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Transcontinental Waters: The Anti-postcolonial Tide in Angolan Fiction and Film

ABSTRACT This article assesses the historical roots of resistance to postcolonial interpretations of Angolan history and culture, tracing this reluctance to Angola's distinctive history, particularly the rise of the Creole class, which ran the slave trade, served as a nascent national bourgeoisie, was deprived of its privileges by the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship, then regained them on independence in 1975. The neo-Creole national imaginary, as funnelled through images of salt water, is explored in three Angolan artistic works: Pepetela's novel *A Gloriosa Família* (1997), which describes the consolidation of Creole identity during the Dutch occupation of Luanda in 1641–1648, Maria João Ganga's film *Na Cidade Vazia* (2004), about a young war refugee's friendship with a fisherman in 1991 Luanda, and Ondjaki's novel *AvóDezanove e o Secreto do Soviético* (2008), in which identities formed by the ocean assist children who are fighting a construction project that threatens to destroy their homes.

KEYWORDS Angola, postcolonialism, Pepetela, Ondjaki, Ganga

Introduction

Intellectuals from the five Lusophone African countries of Angola, Mozambique, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe, like academics who work on Lusophone Africa, regard the postcolonial paradigm with attitudes that range from the skeptical to the dismissive. While the degree of acceptance of postcolonial approaches varies from country to country, and writer to writer, it is safe to say that in Angola this resistance verges on a consensus. The reasons for this are historical, rooted in the processes by which Angola constituted its idea of *angolanidade*, or distinctive national identity, and reach back at least four centuries. It is instructive to

contrast this outlook with trends in Mozambique, the country whose modern history most closely resembles that of Angola, where postcolonial ideas have greater currency and academic studies, such as Hilary Owen's *Mother Africa, Father Marx: Women's Writing of Mozambique, 1948–2002* (2007), have made a persuasive case for the viability of postcolonial criticism. Ironically, the roots of this difference appear to lie in Mozambique's greater distance from, and weaker historical attachment to, the colonial power. Simply too far away for Lisbon to control, Mozambique was officially subordinated to the crown colony of Goa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, so that Bantu Africans were taught to speak in Portuguese by Lusophone South Asians, while large tracts of the country were rented out to Swiss and British land-holding companies. The pervasive influence of South African ideas, from adherence to a colour bar between the races to the decision to drive on the left-hand side of the road, were imported wholesale from white-ruled Anglophone Africa. Bordering on six English-speaking countries, Mozambique even debated whether or not it should retain Portuguese as its official language once it became independent, or whether English, the language in which the independence movement's founder, Dr. Eduardo Mondlane, wrote *The Struggle for Mozambique* (1969), should be adopted. Such discussions continued even after independence in 1975, reviving after Mozambique joined the British Commonwealth in 1995. In other words, many of the historical phenomena which burdened post-independence Mozambique, though specific to Lusophone experience, did not exist in an antagonistic counterpoint to the historical contours of those predominantly Anglophone colonies, whether in Africa or Asia, which served as the models for Anglo-American academic postcolonialism. In Angola, by contrast, the coastal regions, and particularly the city of Luanda, became the site of the creation of a distinctive culture that defied postcolonial paradigms. Many of this culture's central tropes—from fishing and fish-based meals to distinctive forms of cultural and racial mixing, slave trading, and close commercial, political, and cultural ties to Brazil and Cuba—were nourished by the salt water along the Angolan coast.

Precolonial Angolan History and the Rise of the Creoles

The nascent sense of Angolan national identity coalesced around being a counterpart to, rather than a possession of, a European power. Colonialism, for all its racism and brutality, was difficult to define as a system of European exploitation. Various anomalies made Angola different. Angola's early history blurs the colonial model of a European power entering, disrupting,

and exploiting a millenarian African, Amerindian, or Asian civilization. As Adebayo O. Oyebade points out, the original inhabitants of the space we know as Angola were light-skinned Khoisan hunter-gatherers (Oyebade 2007, 21). The Bantu people, who are the present-day majority, migrated from the north between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, with the bulk of the immigration occurring in the later stages of this period (Marbot 2021); the Portuguese, hot on their heels, arrived in 1482. (Though burdened with negative connotations in an Anglophone southern African context, the term “Bantu,” increasingly employed in Lusophone and Francophone studies of the region, is useful in an Angolanist context, particularly in historical discussions of the country’s settlement, and may be preferable to the alternatives: “Black” risks converting the society’s majority population into an alien “other,” while calling Bantus “African” would deny the Africanness of *mestiços* and old-stock whites, some of whose Angolan lineages go back centuries. The present paper prefers “Bantu,” but will occasionally use “Black” when referring to European-dominated contexts.)

Bantu expansion into Angola was gradual, and relatively sparse in many regions, because, on the western side of the African continent, the terrain “became increasingly less attractive the further south they went towards the desert lands of the Namib and the Kalahari” (Fage 2002, 30). The Bantu found more of the green river valleys where their Iron Age farming culture thrived on the eastern side of southern Africa; there they also encountered pastoral cultures, some of whose innovations, such as milking cattle, they were able to adopt, as well as new crops, imported from Southeast Asia by Indonesian sailors, which expanded their agricultural repertoire (Fage 2002, 30). The draw of the east coast of southern Africa restrained Bantu migration into Angola, except for a few key areas, such as what would become the northwest of the country, between the bay where the city of Luanda would be built, and the Congo River; the Central Plateau, whose high-altitude grasslands were well suited to agriculture; and the slightly less fertile northeast, where subsistence agriculture was also possible. The Bantu migration assimilated, marginalized, or exterminated most of the Khoi and San hunter-gatherer groups: “in so far as they were not hunted to extinction, [they] survived only by retreating into the arid refuge of the Kalahari” (Fage 2002, 30).

