

Family Matters: Creolisation and the Production of a Sign in Luanda (Angola)

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Family has become in recent decades the most important social aggregator in Angola, particularly in the capital of Luanda. It is not that kinship no longer has such relevance, or that people are not building forms of relatedness in other ways. What has changed, however, is that family has come to be related to the process of class formation. Since the early 1990s, Angola has been through a transition from socialism to capitalism as the principal way of organising the national economy. Up to 1975, Portuguese colonialism curtailed every path Angolans could fathom to accumulate wealth. The socialist regime that took over at that time, when the country became independent, did the same, in the name of the 'socialisation of the means of production'. However, things changed in early 1992, when the country swerved to capitalism, and some people were faster than the others in accumulating wealth. To justify this distinction, they could not say that they had inherited anything from their ancestors. They could argue, however, that they were fitter than others to accumulate on account of the symbolic capital they had. Being members of prominent families, a socially identifiable patronymic, or being descended from a known patriarch would do the same job. That was the condition for the transformation of symbolic into real capital. In this sense, capitalism became a matter of sign production.

In this chapter I am less interested in tracing the genealogy of this process, although I will mention it, than I am in discussing the modes by which family, as a sign, has come to dominate Luanda's social landscape. To do so, I will be analysing a couple of ethnographic vignettes and discussing *The Book of Chameleons*, by José Eduardo Agualusa, to gain insight into the emergence of the sensuous quality of names in Luanda.¹ I also will discuss *Gloriosa Família*, by Pepetela (1997), in which the question of the ideological formation that animates family names provides interesting ethnographic material. Both novels are staunch critiques, if not parodies, of the importance Luandans attach to

¹ The first edition of *The Book of Chameleons* was published in English in 2007. It was translated from the Portuguese version, entitled *O Vendedor de Passados* (Agualusa, 2004).

family and particularly to their family names – whenever they have a sound one. But as we have learned from Bakhtin, novels are heterogeneous, open to different and contradictory meanings, and sometimes they even help to disseminate the meaning that their creators intend to criticise (Bakhtin, 1981). I read these novels for the ways they help to crystallise the consciousness of an *époque*. For novelists cannot help but work with the signs their cultures make available to them.

Novels have played a central role in the construction of modern Angola. Visiting Angola in 1976, Gabriel García Márquez noted that a great number of the members of the then recently founded União de Escritores Angolanos (Union of Angolan Writers) were nationalists and a number of them had spent time in the prisons of the Portuguese colonial regime.² Novels were not only instrumental in imagining the new nation, but they were also sites of experimentation. The variant of Portuguese that is spoken today in Angola, or the idea that the Portuguese spoken in Angola had its own characteristics, was for the first time rehearsed in the literature of Luandino Vieira (2006). Later on, the literature of the likes of Vieira became part of the pedagogical programmes for the next generations of Angolans. The point I am trying to make here is that novels, in Angola and elsewhere, should not simply be seen as sites of the reproduction of reality. In some instances, they create or validate signs that become reality.

The fundamental question this chapter purports to deal with concerns the production of signs or, more specifically, the conditions that preside over the emergence of particular kinds of signs, in this case the family. Here, in a way, I am attempting to put Karl Marx upside down. For Marx, although the fetish was embedded in the commodity itself, culture, the category that encompasses kinship, was the reflection of relations of production. In Angola, however, because of the nature of production itself, which is largely limited to the off-shore exploration of oil, symbolic production comes first and has then to be translated into physical capital. I agree with Franz Fanon, then, when he writes that in the colony, ‘the economic structure is also the superstructure’ (Fanon, 1963).

1 (Not) Giving Name

To illustrate the ways in which family matters have become an issue of public concern in Angola, it is sufficient to dwell on the case of the alleged daughter

² In fact, one of the first organisations was founded in post-colonial Angola, in November 1975. Agostinho Neto, the first Angolan president, was himself, as a poet, a member of this organization (García Márquez, 1999).

of the former president of the republic. In 2010, news circulated in the country that there was a woman, originally from Congo, claiming to be a daughter of the president of the republic, José Eduardo dos Santos. Although the public television station TPA had not reported such news, the president felt the need to be interviewed so as to stop the rumours.

What is quite interesting in this is that dos Santos has always been a very circumspect person. He may be fond of the reproduction of his image on the national currency and on billboards all over of country, but these images appear as if they were part of a cult of personality that he does not condone, and that takes place beyond his own volition. In the last thirty years, only two journalists have had the chance to interview him, namely the Portuguese journalist Maria Elisa, in 1991, and more recently, in 2003, the (also Portuguese) journalist Henrique Cymerman. Dos Santos avoids crowds, he is not even popular among Angolans, and he rarely speaks off-script. In this regard, if he has become the most powerful institution in the country, dwarfing even his own party, it is because he has succeeded in building what in a different context has been called a 'rhetoric of invisibility' (Gil, 1995).

