

## PREFACE

This book is about a subject with which non-Portuguese-speaking readers are not familiar: Angolan literature and culture. Moreover, it investigates a segment of Angolan history and literature with which even Portuguese-speaking readers are generally not familiar, for its main purpose is to define the features and the literary production of the so-called “creole elite”, as well as its contribution to the early manifestations of dissatisfaction towards colonial rule patent during a period of renewed Portuguese commitment to its African colonies, but also of unrealised ambitions, economic crisis, and sociopolitical upheaval in Angola and in Portugal itself.

Nineteenth-century Angolan society was characterised by the presence of a semiurbanised commercial and administrative elite of Portuguese-speaking creole families—white, black, some of mixed race, some Catholic and others Protestant, some old established, and others cosmopolitan—who were based in the main coastal towns. In addition to their wealth, which was derived from the functions performed in the colonial administrative, commercial, and customs apparatus, their

European-influenced culture and habits clearly distinguished them from the broad native population of black peasants and farmworkers. In order to expand its control over the region, Portugal desperately needed the support of this kind of noncoloniser urban elite, which was also used as an assimilating force, or better as a source of dissemination of a relevant model of social behaviour. Thus, until the 1850s, great creole merchants and inland chiefs dealt in captive slaves who were bound for export to Brazil via Cape Verde and São Tomé: the tribal aristocracy and the creole bourgeoisie thrived on the profits of overseas trade and lived in style, consuming imported alcoholic beverages and wearing European clothes.

After the abolition, however, their social and economic position was eroded by an influx of petty merchants and bureaucrats from Portugal who wished to grasp the commercial and employment opportunities created by a new and modern colonial order, anxious to keep up with other European colonial powers engaged in the partition of the African continent.

This book thus considers the first intellectuals, the early printed publications in the country, and the pioneers of Angolan literature who, feeling the need to raise their roots to higher dignity, wrote not only grammars and dictionaries but also poetry, fiction, and, of course, incendiary articles denouncing exploitation, racism, and the different treatment afforded by the colonial authorities to Portuguese expatriates and natives.

They were fully aware of the fact that their past function as a link between the few rulers sent from the metropolis and the African inland tribes was indispensable to the perpetration of the colonial system—that is to say the system guaranteeing them a privileged condition as well as exposure to European culture. On the other hand, they were thwarted by the impossibility of achieving the highest social standing in their own homeland.

Their first reaction was the invention of a new identity, introducing the terms *filhos da terra*, *filhos do país*, and the adjective *Angolense* in order to define themselves in clear opposition to both the Portuguese and the “uncivilised” black natives.

With the rise of both Black Nationalism and armed struggle still in the future, as well as the international recognition attributed to acclaimed contemporary writers, such as Pepetela and Luandino Vieira, and more in general, to Angolan militant literature from the 1950s onwards, the period of Angolan history that is at the centre of this investigation still presents wide-open spaces. In addition to that, the literary production that flourished during those years is generally dismissed as minor colonial literature or, at best, celebrated by the apologists of the colonial empire as the outcome and the evidence attesting to the existence of a multicultural intellectual creole elite originated by the proverbial and overrated Portuguese “plasticity”. According to this reasoning, the idealised pervasive practice of interracial marriages would be an irrefutable proof indicating a total absence of racism among the Portuguese.

On the other side, it is not a surprise if the end of the colonial period coincided with a call for the reaffricanisation of the new political elites governing Angola and with the banishment of any kind of syndrome evoking the colonial past, let alone the recognition of the intellectual vibrancy and legitimacy of a distinct creole perspective.

When speaking about contemporary literature, for instance, Angolan book reviewer Luís Kandjimbo does not consider authentically “Angolan” the well-known Pepetela’s novel *Yaka*, wondering if it could be indeed defined as a colonial novel, since it emphasises “a kind of alterity built upon a fictional discourse in which, as absolute protagonist, the (creole) Semedo family symbolises the *other* in a society where black characters are reduced to mere walk-on figures or objects of observation... The preponderance of a vision subduing history and its real actors deprives the novel of any worthiness, bringing into question whether it could belong to the genre classified as historical novel”.<sup>1</sup>

Pepetela was born and raised in the colonial society as a white Angolan, but this did not prevent him from joining the national struggle for freedom against the Portuguese (1961–1974), while *Yaka* is a novel portraying the Benguela creole society from the end of the nineteenth century to the eve of independence. An exacerbated defence of Africanness would equally exclude from Angolan literature the

commitment of some contemporary writers aiming to piece together this important but neglected phase of Angolan history, such as José Eduardo Agualusa and Arnaldo Santos.

