

Edson INCOPTÉ

Four stories

Rat Invasion

Isnaba ran fast, tearing through the rough streets of the Bandim neighborhood. He entered the house as if he were being chased and, almost out of breath, shouted:

- Mother, mother... an invasion of rats is coming!
- A rat invasion, son? - Answered the mother, surprised.
- Yes, there are a lot of rats coming, ready to gnaw on everything.

The mother, astonished, began to wonder where so many rats came from that the son spoke of an invasion. She made that look of distrust and asked:

- But, son, are there that many mice?
- Yes mom! Nobody can count them, they are scattered everywhere.

“But if they're all over the place, how come I haven't seen one yet?”

Mistrust was planted in Dona Saba's eyes. He knew well the enthusiasms of the creature he brought into the world.

- It's true mother, it was Professor N'chalá himself who said in class today...

Without finishing speaking, Isnaba went back out the door with the same speed with which he had entered. He ran through the streets of Bandim without looking back, looking for friends to tell the good news. It didn't take long to find them playing soccer. As soon as Isnaba started to scream, the game was immediately interrupted, everyone wanted to listen to what the most enthusiastic kid in the neighborhood was saying.

There he told, once again, the story of the rat invasion and his colleagues soon left the game for later and began to spread the news. It didn't take long and the whole neighborhood already knew that an invasion of rats was coming. Not everyone believed it, but Dona Filomena, Dona Saba's neighbor and friend, immediately tried not to joke about the matter. She quickly went to talk to her friend:

- Neighbor, have you heard the news that an invasion of rotos is coming?
- As a neighbor, my son doesn't talk about anything else.
- And you will not take any action? Look, the mice are not for fun, they destroy everything...

“I don't know yet, I'll wait and see what happens. – She said calmly to Dona Saba.

- I'm already on my way to the fair, I'm going to get a good rat poison and wait for these thieves.

Dona Filomena was like that in everything around her: completely exaggerated. But, like her, there were many other people in Bandim. Everyone started buying medicine for mice. Within a week the news had spread across the country. It was broadcast on all national and community radio stations. At the fairs, the women talked about nothing else. In the stands, young people had no other theme. Numbers were pointed out. Sizes were discussed. Rats were said to gnaw

at stuffed trunks, clothes, wads of money and even people's feet while they slept. Quickly, there was no more medicine for rats at the fairs. Everyone wanted to be prepared for the coming invasion.

Several days passed, several weeks and no rats in the city of Bissau. People began to question where the whole story came from. Everyone had just heard about it, no one had seen any mice. Radio stations began to receive complaints for having broadcast fanciful news. Journalists were forced to investigate. With their knowledge of the Guinean capital, they quickly came to the conclusion that the news had come from Bandim. In the neighborhood, everyone was pointing the finger at the excited Isnaba, who in turn was saying that he had heard the story at school, but without mentioning names. Dona Saba defended her son as best she could. But she couldn't do much either, for she didn't know where all that bullshit had come from. One thing was certain: the son was no gilo. In turn, Mrs. Filomena, exaggerated as usual, ranted the word to accuse the merchants of the Bandim fair of having been the inventors of the whole story.

– This whole story appeared at the Bandim market, it was the sellers who invented it to take money from us. They should be arrested...

– Are you sure of what she just said? – Asked one of the journalists present, with an intimidating tone.

Mrs. Filomena did not have time to respond to the journalist, because immediately there was a great confusion. Everyone wanted to talk, everyone had something to say and no one respected anyone. The journalists were forced to leave the place, but in the minds of many, the accusation made by D. Filomena to the merchants of the Bandim fair remained. Several of them went to the fair with the intention of questioning the fair traders (which they should not have done). Upon arriving at the largest fair in the Guinean capital, journalists were faced with a great deal of confusion. (Guess what: Mrs. Filomena's statement had been broadcast on the radio.) The turmoil was so great that only the intervention of the neighbors from the Second Squadron managed to calm the mood. Everyone wanted to get the money back.

The journalist from Radio Pindjiguiti immediately returned to the station and proposed that a program open to the public on the subject be held the following day. The issue had become of national interest.

On the day of the program, many people wanted to give their opinion on the topic.

