

Introduction: "Never Again?"—Remembering Angola

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"Nunca mais?" is the interrogative closing line of Pepetela's 2005 novel, *Predadores*. The two-word question triggers an uncomfortable chain of signification given the reflection that immediately precedes it and, more subtly, the novel it concludes. "Era noite de Natal, terceira noite de natal em paz. Não havia sons de tiros nem balas tracejantes riscando o céu, não havia conversas sobre guerra. Nunca mais?" (380). Almost three years after the assassination of Jonas Savimbi, the UNITA leader whose lust for power many blame for the prolongation of civil conflict in Angola, Pepetela's novel does not lead to an affirmation that war is finally and definitively a thing of the past in the former jewel of the Portuguese imperial crown. Rather, the novel concludes by raising doubt.

Predadores is not a narrative about the various conflicts that have raged in Angola since the 1961 uprisings against the Portuguese, although they permeate the text. It deals with what Angola has become, and the question—"never again?"—is enounced against a contemporary backdrop of predatory capitalists. The youth of these predators was spent espousing the utopian egalitarianism of the MPLA, while enforcing their very coercive and urban worldview on rural and dissenting traditions. Their middle age consisted of eliminating those who really believed in that utopia. What has become of the nation for whose birth they claimed to fight as they mature into old age?

One of the most poignant lessons recent Angolan history teaches us is that structural repetition is the *modus operandi* of power relations. The current ruling elite is an uncanny reflection of the colonizer it overthrew. Years of conflict have made that new elite extremely wealthy. As has often been commented, the nature of Angola's resources—particularly its offshore oil reserves, first seriously exploited in the 1960s—makes it easy for multinational conglomerates to extract Angola's wealth without the consent or participation of Angolan civil society.¹ One of the ironies of postindependence Angolan history was the extent to which American oil companies effectively paid for the presence of Cuban troops on Angolan soil at the height of the Cold War. No democratic accountability has ever been exercised over Angola's immense mineral wealth and, with the connivance of the global marketplace, that wealth has been channeled into a burgeoning clientelism. Gradually, the imagination of a national project has been superseded by the predatory coarseness of Pepetela's *Predadores*, in which once-avowed ideological enemies work in tandem to profit as much as possible without being held to account.

David Birmingham offers a very damning critique of the current state of the Angolan polity as an alarmingly precise replication of the colonial era. A similarly small elite controls all the resources and resists any suggestion that they should be redistributed, shares the same Portuguese language and visceral contempt for rural Angola, has even rediscovered the same Catholic god in the post-Marxist era, and controls the mass media through fear or acquisition. Birmingham concludes, "freedom of opinion and of opportunity, which had been stifled in the days of empire, proved virtually incapable of resuscitation in the era of liberation" (Birmingham, "Angola" 184).

The 1960s' MPLA utopian vision of a new society, to be achieved through the creation of the Marxist "New Man," was flawed from its inception by its praxis. Not only did it perpetuate a tradition of gender bias, celebrating the masculine Sem Medos of Pepetela's *Mayombe*, while condemning the Ondinas, its rhetoric cloaked the transformation of the abusive power structures of the late colonial period into one of the most disheartening mimickings of social injustice in the history of postcolonial Africa. Under the catchphrases of Marxist-Leninism, rampant corruption and repression thrived. Without doubt a repeated arena for foreign intervention, the most troubling aspect of Angola's recent history is the manner in which the nation has been betrayed by those who have purported to lead it in the name of the "povo." That betrayal by those who once propounded an ideology of equality has

been the negative inspiration for much of the powerful literature to emerge from the nation since independence. Writers of the stature of José Luandino Vieira, Manuel Rui, Pepetela and Ruy Duarte de Carvalho have witnessed the disavowal of the national spirit of collective liberation, not just through civil conflict, but rather with the rampant emergence of a limited, neoliberal and ultimately destructive conception of self-interest. The poverty of such a conception creates the conditions for the interrogative “nunca mais?”—the sense that peace has yet to be won for the Angolan nation.

