

# A READING OF CHILDHOOD IN "NO GALINHEIRO, NO DEVAGAR DO TEMPO", BY ONDJAKI

UMA LEITURA DA INFÂNCIA EM "NO GALINHEIRO, NO DEVAGAR DO TEMPO", DE ONDJAKI

UNA LECTURA DE LA INFANCIA EN "EN ELGALLINERO, EN EL LENTO DEL TIEMPO", DE ONDJAKI

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**Abstract:** The African literature of Portuguese language corresponds to a relatively recent production, if we take into account the post-independence history of these countries. However, they consist of a vast and rich production from the cultural, identity, aesthetic point of view and the way in which orality is imbricated in the writing. It is in this context that the work of the Angolan Ondjaki is situated, which explores, among so many themes and perspectives, the issue of childhood, the starting point of one of his best-known works, *Os da Minha Rua* (2007), composed of twenty-two narratives. Among them is the text "No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo", object of study of this article, which aims to analyze how childhood is presented in this story. For this, we developed a bibliographical research, based, in particular, on the ideas of Bakhtin (2002), Jacoby (2010), Chombart de Lauwe (1991), Lajolo (1997), among others

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**Keywords:** Ondjaki; African Literature; Childhood.

**Resumo:** As literaturas africanas de língua portuguesa correspondem a uma produção relativamente recente, se levarmos em consideração a história do pós-independência desses países. No entanto, consistem numa produção vasta e rica do ponto de vista cultural, identitário, estético e pela forma como a oralidade está imbricada na escrita. É nesse contexto que está situada a obra do angolano Ondjaki, que explora, entre tantas temáticas e perspectivas, a questão da infância, ponto de partida de uma de suas obras mais conhecidas, *Os da minha rua* (2007), composta de vinte e duas narrativas. Entre elas tem-se o texto “No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo”, objeto de estudo deste artigo, que objetiva analisar como a infância é apresentada nessa história. Para isso, desenvolvemos uma pesquisa bibliográfica, fundamentada, em particular, nas ideias de Bakhtin (2002), Jacoby (2010), Chombart de Lauwe (1991), Lajolo (1997), entre outros.

**Palavras-chave:** Ondjaki; Literatura Africana; Infância.

**Resumen:** Las literaturas africanas de lengua portuguesa corresponden a una producción relativamente reciente, si tenemos en cuenta la historia post-independencia de estos países. Sin embargo, consisten en una vasta y rica producción desde el punto de vista cultural, identidad, estético y por cierto la oralidad se imbría en la escritura. Es en este contexto que se sitúa la obra del angoleño Ondjaki, que explora, entre tantos temas y perspectivas, el tema de la infancia, punto de partida de una de sus obras más conocidas, *Las de mi calle* (2007), compuesta por veintidós narraciones. Entre ellos se encuentra el texto "No hen house, no devagar do tempo", objeto de estudio de este artículo, que pretende analizar cómo se presenta la infancia en esta historia. Para ello, desarrollamos una investigación bibliográfica, basada en particular en las ideas de Bakhtin (2002), Jacoby (2010), Chombart de Lauwe (1991), Lajolo (1997), entre otros.

**Palabras clave:** Ondjaki; Literatura Africana; Infancia.

## 1. Introduction

Ndalu de Almeida, better known as Ondjaki, is an Angolan prose writer and poet, currently one of the great representatives of the African literary production. Born in 1977, in Luanda, in a post-independence context, his childhood was still marked by the civil war (1975-2002) that ravaged the country. Therefore, it is observed that his work, as a writer, is strongly influenced by the social-historical aspect of which he was a part, imprinting marks of his roots throughout his production.

Ondjaki lived his childhood in Angola and studied elementary school in Luanda, therefore, his early life experiences reflect directly in his work, which is marked by memory and an attempt to reconstruct the past, of another moment that was so remarkable. We find in her narratives an Angola and a childhood poetically reconstructed, and her texts reveal a certain engagement in relation to the history of her people, its traditions, its past, as is common in African literary productions in Portuguese language.