As noticed by Leonel Cosme in his essay *Crioulos e Brasileiros de Angola*, at the present time, a memory other than the genuinely black African one can hardly be appreciated in Angola.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, these days, the concept of “creoleness” intended as a sort of caution or royalty granted by Portuguese colonisation is no more than a rhetorical figure destined to fade away with those who still aspire to any historical right of compensation for the discrimination suffered in the past or for the political prescriptions that turned them into “Portuguese-others”.

This attitude seems to be confirmed by the demolition in 1999 of the primary emblem of the creole past dating back to the nineteenth century: the mansion which once belonged to the powerful mulatto mistress of Luanda, Dona Ana Joaquina dos Santos Silva, a slave trader who grew rich from the fortunes of ships, *fazendas*, and buildings owned both in Brazil and Angola, an authentic patroness of creole society until her death in 1859.

The claims of autonomy and independence expressed concomitantly with the profound changes affecting Portuguese society and colonial policies during the period examined were exclusively put forward by a tiny fragment of Angolan urban society that was reprovably involved in the slave trade and deeply integrated into the colonial system, to which it supplied the subordinate administrative body of the province and the middle and low ranks of the armies sent to fight in the countless *Gueras Pretas* (Black Wars) waged by Portugal to subdue unruly and rebellious tribes. Moreover, these demands were not the direct evidence of an original sprouting of national consciousness as much as they were inspired by the echoes of the liberal ideals that could reach, covertly packed below deck, the harbours of Luanda and Benguela through the merchant ships proceeding from Brazil or Europe—ideals that were often assimilated in a quite disorderly and confused way.

It is also evident that the vast majority of the inhabitants of the country were completely excluded from the formulation of these claims, and

that the same happened for the concept of the country itself; at that time, the notion of Angola was grounded on the limited—if compared with the actual size of the country, that is, the territory claimed by the Portuguese at the end of the nineteenth century—surface of the land effectively occupied and “civilised” by the colonial rulers: the towns of Luanda, Benguela, Moçâmedes (present-day Namibe) and related districts, the river Kwanza region, and a few more garrison houses, trading posts, *fazendas*, and frontierlike small inland settlements.

This first wave of dissidence was most assuredly born and raised inside the colonial milieu itself and was promoted by a local and heterogeneous urban social stratum that embraced and opposed at the same time both its European and African background; consequently, it seems that the fate of the so-called “civilised” Africans was to be eternally confined in a sort of limbo that precluded any possible access to either the metropolitan or the African world.

Nonetheless, we are facing the first sign of “modern” resistance to colonial rule in Angola: the historical and cultural worthiness of the texts produced—as well as the development of a cognitive inquiry around the discourse of nativism, protonationalism, and nationalism—cannot be ignored, especially in the light of the influence exerted by these fore-runners on the following generations. Already in 1891, for instance, the only and anonymous issue of the satirical journal *O Tomate* featured an article titled “The Independence of Angola”. Its main purpose was to capture the family connections and interrelationships that took place during the whole colonial period between the *sons of the country* of the coast and the rebel African chiefs based in the hinterland. For the first time, the protagonists of the resistance against Portuguese penetration were cheered as heroes.<sup>3</sup>

Almost one century later, MPLA founder Mário de Andrade, interviewed in 1982 by the French sociologist Christine Messiant on the birth of Angolan nationalism, said,

Those who later followed the path of nationalism—and I am talking about the first small group, the core—shared, generally

speaking, an important source, that is the familial source. I mean that all of us were aware of the generation belonging to the final part of the last century and its cultural expression, be it political or simply literary. My father, for example, owned all the books, *Voz de Angola Clamando no Deserto* among them and all the old articles published in the *Almanach de Lembranças Luso Brasileiro*. We can say that we were nourished by the ideas of that generation.<sup>4</sup>