That said, the president caught the whole country by surprise when in September 2010 he responded to a journalist of TPA who had approached him to ask a 'personal and intimate question' (YouTube, 2010). Interestingly enough, the journalist did not have to spell out the facts that he wished the president to comment upon, asking him simply if he had heard the rumours that were circulating through private press outlets claiming that dos Santos had fathered a Congolese child during the years that he was living in Congo Brazzaville, in the context of the national liberation struggle being waged there in the early 1960s. That child, now a grown woman called Josefa, was then in Luanda claiming his paternity. Dos Santos spoke to the TV station, during prime time, for four minutes, without being interrupted by the journalist, on facts of his life that he had never commented on publicly. He started his remarks by saying that he had not read the material – he has never admitted that he reads the private press, which he cannot control as he controls the public press – but that members of his family had briefed him on the contents of the reports. He then commented on the allegations. He first advised Josefa to keep looking for her father, since, according the information she gave, 'Mr José Eduardo dos Santos' – referring to himself in the third person – was not her father. Secondly, he challenged the evidence Josefa gave regarding her paternity. She was looking for an 'Edu', which is a diminutive of Eduardo, but he had never been called by this name. 'I am not Edu. I am José. In my house, my relatives call me Zé'. He then proceeded to give a long list of the names he had been called by since his years in high school. Eduardo, he construed, was not his name but his father's name. Furthermore, dos Santos said that he had arrived in Congo in November

1961, when he was nineteen years old, and left for the Soviet Union in July 1963, at the age of twenty. During those months, he had only thought of Angolan politics, and had not befriended any Congolese family, let alone had sexual intercourse with a Congolese woman. Therefore, he philosophically concluded, 'there cannot be any child' (*ibid.*).

Dos Santos only weighed in on the hotly debated subject of his possible paternity to stop the ubiquitous rumours. Some people also speculated that dos Santos was only having a private conversation in public with members of his family, who had received Josefa Matias with the promise of introducing her to her alleged father. In this sense, dos Santos was sending a message to that part of his family, while reassuring the other part, particularly his heirs, that he would not recognise any other child. A vast majority of commentators on popular Angolan news sites, such as *Angonotícias*, for instance, wondered why dos Santos did not simply submit himself and Josefa Matias to a DNA test so as to prove or disprove the veracity of her allegations, since by publicly commenting on such matters he was giving his word against scientific evidence, or against something that could be proven scientifically.

But this was not necessary, since it was not the truth that was at stake here. What was important was the voice of the president, or that he addressed the matter in his own voice. In a system of signs such as the one in Angola, where dos Santos is the master of a 'master signifying' system, or the chief encoder of the encoding machine, he not only creates statements, but also the conditions of validity for these statements (Austin, 1975). In this sense, what is relevant here is not whether Josefa is dos Santos's daughter, but whether or not he will recognise her. By this gesture, dos Santos was performing an illocutionary act, which has been defined by Austin as performing an 'act in saying something' (Austin, 1975). Or, as Alexei Yurchak has suggested in a different context, dos Santos, in this case, was engaged in a performance that had to be not true or false, but rather successful or unsuccessful (Yurchak, 2013, p. 258). In this sense, calibrating the success of dos Santos's utterances requires us to deal with the conventions and the proper context in which dos Santos's speech act was deemed successful.

Furthermore, this vignette also reveals another very important aspect of Luandan political culture: the importance people attribute to names and family names. It is noteworthy that the thrust of the argument for dos Santos to refuse the paternity of Josefa was her failure to call him by the proper name: José, or his nickname Zé (since Edú is his father's name, even if for the whole country he is also known as Zé Dú). This shows the extent to which names in Luanda have a sort of double contingency (Luhmann, 1995). A name is not only the designation by which someone is known. Whoever addresses another person by a name is marking the degree of relationship with that person. In this

sense, this is to say not just that intimate people have the licence to call people by their nickname, but that the name by which one chooses to address someone indicates the pattern of the relationship between the addressed and the addressee. In this sense it is understandable that some people take their father's first name instead of their father's family name, since this is how a given family sees the continuation of the father in the son. For instance, although in Angola, as everywhere in the Portuguese former colonies, people tend to take their family names as the last name, in Angola some people may have their father's name as the last name. A person called Miguel da Silva Pedro, for instance, is likely to have taken Pedro, his father's name, after da Silva, his family's name. However, even in this case, the family name is no less important, as I will show in the remainder of this chapter. Luandans, by the way they pronounce names, can turn common names into marks of distinction. In the Portuguese of common usage in Luanda, people may say that a given person *belongs* to a given family: 'ele é dos da Silva' (he is of the da Silva family); it is implicit that anyone who hears this knows who are the da Silvas, and that those da Silvas that are referred are not any da Silvas, but a very particular cluster of da Silvas.

So, the point here is that to be a part of the family is to be granted the right to use a particular name, or to be granted the opportunities associated with a particular class of people, or a cluster, that is associated with a particular name. This, as we will see throughout this chapter, may give a number of advantages – a licence to pursue certain careers, for instance – but it also gives people a share of or access to channels of distribution. The link between family and economy does not have to be rehearsed here. Long ago, Marx and Engels made the case that the formation of family is the product of capitalism, especially when it comes to matters of inheritance (Engels, 1972). In Luanda, however, in the context of the emergence of capitalist forms of appropriation, this is not the case yet. For someone like Josefa, for instance, the desire to be part of dos Santos's family is motivated less by the expectation of inheritance, and more by the opportunities that such association can bring (Marques de Morais, 2011). Key to this is that family has been conceived of as a unit of production. I will come back to this later.

2 The Seller of Past or Genealogical Anxieties

In the novel by the Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa, *The Book of Chameleons*,³ the main character, Félix Ventura, has a very uncommon métier:

3 The original title is *O Vendedor de Passados*, or the *Sellers of Pasts*. I prefer to refer to this book by its original title because something seems to be lost in the translation.

he sells pasts or, less poetically, he fakes genealogies. His business card reads: 'ofereça aos seus filhos um futuro melhor' ('provide your children with a better past') and his clients are members of the 'new bourgeoisie', or people who need a good past, 'a name that resonates nobility and culture' (Agualusa, 2004). To forge personal histories, he has to have an eye on history. He is an archivist, a collector of facts, storing news from newspapers and TV, which he uses in quite contradictory ways: as the necessary supplement of truth that gives subsistence to his fictions, but also as a way to vindicate the truth. He also uses the same material when he suspects that the president of the republic has been replaced by a double, by comparing the hand the president uses to make his signature in his archived footages of TV news.