The uneven distribution of Bantu settlement is key to later debates about Angolan identity. The strong identification of the Bantu with farming, and their preference for fertile terrain, meant that there were significant regions of the future Republic of Angola that they did not settle: “The first Bantu pioneers probably were few in number, selected wet-forest areas suitable for their yam agriculture, and leapfrogged over

drier areas, which they left to Khoisan hunter-gatherers” (Diamond 1997, 398). This “leapfrogging” left certain areas largely, or apparently, uninhabited. As a result of this pattern, European colonization occurred in a more ambiguous context than in many areas of Africa, the Americas, or Asia, where local populations had enjoyed a millenarian claim to the land that European conquerors usurped from them. Anecdotally, one hears in Angola that there were some areas of the country that the Portuguese reached before the Bantu. The Angolan writer José Luandino Vieira reports that during the 1960s, when Portugal imprisoned Bantu, *mestiço* and white independence activists together in the Tarrafal concentration camp on the island of Santiago, one topic they discussed was, “as migrações dos povos Bantus para Angola. A propósito de haver migrações de Bantus mais recentes que a chegada dos portugueses” (Vieira 2015, 727) [“the Bantu peoples’ migrations to Angola. On the subject of there being Bantu migrations more recent than the arrival of the Portuguese”]. While this claim may appear dubious and is to some degree refuted by the fact that early Portuguese settlements were concentrated close to areas where Bantu population density was high, such as the region south of the Congo River and the southern coastal stretch where the cities of Benguela and Lobito would be founded, it is true that the cultures disrupted by colonialism were themselves of relatively recent “colonial” vintage.

Bantu culture was still in the process of colonizing Angola at the time the Portuguese entered and began to mingle with the Bantus as part of their own colonizing efforts. Mixing between Bantus and Portuguese began at a time when both cultures were in the formative stages of their adaptation to Angolan territory. The extensive miscegenation, as a matter of habit, custom, and even policy, that occurred in Portuguese Africa and, during the colonial period, in Angola far more than in Mozambique, stands in contrast to the relatively limited degree of racial mixing in Anglophone or Francophone Africa. In Malyn Newitt’s summary:

Most of the Portuguese took African wives and their children, while retaining their Portuguese identity, were brought up in the country and after two generations were indistinguishable from the local populations [...] With the founding of Luanda and the control of the Kwanza valley the Afro-Portuguese had their own sovereign territory. Although the king of Portugal was nominally the sovereign, in practice the new settlement was dominated by powerful Afro-Portuguese families (2008, 25–6).

The high degree of transculturation was epitomized by the group known as the Creoles. In the Creoles, Angola forged a national bourgeoisie more than

three centuries prior to independence. In the Angolan context, the word “Creole” refers to Bantu families with some Portuguese or Dutch ancestry who converted to Roman Catholicism and, after a generation or two, often ceased to speak African languages—a decision which, in the African context, was unique to Angola. In the absence of a substantial settler population prior to the early twentieth century, the Creoles—a term which refers to a specific cluster of Black families with distant white ancestry and does not include other culturally and racially mixed groups such as *mestiços* or more recent Black *assimilados*, ran the colony. They enriched themselves by shipping more than three and a half million of their compatriots to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the southern United States as slaves (Meredith 2014, 125). As the historian David Birmingham writes of the Creoles:

In the nineteenth century some of the great families even owned private regiments of slave militias which could be used to further colonial aspirations at little cost to the empire. Creoles were appointed captains of the half-dozen forts which held the two-hundred-mile Portuguese enclave behind Luanda. They were also given directorships of the great “factories” where goods were stored for the long-distance trade [...]. These families greatly valued receiving colonial honours and titles in return for their services (2015, 23).

The scale of the Creole class’s divergence from traditional African culture, and their integration into, and even partial control over, Portuguese colonial structures, disrupts the colonial paradigm; by extension, it neuters the efficacy of postcolonialist criticism. Starting with King Afonso, the ethnically Bakongo, Christian, Portuguese-speaking king who ruled the Kingdom of Kongo from 1506 to 1543 and wrote letters to the King of Portugal, in which he addressed the European sovereign as “my brother king” (Meredith 2014, 103), Africans in Angola who occupied roles of authority saw themselves as substituting for a largely absent or ineffectual Portuguese administrative structure rather than being subjugated by such a structure. Jacopo Corrado, for example, stresses how this “colonial bourgeoisie was deeply rooted in Angola and disconnected from the metropolis, and how its economic links were far stronger with Brazil—or better with the Brazilian colonial bourgeoisie involved with the [slave] traffic—than with Portugal” (Corrado 2010, 67–8). Repeated crossings of the South Atlantic Ocean were essential to the formation of Angolan culture. The author of the first work of modern Angolan literature, the Romantic poetry collection *Espontaneidades da Minha Terra* (1849) [*Spontaneities from my Land*], José da Silva Maia Ferreira, was a Luanda Creole who had been

educated in Brazil. As Luís Kandjimbo observes of Brazil's mid-nineteenth-century influence on Angola, “[a]lém de ser um dos países destinatários do comércio de escravizados africanos, uma certa burguesia escravocrata para lá enviava os filhos, onde realizavam os estudos e nele investiam adquirindo bens imóveis” (2015, 210) [“In addition to being one of the recipient nations of the commerce in enslaved Africans, a certain slavocrat bourgeoisie sent its sons there, where they undertook studies and made investments, acquiring real estate”]. Some Luanda Creole families went so far as to relocate to Brazil after the formal abolition of slavery in Angola in 1878. By the seventeenth century, Portuguese in Angola had become both a language of colonization *and* the lingua franca of Angola's dominant endogenous class. As Patrick Chabal has written, the Angolan Creole class “is undoubtedly both singular to Angola and of protracted significance” (2008, 4).

