




ARTICLE

Independent Publishing in Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau

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Abstract

Focusing on the work of independent publishers in Lusophone Africa, this article investigates the strategies undertaken by the publishers to develop their catalog and run a publishing house in challenging environments. My examples will be drawn from ongoing initiatives by Filinto Elísio and Márcia Souto (Rosa de Porcelana, Cape Verde), Miguel de Barros and Tony Tcheca (Corubal, Guinea-Bissau), Abdulai Sila (Kusimon, Guinea-Bissau), Luiz Vicente (Nimba Edições, Guinea-Bissau/Portugal), Ondjaki (Kacimbo, Angola), Mbate Pedro, Jessemusse Cacinda, Sandra Tamele, and Dany Wambire (Cavalo do Mar, Ethale Books, Trinta Zero Nove, and Fundza, respectively, Mozambique). Although most scholarship on Luso-African writing has been devoted to the form and content of these literatures, there has been scant attention to the socio-history of publishers.

Keywords: Independent publishing; Lusophone Africa; Portuguese; Lusophone

Introduction

The first case, or rather story, took place in Luanda where, in 1978, a book fair was held in a public square. A television reporter circled between the stalls interviewing book buyers, among them a cloth merchant lady. Evidently, she was an illiterate woman buying books. Therefore, after ascertaining that this cloth merchant lady had a preference for national authors—that is, writers whose works appeared in editions of the Union of Angolan Writers—, the reporter asked, with all due respect, if by any chance “the comrade can read?” The lady replied that, as it happens, she could not read, but she was buying the books because these were national authors and the works would be an inheritance for her grandchildren, who would know how to read.¹

¹ Russell G. Hamilton, “Síntese e Conclusões,” *Les littératures africaines de langue portugaise: Actes du Colloque International—Paris, 28–29–30 Novembre, 1 Decembre 1984*, eds. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

First reported by the critic Russell G. Hamilton, this anecdote has often been cited by Angolan writers, especially those involved in the liberation struggle. In one of the interviews providing the source material for this article, Pepetela retold it as something he had witnessed. If this indeed was the case, or if the story first appeared on television has little importance, what draws our attention is the very predicament of literary production to which the anecdote speaks. Not just in Angola, but in all Portuguese-speaking African countries at the time, several challenges had to be faced simultaneously. Alphabetic illiteracy was extremely high; learners (both young and old) lacked books and other pedagogical materials, especially with a decolonized content; new national literatures, entailing support for writers and critics as well as publishers and booksellers, had to be consolidated.

Time has passed since the 1970s and 1980s, but contemporary literary publishing in Lusophone Africa continues to face severe challenges, albeit under changed political circumstances. Rather than refer to anecdotal evidence, however, it is my intention in this article to present a more thorough account of the sociogenesis of publishing houses in these Portuguese-speaking countries. This will then illuminate their decisive role in promoting literacy, nurturing literary movements, and even inspiring young people to create their own independent publishing houses.

In a recent article, I examined the emergence of a Cape Verdean imprint belonging to a contemporary group of independent publishers that will be a focus of this article. Building on my earlier work, the idea here is to present a panorama of independent publishers in Portuguese-speaking African countries. I will be looking at the individuals who founded these publishing houses, including their social origins and trajectories, and examine their catalogs in their entirety, thus seeking to identify patterns and singularities of each editorial project.²

The publishers discussed here have all set up shop in the last two decades. They are, notably, Filinto Elísio and Márcia Souto (Rosa de Porcelana, Cape Verde), Miguel de Barros and Tony Tcheca (Corubal, Guinea-Bissau), Abdulai Sila (Kusimon, Guinea-Bissau), Luiz Vicente (Nimba Edições, Guinea-Bissau/Portugal), Ondjaki (Kacimbo, an incipient Angolan publishing house created by the author himself), Mbate Pedro (from Cavalo do Mar, Mozambique), Jesse-musse Cacinda (Ethale Books, Mozambique), Sandra Tamele (Trinta Zero Nove, Mozambique), and Dany Wambire (Fundza, Mozambique).

(Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1985; my edition says 1989), 561–67; “O primeiro caso, ou, melhor, estória, passou-se em Luanda onde, em 1978, se realizou uma feira do livro numa praça pública. Um repórter de televisão circulava entre as barracas a entrevistar compradores de livro, entre eles uma senhora de panos. Evidentemente, tratava-se de uma analfabeta a comprar livros. Portanto, depois de averiguar que a tal senhora de panos tinha uma preferência por autores nacionais —isto é, escritores cujas obras saíram em edições da União dos Escritores Angolanos -, o repórter indagou, com toda delicadeza, se, por acaso, “a camarada sabe ler?” A senhora retorquiu que por acaso não sabia ler, mas que comprava os livros porque eram autores nacionais e que essas obras seriam uma herança para os seus netos que sim saberiam ler” (561). My translation.

² Marcello Giovanni Pocaí Stella, “Una rosa en medio del Atlántico: La sociogénesis de la editorial caboverdiana Rosa de Porcelana,” *El Taco En La Brea* 1 (15): 2022 (<https://doi.org/10.14409/tb.2022.15.e0063>).

All these projects manifest a certain resistance to the dominant economic logic of publishing. They opt, for example, to publish works that are not only aimed at commercial success but guided by other criteria such as bibliodiversity or artistic merit. They attempt, likewise, to shape and incentivize new groups of readers, in some cases by valorizing local African languages. They also attempt, not least, to cultivate new literary geographies and geopolitics. On the one hand, they promote greater integration among the Portuguese-speaking African countries (known as PALOP, or *Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa*) without the mediation of Portugal or Brazil. On the other, just as importantly, they construct editorial bridges with African countries from other linguistic areas.

