

Oral Traditions in Lusophone African Women's Poetry

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Oral traditions and oral literatures are still fundamental characteristics of several societies, such as the African rural communities, among many others around the world.¹ Using these terms in the plural demonstrates the fact that there are many oral forms that differ from culture to culture, not only in their content but also in their shape, although they share many similarities. In fact, those cultures that experienced the influence and imposition of other cultures by means of colonialism kept some aspects of the traditional oral literature carried by the coloniser. For instance, in the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, many characters of the local folk tales and fables were originally Portuguese.²

When studying oral literatures, the concept of performance is undoubtedly an important element to take into consideration. The moment of performance of oral forms involves the participation of an audience, in some cases the existence of accompaniments, like dances and musical instruments, and also the performer's corporal movements and ability to control the sounds.³ Taking into account these diversified characteristics, it ought to be concluded that, in fact, oral traditions reveal no sign of inferiority. They are rather as artistic and complex as written traditions or any other kind of art, according to their respective and differentiated characteristics of production and delivery.

For a long time the literary qualities of African oral literatures were not recognised and acknowledged. In Lusophone Africa changes began to take place mainly in the 1980's, though some older works contributed to this evolution. During these last few decades oral literatures have been revived in the five countries that constitute Lusophone Africa. This has happened not only through the interest taken by academic scholars or writers in collecting and translating texts, but also through the borrowing of techniques and ideas used in the writers' oral traditions for the creation of written works either by novelists, playwrights or poets.

As the title of this study indicates, this essay will focus on poetry written by women poets from two Lusophone African countries. The poets under study are Maria Olinda Beja, from São Tomé and Príncipe, and Paula Tavares, from Angola, and the poems were written in the 1980's and 1990's.⁴ These two poets, although originally from different backgrounds,

share the utilisation of elements of their cultures' oral traditions in the making of their poetry.

In fact, oral traditions may be seen as a retrieval and celebration of the poets' identities to the extent that they enable them to construct themselves as agents. By retrieving oral literatures the poets are celebrating their agency as creators of their own texts, unlike the story-tellers or performers who memorised a group of texts that could be adapted or not during the performance or narration. There is then an interaction between the two types of production, oral and written, which these poets achieve in their works and it is this interaction that makes their poems distinctive and different from other poetic texts. Indeed, this interactive technique expresses an attitude of sharing which may be considered one of the most important characteristics of African female communities, among the different countries of Lusophone Africa, however different they might be. Moreover, if agency is reclaimed by these poets, then the image of the victimisation of African women is denied and resisted as never happened during colonialism. Taking into account all this, it may be asserted that the birth of a new mode of expression, a new African woman-centred poetics, as opposed to the male discourse, which has shown more concern with literacy, is being celebrated.

As will be demonstrated, there is much evidence of the utilization of elements of oral traditions in these African women's poetry. They may vary from some explicit references to story-telling or story-tellers to the structure of the poems: from the punctuation used or its absence to the recourse to historical and mythical characters, to the inclusion of tales, proverbs, refrains, riddles, songs and oral expressions to the utilisation of different voices and languages, and thus to the "possibilities of the performative embedded in the language"⁵ that are present in the poems.

This study will proceed with a closer look at some of the poems. Let us start, then, with Paula Tavares who writes in Portuguese, but includes in her writing words from an African language spoken in Angola (probably the Kwanyama). Those words vary from names of people ("Muvi," "Ozoro," "Suku"), places ("Ochilombo," "Bié," "Lunda") to other categories: "mundjiri" (a kind of plant), "massambala" (maize), "tate" (father), "tacula" (a kind of tree).

Another aspect representative of the influence of oral traditions in this poet's work is, for instance, the use of proverbs and quotations. For example, a proverb from the Angolan people called Kwanyama is the epigraph of the collection *O Lago da Lua*: «...lá onde és amado constrói a tua

casa.»⁶ Similarly, quotations can be found functioning as prologues or titles of poems:

*“Amparaí-me com perfumes, confortai-me com maçãs
que estou ferida de amor [...]”*

Cântico dos Cânticos

Tratem-me com a massa
de que são feitos os óleos
p’ra que descanse, oh mães

Tragam as vossas mãos, oh mães,
untadas de esquecimento

E deixem que elas deslizem
pelo corpo, devagar

Dói muito, oh mães

É de mim que vem o grito.⁷

«A massambala cresce a olhos nus»

Vieram muitos
à procura de pasto
traziam olhos rasos da poeira e da sede
e o gado perdido.

