

## 7 Historical controversies, *Netoscapes* and public memory in Luanda

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On 1 November 1975, ten days before the independence of Angola, the last high-commissioner and general-governor of the Portuguese colonial government in Angola, Leonel Cardoso, signed and made public the following dispatch:

We call special attention to all Portuguese citizens who left the airport terminal yesterday after dinner, to the fact that the aero bridge has come to an end, at midnight of the same day, 31 October, in accordance with insistent warnings diffused in the press and radio since 9 October 1975.<sup>1</sup>

In this warning resided, even if symbolically, a definitive change to the human landscape of Angola. Amidst much confusion, between the escape of the Portuguese, the nervousness of the Portuguese army and the intense political and military activity of the three liberation movements, a new concern made its way into the limelight, regarding not the human but the material landscape of Angola. On 8 November 1975, one week after the end of the aero bridge that transported hundreds of thousands of Portuguese citizens out of Angola, and still three days before official independence, began the dismantlement of various colonial monuments. On that day, the *Jornal de Angola* announced in headline:

The date of the independence of our country approaches. For that reason, there is a necessity to clean the nation of all the evils that were inherited from colonialism. Statues and monuments, although not a malign legacy, are above all a memory the Angolan people are not interested in keeping.<sup>2</sup>

The door opened to the removal of statues, monuments and plaques, the process was to cut the most visible colonial traces and create a new mnemonic landscape in Angola, above all in Luanda. This process was as vast as it was diversified. If the statues most representative of Portuguese colonialism were removed from their pedestals, as were those of Luís Vaz de Camões, Afonso Henriques and Paulo Dias de Novais, moved to the interior of the Fortress São Miguel of Luanda, others, like the monument dedicated to Norton de Matos in Huambo were taken from central areas of the city and placed in more peripheral spaces. Others even, like the plaque

indicating the name of the Liceu Salvador Correia de Sá, today the Liceu Mutu ya Kevela after one of the leaders of the Bailundo Uprising (1902), were removed but reposted after some time, although only for a brief period. In their place new material celebrations were built, statues and monuments that gained life and created new narratives. The new regime of memory that began with the independence of Angola on 11 November demanded a new mnemonic order, one that primed the rupture of colonial celebrations to make a political statement and promote the edification, celebration and dissemination of histories and cultural legacies that were more common and well-known in the Angolan popular imaginary. It became clear, already in 1975, that the government of Angola would resort to the materiality of memory as a substrate for the construction of the nation.

This chapter analysis the formats and contents that guided the new monumentalisation efforts in Luanda in three specific places, the Museum of the Fortress of São Miguel, the monument to Agostinho Neto at Independence Square, and the António Agostinho Neto Memorial (MAAN). Its focus is not on the removal of colonial monuments but on the mnemonic signifiers and subsequent metaphorical segments of the new materialities of memory in Luanda throughout the recent political history of the country. I invoke the concept of *memoriscapes*, which refers to the spaces that occupy, and the symbology that accompanies, the materialities of memory, whether museums, squares, monuments, statues or plaques. But I follow its application by Cardina and Nascimento Rodrigues who adopt a 'broader perspective, which does not only merely focus on materialisations of memory in concrete physical and territorial spaces but also attempts an integrated analysis of the materiality, politics and social imaginary involved in the composition of *memoriscapes*'.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, I add Philips and Reyes reading of the *memoriscapes* as a 'complex and vibrant plane upon which memories emerge, are contested, transform, encounter other memories, mutate and multiply'.<sup>4</sup>

The search for solutions that invoke the material and mnemonic but cross them with alternative political narratives and immaterial imaginaries is at the very genesis of this chapter. Through the *memoriscapes* of Luanda, I analyse the dominant discourse that defines the ways in which the Angolan population is encouraged to consider, narrate and visualise their historical past, specifically that of the liberation struggle. This is accomplished by positioning the concept of *memoriscapes* as a central configuration not only to read public memory but also to analyse its instrumentalisation and categorisation by the political regime of memory in post-colonial Angola.

