

2 Politics of memory and silence

Angola's liberation struggle in postcolonial times

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In 1998, Christine Messiant published an article with a title that rapidly became a colloquial expression for academics and observers of Angola: 'chez nous, même le passé est imprévisible' (in Angola, even the past is unpredictable).¹ The expression encapsulates in an elegant yet simple manner many of the pitfalls of studying the history and memory of the liberation war in Angola. As one of the countries in Africa with the most fragmented anti-colonial nationalism, Angola is rich not only in historical revisions and mnemonic politicisations, but also in producing politics of silence.

Angola holds significant differences to other African countries that also had processes of anti-colonial liberation struggle, as it developed not one but three strands of anti-colonial nationalism. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the hegemonic power since independence in 1975, Marxist-Leninist in nature, often characterised as internationalist with a strong presence in urban areas, composed of a diverse array of cultures from all over the Angolan territory, including mestizos and Angolans of European descent; the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), a movement with a regional implantation in northern Angola and the lower Congo region, generally associated with conceptions of autochthony and tradition; and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), a movement created by Angolans from the central-southern regions and Cabinda that abandoned the FNLA to create a third alternative on the Angolan nationalist palette, associated with tradition, Maoism and black socialism, later with democratic and capitalist ideologies during the Cold War.

Each nationalist movement generated a complex collection of historical experiences that inform their current political claims and mnemonic configurations. The strength, centrality or subordination of their memories depends on the political force that each actor manages to exert over the current regime of memory, a regime that is dominated by the current hegemonic political power, the MPLA. It is for this reason that the Angolan context is characterised by a marked disconnect between historiographic production and official memory. Through the various geological layers of Angolan history, the archaeology of the memory of Angola's liberation struggle has become increasingly elusive, largely due to the exercise of power that has been constituted over it and draws upon it as a source of political power. Adding to the dilemma, Angola is still one of the rare cases in sub-Saharan Africa in

which the formation of the state in the post-civil war period (1975–2002) is more defining of its political character than the various processes initiated after independence. Reading the memory of the liberation struggle that underlies all these processes is the challenge to rescue the history of the struggle and emancipation of the Angolan people, to which this chapter aims to contribute.

Politics of memory: the MPLA before Angola

Angola's armed struggle for national liberation began with the first anti-colonial actions led by two liberation movements – the MPLA and the UPA/FNLA – in the early months of 1961, later followed by UNITA after its founding in 1966, totalling the three movements that fought against Portuguese colonialism.² These actions symbolise a singular event in the history of Angola among the several actions of resistance against Portuguese colonialism. Throughout centuries, many insurgencies, and revolts against colonisation in various parts of the country had taken place.³ Yet, it was the armed liberation struggle (1961–1975) that dealt the final blow to Portuguese colonial presence in Angola, which would come to an end in a process that began with the signing of the Alvor Accords and was firmed with the country's independence in 1975.

With the declaration of independence on 11 November 1975 by President Agostinho Neto, the MPLA took control of the state apparatus and installed a single-party rule. But it found a country torn apart, emptied of a bureaucracy formerly occupied by Portuguese civil servants and ravaged by a civil war that first opposed the FNLA and UNITA to the MPLA, and finally the latter movements in one of the longest and most destructive conflicts on the African continent south of the Sahara.

The challenges the MPLA faced during this period, especially the civil war that rapidly became international based on the logics of proxy conflicts within the framework of the Cold War, divided the country into regions of control and influence, thus motivating the urgency to create a solid narrative of unity, legitimacy and broad hegemony. To this end, the movement resorted, among other elements, to its very own idiosyncratic historical memory, armed with control over the official media and propaganda dissemination apparatus of the state that allowed it to define the properties that would become part of Angola's official history.

