

## “Os Transparentes” de Ondjaki: Luanda como metáfora de Angola

### Ondjaki’s “Transparent City”: Luanda as a metaphor for Angola

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**Resumo:** *Este artigo analisa a obra Os transparentes do escritor angolano Ondjaki, a partir dos conceitos de memória, nostalgia e ficção, no cenário da cidade de Luanda, entendida como metáfora de Angola. Recorrendo aos trabalhos de Baccega sobre Mayombe de Pepetela, inicia-se a exposição traçando o contexto em que se inscreve o romance de Ondjaki. Assinala-se, a partir de excertos da obra, como o autor ficciona personagens e interesses da cidade de Luanda, nomeadamente os de uma elite afeta ao ex-presidente, que governou o país por cerca de 40 anos. Em seguida, evocando mais uma vez Baccega, analisa-se como são construídas as personagens, numa dicotomia ganhadores/perdedores, e num cenário urbano progressivamente caótico e corrompido, onde a memória e a nostalgia são âncora da resiliência dos despossuídos. Por fim, são mapeadas as referências e o papel das mídias, com principal relevância para o Jornalismo em Angola e a influência das telenovelas brasileiras.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Ondjaki; literatura angolana; ficção, mídias em Angola.*

**Abstract:** *This article analyzes the work Transparent City of the Angolan writer Ondjaki, based on the concepts of memory, nostalgia and fiction, in the scenario of Luanda city, understood as a metaphor for Angola. Using Baccega’s works on Pepetela’s Mayombe, we trace the context in which Ondjaki’s novel is inscribed. It is pointed out, from work excerpts, how the author fictionalizes characters and interests of Luanda city, namely the elite that supports the ex-president who ruled the country for about forty years. Evoking Baccega once again, we*

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*analyze how characters are constructed, in a dichotomy of winners/losers, and in a progressively chaotic and corrupt urban scenario, where memory and nostalgia are the anchor of dispossessed resilience. Finally, we map references and the role of the media, focusing the relevance of Journalism in Angola and the influence of Brazilian soap operas.*

**Keywords:** *Ondjaki; Angolan literature; fiction, media in Angola.*

## Introduction

This text celebrates the friendship and libertarian dreams of a friend, colleague and mentor Maria Aparecida Baccega. In her PhD thesis in Languages, presented at Universidade de São Paulo, in 1986, titled *Mayombe: fiction and history (a literature in movement)* she studied Angolan literature, choosing to analyze the classical work *Mayombe* (1980), by the Angolan author Pepetela. The author's goal was discussing the role of literature in moments of historic rupture, such as what happened in the end of colonialism in Angola, and its contribution for the arrival of new ideologic, historic and sociologic structures. In this sense, the work *Transparent Cities*, by the Angolan author Onjaki, constitutes an instigating text – after over 40 years of *Mayombe* being written and the independence of Angola – by denouncing, in a realistic way, the major contradictions of society and the lack of hope of those who fought for a more dignified and fair society. A theme that takes on relevance in the current scenario in Brazil and arrives as a path to explore, in this phase of the intellectual work of Maria Aparecida Baccega.

*Transparent Cities* (2012) is a novel that takes place in Luanda, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, telling the story of Odonato, an old public servant, and a vast group of characters, which represent not only Luanda's society but also Angola. The story is built around the growing transparency, in the literal sense, of the lead character, who stopped eating to feed his children, after not getting a job, because, in “Luanda, people who don't get into schemes...” (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 282). But, in the lead character's speech, the characteristic that is progressively accentuated throughout the novel, is due to a new reality, “... We are transparent because we are poor” (ONJAKI, 2012, p. 203).

In the story, we see, fictionalized, specificities of the Angolan regime, of schemes and businesses of survival and corruption – especially around the exploitation of oil – that surpass, transversally, all society and leave common citizens gradually “invisible”. A story, where the author recurs to different literary registers, including humor, using nuances of the Portuguese language to describe embarrassment and challenges of

the Angolan society, as, for example, the announcement of the official demise of the "Lady Ideology", in a huge headline on Angola News (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 331).

The analysis of the story is founded, in methodologic terms, in an interpretivist perspective that privileges the construction of science, through a subjective approach. This presupposition intends to enterprise a path of discovery founded in the declaration of principles and the enunciation of concepts, with the goal of exploring and understanding the meaning attributed by individuals or groups to a social or human problem (CRESWELL, 2009, p. 4). With this orientation, we draft the historic and social context which involves the novel *Transparent Cities* and call elements of history and sociology of Luanda. We also recur, to principles of the Literary Sociology (GOLDMANN, 1974; BACCEGA, 1990), namely to studies about the construction of characters (CÂNDIDO, 2007; REIS; LOPES, 2002), as well as the concepts of memory (POLLACK, 1992; BARONE, 2005) and nostalgia (PICKERING; KELGHTLEY, 2006).