Resorting to the concept of *memoriscapes* to read the dominant political narrative on historical memory in the public sphere of Angola, my proposal shows the *memoriscapes* of Luanda as *Netoscapes*, that is, *memoriscapes* that communicate with the Angolan liberation struggle and national independence, but do it tendentially through the celebration of the figure of Agostinho Neto. To do so I compare three contrasting case-studies that characterise this tendency to configure the *memoriscapes* of Luanda as *Netoscapes*: the Museum in the Fortress of São Miguel of Luanda, the space where Portuguese colonial presence is more evident; the Independence Square, where the monument to Agostinho Neto stands central

and tall, the space where the memory of the founder of the nation was immortalised; and the MAAN, where the embalmed remains of Agostinho Neto are kept, the biggest memorial of Angola, a *Netoscape* to its very core.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the genesis of the *Netoscape*, looking at the diachronies that categorise the tendency to agglutinate in the figure of Agostinho Neto the vast history of the memory of the Angolan liberation struggle, through the various polemics and initial controversies of the post-independence period. The second section looks for contrast and deviance by analysing the semiotic lines of the three above-mentioned memoryscapes, all located in Luanda. It crosses the three sites of memory to demonstrate that *Netoscapes* were constituted in a deliberate effort, seeking to congregate upon the figure of Agostinho Neto the memory of the Angolan liberation struggle in acritical fashion. It shows that the *Netoscapes* became a vehicle for a segment of the MPLA to benefit from the legitimacy of this historical era by creating politics of memory that were mostly erected by silencing the initial controversies of the recent history of the country. The last section analyses the political controversies and contestations of the memory that is encapsulated by the *Netoscapes*. It demonstrates that the only segment of Angolan society that refuses to accept Agostinho Neto as a national hero is the families of the victims of the 27 of May, as all other political parties opt not for the exclusion of Neto but for the elevation of their nationalist leaders to the same rank.

Research for this chapter was conducted during archive work in Luanda between 2017 and 2022. Archive research took place mainly at the Lúcio Lara Archive of the Associação Tchiweka de Documentação and the archive of the National Library of Angola.

### **‘Aquele por quem se espera’**

‘Our long path represents the heroic history of a People, who under the unitary and correct guidance of its vanguard, relying only on its own forces, decided to fight for the right to be free and independent’.<sup>5</sup> Words proffered by Agostinho Neto during the proclamation of Angola’s independence on 11 November 1975, referencing the long path undertaken by the MPLA to fundament the heroic history that delivered national independence. On that day of November, the heroic history of liberation contrasted with the material representations that still populated the mnemonic landscape of Luanda and began being removed on 8 November.

The removal of colonial monuments made clear that even before independence the new government of Angola would resort to historical memory to build the new nation.<sup>6</sup> The only possible way to achieve such a goal required a complete cut with the colonial past, by installing new mnemonic materialities that reflected the heroic history of the Angolan people as Neto defined it. However, the parameters used to define the new landscape, centred on the complex historical challenges the movement had experienced, allied to the urgent need of political affirmation both nationally and internationally, and the fundamental issue of nation-building, forced the congregation of various segments of the MPLA’s heroic history into a single

memory and mode of celebration, largely defined around the figure of Agostinho Neto. The MPLA's need to affirm its rule in Angola, a consequence of the civil war it fought against the FNLA, UNITA and the army of Apartheid South Africa, and no less important, the intense internal contestations Neto faced within the MPLA, forced the inclusion of a large spectrum of memories that communicate with the liberation struggle and resort to it as means of legitimacy, but are presented through the figure of Agostinho Neto.<sup>7</sup>

The absence of well-defined traces of the memory of the liberation struggle crystallises in what Werbner terms elite memorialism, the subordination of several experiences and histories to the promotion of the role of struggle heroes.<sup>8</sup> Following this notion, the formats of the celebration of the Angolan liberation struggle, and in fact of the very independence of the country, came to rest on the celebration of Agostinho Neto. Yet, the mnemonic materiality of Agostinho Neto as an agglutinating figure of the victories against Portuguese colonialism was erected after the dilemmas and controversies of the history of the liberation struggle and those of the MPLA immediately after independence, when the latter had already assumed control of the state apparatus.

Mabeko-Tali argues that, among various episodes of contestation, Neto solidified his control of the party in two key moments, the Inter-Regional Conference of Militants in 1974, where Neto's presidentialist faction emerged victorious among the factions that divided the MPLA; and after the repression of the alleged coup on 27 May 1977, which independently of its origins resulted in the assassination of many MPLA cadres, some in favour others against the presidential line of Agostinho Neto, who emerged uncontested.

Before his apotheotic arrival in Luanda, symbolically on 4 February 1975, Agostinho Neto had a mythic aura. Within the clandestine activities in Luanda, and among the various popular groups that flourished in support of the MPLA, Neto truly was the leader who was awaited, has he described himself in the poem 'Adeus na hora da largada' [Farewell at the time of parting]. However, after independence, his aura of providential leader would be the target of contestation and intense struggles for power. Among the various elements that obscured the MPLA's rule during those first years of the independence of Angola, one would be essential in the fragilisation of Neto's reputation as an uncontested leader: the contrasting ideological positions between the ruling wing of the MPLA and the popular masses of Luanda, which culminated into one of the largest episodes of conflict and massacre in the recent history of Angola.