Student Mamadú Camara defended the following opinion:

– For me this story was invented by someone who thought that the city of Bissau is completely filthy. Which doesn't surprise me because garbage has taken over our beautiful city. There are containers everywhere and under them is just garbage and more garbage. Citizens of neighboring countries consider our city to be a garbage pond, which they don't do on their land, they come here. It seems that there is no one here to ask them for explanations...

The politician Marciano Nhaga defended the following:

– I believe that this story was invented by the Government to divert attention, from these people nothing surprises me anymore. But the truth is that the country is in a penury. Justice does not work, poverty is growing, the gap between rich and poor is increasing, although we all know that many have enriched and enrich themselves in an illicit way, drugs are completely destroying our youth and our society in general. And the government thought that with the rat invasion story people would forget about all these problems. He was completely wrong because we, citizens of good faith, are attentive to his tangles.

In turn, Mrs Evaldina Semedo, a nurse at the National Hospital Simão Mendes, said:

– In my opinion, this story was invented with the intention of alerting people and it only managed to have sustainability because deep down people know that it is something that can really happen. People in this country lack civility. They don't take good care of their homes, food is not well maintained and we all know that these things attract rats and other animals... it's really a lack of civility...

Several other people called and gave their opinions, the issue of the invasion of rats even served for many people to wash their souls in relation to the situation in the country. But even at the end of the program, behold, he calls Dona Saba, Isnaba's mother. She calls and makes the journalist remember her, then claims to remember that the story of the invasion came from the mouth of her son's teacher, Professor N'chalá. Well, the fidelity of the testimony makes many journalists go looking for the professor at his residence in Bandim. When they arrived at his house and saw him sitting on the porch reading a book, one of the journalists immediately asked:

- Professor N'chalá, was it you who deceived an entire country by claiming that an invasion of rats would come?

- Trick? I didn't deceive anyone. - Said the professor, with a serene air.

– But, according to information we have, were you the first to say such a thing to your students?
– The journalist persisted.

– In fact, I told my students that there was going to be an invasion of rats, bigger than the one that already exists and, most likely, I was the first. – replied the teacher, very calmly.

Another journalist present, surprised and outraged by the confession, confronts the professor:

– But how can you have affirmed a thing of this nature? What evidence do you have to put a city, an entire country in a state of panic?

Professor N'chalá finally closed the book he was reading, slowly raised his head, stared into the face of the journalist who questioned him and said:

– Do you think I need any proof? Don't you see rats scattered all over the city of Bissau? If you don't see then you are blind...! Just go up to the square, you'll see all the mice there. Don't you see...? Rats invaded the city, populated the most luxurious homes in this country, gnawed and gnawed, every day, the hearts of people. They gnawed dreams and values. They gnawed at all honesty, manhood, even the humility of people. There is almost no hope left, they have gnawed almost everything.

The journalists, without letting the professor conclude what he was saying and without saying another word, turned their backs and left, with Professor N'chalá going back to his reading.

A Question of Freedom

Five years of living far from his cradle, and although the adventures and misadventures of Lisbon challenged him to do so, Martinho N'fanda did not for a day forget his father's last words, before leaving Bissau: «a tree can have the size it may be, but the day its roots rot, it inevitably falls to the ground». He quoted this phrase to me over and over again.

Like me, Martinho N'fanda had come to Portugal with the aim of continuing his higher studies. In Guinea-Bissau he had his life done. In fact, he was born with more than a finished life, he was born with his destiny set: to assume his father's throne in Braia, in the north of the country.

He always took the fact that he was the first son of the Chief of Village, and therefore his successor, with great naturalness. It could not be otherwise, because until completing high school, he had enjoyed two complementary training: academic and traditional, which his father had insisted on instilling in him. He was deeply knowledgeable about the culture and traditions of his people. He spoke to me with great authority and knowledge of the Balantas of Kuntowe and the Balantas of Fora, enumerating their subdivisions. He proudly reported that he had gone through all the stages of traditional training, «from Bidokn Ni Nharé to Lante-Ndan», he said vainly.

His coming to Lisbon was only consummated because his father didn't find a sufficiently strong argument to keep him in the country. And, taking advantage of the compensation he received for the votes of the village in the presidential elections, he sent him to Portugal with the aim of continuing his studies, with all the benefits. However, without a date of return, that is, at any moment fate could summon him to what he was born for.

