

# BANTU SPIRITUALISM IN “O CESTO DE ADIVINHAÇÃO” BY ANA PAULA TAVARES

## O ESPIRITUALISMO BANTU EM “O CESTO DE ADIVINHAÇÃO” DE ANA PAULA TAVARES

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyses some of the linguistic and literary strategies used by Ana Paula Tavares<sup>2</sup> to describe the spiritual discourse of Bantu derivation in the chronicle (*crônica*) “O cesto de adivinhação”, taken from the book *A cabeça de Salomé* (2004)<sup>3</sup>. I will argue that, in this text, Tavares expresses the importance of spiritualism through the use of culture-bound terms, as well as the deployment of stylistic strategies, in order to redefine the Angolan identity. The result of such literary creativity, matched with a deep historical and ethnographic investigation of the Bantu populations represented in her fictional work, supports the recreation of the Angolan identity that puts a great emphasis on aspects such as rituals, ancestral characters, and key figures that represent the culture of the native societies of the country. The aim is to discuss the ideological tensions and contradictions existing in Angola, as well as to inform and inspire a different perspective towards its multicultural society, through the words of the above author.

KEYWORDS: Ana Paula Tavares; Angolan Literature; Bantu Spiritualism.

### RESUMO

O presente artigo pretende analisar as estratégias linguísticas e literárias utilizadas por Ana Paula Tavares para descrever o espiritualismo de origem bantu na crônica “O cesto de adivinhação”, que faz parte da coletânea *A cabeça de Salomé* (2004). Pretende-se demonstrar que, no texto mencionado, Tavares discute sobre a importância do espiritualismo como parte de um processo de formação identitária do país angolano, através de termos

e de certas expressões literárias específicas. A criatividade literária da autora, enriquecida por uma investigação histórica e etnográfica das populações bantu representadas na própria obra ficcional, suporta a criação de uma identidade angolana que enfatiza a importância dos rituais, das personagens ancestrais e das personalidades que representam a cultura das sociedades nativas do país. O objetivo é discutir as tensões ideológicas e as contradições que existem em Angola, além de informar e encorajar uma perspectiva diferente perante a sociedade multicultural angolana, analisando a escrita da autora.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Ana Paula Tavares; literatura angolana; espiritualismo bantu.

The works of Ana Paula Tavares can be considered as a point of reference in contemporary Angolan literature for the literary creativity of poetic inspiration, as well as the shift from Luanda to the geographical periphery of Angola, by giving voice to the various Bantu ethnicities, who deserve to be rediscovered and appreciated as part of the multifaceted Angolan identity. With this regards, Secco (2016, p. 85) reminds us that Tavares grew up in a Portuguese environment, but also learnt the local cultures of Angola, which constantly appear in her literary production. In fact, Ana Paula uses a language that evokes the ancestral memories transmitted by the eldest and re-invented in a way that combines tradition and modernity (SECCO, 2016, p. 85), hence creating multiple levels of interpretations of the Portuguese written text, as we will see later.

Due to her wide poetic production, Tavares is mostly known for her poems, but also her fictions deserve our attention, considering that her *crônicas* (chronicles) are a combination of ethnologic and anthropological essays, mixed with the imagination of the fictional writing, permeated with the symbolic language of the poetry, hence creating a peculiar kind of narrative that talks about Angola and its people. The thematic variety portrayed in her chronicles can be seen as a reflection of the diversity of the author's world, as a result of an extensive knowledge acquired through experience and academic studies, hence representing the personal learning process, rather than a 'repository of knowledge' (CHAVES, 2000, p. 160). In addition, Chaves stresses the importance of the sensibility of the reader who needs to understand the ability of the author in giving uniformity to the multiplicity of perspectives within these *crônicas*, despite the apparent fragmentation of the images portrayed.

Because of the importance of the local traditions in Tavares's works, as well as the wide range of interpretations given to the reader through a language that includes terms and concepts describing these traditions, the focus of this article will be a close reading<sup>4</sup> of "O cesto de adivinhação" (the divination basket), a chronicle that puts an emphasis on

the spiritual practices among the Tshokwe, a Bantu ethnicity living in the North-Eastern region of Angola, implicitly referred in this work. In detail, this *crônica* discusses the importance of the divination basket, the figure of the *tahi*, the fortune-teller who administers this sacred instrument, and the ritual of circumcision, or *mukanda*. This work can be seen as a descriptive text that re-elaborates the divination process, besides giving an idea about the holistic vision of the world ruled by internal relations of interactions that put each participant (humans, spirits and objects) in an intelligible hierarchical structure that can only be understood through faith and communication. In Tavares's work, words and figures are vital for the sake of the divination process, not only for the believers, but also for those who are not familiar with the secret messages coming from the afterlife.