Angola should have been a great liberation success story. To paraphrase the title of the colloquium organized by Joanna Lewis and Stephen Hart in 1994, Angola really did matter, for symbolic as well as economic reasons. In fact, Angola has a history of being somewhat overdetermined, outside its borders, at a symbolic level. Besides the Portuguese colonial imagination of an Angolan paradise, the nation attracted the imagination of the world’s romantic left in the 1960s and 70s. In the early 1960s, both Che Guevara and Fidel Castro saw Angola as one of the African countries with the greatest potential for a dramatic and meaningful revolution. In 1977, the Colombian novelist and future Nobel-Prize winner, Gabriel García Márquez, published a romanticized account, distributed throughout Latin America, of Cuban involvement and revolutionary “success” in Angola, entitled *Operación Carlota*. Angola really was expected to become a revolutionary paradigm, in which unjust social structures would be replaced and opportunities extended to all its population. It was held up as such across the world in ignorance of what was actually taking place on the ground. Working against this noble imagination was a reality, also with a long history, encapsulated in a detail from a different era related by David Birmingham. The detail is that a young child could be purchased as a slave in Angola in 1906 for a “single small keg of gunpowder” (Birmingham, *Empire* 15).

This historical fact points to two repeated activities weighing down on the Angolan nation. First, it highlights the horrors of the slave trade in Angola, which continued in varied forms well after its official abolition. The demographic consequences of slavery are hard to measure. Conservative estimates claim that around a third of all the slaves who eventually reached the Americas in the modern slave trade were from Angola, and that the total number of Angolan lives lost during its practice is in excess of eight million (Tvedten 18). Second, it exemplifies an excess of armed violence that has sullied Angolan history. An unpleasant aspect of the territory’s interaction with

the outside world has been the repeated importation of armaments and the price paid for this importation in human and natural resources.

Yet, in the midst of injustice and oppression, Angola was, and still is, the heart of a vibrant and diverse culture. This cultural richness is central to a reimagination of a future Angola. The country's material riches are more than sufficient to raise the standard of living of every Angolan to one that would rival an average European nation. However, the legacies of both an erratic colonialism and the Cold War, mixed with the self-serving baseness of the new ruling elite, has produced a state of affairs in which Pepetela can seriously doubt the permanence of peace because the peace gained in 2002 is merely the absence of war.

Inge Tvedten points to the fundamental problem of postindependence Angolan politics: discrepancy. There has always been a discrepancy between political theory and praxis, between economic potential and actual performance, and, worst of all, between national income and indices of general human development. While the various stages of civil war can be adduced as a primary cause for these discrepancies, they have also been used too freely to overlook the general incompetence or willful corruption of elite cadres within the MPLA.

The MPLA rulers' conversion to capitalism became noticeable at its Second Congress, held in December 1985. According to Tony Hodges, it was partly inspired by "emergent class interests" (12). Hodges sees in the early praxis of the MPLA "political concepts borrowed from the USSR," which "reinforced an authoritarian, bureaucratic system of governance inherited from Portuguese colonialism" (4). This produced a prohibition on truly democratic structures. Against this backdrop of distrusting the people the rulers claim to represent, "predatory characteristics" became "highly prominent in the distorted form of capitalism that has emerged in Angola since the early 1990s" (5). If we follow Pepetela's logic, that predatory nature is now the most rigid barrier to peace in the Angolan nation.

Despite the seemingly normalized situation of social injustice characterizing Angola today, this volume aims, in part, to celebrate the nation's great cultural and historical richness—a richness that augurs well for the imagination of alternative social structures. "Remembering Angola" draws on the multiplicity of connotations associated with the verb. It is not just about reminding us of the country's troubled existence. Nor is it only about recalling its complex past, although there are articles that explicitly deal with less well studied periods from Angola's long history. This volume also takes

“remembering” to mean putting pieces back together: limbs blown apart by the countless detonations of Angola’s nine million landmines are a physical metonym for a national consciousness torn apart by the realization that the ideologies interfering in its sphere were nothing but vacuous cloaks for an assortment of self-interests irrationally fleeing the nation.

