



**SILENCED VIOLENCE IN THE FEMININE: A READING OF YARA  
MONTEIRO'S *ESSA DAMA BATE BUÉ!*  
VIOLÊNCIAS SILENCIADAS NO FEMININO: UMA LEITURA DE *ESSA  
DAMA BATE BUÉ!* DE YARA MONTEIRO**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Based on the most recent research on women and violence during the colonial and civil war periods which defined post-independence Angola, I analyze *Essa Dama Bate Bué!*, a novel written by writer Yara Monteiro. My objective is to show, on the one hand, how the novel tells us that writing about personal matters means writing about politics. On the other hand, it is my intention to explore how the writer explores the issue of female violence by creating female characters who enact violence on other women, specifically their own children. Monteiro's novel demonstrates the interconnectedness of violence, public and private, and its effect on social and psychic life. In sum, my goal is to highlight the silenced forms of familial violence within the broader context of colonial and civil conflicts in Angola and their repercussions in the country's post-independence.

**KEYWORDS:** violence; women; Angola; colonial and civil wars

**RESUMO:**

Tendo por base a mais recente pesquisa sobre mulheres e violência durante o período colonial e o da guerra civil que marcou a pós-independência em Angola, analiso *Essa Dama Bate Bué!*, o romance de estreia da escritora Yara Monteiro. É o meu objectivo mostrar, por um lado, como este romance nos revela que escrever sobre questões pessoais significa também escrever sobre política. Por outro lado, é a minha intenção explorar como a autora vai mais longe ao criar personagens femininos que exercem violência sobre outras mulheres e, mais especificamente, sobre os seus filhos. Este romance demonstra a interligação entre a violência pública e privada e o seu efeito na vida social e psicológica. Por último, é objectivo desta apresentação enfatizar as formas silenciadas de violência familiar no contexto mais amplo da guerra colonial e civil em Angola e as suas repercussões na pós-independência do país.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** violência; mulheres; Angola; guerras colonial e civil

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I begin by drawing on the most recent published research on women and violence in Angola during its colonial period and its post-independence civil war. My purpose is to contextualize my argument as I analyze Yara Monteiro's novel *Essa Dama Bate Bué!* I will try to show how Monteiro, by writing about private matters, also exposes the country's political situation. Also, it is my intention to explore how she explores female violence by creating female characters that enact violence on other women, specifically their own children. The novel demonstrates the interconnectedness of violence, both public and private, and its effect on social and psychic life. Finally, I will highlight the silenced forms of familial violence within the broader context of colonial and civil conflicts in Angola and their current repercussions.

In *Violence and Gender in Africa's Iberian Colonies*, which covers the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, Andreas Stucki affirms that women played a vital role while war and violence were taking place in African Portuguese colonies. This first happened during the colonial wars that lasted from 1961 until the mid-70s; after independence, this climate continued in Angola and Mozambique, countries that descended into civil wars. In Angola, the war lasted almost three decades (1975-2002), resulting in countless adverse repercussions for the country. Stucki alludes to Portuguese women's role in the early 1960's and their deliberate discussion against warfare. He also adds that military officials and civil servants highly regarded and considered the role of women in Mozambique and Angola during the guerilla warfare. As such, the Portuguese considered women essential in the "pacification" mission of their overseas provinces. The message that came from high colonial authorities was that, potentially, colonies were to be strengthened through the involvement of African women. Thus, as Stucki explains, African women were to become more invested in domestic household duties since they were no longer involved in agricultural practice. Married women would play a strong role at home and in society. Women in general were expected to implement the empire's ideals pertaining to the preservation of societal roles in a colony through exemplary households. Yet, this interest in women's role in society was not limited to the colonialists. The MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), in Angola, was also trying to find ways to make women visible in their liberation program as it attempted to transform its so-called traditional African society by integrating them into the revolutionary movement. Stucki shows that "Women's support in creating a 'new society' was a contested field between anticolonial and imperial players [which] extended over a wide array of social, cultural, educational, and economic issues" (2019, p.266). For liberation movements "women were to contribute to constructing united, egalitarian, and sovereign nation-states that would overcome political, cultural, and ethnic divisions" (2019, p.267). What is most relevant here is that this was the intention of the colonial state and the African nationalists that intended to become part of the imperial nation or a sovereign nation-state. This means that:

Although those who sought to maintain the imperial nation and those seeking to achieve independence were engaged in armed struggle, the language and concepts employed by the nationalist liberation movements overlapped with those voiced by official representatives of the empires. Juxtaposing imperial development programs with the revolutionaries' notions of modernization reveals remarkable analogies. (2019, p.267)