### CESTO DE ADIVINHAÇÃO

This *crônica* starts with the definition of the divination basket named as *pequeno labirinto organizado*, a small organised maze. The mysterious concept of the maze here gains a connotation of logically structured object of divination, where the latent meanings hidden behind this object have a rigorous order in the interpretation of the future. Thus, the apparent complexity of the maze from the viewpoint of a non-Tshokwe observer is governed by an abstract system that makes *o cesto de adivinhação* a logical means of interpretation of the truth for the native people from North-East Angola. The idea of a labyrinth acquires, then, two perspectives: from a foreign angle, if the story is read by a foreigner or even by a Portuguese-speaking person from outside Angola, the maze is a place where rationality gets lost in a metaphysical journey towards the truth, the interpretation of the world and the future that the basket is meant to predict. From the point of view of the Tshokwe, instead, the divination object can be seen as a distant place, accessible only by experienced people who are able to reveal the truth through a rigorous spiritual and mental process of decoding the prophetic language inside the basket.

After giving that short definition, the author explains that the basket “É feito por mãos treinadas pelo tempo, a partir do entrelaçamento miúdo de entrecasca de árvore e outras fibras vegetais, colhidas em especiais manhãs de cacimbo, quando o dia ainda dorme seu pequeno sono no colo da terra” (TAVARES, 2004, p. 33). The accuracy and extreme attention to detail expressed in these lines emphasise the sacredness of the divination basket, which is made by experienced people who interlock sapwood with vegetal fibres. In here, the adjective *treinadas* highlights the ability required to create such object; *miúdo* indicates the precision to craft the object; *especiais*, instead, refers to the meticulous selection of the right materials to pick on a certain time of the day. From the very beginning (*a partir do*), the act of basketmaking is a sacred ritual, during which nothing can be overlooked.

Turning to the time when the raw material is collected, the author refers to the morning dawn during the *cacimbo* season, a dry time of the year characterised by misty atmosphere in certain times of the day, describing the typical climate of the Angolan weather. Basketmakers wake up earlier than anyone else to gather the material they need, as the author says that the morning 'is still sleeping', like a child would do on the bosom of (Mother) Earth. The humanisation of the day here is given by the adjective *pequeno* referring to the sleep, the sweet time of the day when the world around the basketmaker is resting.

The following paragraph explains what happens to the basket once it is ready: "Depois de pronto, fica a envelhecer, enquanto se vai enchendo de objectos que o povoam, estabelecendo, entre si, relações de entendimento e todos com o espaço que os contém" (TAVARES, 2004, p. 33). Once it is ready, the basket is filled with different items, or *tupele* (BASTIN, 1999, p. 40) who 'inhabit' it as if they are living beings populating a sacred house. These objects are not just pieces of wood, due to the spiritual value they gain once they are made. In fact, the general meaning of the divination depends on the combination of those *tupele* who create a specific net of connections with the invisible world and interact like animated entities who 'talk' with each other, communicate a hidden message that is not visible by everyone.

In addition, the animated side of these sacred objects is reinforced in the following extract: "Desde figurinhas roubadas ao coração de certas madeiras preciosas, no momento de distração dos espíritos que as habitam" (TAVARES, 2004, p. 33). As we can figure out from the analysis of the text, the preposition *desde* tells us that the spiritual message is innate within these figurines, the sacred *tupele* whose inner sacrality is inherited by the trees they are made of. In fact, according to Bastin (1999, p. 22), these trees are called with the generic word of *mutondo*, while the *madeiras preciosas* referred in the above text are likely to be *mukumbi*, *muyombo* and *mulemba*, sacred trees dedicated to the cult of the ancestors (BASTIN, 1999, p. 22).

Generally speaking, the connection with the cult of the ancestors derives from the ritual of foundation of a village. The chief of the clan plants a branch of *mukumbi* to the ground and its growth will mark the birth of a new child within the family (AREIA, 1977, p. 69). Furthermore, this plant is related to the rite of initiation of the *tahi* who makes a small fork to show the head of the cock sacrificed in so-called "night of initiation", when he is possessed by the *Ngombo* spirit (AREIA, 1977, p. 70). As well as the *mukumbi*, also *mulemba* or *musuwa* is considered the main plant dedicated to the cult of the ancestors. Its wood is, in fact, used to make the *kalamba kuku* (AREIA, 1973, p. 70), the figurine of a person whose elbows touch the knees as if he is thinking. The function of this symbol is to discover the origins of an infirmity inherited from an ancestor (AREIA, 1973, p. 41-42), or other aspects related to the progenitors of the clan (AREIA, 1973, p. 42-43).