Mostly created from 2010 onward, these publishing houses also seek to fill gaps left by the expansion of large transnational publishing conglomerates as well as resist policies and spaces controlled by the old metropolises. Notwithstanding these policies, the use of transnational or national bodies from the Northern Hemisphere is still necessary. One such example is the Invitation Programme of the Frankfurt Fair, an initiative undertaken in partnership with UNESCO that invites independent publishers from “peripheral” regions of the world for workshops, training, and networking during the Frankfurt event each year. As an example, the publishers Trinta Zero Nove, Cavalo do Mar, and Rosa de Porcelana were awarded scholarships to participate in the fair through this very program, which has been particularly lively since the turn of the millennium.

Using established sociological methods, I will in what follows first map out the emerging group of independent publishers of the PALOP, while at the same time interrogating the concept of publisher and independent publishing by presenting an overview of the editorial history of the PALOP from the earliest beginnings to the current moment. From there, I will then look more closely at the publishers’ catalogs, with a view to identifying the main literary genres, the authors’ nationalities, the most frequently published authors, their decade of birth, gender, and so on. This section will show how national authors dominate the catalogs as a result both of independent decisions and constraints, notably the difficulty in obtaining translation rights of authors from other languages, as well as the lack of qualified translators. Another clear result from this investigation is that the catalogs are still mostly composed of male authors, usually from an older generation, who write poetry and short stories. Finally, I wish to highlight what is, in comparison with their PALOP colleagues, the remarkably strong and diverse production of Mozambican independent publishers. This editorial mapping is fundamental to understanding the contemporary literary production in Portuguese-speaking countries and to show how they manage to prevail in the global publishing world.

Finally, in closing, I will zoom in on a few publishers and editors whose projects and social origins make them stand out. The enterprise of the only Black woman publisher in this group, Sandra Tamele, the proprietor of Trinta Zero Nove in Mozambique, is particularly striking. She produces narrated audiobooks and physical books written in the main Bantu languages of her country (Macua, Sena, and Changana) at modest prices to be consumed and enjoyed by the part of the population not literate or versed in Portuguese—an

initiative that points to counter-hegemonic solutions. She also stands out for the choice to build a catalog with a majority of women authors, being the only case among all the publishers researched in which this occurs. I will also highlight the initiative of Filinto Elísio and Márcia Souto from Rosa de Porcelana, who produce books translated into Cape Verdean Creole. Their publishing house emerged out of a literary festival hosted in their native archipelago, the World of Salt Literature Festival, which alerts us to an extension of the universe of possibilities of independent publishers of the PALOP.

In Search of an African Editorial Catalog

Building on an ongoing doctoral project, the research undertaken for this article consists in the main of twelve semi-structured interviews.³ Ten were conducted through videoconference, one by email (by a senior editor of a transnational Mozambican publisher). The interviews took place between October 2020 and March 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is mainly based on qualitative methods, but I also work with quantitative data when referring to publishing catalogs. Thus, I follow the suggestion of Franco Moretti to always try to combine a (quantitative) distant reading strategy with a closer (with quantitative) approach to corroborate the relevance of patterns and singularities found.⁴

Given that much of my source material is interview-based, an initial problem to be addressed concerns the anonymity of the interviewees. Maintaining anonymity in these very restricted sectors is almost impossible, so the identity of publishers and publishing houses will normally be disclosed with their consent. In addition, even when I make collective statements about publishing in all countries, or when referring to lifestyles and different social attributions or attitudes toward the profession and the publishing world, I will also remain loyal to their individual strategies and profiles.⁵

But, to begin with, what is independent publishing? Differences between Africa and Europe notwithstanding, Sophie Noël's seminal work on independent publishing in France may help to answer that question. In her book, Noël examines the publication of French politically committed, even subversive, social and human sciences. Despite the more literary slant of my study, some characteristics pointed out by Noël remain relevant.⁶

A first similarity with the findings of Noël is the unstable position of independent publishing in relation to economics, politics, university, and literature. Publishers strive to maintain a balance between these four spheres of social life, but it is always a very troubled and delicate operation because maintaining a relative independence of such spaces implies that one must rely on some of

³ I have the consent of all the interviewees to mention their names.

⁴ Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68.

⁵ The only publisher I was unable to interview, due to scheduling problems, was Ondjaki.

⁶ Sophie Noël, *L'édition indépendante critique: Engagements politiques et intellectuels* (Villeurbanne: Presses de l'enssib, 2012; <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pressesenssib.1104>).

them at certain times, but not completely and indefinitely. It is not possible, therefore, to rely on a single dimension, under penalty of losing political or economic autonomy, or literary value or beliefs and political values and critical engagement.⁷

Therefore, these publishers are always trying to find solutions to funding, partnerships, and projects that meet their desires and expectations, and their essential needs to survive. In addition, among the PALOP, all of this happens in markets that are relatively unfavorable to literary publishing.

At the same time, this precarious position can be seen as a place of high symbolic value because it refers to the foundational values of the literary field: the belief in the transformative, emancipatory, and revolutionary power of words and literature, in its intrinsic capacity to promote society and responsible citizenship, as well as more education and freedom. Although these values might be considered “Western,” we will find that they have been adapted and transformed by the African literary movements. Indeed, these movements began as an intrinsic part of the struggle against colonialism to counterattack the racist, ethnocentric, and offensive conceptions of the colonizer.