Unexpectedly, and ironically perhaps, men on both sides envisioned women's roles in a very similar way. Even if liberation organizations had accepted the integration of women fighters, the revolutionary movement did not provide the appropriate recognition pertaining to career roles or education as it might apparently seemed. In theory, according to revolutionary projects, women were to participate in all areas of the nation-state, but as Stucki remarks,

Despite the OMM and the OMA's [Organização da Mulher Angolana] promises of a new status for women, despite the iconographic pictures of African women with Kalashnikovs, in the end it was mostly about 'the mother who transmits the new education and revolutionary knowledge, instructing the future defenders of the *Pátria*'. (2019, p.281-282)

Concluding his analysis, Stucki reveals that "while revolutionaries promoted women's participation in political life, emancipation and equal rights were in fact postponed until the post-independence era and then to an ever more distance future" (2019, p.282). Nonetheless, in the scope of "revolutionary perception or dictatorial imperial culture," women played a vital role pertaining to the national culture.

In *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature*, Chantal Kalisa mentions, using Françoise Lionnet's terminology, "geographies of pain", i.e., a shared history by African and Caribbean individuals of violent "disruptions of slavery, colonialism and latent neocolonialism" (2009, p.1). Angola is arguably a country that can most identify with this description. Kalisa also uses Gayatri Spivak's classification "epistemic violence," "(...) that is, the cultural violence in the dehumanization of slaves; the imposition of the colonizers' language, religion, and customs; enforced assimilation; and political dependence. Slaves and the colonized experienced a mixture of physical and cultural violence through unbearable work conditions, mutilations, and executions" (2009, p.1-2), as a background tool for her own interpretation of women's novels centered on violence. Her work is indispensable to the understanding of African women's writings since it is one of the very few that focus on the topic. According to Kalisa, women writers from Africa and the Caribbean "are making extraordinary efforts to explore how old and new forms of violence affect the female gender" (2009, p.2). There are many approaches to how "women write about violence to break with the silence imposed on them by society and to challenge readers with their gendered perspectives on violence" (2009, p.2).

Yara Monteiro's novel, *Essa Dama Bate Bué!*, provides its own approach. (Monteiro is one of the newest Afro-descendant writers in Portugal who are beginning to change and to

challenge the literary scene.) Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida, Kalaf Epalanga and Telma Tvon also come to mind as voices of women—born in Angola, raised in Portugal—who are now confronting some of the issues that arise from the experience of being African in the ex-colonial metropolis. As Monteiro states in an interview, “Somos afrodescendentes que tocamos nos mesmos pontos da identidade, da vivência em Portugal, dos desafios de um africano” [“We are afro descendants that fall into the same points of identity, our experiences in Portugal, and from the adversities as an African”] (ÍPSILON, n/p). *Essa Dama Bate Bué!* tells the story of Vitória and her challenges to overcome the absence of her mother’s presence in her life. In the narrative, the reader follows Vitória in her journey back to Angola in search of a mother, a fighter in the country’s colonial and civil wars, whom she has never met. Aside from some evident biographical similarities between the writer and the character, what is noteworthy is the multilayered violence that the novel communicates. Better said, this is a story where, due to a broader context of violence, a very specific form of violence is inflicted. I will further show how the interconnectedness of public and private violence in the novel influences Vitória’s social and psychic life. As Kalisa mentions, “not only are women absent or poorly represented in [the] public discourse of violence but also (...) critics often ignore the ‘private’ or ‘intimate’ violence associated with women or interpreted it only in a metaphorical sense” (2009, p.3). This is also true in Luso-African studies. In a dossier devoted to “História, Violência e Trauma na Escrita Literária Angolana e Moçambicana,” Terezinha Tabora Moreira affirms that the volume’s studies focus on the images of violence “produzidas por narrativas angolanas e moçambicanas que têm como tema a guerra e/ou seus impactos sobre a população e a sociedade,” [“produced by Angolan and Mozambican narratives that contain themes of war and/or their impacts on a population and society,”] adding that “[e]ssa investigação foi feita a partir de uma análise que contemplou a reflexão sobre o processo de construção textual empreendido pelos escritores angolanos e moçambicanos como efeito de uma problematização do ato de narrar e, também, do sujeito, em contextos marcados pela opressão da história” [“that investigation was made from an analysis that contemplated the reflection about the contextual construct driven by the Angolan and Mozambican writers as a narrative of problematization, in addition to the subject, in contexts marked by the historical oppression”] (2015, p.2). The dossier’s literary analyses center on the dialogues between literature and history, showing how literary writings in Mozambique and Angola are intimately connected with the issue of memory, establishing an approximation between fiction and historical facts. This means that, for the writers of these countries,

problematizar a história de seus países por meio da proposição de sujeitos ficcionais que metonizam os excluídos da história oficial parece ser (...) uma maneira de representar as divergências ideológicas, as contradições e as injustiças presentes nas realidades angolana e moçambicana, marcadas por conflitos desde a época colonial até os anos da pós-independência. (MOREIRA, 2015, p.4)

