextual continuity from one author to another, it forms a structural foundation of a literary tradition, solidifying into a durable, transformative patrimony. Certainly, the transcolonial Afrotopia of mental liberation—conducive to positive justice, social harmony, and inclusiveness—is difficult to achieve. Both books testify to this essential difficulty. As I wrote in a former approach to *Kikia Matcho*, "the transcolonial renegotiation, i.e. the liberation from the symbolic schemes inherited from the former, colonial relations, becomes a crucial element. With the death of the *combatente*, Guinea-Bissau should sever its link to decolonial, revolutionary schemes of male activity that found a disastrous sequel with a long series of coups destabilizing the local politics" (Łukaszyk 2024: 174).

At a distance of a quarter of a century from the publication of Barros' novel, Tony Tcheka's new approach re-evaluates the outcomes of anticolonial struggle, revisiting the lives of the combatants involved on both sides of the conflict. Obviously, such an approach builds a vision that is not only broader, more encompassing, but also providing a basis for a deeper understanding of each other's reasons among different factions and opening a prospect of transcolonial reconciliation that should close the divisions that one can still observe in the Guinean society and the constant upheavals of its

political life. Last but not least, Tony Tcheka suggests a turn toward a brighter future as he tries to overcome the limitations of Afro-pessimism through detabooization and humour that was absent in the rather gloomy and ominous novel by Filinto de Barros.

3. The failed victors of anticolonial fight in *Kikia Matcho*

As Moema Parente Augel (2007: 293-294) and Sebastião Marques Cardoso (2017: 360) suggest, Filinto de Barros (1942-2011) recounts quite straightforwardly his own story and the story of his generation. The writer was a combatant of the PAIGC from 1963 on, first in Bissau, then in Lisbon where he studied engineering. After the independence, he was an active member of various structures of the party. In 1978-1981, he served as an ambassador of Guinea-Bissau in Lisbon, assuming later on various ministerial charges in the domain of culture and information, natural resources, justice, and finances. After the end of the single-party system and the advent of the turbulent political pluralism, he retired from active participation in governance. *Kikia Matcho*, published in Bissau in 1997 and in Lisbon two years later, is thus a work of maturity, if not of old age, arguably assuming the characteristics of what Edward Said defined as 'late style,' reflecting the final disharmony of the world that the creator approaching the end of his life must recognise, abdicating from the hopes that might have motivated him in his idealistic youth. The interwoven stories of characters in Barros' novel remain, to use the definition of this specific aesthetic quality formulated by Said, "unreconciled, uncoopted by a higher synthesis: they do not fit any scheme, and they cannot be reconciled or resolved, since their irresolution and unsynthesized fragmentariness are constitutive, neither ornamental nor symbolic of something else" (Said 2006: 12).

The narration starts with the news of the death of 'N Dingui, one of the veterans of anticolonial struggle. Benaf, his nephew who has recently come back after finishing his studies abroad, is supposed to feel all the pain of this death, yet he has too many problems of his own to mourn his uncle as he should. Be that as it may, the *tchoro* ceremonies, traditional in the Pepel community, should start. Rather mysteriously, an owl—*kikia*—obstinately tries to poise on the windowsill of his room. As the characters discover in the later part of the narration, the reincarnated spirit of the dead man returns with an unclear request: the celebration of some sort of ceremony is necessary, as he is stuck in his passage to the afterlife. In this way, the plot creates a framework to discuss the evolution, or rather degeneration, of traditional beliefs that lose not only their authenticity but also the transformative power. This is one of the fields of further transcolonial renegotiation that Filinto de Barros introduces with his novel.

'N Dingui belonged to the first generation of modernisation, eradicated from the traditional life. He was born in the Pepel ethnic group, in one of the *tabancas* (traditional villages) of Safim, yet his engagement in decolonial affairs linked him to the *praça* (the city of Bissau). He refused to accept his legacy and to reassume his place in the traditional structure, choosing a marginalised, solitary life in the capital, although he fell in disgrace also among his former comrades after the events of November 14, 1980.[3] Benaf, his nephew, is rather surprised to see some of the ex-combatants waking the dead. The circumstances of the colonial war barely appear as vague reminiscences for the younger man. On the other hand, his uncle, who refused to assume the rituals of the *baloba,*[4] now, transformed into an ancestral spirit, will have no choice but to comply with the animist tradition.

Filinto de Barros carefully observes how much of a cultural shock might have existed inside the country, as the anticolonial fighters belonging to the Creole group, living, just like the Pepel ethnic group, relatively close to white colonisers and additionally, imbued of the leftist ideology of revolution and progress, had to deal with the varied tribes inhabiting the *tabancas* of the interior. Be that as it may, in postcolonial reality, the former combatants form a group for whom *o comboio da independência havia escapado* ("who missed the train of the independence;" Barros 1997: 20). Although the meagre pension they receive is not enough to buy a bag of rice, they are ready to relive the glorious time of their Fight (Barros systematically capitalizes the term *Luta*, referring to the anticolonial struggle).