Thus, due to the peculiarities of his narratives, his writing usually enchants those who read them and reveal the potential of the word to value experience, to sensitize the reader through language and contact with characters and places that were remarkable in the author's life. Thus, it can be said that his writing is permeated with autobiography, which makes the boundaries between reality and fiction very narrow, and, in our reading, this aspect is fundamental to the various possible looks at the work of Ondjaki. Another relevant point to highlight is that if we consider the post-colonial perspective, it can be said that the writer's narratives present a colonized look at his own history, with a writing permeated by the self.

The innocent childlike look and the return to this remarkable phase in the life of every human being, which is childhood, is the starting point of one of his best known works, *Os da minha rua* (2007), composed of 22 stories that seem to be a kind of hybrid between the short story and the chronicle. For this reason, we chose not to classify them in one genre or another. It is also worth saying that the reading of childhood in the narrative in question suggests that this moment in life is a space of resistance to reality and to the confrontations of adulthood, an element that motivated us to investigate the representation of childhood in the text "No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo", present in that work.

## *2. Literature of African origin written in Portuguese*

The written African literatures in Portuguese are recent productions, and the first signs of such manifestations date from the middle of the last century, resulting from a historical and decolonial process. This is because some African countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe, were for a long time colonies of Portugal, and the first territories of the continent to acquire freedom only achieved it around 1949-1950 (FONSECA; MOREIRA, 2007), when they became independent countries, "free" from Portuguese domination and from the colonizer.

Thus, the literary production produced before the first half of the twentieth century was written by the white European man, of a culture distinct from that existing in the African territory and imprinting his worldview on this place, a view that mischaracterizes, inferiorizes and disqualifies the African man and his place. Therefore, this literature written by the colonizer, called colonial, says nothing about Africa, the African and his roots (CAMPOS 2008; OLIVEIRA, 2008). Thus, it cannot be considered genuinely African literature.

Based on this point of view, considering the achievement of freedom and independence of these territories, the first African nations begin to form and increasingly seek the right and freedom to express their traditions and identities. It is only with the independence of these countries that one can speak of a written African literary production that represents the people in its essence. It is noteworthy that the African literatures in Portuguese language are recent and arise from the very idea of nationhood and freedom of expression, which in the case of African countries came late.

In this scenario, the post-independence of many African countries, despite the difficulties still to be faced, brought possibilities of renewal and cultural, artistic, and ideological expression for the African people. Literary

production, for example, found an open ground for engagement, for the expression of identity, for the desire to speak and to be heard, to be able to tell their own story, to say it from the perspective of the African. It is important to mention that in order to think about African literature with respect to its people, one must read and analyze it from the perspective of the African himself, who writes and identifies as such. For "studying Africa through the prism of the former colonizer is an intellectual crime" (MATA, 2009, p.6)<sup>4 5</sup>.

In this perspective, Africanity can be observed as a frequent and primordial mark in African literary production, which, even in the case of countries that have Portuguese as their official language, does not lose its identity for expressing itself through the language of the colonizer. Writing in Portuguese is, in fact, the intention of wide circulation of these productions, so that other cultures and realities can read and hear the African through literature, since the colonizer's language has more visibility than native languages. However, this choice does not diminish or hide the ancestral languages of the African people, because they end up being present in their productions, and orality is a characteristic feature in Portuguese-speaking African literature.

The oral tradition, therefore, is a defining aspect of African literary production and the "narration resources rubricate a mimetic form to it and allow the identification, in the narrative speech, of the interaction between the written and the unwritten texts incorporated in the local culture, which are made known in Portuguese" (MATA, 2000, p. 4).<sup>6</sup> Another very evident issue in these productions is ancestry, so that in poetry and narratives, traces of the

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<sup>4</sup> The translations of all the quotes into English were made by Livia Saraiva. The quotes in the original language are shown in the footnotes.

<sup>5</sup> "estudar a África pelo prisma do ex-colonizador é um crime intelectual" (MATA, 2009, p.6).

<sup>6</sup> "recursos de narração rubricam-lhe uma forma mimética e permitem identificar, na fala narrativa, a interação entre a escrita e os textos não escritos incorporados na cultura local, que se dão a conhecer em português" (MATA, 2000, p. 4).

memory of the ancestors are invoked, either materialized in the characters or narrators who are no longer alive, or by the presence of the elders, who, with their wisdom, transmit tradition and ancestral knowledge to the younger ones.