Creole dominance facilitated Portuguese governance of Angola in the absence of a substantial settler population. As late as 1846, after more than 350 years of Portuguese colonialism, there were only 1,830 people defined as “white” in Angola (Bender 1978, 64). When the Portuguese began to send large numbers of white settlers to the colony, in the early twentieth century, and particularly after the formation of the fascist dictator António Oliveira de Salazar's *Estado Novo* [New State] between 1926 and 1933, the Creoles became an obstacle to white superiority. Wealthier and better educated than the poor, often illiterate peasants and *degradados* (convicts) that Portugal dispatched to Angola, the colony's elite could be displaced only through the imposition of race laws. At the same time that *mestiços*, *assimilados*, and the Creolized elite became an obstacle to settler dominance, they enabled the Portuguese government to claim, through its adoption of the ideology of *Lusotropicalismo*, that Portuguese colonialism differed from, and was less pernicious than, the British, French, or Belgian varieties, because, they maintained, extensive miscegenation proved that the Portuguese did not subjugate Indigenous populations but rather fused with them (Bender 1978, 3–18). Lusotropical ideology originated in the work of the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala* ([1933] 2002) [translated as *The Masters and the Slaves. A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (1963)], which provided the basis for the dubious assertion that due to racial mixing, Brazil's patriarchal society had created a racial democracy. The invocation of Lusotropicalism became a particularly vital thread of Portuguese colonial ideology after 1960, when British and French African colonies had achieved independence, and Portugal was forced to mount an argument at the United Nations to explain why it had failed to relinquish its African colonies.

Creole assumptions and Lusotropicalism were internalized by many Angolans. Before addressing contemporary Angolan intellectuals' resistance to postcolonial characterizations of the nation, and how this influences the framing of evocations of salt water in contemporary Angolan fiction and film, it is pertinent to mention examples of this internalization. The Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) [People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola], the country's governing party since independence, distinguished itself from the two competing independence movements by virtue of its multiracialism. The pro-Western FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola) [National Front for the Liberation of Angola] was based in the Bakongo culture of the north of the country. UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola], whose ideology migrated over the years from Maoist to Reaganite, was rooted among the Ovimbundu people of the Central Plateau. The MPLA, by contrast, was a Marxist-Leninist party; but as it was also militantly multiracial, its upper ranks were filled with coastal people such as radicalized whites, *mestiços*, and the grandchildren of Creoles who had lost their privileged status to the race laws of the *Estado Novo*. In this sense, Angolan independence did not so much establish a new nation as re-establish the society which had existed in the Creole imagination prior to Salazar's creation of the *Estado Novo*. As the historian Malyn Newitt, who refers to the Creoles as "Afro-Portuguese," emphasizes, "it was the Afro-Portuguese who seized power in 1975 and subsequently took control of Angola's wealth" (Newitt 2008, 19). MPLA multiracialism can be seen, in this context, as a resurgence of Lusotropicalism, though its roots reach even farther back to the Creoles' rise to prominence in the seventeenth century. As David Brookshaw writes: "if the literature of its Afro-Marxist founding generation began on the periphery to assume control of the centre, the Luso-Tropical ideal of the late colonial years was banished to the periphery to live on" (2002, 3).

This sense of a continuum was accentuated by the fact that in Angola none of the three independence movements that fought against Portuguese colonialism—the FNLA, the MPLA, or UNITA—won the war for national independence. Unlike Mozambique and Guinea Bissau, where nationalist guerrillas defeated the Portuguese army on the battlefield, in Angola Portugal held the three guerrilla movements at bay and kept them away from the major cities. Independence occurred because the fascist regime in Lisbon collapsed on April 25, 1974 and its radical successors freed the colonies, leaving the three rival Angolan independence movements to fight a twenty-seven-year war for control of the country. Even though independence brought with it many distinctive features, such as Marxist-Leninist

ideology, a new flag, and a close alliance with Cuba, post-independence society continued to feature warring guerrilla factions, as in the 1960s, and a dominant Creole elite dependent on transatlantic connections (now primarily to the former slave destination of Cuba), as during the period between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries. Nowhere was the Creole model so dominant as in linguistic preferences. At independence in 1975, in the wake of the flight of hundreds of thousands of Portuguese-speakers, only 5 percent of Angolans spoke Portuguese (Hodges 2001, 25–6). Thirty-nine years later, the 2014 census revealed that 75 percent of the population of over thirty million considered itself fluent in Portuguese, with 40 percent describing Portuguese as their first or only language. In cities this figure rose to 100 percent, with almost no urban Angolan under thirty reporting fluency in an African language (Simons and Fennig 2015). This post-independence boom in widespread acquisition of the former colonial language, and the progressive extinction of African languages, has few parallels. In adopting Portuguese—the only language Creoles speak—Angolans who had grown up with African languages were assimilating into the hegemonic Creole ideology of Portuguese unilingualism implicit, and sometimes explicit, in the MPLA's seizure of power. As the American travel writer Paul Theroux, who had assumed that his ability to speak two Bantu languages would enable him to communicate during his journey through Angola, discovered to his chagrin: “I did not speak more than a few words of Portuguese. This was a handicap, not merely because the country was generally Portuguese-speaking, but because [...] Angola was an anomaly: apart from Portuguese, nothing else was spoken” (2013, 225).