Benaf belongs to quite a different generation: that of 'materialists' educated in Europe, feeling no affective connection neither with the ancestral traditions nor the decolonial heroism: *A Africa tinha-se esfumado do seu ser; [...] não conseguia reter nem compreender a profundidade da sua mística* ("Africa volatilized from his being; [...] he was unable to recall or to understand the depth of its mysticism;" Barros 1997: 21). He can hardly understand how and why a semi-illiterate person like his uncle could ever fight for any greater cause. Similarly, 'N Dingui's niece, Joana, is a renegade of the independent

[3] On November 14, 1980, Guinea-Bissau experienced a coup led by Prime Minister João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira, who overthrew President Luís Cabral. This event marked the end of the first post-independence government in the country. The coup occurred due to political and ethnic tensions within the ruling *African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde* (PAIGC). Vieira, who had support from the military, accused Cabral of favouring Cape Verdeans in government positions and marginalizing Guinean natives. The coup disrupted the vision of unifying Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde under a single PAIGC-led government, and it shifted Guinea-Bissau's trajectory toward Vieira's extended rule, which lasted (intermittently) until the late 1990s.

[4] A *baloba* is primarily a sacred kapok tree where an ancestral spirit has settled. *Baloba*s are central to the animist religion practised by most Pepel. Those natural sanctuaries are served by girls and women delegated by their matrilineage to 'bring water' (*kata iagu*, thence the name of their function, *katandeira*) and cook rice for ritual offerings. The novel's hero was supposed to become a *balobeiro*, a sort of ritual supervisor believed to collaborate with the spirit residing in the tree sanctuary. Traditionally, he is entitled to marry the *katandeira* or arrange a marriage for her.

country. As a nurse, she could have been very useful in the new reality but material shortages and deficient conditions of her workplace made her finally emigrate to Portugal, despite all her initial enthusiasm: *Joana quis ajudar mas o poder político não permitia* ("Joana wanted to help but the political power did not permit it;" Barros 1997: 25). As her idealism vanished, money became the only mobilising factor. Barely a few years after the independence, in 1977, she chose to adopt the citizenship of the former colonisers. Yet having no sufficient means to live in Lisbon, she is forced to accept the company of people whom in Bissau she would consider much beneath her social stance. The postcolonial reality does not bring genuine equality with the former colonisers but it does bring equality between those who occupied different places in the colonial hierarchy: the *cristons* ("Christians") and *murus* ("Moors," i.e. the Muslims), people wearing *camisote* ("Muslim clothes") or *lopé* ("loincloth used by animist population"). All of them merge into an indistinct, bottom-level category of immigrants and are chased out of Lisbon to the ghetto of Quinta do Mocho (one of the agglomeration's peripheral districts).

In *Kikia Matcho,* promiscuity is depicted repeatedly as a sort of dominant Guinean lifestyle. It not only shows female misery, but also backfires at men who discover themselves as the permanent source of bitterness and frustrations for any woman who might approach them. This sense of masculine intimate incapacity to offer even a minimal material comfort to a female companion and play any productive or transformative role in the society is a source of powerful discomfort. It will resurface in the transcolonial rewriting of mentalities, initialising the quest for positive gender identities for both men and women. Joana, a descendant of the Creole middle class, is downgraded to the promiscuity of the abandoned house in Quinta do Mocho, in which emerges her newborn son, the fruit of a casual love encounter. As Benaf returns to his country of origin hoping for a brilliant career, he attracts the attention of Yama, one of those illiterate Guinean girls trying to find a better life under the auspices of an influential man, or at least to get a new pair of shoes. Yet the man, having sexually abused her, fails to pay for her services. Papai, the former combatant originating from a relatively high standing, assimilated Creole class, is unable to maintain the former standard of living after the independence, causing a bitter disappointment in Yulé Nan Bitna, the woman who joined him during the war, seeing in him a promise of getting out of the tribal world into some other, more attractive reality. Frustrated, she returns to her *tabanca* with a sensation of relief: *Libertou-se da tirania da civilização do branco incrustada na mente dum preto* ("She liberated herself from the tyranny of the white man's civilization incrusted in the head of a black one;" Barros 1997: 47). This bitter diagnosis shows how deep the consequences of colonial violence penetrate into intimate realities, appealing for the transcolonial rethinking of the concept of *kerensa* (idiomatic, Guinean version of love, eroticism, and relationship).