After so much bloodshed at the hands of totalizing epistemologies, starting with colonialism and then, in Hodges’s concatenation progressing from “Afro-Stalinism to Petro-diamond capitalism,” Angola needs to be rethought. The place this rethinking has already been taking place is in the field of culture. One of the most important voices in that field, a writer who, although born in Portugal, was integral to the imagination of an independent and equitable Angolan identity, is Luandino Vieira. It is now over forty years since his volume *Luuanda* so impressed the Portuguese Writers’ Association that they awarded the resident of Tarrafal their literary prize, an action that led to their closure by the PIDE. This volume opens with an interview by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro of Luandino, in which he reveals the ambiguities inherent in the PIDE’s prohibition of *Luuanda*, a book from which their agents simultaneously profited in a sequence of events worthy of a chapter in Pepetela’s *Predadores*. Without doubt, one of the most important influences on subsequent Angolan literature, Luandino sees in the modern traits of his adopted nation, his characterizations of another era. Ana Paula Tavares’s poem, “As portas de *Luuanda*,” pays homage to the cultural doors Luandino opened for those, including Tavares, who followed him. Luandino’s genius was not just to give voice to those marginalized in Angolan society in the dying days of Portuguese colonialism, but through them to imagine alternate realities, in lessons as relevant today as in the dying days of Portuguese colonialism.

Another literary voice often held to be the father of the Angolan novel is Antônio de Assis Júnior. He was a member of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Angolan cultural elite—an elite that lost its status dramatically as the century progressed and immigrants from Portugal flooded the colony. Involved in struggles for native rights, and imprisoned on several occasions, his legacy to the Angolan nation includes the novel *O Segredo da Morta* and a Kimbundu-Portuguese dictionary. Regina Claro, in her article, reads Assis Júnior as an example of burgeoning resistance to colonial practice in his social circles in the early part of the century. As a member of a group that saw its rights increasingly withdrawn by an ever-more colonially conscious Portuguese state, Assis Júnior embodies for Claro a subversive frontier, cog-

nizant of the worlds of both the masters and the slaves. The process of “remembering” in Assis Júnior is always a strategic reorganization of a past that is long-gone in order to better understand the trauma of the present—a point as valid in today’s Angola as it was at the moment the author helped to raise consciousness of Angolan identity.

The proto-nationalism of the generation prior to Assis Júnior is investigated by Jacopo Corrado. In his article, Corrado traces the development of a feisty journalistic and literary tradition among the Creole elite of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Their increasing dissatisfaction with the Portuguese state’s removal of their status helps to explain their pivotal role in the raising of a specifically Angolan consciousness in the colony.

Covering a similar time period as Corrado’s article, Timothy Coates investigates the peculiar penitentiary experiment undertaken by the Portuguese state when it founded the Depósito Geral de Degredados in Luanda by decree on 27 December 1881. The Portuguese state had a long tradition of deporting from the metropolis those it deemed to be undesirable. The cheap labor provided by the late-nineteenth-century deportees sent to Angola became an integral part of the policy of effective occupation of the colony at a time when the international rules of the imperial game began to prejudice Portugal’s claim to an empire by historical precedence. Indeed, these “unwilling” colonizers, the *degredados*, outnumbered free immigrants to Luanda during the period of this penal experiment, which was finally deemed to be a failure and closed, in part, because of the European penal reform movement.

Angola’s history is replete with examples of external factors determining the course of domestic events. Portugal’s response to the changed imperial climate around the time of the 1884-5 Berlin Conference led, as Coates argues, to the establishment of the Depósito. However, another aspect of that uncomfortable colonial relationship with Portugal, particularly as it developed in the twentieth century, was the extent to which events in Angola affected and altered the consciousness of Portugal. Since the loss of Brazil, Angola had become the center of Portuguese imperial focus, at least in the abstract. When, in 1961, uprisings heralded the beginning of the wars for independence, the intransigent reaction of the Estado Novo guaranteed its eventual demise thirteen years later. By committing Portugal’s youth to a series of wars across the colonies that could not be won, the Estado Novo laid the foundations for its own overthrow at the hands of its armed forces. A peculiar aspect of that war, and one investigated by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, was the presence of Portuguese women, who

accompanied their husbands on their military service. Ribeiro provides testimony from Maria Adelaide Ruano, a Portuguese woman who lived in Angola during the Colonial War. The testimony reveals the extent to which the experience of Angola raised the consciousness of “ordinary” Portuguese that something was very wrong with their own political system at home.