Vieram muitos
à promessa de pasto
de capim gordo
das tranquilas águas do lago.
Vieram de mãos vazias
mas olhos de sede
e sandálias gastas
da procura de pasto.⁸

In addition, some poems are based on the structure of quotations that constitute a call-and-response game, as the poem, “Cerimónia de Passagem,” from the collection *Ritos de Passagem*, exemplifies:

“a zebra feriu-se na pedra

a pedra produziu lume”

a rapariga provou o sangue
o sangue deu fruto

a mulher semeou o campo
o campo amadureceu o vinho

homem bebeu o vinho
o vinho cresceu o canto

o velho começou o círculo
o círculo fechou o princípio

“a zebra feriu-se na pedra
a pedra produziu lume.”⁹

Apart from these elements, Paula Tavares makes use as well of mythical and historical characters in the writing of her poems. An example of a mythical character that appears in this poet's work is the mask “Mwana Pwo,” the female ancestor, one of the most important characters in a kind of initiation rite held by the Chokwe-related peoples of Angola.¹⁰ It represents the ideal young woman, as “Mwana” stands for “young” and “Pwo” stands for “woman”:

chegou a noite
onde habito devagar
sou a máscara
Mwana Pwo em traje de festa
[...]
vem atravessar o espelho em dois sentidos
depois, podemos, rumo ao sul
navegar
as horas
desembrulhar a espuma desta
 lentíssima noite
e ficar por dentro
dançarino e máscara
no meio da noite.¹¹

On the other hand, historical characters can be found, for instance, in a poem called “HISTÓRIA DE AMOR DA PRINCESA OZORO E DO

HÚNGARO LADISLAU MAGYAR.”¹² Lázló Magyar was in fact a Hungarian explorer (1817-64) who married an African King’s daughter in Bié, Angola.¹³

This poem may be considered one of the most representative texts, with respect to the subject under study. It is structured according to the basis of a theatrical show or play. Indeed, the poem is divided into four different moments like four different acts in a play, where different voices are introduced, sometimes solo voices, other times choral voices, through which symbol-characters are allowed to participate. As an example of the solo voices there is the King, Ozoro’s father, who orders his daughter to prepare herself because the time has come for her to marry a man who paid more than he had asked. In the end of his speech, the King gives advice to his daughter in the shape of a proverb, which is written in capital letters. With these words he may be telling Ozoro to live and accept life the way it is, without questioning it:

Primeiro momento

Meu pai chamou e disse:
mulher, chegou a hora, eis.o senhor da tua vida
Aquele que te fará árvore

Apressa-te Ozoro,
parte as pulseiras e acende o fogo.
Acende o fogo principal, o fogo do fogo, aquele que arde
[noite e sal.

Prepara as panelas e a esteira
e o frasco dos perfumes mais secretos
Este homem pagou mais bois, tecidos e enxadas do que
[aqueles que eu pedi
este homem atravessou o mar
não ouvi falar do clã a que pertence
o homem atravessou o mar e é da cor do espírito

NOSSA VIDA É A CHAMA DO LUGAR
QUE SE CONSOME ENQUANTO ILUMINA A NOITE.¹⁴

Then, there is Ozoro who questions her father about that decision and expresses her opposition against it, because she does not feel ready; she is still a young woman:

Voz de Ozoro:

Tate Tate
 meus todos parentes de sangue
 os do lado do arco
 os do lado do cesto
 tate tate
 porque me acordas para um homem para a vida
 se ainda estou possessa de um espírito único
 aquele que não se deu a conhecer
 meu bracelete entrançado
 não se quebrou e é feito das fibras da minha própria essência
 cordão umbilical
 a parte da mãe
 meu bracelete entrançado ainda não se quebrou
 Tate tate
 ouve a voz de meu pequeno arco esticado
 as canções de rapariga
 minha dança que curva a noite
 ainda não chegou meu tempo de mulher
 o tempo que chegou
 é lento como um sangue
 que regula agora as luas
 para mim
 de vinte oito em vinte e oito dias.¹⁵

Then, it is Magyar's voice that it is heard, first when he asks the King for Ozoro's hand and, later in the poem, when addressing himself to the princess, he expresses his will to share his life with her:

Segundo momento

Voz de Magyar:

Senhor:

Atravessei o mar de dentro e numa pequena barçaça
 descí de Vardar para Salónica, durante a batalha das
 sombras. De todas as montanhas, a que conheço expõe um
 ventre de neve permanente e uma pele gretada pelo frio.