What can be observed in African written literature is that the history of African peoples is permeated with poetry, and this, in turn, is inseparable from the identity of these people, which was built through pain, violence, and spilled African blood. The post-independence narratives, for example, are marked by a return to the past, revisiting the streets of cities devastated by war, chaotic spaces, but which, at the same time, breathe the air of hope. Many writers, even, in a work of re-signifying the past, recall their childhood in the midst of this scenario, describing situations that, even amidst the difficulties, are remembered in a nostalgic way, giving an account of a time and a social space of which they were part.

In *Os da minha rua*, the writer leads his readers through intimate images that reveal a record of a time in Angola. The narrator recalls, with rich details, events and people who marked his childhood. This reading evidences, therefore, elements intrinsic to the African reality and culture, which somehow dialogue with the globalization that the world was watching happen. These productions explore a diversity of themes, and although they are marked by Africanity, they also dialogue with universal issues.

### *3. Writing and autobiography*

In our reading, Ondjaki's literature is especially attractive because, by adopting a lyrical perspective, the author weaves writings about his life in his homeland, an Angola now independent, but which suffers due to intense social inequalities, suffering from the internal chaos established in the country itself. It is through his eyes that the readers reflect on how small events can be big,

and show themselves as points of hope for change and the long-dreamed-of progress to happen. They are the eyes of an African and an Africa that resist and show their identities.

Although the literary character of fiction is considered, Ondjaki's writing is situated on a border that allows us to identify many traces of the real, of his private and collective life. Thus, the autobiographical traces that permeate his productions are evident. These stories are thus marked by memory, evidently permeated by a self that confesses and describes a past that translates into people, images, and places that constitute the individual, the writer himself. In the book's front page of *Bom Dia Camaradas* (2007), for example, the author states about narrative, that it is everything,

[...] all of this told through the voice of the child that I was; all of it steeped in the ambiance of the 1980s: the one-party system, the fuel cards, the Cuban teachers, the anthem sung in the morning, and our city of Luanda with its capacity to turn mujimbos into facts. all these things... this fictionalized story, being also part of my history, gave me back fond memories. it allowed me to fix, in a book, a world that is already past, a world that happened to me and that, today, is a dream that is tasty to remember (ONDJAKI, 2006, book's cover).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the reconstructed memories that refer to a past and the writer's childhood are common aspects in his writings and that permeate his works. This also reveals, in some way, the engaged character of Ondjaki's literature and that is characteristic of African literary texts. It is also perceived in the author's statement that his writing is inseparable from himself, his childhood, people

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<sup>7</sup> [...] tudo isto contado pela voz da criança que fui; tudo isto embebido na ambiência dos anos 80: o monopartidarismo, os cartões de abastecimento, os professores cubanos, o hino cantado de manhã e a nossa cidade de Luanda com a capacidade de transformar mujimbos em factos. todas estas coisas... esta estória ficcionada, sendo também parte da minha história, devolveu-me memórias carinhosas. permitiu-me fixar, em livro, um mundo que é já passado, um mundo que me aconteceu e que, hoje, é um sonho saboroso de lembrar (ONDJAKI, 2006, orelha do livro).

who were part of his past, places, the socio-historical context in which he lived and the simplicities of life. The writer, who comes from a difficult, needy, violent reality, remembers his childhood with affection and tenderness, as happens in many of his productions.

He presents the colonized, the subaltern, as childlike and with an ethical commitment that is revealed in his work as a writer, inserts him in his own culture, representing the identity and history of a people. The subaltern speaks, representing himself and his fellow man. Writing is like a commitment, but above all, it is art representing life(s). In this sense, Ondjaki's writing reveals itself, in many of his productions, as autobiographical, he is the author of himself, he is also the narrator of his own story. He tells, through literature, about his own life, about past moments, about the childhood lived by him and that, in the text, is added by the magic of the fictional.