A Porous Prospero, a Paucity of Postcoloniality

In spite of these crucial historical factors, postcolonial critics such as Robert J. C. Young attempt to shoehorn the five Lusophone African nations into an Anglo-American postcolonial mold. Though Young concedes the existence of Lusophone African difference in the greater importance lent to culture as a form of resistance (2001, 288–92), his inclusion of these nations in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) received a hostile reception from Lusophone Africans, who see “postcolonialism” as both an assimilationist Anglophone discourse and one that simply gets their history wrong. As Phillip Rothwell writes,

[d]espite being the first European power to subscribe to a process of global colonization, and the last to relinquish the dream that direct colonization

could be made to work to its advantage, Portugal rarely controlled the rules of the colonial game, which became increasingly dictated by a normative colonialism designed with the interests of the British Empire in mind (2004, 197–8).

If Rothwell's statement applies more clearly to Mozambique, where British influence was significant, than to Angola, where "the rules of the colonial game" were administered, if not controlled, from the mid-1600s until the 1920s by the Creole class, his rejection of the viability of postcolonialism as a useful analytical framework in Lusophone Africa is widely shared. Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that Portugal brought its language, culture, and genetic inheritance to Angola and Mozambique, but afflicted them with a deficiency of both capitalism and colonialism, and finally retreated into internal upheaval in 1974, leaving its nominal colonies alone to face a global capitalism that had, in any event, been ravaging them for centuries. Summarizing Santos's arguments, Rothwell writes: "the injustices perpetrated on the vast majority of the Angolan people bear only a trace of Portuguese intervention on the continent" (2004, 199). Alluding to the Shakespearean paradigm often employed to capture the colonial relationship, Santos characterizes Portugal as a Prospero who "oscillated between Prospero and Caliban" (2002, 36). An indebted junior partner to Great Britain during the colonial era, and a subordinate of the United States during the later Salazar years, Portugal lacked the unquestioned autonomy and cultural authority of colonizing powers such as France or Great Britain. Northern Europeans regarded the Portuguese themselves as a dark southern race; writers such as V. S. Naipaul categorized the Portuguese as non-whites (Santos 2002, 28). The Creolized Angolan bourgeoisie derived more of its image of "civilization" from the mixed-race bourgeoisie of Rio de Janeiro than it did from Lisbon. Both before and after independence, the primary factor impeding national autonomy was the global capitalist economy, rather than the extremely porous structures of Portuguese colonialism. This led to a situation in which "postcolonialism in the Portuguese space is very little post- and very much anticolonialism" (Santos 2002, 37).

For this reason, Marxist and neo-Marxist frameworks hostile to postcolonial discourse have dominated in Lusophone African, and, particularly, Angolan art. Fernando Arenas, in *Lusophone Africa: Beyond Independence* (2011), balances Marxist and postcolonial perspectives on Lusophone Africa, noting the unpopularity of the latter. Anne Garland Mahler, in *From the Tricontinental to the Global South* (2018), takes a position which, echoing that of Santos, lends the independence struggle contours that are

more familiar to Angolans themselves: that of the revolutionary discourse of tricontinentalism, which links Cuba, the most recently independent of Spanish American territories, to Angola and Guinea Bissau through Fidel Castro's "Black Atlantic/Marxist Atlantic" collaboration with these countries' independence movements. The Cuban–Angolan alliance dates back to at least 1962, when six Angolan guerrillas, including Ndalú (who, like a number of prominent Angolans, including the writers mentioned below, uses only one name, and who would later serve as an important battlefield commander in the wars against apartheid South Africa and then as Angolan Ambassador to Washington), went to Cuba for academic and military training (George 2005, 22–3). The Angolan–Cuban alliance, developed through Che Guevara's faltering orchestration of the collaboration of Cuban and Angolan guerrillas in the Congo and Angola in 1965, was strengthened immensely by the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana, which forged the first outlines of what might be described as an ideology of the Global South and, as is well known, blossomed into the service of more than 400,000 Cuban soldiers, doctors, and teachers in Angola between 1975 and 1991 (Hatzky 2015, 4). These *cooperantes* ensured the survival of Angolan independence against invasion by the South African apartheid regime. Thinking about Angola as a nation consolidated through tricontinentalist ideals restores agency to Angolans, shifting the focus away from postcolonialism's emphasis on the European experience of colonization. Postcolonialism, as Mahler writes, "has not had a reach commensurate with the transcendent geocultural boundaries of globalization" (2018, 34). The theories of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak are too rooted in the Middle East and India, and in Anglophone histories, to have broader applicability. For Bhabha, postmodern hybridity occurs when the migrant moves to the metropolis (1994, 212–29); in Angola, hybridity is the 400-year-old endogenous reality that forged the nation's governing class.