In short, we can affirm that these publishers and publishing houses exist in strongly cleaved social positions, between economic precariousness and a highly positive symbolic value attribution of their craft. It is worth noting that the notion of independence is always a relational category. That is, it exists to the extent that it establishes a relationship of distance or proximity to other social spheres; therefore, it must always be examined in the light of well-located socio-historical situations and verified from the meaning employed by each individual agent in relation to their position in the social space in which they are inserted. For some publishers economic independence can be more important than political independence. The point, is however, that when someone affirms their independence, it reveals somebody else’s dependence on a social field. Independence or dependence is in other words always a relational nexus. Sometimes economic self-sufficiency requires a degree of political submission, or vice versa.

We will not rehearse the full publication history of Lusophone Africa, but we would like to stress two important moments that paved the way for the new young publishers that we analyze in this article. In this case we will look at two crucial periods: the post-liberation years from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s and the 1980s and 1990s.

Once the anticolonial struggles for independence had been won, socialist governments of different hues took over in the PALOP. A common characteristic was the centralization of power in state bureaucratic machines and the adoption of a single-party state. The new governments invested in the model of an official state publisher, creating National Institutes of Books and Records in the 1970s alongside, as a rule, National Writers’ Unions or Associations.

All these literary institutions were inspired by the Soviet model of Writers’ Unions, as well as the Soviet state centralization of cultural and literary infrastructures. According to Dragomir, before spreading to all the countries of

⁷ Noël, *L’édition indépendante critique*, 2012.

eastern Europe when the Soviet bloc was formed, the first Union of Writers emerged from the decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) on April 23, 1932, which stipulated that all writers be brought together under the Soviet power platform, thus liquidating the possibility of the existence of other associations of authors other than those linked to the single party.⁸

In the case of newly created and barely consolidated literary spaces with reduced autonomy relative to other social spheres, the creation of unique national organizations for the grouping of writers became a political asset of the new leaders and carried with it the permanent possibility of political intervention in the literary field to the detriment of its own rules of operation and the artistic autonomy of the writer. Therefore, it is not surprising, as Landgraf shows, that there were conflicts and protests when the Association of Mozambican Writers (AEMO) was created. According to Dragomir and Landgraf, these spaces are privileged places for observing tensions and ambivalences between the political and literary spaces in the PALOP. The unions and associations, whether more or less powerful, will have, nevertheless, lasting impacts on the configuration of national literary spaces due to the monopoly they have had for a long time in the book publishing sector and as institutions that had the power to recognize/legitimize new writers, as well as to make the works circulate.⁹

Notwithstanding these tensions, both the writers' unions and the institutes will be responsible for the production of books at low cost and on a large scale, which will be printed either in the remaining national presses of the colonial period or in the newspapers' printers, taking advantage of their infrastructure, or even, as in the case of Angola, by striking up partnerships with Portuguese publishers (such as *Edições 70*). In the latter case, the books were produced in Portugal and flown by plane to Angola. This publication strategy, as can be seen from the interviews gathered in Magnier's compilation and from the interview carried out for this research with writer Pepetela (former Minister of Education of Angola and former member of the Writers' Union), was feasible because the writers of UEA (Angolan Writer's Union—*União dos Escritores Angolanos*) achieved a favorable exchange rate for the importation of books from Portugal. This is how it worked: the former editor of *Edições 70*, Joaquim Soares da Costa, a friend of the writer José Luandino Vieira—who in the 1960s worked for Soares da

⁸ Lucia Dragomir, *L'Union des Écrivains: Une institution transnationale à l'Est* (Paris: Belin, 2007).

⁹ Notwithstanding their power, some literary groups, for instance, the creators of literary magazine *Charrua* in Mozambique, were able to confront and subvert some of the politics of the Mozambican Writer's Association, even if for a short period of time. Stefan Helgesson, "The Little Magazine as a World-Making Form: Literary Distance and Political Contestation in Southern African Journals," *Literature and the Making of the World: Cosmopolitan Texts, Vernacular Practices*, ed. Stefan Helgesson, Helena Bodin, and Annika Mörte Alling (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), 215–49; Pascale Casanova, *A república mundial das letras* (São Paulo: Estação liberdade, 2002); Stefan Helgesson, *Transnationalism in Southern African Literature: Modernists, Realists, and the Inequality of Print Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Tristan Leperlier, "La langue des champs" *CONTEXTES* 28 (2020 [<https://doi.org/10.4000/contextes.929>]); Flávia Landucci Landgraf, *Políticas culturais de um Estado revolucionário: Moçambique no pós-independência* (Salvador: UFBA, 2018); Dragomir, *L'Union des Écrivains*, 2007.

Costa and settled the agreement—produced a smaller print run to be sold in Portugal and a larger one to be sent to Angola, with the UEA logo on its cover, at a cost of not much more than one or two dollars. The UEA paid for the edition of, for example, 6,000 copies, of which 1,000 were to be sold in Portugal by Soares and another 5,000 were shipped to Angola. When they arrived, due to the exchange rate policy of the National Bank of Angola, they cost something like one to two dollars in Angolan national currency of the time. Hence, a book could cost anything from 30 to 60 Kwanzas, making it one of the cheapest products on the market, cheaper even than fruit.¹⁰