The accounts that are understood to be autobiographical (as is the case of the narrative "No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo") seem to suggest an internal change to the narrator, as corroborated by Wander Melo Miranda (1992, p. 31), when he states that "there seems to be no sufficient reason for an autobiography if there is no intervention, in the individual's inner existence, of a radical change or transformation that drives or justifies it".<sup>8</sup> Thus, by making a return to his childhood and narrating it according to his memories, the writer seems to tell us something like "I am what I am because of this childhood" or "who I am today is part of my history". Therefore, his autobiographical writing reveals a transformation of the subject, of this self-narrator.

In the last decades, it is a fact that the production and circulation of autobiographical texts, as well as researches focused on the understanding of

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<sup>8</sup> "parece não haver motivo suficiente para uma autobiografia se não houver uma intervenção, na existência interior do indivíduo, de uma mudança ou transformação radical que a impulsione ou justifique".



this kind of writing, have been increasingly noticed. Among many possible factors, the growing appearance of texts of such nature possibly has to do with the spectacularization of the subject and the growth of media culture (LOPES, 2003), when intimacy and the experience of others become the object of interest of readers, who, as explorers, navigate through these life narratives. Above all, such narratives arise from the subjective character of the self that writes, they are written from the self, and, therefore, communicate the individuality of the experiences, what is revealed in these texts are the marks of the self.

Autobiography is commonly understood as the writing of the self, a kind of confessional genre, and although it has great repercussions today (as already mentioned), it is not a novelty in terms of writing, because texts of such nature were already observed since the *Confessions* by St. Augustine, and *The Confessions* by Rousseau, although this writing, over time, has not always aimed the same purposes or been analyzed under the same objectives. In general, autobiographical writing is marked by certain ambiguities and by an impossibility of being understood in an objective or simplified way. Therefore, it may seem difficult or confusing to attempt to define this narrative form.

Still, to think of an approximate concept of what we are discussing here, and that is common in the writing of the Angolan Ondjaki, we bring the conception of Mikhail Bakhtin, who perceives autobiography as "the immediate transgressive form in which I can objectify my life myself artistically" (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 139)<sup>9</sup>. For Philippe Lejeune, for example, autobiography is "any text in which the author seems to express his life or his feelings, whatever the form of the text and the contract proposed by it" (LEJEUNE, 2008, p. 53)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> "a forma transgrediente imediata em que posso objetivar artisticamente a mim mesmo a minha vida" (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 139).

<sup>10</sup> "qualquer texto em que o autor parece expressar sua vida ou seus sentimentos, quaisquer que sejam a forma do texto e o contrato proposto por ele" (LEJEUNE, 2008, p. 53).

However, within literary theory, the conceptualization or classification of autobiography as a genre is not a consensus, and, to a large extent, it was Roland Barthes, in the 1960s, in his essay *The death of the author*, who was responsible for making us rethink autobiographical writing, which for a long time had been inferior in literary terms.

In his publication, Barthes alerts to the fact that when the author makes his text public, it becomes the other's, he loses control over it, which gains autonomy. Thus, the reader's role is evidenced and potentiated. From this perspective, the theorist reveals a notion of autobiographical pact, which involves author and reader, and according to Lejeune (2013, p. 538), Barthes inaugurates/thinks the idea "[...] that autobiography could also be an art and that this art, brand new, had yet to be invented."<sup>11</sup> And further, as Diana Klinger (2007, p. 27) points out, "the twentieth century will continue the critique and deconstruction of the subject, the culmination of which is found in Foucault's declaration of the 'death of the author' in literature [...]".<sup>12</sup>

Thinking about autobiographical productions in the current context, it is important to think about the aesthetic issue, and how it is essential to analyze the value of the account, not necessarily as the veracity of the facts. What should be emphasized is the quality of the reader's experience when reading this text. Corroborating this idea, Lejeune (2014), citing Vapereau, states that "autobiography opens a large space to fantasy and the writer is not absolutely obliged to be exact about the facts, as in *Memoirs*, or to tell the whole truth, as in *Confessions*" (VAPEREAU, apud LEJEUNE, 2014, p. 63).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the

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<sup>11</sup> "[...] que a autobiografia podia também ser uma arte. E que esta arte, novíssima, ainda tinha de ser inventada."

<sup>12</sup> "o século XX continuará a crítica e a desconstrução do sujeito, cuja culminação se encontra na declaração de Foucault da "morte do autor" na literatura [...]".