Angolan Literature and Film

Young's concession of the heightened role of culture as a form of resistance in Lusophone Africa, even though he deploys it to bring Lusophone Africans back within the orbit of Anglo-American postcolonialism, provides a paradoxical corroboration of the importance of the Creoles and, in political terms, of the multiracial intellectuals of the governing MPLA, as a nation-imagining "literate bourgeoisie" in the sense developed by Benedict Anderson (1983, 9–36). The three examples of Angolan film and literature discussed below are from after 1990, when the MPLA abandoned

the socialist ideology that had served as the glue of the nation. Accepting the concept of Angola as a nation unified by tricontinentalist ideology entails questioning how this ideology adapts to the end of the Cold War and the onset of an accelerated form of globalization. This crisis provokes a reaction, a retrenchment within the cultural sphere, of the socialist ideals of egalitarianism and anti-racism. These values become linked to more long-standing Creole values of an *angolanidade* defined by mixed-race, culturally hybridized identity and anchored in the use of Portuguese not as a language of colonization, but rather as the language in which Angola's Andersonian "literate bourgeoisie" has expressed itself throughout its history. In this context, coastal life and the oceans become the locus of the forging of the nation, a reminder both of Angola's early history, and of the role played by the city of Luanda as the epicentre in which that culture was forged. During the war of independence (1961–1975), the wars of resistance to South African invasion (1975–1992) and the civil war (1992–2002, with short truces), the capital was the one safe place to which refugees from the war zones could flee. This caused the city's population to bulge from 500,000 inhabitants to probably about eight million. In the process, Luanda forcibly integrated people from the countryside into the Lusophone, Creolized interculturality of the capital and its hegemonic national imaginary.

The most surprising characteristic of Creole ideology is how resilient it is. Not only the literate bourgeoisie constituted by MPLA intellectuals, but even opponents of the MPLA, provided they are also "literate," embrace hybridity as a defining trait of *angolanidade*. The first novel published by José Eduardo Agualusa, a longstanding MPLA opponent, *A Conjura* (1989) [literally *The Conspiracy*], dramatizes an uprising against the first attempt to impose race laws in Angola in 1910; one of the best-known of Agualusa's later novels, *Nação Crioula* (1997) [translated as *Creole* (2002)], praises the cultural mingling of the Black Atlantic. Yet it was the pro-MPLA writers, who were heavily invested in a socialist Angola, whose ideology was most severely challenged by the conclusion of the Cold War. One of the multiple responses of Pepetela, the country's most prominent novelist, a former MPLA guerrilla and cabinet minister, to the end of the Cold War was to write a historical novel, *A Gloriosa Família* (1997) [literally *The Glorious Family*] about the origins of the Creole elite, suggesting that Creole ideology was Angola's enduring source of unity and that it would outlast the collapse of socialism. As Rothwell notes, the date of the novel's composition "followed the discrediting of alternatives signalled by the fall of the Berlin Wall and pre-dated the rhetoric of terrorist threats and axes of evil" (2019, 98). To some extent, the virtually global 1990s acceptance of international trade as a positive force enables Pepetela, a lifelong foe of capitalism, to

overlook the fact that the source of the Creole elite's wealth is the slave trade and allows him to concentrate on the Creoles as nation builders.

A Gloriosa Família is set during the Dutch occupation of Luanda between 1641 and 1648. Baltazar Van Dum, a white trader with eight *mestiço* children, is the barely fictionalized stand-in for the founder of the historical Van Dúnems, Angola's most powerful Creole family, who are descended from a Portuguese Jew who fled to the Netherlands, took a Dutch name, then moved to Angola and intermarried with Bantus (Birmingham 2015, 23). This family's power remains pervasive in business and politics in Angola—and even in Portugal, where, from 2015 to 2019, one member of the family, Francisca Van Dúnem, served as Portugal's Minister of Justice, the first Black woman to hold this position. In the novel, the Van Dums incarnate the hybridized coastal microcosm of the future nation while the narrator, an unnamed mute slave, regards the interior behind Luanda as “a pátria dos Ngola, a minha” (1997, 10) [“the homeland of the Ngolas, my homeland”]. Baltazar Van Dum fights a battle on two fronts, on the one hand struggling to maintain his business operations under the hostile rule of the Dutch occupying forces, and on the other attempting to extend his business interests, and with them his Creolized, Portuguese-speaking culture, into the Bantu-dominated interior. The agility he develops to balance these interests is portrayed as exemplary of the intercultural forces that will consolidate *angolanidade*. Baltazar recognizes that, as *mestiços*, his sons will not benefit from a colonial order which privileges whiteness. Nor will they fare well in an Angola defined by Bantu cultures. The society Baltazar begins to sketch out, in his manoeuvring between the Dutch, the Portuguese, and the Bantu kingdoms of the interior, is one in which mixed-race people such as his sons will be able to play important roles. At one point Baltazar's son Rodrigo even goes into battle with the Dutch against the Portuguese (1997, 356), an event that sketches the ultimate independence and self-interest of the Creoles as an autonomous group who define the coastal area of Angola rather than being subject to any particular European empire.

In this seventeenth-century consolidation of the national imaginary, the ocean and coastal regions offer both threats and liberation. The coast is a fertile liminal zone in which a new, Creolized, national imaginary is taking root. At the same time, in the novel's opening pages (1997, 12–3) the invading Dutch forces destroy the waterfront business district, forcing merchants such as Baltazar to move uphill to the Cidade Alta (Upper City). Baltazar's retreat away from the water becomes the first step in the diffusion of his culture into the interior. As he moves deeper into Angolan territory, he relies on his transatlantic business dealings with Brazil to

support him. His Brazilian connections include both Catholic merchants from Portuguese-controlled Rio de Janeiro and Protestants from Dutch-occupied Recife in northern Brazil. This submerged tension comes to a head when a timid Huguenot asks for the hand of Baltazar's assertive daughter, Mathilde, who participates in political arguments with men and flouts Catholic concepts of female chastity. Baltazar lays the basis for new forms of morality by inveigling officials of both Christian churches to consent to a wedding with which neither religious authority is in agreement. When the marriage fails, Mathilde moves herself and her infant son back into her father's *sanzala*, the yard identified by Gilberto Freyre as the locus of racial mixing, where, traditionally, in Angola as in Brazil, many children are the offspring of absent European fathers. Born of the improvisation of interracial coastal merchants, the ideology of *mestiçagem*, whether racial or merely cultural, as in the case of Mathilde's son, prevails over both Portuguese and Dutch attempts to impose their respective colonizing doctrines. At the same, as Denise Rocha maintains, the marriage's failure sketches the limits of Luanda Creole culture, which, though able to absorb people of different nationalities and phenotypes, remains a Catholic preserve where the Protestant French Huguenot is ultimately viewed as heretical (2017, 567–9).