Having lost his female companion, Papai is a solitary drunkard, except on the occasions of meeting the other misers, his fellow ex-combatants, in the primitive tavern of *Tia Burim Mudjo.* Its description serves the writer as an occasion to enlarge his gallery of failed types. Farim, a former opponent of Papai in times of war, was a former servant of white colons, admitted to the category of *gurmetos* and rewarded by the Portuguese with second-class citizenship, the status of *assimilado*. At the beginning of the armed conflict, he was recruited for special forces. After the independence, he could have emigrated to Portugal just as Joana did, yet he chose a life of passivity and alcohol. Material misery serves as an equaliser of those who had occupied distinct places in the colonial hierarchy, and Farim dutifully accompanies Papai in the mourning of his former adversary. Also Djámanca, another servant of the Portuguese state, makes part of the group, although he never misses the occasion of deprecating against the former anticolonial fighters; whatever he might say, nonetheless, falls in the void of alcohol and their shared indigence. Once upon a time, he was a member of an Islamised tribe in the province of Gabú, manipulated by the Portuguese against the *turras* (i.e. the anticolonial rebels) of Amílcar Cabral. He was easily persuaded to protect the traditional values against the communists preaching the destruction of mosques, gender equality, and disobedience to local leaders. During the conflict he treated as a holy war, he committed atrocities that continue troubling him during the post-independence days. He drinks to chase away the macabre visions that torment him: *as imagens de tabancas incendiadas, de crianças mutiladas, de mulheres violadas e esventradas, quando estavam grávidas* ("the images of burned villages, mutilated children, women raped and gutted when they were pregnant;" Barros 1997: 74). Only Infali Sissé strangely stands out in the group. Known merely by his combat name, he is an anonymous presence, with no past other than that of the circumstances of the Fight. He is also the only one who managed to retain with him his female companion of that time, Apili, who, without any sense of shame, comes to search him at the end of his drinking evenings. What is more, she pronounces words of surprising insight:

> *Isto faz parte da Luta, do desencanto que todos nós sofremos ao não conseguirmos atingir os nossos objectivos. Aliás, o universo dos objectivos foi tão grande e tão díspar, que acabámos todos confundidos. Para o meu homem, esta é a solução que melhor se adapta à sua maneira de ser; cair fundo, mas de cabeça erguida* (Barros 1997: 76).

> This is part of the struggle, of the disappointment we all suffer when we fail to achieve our goals. In fact, the universe of goals was so large and so disparate that we all ended up confused. For my man, this is the solution that best suits his way of being: to sink deep, but with his head held high (own translation).

The romantic—or rather existentialist—figure of Infali Sissé marks the presence of the type of anticolonial rebels who, having passed through Portuguese political prisons, suffered their disillusion even before the Guinean independence and, due to their heterodox viewpoints, ended up ostracised by their former comrades. His true world is that of multiple, unsolvable contradictions: *de negação da negação cultural, do rejeitar da cultura tribal, mas igualmente da rejeição dos outros, da sua presença* ("of the denial of cultural denial, of the rejection of tribal culture, but also of the rejection of others, of their presence;" Barros 1997: 80).

The tavern—where even the nephew of the deceased 'N Dingui feels sick, as he can hardly overcome his awe at finding there people who had been ministers and ambassadors of his country —is characterised as a black hole of the Guinean galaxy. In the tavern, time loses its value and significance: *as etapas se confundem em interferências de ondas com amplitudes iguais, mas tão desfasadas que acabam por se anular e o sistema no seu todo pára!* ("the stages are confused in interference of waves with equal amplitudes, but so out of phase that they end up cancelling each other out and the system as a whole stops!;" Barros 1997: 157).

The final sections of *Kikia Matcho*, focusing on Joana's and Papai's parallel consultations of various *djambacus* ("soothsayers") who might exorcise the spirit embodied in the mysterious owl, show the return to animistic beliefs as yet another of the Guinean problems rather than a perspective of rebuilding authentic cultural roots. The soothsayers exploit precisely the class of people who lost contact with their animistic background, making them pay for fake ceremonies and long-forgotten *bocas* ("vows," or promises made to supernatural forces in exchange for the fulfilment of a request).

4. Giving voice to those on the wrong side of history

In 2020, Tony Tcheka returns to the post-independence reinvention of identities to portray a series of marginalized types. Each of them failed to handle the challenge of the new reality peculiarly, yet all of them remained for a long time in a discursive shadow, as their stance was in a way inenarrable in the framework of the dominant postcolonial discourse. Those petty traitors to the cause remained silent. Arguably, the moment their unvoiced grudges come to the fore marks the completion of the colonial—decolonial—postcolonial cycle. Tcheka's ground-breaking work of narration, giving due account of their existence and peculiar experiences, marks this passage to transcolonial healing.

The first short story, *PeKadur di Sambasabi*, is protagonized by an African commando coopted by the Portuguese state. The second one, *Manito, o Patriota*, presents a Guinean who got persuaded by the official discourse, teaching him that Portugal is his homeland. *Camarada Melhor Amanhã* tells the story of a Creole official who changes his colours to suit the situation, dutifully adopting the communist

credo under the rule of PAIGC. While the texts depict different attitudes adopted by men, the last one seems to address a major feminine problem, that of genital mutilation. *Excisadas na Flor da Vida*, however, focuses on yet another typical male figure, the new intellectual educated abroad, pretending to contribute to his country's modernisation. This figure too, like the remaining ones, is a case of a bitter failure. Only the unexpected switch of the perspective, focusing on the figure of his mother, introduces a glimpse of optimism at the conclusion of the volume.