<sup>13</sup> "A autobiografia abre um grande espaço à fantasia e quem a escreve não é absolutamente obrigado a ser exato quanto aos fatos, como nas *Memórias*, ou a dizer toda a verdade, como nas *confissões*" (VAPEREAU, apud LEJEUNE, 2014, p. 63).

autobiographical character in a literary text is also guided by the principle of verisimilitude.

In *Os da minha rua*, Ondjaki tells us stories with a very intimate tone and leads readers to the record of a happy childhood in the context of a post-independence Angola, in which the thread that unites all accounts is himself. Ondjaki is present in the 22 narratives of the book and celebrates childhood and the memories related to it. Thus, the childhood perspective is constitutive of these narratives and delimits an individual experience, but also reveals the experience of the collectivity. According to the writer's own words: "I always think that childhood has this advantage (literary) of already coming full of emotions".<sup>14</sup>

#### *4. Conceptions of childhood and its representation in literature*

Thinking about childhood, especially as a social construction, is a task that demands to consider different conceptions, arising from different times and places throughout history. The child, initially, was never conceived according to the current view of its existence, childhood, in fact, did not exist, because the child itself was seen as a potential adult, there was no space for playing, studying, and having fun, as we think of childhood today. The child from its early years already participated in adult life, working, taking on responsibilities, and witnessing the rituals of life and death, now considered part of adulthood. They did not receive any particular attention, nor did they enjoy a distinguished status, and there were still high rates of infant mortality.

It was only in the 18th century, as Regina Zilberman (2003) points out, that childhood starts to be perceived with other eyes and becomes the center of attention, which is mainly due to the reconfiguration of the family institution,

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<sup>14</sup> "penso sempre que a infância tem essa vantagem (literária) de já vir cheia de carga emotiva".

the edition of the first pedagogical treatises by English and French Protestants, and the importance given to school education. In this context, it should be noted that even in the face of this new look to childhood, it is the bourgeois child who is integrated around this concern and the protection by the family, because in the midst of the proletariat, the concern for childhood is not exactly the same.

In the same sense, Lajolo (1997) states that we witnessed, during history, several perceptions about childhood, according to her:

[...] first seeing the child as an adult in miniature; then, conceiving the child as a being essentially different from the adult, then... We believed successively that the child is a tabula rasa, where one can inscribe anything, or that his way of being an adult is predetermined by his genetic load, or even that female children are born with no penis [...] (LAJOLO, 1997, p. 228).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the ideas of childhood over time have not always been the same, although the current conception (which may be divergent in different societies), proves to be the most appropriate as a way of understanding this stage of human life, because in most cases, it carries the trait of innocence and the right to play and the fantastic. As well as many other events of human existence and of the world, childhood is also present in literary productions, and its representation occupies a privileged space both in works aimed at children and the general public. In this sense, the presence of childhood in literary texts happens in the most varied ways, which does not allow exhausting its possibilities of representation.

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<sup>15</sup> ...primeiro vendo a criança como um adulto em miniatura; depois concebendo-a como um ser essencialmente diferente do adulto, depois...Fomos acreditando sucessivamente que a criança é uma tábula rasa, onde se pode inscrever qualquer coisa, ou que seu modo de ser adulto é determinado pela sua carga genética, ou ainda que as crianças do sexo feminino já nascem carentes de pênis.... (LAJOLO, 1997, p.228).

According to the words of the writer Mia Couto, in *Tradutor de chuvas* (2015), childhood acquires an even broader meaning than those we usually confer to it, the writer does not limit it and says that "Childhood is not a time, is not an age, a collection of memories. Childhood is when it is not yet too late. It is when we are available to be surprised, to let ourselves be enchanted."<sup>16</sup> Writing about childhood is, therefore, an exercise that demands even greater creative and sentimental strength, and consists, in some way, of an attempt to return to a past that has left its marks and that is often remembered in a sweet and nostalgic way. It is a rescue of memories, a return to places, people and events that marked and were responsible for who we are. It is also an attitude toward the future, because childhood is a determining factor in the directions our lives will take.

