

Son of Angola

Waldemar Bastos

*Sufrimento**

<i>P'ra que tanta dor</i>	<i>Angola e tão grande</i>
<i>P'ra que tanto ódio</i>	<i>Tão rica e tão linda</i>
<i>Se somos irmãos</i>	<i>Que dá para todos nós</i>
<i>E temos e temos e temos</i>	<i>E para quem ama Angola</i>
<i>Que dar as mãos (bis)</i>	<i>Angola é tão bela</i>
<i>Olha o sofrimento, olha o tormento</i>	<i>Tão rica e tão linda</i>
<i>Que vem cá de dentro</i>	<i>Que dá para todos nós</i>
<i>A nossa terra está a morrer</i>	<i>E para quem ama Angola (bis)</i>
<i>Olha o sofrimento, olha o tormento</i>	<i>Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh</i>
<i>Que vem cá de dentro</i>	<i>Angola viva</i>
<i>A nossa terra está a sofrer demais</i>	<i>Angola viva</i>
<i>Olha aquela mamã</i>	<i>Angola viva</i>
<i>Já não tem lágrimas</i>	
<i>Já não tem lamentos</i>	
<i>A nossa terra está a morrer</i>	

*Suffering

Why so much pain/Why so much hate/When we are brothers/And should offer a hand?/Look at the suffering/Look at the torment/Coming from within/Our land is dying./Look at the suffering/Look at the torment/Coming from within/Our land suffers too much./Look at this mother/She has no more tears/She has nothing left to lament/Our land is dying./Angola is so great/So rich and so beautiful/Let there be a place for all of us and for those who love it (bis)./Long live Angola/Long live Angola/Long live Angola

My music surges out of paradox. I am a professional musician but have barely studied music; an African artist whose first album was recorded in South America. An artist from a country torn by a war whose central themes are peace and optimism. A singer-composer who is considered the voice of Angola, though I presently reside in Portugal.

I was born in Angola in 1954, in the province of São Salvador do Congo. My country has been ravaged by war. The first was the war of independence – to rid our country of Portuguese colonists. It began in the early 1960s and lasted until 1974 when Dictator Salazar was overthrown. Angola thus became an independent nation. The second was a civil war, which began shortly after the first – fueled and reinforced on one side by the United States and South Africa and on the other by the Soviet Union and Cuba. It has lasted nearly until now. Though both belligerents tried to appropriate my music, I refused to be swept into partisan politics in the name of materialism. My music offers a simple message, focusing on the value of every life, the beauty and abundance of this world, and the profound need for hope. This seems to have been a meaningful message for my compatriots – and all the factions and ethnic origins that they represent. When I gave a free concert in 1990, over 200,000 people came to Kinaxixe Square in the capital of Luanda. My songs have such power that it is said President Santos and the leader of the opposition Jonas Savimbi were dancing.

*My musical career began when I was seven. My father, a traveling nurse who had played the piano and the organ when he was studying at the seminary, discovered one day that I was playing songs from the radio on an accordion that was under his bed. Then, my parents asked me to choose between a bicycle and music lessons for Christmas. Though all my friends in Kabinda, the city where we lived, and even I desperately wanted a bicycle, I chose the lessons. One day, the teacher's daughter noticed I was not looking at the music as I played, and when her father asked me to name the notes, I could not. I was surprised at first, but soon realized that I had been blessed with what in Portuguese is called *dádiva*, the virtuous gift of music.*

I met all sorts of people as I grew older, since my two parents, who were nurses, traveled the country to care for victims of tuberculosis, leprosy, sleeping sickness, and other illnesses. Learning an African language was forbidden by the colonial authorities and I was educated in Portuguese, but I heard many different languages, such as Kim-

bundu and Ovimbundu, and came into contact with a great number of musical traditions.

I remember very well the songs of those who, in the hospital, were visiting their loved ones and the music sung during the funerals of the deceased. On the radio, I heard the music of British and American artists – the Beatles, the Shadows, and Nat King Cole – and of Brazil – the romantic ballads of Angela Maria. My first band was called Jovial and we played throughout Kabinda.

After Angola won its independence in 1973, I started to play my compositions but the climate in the 1970s did not support artists politically or economically. In 1977, some artists from the city were killed for participating in what were called “activities against the state.” I have traveled in the Communist block: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and the Soviet Union. In 1982, thinking I was in potential danger in Angola (during the colonial regime I had been thrown in jail by the Portuguese state police) and since the Communist government replacing the colonial government was even more repressive, I deserted during a cultural visit to Portugal.

During the 1980s, I lived in Brazil and, with the help of Chico Buarque, recorded my first album. We had met several years before, when he was in Angola for Projeto Kalunga [Project Ocean] – an attempt to bring Brazilian artists closer to the African slave culture, a significant part of Brazilian culture and music.

As my parents cared for the sick and my brother healed the wounds of war, dedicating their lives to caring for the body, I dedicated my life to caring for the soul. The deepest paradox, and the basis for my work, is the power of love – the only antidote for the spiritual illness that springs from war and human cruelty.

The period of time that I have been given to live is not a happy one. I would be a fraud if my music did not reflect that. I have always known my country at war: against the colonials, then between Angolans. Singing of suffering is necessary for me, as a kind of exorcism. But I sing also to soothe the pain. I have never lost my hope for a better world.

Pretaluz, Lyrics and music by Waldemar Bastos, Luaka Bop, Inc.
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Translated from the French by Jill Cairns