### ***Mayombe and Transparent City: works and their historic time***

In an article, inspired in the PhD thesis, published in the Magazine of the Center of African Studies at USP, with the title "The movement between fiction and history. The Mayombe Case" (BACCEGA, 1990), the author affirms that that romance "deals with the daily lives of a Guerrilla base, during the fights for freedom in Angola" where each member of the Base has a different ethnic origin and maintain their individuality", but, despite the diverse origins, "what counts, however, is the common project of defeating colonialism" (BACCEGA, 1990, p. 143-145). This utterance is very current, due to the political, racial and social polarization in which societies, namely Brazil, move. The "common goals", the "common good" is more important than the "particular differences". Lessons that cannot, however, make forget, according to the author, that

“the manifestation of harmony of races” is “one of fictions in our country” (BACCEGA, 1990, p. 145). Although, as Celso Frederico (2020) says, the fact that this harmony is a “myth” point towards a “story, a dream, that reveal deep social aspirations and latent values...” which projects a future of reconciliation... a racial democracy where an individual’s color of their skin will be finally an insignificant characteristic.

Baccega (1986; 1990) describes and analyzes society and history of Angola, in Mayombe, from Pepetela, from a liberating view of MPLA (Movement for the Liberation of Angola) here they are “present as fictional reasons the big issues that characterize that moment of the historic process, such as tribalism, national identity, culture, education and school degree, party, theory-practice relation, the intellectual role, the issue of violence” (BACCEGA, 1990, p. 147).

We remember that the inspiring thought process of Baccega, present in text about Angola, was materialized in courses she promoted about Africa – in which I had the privilege to participate – in late 1980’s, at School of Communication and Arts at USP. These seminars, with suggestive titles as “To better understand Africa” (1987-1988), involved professors and experts that approached issues like traditional societies, demographics, religion, politics and symbolic representations in an innovative way. In these courses organized by Professor Baccega, participated professors like Dilma de Melo, Fernando Mourão, Maria Aparecida Santili, Kabengele Munanga and others.

The present work seeks, thus, to pay tribute to Professor Baccega’s pioneer spirit on studies about Angola and Africa. The book *Transparent City* (2012) from the Angolan writer Ondjaki Ndalú de Almeida, born in 1977 integrates a vast literary body of work, located in Luanda, which goes through a period from the declaration of independence (November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1975) to nowadays. *Transparent Cities* refer to the final years of government of the President José Eduardo dos Santos, who governed Angola for 38 years (1979-2017) and conducted the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) during this period. With the exit of José Eduardo dos Santos, we watch a reorganization of the regime,

in which the "fight against corruption" enters the daily discourse of the new president João Lourenço.<sup>2</sup> The family business from the former president and the elite that surrounded him were exposed nationally and internationally, being designated the Luanda Leaks scandal the great promotor of these criminal investigations (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 2020).<sup>3</sup>

In *Transparent Cities*, the negligence and greed of a political elite is fictionalized, associated to MPLA, capable of destroying, to their own advantage, Angolan society. Oil extraction in Luanda and the interests articulated around this "prospection" constitute the metaphor of that reality, illuminated in the novel, through the conversation between an entrepreneur, DomCristalino and a minister, SantosPrancha.<sup>4</sup>

[...] (Minister) oil extraction will go on, that is not a doubt, but the Boss is very worried... The mouths of opposition and the own concerns of the president... ;(Cristalino) the capital city is for everyone... and we will move forward... after the excavations, you guide yourselves with oil, I want water... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 191-192)

With this text, the intention is to carry on with the same trail of *Baccega* and analyze how, approximately 40 years later, Ondjaki, a young writer, intertwines literature, fiction and history, in the sense of building a big picture of the Angolan society, having as scenario Luanda, in the first decade of the 21st century.

In Angola, the independence was declared after 14 years of fight against the Portuguese presence, which colonized the territory for 500 years. In a context of cold war and a new sharing of Africa, over 20 years of civil war had passed between the three main movements of

2 According to João Lourenço, the fight against corruption will go on despite of the "organized resistance" *Público*, 13/03/2020. Available at: <https://www.publico.pt/2020/03/13/mundo/noticia/joao-lourenco-luta-corrupcao-vai-continuar-apesar-resistencia-organizada-1907589>.

3 Cfr.: International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, *O Império de Isabel: como a filha do ex-presidente de Angola aproveitou o poder político do pai para, com empresas de fachada e informações privilegiadas, se tornar a mulher mais rica de África*. 19/01/2020. Available at: <https://apublica.org/2020/01/o-imperio-de-isabel/>.

4 We followed Ondjaki's grammar in the names, citations and excerpts of the book *Transparent City*.

liberation – MPLA, UNITA and FNLA – supported by foreign powers. Specifying, MPLA, the country with the larger number of boards and supporters, was led by Agostinho Neto and installed in Luanda, having been aided by Cubans and Russians; UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), located in the center region of Angola, of the ovimbundo ethnic group, was led by Jonas Savimbi and supported by South Africa, FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola), of the bapungu ethnic group, implanted in northern Angola, was financed by the United States and led by Holden Roberto. The conflict lasted 27 years, from 1975 to 2002, and finished with the death of UNITA's leader and the transformation of this movement into a political party.