The popular masses, organised in autonomous groups of action, neighbourhood and workers committees, to whom the MPLA owed 'its supremacy and political regeneration, whether militarily whether referent to social and popular mobilisation in Luanda during 1974/75', represented to the leadership of the movement 'an impressive yet unknown MPLA, above all organised by a youth without any directive from the MPLA itself'.<sup>9</sup> The majority were young people who never had contact with the MPLA before the 25 April, but saw in it a vehicle for the materialisation of their political aspirations, mostly connected to the extreme-left. This absence of contact and familiarity between the two segments rapidly caused tensions between

the popular masses that had remained in Luanda building support to the MPLA and the leadership of the party arriving from exile,

The MPLA intended to install a model of socialism that was very much its own. This attitude, no doubt pragmatic, cooled the delegates temper and caused a bad impression. (...) they did not lower their guard in supporting the MPLA against rival movements, but a breach had been opened in the ideological wall they had built around the image of the MPLA and of its main leader.<sup>10</sup>

Ideological tendencies and configurations divided the socialist model that Neto and the MPLA were looking to install in Angola from the pro-Soviet and/or Maoist organisation a considerable segment of the extreme-left of Luanda ambioned for the country. An irreconcilable breach opened between a substantial part of the popular masses who supported the MPLA as they had imagined it, aggregated around some of the nationalists who had been involved in the clandestine struggle as well as combatants who had fought against the colonial army, and the leadership of the movement which had been exiled for almost two decades and was returning in 1974/75 to a country that was less familiar than the one they had left to fight Portuguese colonialism. As Moorman suggests,

Under such circumstances, the party needed charismatic spokespeople who could reassure the people and redirect their concerns. Nito Alves fit the bill: 'In an organization – the MPLA – which did not have a reputation for possessing great orators among its leaders, Nito Alves was an exception: he knew how to find the right tone – vigorous and daring – to speak to the populace.' Musicians allegedly involved with Nito Alves, notably Urbano Castro, David Zé and Artur Nunes, likewise stood out in the popular imagination because of their stage presence and recognizable voices. Audiences respected them for their ability to represent the troubles and joys of daily life, troubles and joys that these musicians, unlike the recently returned political leaders, know firsthand.<sup>11</sup>

Bernardo Alves Baptista 'Nito Alves' enjoyed support from various groups, above all the Comitês Henda, who published his speeches and saw him as a hero of the 1st Region; the Grupo de Reflexão Sita Valles, which supported his rise and had influence in his following of a pro-Soviet line; and the Comité Talahadi, constituted by young people who gravitated around Nito Alves, initially adopting a Maoist discourse that soon followed the 'Nitist evolution towards a pro-Soviet fraseology', who participated in the radio programme Kidubanguela and later allied with the Comité Henda in an attempt to dominate the base structures of the MPLA.<sup>12</sup> The political support these groups provided to Nito Alves, above all the attempts to infiltrate and dominate the MPLA, lead to their expulsion from the movement and consequent cut of relations with Neto in May 1977, a process that resulted in the repression of 27 May of the same year and ended with the continuation of

the political wing of Neto in the leadership of the MPLA and the Angolan state.<sup>13</sup> Neto had already survived several episodes of internal contestation, from the initial controversies with Viriato da Cruz and Mário Pinto de Andrade, to the Revolta de Leste lead by Daniel Chipenda and the Revolta Activa. However, a substantial part of this contestation had been either eliminated or marginalised when Angola became independent. And it had been so when the removal of colonial statues began and the construction of a new identity around new mnemonic materialities began.

In opposition to the Revolta de Leste and the Revolta Activa, to which Nito Alves stood against in defence of Agostinho Neto in 1974, the contestation of the Nitistas occurred after the MPLA had taken control of the Angolan state, that is, 'it had the particularity of happening within a party already installed in power', in control of its properties of communication and signification.<sup>14</sup> The control of the state paralleled to the strong contestation Neto suffered incentivised the construction of memoryscapes that were tendentially constituted as *Netoscapes*, a form of politically affirming and legitimating the winning side of the many internal contestations within the MPLA. The result, particularly after the events of 27 May 1977, was the production of state symbolism ubiquitously in favour of the elevation of Agostinho Neto as a statesman, a truly uncontested leader, as much for fear as for support and veneration. If already in 1976, the new Angolan currency presented the figure of Agostinho Neto, all of its subsequent iterations came to include the face of the first president of Angola, having introduced, and recently excluded, the figure of José Eduardo dos Santos from the numismatic.