Ventura sees himself as an artist, and his work as not simply faking documents, for the construction of genealogies, and the insertion of a subject into a given family tree, requires more than that. It is important that the subject inhabit the space that is opened up by the invention of memories. This is what takes place when, one day, Ventura is visited by a new client who wants to become José Buchmann. Ventura provides him with fake documents, such as an ID, a passport and a fake biography. He is the grandson of Cornélio Buchmann, a Boer who migrated to Angola at the beginning of the twentieth century. He is among the South Africans allowed to live in the southern Angolan locality Chibia, founded by Portuguese from the island of Madeira. Ventura and Buchmann become friends, and the first observes the second going through a metamorphosis, by changing the way he dresses, the way he speaks and so on.

Later in the novel we learn that José Buchmann is the Portuguese Pedro Gouveia, who used a fabricated identity to perform an act of revenge for the torture he was subjected to during the events of 27 May 1977. Although, the novel lacks verisimilitude, in the sense that in the almost lawless society of post-war Angola nobody has to go through all of this to commit a crime, the book is more a satire of the attachment to family name in contemporary Luanda than a commentary on vengeance. There is, for instance, the story of a minister who hires Ventura to dust off his genealogy. Ventura not only inserts him in the family tree founded by Salvador Correia, the liberator of Angola from the Dutch occupiers in 1648, but also ghost-writes his memoirs, in which this genealogy plays an important part.

Although this story seems to have been taken from the canon of magic realism, there is some truth in it. In fact, Agualusa has only translated into novel form a number of stories that have circulated for years in Angola, mostly in Luanda, about the anxieties over family names. I can give an ethnographic example that shows the extent to which Luanda's reality was a major source of inspiration for Agualusa. Once, in 2009, I went to the Banco de Poupança e

Crédito (Bank of Savings and Credit, BPC) to interview a veteran clerk who, in the summer of 1975, had taken part in the founding episode of the Angolan National Bank, called the 'Assault on the Bank'. Ever since the Carnation Revolution had taken place in Lisbon in April 1974, and it had become clear that colonialism was coming to an end, settlers had increased their remittances to Portugal. To prevent the soon-to-be country of Angola from experiencing a financial haemorrhage, a number of low-ranked Angolan clerks took over the bank and nationalised the reserve.

Now retired, the former clerk received me in the towering BPC building, where he still maintained an office, to discuss the details of the 'Assault'. During our conversation, I tried to ask him various questions on the subject I was interested in, but he kept changing the topic to the history of his family. His family name was Moreira, a quite a common family name, and yet he considered himself *a* Moreira from the main branch of the family tree, and thus a direct descendant of a Portuguese ancestor who had moved to Angola in the early nineteenth century. More significantly, he told me that over several years he had painstakingly amassed information on his family history, which he had then tried to publish in the form of an illustrated book. But he had not done so because he encountered resistance from a cousin who threatened to sue him if he published the book. His cousin was the son of a single mother, who had raised him and his siblings by washing clothes at home for white clients during late colonialism. This is a common story in Luanda for people who came of age during the last years of the Portuguese presence in Angola. And Moreira's cousin himself had recounted it many times. It was in the heyday of socialism, Angola was the 'fatherland of workers', and people sought to emphasise their working-class roots. But things have changed since then, and in the quest for belonging to the burgeoning national bourgeoisie a 'better past' has to be invented.

3 Creole Society

Perhaps in Agualusa's satire, Moreira's cousin would be good material for Ventura's creative powers. But reality in Luanda, as elsewhere in the world, is always more complex than anything fiction can convey. 'Past', or 'genealogy', is simply one of the terms by which the family sign comes into being. If we may use here de Saussure's distinction between diachronic and synchronic identities, genealogy only explains the term 'succession', or, as de Saussure has it, 'relations between successive terms that are substituted for each other over time' (de Saussure, 2011, p. 140). The other element is selectiveness, which,

although it also cuts through time, is more synchronic than diachronic. For understanding the case of Angolan families that claim the status of quasinobility, the reflections of Denise Youngblood on the disappearance of her black grandmother from her narrative stories is worth consideration (Youngblood, 2001). Although Youngblood is addressing a very different context, what is relevant here is the relationship she construes between the family and the nation to suggest that the criteria by which certain family histories circulate and others are occulted may be related to the body politic and its politics of memory. Or, as she puts it, the rhetoric of family is only supported when 'defended by the prevailing national ethos, and sustained by the centrality of a specific kind of people' (*ibid.*, p. 64).

I follow Youngblood in these considerations, since she provides a very interesting alternative to the terms in which family, or kinship, have been debated in much of African studies. The critical purchase of such a line of enquiry reveals not only the relationship between family and nation, but more importantly the relationship between family and ideology. If nationalism is the production of the nation's imagination, as Anderson (2006) so powerfully argues, the family in Angola is the best site through which to understand nationalism.