The war, and MPLA's victory, made so that it was installed in Angola, especially in Luanda, a name constituted by powerful members of that political party and generals that won the war (OLIVEIRA, 2015). Business, associated with oil and diamonds, were distributed through family members and followers of President Eduardo dos Santos, situation that seem to be reversed by the current president João Lourenço,<sup>5</sup> elected in August 2017 (CUNHA, 2020, p. 28-39). *Transparent Cities* approaches the “golden” period of the government of José Eduardo dos Santos, the high price of oil, which promoted the “distribution” of gifts and the consolidation of corruption “schemes”, where was involved all institutions of State, from ministers to smaller public servants. The book illustrates, equally, the consequences of this social “pathology”, showing the perverse effects and the degradation of the social, political and economic fabric. Let it be reminded that, in its widest meaning, corruption means the indebt appropriation of goods or earnings and involves three big scenarios: i) the degradation in the ethical sense of the agents involved; ii) a set of predatory social practices within certain institutions; iii) the indebt appropriation of benefits, by agents that are in mutual accord (GAMBETTA, 2002).

5 According to Peres, Cristina. Angola está mesmo a mudar? *Expresso Sociedade*, 08/02/2020. Available at: <https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2020-02-08-Angola-esta-mesmo-a-mudar->.

## **Luanda: from its colonial history to the metaphor of the Angolan nation**

In colonial times, Luanda was born as a commercial warehouse for slaves directed to the Atlantic (GONÇALVES, 2010), preferably to Brazil, and expanded as they established relations with pre-colonial aristocracies with emphasis to Kongo, Matamba, Ndongo and Lunda (GONÇALVES, 2010:4, citing TIDIANE DIAKITÉ, 2009). The commercial exchanges were fixated in a local mixed-race aristocracy, in 19th century (MOURÃO, 1996; BITTENCOURT, 2000; NASCIMENTO, 2013), built by merchants that lived there and by those who used to make commercial incursions in the wilderness, men designated by pombeiros. Pombeiros kept connections between country regions, under the jurisdiction of native kingdoms, and the shore, promoting slave traffic and trade of European and Portuguese manufactures, as well as wine. The abandonment of Luanda by Portuguese public authorities, throughout the colonial period, promoted the raise and autonomy of the city and the hegemony of a mixed-race population, which frequently affirmed facing the metropolis (MOURÃO, 1996, p. 58-60). This situation only changed after the "English ultimatum" (1890)<sup>6</sup> (ALEXANDRE, 2002), but, mainly, through the reorganization of the ultramarine politics of the Portuguese New state (ALEXANDRE, 1993), affective in 1950's of the 20th century.

Luanda's urbanization happened in the late 18th century, early 19th century. Streets were arranged and the connection between public buildings, neighborhoods and houses were created, originating the distinction between downtown and uptown. In both spaces prevailed a Kimbundo toponymy, to which were linked Portuguese historic and religious references (MOURÃO, 1997). Luanda integrates, thus, a religious city, a civil city, a city of militaries, a camp-city, a *feitoria* city and a settlement colony city (MOURÃO, 1997). From 19th century to

6 English Ultimatum (1890) – memorandum of the English government led by Lord Salisbury demanding that Portugal comply the agreement on Africa, signed in the Conference of Berlin, and left the territory between Angola and Mozambique.



the 20th century – based in administrative politics, in the differentiation of occupations and in the arrival of new inhabitants coming from the countryside, and the colonial metropolis – the city was organized around *asphalt* and *musseques*. This transformation, intensified with basic sanitation projects and urbanization post-Second World War, corresponds to a economic and racial hierarchization, painted by the so-called “popular” neighborhoods where mixed-race people, assimilated and poor white people built their identity of Luanda (NASCIMENTO, 2013).

The successive plans of fomentation created by the Portuguese New State (1926- 1974) for the African colonies, from the 1940's of the 20th century, contemplated the creation of infrastructure of road and port communication, Angola, and mostly Luanda, being one of the most benefited regions. In this context, roads and railway tracks linked the main cities, which favored the populational rise of the district capitals, but mainly Luanda, which in the independence day would have around 600 thousand residents. The post-independence civil war, with massive destruction of existing infrastructure, pushed residents of the destroyed provinces of the rural countryside for the Angolan seaside towns, in the condition of dislocated and refugees. Luanda grew rapidly in population, receiving approximately 4 million inhabitants, which had as consequence the expansion of a “spontaneous city”, characterized by the scarce development in areas such as basic sanitation, energy, housing, as well as the absence of investments in social equipment, such as schools and hospitals (RAMOS; NETO; FERREIRA, 2004, p. 212). Consequently, neighborhoods with precarious constructions were created, called *musseques*, while the degradation of the housing park in downtown took place, partly built in the colonial period and occupied by Angolans, when Portuguese residents flee to the Portuguese metropolis. This is the reality lived by the characters in *Transparent City*, which live in a building in accelerated state of decay, in downtown Luanda, more specifically, at Maianga, one of the most central neighborhoods of the city.