The premature death of Agostinho Neto on 17 September 1979 and subsequent change in the leadership of the MPLA and the presidency of Angola did not readress the uses of his memory from the central narratives and materialities of mnemonic celebration that were constituted. It motivated not only a long and important funeral procession, with Neto's body deposited in the provincial government's headquarters in Mutamba, Luanda, open to the public, but more importantly the construction of the biggest monument of Angola, the MAAN. The national press was largely responsible for the maintenance of his memory and legacy. Apart from numerous texts and articles, the *Jornal de Angola*, the daily newspaper of the state, published a photograph and saying of Agostinho Neto in the header of all its daily editions between November 1979 until, for what I could gather, January 1991.

The first president of Angola occupies a central role in the memory of the liberation struggle, mostly in the imaginary of a people who were incentivised to follow the teachings of the Immortal Guide of the Angolan Revolution, as Neto was called. By establishing himself as the undisputed leader of the MPLA while in control of the state apparatus, Neto became an unavoidable presence within the many formats of the memory of the liberation struggle, consequently forging and defining the memoryscapes of Angola. I have considered elsewhere that by defining the memory of the liberation struggle of Angola around the figure of Agostinho Neto, the regime of memory that defines it silenced a vast palette of figures, episodes, victories and ruptures that constituted the essential history not only of Neto but of the MPLA.<sup>15</sup> The constitution of memoryscapes as *Netoscapes*, namely in the three sites under analysis in this chapter, exhibits the same defining logic that

steers these politics of memory: the celebration of Agostinho Neto as the primary narrative to inform the materiality of the liberation struggle, in subjugation of various other possible elements.

### **Under the silent gaze of Neto**

Of all the monuments and sites of memory that exist in Luanda, the one that better presents the liberation struggle is the Museum of the Fortress of São Miguel of Luanda. This is a space where history is palpable, where not only the memory of Portuguese colonialism but also of the liberation struggle is more vivid, both materially and symbolically.

The fortress was the first major military compound constructed by the Portuguese in Luanda. Commissioned by Paulo Dias de Novais in 1575 after the occupation of the island of Luanda, it went through numerous phases of construction and expansion, purpose and tutelage, having been the place where the last Portuguese flag was lowered in Angolan soil, on 10 November 1975. After independence, the Fortress became home to the Armed Forces Museum, also serving as a venue for various state events. The Museum of the Fortress is the only space where the material remains of the Angolan liberation struggle and the Portuguese colonial presence are deposited. At the entrance to the fortress, outside the museum, two aircraft of the Portuguese Air Force can be found, which contrast with two large panels alluding to the liberation war and the signing of the peace agreements that ended the civil war in 2002, united at the entrance gate by a five-pointed star flanked by two pieces of artillery from the early twentieth century.

The entrance to the Museum of the Fortress contains speeches by Agostinho Neto and photographs of the inauguration of the space, alongside a commemorative plaque of the founding of the MPLA-PT in 1977 by Agostinho Neto, among various other plaques of historical interest. In the museum, inside the fortress and at ground level, are deposited several statues of Portuguese historical personalities, those that began being removed on 8 November 1975. Among the statues of Afonso Henriques, Luís Vaz de Camões and Vasco da Gama, military vehicles captured from the Portuguese Armed Forces and the South African army can be found, a sample of the wars that took place in Angola in the second half of the twentieth century. Between the military hardware, the car Agostinho Neto used when the MPLA had its headquarters in Congo-Brazzaville conspicuously stands out, the only civilian vehicle in the exposition, alongside his bust, sided by that of Hoji ya Henda, and a statue of Njinga Mbandi, formerly located in the Kinaxixi square.<sup>16</sup>

As one of the spaces that most communicate with the material remains of Portuguese colonial presence and the Angolan liberation struggle, the Museum of the Fortress is also the one that appears to least promote the memory of Agostinho Neto. This, however, does not mean his presence is less clear. If the figure of Neto appears to be balanced with other relevant themes of the recent history of Angola, the street that leads to the Museum of the Fortress dispels any doubts concerning the political intentions of its design: Rua 17 de Setembro, day of the National Hero and birthday of Agostinho Neto. It becomes clear that the designers of the

Museum made a deliberate effort to include Neto as a narrative nexus to address the lack of political contextualisation that would otherwise manifest with the presence of airplanes and colonial statues, pieces that if devoid of such a narrative would hardly be constituted as elements of Angolan national memory circumscribed to the history of the liberation struggle. If, in the words of Agostinho Neto, it was ‘under Lenine’s silent gaze’ that the MPLA-PT was founded, as can be read in the commemorative plaque celebrating the event, it is under Neto’s silent gaze that Portuguese statues and other historical pieces are judged and Angolan historical memory edified.