The dialogues between literature and childhood are very extensive, so that the latter is often present in the verses of poems or in the length of narratives such as short stories, novels, and so on. However, literature has not always been interested in childhood, in its representation, as Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe (1991, p. 7) points out, "childhood was of very little interest to literature in the 18th century".<sup>17</sup> Still and little by little, it is that the beauty of childhood is revealed before adulthood and begins to gain space in the narratives, becoming interesting to the romanesque accounts. It was only "around 1850, the character of the child comes massively into literature. Men discover that there is not only one way to be human, the adult loses its prestige as the only model" (CHOMBART DE LAUWE, 1991, p. 8).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "A infância não é um tempo, não é uma idade, uma coleção de memórias. A infância é quando ainda não é demasiado tarde. É quando estamos disponíveis para nos surpreendermos, para nos deixarmos encantar".

<sup>17</sup> "a infância interessou muito pouco à literatura do século XVIII".

<sup>18</sup> "por volta de 1850, a personagem da criança entra maciçamente na literatura. Os homens descobrem que não existe apenas uma maneira de ser humano, o adulto perde seu prestígio de modelo único" (CHOMBART DE LAUWE, 1991, p. 8).

It is during the following century that, with even greater frequency, the images of childhood will be even more recurrent in the universal literary production, including in Brazilian literature texts, as is the case in some narratives by Machado de Assis. In the African literature of Portuguese language, for example, it is not possible to verify images of childhood at that moment (nineteenth century), because the African literary system of Portuguese expression had not yet been formed, as it exists today.

Violane Magalhães suggests that:

the literature in which the image of the child permeates, began to flourish, especially from the mid-nineteenth century; in this period, literature purposely aimed at childhood also emerged. The evolution was so big that there is currently a vast production of significant quality in these fields (MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 11).<sup>19</sup>

Thus, in literature, which is understood as a symbolic activity, different images are constructed about childhood that seek somehow to capture the various realities in which children are immersed in the world, their different ways of experiencing the tastes, and even the discomforts, of the early years of their existence. In literature, childhood can even go beyond its limits and extend into adulthood.

### *5. Childhood in “No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo”*

The narrative “No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo” is part of twenty-two stories told by Ondjaki, and it is understood that he himself is the main

<sup>19</sup> a literatura na qual perpassa a imagem da criança começou a medrar, especialmente a partir de meados do século XIX; nesse período, despontou ainda a literatura propositadamente dirigida à infância. A evolução foi de tal monta que há actualmente nestes domínios uma produção vasta e de significativa qualidade (MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 11).

protagonist and link between them all. It is the time of childhood that the author chooses to weave the experiences reported through the playful look and innocence typical of a child. In the narrative in question, as well as in the others present in the work *Os da minha rua*, Ondjaki walks through the childhood lived in Luanda, and reconstructs the record of everyday life in a post-independence Angola.

It is known that the context of peace or chaos resulting from war does not define childhood, but it influences it greatly. However, this scenario of war does not seem to have much importance for the child who is happy and finds happiness in gestures, people and in the simplest but intense moments, to the point of being remembered in detail many years later, under the perspective of adulthood. In this sense, time, as well as space, are not only relevant, but also constitutive aspects of the narrative, and inseparable from each other. They are intrinsic and relate to the existence and the trajectory of the protagonist.

Therefore, through this relationship, it is possible to remember the concept of *chronotope*, listed by Mikhail Bakhtin, which refers to the "fundamental interconnection of temporal and spatial relations, artistically assimilated in literature" (BAKHTIN, 2002, p. 211).<sup>20</sup> In such a way, it is observed that Ondjaki's narrative is built from his memories and that the accounts unfold within a temporal framework that is inseparable from the space, which, in turn, not only identifies the characters, but is part of them. The universe (re)created by the writer is represented from time and space.

From the perspective of these categories, the very title "No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo" suggests the importance of space and time, which are components of childhood represented in the text. The story has as main characters the child who tells (Ondjaki) and her friend Charlita, although other

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<sup>20</sup> "interligação fundamental das relações temporais e espaciais, artisticamente assimiladas em literatura" (BAKHTIN, 2002, p. 211).

children and adults from her street are also present. Everything starts from the occasion when Charlita travels with her father, Tuarles, to Portugal, to do "eye exams", as the child narrator tells us.