In the same collection by Magnier and in the interview given by Pepetela, it becomes clear, however, that the policy of popularization and cheap print-runs soon exhausted itself. From the moment in the late 1970s of editions that sold anything from 60,000 to 300,000 copies, there was a rapid decline, and it could suddenly take five to ten years to sell 10,000 copies. This shift was experienced differently in each of the PALOP, but there were nonetheless, from the 1980s onward, some factors in common. In brief: drawn-out internal civil conflicts and wars; the weight of the decline of the Soviet Union and communist and socialist bloc (which could no longer technically, commercially, and militarily support their former African allies). Additionally, we can say that the combination of a reconfiguration of the post-oil crisis global economy and the increasing impact of IMF-driven structural adjustment have put a damper on public spending policies, but eventually it opened space for the emergence of the first private editorial projects in the PALOP.¹¹

In all cases, even where there was no prominent presence of the IMF or World Bank, the combination of crisis factors shows an abrupt transition from centralized state economies to more decentralized market economies. The retraction of the state also produced a need to associate with local cultural intermediaries such as NGOs and other transnational cultural institutions to raise funding for book publishing projects in case one could not or did not want to create a new publishing house.

There is a transitional phase in the 1990s, when publishers such as Ilhéu Editora (1989, Cape Verde), Chá de Caxinde (1989, Angola), Kusimon (1994, Guinea-Bissau), Ndjira, Nzila (1996, Mozambique and Angola), Alcance (2007,

¹⁰ Bernard Magnier et al, ed., “Littératures d’Angola” *Notre Librairie* 115 (1994): 2–141.

¹¹ In both the Mozambican and Cape Verdean cases, the institutes dedicated to book production were not as successful as the Angolan one. Significantly, in the first case it took seven years after the end of the Portuguese rule to the creation of AEMO, and as Chissano points out the association never had a substantial budget nor the publishing equipment needed until the beginning of the 1990s. In comparison, the Cape Verdean institute was created just one year after the independence, but as Varela affirms, it just started working in 1985 with scarce resources. The Guinean case is particular because, as Tony Tcheka says in an interview, Mario Pinto de Andrade, who had left Angola due to internal MPLA disputes, replicated the Angolan model, giving great importance to the formation of a writers’ union and an institution that promoted books, even with a more difficult financial condition and a literary tradition that was less long lasting than in Angola; we see in the country an important production of works by national authors, especially poetry after 1975. Tomé Varela. “L’Institut capverdien du livre” *Notre Librairie* 112 (1993): 80–83; Pedro Chissano, “L’association des écrivains mozambicains” 113 (1993): 86–87; Magnier, “Littératures d’Angola,” 1994.

Table 1. Number of Titles per Catalog (n = 187)

Publishers	Titles
Rosa de Porcelana	56
Fundza	27
Corubal	21
Kusimon	21
Cavalo do mar	17
Nimba	17
Ethale	16
Trinta Zero Nove	12

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

Mozambique) and Índico Editores (2007/2008, Mozambique) emerge. These enterprises faced an extremely turbulent period. In Guinea Bissau, in the 1980s and 1990s, the country experienced ten coups d'état; in Mozambique, the civil war ended in 1992, which marked the beginning of a difficult peace process, and in Angola the war dragged on until 2002.

The aforementioned Kusimon resumed its trajectory with greater vigor than others and repositioned itself among the newly created publishers: Nimba and Corubal (Guinea Bissau), Rosa de Porcelana (Cape Verde), Cavalo do Mar (this is the heir of its publisher's experience with Índico Editores), Trinta Zero Nove, Ethale, Fundza (all four from Mozambique), and Kacimbo (from Angola).

Before we review some data of the social origins of the publishers, let us briefly look at their catalogs to see how independent editorial projects have been structured in the PALOP.

As we can see, in [table 1](#), the most voluminous catalog is that of Rosa de Porcelana. This fact deserves to be highlighted because Rosa de Porcelana was founded later than the Bissau-Guinean publishers Corubal and Kusimon, indicating particular difficulties in Guinea-Bissau. On the other hand, although more recent than Rosa, Fundza's list tallies already half of its Cape Verdean colleague's, indicating the relative vigor in the Mozambican production of books. Finally, it is important to highlight how publishers struggle to accumulate voluminous catalogs even after a decade or more of publishing activities. On average, over the last thirty years, the output of all these publishers has amounted to six books per year.

When we look at [Tables 2](#) and [3](#), we note that the production of books in Mozambique was the largest among the publishers considered, a fact that may have to do with a boom of this type of edition in the country, but as Can warns, this increase cannot yet address the unequal access to literacy and cultural goods in Mozambique and also occurs in a very fragile literary space institutionally due

Table 2. Titles by Country of Origin of the Publisher (n = 187)

Country	Titles
Mozambique	72
Cape Verde	56
Guinea-Bissau	42
Guinea-Bissau/Portugal	17

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

Table 3. Decade of Publications (n = 187)

Decades	Titles
1990–1999	7
2000–2009	6
2010–2019	113
2020–2021	60
No info.	1

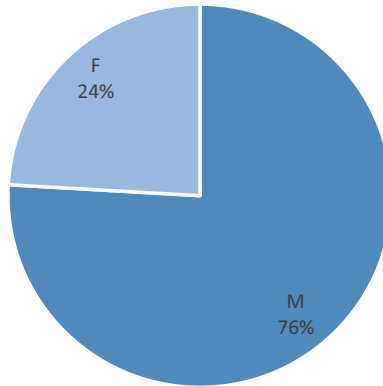
Source: Own elaboration with research data.

to the lack of long-term cultural and educational policies and scant investment in the cultural field.¹²

In any case, it is remarkable that we have found more publishers in Mozambique than in the other PALOP, which should also be read as a window of opportunity for future research to focus on finding initiatives that certainly exist in other territories, but often do not reach even the most consolidated publishers abroad nor, therefore, researchers.¹³ We may recall that my interviewees were first screened from the list of publishers invited to the Invitation Programme of the Frankfurt Fair and then from the indications of the publishers themselves. Hence, the sample should not be read as exhaustive, but possibly representative. The point of surprise that should also stimulate more research and reflections is the apparent lack of Angolan production today. The editorial house created by Ondjaki is still largely just a bookstore and a scene for staging cultural events, not an actual publisher. This fact deserves mention, given that Angola in its early post-independence period provided such extensive support to its writers and placed such a

¹² Nazir Ahmed Can, *O Campo literário moçambicano: tradução do espaço e formas de insilio* (São Paulo: Kapulana, 2020).