The novel's unspoken core, never plumbed in detail, is the most glaring heritage of the salt-water world: slavery itself. As Rothwell explores, Baltazar does not think about the moral implications of his acts in selling men and women from the interior, transporting them to the coast and dispatching them across the Atlantic to Brazil or Cuba: he "acts as both agent and product of the slaving system to which he subscribes" (2019, 100). This salt-water crime is facilitated by the freshwater Kwanza River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean south of Luanda. In a scene in which Baltazar stands on the battlements of the São Miguel fortress overlooking the capital, "[o]lhou o rio Kwanza, onde pirogas iam e vinham da ilha" (Pepetela 1997, 279) ["he glanced at the Kwanza River, where canoes came and went from Luanda Island"]. In an ambiguity typical of the novel, as of the formation of the Creole class, the Kwanza connects the beleaguered proto-Angolan merchants of occupied Luanda not only with their human merchandise in the settlements upriver where their boats pick up shipments of enslaved people destined for locations on the other side of the Atlantic, but also with the surviving Portuguese administrators and their followers. Unable to flee Luanda at the time of the Dutch occupation, these figures have gone into hiding at Massangano, thirty kilometres upriver, where they live from hand-to-mouth for seven years (also mainly by selling slaves) until the colony is rescued. The river which leads from the

interior out to the coastal capital and the ocean both secretes the hope of deliverance from occupation and perpetuates the crime of a bourgeoisie consolidated and enriched by slavery. The salt-water environment reduces slaves to incidental cargo on journeys that preoccupy the novel's protagonists for other reasons. When an annoying Dutch official is recalled to Europe, the narrator notes in passing that, before he can leave: "O veleiro tinha antes de ser lavado e carregado com alguns escravos, além de abastecido de comida e água" (1997, 321) ["first the sloop had to be washed and loaded with some slaves, as well as supplied with food and water"]. The status of the enslaved people as merchandise, offhandedly added to the sloop's load, could hardly be clearer.

If salt water facilitates the Creoles' original sin, it also furnishes their salvation. At the novel's close it is from Brazil that deliverance arrives in the form of a fleet commanded by the governor of Rio de Janeiro, which liberates Luanda from the Dutch. The image of sails glimpsed far out at sea, with which the novel's final chapter opens, inverts an image of colonial conquest—European sailing ships appearing off the African coast—by reimagining this stock allusion as an image of liberation. The final confrontation between the Brazilians and the Dutch takes place on the water, in the bay where slaves are loaded and sent to the Americas, as the Dutch ships see that they are outnumbered and must surrender. The use of the conquest-oriented image of the sails advancing towards the African coast is not an argument in favour of colonialism, but rather an assumption that, once the Brazilians—who, at this point in history, remain technically Portuguese, though they, too, exemplify a mixed-raced coastal culture—have expelled the Dutch, the nascent Creole families such as the Van Dums will be free to develop an Angola congruent with their hybridized vision. At the same time, the fact that Luanda's liberators are not from the colonial metropolis, but from a fellow colony, adumbrates the future outlines of the Global South described by Mahler (which fell into relief when Brazil became the first non-communist country to recognize independent Angola in November 1975). The coast, with its hybridity and the cultural variety brought by the ocean, is the point of origin of the national imaginary. At the novel's close, as the Dutch are about to leave, the slave narrator is revealed to be not pure Bantu, but a "mulatto" (1997, 393). His identification with the Ngolas, the traditional Bantu rulers of the Kwanza River area south of Luanda, is exposed as a form of false consciousness now discredited by the copious history that he has narrated of the rise of the Creole class. In spite of his enslaved status, the narrator, too, is part of a mixed-race *angolanidade*. The novel concludes with the formal incorporation of Luanda as a city and with a prophecy that the Van Dums

are destined to become a glorious family. This prophecy, which in the present presents Creole ideals as a nationalist substitute for the ideals of a defeated socialism, resonates in the twenty-first century as well as the seventeenth. The anti-postcolonialist subversion of the vision of sails out at sea approaching the coast as a positive, nation-building development recasts what in a different colonial context would have been a threat rather than a source of salvation.

The second work I would like to discuss is Maria João Ganga's 2004 film *Na Cidade Vazia* [*Hollow City*]. Set in 1991, it follows Ndala, an eleven-year-old war orphan from the country's interior as he wanders through the disorientingly modern streets of Luanda. 1991 is the year of transition from socialism to capitalism, when no set of values is hegemonic. One of the film's opening scenes portrays a schoolteacher instructing a class in front of a blackboard on which are written the words: *1991—ano da reestruturação da economia e da democracia multipartidária* ["1991—year of economic re-structuring and multiparty democracy"]. Here, the sandy coastline of the peninsula known as Luanda Island, which encloses the natural harbour on which the capital lies, acts as the repository of traditional coastal Angolan values. Fleeing from the chaos of the city, Ndala meets a fisherman on Luanda Island. A wise bearded sage, the fisherman feeds him and lets him sleep in his tent. The fisherman's traditional culture differs from that of the boy from the interior. The beach and the ocean serve as a safe haven, a margin of security where the boy can take refuge when the unpredictability, chaos, and violence of the city overwhelm him. The film's thematic arc depends on the tension between the retreat of the values of socialism, which are depicted as self-abnegating and heroic, and the advance of incipient capitalism, which the film portrays as corrupt, indolent, and larcenous. The Creole elite, too, has been corrupted by the temptations of capitalism; in fact, the film's villain is a *mestiço* who has given up his job as a mechanic to become a burglar.