The very display of statues and busts on the ground level of the museum is indicative of that silent gaze. Exposed at a 90 degrees angle, colonial statues are observed from the entrance of the fortress’ hallway by Agostinho Neto, Hoji ya Henda and Njinga Mbandi. However, this is but one of the material aspects of the space. The fortress, much like other sites of memory in Angola, displays a skewed immaterial version of the recent history of Angola, which assists in defining it as a *Netoscape*. The immaterial element that best configures the fortress as a *Netoscape* might well be its symbolic signifier as a place of Neto’s uncontested leadership. Given the contestations that Neto endured after the independence of Angola, above all stemming from Nito Alve’s wing, and knowing that Nito Alves, José Van Dúnem and Sita Valles were allegedly arrested and assassinated inside the Fortress, the silence that surrounds this critical episode of the history of the country is palpable in the dichotomies that stand out in the space: Neto and the MPLA against Portuguese colonialism during the first liberation war; and Neto and the MPLA against Apartheid and the ‘puppets’ supported by international imperialism during the second liberation struggle.<sup>17</sup> This binary presentation silences alternative narratives, erasing the internal contestation that always defined the MPLA by showcasing a unity of forces that rarely existed. The Fortress is a site of memory that configures itself as a *memoriescape* not only because of its structure and unavoidable presence in Luanda, but also due to its Museum and to the very symbolic place that the ghosts that inhabit it occupy in the Angolan imaginary.

Yet, Angolan people do not visit the Fortress of São Miguel, a place far from their daily obligations and necessities and too closely situated to the *cidade Alta*, where rests the political power of Angola guarded by an omnipresent military apparatus. But they do cross the statue of Agostinho Neto at Independence Square on a daily basis. The square displays a semiotic interpretation only possible in Angola, a place that owns a symbology politically rooted in the history of the country since the declaration of independence – proclaimed there –, contrary to the Fortress which has a long life amply situated on the history of Portugal and its colonial expansion.

The contrast of the monument of Agostinho Neto in Independence Square with the Fortress is obvious. The area where Independence Square is located, formerly called Primeiro de Maio, was before independence, the Largo dos Liceus, the schools square. During the colonial period that part of the city was an open and empty space with a large mulemba tree, an important point of transit between the road to Catete and the D. João II Avenue. After independence, the square became



the birthplace of the new country. It was at the formerly known Primeiro de Maio Square that Agostinho Neto proclaimed ‘before Africa and the world, the independence of Angola’. With the proclamation, the space became connected with the birth of the Popular Republic of Angola, a new country, emancipated and independent. The area was used throughout the years for mass political rallies, privileged as one of the sites of political affirmation of the MPLA.

The monument to Agostinho Neto at Independence Square was inaugurated on 17 September 2000 by then President dos Santos. The statue of Neto, at the centre of the square, presents a hagiography of the leader, elevating his virtues as a statesman and founder of the nation, as can be read in the description on the centre of the pillar. The base of the monument displays four panels with references to the liberation struggle and the political history of Angola. The front mural contains a transcription of the poem ‘Havemos de Voltar’ [We shall return] by Neto, with a map of Angola. The last verse of the poem reads ‘We shall return, to a free Angola, to an independent Angola’. The second mural exhibits a woman carrying a child, a symbol of the Angolan people, more precisely of Angolan women, pointing to the future, alongside a white dove, the symbol of peace. The third mural a combatant raising a rifle accompanied by his comrades, an allusion to the armed struggle for national liberation. Finally, the last panel presents an African man enslaved, in a heroic pose freeing himself from the shackles of slavery and colonialism.

The murals provide a mnemonic experience to passers-by, a memory of liberation and independence. It is a memoryscape planned and designed as a *Netoscape* that interferes with the place that was the genesis of the new country, translated by the figure of Neto as the ultimate representation of the defeat of Portuguese colonialism, the end of colonial oppression and the foundation of the nation by the



*Figure 7.1* Statue of Agostinho Neto at Independence Square in Luanda.

Photograph by Bruno Cabral.



Figure 7.2 Murals of the monument to Agostinho Neto at Independence Square. (a) Map of Angola with the poem 'Havemos de voltar' by Agostinho Neto. (b) Angolan woman and child with a white dove pointing towards a future of peace. (c) A representation of the Angolan armed struggle for national liberation. (d) Angolan man breaking his shackles, a representation of the end of slavery. (Continued)

Photographs by Bruno Cabral.