From this point on, small great perceptions are presented to us, such as that "At that time, time then passed slowly, and at night we went to watch a soap opera at Mr. Tuarles' house" (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 45).<sup>21</sup> The statement of the narrator child reveals us, thus, that in childhood time seems to have an even greater value, because the hours do not pass quickly and the very perception of time is not relevant to the child's look, because innocence and playfulness account for the lightness of days in childhood.

In another story, the narrator character tells us that:

Life is sometimes like a game in the street: we are at the last minute of a very hot game and we don't know that at any moment an older person might come along and tell us that the game is over and it's time for dinner. [...] We children lived in a time out of time, without ever knowing about real calendars. For us Monday was a day to start the school week and Friday meant we were going to have two days without school (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 26).<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, as Sissa Jacoby (2010) points out, and also with a reference to Bakhtin's chronotope, "The indissolubility of space and time that the term expresses translates the idea of fusion of spatial and temporal indications into a comprehensive and concrete whole that, in our view, childhood seems to

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<sup>21</sup> "Naquele tempo o tempo então passava devagar e, à noite, nós íamos ver telenovela na casa do senhor Tuarles" (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 45).

<sup>22</sup> A vida às vezes é como um jogo brincado na rua: estamos no último minuto de uma brincadeira bem quente e não sabemos que a qualquer momento pode chegar um mais velho a avisar que a brincadeira já acabou e está na hora de jantar. [...] Nós, as crianças, vivíamos num tempo fora do tempo, sem nunca sabermos dos calendários de verdade. Para nós segunda-feira era um dia de começar a semana de aulas e sexta-feira significava que íamos ter dois dias sem aulas (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 26).



aggregate" (JACOBY, 2010, p. 200).<sup>23</sup> The value of childhood is evident for many writers who, at some point in their lives, detach it from time and evoke it. In Ondjaki's writing, for example, it is recurrent. This can be explained, according to Gaston Bachelard (2009), because "A potential childhood dwells in us. When we go to rediscover it in our daydreams, even more than in its reality, we relive it in its possibilities" (BACHELARD, 2009, p. 95).<sup>24</sup>

Through the eyes of the children on the street, Charlita's trip to Portugal takes on such grandeur and expectation that everyone rushes to announce the news to the entire neighborhood. "We all went outside to spread the news. Charlita was going to Portugal in a very big plane that made a lot of noise and flew for a lot of hours without stopping for gas" (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 45).<sup>25</sup> The child's account shows us the enchantment with the world, the wonder that exists behind the simplest things, built by the child's point of view, even in the face of an unstable scenario, of devastation, marked by various problems.

The value of friendship is also very strong in the narrative, so that it is precisely through the children's perspective that this value is revealed. The children spend the days following the departure of their friend between games and conversations, watching the soap opera Roque Santeiro, one of their favorite entertainments, but always anxiously waiting for her to return, who is so missed. The value of the moment, the time and space of childhood is announced by the narrator, who expresses the uniqueness of such memories:

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<sup>23</sup> "A indissolubilidade de espaço e tempo que o termo expressa traduz a ideia de fusão dos indícios espaciais e temporais num todo compreensivo e concreto que, a nosso ver, a infância parece agregar" (JACOBY, 2010, p. 200).

<sup>24</sup> "Uma infância potencial habita em nós. Quando vamos reencontrá-la nos nossos devaneios, mais ainda que na sua realidade, nós a revivemos em suas possibilidades" (BACHELARD, 2009, p. 95).

<sup>25</sup> "Fomos todos lá fora espalhar a notícia. A Charlita ia a Portugal num avião bem grande que fazia bué de barulho e voava bué de horas sem parar para pôr gasolina" (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 45).

The soap opera was almost over, and although her sisters would keep an eye on the sound - watching the television very closely - at the end of the episode we would always go outside, sit on the wall and tell the whole episode again. I liked this moment very much because everybody changed the soap opera, changed the characters' conversations, invented new situations, and Charlita's sisters were delighted or confused by these Angolan versions of the soap opera (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 45).<sup>26</sup>

The socioeconomic context of the inhabitants of the street is evidenced by the narrative in several moments. Charlita's sisters, for example, had vision problems just like her, but for lack of resources, they had no access to consultation or even to the use of glasses. The children, at night, would all gather in one of the houses to watch the soap opera, because television was not accessible to everyone, few had one at home. The soap opera Roque Santeiro is remembered with many details and appreciation, it was a narrative that marked the lives of all the children in the play, especially that of the protagonist.