Tony Tcheka (pseudonym of António Soares Lopes Júnior, born in 1951) belongs to a slightly younger generation than Filinto de Barros. His main professional area of activity is media and social communication, where he has been active both as a journalist and a researcher. For a long time, he was reputed as a poet, having published various volumes: *Noites de insónia na terra adormecida* (1996), *Guiné sabura que dói* (2008), *Desesperança no chão de medo e dor* (2015). The collection of short stories published in 2020 stands apart from his former work not only in terms of literary genre but also due to a lighter, humorous tone, while his poetry was often centred on a gloomy depiction of indigence, stagnation, and lost opportunities of development (Łukaszyk 2019). The sense of disillusionment Tcheka exploited for many years in his poetry would be a good parallel to Filinto de Barros' ambience of the tavern *Tia Burim Mudjo*. Also, just like *Kikia Matcho*, *Quando os cravos vermelhos cruzaram o Geba* should be seen as a work of maturity. Yet if Tcheka reaches the Saidian 'late style' mentioned above, it takes on a different colouration. Certainly, it is still the expression of a world in which things fall apart, 'uncoopted by higher synthesis,' yet the literary elaboration of his topics is marked by irony. The passage of time, bringing the decay of all things and dissolution of all idealisms, leads to disenchanted, yet distanced awareness. The writer still portrays a world of old men who had lost everything, yet the narration leaves place to only occasional glimpses of pity.

The literary discourse of Tony Tcheka seems much more refined and sophisticated than the simple diction of Filinto de Barros, preoccupied rather with narrating his painful story as straightforward as possible than chiselling a literary masterpiece. Tcheka takes his time to offer to the reader a text with aestheticist resonance, even if this aestheticism serves as a mark of ironic distance between the writer and his heroes. In the opening short story *PeKadur di Sambasabi*, such is the function of the florid description of the silence in the *tabanca*, enlivened only by the baroque presence of dragonflies: *as asas das libelinhas em voos serpentinados ornando a tabanca toda* ("the wings of the dragonflies in serpentine flights adorning the entire village;" Tcheka 2020: 23). The serenity depicted creates a sharp contrast with the date, 25 of April (i.e., the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in 1974), marked by upheaval and confusion in all the remaining parts of colonial empire. Also, the hilarious, farcical tone adopted from the first sentence contrasts with the growing climate of bad omen, quite similar to the appearance of

kikia matcho (the ghostly owl) in Barros' novel, suggesting that 'N Dingui is to be transformed into an evil spirit, the *kassissa*. Here, the reasons seem clearer and, at the same time, more strident. The silent *tabanca* is greeting the returning soldier, Basinho, dubbed *Capiton* ('the Captain') or *Alferes Mon di Ferro* ('Sergeant Iron Fist'). His fame is due not only to his military prowess shown during his service in the Portuguese army. Already as a new-born baby, Basinho had been pronounced guilty of having killed his twin brother.

Leaving the macabre in the margin, Tcheka's narration progresses by broad digressions incrusted with picturesque Kriol proverbs and funny dialogues suspended between translingual expression and the ambient silence. Similarly elliptic is the depiction of Guinean destiny. Once it used to be determined simply on the exit crossroad of the village. Some children had only a short way to go, others, a longer one: it led to a water well for some of them, to a school for other, privileged ones. The girls, nonetheless—just like Basinho accused of having caused the death of his brother—were condemned at birth; they never went to school. The figure of the military *matcho* that now returns to the village is defined not only by his attributes, such as the dagger he brought from his service in the Portuguese army, but also by the ambient conditions, sketched at rough strokes in the background. Yet Tcheka's ex-combatant is just as much lost in the new reality as we have seen in *Kikia Matcho*. The only difference is that now the attention of the writer is focused, in the first place, on the opponents of the anticolonial rebels, the African soldiers of the Portuguese army, often recruited, just like Basinho, in the Islamicate ethnic groups manipulated to despise their animist neighbours. The exit road of the village, apparently open large in front of him, brought him back to the narrow horizons of familiar reality.

Basinho is the first figure in Tcheka's new gallery of males suspended between identities. As he reaches Bissau after his demobilisation, he prays in the mosque of Pilum and the nearby Catholic cathedral, which may be treated as yet another humorous situation. Yet if we see things in depth, Basinho participates in two accomplice identities: that of the colonisers and that of their auxiliary troops. On the other hand, he remains painfully excluded from the victorious identity of Cabral's followers, proudly wearing the distinctive *sumbias* on their heads; he is unwelcome in their circle. Neither does he find his hereditary place in the patriarchal microcosm of the village. Basinho will not become a chief, the new *Omi-Garandi* after his father, the proud *Aladje* (Hajji) Mam Bá, reigning over his tiny workforce of wives. The traditional way of life has been destroyed—not despite but because—of the anticolonial revolution and the subsequent independence.