Succinctly, literary criticism has not consistently explored private gendered violence resulting from the contexts of colonialism, war, and post-independence. These studies reflect the more general and perceptible (despite its importance) idea that “os contextos sociais angolano e moçambicano result[am] de formações históricas marcadas pelo colonialismo, pela guerra anticolonial e pelas guerras civis, os quais, por seu carácter opressor, contribuem para a desumanização do sujeito” [The Angolan and Mozambican social contexts result from historical formations that are marked by colonialism, from anticolonial war and from the civil wars, which, by their oppressive character, contribute to the dehumanization of the subject.] (MOREIRA, 2015, p.9). As we shall see, what distinguishes *Essa Dama Bate Bué!* is that some of the most insidious acts of violence are performed within the same gender, i.e., the abuse and its effects were caused by women on other women as the outcome of external forms of violence associated with colonial and postcolonial conditions. Monteiro’s novel also lifts taboos “over traditionally silenced discourses about domestic and intimate violence” (KALISA, 2009, p.3). Her writing examines, as Kalisa states the effects of rape, sexual violence, and physical and physiological abuses on women and, I would add, as well as of psychologic traumas.

Violence is a difficult term to define even though it is easier to recognize its countless manifestations. Scholars have been defining the term according to their fields of study. Here, I draw on the explanation of violence developed by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* in which he delineates the psychological impact of the institution of colonialism on the psyche of the colonized. He states:

All forms of exploitation resemble one another. (...) All forms of exploitation are identical because all of them are applied against the same ‘object:’ man. When one tries to examine the structure of this or that form of exploitation from an abstract point of view, one simply turns one’s back on the major, basic problem, which is that of restoring man to his proper place. (1967, p.88)

Psychological violence, for Fanon, derives from the impact of colonial policy resulting in the economic exploitation and alienation of the oppressed. It also includes brainwashing and threats; it is the consequence of the combination of cultural, structural, and physical violence. Using Kalisa’s phrasing, “It represents the attempt, conscious or unconscious, by the colonizer to create alienated colonized individuals who reject indigenous values and institutions because they are deceived and brainwashed into believing that those values and institutions are inferior to those of the colonizer” (1967, p.9). It would be only using violence that the colonized could regain their humanity and self-determination, i.e., violence would “restore man to his proper place.” In the post-colonial world, he foresaw the replication of colonial violence by the new elites who had assimilated the colonizer’s values. Referring to post-coloniality, Ato Quayson affirms that “The postcolony is a place of violence. This violence constituted by the wars and acts of expropriation that undergirded the colonial order becomes endemic in the postcolony and produces a series of persistently violent political and social disjunctures” (2001, p.192). Gender was frequently a blind spot in Fanon’s theories, though he did consider the position of women in decolonizing efforts. Moreover, Kalisa emphasizes, “(...) gendered violence of postcolonial

literatures shows that women writers actively oppose the idea that women bring this violence on themselves” (2009, p.12), a sort of a counterreaction to Fanon’s and male theories on violence. Feminist and interdisciplinary scholarship on gendered violence and women’s literature show how discourses of violence are fundamentally gendered. Kalisa, for example, defines gendered violence “in the context of feminist resistance to the depoliticization of ‘private’ and ‘domestic’ acts of violence” (2009, p.13). I adhere to her definition of gender violence because it encapsulates Monteiro’s novel plot, i.e., “a term originating from interdisciplinary studies whose focus is on the physical and psychological impact of violence and conflict on female subjects” (2009, p.13). In Monteiro’s novel, we find an individual trauma that indirectly spawns from a collective experience of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and war. Vitória is a remnant of war’s impact on female subjects as we will further discuss.