[...] The building had seven floors and breathed like a live entity... There is to know its secrets, the useful or unpleasant characteristics of its air, the functioning of its old pipes, the steps and doors leading nowhere [...]" (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 16).

This reality does not change after the civil war, after the death of UNITA's leader, in 2002, although the raise of oil, the peace and plans of reconstruction, supported by China, had reached indexes of growth of GDP, between 2002 and 2008, of about 10%. The growth did not translate in an increase of HDI (Human Development Index) constituted by the indicators of GDP per capita, access to education and health. The increase seen in this index, in Angola, that fills the 149th position, among 189 countries, is due to, mainly, the increase of GDP per capita – the increase of super rich and rich, not reflecting in acquisitions of social welfare, education and health.

In this period, the city surpassed 6 million inhabitants and constitutes today one of the biggest and most dense urban centers in Southern Africa, in an area of approximately 3,000 km<sup>2</sup>, according to the Luanda General Metropolitan Master Plan (PDGML).<sup>7</sup> Currently, the *musseques* that shelter the majority of the population, are self-constructed, present major structural problems and represent approximately 80% of the urban geography of the city of Luanda. The first quarter of the 21st century comes to confirm, in the city, the projects of national reconstruction and investment in real estate and in the requalification of capital, in the shadow of PDGML. In this framework, the downtown area and the waterfront of the old town were remodeled, followed by the demolition of historic buildings, and modern surrounding cities grew, located in distant and pleasant places, without access to public infrastructure (ALEXANDRE, 2016, p. 81-82). Consequently, the city traffic became chaotic, given the non-existence of new access and the deterioration of existing roads. Ondjaki comprises this reality in a fictional

7 Luanda's Metropolitan Masterplan (PDGML) was presented in the Palace of Justice in December 14th, 2015, with the goal of guiding the decisions of strategic planning for the city of Luanda (Alexandre, 2016: 89).

and humorous form, narrating the daily life and social hierarchization, through the access of motorized vehicles and forms of transportation to and within the city of Luanda.

[...] In the avenue, the traffic was intense, Chinese motorcycles used to run among huge cars, American, Japanese and Korean jeeps, lots of mini-buses transporting the people that only could move around with buses, a lot of Toyota Starlets, also known as neighborhood movers, also in the service of transporting people, but illegally and in a more risky way... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 70).

The narrator also describes the neglect of public services of public affairs when he describes the degradation of the streets and the supremacy of private interests, referring aspects that indicate business associated to the former president's family and the elite surrounding him<sup>8</sup>, for instance, telecommunications.

[...] The city was chaotic with new and old construction sites happening at once, and those CIPEL<sup>9</sup> excavations, and the holes for installing cable TV, and the holes made by the rain and the opened holes that no one thought about paving... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 112).

Real estate investments constituted administrative designations and, simultaneously, big business, at times obscure, with the name MPLA. The activities were reported throughout the former president's government by international organizations and national activists, such as International Transparency<sup>10</sup> or the journalist Rafael Marques.<sup>11</sup> The current investigations, made in the context of Luanda Leaks about the daughter of the ex-president José Eduardo dos Santos, Isabel dos Santos, allowed, recently, to build a network of interests and appropriation of

8 BRITO, Ana; VILLALOBOS, Luís. UNITEL: *A empresa que lançou Isabel dos Santos*, 17/02/2020. Available at: <https://www.publico.pt/2020/02/17/economia/noticia/unitel-empresa-lancou-isabel-santos-1904236>.

9 In the novel, the author fictionalizes a possible plan to find oil in Luanda's underground level, where it is created na Comission of Found Oil in Luanda (CIPEL) (*Os transparentes*, p. 91).

10 Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/cpi-2013#>.

11 Rafael Marques acusa figuras do Estado de Angola de branqueamento de capitais. DW-Angola, 17/07/2012. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/rafael-marques-acusa-figuras-do-estado-de-angola-de-branqueamento-de-capitais/a-16103515>.

public resources, implemented by the family and their associates, with international complicity, especially Portuguese.<sup>12</sup> This journalistic investigation tracking the relationship between government and Angolan and international investors in projects of requalification of Luanda, relates the company *Urbinveste Promoções e Projetos Imobiliários SA*, owned by Isabel dos Santos, to the corporation *Broadway Malyan*. Simultaneously, the investigation brings irregularities in the execution of the project *Marginal da Corimba*, which aimed to create an urban corridor along the coast, with the goal of linking the southern region of Luanda to the city centre.<sup>13</sup>

Ondjaki, by fictionalizing, in *Transparent City*, a possible exploitation of oil in Luanda's underground, describes, equally, humorously, the international interests involved in Angola, both in trade and oil exploitation.