The ocean, depicted as an open vista and a place of freedom, yet also a source of cosmic morality, where the coercive forces of the nation do not intrude, is shorn not only of association with colonizing incursions, but even of any trace of modern civilization. On the beach the juvenile protagonist can return to an Edenic reality similar to that of his rural community prior to the slaughter of his family during the war. Yet this Eden is not primitive; rather, it is layered and hybridized. The old fisherman introduces Ndala, who has been catechized by Portuguese nuns into belief in a traditionalist Catholicism, to the Kimbundu sea-goddess Kianda. Ndala, who comes from Bié province, is of Ovimbundu heritage, and hence unfamiliar with Kimbundu (coastal) deities such as Kianda. When Ndala

asks the fisherman whether he enjoys his profession, the old man replies, “Trabalho aqui na terra para o mar até que Kianda me venha buscar” (2004) [“I work here on the land for the sea until Kianda comes in search of me”]. The sea is his governing entity: the source of morality and justice, which provides a refuge from the ever more rampant injustice found in the modernizing capital which is shedding the moral imperatives of socialism. Exemplifying Creolized cultural mixing, the fisherman responds with a tolerant syncretism to Ndala’s confusion of the Catholicism he has been taught with the goddess Kianda, whom he has now adopted into his personal pantheon. When the boy, impossibly, claims to have seen an image of Kianda in a Catholic church, the old man replies, “Todas as santas são boas” (2004) [“All saints [female] are good”]. Ndala is on the point of following in the footsteps of Pepetela’s characters and developing a mental space in which African and European heritages intermingle. His fascination with the ocean as a zone of syncretic mixing, however, leads to his downfall. The thief Joka and his accomplice recruit Ndala to help them in a burglary by offering him a night-time trip to the beach. While Ndala imagines himself cavorting in the waves that he is coming to see as his salvation, the two men plan to break into the waterfront mansion of a corrupt military officer who is about to leave on a shopping trip to Paris. The imagery of the film’s final scenes associates the destruction of the boy’s village in Bié province during the war with his death in a burglary-gone-wrong in the capital. Zé, an older boy who has befriended Ndala, is unable to save him. Though poor, Zé lives with a caring godmother and attends an inner-city public school. On the night that Ndala participates in the burglary, Zé is acting in the school play: a dramatization of Pepetela’s first book, *As Aventuras de Ngunga* ([1973] 2002) [translated as *Ngunga’s Adventures* (1988)], which propounds the moral, self-abnegating revolutionary values that are now at risk as a result of the official adoption of economic restructuring (Hodges 2008, 186–8).

The processes which doom Ndala are inextricably linked to Angola’s transition to capitalism, announced on the teacher’s blackboard at the film’s outset. While the traditional values of the fisherman on the beach of Luanda Island are depicted as honourable, the film mocks the pretensions to authority of the vestiges of the Portuguese colonial apparatus. These are embodied by the anxious Portuguese nun who brought Ndala to Luanda and longs to place him in a Catholic orphan school. The nun pursues Ndala throughout the film, unable to locate him in the streets of Luanda. Her inability to catch Ndala once he arrives in the city symbolizes the impotence of European cultural values and Portuguese colonial history to influence the present. In the end, only hybridized Angolan values, exemplified

by the culture of the fisherman, can save Ndala; but the socialist Angola that, in theory, tried to care for its orphans is being abandoned in 1991. Though *Hollow City's* depiction of the ocean is very different from that in *A Gloriosa Família*, it is equally unexpected in that it erases the history of colonialism, depicting a society that has leapt from tradition to capitalist modernity, and risks forgetting the intervening centuries when the Creole identity fashioned a locally determined blending of African and European cultural traits.

By contrast, the last work I would like to mention, the novel *AvóDezanove e o Segredo do Soviético* (2008) [translated as *Granma Nineteen and the Soviet's Secret* (2014)], by Ondjaki, fits well with the tricontinentalist analytical framework proposed by Anne Garland Mahler. Born in 1977, two years after Angolan independence, Ondjaki belongs to the first generation of writers born into Angolan citizenship. Set in a beach-front suburb of Luanda in the socialist period of the early 1980s, the novel portrays a group of children trying to save their houses from being demolished to make way for a huge socialist construction project. At the same time, the child narrator's grandmother, a lively widow known as Granma Nineteen, is being courted, with obvious allegorical implications, by both a Cuban doctor and a Soviet soldier. In this version of the 1980s, conceived from the globalized perspective of the twenty-first century, Angolan nationality can be consolidated only by the emergence of a hybridized third term, a socialist national identity that defies the binary oppositions of the Cold War. Yet the cross-fertilization which will produce this term depends on interconnections forged by tricontinentalist socialist internationalism. The incarnation of this mixing is a character named Sea Foam, an Angolan who studied mathematics in Cuba until he went insane. He wanders the beach spouting a mixture of Angolan Portuguese and Cuban Spanish. Sea Foam's hybridization represents the promise of a flexible, creative, insouciant nationhood, in contrast to the doctrinal rigidity represented by the Stalinist construction project. Sea Foam inherits the revolutionary example of Cuban mixed-race socialism, yet he is loyal first and foremost to the natural world of Angola. Another minor character, a fisherman who lives on the beach and whose self-sufficient lifestyle is threatened by the construction project, resembles the fisherman in *Hollow City* so closely that he appears to be a deliberate allusion to this figure. The children who collaborate to thwart the building project are assumed to be of a range of cultural backgrounds, yet in deference to socialism's insistence on equality, their individual racial identities are never specified. At the same time, the image of children who discover their unity and independence alludes to both *Verano Azul* (Blue Summer), a 1980s Spanish television