The conclusion on the necessity of transcolonial reconfiguration of the cultural universe is symbolised by a well full of stagnant water (Tcheka 2020: 39), a metaphor of suspended colonial-postcolonial time, with characteristics that make it analogous to the tavern of *Tia Burim Mudjo*. Both

the well and the tavern appear—at the origin—as gender-specific, female spaces, corresponding to laborious, enslaving destinies of women. Nonetheless, the male biographies prove to share in the stagnation that supposedly was reserved for women. As a grown-up man, Basinho is demoted of his military identity and symbolically put in the orbit of tia Bedja and her spring, just like when he was a little child, and his dominant father prevented him from fulfilling his dream of obtaining medical education to save lives. Although Basinho had joined the army hoping that it would help him to learn medicine, his military training quickly downgraded him to a half-animal, feral condition of *soldado-felino* ("wild cat soldier;" Tcheka 2020: 40). Army was merely an illusion of male fulfilment, and Basinho remains forever a despised son of a dominant father. Quite significantly, the international and Portuguese comic books he takes with him to combat, those of *Buck Jones, Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill, Billy the Kid, Zorro, Cisco Kid e Pancho, Mandrake, Major Alvega, João Tempestade* (Tcheka 2020: 46) befit a child or a teenager rather than an adult man. The ostentatious *matchundadi* of Basinho-Mon di Ferro contributes to the hilarious dimension associated with this failed character.

Basinho's marginalised destiny appears to be that of inhabiting all kinds of annexes: the *djemberem*—the small hut adjacent to the big one belonging to his father, or the auxiliary division subaltern to the regular Portuguese army. In the independent country, even such an opportunity of living an annexed life is denied to him. Basinho dies in prison. Just to create an illuminating contrast, the last paragraphs of the narration bring into the limelight his colleague, Musna Na Faiõe, who once tried to warn him and persuade him to run away to Senegal, avoiding the imminent capture. In 2017, the former commando, now in his seventies, listens with incredulity that some people are still protesting in front of the Portuguese embassy in Bissau, asking for the benefits promised in the post-25 April agreement. In his last, disillusioned comment, Musna explains: *Uns e outros continuam a brincar connosco, sem respeito por tanto sacrifício consentido e sangue derramado. [...] E o que nós somos hoje? Digo-te já: Entrudos! Fomos promovidos a entrudos...* ("Both sides continue to play with us, without respect for so much sacrifice conceded and blood spilled. [...] And what are we today? I'll tell you now: carnival puppets! We have been promoted to carnival puppets...;" Tcheka 2020: 75–76).

Certainly, the disillusionment of Basinho—a childish pretender with no real claim to *matchundadi*, able to reproduce the funny way in which his favourite cowboy used to talk to his horse Silver—is far from the seriousness of the broken decolonial dream. The heroes of *Kikia Matcho*, soaked in their own urine as they drank in *Tia Burim Mudjo* tavern, seemed closer to the grandiose dimension of a tragic fall. Tcheka's protagonist hardly creates a narrow space for pity, marked as he is by rather untoward characteristics, such as gender prejudices, collaboration with the colonizers, pretension of dominance and importance. As the years go by, the difference between the auxiliaries of the Portuguese army and

the anticolonial guerrillas falls into oblivion. At the closure of the narration, Basinho occupies the position of the dead and forgotten combatant, just like 'N Dingui in *Kikia Matcho*.

5. Identity and manipulation

The short story *Manito O Patriota* is yet another humorous narration of misconstrued identity, showing a couple of Guineans who consider themselves Portuguese. Certainly, the case could be seen, in a typical postcolonial perspective, as the result of the symbolic violence and identity manipulation by which the colonizers tried to persuade their colonial subalterns that Portugal, *Pátria una e soberana de aquém e além-mar*" ("One and sovereign homeland, both here and beyond the seas;" Tcheka 2020: 85), is the homeland for which they should nurture lofty patriotic feelings. Yet Tony Tcheka does not follow the beaten path of postcolonial criticism. Manito Ribeirinho is not an innocent victim; he is someone who deliberately adopts the lie because he finds his comfort in the skin of a colonial employee. His position in the administration allows him to stand above his Guinean fellows, and this is why he is called *Mais Alto* ("His Highness;" Tcheka 2020: 79) despite his rather short stature. He is a corrupted employee, a mobber, a sexual harasser of his co-workers. Certainly, the abusive structure of colonialism created a perfect habitat for such a person. This is why Manito feels fulgurated by the unexpected news of the revolution transmitted on the Portuguese radio: *uma forte trovoada em tempo seco estoirando a sua cabeça* ("a strong storm in dry season exploding in his head;" Tcheka 2020: 81).

Manito and his wife, equally preponderant Ricardina di nho Xá-Xá di nha Kelé (not quite a Portuguese name, added for its humorous effect), manage to get on board a military aircraft to be evacuated to Lisbon. There, nonetheless, their ordeal begins. The independence of Guinea-Bissau projects them into a limbo. They are forced to prove their status, their link to the state, and—the cumulation of paradox—the certificate of not having collaborated with its political police (PIDE), which is of course the most difficult to obtain, since Manito was a very close friend of the PIDE inspector. Their effort to prove the identity they had never questioned takes years:

> *Dez anos decorridos, Rico e Rica conseguiram obter a nacionalidade com a ajuda de um advogado com bons conhecimentos nas novas estruturas do Estado. Endividaram-se para pagar os custos da operação. Era o preço para recuperarem aquilo que acharam sempre ser: portugueses* (Tcheka 2020: 103).