*Figure 7.2* (Continued)

MPLA. It was also the place where the public transference of power from Neto to dos Santos took place. On 11 November 1979, less than three months after the death of Neto on 10 September of the same year, dos Santos addressed the country as president for the first time. In his speech, he included the square in the historical narrative and destiny of the country:

We all remember that it was in this square of Primeiro de Maio that in 11 November 1975, with the canons of the enemies still roaring in Kifangondo,

when the majority of the country was occupied by the racist South Africans and other invaders commanded by international imperialism, that the Immortal Guide of the Angolan Revolution solemnly proclaimed, before Africa and the world the independence of Angola, giving birth to the Popular Republic of Angola as a firm trench in the revolution of Africa. (...) In this memorable square, we always said no to neo-colonialism. No to the pressures, the blackmail and the Machiavellian manoeuvres of imperialism. In this square we freely declared, as a sovereign people, popular democracy and scientific socialism as the way to organise our society.<sup>18</sup>

The uses of the square throughout the years never severed the connection to Agostinho Neto, even when the historical period and the political challenges surpassed those that defined his political action, above all the long 27 years of civil war. It is under his gaze and according to his teachings that the Angolan people are encouraged to solve the problems that challenge Angola. In this sense, it is a mnemonically efficient site, as it allows the population of Luanda a daily, unrestrained interaction with the place.

The last site that constitutes a *Netoscape* is the one that not only showcases the elitisation and tendency to transmit memory through Neto, but also the ruptures in the recent history of Angola and the MPLA. Together with Cardina, I demonstrated that the MAAN produces silences that become evident upon a semiotic mnemonic analysis.<sup>19</sup> These silences fall upon two elements: the subalternisation of the MPLA and its many heroes to Neto, by presenting a version of the liberation struggle exclusively led by him; and the silencing of the heroic people, presented in a culturally and socially uprooted and uncharacteristic format, voiced only through Neto. These characterisations make the MAAN the quintessential *Netoscape*. Through its careful and thorough management of displays, the MAAN is unable to hide the absolutist funnel of the people and the MPLA onto Agostinho Neto, a closed celebratory jubilation that cannot escape the first president of Angola.

Nevertheless, *Netoscapes* are always the target of contestation by other political forces, specifically by those that always resided within the political ecosystem of the MPLA, as other social and political segments opt for the addition of other important figures and not the subtraction of the first president of Angola. The next section deals precisely with the diversity of contestations to the *Netoscapes*, a reading that exhibits both calls for inclusion but also for revision and historical reform.

### **Problems of memory and the strength of the *Netoscapes***

Contemporary polemics regarding heroes, foundational dates, national holidays, monuments and statues display not only mere political contestation but ampler debates about the identity and political representation of those commonly referred to as founders of the Angolan nation. The celebration of heroes of the struggle remains one of the most fundamental points to those who contest the overlapping of the MPLA over the Angolan nation. The construction of statues to honour the memory of other nationalist leaders, namely Holden Roberto and Jonas Savimbi,

in an attempt to include them as founders of Angolan nationalism alongside Neto, constitutes a controversy that frequently ends in accusations of political exclusion. However, this contestation seeks not to exclude Neto but to include other leaders at his side, presenting a critique to the closed narrative the *Netoscapes* exhibit. Evidence can be found in various political sectors, with or without parliamentary representation, and among intellectuals in Angolan society.

On 11 November 2005, UNITA organised a ceremony to pay homage to the three historical leaders of the liberation movements, Agostinho Neto, Jonas Savimbi and Holden Roberto. Two years after the event, Adalberto da Costa Júnior, today the president of UNITA, stated that although it was a private ceremony organised by only one party, it would have been preferable to have the state pay homage to them.<sup>20</sup> Patrício Batsíkama, Angolan anthropologist with published work on Angolan nationalism, considered that ‘due respect is not given and history told as it should be’, mentioning the existence of contempt towards Jonas Savimbi and Holden Roberto while lamenting that Agostinho Neto is only remembered in September. Batsíkama stated that it is imperative to ‘rethink how to apply reconciliation starting from the figures of Agostinho Neto, Holden Roberto and Jonas Savimbi, and build a great monument that speaks of them’.<sup>21</sup> The Democratic Party for Progress and National Alliance of Angola (PDP-ANA), today without parliamentary representation, created by Mfulupinga Nlando Vitor, also asked the Angolan government to build a historical monument that included the names of Jonas Savimbi and Holden Roberto, stating that ‘if Agostinho Neto has the value he deserves for having been the first president of the republic, resulting from the Alvor Accords, so to do Jonas Savimbi of UNITA and Holden Roberto of the FNLA’.<sup>22</sup> The same logic emanates from the FNLA which, reacting to the posthumous attribution of the rank of general of the army to Neto, considered the side-lining of Savimbi and Roberto to the same honour a historical error.<sup>23</sup>