¹³ We have also tried to get in touch with Angolan publishers from Mayamba and Castelo das Edições, the former answered some of our questions but made it clear that the focus of the publishing house was scientific books, textbooks, dictionaries, and not literature.



Graph 1. Distribution of Authorship by Gender (n = 188)

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

premium on the construction of a national literature, as suggested by Can and also my earlier remarks.¹⁴

It is also worth mentioning that the activity of independent publishers in PALOP rose sharply in the 2010s, and we can see that already now, in the early years of 2020, the number of books is more than half of the previous decade's total. Future evaluations should continue to be made to understand whether this apparent growth will sustain itself in the long run or whether many of the small publishers will shut down their activities.¹⁵

There are two somewhat surprising data in [Graph 1](#) (Distribution of Authorship by Gender) and [Table 4](#) (Authorship by Decade of Birth of Male and Female Writers). First, there is a very low number of published women writers; secondly, the publishers also tend to rely on older authors, most of whom were born between the 1930s and 1970s. This diverges from other recent studies on independent literatures that suggest a tendency to be open to more novelties, younger authors, and also pay greater attention to gender equity in their catalogs.¹⁶

¹⁴ Maybe the success experienced by the state cultural politics for publishing can explain why so little room has been left to private enterprises to grow in Angola. Also, we can think about the centrality of the Angolan Writers' Union as the main gatekeeper for access to publishing, circulation, and consecration in the country. These, however, are still hypotheses to be explored. Can, *O campo literário moçambicano*.

¹⁵ In the absence of a complete statistical panorama of book production in Mozambique, I have also interviewed the director of Plural Editores of Mozambique, a subsidiary of the Portuguese publishing house Porto Editora. He stated that the Mozambican branch produces only school textbooks, dictionaries, and grammar books, tailored for the government purchases for schools. They had not produced a single fiction book until 2007, when they launched their first children's book. It is in opposition to these large textbook publishers that the independents assert themselves.

¹⁶ Analía Gerbaudo, "Las editoriales cartoneras en América Latina (2003–2019): una nano-intervención en la construcción de la World Literature," *Alea: Estudios Neolatinos* 22.3 (2020): 259–78;

Table 4. Authorship by Decade of Birth of Male and Female Writers (n = 188)

Decade of birth authors	Number of Authors
1930s	7
1940s	13
1950s	21
1960s	18
1970s	18
1980s	18
1990s	4
No info.	89

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

Let us move on to our final findings regarding self-publication, the national profile of the catalogs, and the relative openness among these publishers to other literary genres:

Table 5 shows the authors with at least two books launched by the publishers. Some names stand out, especially Abdulai Sila, Dany Wambire, Mbate Pedro, and Teresa Montenegro, who are both publishers and authors. This is, in fact, not so surprising. Often, the motivation to start a publishing house had to do with the shortage of outlets for authors to publish their own works.

Table 6 highlights the prominence of African writers from various parts of the continent. However, most of the African authors are from the PALOP, and there is little circulation and publication of authors outside their borders. Mozambicans are in other words published and read in Mozambique, Cape Verdians in Cape Verde, and so on. Finally, another trend is related to the difficulty of these publishers in enabling translations, either because they cannot afford translation rights or due to the lack of qualified translators. The exception here is Trinta Zero Nove in Mozambique, as I will discuss in the following. Finally, in Table 7 we may note that poetry is the most frequently published literary genre, but also that prose fiction is also prominent. The importance notwithstanding, especially during and after the independence struggle, essays, novels, and short stories together make up the bulk of publications today, indicating perhaps a decline for poetry.¹⁷

Another striking fact is the strong presence of Portuguese authors compared to Brazilian authors. This may signal a difficulty for African publishers in obtaining the rights of Brazilians and points to persistence of a bond with the

José de Souza Muniz Júnior, *Girafas e bonsais: editores 'independentes' na Argentina e no Brasil (1991-2015)* (São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 2016 [<https://doi.org/10.11606/T.8.2016.tde-28112016-103559>]); Santiago Venturini, "La nueva edición argentina: la traducción de literatura en pequeñas y medianas editoriales (2000-2019)," *Cuadernos LIRICO* 20 (2019): 1-16 (<https://doi.org/10.4000/lirico.8691>).

¹⁷ Can, *O campo literário moçambicano*.

Table 5. Authors with at Least Two Books Published

Authors	Titles
Abdulai Sila	7
Dany Wambire	6
Arménio Vieira	3
José Luiz Tavares	3
Carlos Artur de Morais and Teresa Montenegro	2
Abdelaziz dos Reis Vera Cruz	2
Ana Mafalda Leite	2
Evel Rocha	2
Huco Monteiro	2
João Branco	2
Jorge Carlos Fonseca	2
José Afonso Baptista	2
Júlio Carrilho	2
Manuel Mutimucuo	2
Martins Mapera	2
Mbate Pedro/António Cabrita	2
Mélio Tinga	2
Rui Jorge Semedo	2
Teresa Montenegro	2
Teresa Schwarz	2
José Luis Peixoto	2

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

former metropolis, despite the often-expressed intention of these publishers to move beyond established links with Europe.