The epigraph chosen in *Essa Dama Bate Bué!* casts the tone for the novel and is immediately an indication of what lies ahead. It is taken from *Diary* by Miguel Torga, a renowned Portuguese writer. It reads:

*O destino exagerou comigo. Baralhou-me a condição.  
Plantou-me aqui e arrancou-me daqui.  
E nunca mais as raízes me seguraram bem em nenhuma terra.*

The concept of belonging comes immediately to mind and associated with it comes the anxiety of not belonging, of an individual hunted by their lack of roots. This is, in a broader sense, Vitória’s problem; her mother’s abandonment turned her into a rootless character. The first two paragraphs of the novel, which is narrated for the most part in the first person, confirm the issues displayed in the epigraph. Vitória speaks about two contrasting childhood images, a tree and a wave.

*A minha primeira memória é uma árvore; a segunda, uma onda. Sem sombra, voo por entre as raízes que sustentam o fundo do mar. Não existo antes daquele momento, nem existo para além dele. São imagens que irrompem os meus sonhos e atemorizam o meu sono. (MONTEIRO, 2018, p.9)*

The tree can be a symbol of life, growth and protection in mythologies and legends. Its roots represent stability and nourishment. It is a fixed element of nature. On the other hand, a wave is unstoppable, a force of nature that sweeps away everything in its path and that can produce fear and anxiety due to its destructible nature. Vitória is stuck in this specific moment, between these images, and thus lives in that space theorized by literary scholars as the space in-between; she then goes on to explain the reason of her interior conflict:

*De quando em quando, o aroma intenso a leite azedo aflora. Junta-se a ele o gosto a suor salgado que sobrevive na minha língua. Parte de mim conforta-se nestas sensações. A outra parte inquieta-se com o vazio de ser só isto tudo o que tenho de recordação da minha mãe. A verdade mais íntima é não a poder reclamar como sendo minha. Sei-o. Rosa Chitula, a minha mãe, mais do que a mim, amou Angola e por ela combateu. Chamo-me Vitória Queiroz da Fonseca. Sou mulher. Sou negra. (2018, p.9)*

It is the lack of a relationship with her mother that drives Vitória, her “inmost truth,” and the plot of the novel. The narrative becomes a tool for repairing and for healing, an attempt to accept the fact that she never had a mother. That void, along with the psychological violence that it perpetrates on her, is a consequence of a collective violence brought about by colonial and civil conflicts that shaped her mother’s spirit and ideals. Her mother Rosa, the daughter of a father who considered himself Portuguese and who had assimilated Portuguese values and culture due to the nature of colonial policy, “sempre tivera um espírito livre e de revolta à opressão. A sua insurreição ao imperialismo começou a acerar-se à medida que a rádio e os jornais iam deixando de ignorar os saques desordenados, as violações, os raptos e o aumento da tensão entre brancos e negros” (2018, p.11). Her mother, thus, did not fit the traditional definition of a woman; she is described as trying to physically look and dress like a man “e o cabelo preso por debaixo do chapéu subtraíam-lhe a delicadeza das feições do seu rosto. (...) parecia-se com um robusto jovem mestiço, confundindo até o seu pai” (2018, p.10). Probably influenced by the wave of feminism in the 1960s, by the new policies of the Portuguese State and by those of the counter-revolutionary movements in Angola, Rosa leaves home at the time when the colonial war had broken out. She, like many others, broke away from her family to fight for what she believed to be a just cause. José Luís Cabaço speaks about his personal experience with the colonial world of his childhood and its contradictions. He then describes the pain of abandoning *his world* to fight for the freedom of the Mozambican people. The entire paragraph must be transcribed to fully become aware of the psychological violence that is embedded his of decision:

A consciência impunha-me a roptura com o *meu mundo*. Foi, sem dúvida, a decisão mais sofrida que tive de tomar. Romper com o *meu mundo* significava trair os meus afetos, cindir a razão das amizades e amores construídos e consolidados por quase duas décadas. Tinha de deixar para trás quase vinte anos de socialização, as referências que me davam segurança, as certezas sobre as quais fundara os meus hábitos, comportamentos, linguagem. O Bem e o Mal invertiam posições. Em frente tinha um sentido de justiça, um dever de consciência, mas a opção mergulhava-me num mundo totalmente desconhecido. Sentia-me politizado, pleno de certezas racionais, identificado com um futuro de Moçambique (...). (2011, p.217)

Cabaço uses Franz Fanon’s “atmospheric violence” to describe the atmosphere in the former Portuguese. In his words, “cada momento da vida dos colonizados estava impregnado de um potencial violento que determinava, a par da opressão física, uma permanente tensão consciente e/ou inconsciente” [“Every moment of the colonized lives was impregnated in a violent potential that determines, along with the physical oppression, a permanent conscious and/or unconscious tension”] (2011, p.76). Thus, violence was everywhere and saturated every aspect of the colonized lives:

(...) soube da atmosfera de violência—física, social e cultural—que marcava cada momento da sua vida e dos seus: as relações com o *mundo dos brancos*, a polícia, a delinquência reinante nas periferias; as mais sutis experiências do racismo e da humilhação; os mecanismos de autodefesa e a importância psicológica das pequenas retaliações vividas como grandes vitórias. Só então me apercebi realmente da violência total que impregnava a sociedade moçambicana. (2011, p.217)

The same can be said about colonial Angola and the feelings experienced by the fictionalized Rosa Chitula. Although the reader does not have access to her voice, the comparison is striking. The first-person narrator vividly describes the context of horror at the onset of this war, in which her mother took part, and that brings other forms of violence to the population:

Passados alguns meses, a guerra colonial eclodiu. A resistência urbana já tinha conseguido espalhar milícias por todo o país e começou a barbárie entre os negros e os mestiços: separavam-se cabeças de corpos, abriam-se os ventres das mulheres e mutilavam-se as crianças. Massacravam quem não quisesse aderir à revolta. (MONTEIRO, 2018, p.13)

Her family flees Silva Porto to the city of Huambo as entire families leave for Portugal. António, the grandfather, takes advantage of the situation by working for both sides of the conflict—his “cor do meio” [“middle color”], i.e., his miscegenation, puts him in an intermediary world.

Fifteen years after her disappearance, Rosa returns to leave two-year-old Vitória to be cared for by her elderly parents and to never be heard from again. This is the origin of Vitória's personal experience with violence. The narrative then turns to the Angolan civil war which triggers the departure of the Queiroz family to Portugal, leaving behind the women servants who helped them at home. Vitória feels this departure as another void in herself. She is now leaving behind both her mother and her wet nurse: “Dentro do carro, o meu choro prolongado e persistente teima em marcar presença. De boca aberta, abano a cabeça à procura da mama emprestada de Hermínia. Por muito que as tias e a avó me tentem acalmar, nada me diminui a carência. Hermínia e a mamã ficaram para trás” (2018, p.17). On their way to Luanda, Vitória describes how war impregnated every corner of society and even nature: “Conforme nos vamos aproximando do povoado, a mais visível marca da guerra é o silêncio imposto à vida diária. Até mesmo o capim tem a respiração suspensa” (2018, p.17). They make a stop so António can say goodbye to his friend, the chief of the village, Katimba. The latter expresses his feeling towards the war: “—*Haka!*— exclama Katimba, decidindo sentar-se por completo no chão. —Estou cansado!—continua com o seu lamento. —Filhos de diferentes pais, mas do mesmo ventre. Lutam contra irmãos, violam irmãs. Dão armas aos sobrinhos. Fomos enfeitiçados! *Haka!*” (2018, p.19). Angola is here a metaphor for maternity, for a mother whose sons bring violence and destruction on each other by means of war:



As *chitakas*, outrora terras verdes de café ou cana-de-açúcar, estão transformadas em terra queimada. A vida recusava-se de novo a nascer. Por vezes, a coluna de viaturas passa por cubatas. Nessas ocasiões, os camponeses correm na nossa direcção. Em desespero, agitam os filhos pequenos no ar. Não pedem comida ou dinheiro. Querem entregar as crianças, para que estas sejam salvas. Ali, a morte é certa. Se não for a bala, será o estômago vazio. (2018, p.21)

In Portugal, other forms of violence will permeate Vitória's life. They are not only experiences with racism at school, but the inherent violence that is inscribed in any narrative of a displaced life, whatever the reason. Aleksandar Hemon writes about this kind of experience in *The Book of My Lives*. He states that "The situation of immigration leads to a kind of self-othering as well. Displacement results in a tenuous relationship with the past, with the self that used to exist and operate in a different place, where the qualities that constituted us were in no need of negotiation" (2013, p.17). Immigration, he proceeds, "is an ontological crisis because you are forced to negotiate the conditions of your selfhood under perpetually changing existential circumstances" (2013, p.17). Further on he adds that "[t]he displaced person strives for narrative stability—here is my story!—by way of systematic nostalgia. (...) At the same time, there is the inescapable reality of the self transformed by immigration—whoever we used to be, we are now split between *us-here* (...) and *us-there* (...)" (2013, p.17). Since Vitória left for Portugal at a very early age, she experiences something that could be described as a "double displacement," as it is observed in some of her comments upon returning to Angola:

*É a primeira vez que ali estou. Falta-me a espontaneidade de quem regressa à sua pátria.* (Monteiro, 2018, p.28)

Sinto o comentário como se fosse uma mão abruptamente lançada à minha cara. Um lembrete àspero de que não pertença ali. Não tenho o sotaque da terra. (2018, p.71)

Vitória's narrative is therefore not only the search for her mother, but also the creation of her own narrative stability through that quest. Looking for Rosa is not without pain and fear: "Não mais aguento a fome que tenho da mãe. Não a posso renunciar. Mesmo assim, essa certeza não me tira o medo. Sinto-o nos pés. Estão outra vez dormentes. Têm medo de caminhar. São pés com medo de fazer o seu destino" (2018, p.27). Vitória cannot live in peace without knowing what happened to her mother; there is an emptiness and a sorrow that she describes as primitive:

Um ímpeto interior que chega do vazio persegue-me, nunca me deixando totalmente em paz. Surge mais uma vez, trazendo a névoa para tudo o que vigo agora, entorpecendo em dueto qualquer pensamento alegre que tenha e sorriso que dê. É uma dor suspensa, primitiva, que me faz viver com medo. (2018, p.54)

She strives for a sense of belonging that only her mother can give her: "(...) tudo o que quero é pertença, não aos Queiroz da Fonseca, a mãe recusou pertencer à família, ao avô,

mas podia ter regressado, eu toda a vida desamparada, calada, para não chatear, aqui também não posso, nem nascer pelos vistos podia, nasci, se calhar a mãe pensou que não sobreviveria, mas então porque não me matou?” (2018, p.57). It would have been easier, according to the character, if her mother had just killed her for the pain and suffering with which she has had to live would not exist. Even though Vitória tries not to feel like a victim, she is enraged at her mother's decision. She displays a conflicted self when it comes to her mother's actions: “(...) mas não posso ter pena, não posso, a mãe não teve pena de mim, que raio de mãe, não a posso criticar, vá, não chores, sempre a vítima abandonada (...)” (2018, p.58). Vitória bears the weight of unanswered questions: “(...) quando nasci sem berço, sem berço de mãe, quando é que terá decidido que eu passasse a memória?” (2018, p.58). Vitória's childhood trauma must be healed.

In her return to Angola in 2003, Vitória finds a country where other forms of violence exist. Luanda is depicted as a chaotic city that torments its inhabitants, a city where “tudo mata” [“everything kills”] (2018, p.39). There are unrepaired roads, miserable houses where rain water makes its way in, women selling their wares on the streets, barefoot children begging for food while the rich remain inside their houses, afraid of what takes place outside, “portões e varandas gradeadas [que me] parecem intransponíveis” (2018, p.33):

Nas ruas, é possível distinguir as mulheres que não desistem e fazem frente à intempérie das que já nem o sofrimento sentem. (2018, p.31)

É tal e qual como se uma ofensiva de pessoas e viaturas surgisse por brechas nas paredes ou fissuras no chão para de imediato propagar-se pelos passeis esburacados e estradas deixadas barrentas pela chuva.

Com crianças aninhadas às costas, chegam mulheres armadas de bacias recheadas com o colorido de frutas, legumes e latas de bebidas. Estendem o pano no chão, improvisam a banca e vendem o que têm na esperança de conquistar o dia. Ao longo da estrada, fileiras de homens começam a colar-se à fila de carros. Vendem a parafernália que se pode encontrar numa loja dos trezentos. (2018, p.32)

Vitória realizes that Luanda is a merciless city, where the upper classes shut their eyes to the dire poverty around them, where Whites still hold race or social privileges, where children's hunger is ignored: “Aparecem mais miúdos. Seguem-nos. Não estão a vender cigarros. Com a mão massajam a barriga, pedem dinheiro. Ninguém lhes liga” (2018, p.50). As the rap song that gives the book its title, Luanda is a “dama,” a lady that beats you up, or in the words of the General Zacarias Vindu, “Luanda é como uma mulher complicada” (2018, p.111). A city where people are robbed and physically attacked in buses on their way to work, the poor are segregated from the rich and lack basic needs, but, contradictorily, a place where “[d]e uma maneira ou de outra, queremos sempre voltar” (2018, p.111).