Nasci perto do Tisza Negro, junto à nascente.

Naveguei um oceano inteiro no interior de um navio
 habitado de fantasmas e outros seres de todas as cores com
 as mesmas grilhetas. Como eles mastiguei devagarinho a
 condição humana e provei o sangue o suor e as lágrimas do

desespero. São amargos, senhor, são amargos e nem sempre servem a condição maior da nossa sede. Vivi durante muitos meses o sono gelado da solidão.

Senhor

Eu trago um pouco de vinho sonolento do interior da terra e a estratégia de uma partida húngara, levo o bispo por um caminho directo até à casa do rei, senhor. Por isso aqui estou e me apresento, meu nome igual ao nome de meu povo, Magyar, os das viagens, Magyar, o dos ciganos.

Senhor

Eu trouxe meus cavalos e vos ofereço minha ciência de trigo, em troca peço guias dos caminhos novos, alimento para as caravanas, licença para o Ochilimbo e a mão de Ozoro a mais-que-perfeita.

Senhor, deixai que ela me cure da febre e da dor que trago da montanha para lá dos Cárpatos.

Senhor, deixai que ela me ensine a ser da terra.

[...]

Fala de Ladislau Magyar, o estrangeiro:

Amada, deixai que prepare o melhor vinho e os
[tecidos

e que, por casamento, me inicie
nas falas de uma terra que não conheço
no gosto de um corpo
que principio

Amada, há em mim um fogo limpo
para ofertar
e o que espero é a partilha
para podermos limpar os dois o ninho
para podermos criar os dois o ninho.¹⁶

There are a few other voices, including different choruses, but it is the voice of Ozoro's mother that is probably the most relevant. Unlike the King, the mother does not show any concern about the riches Magyar has given them. Therefore, to some extent, she "stands as the figure of dispossession in [this] patriarchal culture, but also the figure of language and articulation."¹⁷ She delegates her knowledge, in the shape of an animal fable, to her daughter. The fable teaches a woman to take good care of her children and of her place, so she can actually deserve them. It is a

lesson about domesticity and the role a woman should hold in that society. Thus, the mother may be social and materialistically dispossessed, but she owns the power of language that she passes on to her daughter in secrecy. By paying attention to the way the tale is written, it is noticeable that the size of the letters is much smaller than the rest of the poem, as if to indicate that the fable was told by whispering. Actually, the whispering may stand for the "silenced female talk" or "unheard mother-daughter language":¹⁸

Fala da mãe de Ozoro:

Fui a favorita, antes do tempo me ter comido por dentro. Semeei de filhos este chão do Bié.

Para ti, Ozoro, encomendei os panos e fiz, eu mesma, os cestos, as esteiras. Percorri os caminhos da missão. Encontrei as palavras para perceber a tua nova língua e os costumes. Com as caravanas aprendi os segredos do mar e as histórias. Deixo-te a mais antiga.

História do pássaro Epanda e do ganso Onjava

Há muito muito tempo estas duas aves decidiram juntar forças e fazer o ninho em conjunto. Onjava era um animal muito limpo e lavava e cuidava dos seus ovos e da sua parte do ninho. Quando nasceram os filhos, os pequenos de Epanda estavam sempre muito sujos e feios, enquanto os de Ondjava deixavam que o sol multiplicasse de brilho as suas penas. Um dia, Epanda raptou e escondeu os filhos limpos de Ondjava quando esta se afastara em busca de comida. Ondjava chorou muito e, enquanto recorria ao juiz para resolver o caso, cuidou dos outros filhos, lavou o ninho todo e armazenou comida para o cacimbo. Um dia os filhos limpos de Ondjava voltaram e o juiz determinou pertencerem a esta ave, ninho, filhos e ovos, porque só merece o ligar quem dele cuida, quem o sabe trabalhar.