This desire to decolonize the geography of the world publishing space is seen in the presence of non-Lusophone African authors from Senegal, South Africa, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Nigeria, Togo, and Zimbabwe. Few though they may be, their presence marks a commitment to transgress the symbolic barriers imposed by the separation of the continent in linguistic spaces of European origin. Yet, there is a similar difficulty also regarding authors from other Portuguese-speaking countries, as can be seen from the limited presence of Angolan authors, São Tomeans, or even Asian authors from East Timor or Macau who write in Portuguese. Regardless, the data confirm the ambition among these publishers to widen the scope of their activities beyond established Lusophone, national, and colonial patterns.

Table 6. Titles by Nationality of Their Authors (n = 187)

Countries	Titles
Mozambique	51
Guinea-Bissau	46
Cape Verde	41
Portugal	17
Brazil	6
No info.	5
Angola	5
Italy	3
Senegal	3
South Africa	2
England	2
Kenya	2
China	1
Ivory Coast	1
France	1
Morocco	1
Nigeria	1
Poland	1
São Tomé and Príncipe	1
Togo	1
Zimbabwe	1

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

Finally, the enduring, if weakened, prominence of poetry merits comment. It is well known that smaller publishers often devote themselves to the less profitable genres in the literary field. This is, on the one hand, an active choice, given that they commonly value these genres as purer and more aesthetically independent, and hence less commercial; on the other hand, however, the apparent choice makes a virtue out of necessity because more profitable genres such as the novel are too costly for this group of publishers.¹⁸ Typically,

¹⁸ As stated, by Can, we can observe, both in Angola and Mozambique, a strong and affluent production of poetry, ever since the beginning of the anticolonial struggle. In the Mozambican case, it took at least twenty years, until the first post-independence novel appeared: *Ualalapi* by Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, in 1987; Can, *O campo literário moçambicano*.

Table 7. Main Published Literary Genres (n = 187)

Literary genre	Titles
Poetry	52
Short Story	30
Novel	29
Essay	20
Infant - youth literature	12
Technical	10
History	7
Theater	7
<i>Crônica</i>	5
Autobiography	3
Biography	2
Letters	2
Short story/Children's and Youth	2
Art	1
Dictionary	1
Interview	1
Non-fiction	1
Pedagogy	1
Psychology	1

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

publication rights are owned by large publishers and their authors are tied to them contractually. On a more positive note, the range of different genres published reflects that it is only the independent publishers who provide this service to authors. When authors themselves cover the printing costs, publishers cannot refuse to comply.

Independent Publishers: A Group Portrait

Who, then, are these publishers? What can we say about their social origins and positions? For Bourdieu, trajectory analysis aims to overcome the naturalized discourse that agents normally have about their lives, namely, the tendency to see existential paths as linear, singular, and coherent from beginning to end. In his understanding, a social trajectory traces the different social positions occupied successively by an agent, as well the passage through each point in the social space that has shaped them and allowed for the accumulation or loss of various

types of capital. Each point in a trajectory, thought in this way, would then allow us to glimpse the universes and horizons of possible openings at a given moment in life, and consequently, also the paths considered impossible or unthinkable. In addition, trajectories could be thought of equally in relation to their hesitations, retreats, deviations, and crossroads, fleeing the biographical illusion that all life is a succession of successful steps toward a predefined goal of start.¹⁹

Claire Ducournau updates Bourdieu's research procedure, tracing a sociological profile of French-speaking African authors who debuted in the twentieth century. From the results obtained, she identifies that most French-speaking African writers are highly educated, as are the editors studied in this article, but few have published on African soil. In addition, although African languages are symbolically valued by these authors, they are seldom employed in writing. This illustrates circumstances that the PALOP publishers are trying to modify. Unlike the group of writers identified by Ducournau in French-speaking Africa, with their privileged backgrounds, publishers from PALOP countries come from more modest conditions, in many cases being the first in their families to obtain extended formal education.²⁰

What we see in the [table 8](#) is that only one of these ten publishers is the child of senior officials. In most cases, their parents have been teachers, industrial workers, doctors, and service providers. Half of the parents have only an elementary school education or are alphabetically illiterate, especially the mothers. Most of the relatives reached at least a level of education close to the bachelor's/licentiate degree or completed it (some of the editors are children of parents who engaged directly in the liberation struggles, but for the most part they did not become senior party officials in the post-independence period). All publishers have at least one undergraduate degree (architecture, sociology, medicine, engineering, administration, literature and library science) showing a clear movement of social and educational ascension in relation to their parents. Eight out of ten have some degree of postgraduation or specialization closer to literature or public policy. Most were born in the late 1970s and early 1980s, only two in the 1960s.

Despite the qualitative differences, we can state that these publishers in general have humble origins and are the first generation to have received higher education. Well educated and trained, they have access to valuable knowledge to help in the administration of their home countries, but in most cases this career path is blocked by the elite of the ruling parties. For some, therefore, being a publisher is also a means of providing a public service to their countries. By publishing important technical and historical material, they attempt to influence government decision-makers or help develop literary skills and tools among the younger generation of their fellow citizens.