> Ten years later, Rico and Rica managed to obtain nationality with the help of a lawyer with good knowledge of the new structures of the State. They went into debt to pay the costs of the operation. It was the price of recovering what they had always thought they were: Portuguese (Own translation).

Finally, what becomes Manito's last haven, quite similar to the tavern of *Tia Burim Mudjo,* is a typically Portuguese *ginjinha* ('cherry liqueur') bar in the centre of Lisbon. This is where the former collaborators of the collapsed empire meet to discuss their qualms, that are—what is significant—voiced in Kriol: *diskisimenti i ingratessa* ("oblivion and ungratefulness;" Tcheka 2020: 104). Finally, the couple resign themselves to hire a little hut in the ghetto district of Lisbon that has already been discussed: Quinta dos Mochos. Yet till the end, even as he sinks deeper and deeper into alcoholism, Manito/Rico always walks with a book under his arm, not to enjoy reading but as a mark of his long-gone distinction and superiority over the illiterate natives. He lives absurdly immersed in his past, desperately reviving the status conferred to him by the colonial empire; when he is drunk, he improvises fervent patriotic speeches. And when there is no one left to hear him, he closes his eyes, transported in his imagination to the good old days of the colony—dreaming of his secret visits to the PIDE inspector, the marches of the *Mocidade Portuguesa*,[5] and all the grand celebrations of the fallen empire. Yet those moments invariably end with the bursts of madman's laughter (Tcheka 2020: 107).

The protagonist of *Camarada Melhor Amanhã* seems slightly better integrated than the patriotic employee, of whom he had formerly been a colleague. Just like Manito, Epuíno Emerlindo Mendonça also believed in the project of *Guiné Melhor* ('Better Guinea'). This man cherishing his old Olivetti writing machine as his most prized possession is much more innocuous than the PIDE collaborator in the former short story, and certainly appeals for greater sympathy. Also Epuíno, the procrastinating employee who shifts everything for an eternal *manhã* ('tomorrow'), was a natural product of the colonial administration. His peculiar relation with time makes him switch easily between the futuristic visions: the official one, fostered by state propaganda, and the decolonial one, fostered by the post-independence government. He could have been evacuated to Portugal together with other members of the colonial staff; only his natural tendency to postpone every decision made him remain in the now independent country. Meanwhile, he makes good use of his old Olivetti to tape letters for the illiterate population. Yet just like Manito, he is projected into a limbo, *entre senhor e camarada* ("between mister and comrade;" Tcheka 2020: 118), referring to the forms of address he lost and gained as the country passed from colonialism to the single-party, revolutionary government. However, he fails in his absurd project of reinventing himself as a ship pilot. His fragile corporal structure seems made for a sedentary, bureaucratic life and Epuíno is easily vanquished by rough seas.

[5] *Mocidade Portuguesa* ('Portuguese Youth') was a paramilitary youth organization established in Portugal in 1936 under the Estado Novo dictatorship.

The disintegration of the world of this passive, sedentary character is shown through the description of his carefully organised, perfectly Portuguese apartment, with neat rows of porcelain cups and plates, framed photos, and the unavoidable inscription *Deus abençoa este Lar* ("God bless this House;" Tcheka 2020: 114) on the wall. This tiny oasis of the civilized order is invaded by new families, bringing with them their smelly food and livestock. The comfort zone of Epuíno is progressively restricted to an album of photographs illustrating different moments of his exemplary colonial life, and a little table, where the old Olivetti, carefully cleaned every Sunday, focuses all his attention as the postcolonial way of life progressively vanishes. The growing importance of the object makes it quite similar to the old radio on which Papai used to listen to the programs of his Party in *Kikia Matcho* (Barros 1997: 103). At the time of growing indigence in Bissau, when even the *cuntango* rice (i.e. white rice cooked with salt without any other condiment) disappeared from the table, hunger obliges Epuíno to sell his beloved machine, which appears to seal his fate (Tcheka 2020: 135). This literary image of slow exhaustion resumes the slow draining of the postcolonial Guinea, opening a sort of empty space for transcoloniality as an urgent necessity of inventing an entirely new way of life.

6. The inefficiency of good intentions

Finally, the short story *Excisadas na flor da vida* features Antoninho, a Guinean Muslim who, having studied in Lisbon, starts to notice the multiple problems of his religious community: sexual segregation, the exploitation of children by the supervisors of Quranic schools, or excision. Thus, as soon as Antoninho returns to his country, he decides to fight against genital mutilation. For this reason, he joins an Islamic organisation with which he studies the Quran every evening, concluding, under the guidance of an imam educated in Saudi Arabia, that the holy book does not prescribe—or actually does not mention at all—female circumcision. Some years later, he joins a foreign NGO that pretends to cooperate in the eradication of the practice. Everything seems to advance in the right direction when, after a talk on the national radio, his father calls him to express his indignation—despite his public activism, Antoninho remained what his diminutive name indicates: yet another immature son of a dominant father. Upon his return home, he notices the absence of his sisters, Aissa and Awa, who had just been taken to the *baraka di fanadu* ('initiatic hut') for the ritual of excision. In the fury of saving his sisters, Antoninho violates the holy space, yet the *fanatecas*[6] quickly pacify the intruder:

[6] *Fanateca*—the responsible for the *fanadu*, i.e., the ceremony of excision.