Coro:

SÓ MERECE O LUGAR QUEM O SABE TRABALHAR
SÓ É DONO DO LUGAR AQUELE QUE O PODE
LIMPAR.¹⁹

Just as the King, Ozoro's mother advises her to live her life according to their society's expectations. But, because she is a dispossessed figure, the advice and the moral of the story can only be heard publicly through the chorus, unlike the King who expressed himself directly. This is demonstrated again by the use of capital letters in the chorus' intervention, thus indicating the power of public speech, as opposed to the private speech owned by Ozoro's mother. Moreover, the capital letters may also

stand for a closer proximity between the sounds of the words and their writing, that is, for a stronger commitment between orality and writing. In the end, Ozoro's speech exemplifies this union as half of it is written in the conventional way of writing,²⁰ and the other half is entirely written in capital letters:

Última fala de Ozoro antes da viagem:

Amar é como a vida

Amar é como a chama do lugar

QUE SE CONSOME ENQUANTO SE ILUMINA
POR DENTRO DA NOITE.²¹

So, Ozoro stands for a new kind of language or discourse, just as her mother had expressed before when she told her daughter she had found the words to understand her new language. But, above all, Ozoro, unlike her mother, expresses herself publicly. Although she reveals her acceptance of her parents' advice, she claims more from life than what they taught her; she wants love in her life. Indeed, Ozoro may stand for an African "sheroe" for having broken the silence of the subaltern woman against patriarchal decisions.

In addition, the whole poem consists of an alternation between stanzas with free verse and short narrative texts, though not presenting a very strict obedience to the rules of punctuation. This formal aspect of the poem is a sign of its hybrid nature, not only in terms of literary written genres, but also of making use of both forms, oral and written. In a way, the poet challenges the rules of writing by including oral elements, thus creating a different poetic language. In fact, the speeches of all the characters, but especially those of the chorus, are full of repetitions and anaphoric constructions very much following the tradition of songs and chants. The alternation of the literary genres mentioned above might indeed mark the rhythm and the movement that a performance would have.

Similarly, the poet Maria Olinda Beja (São Tomé and Príncipe) writes also in Portuguese, but unlike Paula Tavares, this poet includes, apart from single words in her poetry, entire Creole expressions, from the "Folo" Creole spoken in São Tomé, as well as from the local Portuguese.²² Here are some examples, which actually in some poems function as titles, refrains, or epilogues: "Plamá Biliza" ("It is morning"), "Kidalê...ô!" ("Help!"), "Págá Dêvê" (from Portuguese "Pagar um dever" or "To pay a debt") and "Lemblá cu plamá sa uê" ("Remember that the morning comes first");

Plamá Biliza

Amanhece na orla da Praia Gamboa
e amanhece também no ventre
da lua-cheia.

Ana de Chaves espreita a cidade em letargia
e derrama os seios lacrimais
na baía que aceita os seus queixumes ...

“Plamá Biliza ... plamá biliza... plamá biliza... ê”

E já Rio do Ouro percorre ciumento a estrada sinuosa
da Boa Esperança
traz no seu leito os perfumes da manhã
e é ele que canta o destino e a força da rota do sol
nas ilhas do celêlê...

“Plamá Biliza... plamá biliza... plamá biliza... ê”²³

Boca do Inferno

Falésias da ilha
abruptas sobre o mar.

...

São dúvidas de cais nos trilhos das roças
São sombras de navios de costas para a praia

Kidálê...ô! Kidalê...ô!

Onda engoliu e peito do gandú
onda rasgou o vestido da lagaia
onda rumorejou no farol da nossa imensidão
arquipelágica

Kidálê...ô! Kidalê...ô!²⁴

Págá Dêvê

Mamã mandou págá dêvê

"Quê?

Minha filha já sabe que na Praia das Conchas
Vai sonhar sua vida."