Most publishing houses are managed by their own founders with few or no employees. Therefore, these individuals depend almost entirely on their own

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *O poder simbólico* (Lisbon: Difel, 1989); Pierre Bourdieu, *Razões práticas: Sobre a teoria da ação* (Campinas: Papirus, 1996).

²⁰ Claire Ducournau, *La Fabrique des classiques africains: écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone* (Paris, CNRS éditions, 2017).

Table 8. Social Origins of the Independent Publishers of the PALOP

Publisher	Creation date	Founder	Country	Educational Background	Educational Background (father/mother)	Profession (father/mother)
Kusimon	2013 (1994)	Abdulai Sila	Guinea-Bissau	Graduation and master's degree in Engineering	Elementary education/ Illiterate	Truck driver-mechanic/ Homemaker
30.09	2018	Sandra Tamele	Mozambique	Graduation in Architecture and translation studies	Licentiate/Licentiate	Teacher/Teacher
Rosa de Porcelana	2013	Filinto Elísio e Márcia Souto	Cape Verde/ Portugal	Graduation and Master's degree in Literature (Marcia) and Graduation in Library science (Filinto)	* / *	Teacher/Teacher
Corubal	2012	Miguel de Barros	Guinea-Bissau	Graduation in Sociology, Specialization in Planning and Public policies	* / *	* / *
Nimba	2019	Luiz Vicente	Guinea-Bissau/ Portugal	Graduation in Business administration, Specialization in Public policies	Higher education/ Elementary education	Accountant/ Factory worker
Cavalo do Mar	2017	Mbate Pedro	Mozambique	Graduation in Medicine	Elementary education/ Technical	Carpenter/Nurse
Kacimbo	2020	Ondjaki	Angola	Graduation in Sociology, Specialization in African studies	Higher education/ Elementary education	Ministry/Teacher
Ethale	2017	Jessemusse Cacinda	Mozambique	Licentiate in Philosophy, Master's in Sociology, MBA in Education and management	* / Licentiate degree	Tourism worker/ teacher
Fundza	2016	Dany Wambire	Mozambique	Teacher formation (Licentiate)	* / *	Military officer/ homemaker and peasant

Source: Own elaboration with research data.

working capacity, which inevitably imposes several constraints with heavy weekly work hours and extremely tight schedules. This is one reason why the active catalog of publishers in most cases does not amount to more than thirty books; the average is twenty books published per editor.

Zooming in on some individual trajectories, I wish to highlight, first, Rosa de Porcelana and its editors, Filinto Elísio and Márcia Souto. Of note here is their political anchorage and networks in the wider Portuguese-speaking world. Secondly, I will discuss a particularly striking circumstance, namely, that only one of these publishing houses is managed by a woman: Trinta Zero Nove in Mozambique, run by Sandra Tamele.

Filinto Elísio, born in 1961 in the city of Praia in Cape Verde, is the son of professors and intellectuals. When touching upon his social origins, he mentions that his family strongly encouraged him to approach the world of arts and letters. Filinto graduated in Library Science at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and also has a degree in business administration. Before becoming a publisher, he was a professor in Sommerville in the United States and adviser to the Minister of Culture of Cape Verde.²¹

Márcia Ferreira Souto, interestingly, is not from Cape Verde, but from Itabuna in Bahia, Brazil. Her uncle was a poet and strongly influenced her choice to enroll in the UFMG Language program (from which she graduated in 1999). She taught Portuguese and Brazilian literature for a long time in schools in Minas Gerais, before earning a master's degree in Portuguese-language literatures with a focus on African Portuguese-language literatures. She received all her education at Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais; her MA resulted in 2011 in a dissertation on Mia Couto's novel *Venenos de Deus, remédios do Diabo* (*Poison of God, Remedies of the Devil*—yet untranslated). In 2011, she became editorial coordinator of the University of Cape Verde.

When Márcia and Filinto founded the publishing house in 2013, they accordingly had the requisite experience, training, and specialization in the educational, cultural, and literary area. This preparation arising from their personal, educational, and professional experiences can be considered as an important knowledge capital, enabling them to invest in their own undertaking in the editorial field. In recent years and on behalf of the publisher, the couple settled in Lisbon and have since then shared their time between the archipelago and the European continent.

Rosa de Porcelana can be considered as the most Portuguese-speaking of all the publishers discussed in this article. Its catalog comprises Cape Verdean, Brazilian, Portuguese, Angolan, and São Tomean authors. In addition, the two publishers have created their own literary festival, Mundo do Sal, which since 2017 has received guests from practically all Portuguese-speaking countries, as well as writers, critics, and literary personalities from various parts of the world. Although we do not have room for a detailed analysis of all publications, it is worth mentioning that the publisher is committed to publishing works in Cape

²¹ Ana Mafalda Leite et al., "Filinto Elísio," in *Nação e Narrativa Pós-colonial IV. Literatura & Cinema: Cabo Verde, Guiné-Bissau e São Tomé e Príncipe—Entrevistas*, ed. Leite et al. (Lisboa: Colibri, 2018), 103–21.