Isabel Moutinho’s article interrogates the literary results of the Portuguese memory of that costly war in Angola. For both Ribeiro and Moutinho, the act of “remembering Angola” is intrinsic to putting the pieces of Portugal back together after an outlived colonial experiment. Moutinho points to the double role of memory in novels by Portuguese authors that recount soldiers’ experiences of the colonial war. They both preserve voices as a collective memory and provide the future with a memory of events. In many ways, the texts Moutinho studies bring closure to the old narratives of the Portuguese empire in Angola with which they dialogue. They serve, for Portuguese literature, as both a postscript and simultaneously a full stop to the imperial endeavor.

Independence in Angola turned the former colony into a memory not only for those Portuguese who were sent there to fight an unjust war, but also for those born in Angola who felt forced to flee with the installation of the MPLA government and the subsequent conflicts. Indeed, exile and migration seem to have been an intrinsic aspect of the lusophone postcolonial condition, and postindependence Angola, with its wars and injustices, has produced more than its fair share of exiles over the last thirty years. One such exile is Jorge Arrimar, whose roots lie in the highlands of Huíla. As David Brookshaw discusses in his article in relation to Arrimar, the rupture with one’s roots may lead to an intense urge to wander, but it also triggers the desire to return to one’s origins, and is thus underpinned by the importance of memory. For Brookshaw, the exiled Arrimar’s recent acceptance into the Angolan Writers’ Union indicates how Angola itself is opening up culturally as armed conflict ends in the country. Arrimar’s life has come full cycle, as he finally becomes a legitimized literary voice within the cultural mainstream of post-revolutionary and postwar Angola. His life has been a journey home.

The journey, as Laura Cavalcante Padilha reminds us, was intrinsic to the imagination of the process of colonization. What she goes on to demonstrate in her article is the extent to which the journey—of the subject in search of its own alterities—is part of the postcolonial trajectory of the Angolan imagination. Angolan novelists, from Assis Júnior to Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, have depicted that quest through alterity as the desire to be recognized in and

as a cultural body grounded in difference. Padilha's article provides a groundbreaking theoretical basis to approach a broad range of Angolan texts that contest in innovative and affirmative, rather than simply responsive, ways the fundamental Othering question posed in Camões's *Os Lusíadas*, when the bard asks "who might these people be?" (I: 45). As Padilha shows, they are a multiplicity who confirm identity through their own Others, rather than against an Other.

Ana Maria Mão-de-Ferro Martinho continues a theoretical approach, using the gaze of Orientalism as a tool when considering that desire to be recognized in difference. In her article, she reminds us of the extent to which Angola functioned as an imperial fantasy in the Portuguese colonial imagination—a new Orient against which the colonizer sought to define himself. The elites who led the struggle for the independence of Angola idealized the nation-to-be in an equally essentialist maneuver. Martinho reads in the works of José da Silva Maia Ferreira, António Jacinto, and Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, the vagaries of what we might term the Angolan Orientalist memory.

Livia Apa reminds us, in her article, that traumatic violence knows no "after." If, as the title of Lawrence Henderson's book suggests, Angola is a history of five centuries of conflict, we can extend Apa's argument to venture that there has been an excess of the "present" in the various narrations of Angola since the first colonial moment. Apa focuses on the effects of postindependence violence in Angola on the concepts of time and space, and points out that enduring conflict has been the only shared national memory possible until very recently. During the years of civil war, the defining categories of space and time lost their ability to orientate—a side-effect of the trauma she argues surfaces in its contemporary literature.