These ideas are also a starting point for a more extensive reflection about the effective meaning, at least as far as Portuguese colonial and postcolonial studies are concerned, of paradigmatic categories such as cultural, linguistic, and racial hybridism, or of the concept of “creoleness”, for they are the expression of a transcultural autochthonous society emerging in urban or semiurban spaces and characterised by the fusion of distinct migratory streams. Portuguese, Brazilians, other Europeans, Bantus, traders, missionaries, and slaves shared a common condition of eradication from the homeland and lived in a “double trance made of disadaptation and readaptation, deculturation or exculturation, acculturation or enculturation”.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the relevance of the role played by a literary corpus sprouting in such a milieu is evident today: in addition to its contribution to cultural and postcolonial studies, and to the deepening and understanding of basic concepts such as “nationalism” and “creole”, the importance of its seminal function relative to the birth of modern Angolan literature and to the settlement of the dichotomy existing between colonial and national literature is beyond doubt. An abrupt definition of all poetry and fiction written in Angola before 1948 as simply colonialist, exotic, and assimilationist overseas literature—retaining only aspects such as alienation, descriptiveness, or the Portuguese colonial point of view—seems to be a gross historical and cultural deformation since, even as far as Angola is concerned, the rise of national consciousness is a slow and deep maturation process.<sup>5</sup> Generally, this rise of consciousness contributes to a series of ethnic, social, religious, political, and ideological factors and is unlikely to start suddenly on the eve of

independence. It starts through the observation of the differences existing among the land, the people, and the coloniser country; it goes on through acquisition of awareness in respect to problems related to the colour of the skin, through the rejection of injustice; and it creates its own traditions and historical events; and, from then on, it claims independence and state organisation.

Since the present study aims to make its way through cultural ethnic, and social border zones, however, it is important not to underrate a huge barrier in relation to issues regarding a Lusophone context. Beyond the difficulties of finding sources and information, due to the thirty-year-long civil war following the declaration of independence in 1975, a correct interpretation of the Angolan reality has been overshadowed for a long time by the persistence of a series of exploited and abused myths, traditions, and rhetoric constructions aimed at praising Portuguese overseas expansion.

As deeply investigated in chapter 1, during the twentieth century, powerful myths related to Lusotropicalism or to the effective colonial penetration in Angola contributed to characterising and affecting the Portuguese vision of its own overseas empire—rendering the celebration of a presumed widespread creoleness according to propagandist demands.

The most pernicious tendency affecting Lusotropicalism—a special affinity for the tropics that the Portuguese, according to the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, entertained to a greater extent than did other Europeans—is probably the association of all the former Portuguese dominions under a common idea of joyful miscegenation. That would be the effect made possible by the innate capacity of adaptation peculiar to the Portuguese abroad and by the expansion of their faith and values, by means of a cultural dialogue that, rude and all loving at the same time, ensured a space of interaction between Europeans and natives. It is a tempting and easily exploitable theorisation that does not bear up to a more exhaustive examination. Comparing Brazilian and Angolan realities is in itself a risky operation, even if solely from the sociological point of view entertained by Gilberto Freyre. The original colonisation of Brazil, for instance, was executed through the establishment

of a feudal system based on donations. The *capitães*, who were both landlords and managers of property, could dispose of resources, allowing them to buy or hunt for slaves and feed them, build quarters and plantations, equip private armies, raise forts, and hire garrisons. Quite different was the fate of the poor settler coming—and often forced to come—from Minho, Algarve, or Madeira, who disembarked alone and seminaked on the African coast, with no protection or resources to help him face the unkind climatic conditions and find his way through the wilderness.

In order to provide a valid interdisciplinary approach to the main theme of the investigation, the structure of the study is imagined as follows. The purpose of chapter 1 is to overcome some of the myths that could hinder a correct analysis of the Portuguese overseas expansion. In the Angolan case, the research has to be focused on the persistence of die-hard stereotypes such as the overstatement of a five-century-old Portuguese presence in Angola and on the influence of the work of Gilberto Freyre on twentieth-century Portuguese colonial ideology.

Chapter 2, dedicated to nineteenth-century Angola and its intellectual setting, investigates the literary and cultural influences spread throughout the third pole of the axis of Portugal, Brazil, and Angola. Centuries of communication through the transatlantic trade route left in that part of Africa many literary and linguistic vestiges of relations with America and Europe. From the second half of the nineteenth century on, many factors contributed to the establishment of a first, even if modest, authentic literary nucleus of Angola: the opening of the harbours to foreign ships, the convergence of European and Brazilian influences—the former, channelled and directed through Portugal, generally resulted as the predominant one, but in the Angolan case, the latter is no less piercing—the introduction of the “free press”, and the settling down of a constitutional metropolitan government after the liberal victory in the Civil War.