The powerful Angolan families claim to have ancestors among, or to be related to, the creole society that flourished in the late nineteenth century (Dias, 1984). Although the Portuguese crown claimed possession of the Angolan territories, Portugal did not have the capacity to fully dominate the vast country. So a number of natives gained great prominence in various aspects of national life: in the army, the clergy, the colonial administration and commerce. Some of them became prominent journalists, and intellectuals who flirted with nationalistic ideas of liberalism current at the time.⁴ As the economy of Angola was particularly dependent on slavery, the fortunes of the native elite were anchored in the slave trade. Still today, a part of the distinction between those who belong to the elite – within the same families – and those who do not is tacitly predicated on the distinction between those who are descendants of slave masters and those who are descendants of slaves.

Local families of Luanda lost their political prominence with the brief experiment in the administrative decentralisation of Angola, in the 1910s, when Norton de Matos was appointed Angola's high commissioner. De Matos decreed and created conditions so that the 'colonization by white families exclude[d] from the colonial nucleus individuals of black race' (de Matos, 1926, p. 30). So when large numbers of Portuguese came to Angola from the 1930s

4 For a discussion of the nationalistic project of this generation, see, for instance, Andrade, 1997.

on, and especially to Luanda, local families had to be relocated from the centre of the city to the new *musseques* (slums). A number of those families were descendants of the creole society of the late nineteenth century (Monteiro, 1973). This is why the literature on Angolan nationalism persistently remarks the protest of Angolans against the loss of certain privileges that the members of these former elites experienced, and sees this protest as continuous with more vehement liberation struggles (Laban, 1997). However, the history of Angolan families is more complicated than that.

If those names, as floating signifiers, have passed from one generation to the next, it was not on account of a patriarchal society that tends to preside over these things. Rather, single mothers guaranteed the transmission of the family names. The family story of Moreira's cousin, rather than being the exception, is in fact the rule. Although some members of Angolan society had been prominent in the colonial period, the colony did not offer them the conditions for the reproduction of any privileges. Fernando Mourão, for instance, says that it was not as a result of being dispossessed of their land by the state that those traditional families saw their prominence dwindle in the subsequent decades. Those families' patriarchs have many offspring, which has contributed to the dispersal of their wealth (Mourão, 2006).

Access to education was limited, and with the transformation of Angola into a settler colony, precisely those Africans who held elevated social positions quickly moved down the social ladder. Very few households subsisted intact from this process. Polygamy was common. A significant number of the Angolans who attended school in the 1960s⁵ were raised by single parents. Some of them took the names of their fathers, who had other families, and sometimes had their tuition paid by them (Mourão, 2006). But this generation relied mostly on the effort of mothers, washing white men's clothes to make ends meet. It was not uncommon for women to have children with different fathers, but raise them by themselves, or with the help of an estranged father. These women were the guarantors of the continuity of those family names that later served as the symbols of the emerging bourgeoisie. This is the case for many families that may now claim to be descended from powerful masters in the nineteenth century. When those who make these claims are pressed to tell the stories of their families, one finds out that the central figure is not a patriarch, but likely a woman, who had children with different men, and whose children took their various fathers' names. That some of these names have

5 Portuguese colonialism intentionally thwarted the progress of Africans. Until late 1950, a number of laws prevented Africans from advancing beyond primary education. For a discussion on these laws, and their eradication, see Oliveira, 2006.

become respected, and that their bearers have rewritten their genealogies, is to a considerable degree the work of economy and ideology, and is related to the forms of self-justification by which Portugal attempted to maintain its colony.

From the standpoint of ideological production, this process began long before independence. When the British and the French were preparing their African territories for decolonisation, the Portuguese had either to follow suit, decolonising, or to justify their mission in Africa. Portuguese settlement in Africa was recent and could not aspire to bring about the sort of political reality that the South Africans were pursuing with apartheid. So when nationalistic claims for self-determination reached the UN, the Portuguese, to discredit them, made the case that their colonial rule was instrumental in creating multiracial societies in Africa. The theories the fascist Portuguese state employed were a free adaptation of the Luso-tropicalism proposed in the 1930s by the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre as the model to explain the formation of Brazilian society, or the so-called Brazilian racial democracy. For Freyre, Brazil was a racial democracy by virtue of the patriarchal structure of the society formed in the sixteenth century, between masters and slaves. Contrary to the British colonies of North America, Freyre argues, in Brazil masters mixed with slaves, sexually and culturally, and the outcome was the formation of a racially diversified society free of the racial tensions that characterised many other post-slavery societies (Freyre, 1980).

Freyre had studied in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, in the 1920s, where he was a student of Frantz Boas and Ruth Benedict. It is not a surprise that the work of Freyre bears the stamp of the ideas developed by this department in those years. Columbia's school of anthropology was then at the vanguard of debunking the evolutionist theories used to explain the formation of human groups. Instead of biology, this school would emphasise culture; instead of innate characteristics associated with races, this school would argue that the social milieu has a decisive role in cultural differentiation. Freyre comments on this, echoing, to a great extent, Boas's thinking: 'once we have discarded ethnic as well as geographic and economic determinism, and look upon race, milieu, and techniques of production as forces which condition human development without determining it rigidly and uniformly we are free to interpret this development in terms of its own dynamics' (ibid., p. 426).

More significantly, Freyre also stresses that the benign character of the Brazilian people is due to the plasticity of the Portuguese, who were already historically infused with and strongly influenced by Jewish and Moorish traits. In the absence of any good justification for remaining in Africa, the Portuguese appropriated Freyre's ideas to argue that the outcome of their presence in Africa was the formation of multicultural societies, as had been the case in Brazil

(Castelo, 1998). The Estado Novo, then, commissioned Freyre to do a series of works on the Portuguese in Africa, of which the travelogue *Aventura e Rotina* (*Adventure and Routine*) is the best known (Freyre, 1953).