The author-character brings up significant elements of his childhood universe. From his perspective, it is light, there is no weight around this existence. Life in Angola is only described, it is not as if through the narrative construction the writer analyzes himself, or problematizes the universe where he grew up and lived his early years. There is only joy in the memory and the words become light and translate the individuality, but at the same time, also, the collectivity of the memories, which have the street as a conductor.

The imagination is a free and fertile territory in the childhood of Onjdaki, the children retell the episodes of the novel and add new events and situations, keep thinking of possibilities of how is being the trip of Charlita to Portugal,

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<sup>26</sup> A telenovela estava quase a acabar e, apesar das irmãs dela ficarem atentas ao som — olhando a televisão de muito perto —, no fim do episódio nós íamos sempre lá fora, sentar no muro e contar todo o episódio outra vez. Eu gostava muito desse momento porque todo mundo modificava a novela, mexia nas conversas dos personagens, inventava novas situações, e as irmãs da Charlita deliravam contentes ou confusas com essas versões angolanas da telenovela (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 45).

creating in their imaginations images of what the friend is doing of her days, "[...] some were imagining her with new toys offered by the ophthalmologist himself, others were talking about her eyes already fixed" (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 46).<sup>27</sup> Another aspect evident in childhood in "No galinheiro, no devagar do tempo" is the affection among children, the care and concern for the other, the emotion evident in the arrival of the friend.

In the street, on the wall that was the kids' meeting place, the narrator character hopes to find his friend Charlita, eager to tell her about the news, especially in relation to the chapters of the soap opera that she has not been able to watch. However, he doesn't find her, she is not there with her sisters. This is when the intimacy, the close ties between the children, is once again revealed. He remembers that Charlita could be in a place that, for both of them, had a special value, a meaning that only childhood holds.

I wondered, I don't know why, that Charlita might be in a place where only the two of us liked to go sometimes: in the abandoned chicken coop of her house, with scraps of hard corn scattered on the floor. It was dark. [...] impossible things happened that night, in the abandoned henhouse of Mr. Tuarles' house (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 47).<sup>28</sup>

The narrative closes amidst the space of the chicken coop, when the two friends listen to each other, taking advantage of the moment to repair the emptiness left by the absence caused by the temporary estrangement between the two. It is in the secrets that childhood holds that the essentials of life seem to reside, goodness, friendship, companionship, and joy. Just as it begins, the

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<sup>27</sup> "[...] uns imaginavam ela com novos brinquedos oferecidos pelo próprio médico das vistas, outros falavam das vistas dela já arrançadas" (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 46).

<sup>28</sup> Imaginei, não sei porquê, que a Charlita podia estar num lugar onde só nós dois gostávamos de ir às vezes: no galinheiro abandonado da casa dela, com restos de milho duro espalhados pelo chão. Estava escuro. [...] coisas impossíveis aconteceram assim relatadas naquela noite, no galinheiro abandonado da casa do senhor Tuarles (ONDJAKI, 2007, p. 47).

text ends with the perception of the boy, now an adult, observing that in those days, time passed slowly.

Closing the observations on childhood in Ondjaki's text, we affirm the relevance of time for the construction of childhood, "time, for Bakhtin, becomes plurality of worldviews: both in experience and in creation, manifests itself as a set of simultaneities that are not instants, but events in the complex of its unfolding" (MACHADO, 2010, p. 215).<sup>29</sup> Angola, which carries the traces of war, devastation, and is a recent nation, needs to learn about life with the lightness of children.

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<sup>29</sup> “o tempo, para Bakhtin, torna-se pluralidade de visões de mundo: tanto na experiência como na criação, manifesta-se como um conjunto de simultaneidades que não são instantes, mas acontecimentos no complexo de seus desdobramentos” (MACHADO, 2010, p. 215).

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