In her article, Inocência Mata argues that the poet Adriano Botelho de Vasconcelos, imprisoned by the MPLA, challenges the totalizing discourse of the government by calling for the past to be faced. Catharsis can only come for Angola through the enunciation of dissent and the refuting of silencing homogenization. Facing the recent past does not mean, in Mata's interpretation, a nostalgic elevation of what never actually was. Rather, it allows the poet to locate a patriotic position for himself through which to rebuild, and be liberated from the power of the traumas of all-too-recent episodes of injustice in Angola.

Fernando Arenas discusses in his article the recent renaissance in Angolan cinema, providing a critical review of an innovative turn in the nation's cultural production. While the films Arenas discusses are to a great extent a com-

ing to terms with the horror of Angola's recent past, they also bear witness, he argues, to a more universal struggle for survival in spheres of armed conflict.

One of the most profound imprints of a nation's past, and increasingly, one of its most patriotic markers is what we are led to believe is its national cuisine. More often than not, the product of cultural mixing and colonial dislocations, what one eats as the quintessence of a nation in its dish both occludes and celebrates a checkered history of prandial miscegenation. Igor Cusack, in his article, outlines how Angolan cuisine has become a tool in the armour of national ideology, celebrated in national websites, internationally marketed in cookbooks, and integral to its literature. At the same time, he demonstrates the lusotropical undercurrent of Portugal's celebration of luso-phone African cuisine. Drawing on Luandino Vieira, Manuel Rui, and Pepetela, Cusack shows how perceptions of food alter in line with the conception of the national self. In Pepetela's Jaime Bunda novels, the grotesquely overweight, bumbling detective—from an era of excess among the Angolan elites—has replaced the slender body of Sem Medo—the ill-fated hero of the revolution from *Mayombe*.

Robson Dutra interrogates the evolution of Pepetela's heroes in his article. In particular, he focuses on Jaime Bunda, as an example of the inauguration of detective literature in Angola, but through pastiche and parody. As Dutra shows, the particular form of Pepetela's detective novels undermines the hegemonic discourse of the absolute—questioning the very possibility of Truth in Angola today. Bunda bears witness in his bumbling questioning to the corruption and loss of noble cause characteristic of Angolan society today. Yet, written into his characterization is always the memory of the utopian ideal that briefly appeared to be in the ascendancy as the nation was born.

Phyllis Peres continues our study of Pepetela, and concludes the studies on Angola in this volume by reminding us of a work by the author that pre-dates the assumption of his *nom de guerre*—and subsequent *nom de plume*. Peres reads the short story, "As Cinco Vidas da Teresa," published in 1962, as a useful key to understanding Pepetela's subsequent narrative evolution. She sees the trace of Fanon in the narrative, written and set in the dying days of colonialism. Teresa's body, alongside the hidden site of the *sanzala*, becomes part of the colonial landscape, subject to violation and colonization, but also the locus of resistance. Peres's speculation of the possible reincarnation of Teresa in a sixth life, in Pepetela's subsequent fiction of critique, gives pause for thought. What would Teresa in her innocent desire to be loved think of

today's Angola—the Angola of Jaime Bunda or *Predadores*? Is Pepetela's portrayal of Shirley (the black, lesbian, American FBI agent in *Jaime Bunda e a Morte do Americano*) the postcolonial version of Teresa, as she claims empathy with Africa because she bears every marker of otherness but who in reality works against difference and for the hegemony of the global market? Or might the postcolonial Teresa be Mireille—the self-serving daughter of Vladimiro Caposso in *Predadores*? The nationalities of their names point to the true nature of the revolutionary change that has hit Angola. A lusonymic Teresa—both a product and a victim of Portuguese colonialism—gives way to an anglonymic Shirley and a franconymic Mireille—markers of neocolonial American, British, and French oil company profits. At so many levels, when we remember Angola, Pepetela's question is among the most relevant: “nunca mais”?

Note

¹ Angola's first oil concession was granted in 1910. Production began in the mid-1950s in the Cuanza basin. Congo-basin exploitation began in the 1960s and the huge offshore oil reserves of Cabinda began to be exploited in 1968. See Tvedten 82.

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