The work of Gilberto Freyre has played out in the Angolan present in two major ways. Firstly, Freyre has brought to the Angolan debate the quest for the social blueprint, for the social matrix of the nation. Secondly, a strong sector of the population, especially the members of the remnants of creole society, promoted these ideas to mark the fact that Angolans are different from other Africans by virtue of having more similarities to the Brazilians. One of the staunchest defenders of such views is precisely José Eduardo Agualusa, the author whose novel was discussed above,⁶ but we will see that he is not the only one to deploy Freyrian concepts when we examine *The Glorious Family*, by Pepetela.

Agualusa's most recent novel is unapologetically Freyrian in the way it praises the adoption of the Portuguese language by Angolans (especially Luandans). Like Freyre, praising the benignity of slavery in Brazil, Agualusa erases the violence that is implicit in the fact that most Luandans speak Portuguese today as their own language. The novel revolves around a study of neologisms being undertaken by a Portuguese linguist of Angolan origin. He is particularly interested in the fact that, suddenly, a number of neologisms have been adopted by speakers of Portuguese in different parts of the world, including Portugal and Brazil. Agualusa's purpose is to celebrate the contribution of African languages to the formation of the Portuguese lexicon. To do this, Agualusa has to convert to his project the most recalcitrant enemies of the Portuguese order. In one chapter, Agualusa invokes one of the most illustrious descendants of the creole families, Mário Pinto de Andrade, the nationalist and founder of the MPLA, saying: 'when he was a child, Portuguese was the language of the house, and Kimbundu, the language of the yard. In the comfort of the bourgeois living room, people spoke Portuguese. In the yard, with servants and friends, people used Kimbundu' (Agualusa, 2010). He refers to these yards as 'amiable places of conviviality and exchange' (ibid.). Here we can see some of the topics discussed by Freyre in many of his studies: the house and its divisions, as the space for the masters and the space for slaves. Furthermore, there is something else at play here. It is not the case here that Mário de Andrade, as a nationalist and

6 Angola has an even stronger movement at odds with any form of foreign influence that was deemed neo-nativism by the Angola art historian Adriano Mixingi, who puts neo-nativists against neo-Luso-tropicalists, among whom he situates José Eduardo Agualusa (Mixinge, 2009).

critic of Luso-tropicalism, could not make such statements.⁷ What is lacking is the context that allowed the emergence of these cultural formations: colonialism. Only by the erasure of colonialism in such a context can one understand the extent to which the ideology that was once used to justify the presence of Portugal in Angola is still in use today, albeit for different purposes. The names, and the identities inherited from colonialism, are among those ideological devices still in place.

4 Family as the Economic Infrastructure

Frantz Fanon aptly stated that in the colony, 'the economic infrastructure is also the superstructure' (Fanon, 1963, p. 39). Fanon was referring to the colonial 'compartmentalized world' where 'you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich' (ibid., p. 5). For the post-colony, and particularly for Angola, this formula has to be reworked: the superstructure is the economic infrastructure. For the difference between infrastructure and superstructure, according to Marx, resides in the correspondence between the modes of production and the social relations that produce and are produced by the modes of production. In places such as Angola in general, and Luanda in particular, where the economy depends on oil and its potential for exchange at a price imposed by the consumer countries, exchange becomes itself the mode of production and produces the economic infrastructure.

I owe this line of reasoning to the exceedingly stimulating work of Jean Baudrillard on the relationship between exchange and ideology. Baudrillard attempts to dismiss the 'absolute contingency' (Morris, 2000) of use value by dismissing 'the anthropological illusion that claims to exhaust the idea of utility in the simple relation of human need to a useful property of the object' (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 132). Furthermore, Baudrillard castigates Marx for being so vigilant in the ways that he unveils the work of ideology implied in the constitution of fetishes, those theological things, while failing to apply the same kind of theoretical alertness to the analysis of use value, which Baudrillard calls a 'mythology' (ibid., p. 134). It is, then, in reference to a system of meaning deprived of use value that every commodity is for exchange, and names constitute commodities that may illuminate the question of symbolic production in Angola.

7 Although they had to be read alongside the lines of the critique of Luso-tropicalism by Mário de Andrade (Andrade, 1955).

Marx and Engels, as I have already said, have insisted that the formation of the concept of family is not unrelated to property rights in the context of a burgeoning bourgeoisie in Europe, which is inextricably related to the anxiety of inheritance (Engels, 1972) Such an argument depends on there being fixed assets to conserve and transfer, whether these assets are reproduced or are the means of reproduction. In Angola, this is not quite the case: the production of signs of distinction is related to the formation of the networks of distribution and the structures of belonging that are crucial in an economy where distribution is itself production. The collapse of the centrally planned economy paved the way for this change of course, in the sense that Angolan leadership became increasingly convinced that the path to development lay in the formation of a national bourgeoisie. Steady steps along this path were taken in 1992. But the peace agreement and the advent of multiparty elections brought about new fears. UNITA of Jonas Savimbi (the guerrilla movement which fought the MPLA's hegemony) was cleared to participate in the electoral process without disarming its men. Besides, not only was Jonas Savimbi convinced that he would win the elections in a landslide, but also he announced the witch-hunt UNITA would indulge in as soon as it took power. In the run-up to the elections, a number of members of the MPLA abandoned the country and many others sent their families abroad. A luxurious hotel-ship was docked at the Port of Luanda, presumably, to provide shelter to members of the Angolan government in case something went wrong in the days ahead or after the elections.