Turning to Tavares's *crônica*, the narration continues with the description of the *tupele* in terms of accuracy like a surgical precision, hence anticipating another aspect of the Tshokwe spiritual practices: "Esculpidas com os mesmos instrumentos de precisão com que os cirurgiões trabalham, por exemplo, nos recintos sagrados da circuncisão" (TAVARES, 2004, p. 33). Not only is the basket made with meticulous care, but also the figurines are. According to the Tshokwe culture, the people in charge of the making of the *tupele* are called *songi*, a word coming from the verb *kusonga*, meaning to carve (BASTIN, 1999, p. 22), and the tools used for making sculptures are diverse, according to the precision required for carving a figurine: *kasau* (hatchet), *seso* (adze), *poko* (knife) and *shinzo* (chisel) (BASTIN, p. 23-24). Their work is sacred and comes from spiritual inspiration; when a *songi* needs to make a ritual sculpture, he hides in the forest to avoid being seen by the women of the village (BASTIN, p. 23-24), hence the mention of the sacred precinct dedicated to the practise of the circumcision in the above text. As we read through the references to this rite of passage, more details are given; in fact, Ana Paula reminds us the ancestral origins of such Bantu tradition that is a focal point in the education of the young adults for their integration in their society:

A escola da mukanda, o espaço onde tem lugar, resguardado da vista dos profanos, reproduz esse espaço circular, afastado dos donos do vento, onde deve reinar a tranquilidade das folhas, e onde tudo está decidido desde um antes inicial princípio e memória de um tempo do mundo habitado por um único homem que, em busca desesperada da sua reprodução, se fechou a si próprio no primeiro cesto e se autocircuncisou (TAVARES, 2004, p. 34).

The ritual of circumcision, or *mukanda*, is a vital part in the life of the Tshokwe. The association of this practice to the idea of knowledge given by the term *escola* is justified by the fact that young boys learn everything is needed to become men and active part of the clan after a long educative process (no author provided, 2013, p. 40). The origins of such millenarian tradition is conductible to the figure of *Safandenda* (BASTIN, 1999, p. 57), the Lunda ancestor who first practised the circumcision as described in Tavares's story. The camp used for the ritual has a portico representing this *mahamba* spirit made of two stakes and a wooden beam, decorated with *malangala* wicker (BASTIN, 1999, p. 57). The rite itself is carried in a close, secret space, whose shape recalls the divination basket. It is circular and protected, far from the interference of external factors that might disturb the execution of the operation, a sort of sacred hospital ward, to connect this paragraph to the previous through the word *cirurgiões*, the surgeons, or *nganga mukanda*, according to Bastin (1999, p. 56). Thus, the people involved in the circumcision, their tools and movements can be seen as a physical representation of the *ngombo*, where the participants are the *tupele* previously mentioned.



As Tavares's text says, the precinct for the circumcision is repaired from the wind; there, the leaves have to be left in peace, away from any disturbance. This statement might recall Bastin's description of the so-called *cisangu* medicine, a remedy made of the plant used for the circumcision. With these regards, a Tshokwe saying states "*Yitumbo ya cisungu mafwo waze akwiza nyi fundji maholoka um cihunda*", meaning: "leaves brought by the wind, will fall on the village" (BASTIN, 1999, p. 70). According to the procedure, both the circumciser and the initiated go to the village seeking for the *cisangu* leaves and then go to the *cifwa* (the precinct for the circumcision) and quickly make a medicine out of it to be used for the ritual. This means that, after the fast ritualistic search for the remedy, the leaves of *cisangu* need to make their effect in complete peace in order to perform the ritual correctly.