> *À boa maneira da terra, a mais velha, numa pose altiva, numa leve rotação da cabeça, fitou Antoninho, fincou-lhe o olhar dentro dos olhos. [...] Não lhe permitiam sequer abrir a boca [...] outro remédio não teve senão conter-se perante aquele olhar vítreo que o fulminava e o dedo polegar das duas mulheres, encostados aos lábios exigindo absoluto silêncio ao perturbador das normas estabelecidas por uma tradição antiga que tornavam o lugar inviolável. [...] Tudo se resumia às duas expressões sempre repetidas nos discursos das fanatecas: blufu estrangeirado e abusador* (Tcheka 2020: 166–167).

> In the typical local way, the older one, in a haughty pose, with a slight turn of the head, looked at Antoninho, staring straight into his eyes. [...] They wouldn't even let him open his mouth [...]; he had no choice but to contain himself before that glassy gaze that was fulminating him and the thumbs of the two women, pressed against their lips, demanding absolute silence from the disturber of the rules established by an ancient tradition that made the place inviolable. [...] His crime was resumed in two expressions constantly repeated in fanatecas' speeches: *blufu*[7] foreigner and abuser (Own translation).

The pacification of the activist by sheer glance of a figure embodying traditional authority is just as comic as it is symptomatic of the Guinean problems. The ritual excision is practised by some Guinean tribes, such as the Fulani described in the text. Yet the story deals with a topic concerning women only at a first glance. At a closer look, it becomes obvious that the narration recounts a male story, that of a young man educated abroad who finds the ancestral rituals revolting and unfitting the cause of modernization of the country. He decides to intervene, preventing the excision of his two sisters. Yet just like other well-intentioned heroes of the volume, he fails. The sisters are duly mutilated; what is more, he is humiliated and obliged to pay the customary compensation for having 'insulted' the traditional institutions.

The men in Tony Tcheka's collection of short stories are eternal sons, infantilized not just by the colonial school, army, and parallel institutions but primarily and most durably by the patriarchal relations in their cultures of origin. Basinho never gets out of the shadow of his *hajji* and *omi-garandi* father, Aladje Mam Bá, imposing his regime of *mukur-mukur* ('silence,' 'mutism') on all the family. Also, paradoxically, he never grows out of the influence of the female figures, such as his aunt, Tia Bedja. Similarly, Antoninho is only a diminutive of his father António Sory Dansó. Despite the adventure of his studies in *terra-branku* ('the country of White man,' i.e. Portugal), never leaves the shadow of his mother Trisia Cady who had decided to make of him *um homem de caneta comprida* ("a man of the long pen;" Tcheka 2020: 141). The moment of his failure and humiliation—when not only the sisters are circumcised against his will but he is also obliged to pay a fine and work gratuitously for the *fanatecas*—is his mother's greatest victory. Certainly, although she shares their pain, she would not wish to spare

[7] *Blufu*—an uncircumcised person.

her daughters Aissa and Awa from their traditional fate. They are forced to assume their prescribed female destinies, transformed *em pedras de fogão, sem direito a lágrimas* ("into oven stones, without a right to tears;" Tcheka 2020: 174). Yet at the same time, the mother is proud of the son she had decided to transform into an educated man at the price of enormous perseverance and countless coins saved in an old can she had buried in the garden of her hut. This investment, presented in hilarious and grotesque terms, proves to be, at the end of the sequence of short stories, the only gage of the country's future. Despite the cultural predominance of *matchundadi*, the fate of infantilized, emasculated, or powerless males remains in female hands.

7. Conclusion: striving to close the colonial–decolonial–postcolonial cycle

Tony Tcheka's recent book differs from the vision of his predecessor, Filinto de Barros. What dominated in *Kikia Matcho* was the state of suspension, highlighting the absence of viable solutions and the impasse at the end of the historical cycle encapsulated in the triad of colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial concepts. This situation created a sense of a vicious circle. The spirit of the dead reappears, embodied in a male owl—an African counterpart to Minerva's owl in Hegel—that takes flight at dusk. Nonetheless, while one might expect the bird to carry ancestral wisdom from the afterlife, no such message emerges. On the contrary, the only message that can be deciphered is a warning against the potential transformation of the dead into an evil spirit, *kassissa*, symbolizing the danger of keeping African reality permanently intoxicated by its own past. *Quando os cravos vermelhos cruzaram o Geba* seems bogged in a similar Afro-pessimist vision, adding to the dystopian equation the burden of pre-colonial traditions, reborn from their ashes when the vogue of decolonial atheism and materialism waned. The paradigms brought to the country by the new intelligentsia educated abroad apparently prove to be as inefficient as the belief in modernity nurtured by the first postcolonial generation. Certainly, the invitation to laughter inscribed in the stories is a means of building a distanced outlook of the problems evoked.