Chapter 3 is focused on the Luanda intellectual scene, aiming to set against its background a Euro-African minority suspended between romantic European culture and Kimbundu oral tradition. The starting point of Angolan literature traditionally overlaps with the 1849 publication of *Espontaneidades da Minha Alma* by José da Silva Maia

Ferreira. Strongly influenced by Brazilian Romanticism, and particularly by Gonçalves Dias' native pride, Maia Ferreira celebrated his homeland through a mixture of local topics, on one side, and typical European romantic forms, on the other, revealing aspects of the social life shared by the bourgeoisie based in Luanda and Benguela. A second phase, developed during the 1880s and 1890s by Alfredo Troni, Pedro Félix Machado, and Joaquim Dias Cordeiro da Matta, is rather marked by Portuguese Realism, and its distinction resides in the fact that in the texts produced at this stage, natives are frequently depicted as individuals to whom social ascension is not totally precluded in an intermediate space existing between the discursive space of African textual traditions and the personal relations with Portuguese masters.

With the advent of the new century, Angolan literature entered a phase that can be defined as fully nativist, marked as it is by the claim to equality, fraternity, and by a conscious and peremptory attitude inclined toward autonomist pretensions. The generation of 1900 (Pedro da Paixão Franco and the anonymous authors of *Voz de Angola Clamando no Deserto*) inherited the legacy of its predecessors and developed different forms of civic struggle. Paradoxically, as witnessed by António de Assis Júnior, repression grew concomitantly with the settling down of Portugal's first republic, a regime that managed to definitively wipe out both the monarchy and the relative freedom of expression allowed to overseas territories during the previous administrations. The union between this kind of Angolan intellectuality and written press, therefore, came to an end.

The first part of chapter 4 reflects on the meaning of the word "creole" in order to discuss the pertinence of this adjective for the definition of the social fragment analysed, and to hone the investigation under cultural, biological, and linguistic points of view.

After comparing the differences between Angolan reality and accepted creole spaces originating in the Portuguese-speaking world (Cape Verde and São Tomé), the investigation will proceed to throw light on the features of the Angolan "creole islands", to use the famous and controversial definition by Mário António, going beyond the ideological limits

imposed throughout the twentieth century by contemporary Portuguese criticism, respectively inspired by apologists and detractors of the colonial effort. According to the latter stream, the point is that what researchers, or at least most of them, tend to designate as “creole” in reality would be nothing more than a petty local Luso-Angolan bourgeoisie together with its customer base, a class that has never considered itself to be “creole”. However, the use of this term allows a stance outside a racial framework to narrate the history of a heterogeneous group: the term “creole” is meant to define, in this study, a sociocultural category encompassing, conveniently, a vast range of heterogeneous elements from the descendants of Europeans born locally—as many white as *mestiço*—to the detribalised Africans, more or less adapted to European culture, all of whom formed an intermediate group between the Europeans of the metropolis and the uneducated native rural population.

Finally, the second section of the chapter applies the concepts of nation and nationalism to late nineteenth-century Angolan claims, trying to understand whether it is possible to define them as nationalistic claims, or more correct to stick to Pélissier’s definition that refers to protonationalistic claims. Are they perhaps the outcome of a mere nativist uproar, based on an isolated case of colonial bourgeois discontent?

## ENDNOTES

1. Luís Kandjimbo, *Apologia de Kalitanji* (Luanda: INALD, 1997), 61–62.
2. Leonel Cosme, *Crioulos e Brasileiros de Angola* (Coimbra: Novo Imbondreiro, 2001), 57.
3. See Rosa Cruz e Silva, “O Nacionalismo Angolano, um Projecto em Construção no Século XIX?”, in *Construindo o Passado Angolano: as Fontes e a sua Interpretação. Actas do II Seminário Internacional Sobre a História de Angola* (Lisbon: CNCDP, 2000), 741–802.
4. Christine Messiant, “Sur la Première Génération du MPLA: 1948–1960, Mário de Andrade, Entretiens avec Christine Messiant”, in *Lusotopie* (Bordeaux: Institut d’Etudes Politiques, 1999), 189.
5. The year 1948 is a year marked by the foundation of the cultural movement known as “Movement of the New Intellectuals of Angola”, or *Vamos Descobrir Angola* [Let us discover Angola] whose purpose was to give expression to popular concerns and to promote the emergence of black African consciousness.