In addition to the above, the image of the wind as a perturbation against the sacrality of the Tshokwe divination is later re-evoked in this short story: "Todas as figurinhas estão deitadas e tapadas, para que os espíritos do vento forte não perturbem a sua concentração" (TAVARES, 2004, p. 35). Once again, the sacred space of the *ngombo* needs to be safe for the figurines contained. According to the Tshokwe culture, the basket is composed of a smaller one called *kasanda*, which is the actual means of divination, and a bigger basket, or *cikulimba*, meant to transport the *kasanda* along with its *tupele*. That is why Tavares's figurines are *tapadas*. In this extract, the wind might also refer to the negative spirits that Wastiau calls as (*ma*)*hamba apeho* (2010, no page provided). Even though the term *mahamba* recalls the spirits of the ancestors, in Wastiau's text these entities are alien causes of illness floating in the air, linked to historical figures or events occurring during colonisation. These external factors polluting the sacred message of the divinatory process need to be isolated as they are likely to compromise the whole ritual, hence the need of a lid to cover the *ngombo*. Both in the case of the *mukanda* precinct and basket, the profane influence coming from outside is seen as a danger to be prevented in order to avoid the failure of the communication with the ancestors and the immaterial world as a whole.

## TAHI

After having analysed all the implicit spiritual references of the divination basket and its resemblance with the precinct for the circumcision ritual, two pivotal figures in Tshokwe culture, Tavares gradually introduces the figure of the diviner:

Tudo isto se adivinha na voz pousada dos actuais mestres de adivinhação. São eles que reproduzem, no *ngombo* ou cesto de adivinhação, objecto de que nunca se separam, sob risco de assistirem à separação do corpo e do espírito, essa geografia solene dos espaços aprisionados e obedientes às ordens de quem as sabe dizer (TAVARES, 2004, p. 34).

In this paragraph, the key figure for the interpretation of the mysterious messages of the divination basket is called *mestre de adivinhação*, a generic title of Portuguese diction to define the divination master. The informative purpose of the author, consisting on introducing a concept that belongs to the Tshokwe tradition, is further supported by the explication of the function of such topical role in the communication with the spirits of the ancestors. In fact, the text continues by stating that the diviner is the one who is able to recreate the immanent world ruled by obedient rules of interaction through the *ngombo*, also named with *cesto de adivinhação* – for the same informative purpose this object is semantically linked to the *mestre* through the substantive *adivinhação*, so that the reader can understand the relationship between the diviner and his tool of divination. In addition to this, the concept of apparent complexity of the basket is once again rephrased as a geography following the orders of whom knows its interpretation.

The linguistic choice of certain terms in favour of others is covertly expressed in Tavares's *crônicas*; their selection or replacement are a constant part of a thoughtful process of literary creation, where the terms adopted and their etymological meanings have several reasons to be in a specific text, within a specific context. Like Miranda highlights in her study (2010, p. 56), Ana Paula clearly speaks of this task of word-selection in "Utopias": "Palavras esquecidas e mal usadas, tornam-se, de repente e por intervenção do poeta, no alimento indispensável, na água da vida, o pão e a dor necessários a um dia a dia que não se pode dispensar" (TAVARES, 1998, p. 49). Myths or local rituals have a broad range of specific culture-bound words that define them. Their use enable the literary and ideological reconnection to the origins of the author, as well as the origins of her people, for their ancestral link with a past that has been lost forever, but urgently needs to be re-evoked (MIRANDA, 2010, p. 56) in order to re-discover their identity, both individually and as part of a wider community. As we can read in the citation, sometimes, these words can be misused by a writer, hence causing a misinterpretation in the reader who may stumble across a concept of difficult interpretation. Thus, the role of the writer may be understood as the ability to guide their readers through the correct understanding of the messages they wish to convey.

Another consideration we may make out of this paragraph is the transcendental vision of the universe according to the Tshokwe and the Bantu peoples in general. The first sentence, in fact, summarises the function of the diviner and the power of his words translating the message of the invisible world. Subsequently, the paragraph describes the action of the diviner as it is seen by an external viewer and the object used for his practise. After the explicit link between body and spirit mentioned in the text, the author concludes the paragraph by shifting the action of the diviner to the purely spiritual dimension, a sacred geography established in the afterworld. The diagram below clarifies the physical passage from the world of the dead to the world of the living and vice-versa:

Table 1: Spiritual and material dimensions in discourse

Text	Function	Dimension
Tudo isto se adivinha na voz pousada dos actuais mestres de adivinhação.	Summarise the figure of the <i>tahi</i> and his relation to the spiritual world.	<b>From spiritual to material.</b> <i>Tudo isto</i> refers to the message of the spirits, and the <i>tahi</i> transforms it into words, something almost tangible considering sounds vanish after being emitted.
São eles que reproduzem, no ngombo ou cesto de adivinhação, objecto de que nunca se separam,	Describe what the <i>tahi</i> does and what his tool is.	<b>Material.</b> <i>Reproduzem</i> means to reproduce, to replicate physically. <i>Objecto</i> is another word describing the material dimension.
sob risco de assistirem à separação do corpo e do espírito,	Explain that the <i>ngombo</i> is part of the <i>tahi's</i> life as a diviner.	<b>From material to spiritual.</b> <i>Corpo</i> (body) and <i>espírito</i> (spirit, soul) are indissoluble, that is why their separation is seen as a risk.
essa geografia solene dos espaços aprisionados e obedientes às ordens de quem as sabe dizer	Define the content of the message to be delivered by the <i>tahi</i> .	<b>Spiritual.</b> The contents of the <i>ngombo</i> are a mere reflection of the invisible world. The basket is just a container where the spiritual geography of the afterlife is restrained ( <i>geografia solene dos espaços aprisionados</i> ), controlled by the orders coming from the afterlife.

At first glance, the relative clause *quem as sabe dizer* seems to refer solely to the diviners, as the paragraph is meant to introduce their figure as previously said. Although, further analysis may suggest that *quem* could also be the spirits, and the reasons are various. To start with, the adjective *solene* can allude, in first instance, to the divination as a ritual but also to the concept of extraordinary, something above humanity, spiritual. Thus, the geography mentioned in the text is not physical, but sacred. These geographic *espaços* are *aprisionados*, bound to the reproduction of something immanent in the divination basket; as explained in the diagram above, the *tahi* recreates what is invisible to human beings. In addition, these constrained spaces obey to orders; the diviner does not have the power to give them, but to express them with words. In fact, who knows how to say them can be the spirits of the ancestors, the *mahamba*, who speak to the diviner to express their wishes or messages of all sorts.

Finally, the following paragraph defines the role of the diviner who is a medium, a means to establish the communication between the visible and the invisible world. It is true that the *tahi* knows how to say the right words like interpreters do, but he cannot give orders, he just translates them:



São eles os mediadores e donos das linguagens que se trocam entre o mundo dos homens e o outro universo, afastado e tão perto, o reino do nevoeiro onde pairam também, muito atentos, os espíritos protectores do local que convém trazer contentes e em descanso para que os ainda vivos possam amar, caçar e preparar a morte em paz (TAVARES, 2004, p. 34).

The spirits communicating with the diviner through the divination basket are the same as the ones evoked during the ritual of circumcission. According to Clavert (2009, no page provided) the *mukanda* takes place during the cold and dry season, when the air is misty. During this time of the year, the Tshokwe go hunting and prepare the soil for the cultivation. The *cacimbo* mentioned at the beginning of the *crônica* here is replaced by *nevoeiro*, a Portuguese term to describe the peculiarity of the Angolan weather. *O reino*, instead, refers to the *escola da mukanda* previously referred, the place where the ritual occurs and protected by the *mahamba Mukula* and *Samukishi* (BASTIN, 1999, p. 57), the spirits invoked to ensure a propitious hunting and fertility, but maybe also the *tshikunza*, which is, according to Lima's studies (1971) as reported by Areia (1973, p. 37) a daemon, an evil spirit entering the people's bodies, hence the word *morte* mentioned in Tavares's text. The respect to be showed to these spirits is enormous, if men want to have a serene life; thus, the pyramidal structure of the Tshokwe is here clearly expressed: *os ainda vivos* are to the bottom of this hierarchy, the diviners stand in the middle and the spirits are above everyone else. As we can see, the next paragraph tells us more about this: "Os tahi [...] colhem, das árvores onde pairam, as verbalizações necessárias para a organização do mundo, os mecanismos das ordens que as comandam, a hierarquia rigorosa dos sagrados e as suas relações planificadas com o mundo dos profanos" (TAVARES, 2004, p. 34). The apparent confusion of the universe through the eyes of those who do not believe is, in reality, something well-organised, something logically structured by someone who is above us and that needs a special person to understand the rules governing the cosmic order: the diviner, a spiritual figure that has the knowledge to spread the words from the afterlife. As Tavares says:

Não é tahi quem quer, mas quem herdou de um antepassado bondoso ciência e princípio de cesto e que, além disso, aceita submeter-se às sete provas convenientes, a última das quais tem a ver com o conhecimento de cada uma das peças (nome, origem, espírito, função, lugar exacto onde se deita, língua que fala, hora a que se alimenta e como, momento em que deve ser invocada) que habitam o seu cesto, o seu próprio corpo (TAVARES, 2004, p. 34).