N'fanda spoke to me, almost daily, about his father. He showed to worship him. He sculpted him, in his speeches, as a fair and sensible man, whose main characteristic was being an exceptional listener. «Only a good listener can see the truth and do justice. Those who do not know how to listen cannot see where the reason is. A leader has to be, above all, a good listener», reproduced his father's words.

Coming to Portugal freed him, albeit temporarily, from another commitment: his marriage to Maria N'tombikté. The commitment had been made since the day she was born. In fact, it was N'fanda's own father who had given her that name, on the day he decided that she would be his son's wife¹.

N'tombikté had been educated, from the age of 10, by N'fanda's mother. «She grew up beautiful and gifted, of course», he told me enthusiastically, concluding that when she left, she was only waiting for the date of the ceremony. And I felt, in addition to enthusiasm, a great anxiety in her words.

But as time went by, N'fanda's enthusiasm and anxiety waned, until the day when Rita Alexandra came to take the final blow.

A cheerful brunette, full red lips. Rita and N'fanda met when he was in his second year of graduation and she was in the first year of the same course. She immediately sympathized with him, she would even say that she loved him secretly for some time, before they gave themselves passionately to each other, after six months of great complicity. Rita asked N'fanda for any and all work. And he, in turn, responded promptly and patiently. Invariably, the work ended with him explaining some particularities of Guinea-Bissau and, more specifically, of the Balanta people. They were inseparable in almost all cultural and academic events. They accompanied each other weekly on trips to the cinema and then went home excitedly, in a tremendous exchange of arguments on the topic addressed. As I was almost always out of the question, I started to leave them in the living room to read in the bedroom before bed. And I think it was,

above all, in those moments together, when Rita completely lost track of time and space, forgetting that it was already dawn and she wasn't at her house, but in the house shared by two students, one from Sociology and the other from Anthropology, who had in common being Guinean, who ended up becoming more intimately involved.

They lived more than two years of relationship, without allowing, for a single day, that the flame of passion would cool down. On the contrary, they made big plans for the future.

N'fanda was completely fascinated. The glow of that relationship had dulled any and all feelings of commitment his past had established to the future. And between the two years of dating, predictably, N'fanda finished his degree in Anthropology. The satisfaction made him communicate the feat to his parents in Guinea-Bissau. He confessed to me, days later, that, had it not been for the enthusiasm of the moment, he would have postponed that communication indefinitely.

His father ordered him to pack up his bundles and go back to the country. With the argument that he could, at any moment, say goodbye to this world. ~

It was at that moment that N'fanda was faced with a question he never thought he would ask himself: was he really willing to return to Guinea-Bissau?

He told me that after the conversation with his father, he had spent two hours on the sofa, brooding over his thoughts. All he knew was that he had no desire to go back to Guinea-Bissau. It didn't cross his mind to leave Rita, whether because of the throne on the village, or because of N'tombikté, or for any other reason. But on the other hand, his father's phrase, which by then was dozing inside him, had taken all his senses by storm. That's because Rita's appearance hadn't made him forget the phrase, but he had managed to make the phrase lose its importance for a long time.

"What do you think I should do?" He asked me in one of the moments when I regretted his luck. But when he felt that my silence, in itself, represented an answer, he decided to go looking for clearer answers elsewhere.

Returning to me, hours later, even without uttering a single word, N'fanda revealed to be more confused than when he left. After long minutes of silence, he finally opened his mouth to say that he hadn't had the courage to talk to Rita. He hadn't found a way to tell her that, against his will, but against fate, he had to return to his country for good. He hadn't found a sweet way to explain to her that he wasn't truly born free. That he had been born with a mission to weigh on his destiny. And that now he had to choose between the destiny that was laid out for him at birth and the one he wanted to trace himself.

The days passed and uncertainty took hold of N'fanda. He asked all the questions that his mind would allow, to himself and to the world. But he found no answers. Instead, one Friday afternoon, lit by a summer sun, an invitation came to him to be a research assistant at the university where he had graduated. And he began by thinking that this was more than an invitation: that it was a sign of destiny. But even that didn't quell his doubts.

Night fell without decision. In the room next to mine, N'fanda tried to sleep on the matter, putting off the decision for another day. But he was unable. He told me the next day that he could close his eyes, but his mind was still restless, rejecting the various attempts at abstraction. He said he lay down on the matter, with it prickling his conscience and didn't sleep.