These examples are indicative of the inviolability that cuts across all political forces in what concerns the memory of the figure that informs the *Netoscapes* of Angola. Contestation always resides in historical justice, in pleas of plurality and inclusion and not upon revisionist tendencies. There is, however, a segment of Angolan society, that although organically connected to the MPLA, vehemently contests the celebration of Neto as an uncontested hero, the families of the victims of the 27 May 1977. In a letter published on 25 May 2021, reacting to the programme outlined by the Commission for Reconciliation in Memory of the Victims of the Political Conflicts (CIVICOP), the 27 of May Association considered that a formal public apology was necessary, as the people ‘politically responsible, specifically Agostinho Neto, green-lighted the massacres with the incendiary sentence “We will not waist time with trials”’. Although President João Lourenço did issue a formal apology, the 27 of May Association continued criticising the programme of the CIVICOP, noting that it was ‘promoting a theatrical performance (...) a caricature that plans to lay a wreath of flowers in the statue of the man responsible for the slaughter of so many Angolans, certainly paying him homage for having ordered the barbaric episode’.<sup>24</sup> The statue was precisely the monument to Agostinho Neto at Independence Square.

The most visible contestation to the *Netoscapes* originates among the survivors and families of the victims of the 27 of May, the only segment in Angolan society to have always criticised the memory of Agostinho Neto and the material apparatus I call *Netoscapes*. This segment interprets the *Netoscapes* differently from other actors, by reading them in light of a recent episode that still carries much pain and produced a substantial number of victims. They observe the mnemonic tendency towards the *Netoscape* as heinous and barbaric, intending to erase from public narrative their closest relatives and the ordeals to which they fell victim. This critique displays a more generic format of protest to monuments to historical personalities that have been strongly contested by the immorality, exploitation and criminality they practised in life. It is following this internationalised format that the contestation of the families of the victims of 27 May to the *Netoscapes* is strengthened and configured as a critical debate within Angolan society. A debate that seeks to discuss and reconcile autochthonous themes not related to the materialities of colonial memory as they are presented in places like the Museum of the Fortress, but with those sites at the genesis of Angolan independence. It is a frontal yet ambiguous position, since the 27 May was an episode of revolt and consequent purge within the MPLA itself, between comrades of the same liberation movement. It is due to this fact that their interpretation of the *Netoscapes* is nuanced, since these scapes are not criticised for their symbolic materiality of the liberation struggle and national independence, ideals for which many of the people who succumbed to the repression fought for. The families of the victims of the 27 May contest what they characterise as the repressive and barbaric nature of the political system Neto built at the end of his life, a system that heavily dictated his presence in the history of the country and ended configuring the memoryscapes and the narratives that stem from them as *Netoscapes*. Historical memory within the ample ecosystem of the MPLA generically tends towards the *Netoscape*. What does oscillate are the interpretations, heavily defined by historical experience, but which display a unison with regards to the legitimacy of the liberation struggle and independence. It is a conversation that exhibits a historical maturity that flourishes through pain, silence and taboo, one that Angolans are attempting to solve among themselves.

## **Conclusion**

Memoryscapes hold material and immaterial interpretations that provoke fundamental conversations for the history of any country. Angola fits this description well, as since the country's independence the MPLA has resorted to historical memory to build not only its legitimacy to rule, but more essentially, its very place in Angola. Yet, Angola's postcolonial woes and the complex controversies surrounding the history of the MPLA, sponsored the production of memoryscapes constituted through a tendency to celebrate a host of historical events funnelled and transmitted through Agostinho Neto, the first president of Angola, a process I call *Netoscapes*.

Grounded on the notion of the *Netoscape*, the chapter analysed the three most important mnemonic spaces in the city of Luanda, demonstrating that, albeit

containing different narratives, all are constituted as *Netoscapes*. It then searched for calls for reform and revision of these spaces among various political and intellectual segments of Angolan society. The exercise showed that, while most of Angolan society does not agree with the depictions presented, they are only contested for not being more inclusive. That is, *Netoscapes* are criticised not for celebrating Neto but for only celebrating Neto. The chapter then identifies and reads existing calls for revision, noting that they stem not from any opposition force but from an important section of the MPLA itself, constituted by the families of the victims of the 27 of May. This fact constitutes an important drive not only to continue debating memoryscapes but to further democratise historical memory in Angola, a historical memory that albeit largely constituted through the *Netoscapes* continues to be subjected to intense debate.