On the other hand, giving voice to people who stood, in multiple and idiosyncratic ways, 'on the wrong side' of decolonial history is undoubtedly a step toward the detabooization of the Guinean past. Putting multiple tribal identities in the focus of his narration, Tony Tcheka steps away from the dominant postcolonial construction of Kriol identity as the creative centre of the new nation. Once again, the silenced tribal identities are allowed to speak, liberated from the ideological yoke, be it the servitude to the Kriol-nationalistic utopia of the first postcolonial decades. For the rest, the difficult transcolonial Afrotopia depends on the perseverance and resilience of the Fulani woman who gathers spare coins in an old can to buy 'long pens' for her (male) children.

References

Agbakoba, Joseph C. A. and Marita Rainsborough (eds.). 2024. *Beyond Decolonial African Philosophy: Africanity, Afrotopia, and Transcolonial Perspectives*. London – New York, NY: Routledge.

Ajah, Anthony and Marita Rainsborough (eds.). 2025. *Transcoloniality and Positive Justice for Development in Africa*. London – New York, NY: Routledge [In press].

Augel, Moema Parente. 2007. *O desafio do escombro. Nação, identidade e pós-colonialismo na literatura da Guiné-Bissau*. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond.

Augel, Moema Parente. 2019. "Breve panorama da prosa literária da Guiné-Bissau." In: *Heranças pós-coloniais nas literaturas de língua portuguesa*, edited by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Phillip Rothwell, 87–104. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.

Barros, Filinto de. 1997. *Kikia Matcho.* Bissau: Instituto Camões – Centro Cultural Português de Bissau.

Barros, Filinto de. 1999. *Kikia Matcho. O desalento do combatente*. Lisboa: Caminho.

Cardoso, Sebastião Marques. 2017. "Crítica da razão cultural guineense: um estudo sobre a representação da cultura em *Kikia Matcho*, texto ficcional de Filinto de Barros." *Via Atlântica* 18 (2): 357–375.
https://doi.org/10.11606/va.v0i32.133753
https://www.revistas.usp.br/viaatlantica/article/view/133753

Fistein, David. 2011. "Guinea-Bissau: How a Successful Social Revolution Can Become an Obstacle to Subsequent State-Building." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44 (3): 443–455.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/23267205

Helman, Gerard B. and Steven R. Ratner. 1993. "Saving failed states." *Foreign Policy* 89: 3–20.
https://doi.org/10.2307/1149070

Łukaszyk, Ewa A. 2019. "Amargas mistidas. O desalento africano em *Desesperança no chão de medo e dor* de Tony Tcheka." *Studia Romanica Posnaniensia* 46 (3): 7–18.
https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/srp/article/view/20365

Łukaszyk, Ewa A. 2020. "Ondjaki's Classmates Read Honwana: Towards a Transcolonial Theory." In: *World Literature and the Postcolonial: Narratives of (Neo)Colonization in a Globalized World*, edited by Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, 171–180. Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler.

Łukaszyk, Ewa A. 2024. "Quest for Afrotopia in Late Postcolonial Lusophone Literature: A Focus on Guinea-Bissau." In: *Beyond Decolonial African Philosophy: Africanity, Afrotopia, and Transcolonial Perspectives*, edited by Joseph C. A. Agbakoba and Marita Rainsborough, 158-177. London – New York, NY: Routledge.

Moreira, Joacine Katar. 2020. *Género, performance e violência política na Guiné-Bissau.* Lisboa: Sistema Solar.

Mucale, Ergimino Pedro. 2023. *Renascimento africano: retrospetivas e perspetivas.* Maputo: Paulinas Editora.

Oguejiofor, Obi. 2001. *Philosophy and the African Predicament.* Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Perdigão, Fernando. 2013. *O Retorno dos 'Gans.'* Lisboa: Colibri.

Said, Edward W. 2006. *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain.* New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Sila, Abdulai. 1997. *Mistida*. Bissau: Ku Si Mon.

Sila, Abdulai. 2016. *Memórias SOMânticas.* Bissau: Ku Si Mon.

Tcheka, Tony. 1996. *Noites de insónia na terra adormecida*. Bissau: Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa.

Tcheka, Tony. 2008. *Guiné sabura que dói.* São Tomé e Príncipe: UNEAS.

Tcheka, Tony. 2015. *Desesperança no chão de medo e dor.* Prefácio de M. Parente Augel. N.P.: Edições Corubal.

Tcheka, Tony. 2020. *Quando os cravos vermelhos cruzaram o Geba*. Lisboa: Editorial Novembro.

Ewa A. Łukaszyk is currently a Professor of Romance Literatures at the University of Ostrava. Her main areas of specialisation are global literary studies, Lusophone African literatures and newly developed transcolonial theory (that may be followed at: www.ewa-lukaszyk.com/transcolonial-studies.html).
Ewa can be contacted at: ewa.a.lukaszyk@gmail.com