For him and for me, morning had come earlier than usual. And N'fanda walked out the door, with no destination. He would simply go floor by floor. «I ended up on the banks of the Tagus talking to my buttons». He told me when he got back.

“Life is giving me an opportunity to choose. For the first time I have the freedom to make a choice about my destiny.” He advanced. And I realized that the softness of the dawn had served him to come to that conclusion, but it hadn't come to him to actually make the choice.

I made my silence answer once more. He goes out the door leaving him, always haughty, standing in the center of the room waiting for a word from me. But I was not only afraid of influencing him with an answer; I also wanted him to reserve the freedom of choice exclusively for himself.

In fact, in our group, a group of young Guineans who were studying in Portugal, nobody talked about it, either in the presence or in the absence of N’Fanda. It was a settled idea that our only duty as friends was to listen to him, nothing more!

When I returned home at the end of the day, I found him sitting on the sofa in the living room, looking as if he had been like that all day. Obviously, I didn't dare question him. But I looked into his eyes and saw an unusual gleam in them. It was tear. I realized he had been crying all day. And it was then that I understood that the decision was made--whatever it was, it was made.

I predisposed myself to listen to him, but this time he wasn't in the mood for conversations. He headed for the bedroom just as the cell phone rang. But he didn't even look back. He entered the room and slammed the door. I don't know why, but I didn't dare, if you want, to look at the call.

1- *N'Tombikté is a female name of Balanta ethnicity, which is usually placed as N'Fanda's wife.*

The Generous Sea of Biombo

When Carlos Cambua shook himself off the bed, the serenity was still felt. He left the house with his fishing rod wedged on his shoulder for another day of look for food. Far from imagining that that day would be different from the usual, he went on singing to ward off the loneliness of the walk. Twice, lulled by the chant, he tapped it with his left foot. He thought about going back home, because the two slaps wouldn't bode well. But the duty of putting food on the plate at home spoke louder. He continued on until he reached the place where he usually fished, there it was guaranteed. There was no lack of fish! To his surprise, two large bags were stuffed and stranded on the sand. He looked around to see if anyone else was there, but he didn't see anyone, he saw two more bags of the same. He came closer. Distrustfully, he tapped the bag with his foot. Sensing something cute, he got up the courage to open the bag. He opened it and inside were other transparent bags with what looked like flour to him. But for its texture, it couldn't be flour. It was too thin. So he deduced that they were powdered milk. After all, what else did he know? He was so happy that he looked at the immense sea and said "thank you, generous sea". He carried two bags and hid them in the bushes around the beach. He easily loaded the other two and forgot about fishing: straight home. For someone who had gone out looking for a lunch, there was nothing better than starting with the milk from the breakfast.

He arrived at the house and announced the great bounty of the Biombo sea to his wife. Overjoyed, he returned to the beach to fetch the other two bags. Now he no longer sang to scare away loneliness, but to declare his contentment with that same loneliness. However, he had one more surprise upon arrival. The bags were no longer where he'd left them. He looked everywhere and no bags of powdered milk. On the way home, he stopped singing, wondering if in fact anyone was on the beach when he saw the bags. If in fact no one saw him hiding the bags. If whoever took the bag from the bushes would be the real owner of them and not an offering from the generous sea. Answers were scarce. The only thing he knew was that he hadn't seen anyone! To rest his mind, he decided to keep it a secret, the milk will be only for the family. The neighborhood would forgive him, but the usual solidarity this time would be broken.

However, as soon as he set foot in the house, there was the woman showing off the blessed milk to the neighbors. He was useless to do much if he didn't sustain the story of the generosity of the Biombo sea. «The sea has brought it, it has brought it. It belongs to no one but God». – Said the neighbors. – Meanwhile, Cambua spoke quietly to himself: «and now, how to keep a secret?! What if the true owner of the milk hears the story and comes to claim what is his?!». He decided that he would share it as quickly as possible, so that each family took advantage of what they could. If the owner showed up, the division would already be done, even returning it wouldn't be all. He immediately carried out his plan, shared the milk among the neighbors and took his share. Thanks did not fail. After all, milk in those parts was rare and only within the reach of a few.