Generally speaking, some diviners become so because of their fathers (MBITI, 1999, p. 173), so they inherit the knowledge through generations. But this is not sufficient to practise the divination rituals, as they also need a long training, between three and seven years, during which they will need to learn all the names and meanings of each sign (MBITI, 1999, p.

173). By reading Tavares's *crônica*, we can deduce that the same procedure applies to the *tahi*, who must be able to understand the characteristics of each figurine according to their shape, place where they stand within the basket, the spirit related to it and so on.

In this context, the divination basket, the source of interpretation of signs for the diviner, here becomes the means through which the *tupele* altogether become meaningful, their message is finally complete, ready to become words. Thus, the word *corpo* in the above quotation refers to the materialisation of the spiritual message, the structure of the spiritual discourse composed of smaller units, the figurines, comparable to the organs of the human body. Each part is vital for the general interpretation of the spiritual call from the invisible world: if we take these figurines separately, the meaning will not be the same as if they are grouped within the same basket, like single words taken out of context.

Another element that deserves our attention at this stage is given by the following exert: “O fruto seco de tombe comanda a operação enquanto assume a chefia de todas as peças dentro do cesto. Ao tahi compete descobrir o centro que este fruto vai habitar para poder controlar as outras setenta e quatro peças que constituem os habitantes do seu reino — o cesto de adivinhação” (TAVARES, 2004, p. 34-35). As we can see here, the hierarchical structure of the universe is, once more, expressed by the set of figurines contained within the *ngombo*. As a reflection of the holistic vision of the world, with all its elements, physical, spiritual, animated and unanimated, also the items contained inside the basket can be ordered in terms of power. In fact, the influence exerted by one single piece over the others is a central factor to determine the net of connections among the various elements participating to the divination process.

Also in here, the comparison between the *tupele* and the human beings becomes evident, thanks to the expression *habitantes do reino*, the “kingdom of divination”, whose ruler is represented by *o fruto seco de tombe*. This dry fruit here is described as the commandant of a troop of soldiers whose mission is to deliver the right message to the diviner, as it “leads the operation” by taking the organisational role in the internal hierarchy of the “kingdom of divination”. The ideas of control and order encountered several times across the text are here finally explicated, as this piece, *fruto de tombe*, is the actual fulcrum of the whole narration. And its difficult interpretation, due to very scarce documentation, gives this *tupele* the supreme message of the spirituality of Bantu derivation through language. At present, no academic documentation information has been found so far with regards to this object. Further investigation is, then, required to find the adequate literature regarding this specific form of divination. Although, Areia (1973; 1977) can cast a light in this analysis, thanks to a collection of documents studied for his investigation. According to his studies (AREIA, 1973, p. 90) the *tupele* called *tuhemba* is a set of two figurines with childish semblance; following Santos's findings (1960), Areia (1973, p. 90) tells us

that these statues represent a man and a woman with their reproductive apparatuses developed (the spirit of *kahamba*, in fact, seems to be related to fecundity). These statues can be made of clay or wood and decorated with the so-called *cifuci*, affecting the meaning of the figurines within the basket (AREIA, 1973, p. 91). The fruit mentioned is the actual seed of the climber plant *munzombo* and represents the village, the settlement (1977, p. 17). If the fruit is entire, it means that the place chosen to live is suitable for the clan; otherwise, if it is broken, then the environment is not favourable to settle down (AREIA, 1977, p. 17-18).

After these considerations, we may think that Tavares's *fruto seco* corresponds to the *cifuci* seed, while *tombe* may be the *tuhemba* previously described. And this interpretation can also fit with the rest of the narration if we think about the constant similarities of the *tupele* with the inhabitants of a land, a kingdom. The idea of a fruit as part of the divination process deciding the entire prediction coming from the message of the ancestors can be seen as the forecast of the future of the Tshokwe beliefs for their survival. The concepts of struggle and fight will be discussed in the next section of this analysis.

## STRUGGLING FOR RELIGION

As previously mentioned, the *fruto seco de tombe* is described like the chief of a military operation, its decision is vital for the rest of the community within the divination basket. If the Tshokwe do not fight for their identity, culture, existence, their destiny may be in danger. The story was written during the Angolan Civil War, thus the bellicose theme appearing in this, as well as other *crônicas*, is a means to express the sufferance of the author and share it with the Portuguese readers of *Público*. The words used here can be seen as a conceptual tool that helps Tavares in her desire of surviving from the atrocities of the war, by giving voice to all those Angolans who had the same experience (SCHMIDT, 2010, p. 14-15).