It was amid this climate of fear and concern regarding the future that a number of very prominent members of the MPLA convened, in September of 1992, a week before the elections, to create a conglomerate of economic interests called GEPI (Sociedade de Gestão e Participação Financeiras – Business Management and Equity Society). Various prominent members of the MPLA, MPLA representatives in the national parliament, and a major Angolan public foundation, Sagrada Esperança, signed the company's founding charter. GEPI's portfolio included a diversified set of economic interests including aviation, real state, fisheries, media and so on (Marques de Moraes, 2012). According to Rafael Marques, the idea that presided over the formation of this group, which would coordinate in the coming years the transfer of public assets to private ownership, was to put the vital sectors of the country's economy into the hands of the regime's most trusted people in such a way that if power passed to the opposition, these people could still manoeuvre the political scene by their hold on those vital areas of the national economy.

The orchestration of this plan transpired through a number of private conversations, and even found its way into the pages of Angolan newspapers. And cynically, this move has not been described as corruption or unlawful,

but simply as a necessary step in bringing about a national bourgeoisie whose interests and portfolio could then be disengaged from the state. The national bourgeoisie, then imagined, had on the one hand to become totally free from the state without, on the other, relinquishing its control. This is, for instance, the spirit of a famous op-ed piece written by João Melo, a prominent MPLA representative in the national parliament, journalist and opinion maker. In his piece published in the official *Jornal de Angola*, Melo begins by justifying the MPLA's model of wealth creation by citing Marx saying that 'capitalism was born with its hands full of blood' (2008). He suggests that corruption, the undue appropriation of state goods, was a form of wealth accumulation in post-colonial Angola as legitimate as capitalism was for Europe in the wake of industrialism. For him, there is no other way. Colonialism did not allow the formation of a local bourgeoisie, and during socialism private property was subsumed under the 'collectivization of the means of production' (ibid.). That said, the only avenues open for private accumulation had to pass through the state one way or another. He then enumerates the five major ways in which Angolans made fortunes in private business through or with the state: (1) taking advantage of the strategies of the commissions; (2) buying state property at low prices; (3) arbitrating between currency, in the context of a double exchange rate; (4) using privileged information; (5) taking advantage of a position in the government to create business, by demanding participation in projects presented by others, demanding bribes to allow projects to go through, or putting some projects in their own names, or in the names of figureheads (ibid.).

In this way, a small group of Angolans detached themselves from the whole population to become members of the first bourgeois class in the post-colonial country. The first phase was then concluded. Melo also voices another assumption that has gained currency among this privileged circle: this loophole had then to be closed. This is being achieved in law through the recent interventions of the president of the republic, on the basis of claims about the high levels of corruption in the country. He did this first through a speech in which he pledged 'zero tolerance' for new cases of corruption, suggesting also that old cases of corruption, especially those of illicit enrichment, would be pardoned.

However, the loophole could not be closed, since the class of Angolans who, thanks to the operations Melo describes, became part of the national bourgeoisie has never become economically autonomous. This class of people still depends heavily on the state to run their businesses. This has partly to do with the structure of the Angolan economy itself: the extraction of oil in Angola takes place in enclaves and, as Ferguson states, 'very little of the oil wealth even enters the wider society' (Ferguson, 2005, p. 378). In this context, then, the circulation of money is not anchored in production, but rather in exchange,

arbitrage and the myriad ways assets can be produced by controlling the paths of money. In brief, proximity to the state is still the only way wealth can be accumulated and, more importantly, maintained. It is more the rule than the exception that the trailblazers of Angolan capitalism still run their businesses from their official government offices.

These officials of the state are also involved, or have members of their families who are involved, in the country's different economic ventures. In this way, family has functioned as the linkage between the public and the private, between the state and society. The resources of the state pass along the channel controlled by those with access to the means. For such an endeavour, alliances have to be made. For the most part, as Melo notes, family settings such as the traditional Saturday late lunches are the occasions when such exchanges take place. Or, as Melo points out, it is at marriages and funerals that 'Angolans do the real politics' (Melo, 2008).

5 Symbolic Reproductions

No other family in Angola has claimed nobility more than the Van Dúnems. They are represented by various members in the government, and in the office of the President. In their family trees, there are various doctors, generals and colonial clerks who occupy the highest offices available to Africans. They claim to have their origins not in nineteenth-century creole society, but in the seventeenth century. According to this narrative, the founder of the Van Dúnem family was a slave-trading Dutchman, part of the army that occupied Angola from 1641 to 1648. As royal concessioners, they were the owners of the land that stands not very far from what is today the airport of Luanda, which was taken by the state to build the neighbourhood of Cassequel (Mourão, 2006). Like many other creole families, they fell into disgrace during late colonialism, and only after independence, and particularly since 1992, have they reclaimed their status of quasi-nobility.

The foundation of the Van Dúnem family is the theme of the novel *Glorious Family*, written by Pepetela. Although it is a historical novel, whose actions take place in the seventeenth century, Pepetela is clearly writing about the Angolan present, since the kind of social relations he describes are unapologetically contemporary. The novel has some Freyrian undertones, as I have already mentioned. It is not a coincidence, then, that the subtitle of the novel is precisely *In the Time of the Flamingos*, according to Freyre, 'a phrase the country folks still use in referring to something unusual, extraordinary, marvelous, almost diabolical, a piece of engineering or art which seems to them beyond the

technical ability of a Portuguese or a native son' (Freyre, 1980, p. 6). Through this connection, part of the intention of the author is revealed. Pepetela has argued many times that the Dutch occupation of Angola marked the moment when this territory fell under the control of Brazil: not only during the occupation of a part of Brazil by the Dutch (from 1630 to 1654), who occupied Angola to take hold of slave supply, but especially after the liberation of Angola by an army financed and equipped by Portuguese settlers in Brazil. Portugal would only effectively gain control over Angola at the time of Brazil's independence, in 1822, and particularly with the official end of the South Atlantic slave trade, in the mid-nineteenth century. Like Agualusa, Pepetela may have also been moved by the attempt to explain the formation of Angola through Brazilian Luso-tropicalism.