The euphoria around the famous milk was great, with stoves being lit, less potable water being put to boil, boys making schemes to taste the milk still in solid state. Now, one thing has not been forgotten, Cambua was well aware of his responsibilities of putting food on his plate. He picked up his cane and made his way back to the beach. Contrary to what is usual, the fish that day were not very turned to the hook of our friend from Biombo. It felt like something wasn't right. Something had happened in those waters at dawn, something that had scared the fish away. But since giving up was out of the question for Cambua, he persisted in his fishing. Around noon, when the sun's rays were felt with great intensity, he managed to pull a good bent out of the water. Things started to improve, a few more tries and some fish were in the bucket. Now he would go home with his head held high, without the feeling of failure.

Upon arriving home, Carlos Cambua was faced with a situation that was far from his imagination. The entire family was in an advanced state of debilitation. The youngest son appeared to be in a situation of weakness that frightened Cambua. He ran into the neighborhood screaming for help, but the scene was the same. No one had the strength to help the next. If there were any doubts, they were dispelled, the cause of all that could only be the blessed milk. Carlos Cambua returned to run looking for the nearest man to ask for help. For one more surprise, that moray was in a similar state of combalence. In other words, there wasn't much to think about about Cambua's missing bag. Fear took over our fisherman friend. He went to the Biombo health center in search of a miracle, since finding more than one doctor if he was available and willing to travel was just a miracle. Running kilometers without stopping, Cambua saw his effort rewarded, the miracle really happened. Despite the health center being quite crowded with patients in the same state of weakness, the only doctor on duty was interested in going to the fisherman's home.

Arriving at Cambua's house, before any analysis of those affected, the doctor ordered all the bags to be placed in his van, including those from the entire neighborhood, with the justification that they had to be sent for analysis. Cambua's forum did not allow him, for a moment, to view with suspicion the actions of Mr. Doctor. From his willingness to move, to his attitudes towards milk bags. He was really surprised when, getting into the car, the doctor told him «try to fix it, as soon as possible, purgative. For your family and for your neighbors.»

After being relatively restored thanks to the purgative, it was necessary to find answers as to the reasons for all that. Some were convinced that the milk was out of date, others pointed to the spell of the real owner of the product. There were no ways to confirm the hypotheses raised, the bags were transparent and did not contain expiration dates. And who would care if all that was abandoned on the sands of the beach? He had to look for other answers. And for that nothing better than going to look for the doctor who had taken the milk for analysis.

At the health center, no one knew which doctor this was, nor his whereabouts. The only thing the nurses could say was that the enigmatic product was not milk. But cocaine from a ship wrecked on the coast of the generous sea of Biombo. The whole village was astonished, and they all recognized that the *son of if i know is never born*. Our friend Cambua, on the other hand, continued to get up early every day in the same place, maybe just to fish, maybe waiting for fate to smile and the sea to send him milk from Colombia again. Although he never took advantage of fishing to think about what he would do if history repeated itself.

The Minister

Abdulai Carmalah had woken up that day earlier than usual and soon to a long call from his boss. The latter was keen to arrive at the service earlier than usual. Abdulai had left the house running without even taking his animal-killer. The boss had spent the night in white because a colleague had confided in him that there would soon be remodeling in the Executive. That is, heads would roll in the government to which they belonged. And he was fully aware that he occupied a sensitive position, a position that, although he managed to maintain it thanks to his immense ability to say only what the boss wants and likes to hear, had been something unstable before his arrival. So unstable that no one had occupied it for more than a year and a half. But he managed with his chameleon trick to keep himself in office. Three Governments had already passed through him; it should be noted, governments passed through him, not he through Governments. Everyone knew how he kept himself in office, but he still achieved his goal. He changed sides as easily as he changed his shirt.

Abdulai arrived at his employer's house and did not even need to ring the bell, as he often did, the saying-whose was already at the door waiting for him.

- You're late Abdulai, you know I hate being late.

- Yes sir. I didn't hear the call and it's not customary to wake up at this hour. – Says Abdulai, still with a sleepy face and voice.

- Go, go... let's go, I want to get to work fast.

They went quickly to the Government Palace. When they arrived, before going to the office, so that Abdulai could receive the day's instructions, including messages for his mistresses, they had to first go through the chief executive's office. I had to probe him.

- Very good morning Your Excellency Mr. Prime Minister.

- Good morning Good Morning. Arrived early today, my dear. – The chief replied, without even looking up. Which was not a good sign at all.

- You know how it is, a lot to do for this land and for these people. That's my job, that's my life...

