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*Another day of life* | 2018 | courtesy of Midas Filmes

## *ANOTHER DAY OF LIFE:* THE JOURNALIST MEMORIALIZED, ANGOLA FORGOTTEN

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In November 2018, the film adaptation of the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski's *Another Day of Life: Angola 1975*, originally published in 1976, arrived at Portuguese cinemas (1). Kapuscinski was a war correspondent for much of his professional life, (1932-2007) and closely followed the independence processes of several countries in Africa and beyond. In *Another Day of Life*, the journalist records his testimony about Angola's transition to independence and the escalation of the armed conflict between



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September and November 1975. Having observed the exodus of Portuguese military forces and settlers by the air bridge in Luanda, the journalist decides to go to the southern region of the country, from whence they have little news. During his trip, he notes how the Cold War is being played out in Angola: he witnesses South Africa's second incursion to the Namibian border and the arrival of the first contingent of the Cuban army in Luanda on 19 October 1975. His literary reportage of his Angolan experience has now been adapted for cinema by Spanish documentary maker Raúl de la Fuente (1974) and the Polish animator Damian Nenow (1983), in a transnational production from Spain, Poland, Belgium, Germany and Hungary.

The film innovatively blends two genres often thought of as opposites: documentary, which seeks to represent reality, and animation, that offers us fictional, alternative, and even surreal realities. This experimental attitude towards generic boundaries works well with Kapuscinski's journalistic style, which oscillates between reporting and fiction. *Another Day of Life* is unique in this sense. Maybe it's also good journalism. It is, without a doubt, great literature (2). The film's innovative hybridity necessarily shapes its visual (documentary and animation) language. The levity with which real facts and concrete people are treated becomes perplexing. They become diluted in a story of adventure, war, espionage and power struggle on a global scale. It seems it was these elements in the book that inspired the directors to make a film of it.

*Another Day of Life* focusses on the adventures of Ryszard Kapuscinski himself. Angola is a mere context. The journalist dominates the textual and visual narrative. The camera plays close attention to his face, portraying him as someone with strong emotions and great humanity. Like him, the other central figures in the story are also white. These range from informants in Luanda to Commander Farrusco, who joined the MPLA after finishing his commission in the Portuguese colonial army. Farrusco lead the resistance in the "last" MPLA strongholds in Pereira d'Eça in the south. The black public is only given serious attention in one scene, and even then is represented through colonial tropes portraying them as alienated from the political situation and the conflict. They are preoccupied with daily life in the *musseques*, where music, alcohol and parties apparently occupy all their time. Black women are hypersexualized. This film also shows how Angolan society, as the journalist found and lived it, was deeply fractured along political, social and racial lines.



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As a film that blends documentary and animation, Raúl de la Fuente has added excerpts from recent interviews with some of the film's characters as well as photographs of the period. Of these, I want to draw attention to the photographs we see of Carlota, the film's only female character. Carlota is a 20-year-old mixed race commander of a small group of soldiers in southern Angola. She is killed in combat with her entire unit. By forbidding Kapuscinski from accompanying them on that occasion, she saved his life. In the film, Carlota functions to remind the journalist of his 'duty of memory': "Do not let them forget us!" This appeal, contextualised by a photo Kapuscinski took of her, becomes the film's epigraph. The directors' use of photography achieves a strong connection with the audience because the '*imagetext*' (3) (that is, the narrative that emerges from the interrelationship between the photograph and its accompanying text) establishes a bridge between past and present. This appeal to a duty of memory does not exist in the original book, where the episode with Carlota is fleeting and narrated through a masculinist and sexualised gaze. As such this moment represents a creative intervention on the part of the directors that denotes their sense of contributing to a second generation memory. However, although this '*imagetext*' is artistically successful, it also reveals the ethical and documentary bankruptcy of the project. The film itself fails to realise the intentions its directors' apparently announce in attributing to Carlota the role of interpellator to a future memory. Because of Fuente and Nenow's aesthetic and narrative choices, the film only remembers the journalist-turned-hero.

In *Another Day of Life*, a Hollywood-esque aesthetic constructs and celebrates the hero Kapuscinski. It will have the added value of bringing to the attention of new audiences the political chess game that was played in Angola at a regional and international scale. The action-film style might particularly appeal to younger audiences. By focusing the narrative so reductively on the figure of the 'hero journalist', however, the film does not respond to Carlota's appeal, and remains stuck in the dubious game of use (and abuse) of memory and forgetting (4), which so often underlies the production of memories about this historical period.



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- (1) On the book and the author, see António Pinto Ribeiro (2017), *África, os Quatro Rios. A representação de África através da literatura de viagens europeia e norte-americana*. Porto: Afrontamento.
- (2) Pedro Rosa Mendes (2013), “Uma alegoria na história. Prefácio.” in Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Mais um Dia de vida: Angola 1975*. (Translated by Ana Saldanha). Lisboa: Tinta da China, p. 7.
- (3) WJT Mitchell (1994), *Picture Theory: essays on visual and verbal interpretation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (4) Paul Ricoeur (2006), *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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