Any attempt to read Pepetela's *The Glorious Family* univocally may be complicated by the simple gesture of putting this novel in the context of Pepetela's oeuvre. Pepetela – a white descendant of a family with four generations in the country – is the Angolan author whose oeuvre is most associated with the formation of Angola as a nation. He is a practitioner of a kind of demiurgical literature halfway between myth-making and nation-crafting. A member of the MPLA almost since its foundation, in the early 1960s Pepetela was an organic intellectual in the strictest Gramscian sense: as a 'constructor, organizer and permanent persuader and not just a simple persuader', who is endowed with 'organizational and connective' tasks, exercising the functions of social hegemony and political government' through building hegemony across society (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). In this guise, Pepetela wrote the first textbook of Angolan history, taught in guerrilla camps early in the 1960s, when the project was to justify Angola's autonomy. More significantly, Pepetela is also the author of the widely read *As Aventuras de Gunga* (*The Adventures of Gunga*), which narrates the life of a boy who was killed by Portuguese soldiers for refusing to reveal the location of a guerrilla military camp. The books were part of the educational curriculum for Angolans who attended school in the first years of independence.

In this sense, as Frank Marcon suggests, citing James Clifford, the oeuvre of Pepetela is allegorical, insofar as the 'allegorical dimension of a novel is its capacity to convey something else beyond what is written, something like a moral of a narrative, that constitutes itself as a moral in the head of those who read it' (Marcon, 2005, p. 20). The ultimate goal of Pepetela was to narrate the nation itself, or the project of nation unfolding since independence. Furthermore, Pepetela also served as the deputy ministry of education, and his books have benefited from wide dissemination throughout the country.

In the late 1980s, Pepetela parted ways with the MPLA and his novels became more critical. He is the author of a novel called *Os Predadores* (*The Predators*), whose plot revolves around the formation of the national bourgeoisie through the schemes that Melo outlined, by the conversion of public assets into private wealth. *The Glorious Family* is part of this intermediary moment when Pepetela is no longer writing the nation, but he is not yet openly criticising what the national project has become. Although *The Glorious Family* is assumed to be a satire of the Van Dúnm, and their pretensions to quasi-nobility, it is nonetheless allegorical. If, on the one hand, Pepetela is deconstructing the myth of the Van Dúnm family's direct descent from Dutch occupiers – suggesting that Van Dúnm descendants may have inherited the name, since it was the practice that slaves took the names of their masters – he is also, on the other hand, invested in working on a structural template of the Angolan family. In this sense, the relevance of the novel for this chapter's argument is to be found in the moments when it fails to be historical. For instance, Pepetela credits the Van Dums (the name of the family found in the novel) with having invented the Saturday, which in Luanda is the day the extended family meets for late lunches that often last late into the night. This is the moment that Melo had in mind when he refers to the family lunches as the occasions at which the country's powerful families discuss business and politics.

The Glorious Family narrates the machinations of a Dutch trader, Baltazar Van Dum, who is an inhabitant of Luanda before the occupation of Angola by the Netherlands, in 1641. The Van Dums are a self-contained and independent family, a unit of production. Baltazar Van Dum could have built his house within the perimeter of the fortification, which is where white people live. But instead he lives on the outskirts, not very far from what is now Quinaxixe Square (in the city's centre). He is the owner of a dozen slaves who work for him on the small plantation he keeps and in his trade with the natives.

Balthazar keeps an 'official wife', Dona Inocência, with whom he has eight children. These are the children of the Big House, recognised as such. The others, the ones not recognised, live in the yard with the slaves, even if many of them have a skin colour and facial features that leave few doubts that they count among Van Dum's progeny. One of those children is Catarina, only a year junior to Nicolau, Van Dum's eldest son. Catarina helps at home with the domestic chores, like a simple maid, for Dona Inocência wants to constantly show her that 'she was inferior in rights to her children, born in the home, and according to every precept of the Catholic Church' (Pepetela, 1997, p. 22).

The Van Dums are a unit of production in the sense that every member has to channel his/her effort into working for the family in any capacity. Women

help in the house, and men and boys work in the slave business or in agriculture. Freyre was an anthropologist with a keen interest in houses and architecture, and his books are full of descriptions of how people live. Such is also the case for *The Glorious Family*. The Big House is a vast one-storey structure, surrounded by the slave quarters, in a yard with other smaller houses used as warehouses and rooms for free slaves, slaves and animals.

The businesses that Van Dum conducts, selling slaves or crops or other products, depends on the alliances he can forge with government officials. It had been this way with the Portuguese and it was not different with the Dutch. So for Van Dum, there is no separation between family and politics. His business opportunities depend on his offspring marrying key people in the colonial administration. For instance, he offers his daughter Matilde to a French Huguenot military officer, saying: 'I would like to be your father-in-law, it has been such long time since we have done business together' (ibid., p. 280). Implicit in this phrasing are the ways in which Van Dum combines forming kinship with doing business. Furthermore, Van Dum loses business opportunities and business associates when one of his sons, Ambrósio, gets romantically involved with Angélica Ricos Olhos, a Brazilian prostitute deported to Luanda for having killed a Dutch military officer. This son's affair poisons Van Dum's relationship with Cornelius Ouman, the Dutch governor, and the other in-laws.