In fact, he was right, that job was his life. Everything in itself revolved around that post. Everything he had achieved in life came from there. He had done little with his life since he returned from Portugal, where he had completed his higher studies. Those were hard times that he hates to remember, but that he couldn't forget either. When he left Bissau in 1986 for the Portuguese capital, he carried big dreams, very high expectations. That were dissuaded as he unveiled the real Lisbon, the one with tin neighborhoods, his first home; with beggars defying the cold on the sidewalks of Rossio on the harsh winter nights.

In fact, he had left Bissau with no prospects of returning. He had taken as an example the Cubans and the Soviets, who had to make their way back or flee to Europe shortly after returning to the country. The situation was not easy, years passed and the liberators, or readjusters, showed nothing to the people. Worse, they didn't give space to anyone else. The recent graduates, in turn, could not mortgage their youth and their knowledge in a country with an uncertain future and, like him, the main objective was to earn a living, the best it could.

But what did it matter? How important was the lack of patriotism? He didn't plan on returning, but he did; but it was better to be a doctor in his own land than a nobody in other people's lands...

- I'm glad you think so, it's always good to remember that we are here to serve the people. – Said the Prime Minister in a low tone.

- No doubt boss, no doubt...

Almost expelled by the silence of the boss, our economist excused himself and left prematurely. He headed to his office in the company of his driver and errand boy. He'd given this one detailed directions for the rest of the day. Where he had to go, what he had to do and say.

Abdulai had gone about his business, leaving his employer possessed by countless questions. The Prime Minister's image and reaction had not left him satisfied, not at all satisfied. But what to do? Sit still and wait for this one to put you out on the street? Or shake the tail of the stew and take action? Of course, our economist was not a man to wait for anything, he had to do something. But what?

At daybreak, with that unparalleled scenery, without artificial lights that mar the beauty of the twilight, Abdulai caught his employer at the door of the Government Palace, thinking they were going home. He was somewhat surprised when he told him, let's go to Gan Turé, I have to talk to old Satala.

- To Gan Turré, boss? But doesn't the chief always send me for old Satala when he needs him?

- Abdulai, do as I say and do not question me.

- I apologize boss, but I was surprised; and on top of that I see him with a worried face.

- The matter is really for concern. I might lose my job, so you'd lose yours too. Do you understand now?

Abdulai quickly assimilated the issue, understood why they had gone to work earlier than usual and understood why they had stopped by the Prime Minister's office in the morning.

- I understand boss. That would be too bad, I have families to support. You know how it is, two wives and five kids. Not to mention the fact that with the death of my father, all the family burdens fell on my shoulders.

- That's your problem. They think that having lots of women is a demonstration of wealth and power. But in fact they are what sustain you and when they fail to do so, they fall into misery.

- But boss, you Christians also have many women, the difference is that, manga di bias, only one is official.

The conversation took place in an informal tone. For a moment, the barriers that separated the employer from the employee were broken. Most likely, Abdulai's patron was at that moment letting go of the worries that had plagued him all day.

- That's another matter. In my case, for example, they don't let go of me. They always want to take advantage of my situation. And of course, I take advantage of it because with my profession I can support all the women I want, which doesn't mean I'm leaving my wife and children. I will not lack money to give them all.

- Sorry, boss. But what is your profession?

- Now, Abdulai, don't ask silly questions. I am minister!!!

- But boss...

Perhaps the experienced Abdulai would make the great gaffe of telling his boss that, in fact, a minister is not a profession. Fortunately, there was no time to do so. The boss was faster and realized how absurd it is to be discussing personal matters with the driver... where have you seen yourself?!

- But nothing Abdulai... drive, that's what I pay you for. Not to ask silly questions.

Arriving at old Satalá's house, the cowries did not seem to be very much in favor of the professional minister. Old Satala didn't mince words to explain at the same time that this time, someone had passed him by and made him a good cat's bed. A bed that would not be very easy, nor cheap, to dismantle: you had to take out generous, even fat, simolas, kill a few goats and if all that didn't work, the fight between the murus had to continue.

And the fight really continued... only the minister knew how much money he needed afterwards to buy allies, bribe certain people and certain people, create confusion and overthrow the government. That he came to belong. At least in a Government of National Unity, of Transition, or whatever, he could go back to stealing some and pretending not to see the others. Back to having new cars, the trips and all the women who, however, dumped him.

Translated from the Portuguese by the author