Turning back to the analysis of the text, despite the resistance of the Tshokwe in giving up with their culture, their set of traditions, rituals and practices seems to be shaped by factors imposed from outside if we think, for example, that the initiation of the Tshokwe young men in the *mukanda* ritual has been altered for practical reasons, as children are circumcised in hospital so they will not miss out school for too long (no author provided, 2013, p. 28). This cultural and existential fight based on the importance of religion is something that can be read through the lines of Tavares's text. The author, in fact, knows that hate is a threat for the Tshokwe and that peace is not easy to achieve in the circumstances above mentioned. Diviners need to understand the true meaning of the words coming from the afterworld and avoid that the human anger change their meaning for the sake of their people's lives and peace. The idea of war and fight is implicitly expressed in this *crônica*, but is evoked in different parts

of the text, as we can see, as if the Tshokwe are in constant danger. The sense of desperation may also be linked to the above concepts as the reader may find a series of words related to both war and peace, obedience and submission, tranquillity and hope, as we can see from the table below.

Table 2: Tensions between war and peace through words

Text	War or Peace	Possible interpretations
Espaço circular [...] onde deve reinar a <b>tranquilidade</b> das folhas.	Peace	The <i>mukanda</i> school is a place where the ritual needs to be performed in peace in order to establish a contact with the spirits in the afterlife.
[...] um único homem que, em busca <b>desesperada</b> da sua reprodução, se fechou a si próprio no primeiro cesto e se auto-circuncidou.	War	The desperate search for a woman to procreate is the idea behind the <i>mukanda</i> . The search can be seen as the natural struggle that human beings make to keep their clan alive over the generations. Without circumcision, a boy cannot be a man and become an active part of society.
espaços <b>aprisionados e obedientes</b> às ordens	War	The geographic space of the divination basket is submitted to the orders of superior beings who control it to keep their message alive and transmit it to the people on Earth.
[...] local que convém trazer <b>contentes</b> e em <b>descanso</b> para que os ainda vivos possam <b>amar, caçar</b> e preparar a <b>morte</b> em <b>paz</b> .	Peace	The precinct for the circumcision is meant for the people's happiness as they respect the wishes of their spirits in order to gain protection from them and live their lives in peace.
Os tahi [...] conhecem o valor das palavras e de como o <b>ódio</b> as engorda.	War	The hate of profane people may alter the true meaning of the spirits' words. An external culture may interfere with the Tshokwe beliefs to the extent that divergences may arise.
[...] os mecanismos das <b>ordens</b> que as <b>comandam</b>	War	The idea of order imposed from above is like a force constraining the actions of the beings in the universe.
O fruto seco de tombe <b>comanda</b> a <b>operação</b> enquanto assume a <b>chefia</b> de todas as peças dentro do cesto.	War	The main piece of the divination basket leads the order of the other pieces like a commandant does with his troop.
Ao tahi compete descobrir o centro que este fruto vai habitar para poder <b>controlar</b> as outras setenta e quatro peças	War	The idea of order is something that is meant to establish power over the other pieces of the basket.

[...] <b>submeter-se</b> às sete provas	<b>War</b>	The diviner is trained to obey to the order coming from above.
[...] muita coisa de novo se passa a leste, <b>não deixando em paz</b> os novos <i>tahis</i> e seus cestos de adivinhar.	<b>War</b>	Diviners are in constant struggle to find the peace they deserve to practice their ritual of divination.
o facto de a nossa <b>cansada esperança</b> ter encontrado um lugar <b>tranquilo</b>	<b>Peace</b>	Hope for a better future for the Tshokwe and the people from Angola.

The table shows the portions of text that contain the ideas of peace and war, a constant tension between two extreme forces that put at risk the destiny of the Tshokwe holistic vision of the universe and their set of rituals and beliefs as a whole. The ritual of circumcision and the divination baskets are means to establish a contact with the afterlife, but external influences may alter the message of the spirits or even diminish its importance as a consequence of a change in the traditions due to the influence of the Portuguese culture in Angola during colonisation in first place, from a chronological point of view, and the turmoil of the present time of the narration. As a reflection of these chaotic situation, religion can be seen as a fight itself, a struggle to reach the harmony in the material world and the eternal peace in the invisible one. The internal tensions among the various beings of the universe (spirits, humans, mediums, plants and so on) are characterised by orders coming from the above and a well organised hierarchical structure where submission and obedience are required. Devotion is something based on the acceptance and the understanding of oneself and the place taken in the world as part of a bigger picture. And the Tshokwe are aware of that. But a non believer, an armed soldier, someone coming from another culture and speaking the language of violence, may interfere with the solemnity of the spiritual message relayed by the *tahi* who devotes his entire life to the understanding of the wishes of the spirits, a mission to accomplish in the name of his people, whose safety depends on the communication with the transcendent world. The author is aware of the fact that the figure of the *tahi* is in danger and that traditional beliefs are constantly threatened by the brusque changes in society. The incessant search for a place to grow up free and happy has not finished yet, as the author concludes her story with the hope that the diviners might find a place where they can express themselves as they are meant to: “O que fazem, por enquanto é segredo, mas oxalá tenha a ver com o facto de a nossa cansada esperança ter encontrado um lugar tranquilo entre as folhas para poder renascer” (TAVARES, 2004, p. 35).