Table 9. Authors of the Catalog of the Trinta Zero Nove Publisher

Author	Year of publication	Gender	Race/ Color	Nationality	Year of Birth	Literary genre
Futhi Ntshingila	2020	F	Black	South Africa	1974	Novel
Silvia Ballestra	2020	F	White	Italy	1969	Novel
Marta Barone	2021	F	White	Italy	1987	Novel
Mohale Mashigo	2020	F	Black	South Africa	1983	Short Story
Adam Foulds	2020	M	White	England	1974	Short Story
Angela Readman	2021	F	White	England	1973	Short Story
Marguerite About	2020	F	Black	Ivory Coast	1971	Short Story/ Youth
Makena Onjerika	2021	F	Black	Kenya	1987	Short Story
Sandra Tamele	2021	F	Black	Mozambique	1980	Short Story/ Youth
Marcello D'Orta	2020	M	White	Italy	1953	Non-Fiction
Danai Mupotsa	2020	F	Black	Zimbabwe	*	Poetry
Amina Hachimi Alawi	2020	F	White	Morocco	*	Youth

Source: Own elaboration with data from <https://www.editoratrintazonove.org/>.

Verdean Creole, demonstrating a clear tendency to raise the value of this unofficial yet majority language of the archipelago. Finally, it is worth mentioning the presence of important political figures in their list, including a former president of Cape Verde, Jorge Carlos Fonseca, Arménio Vieira (who won the Camões Prize in 2009), among others. This proximity to Portuguese-speaking politicians and Filinto's experience in Cape Verdean politics boosts the activities of the publishing house because it often makes use of Cape Verdean embassies and consulates around the world for book launches. Hence, although economically independent from the state, as its founders affirm, it is nonetheless closely linked to politicians and agencies that assist it with infrastructure and nonmonetary support. "Independence," in a nutshell, is always relative and in constant tension with other social fields.

In the case of Sandra Tamele's Mozambican initiative Trinta Zero Nove, which started in 2018, we have a very different editorial project, based mostly based on translations. This is a strategy highlighted by Noël and Venturini used by publishers in peripheral contexts and in literatures in less dominant languages.²² This is a common strategy to accumulate literary capital and build a catalog.

²² Noël, *L'édition indépendante critique*; Venturini, "La nueva edición argentina."

while avoiding authors with expensive publishing rights. To this end, resources are given to lesser-known literatures and aiming at the ones backed up by national states that offer grants and subsidies for translating national authors into other idioms, as is the case in many Scandinavian countries (Norway, mainly) and in Asian countries, such as South Korea.

Sandra Tamele was born in 1980 in Pemba, Mozambique. The city is located on the north coast of the country and is the capital of Cabo Delgado province. As mentioned at the beginning of her testimony, her parents were trained teachers, although her mother had been brought up a peasant. Her father, on the other hand, had been an *assimilado*. Both belonged, in Tamele's words, to the generation that accomplished the liberation of Mozambique—the generation of the utopia, if we draw on the phrase of Pepetela. Tamele says she always had books at home, thanks to her parents' profession, and started reading literature for adults at a young age.

As she points out when narrating her trajectory, her closest family nucleus is marked by a rapid and abrupt process of upward social mobility. She became the first woman in the family to achieve a university degree, in architecture. Both her grandmothers were illiterate yet rooted in their respective oral traditions, one from the south of the country who spoke Changana, and the other from the north who spoke Macua—two of the most widely spoken Bantu languages in the country next to the Sena. Both were storytellers, but being schooled in Portuguese Tamele could not understand what the grandmothers said, except through gestural communication.

It is striking, in that context, to consider that Tamele has devoted herself so much to translation. As we can see in [Table 9](#), Trinta Zero Nove has published a uniquely wide range of authors, mostly from the African continent, mostly women, working in several genres.

Of the thirteen titles listed on their website, only one collection of short stories edited by Tamele, *As sete por quatro*—with short stories by Mozambican authors—is not a translation. Among all the authors, most are women, ten in relation to two men. Half are White and half are Black; most are young, born in the 1970s and 1980s (eight) and with only two of them born in the 1950s and 1960s. Of the languages spoken in Mozambique, ten titles are in Portuguese, whereas five are in one of the three major Bantu languages (Sena, Changana, and Macua). All books are available in physical and digital format and seven in audiobook. The most published literary genres are short stories (six titles), novels and literature for children and youth (three titles each), and nonfiction and poetry (one title each). Seven publications are of African authorship and five are European. It is worth highlighting the diversity of African countries and languages: we see that in Trinta Zero Nove's catalog, much of the content is represented, from North Africa and the Atlantic side of the continent and to the English-speaking countries neighboring Mozambique.²³ In addition to English,

²³ This is a sensitive point for several of the independent editors interviewed, namely the need to have catalogs with more African authors published by African publishers on African soil.

which is the language with the greatest source of translations, there are also works translated from Italian, French, and Arabic.²⁴

This is, as we can see, a unique editorial profile in terms of variety, range, and ambition. Added to that, Tamele sets up competitions and prizes to stimulate translations, tutors women who wish to work with publishing, participates in international book fairs, and cultivates partnerships with Portuguese-speaking and African countries from other regions to gain greater visibility and become economically viable. (As always, sales are low and bookstores in Maputo are few.)

Concluding Remarks

We hope to have shown that the post-independence Angolan anecdote of books bought by illiterate grandmothers was not an endpoint in the PALOP. On the contrary, the commitment to supporting a national literature seems to have inspired their grandchildren not only to read but also to consolidate a literary ecosystem, its limited public reach and economic and institutional fragility notwithstanding. As we have seen, there are a diversity of strategies to overcome the obstacles and create catalogs that privilege African authors, languages, and symbolic universes and break with the material and symbolic dependence of major European and American editorial centers. What this might result in another forty years down the line is impossible to say, but the conviction of grandmothers will not be swept away easily.

Competing interest. None

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²⁴ Sandra Tamele organizes an annual translation contest in Mozambique to stimulate the emergence of new translators. The contest's prize is the publication of the work in her publishing house.

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