Mamã esperou que o sorriso da lua segredasse a Piadô

A história dos frutos dos rios das gentes

"Lemblá cu plamá as uê"

Mamã falou assim

falou e gravou a coragem no peito

fundo

muito fundo.²⁵

The single words referred to in the whole of this poet's work are related to the fauna and flora: "gandu" (a shark), "lagaia" (a kind of fox), "ôbô, óbó" (the forest), "quitixibá" (a type of banana); to names of places: ("Batepá"), rivers ("Malanza", "Caué"), people ("Madábli", "Simoa"); and costumes of the islands: "D'jógó" (a typical dish). There is also a rocking song in one poem under the title "Canção de embalar":

Vem de novo avó Custódia
cantar e embalar meu sono
na varanda de madeira
no meio de Batepá.

o mato inteiro há-de ouvir
tua canção de embalar
cantada por essa voz
de avó encantada e meiga:

"ôôô mamã b'auá d'izê ê
ôôô papa b'auá xtlôcô ê
ôôô letê bô sá fogo ê
ôôô... êêê..."²⁶

Moreover, a local proverb functions as the epigraph of a part of the collection *No País do Tchilóli* entitled "As gentes": "Nós somos pobres / por sermos ricos demais."²⁷

In São Tomé and Príncipe, the proverbs, sayings and riddles are part of the "véssu," a rich archive of ethic and moral values.²⁸ According to the poet, in São Tomé and Príncipe, people are constantly using a proverb, whatever the occasion is.²⁹ Moreover, it should be mentioned that the title of the collection that has just been referred to, *No País do Tchilóli*, refers to the name of a theatrical show, *Tchilóli*, that belongs to the oral literature

and popular culture of these islands, constituting an example of the afro-portuguese acculturation.³⁰ It is based on the play *A Tragédia do Marquês de Mântua e do Imperador Carloto Magno*, by Baltasar Dias,³¹ which also includes a performance of dance, music and masks. Moreover, the poet describes this show in a poem with the same name, "Tchilóli," where she states that Tchilóli is "um modo de vida,"³² just as oral traditions are.

In other poems, such as "Tijuka e Sum Galo," "Entardecer na roça," "Quem?" and "Histórias," there are clear references to the act of storytelling. The more explicit references are the Portuguese words used for stories, "histórias" and "estórias."

Tijuka e Sum Galo

[...]

Tu sabes meu povo
essa história antiga
de Sum Galo esperando
na floresta cerrada
Tijuka voltando da lida do mato?

[...] ³³

Entardecer na roça

Os cheiros do mato
o vôo cadenciado das aves noturnas
o manto estelar do Equador e até as assombrações
que vão deslizando
nas estórias de San Marinha...

(Estória de velho contratado que ficou de braços floridos nos ramos da jaqueira...)

estória... sempre estória...

[...] ³⁴

Quem?

Vem cá meu negro

vem junto a mim! eu quero ouvir-te
 contar histórias que só tu sabes
 conta-me tudo sobre esta terra
 sobre este mar
 conta-me tudo... eu quero ouvir-te

[...] ³⁵

Histórias

No remanso da tarde
 na hora que passa
 como é bom ouvir Tio Josué contar histórias
 histórias de outros tempos que eu nunca conheci
 (nem ele sequer)
 histórias guardadas no sótão das relíquias infantis
 Tio Josué nunca se cansa
 de enfrentar o desfile das palavras
 que heróicamente vai soltando
 dos lábios grossos e carnudos:

[...] ³⁶

However, the most used term in the islands is "sóias" (a term with Portuguese origin), which may be found in the sole long narrative poem, probably the most representative with respect to the subject under study, of the collection *Pingos de Chuva*.³⁷ These "sóias" are usually narrated, but many times they are sung and they have an important social function as they are a reason for socialising, for example, at night with the family assembled in the "quinté," a large back yard, usually listening to a grandmother; or in the "nozado," a ritual ceremony after eight days of a person's death, where there are story-tellers with the function of entertaining the relatives of the dead person by telling "sóias."³⁸ All these traditions are mentioned in the narrative poem when the protagonist, "Pondô Pingo-de-Chuva," a cloud symbolising a black woman, is recalling her relatives, especially one, "Corisco velho," who used to be a "sóia" teller in the "quinté" or in the "nozado":

Tenho também uns familiares escondidos
 lá para os lados de Monte Mário
 os Coriscos
 envergonhados que só eles
 caçando porco do mato em noites primitivas

e espalhando terror e pânico quando alguém os provoca.