[...] Always the same group, Angola, USA and Russia... and the Portuguese get the leftovers, but since there are some weddings and ID cards taking by force, they may eat a little more... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 126).<sup>14</sup>

Luanda becomes, therefore, a metaphor for Angola, where the author synthesizes the problems of survival of the country, the government and the population, in a complex and heterogeneous context, conditioned by factors inherent to a savage and peripheral capitalism, based by corporative interests, but having big relevance with elements of socio-cultural and historic jurisdiction (HODGES, 2002).

[...] Luanda boiled with their people that sells, that bought to sell, that sold themselves to later sell, that sold themselves to later buy and people

12 Cfr.: *Luanda Leaks*. *Expresso*. Available at: <https://expresso.pt/luanda-leaks>.

13 LOPES, Diogo; VINHAS, Nuno. A "visão" de Isabel dos Santos para Luanda rendeu 500 milhões, mas desalojou três mil pessoas. *Jornal O Observador*, 21/01/2020. Available at: <https://observador.pt/2020/01/21/a-visao-de-isabel-dos-santos-para-luanda-rendeu-500-milhoes-mas-desalojou-tres-mil-pessoas/>.

14 Conversation between Davide Airoso, scientist, and Paulo Pousado, journalist, making reference to the installed interests in Angola, as well as the very media covered marriage of one of the former president's daughters with a Portuguese entrepreneur (*Os transparentes*, p. 126). About the wedding, see: <https://www.cmjornal.pt/mundo/detalhe/casamento-de-tchize-e-hugo>.

that sold themselves without ever getting the chance to buy... [...] (Ondjaki, 2012, p. 72).

As Hodges (2002) refers, the MPLA politicians, when they abandoned the socialism of state in early 1990's, entered an exaggerated capitalism, complying with obscure and authoritarian mechanisms. The elections and institutions consolidated the interests of extractive elite that dominated resources and concessions of diamond and oil, the biggest wealth of Angola, in their own advantage or with corrupted and corruptor international interests. These interests created webs of patronage in society and mines, in a devastating manner, social reforms and investments in health, education and in job creation.

### **Characters: resistance and complicity**

Baccega (1990, p. 145) in the previously cited article about *Mayombe* writes that “fiction is concretized in History through figurativization through characters that gain life inside the book”. Antonio Candido (2007) considers that the character can be recognized, in other words, identified, by what the narrator informs about them, in other words, by what he speaks of himself or by what other characters say about him. In *Transparent City*, the narrator turns to complex strategies of presentation and construction of characters, in the sense of expressing social types, or, more frequently, stereotypes that synthesize the population, not only in Luanda, but also in Angola. To do so, the names of the characters pitch in, for instance, MariaCom Força, CamaradaMudo, CienteDoGrã, JoãoDevagar, AvóTeta, PauloPousado, Pomposa, DestaVez e DaOutra, VendedorDeConchas or Cego. (Hard Mary, MuteFella, AwareofGrã, SlowJohn, TitsGrandma, LandedPaul, Pompous, ThisTime and TheOther, ShellSeller or Blind. Names that synthesize life stories and physical and moral characteristics, as the ones that will be traced next:

[...] Ciente do Grã, Odonato's oldest son, spent his teenage years hopping from bar to bar, he was an associate of an famous disco but ended up as a doorman that was always late, he stole needles in a pharmacy giving it to

a heroin junkie and, in his late youth, was inserted into a Rastafari group in Luanda... Lost by vocation, he would wake up early to have more time to do nothing, and would feed the obsession of having a GrandCherokee jeep, his friends called him "Ciente do GrandCherokee" which quickly were abbreviated to CienteDoGrã... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 25).

The characters build themselves, equally through the actions that they practice, through the thoughts they express, through dialogues, soliloquys, monologues and flows of conscience. In this perspective, in consonance with Candido (2007, p. 58-59), the construction of characters on literary fiction demands of the author the capacity of interpretation and comprehension of people and a longitudinal and transversal gaze that allows unity to the essential diversity of each person. Simultaneously, the characters acquire solidity, through memory and experiences of the author, relived by the narrator and based on experiences, expectation and frustration. In this context, the author Ondjaki "corresponds to a real and empirical entity" [...] While the narrator works as a fictional entity to whom, in the scenario of fiction, has the task of enunciating the discourse of narrative communication" (REIS; LOPES, 2002, p. 257). The narrator's game is to give life to characters based in the author's experience, using memories, observations and experiences, capable of attributing internal consistency – within the romance – and external, in other words, making the characters intelligible to the readers.