Race is also an issue in the narrative. As seen, right at the beginning of the novel Vitória identifies herself as a black woman. While in Luanda, she affirms that “o pior lugar da Terra, é ser-se mulher negra” (2018, p.59), reminding us of the Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw who, in 1989, coined the term “intersectionality.” Crenshaw argues that Black women are dis-

criminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either “racism” or “sexism,” but as a combination of both. In Vitória’s case, though she identifies herself as black, Angolan society does not see her as such, thus placing her in the same category as that of her grandfather, the “middle place.” Belonging to the space in-between is the second worst place in which a woman can be: “aqui sou clara, lá sou escura, o sítio do meio é o segundo pior” (2018, p.59). To complexify her identity and the violence that surrounds her, Vitória is not only a woman, and a black woman, she is also a gay black woman, a part of her identity that she has learned to hide from her family and society: “Preocupo-me demasiado com o que os outros pensam. Aflige-me alguém que já tenha gostado de mim e que já não goste mais. Desistem porque descobrem que não sou perfeita. Com o tabu da falha revelado, passo a esquecimento” (2018, p.64). Identity emerges then as a tricky and complex issue in Vitória’s story, as she feels that she is nothing else than a “sombra de uma identidade, uma língua cortada (...)” (2018, p.60). She tries to downplay her life story in the context of the violence against black women in post-independence Angola, where they may be killed by the military, or abused by men, with no means available to them to fight back the oppression:

Pra quê homem?» perguntei na mãe Josefa. Vai só me fazer filho e depois me deixar. A vida no musseque não é romântica. Aqui homem é pior que cão. Tanto come do prato como come do chão. Olha minha prima Quintinha, na zunga todo o dia, todo o dia. O tal de homem ia e voltava. Voltava para buscar dinheiro, amassar-lhe e depois ir embora.

*A vida aqui é sofrimento diário. Tem dias mesmo que nem sei como vou trabalhar direita.* (2018, p.88)

Vitória nonetheless keeps searching for her mother. She meets General Zacarias Vindu, a venerated figure in Luanda, who promises to help her. She researches the national archives for information on ex-women fighters and, although she wants to give up, she tries to endure as those women once endured the bitterness of war. *O livro da paz da mulher angolana: as heroínas sem nome*, edited by Dya Kasembe and Paulina Chiziane, is an homage to all the Angolan women who were victims of the civil war. It provides women’s testimony regarding their situation: “Nestes anos todos a libertação incluiu e contou com a participação humilde e sacrificada das mulheres que, na retaguarda geravam e criavam os filhos, cultivavam no campo o sustento da família e providenciavam, também, o apoio aos quartelamentos e unidades dos combatentes” (KASEMBE; CHIZIANE, 2008, p.87). This description suggests that traditional women roles were performed in addition to their contributions to the war effort. They had to perform a double role and life for them was one of great sacrifice and pain. Vitória’s description of the photos found at the archives gives a plain account of their suffering:

Consulto as caixas e caixas de arquivo numa sala húmida e sem ventilação. Não entra ar fresco. Transpiro sem parar. Por vezes, quero desistir, mas resisto. Resisto como as mulheres combatentes nas fotografias de identificação dos processos individuais. As caras estão rígidas. Pretas, mestiças e brancas.

Em algumas delas, os olhos parecem esvaziados. Outros incubam a expressão do dever e prestar. A rectidão da postura mostra o orgulho da responsabilidade. Têm sempre os lábios cerrados. Tão cerrados que parecem cosidos com corda de sisal. As camaradas não se asfixiam, mas também não falam os seus queixumes de mulher. Dentro de alguns processos, estão certidões de nascimento de crianças. Imagino-as a carregar a arma e a criança, como o fez a mãe. (2018, p.115)

In another woman's testimony, we see that escapes, death, destruction of families, and creating orphans were part of the vicious acts of war: "A guerra fez sofrer muita gente, destruiu famílias [...] naquela altura tinha de se fugir à guerra com as trouxas na cabeça, se esconder tipo bicho na mata, é por causa da guerra que primeiro o meu pai morreu na tropa e depois a minha mãe; naquele tempo de fugir lhe apanharam para transportar as coisas que eles roubaram, mas ela não agüentava e lhe deram um tiro. Fiquei órfã" (KASEMBE; CHIZIANE, 2008, p.43). Leaving children without parents is thus one of several results of violence caused by the civil war. Vitória describes her feelings as an orphan: "A impressão digital é imutável, mas, e a nossa história? Sabia-me incompleta. Feita pela metade. A outra metade ainda mais desconhecida: «Ingónito», como registado na minha certidão de nascimento. Uma biografia ausente de mãe e pai" (2018, p.136). Despite feeling like an orphan, Vitória's situation is different because we learn that her mother is still alive.