## FINAL REMARKS

After having carried out a close reading of Tavares's *crônica*, it is evident that the relevance of the spiritual discourse is strong throughout the text, not only from an ideological and thematic point of view, but also linguistic. As we can perceive from the analysis provided in this article, the traditional beliefs of the Tshokwe are an instrument meant to convey several meanings that deliver different messages, according to the perspective taken by the reader. In addition, the various references to anthropological studies carried out by scholars who investigated this ethnicity sustain the author's fiction, which is not meant to be an academic essay, but rather a theoretical support to develop a nationalist identity, that is constantly in danger.

From a religious point of view, it is important to say that the vision of the world of the non-believers does not fit within the faiths of the indigenous cultures of Angola, as initiation appears to be the key concept to unveil the messages coming from the invisible world. For this reasons, mystery plays a vital role in the recreation of a national history, which is a complex net of symbolic figures related to each other, whose true meanings are not visible at first glance, especially if you do not belong to those communities. Sometimes, culture-bound references are not defined with their specific terminology name, because of the personal choice of the writer, whose aim is to use the most adequate word to convey the right message to the potential readers, as they may not be familiar with the concepts expressed in the *crônica*. Although, once the reader discovers, through an attentive linguistic and literary analysis, the various aspects of each element brought in the narration, the interconnections become clearer, as a reflection of the personal journey into the metaphysical world of spirituality made by the author.

Furthermore, the implicit references to the bellicose theme that might seem to be contrasting with the spiritual search for peace unveil a desperate need of survival through the help of writing act of the author, who represents the collective voice of those Angolans who experienced the tragedy of the Civil War. The alternation between war and peace discussed in the previous section can be explained, with the words of Padilha (2009, p. 3), as part of a "cyclical game" between these two statuses and the poetic language adopted in narration seems to succumb to the rules of the above game (PADILHA 2009, p. 3), by representing the multiple sides of the same coin. In this literary effort to narrate the tragedy of the war, Tavares combines historical facts, implicitly evoked, with the possible future developments of the events, hence creating a "third fictional time", meant to heal the wounds of the sufferance of the tragic past experiences (SCHMIDT, 2010, p. 17), as we can see in the optimistic ending of "O cesto de adivinhação". The *lugar tranquilo* mentioned in the *crônica*, in fact, can be seen as a utopian place where the Tshokwe can live free to express their identity, in complete harmony with the surrounding nature, hence reconnecting to the ancestors evoked in their divination rituals.

After all these considerations, the close reading of “O cesto de adivinhação” can be seen as an attempt to describe a literary world that needs to be discovered through an attentive investigation in order to understand the linguistic and literary interconnections within the text, by providing the tools for a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical background of the narration. The literary and linguistic analysis of Tavares’s work has facilitated a closer contact with the author, hence creating a deeper understanding of the written text and the development of different levels of interpretation of the concepts and terms related to the spiritual practices of Bantu derivation.

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## NOTAS

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2 Ana Paula Tavares was born in Huíla in 1952. As a historian, she directed National Centre of the Historical Documentation and Investigation between 1983 and 1985. In 1996, she completed her studies in Lusophone African Literature. In her eclectic career, she wrote books of different literary genres, from historical essays to poetries, tales, novels and editing anthologies in Portugal, Brazil, Germany, Spain, Sweden and France.

3 It contains chronicles written between 1999 and 2002 for the Portuguese newspaper *Público*.

4 For the analysis of Tavares's chronicle I referred to the methodology described by Dr Paul and Dr Elder in their book *How to Read a Paragraph: the Art of Close Reading* (2008). The approach deployed by the above researchers can be divided into five levels of Critical Reading: Paraphrasing, Explicating, Analysis, Evaluation and Role-playing (PAUL and ELDER, 2008, p. 9-11).