## Notes

- 1 Originally published in the *Jornal de Angola*, reproduced in a special edition dedicated to the independence of Angola by the weekly newspaper *Angolense*, “Sabia que...,” *Angolense*, November 11–18, 2000, 14.
- 2 “Sabia que...,” *Angolense*.
- 3 Miguel Cardina and Inês Nascimento Rodrigues, ‘The Mnemonic Transition: The Rise of an Anti-Anticolonial Memoryscape in Cape Verde’, *Memory Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 381.
- 4 Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes, ‘Surveying Global Memoryscapes: The Shifting Terrain of Public Memory Studies’, in *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age*, eds. Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 14.
- 5 Speech by Agostinho Neto during the proclamation of the independence of Angola, November 11, 1975. <https://www.novacultura.info/post/2021/11/11/discurso-de-agostinho-neto-na-proclamacao-da-independencia-de-angola>.
- 6 See Vasco Martins, “Hegemony, Resistance and Gradations of Memory: The Politics of Remembering Angola’s Liberation Struggle,” *History & Memory* 33, no. 2 (2021): 80–106.
- 7 The only exception in Luanda is the Monument to the Heroines of Angola.
- 8 Richard Werbner, “Beyond Oblivion; Confronting Memory Crisis,” in *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 8. See also Vasco Martins and Miguel Cardina, “A Memory of Concrete: Politics of Representation and Silence in the Agostinho Neto Memorial,” *Kronos* 45 (2019): 46–64.
- 9 Jean Michel Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas e lutas sociais: o MPLA perante si próprio, 1960–1977* (Lisboa: Mercado das Letras, 2018), 424–5.
- 10 Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas*, 441–2.
- 11 Marissa Moorman, *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to Recent Times* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018), 175.
- 12 See Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas*, 434–5. The 1st Political and Military Region of the MPLA was located in the hinterland of Luanda.
- 13 On the 27 May 1977, see Lara Pawson, *In the Name of the People: Angola’s Forgotten Massacre* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); and Dalila Mateus and Álvaro Mateus, *Purga em Angola, o 27 de Maio de 1977*, 3rd ed. (Alfragide: Texto Editores, 2009).
- 14 Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas*, 538.
- 15 Martins and Cardina, ‘A Memory of Concrete’.

- 16 On the memory of Hoji ya Henda see Vasco Martins, ‘Grande Herói da Banda: The Political Uses of the Memory of Hoji ya Henda in Angola’, *Journal of African History* 63, no. 2 (2022): 231–47.
- 17 See Martins, “Hegemony.”
- 18 José Eduardo dos Santos, “O povo angolano escolheu livremente a Democracia Popular e o Socialismo,” *Jornal de Angola* 1508, November 12, 1979, 1–3.
- 19 Martins and Cardina, “A Memory of Concrete.”
- 20 “Líder FNLA morreu sem o reconhecimento devido,” *Lusa – Agência de Notícias de Portugal*, August 3, 2007, [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/lider-fnla-morreu-sem-o-reconhecimento-devido\\_n139200](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/lider-fnla-morreu-sem-o-reconhecimento-devido_n139200).
- 21 Amélia Santos, “Faltam monumento de figuras nacionais,” *Nova Gazeta*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.novagazeta.co.ao/artigo/faltam-monumentos-de-figuras-nacionais>.
- 22 “PDP-ANA quer monumento históricos com nomes de Neto, Savimbi e Holden Roberto,” *Angonoticias*, September 23, 2015, <https://www.angonoticias.com/Artigos/item/48437/pdp-ana-quer-monumento-historico-com-nomes-de-neto-savimbi-e-holden-roberto>.
- 23 David Filipe, “UNITA e FNLA exigem promoção ao grau de general do Exército a Jonas Savimbi e Holden Roberto,” *Novo Jornal*, June 21, 2018, <https://novojornal.co.ao/politica/interior/unita-e-a-fnla-exigem-promocao-ao-grau-de-general-de-exercito-a-jonas-savimbi-e-holden-roberto-55672.html>.
- 24 “Carta aberta ao Presidente da República de Angola,” *Associação 27 de Maio*, May 25, 2021, <https://27maio.com/carta-aberta-ao-presidente-da-republica-de-angola-2021/>.

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