On a trip to Huambo to speak with Juliana Tijamba, one of Rosas's war *camaradas*, she finally discovers what happened to her mother or, as she is to find out, one version since all who knew her have their own: "—Qual delas meu amor? A da tua mãe, a minha, a da tua família, a que querias ouvir, a verdade do general... Qual delas?" (2018, p.205). Something, according to Juliana, seems to remain unchanged, "Na guerra, matar não chega. *É massacrar, torturer, mutilar e violar. (...) A guerra é um grande feitiço. Ficamos todos cegos*" (2018, p.154). Juliana fought together with Rosa. One day, though, Rosa killed a man, a guerrilla fighter who was humiliating her and wanted to forcefully have a sexual encounter with her. According to Juliana, "—Nem todos respeitavam a tua mãe. Como era mulher, sabes como é? O Palanca era um deles. Gostava de a humilhar. (...) Achavam que éramos inferiores" (2018, p.160). Because Rosa killed Palanca, her platoon gets orders to execute her; they, however, let her escape. After almost a year, Juliana gives up the bush war and goes on a mission to support the population. She then finds Rosa, hiding in a *kimbo* and pregnant. Juliana, not to hurt Vitória's feelings, does not reveal her mother's unhappiness about her pregnancy: "Na cubata ela também deixava propaganda do Partido. Rosa punha-a de lado. Fazia o mesmo com as roupas de bebé. Punha-as de lado, sem mesmo olhar para elas. Juliana oculta esta memória de Vitória. Há outras coisas que também não contou. Não lhe cabe a ela, considera" (2018, p.171). By not telling Vitória about her mother's condition, Juliana is setting her up for even more pain. After a long wait for her mother's letter, Vitória finally receives it. This is a strong letter in which Rosa directly rejects her:

As palavras lidas transformaram-se num arame farpado que aperta, torce e lacera o seu estômago. Sente dó da mãe, Queria pegar-lhe ao colo. Acariciá-la até que adormecesse e não mais se recordasse dos homens que a violaram e da poesia mórbida recitada pelo general Vindu enquanto a torturava.

Vitória sente-se revoltada e traída por todos. A mãe não quer encontrar-se com ela. Nunca a tinha desejado. (2018, p.204)

Juliana also tells Vitória that she had betrayed Rosa by setting up an ambush for the guerrilla fighters to catch her, and that General Vindu wants Rosa's forgiveness for having tortured her after being caught.

As observed earlier, the revolutionary movements learned how to make women visible in their overall program. Nonetheless women, unlike men, were objects of violence. We can say that these women suffered the atrocities of war physically, for which they received no recognition after the revolution. As Margarida Paredes states, "As 'mães da revolução' ou as 'camaradas de armas' são representações ambivalentes que ligam a maternidade à guerrilha e ao militarismo como se fossem complementares" (2015, p.205).

*Essa Dama Bate Bué!* portrays the violence of imprisonments, the hunger, the rapes (aggravated by the female physiology) as well as some silenced forms of violence as, for example, that inflicted on women by other women like Juliana who did not show gender solidarity. Vitória's tale is one in which the violence of war is perpetuated by the children of these women fighters. Not having participated in the war, children have nonetheless become extensions of the generally silenced war traumas. In searching for her mother, Vitória changes, "já não é a mesma pessoa" (2018, p.182), but she is still drifting in the end with no sense of direction. The temporary solution is to "Deixa[r]-se então a pairar por cima dos escombros da casa incendiada, como se estivesse no limbo entre duas vidas. (...) a vida tinha-se tornado um embaraço" (2018, p.182). And, in this in-between place, between her past and her future, she might as well keep waiting since, as Juliana puts it, "És de um povo que ainda está à espera, que espera, sempre" (2018, p.206). Vitória's story may be qualified as a narrative of trauma that functions as a tool for repairing and healing. As Kalisa reminds us, "(...) women's literature about trauma [is] a form of knowledge production that attempts to denormalize violence against women, to reconstruct intergenerational narratives of female trauma, and to offer (...) a record of resistance to violence" (2009, p.14). The story of trauma is not only "the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past," but also "the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (CARUTH, 1996, p.8). Yara Monteiro's novel demonstrates a strong correlation between individual and collective trauma while revealing details of violence in the feminine that are at times forgotten or neglected. She accomplishes this by bringing up political issues in Angola that beg to be discussed and solved. Vitória's personal story, her mother's, and that of all female victims of violence is a political matter that needs to be addressed and not pushed aside as it has been done ever since Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideals were replaced by neoliberal, capitalist policies.

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