In the character presentation, there is a social and moral duality between the one who are "naturally losers", in a capitalist society, but bring in themselves moral and ethical values and the ones who are "winners" by giving up these principles. The resilient and nostalgic figures of Odonato, the transparent, of AvóKunjize, old woman of the Umbundu ethnic group, and Paizinho, who came from the South, bring in themselves the memories of another life, of another story, situated in an Angola who fought for their independence, suffered in this fight but is proud of the path they took, their traditional values and their identity. However, a big part of these characters find themselves in a limbo, between "losers" and

“winners”, when, in order to survive, they get in “schemes” of doubtful nature, although there is a slight hope, in changing everyday life...

[...] There is no time to remember/cry the next day/ the things we should cry about today... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 9).

Odonato, the transparent, and AvóKunjize, old woman of the Umbundu ethnic group, and Paizinho, who came from the South, base their resilience in “events personally experienced”, but also in “events experienced by the group or collective to which the person feels to belong” (POLLAK, 1992, p. 200-212), namely in the fight for liberation and in the first years of independence of Angola. Both events are present in the three characters that recur, simultaneously, to the individual memory, but also to the collective memory, calling people and heroes, events and stories of another time, of another space and another place, which allows them to remake, daily, framings of memory and remembering another life. They evoke, as Barone writes (2005, p. 179-180), “forms of memory” that are found “associated to the social temporality” and allow “forms of living time”. It is a cognitive resource that involve social-physical and cultural characteristics that make memory not only a “cognitive instrument of the subject” but also a tool of “social transformation”.

Illustrative is the conversation between Odonato, his wife and AvóKunjikise which, in a disappointing present, retrieves the memory of another life, of another Luanda and Angola, of hope, of years after the declaration of independence.

[...] The disgrace began... I hope God isn't sleeping – whispered AvóKunjikise

Odonato looked absorbed by the window, looking for a place inside time I believe I suffer of the illness of national discomfort – he tells his wife, smiling lightly... The country pains me... the war, the political disagreements, the ones within and the ones that are for the ones who are out.

His eyes and body felt a deep nostalgia of Sunday strolls with the family, close to the sea, in the Bairroallha...

Luanda was, then, compared to now, almost an urban desert where there was no food or clothing, medicine, no water and no light, often we didn't

have beer or wine... The shoes were old but the legs were happy... And even the people were gentler... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 179-180).

This excerpt, beyond the "forms of memory", brings nostalgia, extended in the Greek primordial sense of "extended pain" by being away from "home", in other words, it's the memory of another life, another Angola, where they were comfortable. That nostalgia, which involves melancholy, expresses a state of mind that articulates the present – where they live, but they feel weird – and a past, where they imagine to be at home (PICKERING; KELGHTLEY, 2006). The feeling of nostalgia is shown not only in Odonato's speech, but in other different characters that overvalue past experiences, in face of difficulties, strangeness and incomprehension of present days, such as the Mailman.

[...] Time has passed and there were things that were lost, respect, morals, good manners... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 80).

The wealth of characters, created by the narrator, is in the diversity, and in the capacity of synthetizing social archetypes, in a simplified manner, which allows immediate recognition of the character in society. The description of the social type arrives, in this sense, as a stereotype, a simplification of the information involving a cognitive process of social categorization, capable of reducing sociocultural anxiety while making possible sharing of mental images, by individuals of groups. This process, adopted by the narrator, reflects the images that groups have of themselves, in the form of self-stereotype, but also images that groups have of other groups, as hetero-stereotypes (LEYENS, 1985, p. 55). A game of mirrors weaved by mutual images.

With base in this procedure, the characters compose a social web, which involves either the poorest – for instance, the ShellSeller and the Blind – or the most informed ones – LandedPaulo, the journalist, DavideAiroso, the scientist – or even the obscure forces of society, namely a minister, interested in oil exploitation, an assistant, subservient and overbearing, or even, a winner businessman, as DomCristalino.



[...] Ribeiro seco, the man they called DomCristalino, for being for years involved with water issues, worked for years in the Ministry of Industry, going through other posts in the era of the Schematic Socialism and went privatizing places, factories and even some people that were involved in his path. [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 165).

Women have, generally, not a lot of expression in *Transparent City*, except the elders, such as AvóKunjikise and AvóTeta. Both give out authority for their life path, experience and age, despite their paths being quite different. While the first one, of Umbundo ethnic group and language, arrives to Luanda as a war refugee and is adopted by Odonato's family, where she replaces the grandma they just buried; the second one lives in the city for a long time, where she organized, in a popular neighborhood, a prostitution business, where she takes care and gives work to abandoned women. All the other women arrive as "secondary characters" for male characters, either dedicated and caring wives, or lovers/girlfriends.

Regardless of that condition of "secondary characters" women are fictionalized, generally, as having strong and resilient personalities, such as MariaComForça, who sells food on the street and other chachkis. However, they can't be free from their condition of subservience facing men, due to their emotional dependence. Clara, PauloPousado's girlfriend is one of the most independent woman in choices and options, especially sexually, within an urban frame of work and sociability.