series widely broadcast in socialist countries during the final years of the Cold War, whose plotline revolved around children and adolescents living on a beach; and the Brazilian writer Jorge Amado's novel *Capitães da Areia* (1937) [translated as *Captains of the Sands* (2013)], in which street children take over the beaches of the city of Salvador (Bahia). These allusions form an intertextual fabric that bolsters socialist Angola's links to, respectively, the Eastern Bloc, and its traditional Creole transatlantic connections to northeastern Brazil.

Though one Soviet soldier is a sympathetic character, overall the children on the beach deem the free-flowing, racially mixed Cuban form of socialism as superior to the Soviet variety; in this they are the inheritors of Pepetela's pioneering Van Dum Creole family, and share the nascent yet truncated syncretism of Ndala in *Hollow City*. The decisive argument in this regard is made when one of the boys opines that, "Cuba tem sol, praia e mulheres mulatas bonitas" (Ondjaki 2008, 160) ["Cuba's got sun, beaches and pretty mulattas" (2014, 142)]. The syncretized culture the children inhabit, in which African animist beliefs coexist with European rationalist ones, means that the narrator treats his dead grandmother, Granma Catarina, who appears in the children's daily lives as a ghost and participates in conversations with them, as frankly and openly as he does his living grandmother, Granma Agnette (known as Granma Nineteen). The natural world, particularly that of the beach and the ocean, also impinges heavily on the children's lives. At the novel's close, when the children are about to take action to save their houses, they are held suspended in motionlessness by a seemingly endless afternoon. When the sun finally sets into the South Atlantic Ocean, authorizing them to proceed, the salt water reflects the children's mixed racial heritages: "O sol se afundou amarelado no azul-escuro do mar e inventou um pôr do sol bonita numa cor mulata sem palavras de uma pessoa poder falar" (2008, 157) ["The sun sank, yellowed, into the dark blue of the sea and invented a beautiful sunset of a mulatto colour no words could capture"]. At this point Granma Catarina disappears, never to return. Her vanishing symbolizes the emergence of the children from an infantilized, war-wounded magical realm into a postmodern hybridity that invests the imagined community of the future post-1991 post-national state with the flexible yet thorough reception of the revolutionary heritage necessary to resist globalization.

In the novel's conclusion, the narrator and his best friend discover Sea Foam breaking into the construction site to set free Angolan birds that are being kept in boxes, apparently as part of a Soviet contraband scheme. It is Sea Foam who propounds the novel's final lesson. Once the birds have been freed, and as soon as it has become clear that the narrator's grandmother

will marry neither the Cuban doctor nor the Soviet soldier, the children follow Sea Foam's example by jumping naked into the waves to be reborn as creatures of the aquatic natural world. They adopt the madman's hybridized language and irrational sayings as the text of an imagined community which is capable of resisting both the doctrinaire Soviet socialism of the novel's 1980s present, and the nation-denying globalization of the new millennium in which the book was written. As in *A Gloriosa Família* and *Na Cidade Vazia*, the ocean is a source of solace and support for the 400-year-old hybridized Angolan nation.

Conclusions

Angolan diffidence towards postcolonial approaches to analysing the country's cultural production is rooted in the forging of the educated, culturally Lusophone, religiously Catholic, somewhat racially mixed Creole class. Having acted as a burgeoning national bourgeoisie from at least the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, and having developed strong cultural ties across the Atlantic Ocean to Brazil and Cuba through its management of the slave trade, this group provides a paradigm of Angola's engagement with the transnational financial system, often on exploitive terms, in a way which rendered the role of the colonial power, Portugal, of secondary importance. Portugal's later attempt to assert a normative control, particularly under the *Estado Novo* between 1926 and 1974, demoted the Creoles; yet it was they, now reborn as Marxist guerrillas, who took over the state at independence in 1975. Inextricably entwined in Marxist imagery and ideals during the first sixteen years of its existence, Angola returned to Creole cultural syncretism as a defining trait in a significant number of post-1991 cultural productions. The former MPLA guerrilla Pepetela's novel *A Gloriosa Família* (1997) depicts the consolidation of the transatlantically oriented Creole class, in opposition to a seven-year Dutch occupation, in the Luanda of the 1640s, implying that this older set of values offers an enduring means by which to define Angolan distinctness after the end of the Cold War has forced the abandonment of Marxist ideology. In Maria João Ganga's film *Na Cidade Vazia* (2004) [*Hollow City*], the tragedy of Ndala, the war orphan from the country's Central Plateau, is that his apprenticeship in the values of Creole syncretism, promoted by the old fisherman on the Luanda beach, is curtailed by a thief who offers him a trip to the waves he loves as a way of recruiting him for a dangerous burglary. Ondjaki's novel *Granma Nineteen and the Soviet's Secret* (2008) reprises the beach imagery of *Hollow City*, including an echo of

the film's fisherman character. Like *A Gloriosa Família*, Ondjaki's novel depicts Angolan independence as inseparable from transatlantic connections—here to Cuba rather than Brazil—that stem from the same salt-water alliances and imagery that make many Angolans conceive of their nation in terms of a tricontinentalism-turned-transcontinentalism that rebuffs postcolonial analysis.

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