Nos tempos mais obscuros da ilha
 em que só a Estrela do Norte assoreava
 os desejos do misterioso Rio do Ouro
 Corisco Velho encheu de camarão e peixes sedosos
 todos os cursos de água
 que mãe Yemanjá espalhou na terra sagrada
 dos falcões e dos papagaios.
 Quando a calmaria inundava
 o regaço dos embondeiros redondos e sóbrios ou os "quintés"
 em noites de "nozados"
 ele próprio se transformava de mágico errante
 em perfeito contador de "sóias."
 Dava gosto ouvi-lo petrificado
 na espuma das calemas
 rodeado de milhões de algas cintilantes
 que de ouvido à escuta compunham o real assento
 feito no tronco brilhante do sape-sapeiro.³⁹

After recalling this, Pondô follows with the telling of a "sóia," just as her relative would do. The story is about two snakes, the black snake and her cousin "gita" and how the latter deceived the former in order to replace her skin with the other snake's skin, so "gita" could stop being so lethal.⁴⁰

This is, then, a story within another story, the story of "Pondô Pingo-de-Chuva" or "Pondô Mulher-Nuvem-de-Algodão," whose voice predominates from beginning to end, from birth as a cloud, to another birth as rain falling on earth. Pondô's "voice as realising agency remains absolutely dominant,"⁴¹ as she is both narrator and subject of the story she is telling:

Chamaram-me Pondô Pingo-de-Chuva
 pois nasci precisamente nesse alvorecer de gotas
 fantasmagóricas
 que projectam as sombras inconscientes da retrospectiva
 periférica da luz e da água.
 Simultaneamente mulher e nuvem
 caminho e caminhada
 berço incógnito de luas benfazejas que as mãos de San Mujica
 inundaram de ternura
 o meu rosto cor de ébano já faz gritar as crianças no Riboque
 "Hoje vem chuva... olha a nuvem tão carregada..."⁴²

She does not reflect the victimised image of the African woman, and neither does Ozoro, the princess who expressed her disapproval of the patriarchal decision. Hence, it is through the voice of Pondô, who calls herself our counsellor, that readers learn a combination of historical and mythical episodes, including not only characters from São Tomé and Príncipe, but also from different countries:

Nasci da terra sonâmbula
para vos despertar das marés conturbadas da História... Eu sou
vossa conselheira!⁴³

For example, there are references to such historical characters as "Amador," "Simão Andreza," "Yon Gato," "Rainha Ginga Mbandi"; while mythical references include "Semíramis or Semiramis," "Yemanjá" and "Neptuno."⁴⁴ In this story, the mythical queen Semiramis was made into an African legend. She inherited her fecundity from Pondô's mother, and with this she fulfilled the cycle of water and life—so longed for by her father—a virile old African man called "Sum Amauri":

Do ventre de mãe Semiramis herdei a abundância e a
fertilidade
para irrigar as pétalas eróticas da densa floresta africana.

Finally, and similarly to Paula Tavares' poem about Ozoro, this poem is an example of a poetic tale or a narrative poem with a varied length of stanzas with free verse and sometimes utilizing few punctuation marks. Some more prosaic sections of text are intercalated in some parts, thus creating, as was before mentioned, a kind of choreographic rhythm, a dancing-like movement from one genre to the other. In the preface of the book, *Pingos de Chuva*, Luciano Caetano da Rosa classifies this poem as an African "Märchen" (a new African genre), therefore confirming the suppression of the border between the genres.⁴⁵ This suggestion of rhythm linked to music and dancing is not the only sign of a possible performance. Once again, in the preface, Luciano da Rosa describes the poem as having the structure of a symphony divided in three substantial movements, which, in this context, are chapters ("Primeiros Pingos," "Chuva" and "Aguaceiro").

To conclude, the primary intention of this study was to show how the oral traditions that these poets keep in their memories and recreate in their writing enable them to be agents of a different poetics. However different the poets and the poems studied, they share the idea of commitment or sharing between orality and writing. These poets are well aware of the changes that their cultures experienced. Therefore they are celebrating them as they are now, hybrid, heterogeneous and plural, like most of the

African cultures, to which the variety of languages contributes. In the case of Lusophone Africa, the Portuguese language, the Creoles of São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, and all the African languages, like the Kuanyama in Angola and the Ronga in Mozambique, constitute this cultural plurality that cannot be denied. So, the fact that these poets write predominantly in Portuguese does not prevent them from contributing to the literary itinerary of their African cultures, or reflecting in their writing both their communities' and their own specific identities.