The blurring of female autonomy does not mean, however, irrelevance, because these are the woman that dynamize the male characters, but mirror, regardless, the difficulties of affirmation of most women, in African societies.<sup>15</sup> Oxymoronically, the only woman with intellectual, emotional and professional autonomy is a BBC journalist, unnamed, who proposes to investigate and report what is happening in Luanda and Angola, giving, simultaneously, voice to the people.

15 Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230162>.

## Media as background

The novel *Transparent City* comprises a media dimension that follows the story, with many characters taking on or fine tuning their identity elements through the consumption of media products such as reading the newspaper, watching CNN, watching Brazilian telenovelas, watching movies, including adult movies, or even listening to jazz or Angolan music from the 80's.

The Angolan media landscape is regulated by the Constitution of Angola, proofread and approved in 2010, which consecrated, in different additions, the right for freedom of expression and information and the prohibition of censorship. In the context in which the novel takes place, despite the law in effect, Angolan media system continued being controlled and monopolized by the government party, MPLA.

In the years in which *Transparent City* takes place, the written press had about 13 newspapers, among public (3) and private (10), while the National Radio of Angola dominated 80% of the market, although they operated over 12 private radio stations, including the Angola's Catholic Channel (Gaspar, 2015, p. 18). In the field of television, we highlight the Public Television of Angola (TPA), which "exercises its work in a regimen of state monopoly, with three channels with national and international coverage. Channel 1, Channel 2 and TPA International" (GASPAR, 2015, p. 19). There were, however, conceived licenses to private groups that had alliances with the government and the installed elite, as, for example, the Media Nova Group and TV Zimbo<sup>16</sup> and Banda TV (paid channel). The private sector, very unstable, due to economic, social and ideologic conditions of work, is constituted by national groups and subsidiaries of international groups, especially Portuguese and Brazilian channels offered through Pay TV. Within these groups, Portuguese channels catering to African audience (RTP, TVI and SIC) and the Brazilian Globo and Record stand out. In addition to

16 Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13036740>.

these channels, we had also European channels, such as BBC, American cable TV such as AXN and FOX and South American channels.

The technologic changes in television that happened in the first decade of the 21st century, which determined the passage of analogic to digital, are signaled in the way it is described the rooftop of the building, the epicenter of the story and the home of the lead character and the main characters of *Transparent City*.

[...] There lied quiet or danced in the wind the numberless antennas, the ones from the old days, aged, crooked or even shaking, and the most recent ones, small and big satellite dishes, those that catch news and voices of other international places... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 52).

The role of the government institutions and the state monopoly of the Radio of Angola and Television of Angola, happens in different moments, basing government decisions, from the “Boss”, the “President”. The declarations made live bring speeches of state in an elaborate bureaucratic register, and announce general dispositions that hide facts, at times hidden and harmful to common citizens.

For instance, when the president speaks to the microphones of National Radio, about the cancellation of the “eclipse” – an event announced by the government as unprecedented in Angola, which would bring out many tourists and would be an opportunity for national celebration – due to the “demise of the comrade ideology”. The excerpt brings out a metaphor of the deviations performed by the governments and the deceptions sold to the Angolan people, whose speech, in the Radio, begin like this:

[...] Dear citizens of the RepublicOfAngola, other representatives of other nations credited in our country, religious and civil entities, in the name of the national government of Angola and according to an extraordinary meeting at the political bureau of the Party, I follow the duty to inform a decision that will have implications in the social, political and cultural life of each one of us... (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 362).

TPA and the National Radio follow the daily lives of the characters, sharing information about the measures adopted by the government, but also there are references to programs of public interest, such as the collection of a traditional song that the National Radio made, or even, TPA's show "Meeting Spot", promoting reunions of families separated by the civil war.

The struggle of exercising journalism in Angola; the daily threats the professionals are subject to, namely physic and psychological threats; the political and economic pressures, as well as the different forms of the regime to curtail the independence and freedom of expression, constitute a reality of daily life in Angola.<sup>17</sup> This reality is portrayed by one of the most tragic characters of the novel, the journalist Paulo Pousado, who, by being within the political and economic stories, decides to murder the president and ends up murdered, with a shot in the forehead, by the Body Guards. His character emerges as a metaphor for Journalism in Angola, where many journalists were persecuted and killed in the period when the novel takes place.<sup>18</sup> Paulo Pousado expresses the angst between who sees himself pressured by a situationist conformism and the freedom of press and expression, written in the constitution.

[...] The boss called a meeting that I couldn't refuse, things weren't so good at work, too much complaints and absences, not to mention the ideologic differences that guided the work of each one of them, if at times the boss began to take on the liberal character that wanted to be an example in the field of national communication, other times were evident his commitment with members of the high scale of... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 83).

The radical escape that the journalist sees when planning the death of the President is combined with the dramatic solution the narrator

17 Available at: <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/angola-acusa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-a-jornalistas-espe-lha-press%C3%A3o-do-governo-em-tempo-de-elei%C3%A7%C3%B5es/a-39480522>; <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/aumenta-press%C3%A3o-contr-a-imprensa-angolana/a-44328461>.