One day, another of his sons, Rodrigo, approaches Van Dum and confesses that he is deeply in love with a young woman. Rodrigo is the most trusted of his sons, seen as his principal heir, so Van Dum is sad that the marriage of Rodrigo will estrange him from his son. But he changes his mind when he realises that Cristina, the young woman Rodrigo is in love with, is the daughter of D. Agostinho Corte Real, who is the governor of the Island of Luanda (the island that at that time was still part of the powerful Kingdom of Congo). Van Dum reflects in his monologues on the advantages of such a marriage between Rodrigo and Cristina:

so far we have got only slaves from Kimbundu-speaking places, who are undoubtedly the best slaves. But it could be advantageous to spread the business within the Kongo kingdom. With the support of Mani-Luanda, who is an aristocrat of the kingdom, it may be easier to establish this liaison. And even among the Dutch we are going to have more influence. Ultimately, we are going to be kin to the governor of the Island of Luanda.

Ibid., p. 85

So when the families agree on the marriage of their children and the bride price is set, Van Dum is not surprised to realise that it is even more expensive than he previously thought. He raises the funds, for he only has his eyes on the

advantages of the marriage and the prospect of expanding his business to the Kingdom of Congo (ibid., p. 90). After the wedding, Rodrigo leaves his father's house and settles at the house of his father-in-law, from whom he receives help in starting up a business that consists of salting fish to sell. One time when Van Dum talks to Rodrigo, who briefs him on the progress of his business and the fact that his father-in-law gave him the initial capital for starting the venture, Van Dum realises that he can no longer count on Rodrigo to take over his business. He then turns his attention to Diogo, teaching him the nuts and bolts of his business. But the problem is that Diogo is one of the sons 'born in the yard and never recognised' (ibid., p. 113). Balthazar produces an illocutionary act, by giving his name to his son, by means of which Diogo becomes a legitimate member of his family: 'now you use my name, because you're my son, and you will take care of my estate in my name' (ibid., p. 115).

6 Conclusion

The incorporation of Diogo into the Van Dum family allows us to see how ideology fits into the broader discussion of family in Luanda. We have seen, as elaborated by Yurchak, that performance can be successful or unsuccessful. I have introduced an example of each type of performance outcome in this chapter. In the case of Diogo in Pepetela's novel, we have a successful performance, by which Diogo is authorised to use his father's name and, consequently, take care of Van Dum's businesses. By contrast, President dos Santos's refusal to recognise his alleged daughter – regardless of whether or not she is the daughter of the president – provides us with a case of unsuccessful performance.

My goal in adducing these examples is to demonstrate the ways in which belonging, or being included, in these powerful families may open up opportunities for symbolic production, or, in other words, to the myriads of material and affective advantages that may be available as a result of being part of such a family. More importantly, I am also gesturing to an understanding of family that takes into consideration some premises of descriptivism in analytical philosophy, regarding the relationship between the name and the cluster (Žižek, 1989). Kripke states that the 'referent of a name is determined not by a single description but by some cluster of family' (Kripke, 1972, p. 31). Kripke is referring to a name such as 'Aristotle'. To be identified as Aristotle, the philosopher, a number of descriptions have to be added to his name: that he was born in Greece, that he is the author of *The Politics* and so on. This scheme may also apply to the formation of these types of families in Luanda. Families are clusters, loosely associated with a name, to which a number of properties may be ascribed. This is, in the example already given, what allowed Moreira to conceive

of his family as a particular class of Moreiras. In the same way as Aristotle is not any Aristotle, the Moreiras form a group associated with a particular history and thus a particular place in society.

Pepetela's novel *The Glorious Family* is more of a satirical take on the Van Dums. But in talking about the emergence of the Van Dums, Pepetela cannot help but provide us with a template for the explication of the formation of urban kinship. And this tells us a lot about the relationship between ideology and cultural practice. It is not only the case here that Pepetela is a writer gifted in transforming local histories and percepts into novels. What is more the case is the extent to which novels, as ideological constructs, help in crystallising the worlds that are fictionalised. Thus, the circulation of an understanding of family and belonging through the mass media (as in the vignette on the intervention of dos Santos regarding Josefa that opened this chapter) is at the service of the 'distribution of the sensible', as Rancière would put it, within society.

In conclusion, this Chapter is about the production of signs, and more particularly the production of a very specific sign, family. My point is not that this has been invented, or created recently, for there is a history of kinship that shows the extent to which Angolans, and in particular Luandans, have always been attached to their kin. Here, I have tried to understand the production of signs in relation to class formation or the emergence of the national bourgeoisie. Suddenly, then, to be part of a group, or to be associated with a group, became a way in which symbolic capital could be turned into real capital. To make my case I have used two kinds of evidence. The first is gleaned from real life, and the second from novels. Here, my point was not only to show the ways in which novels and real life communicate. I wanted also to show the role of the novel in condoning, even while condemning, certain practices.

Here, the point is not just to read novels in order to interpreting how they reflect reality. Rather, at stake here is the extent to which novels, in particular the novels I have discussed in this chapter, are themselves the product of the process they describe, namely nationalism, or the implication of writers such as Pepetela in the struggle for independence, but also the formation of the Angolan sensibility for family's names, through the influence of Luso-tropicalism.

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