Notes

1. I wish to express my gratitude to Praxis XXI Program for its financial support.
2. See Albertino Bragança, "Tradição Oral : Memória Colectiva e Literatura," in *Panorama, Novas Literaturas Africanas de Língua Portuguesa*. Congresso Internacional p. 164.
3. See Isidore Okpewho. *African Oral Literature, Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. p. 16.
4. Maria Olinda Beja was born in the islands of S. Tomé and Príncipe, in 1946. She has published the following poetry collections: *Bô Tendê?* Aveiro: Câmara Municipal de Aveiro, 1992; *Leve, Leve*. Aveiro: Câmara Municipal de Aveiro, 1993; *No País do Tchilóli*. Aveiro: Câmara Municipal de Aveiro, 1996 and *Pingos de Chuva*, Viseu: Palimage Editores, 1999. Paula Tavares was born in the region of Huíla, in the south of Angola, in 1952. She has published the following poetry collections: *Ritos de Passagem*. Luanda: União dos Escritores Angolanos, 1985 and *O Lago da Lua*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1999.
5. Carole Boyce Davies. *Black Women Writing and Identity - Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, 1994. 163.
6. Paula Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1999. 10.
7. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 22.
8. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 27.
9. Tavares. *Ritos de Passagem*. 5.
10. See <<http://www.chokwe.com/mask%20categories.htm>>.
11. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 25.
12. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 47-55.
13. See *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. C1050.
14. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 47-48.
15. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 48.
16. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 49-50, 54.
17. Davies 163.
18. Davies 162.
19. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 53.

20. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 55.
21. Tavares. *O Lago da Lua*. 55.
22. Folo is the Creole orthography for the Portuguese word "Forro."
23. Beja. *No País do Tchilóli*. 36.
24. Beja *No País do Tchilóli*. 38.
25. Beja *No País do Tchilóli*. 93.
26. Beja *No País do Tchilóli*. 92.
27. Beja *No País do Tchilóli*. 48.
28. See Fernanda Pontífice, "A literatura como expressão popular: a força da oralidade" in *Panorama, Novas Literaturas Africanas de Língua Portuguesa, Congresso Internacional*. 176.
29. Maria Olinda Beja, Personal Interview. 7 January 2000.
30. Caroline Shaw, "Oral Literature and Popular Culture in Cape Verde and in São Tomé and Príncipe" in *The Postcolonial Literature in Lusophone Africa*. London: Hurst & Company, 1996. 266-67.
31. Sixteenth-century playwright from Madeira.
32. Beja. *No País do Tchilóli*. 57.
33. Beja. *No País do Tchilóli*. 53.
34. Beja. *No País do Tchilóli*. 54.
35. Beja. *Bô Tendê?*. 48.
36. Beja. *Leve, Leve*. 74-75.
37. Beja. *Pingos de Chuva*. 53.
38. See Pontífice. 175-76.
39. Beja. *Pingos de Chuva*. 53.
40. Beja. *Pingos de Chuva*. 54. According to the poet, this story was not told to her by a traditional "sóia" teller, but by a young taxi driver of the islands who had learned it from his grandfather (in Maria Olinda Beja, Personal Interview, 7 January, 2000).
41. Abiola Irele. "The African Imagination." *Research in African Literatures*. Spring 1990: 58, cited in Ana Mafalda Leite, *Oralidades & Escritas nas Literaturas Africanas* Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1998. 29.
42. Beja. *Pingos de Chuva*. 31.
43. Beja. *Pingos de Chuva*. 36.
44. Amador was a national symbol, a slave and a warrior of the XVI century who led a rebellion of Angolares against the Portuguese colonialists; he was arrested and hanged in 1596; Simão Andreza was the last king of the Angolares and one of the archetypes of the collective memory of the people of São Tomé and Príncipe; Yon Gato was a blind enslaved man that in 1530 led a rebellion against the Portuguese colonialists; Rainha Ginga Mbandi was a historical character from Angola, XVI century; Semiramis was the Syrian queen who founded the Babylon Gardens; Yemanjá is the African goddess of the water, very much honoured in Brazil; and Neptune, in classical mythology, he is the Roman god of the sea.
45. Luciano Caetano da Rosa. Preface. *Pingos de Chuva*. 16.

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