18 Available at: <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/ano-2013-foi-pessimos-para-os-jornalistas-angolanos-misa/1783347.html>.

finds to end the novel: the explosion of the building, and Luanda, and the death of Odonato.

[...] All the horizon was a sea of yellow flames and confused smoke, diminishing noises to later feed other explosions... Odonato takes of his left pocket a small paper, and, under a dry gaze of farewell and tenderness, wrote quick lines t then bend over himself and chew with his canine teeth the piece of rope that connected him to the building... [...] (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 421-422).

Throughout the novel, other media companies are mentioned, such as CNN, Globo, RTP and BBC. The references to other international stations are sparse, but BBC appears in the image of a journalist that seeks to understand what happens with Odonato, and the cause of his transparency. However, she does not have a lot of conviction that her journalistic work will be published and comments that “she does not send anything to BBC anymore. They do not want... No one wants good news about Angola or Africa” (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 281-282).

In the media landscape, we highlight the mention to telenovelas and Brazilian media professionals. We remember, here, that in the intellectual path of Professor Baccega, the studies on telenovela, production and reception received a lot of attention. In an article published in the publication *Educação & Communication*, in 2003, the author writes that “the media, especially the television” are the privileged place of narrative, whose historic matrixes are found in these cultural manifestations” (BACCEGA, 2003 p. 9). In the same article, she refers that “television and televisual fiction in general ...due to its genre format... can, in a much more agile manner, expose concepts and walk successfully in the sense of persuasion of population in general” (BACCEGA, 2003 p. 9). When she explores this issue, she associates television news to telenovela, considering that the first ones are generally much more “fictional” than the telenovela. With this information in mind, it is necessary to understand the role and presence of Brazilian telenovelas in the daily life of Luanda’s people, considering the secular relations that involve cultural and economic exchanges between Brazil and Angola

(CUNHA, CASTILHO; GUEDES, 2017). The success of telenovelas is inserted into a timeline of symbolic exchanges, which involves events and situations such as slavery, African traditional religions, Portuguese literature and Brazilian popular music. Brazilian telenovelas, in Angola, have an audience since early 1980's and, since then, they are present in the daily life of Luanda's people.

In other novels, such as *Os da minha rua* (CUNHA, 2020, p. 35-62), Ondjaki exposed the power of Brazilian telenovelas in stimulating, in the daily life, possible imaginaries, and, at the same time, allowing the escape of difficult realities experienced by the people in Luanda. In *Transparent City* the same feeling, of escape of the daily life, is present and not only the telenovela brings out processes of identification, but it constitutes as a temporal milestone of Luanda families and society, such as "coming home after the novela", "working at the time of the novela", talking like "Odorico Paraguaçu".

The projection of Brazilian media through telenovela and the big companies they produce took to Luanda qualified technicians and professionals in charge of operating these devices. At the same time, it generated among Angolans a big familiarity with Brazilian slang, adopting words and expressions. That proximity also brought evangelical churches to Angola, which, in the novel, appears as the IgrejaDaOvelhaSagrada (church of the sacred sheep), described humorously, as an opportunity of safe business. It is important to point out that Brazilian evangelical churches, in Angola, have been in the epicenter of numerous controversies, not only because of the tithing, but also due to ideologic issues.<sup>19</sup>

References to the cultural industry are also constant in *Transparent City*, a characteristic of Ondjaki's novels which, in this book, enunciates – often within a nostalgic framing, related to the years of colonial struggle, to the period of post-independence, or even civil war – Angolan musicians such as Bonga, RuyMingas, CarlosBurity, WaldemarBastos or PauloFlores.

19 Available at: <https://www.hypeness.com.br/2018/11/por-que-angola-esta-fechando-igrejas-evangelicas-no-pais/>.

## Final notes in form of conclusion

The novel *Transparent City* is, contrary to Pepetela's *Mayombe*, a hopeless piece of literature. In the moment where Baccega wrote and analyzed *Mayombe*, in her PhD thesis, they were apparently tracing the way of independence and freedom in Angola. At the time when Ondjaki wrote *Transparent city*, many years have passed after these events, a ruthless civil war destroyed many lives and many dreams and installed a savage capitalism, with few beneficiaries and many losers.

Contrary to Pepetela, Ondjaki does not point paths towards a future that would bring out peace, prosperity and agreement between ethnic groups and races. In accordance to the lead character Odonato, the transparent, the narrator suffers and describes, in a clear way, many elements indicating the end of a regime and the anxiety about what the future may bring. When illuminating a gallery of characters that fight for survival, in different layers of society, where there seem to have disappeared parameters of coexistence and solidarity, only the people, described, abstractly, as “beautiful, dancing, arrogant, filled with fantasy, crazy, drunk...” (ONDJAKI, 2012, p. 283) appear to have the ability to change the course of history.

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