Already during the liberation struggle and continuing throughout the first 16 years of the civil war, the politicisation of the memory of Angolan nationalism proved instrumental in positioning the MPLA as the only legitimate power to govern Angola. As Christine Messiant states, historical discourse became a weapon in the defence of the movement's hegemony. Its historical experience assumed the status of official Angolan state history, the party's truths became state truths, and the official version of the history of Angolan nationalism became untouchable.⁴ The history of this period was constructed as the history of the MPLA against the other two nationalist organisations, resorting to processes of marginalisation and demonisation of the role of the UPA/FNLA; stigmatising the other two movements as lackeys and puppets of imperialism; suppressing any signs of dissent within the MPLA; and purging controversial aspects of the movement's history.⁵ These

elements coincide with what Borges Coelho called the liberation script in reference to the Mozambican case, that is, a script that defines the narrative of liberation.⁶ The concept of the script is indicative of how the MPLA used its political experiences and historical memories of the liberation struggle to construct the official history of Angola, by constituting a script that is composed of various rules that define formats of memory and commemoration.⁷ Akin to what Terence Ranger deemed 'patriotic history' in Zimbabwe, the MPLA's liberation script sets similar predicates: loyal militants must defend its role as the only liberation movement in Angola, and oppose all those who challenge its hegemony, either internally or externally, or challenge the leadership and memory of Agostinho Neto.⁸ Drawing on Messiant's work, I propose to read the liberation script developed by the MPLA in light of four points:

- 1 The MPLA as the only legitimate liberation movement;
- 2 The war against internal and external enemies, namely imperialism and its puppets in Angola, the UPA/FNLA and UNITA;
- 3 The repression of all kinds of dissent within the MPLA;
- 4 The silencing of the internal purges that took place within the movement.

These elements provide a segmented understanding of the historical trajectory of the movement, the narratives of domination it constructed about the wars it was involved in, and the ways it sought to legitimise its political hegemony in the country. They also reflect some of the most acute dilemmas in the movement's history since the genesis of the liberation struggle, in large part stemming from the UPA/FNLA's military supremacy over the border between Congo-Leopoldville and Angola, which frustrated many of the MPLA's military incursions against Portuguese colonialism. The weight of these early years in shaping the movement's political character and in the subsequent establishment of official memory lines is evident in the narratives, products and practices of memory it produced in the 1970s and 1980s and has been practising ever since.

Historian Carlos Pacheco, wrote that 'forgetting the past (i.e. everything that does not interest the party's mythical narratives) is a weapon of the utmost importance in the MPLA's ideological arsenal.'⁹ Indeed, as Messiant and Martins explain, the control of historical discourse and memory narratives has been one of the resources most used by the MPLA both to legitimise and maintain its power.¹⁰ Several debates and unresolved controversies in Angola provide ample evidence of this process.

First and foremost is the format of the declaration of independence, which several opposition figures, particularly linked to the FNLA, accuse of having been partisan, since it was declared by Agostinho Neto in the name of the MPLA's Central Committee and not on behalf of all Angolan people. As the FNLA made public in a long, historically relevant communiqué relative to the celebrations of independence in 2004:

Independence was proclaimed in Luanda on November 11, 1975 by Dr. Agostinho Neto, not in the name of the patriots, the nationalists, the guerrillas and

all layers of the population who fought against the colonial yoke, but exclusively in the name of his movement, the MPLA. This configured a partisan independence and instilled similar reactions from the two other Movements who signed the Alvor Accord, by proclaiming another Republic, also partisan in nature, in Huambo. (...) 29 years after independence, instead of cultivating the politics of tolerance, of healing, making the past a reference for us to consider our actions in the present and in the future, we are reliving the colonialist politics of cultivating hatred and rancour among Angolans. (...) It is for this reason that our party believes that truth is not the daughter of governments but of the times.¹¹

The FNLA unequivocally underscores the dimension pointed out by Messiant regarding the role the MPLA assumes in the country's official history as the legitimate and only liberation movement. This is a configuration that takes various formats among the multitude of practices and mnemonic products that make up public memory in Angola. Legislation informed by historical events underlines this very dimension. The law of national holidays of 2011, which, as Jon Schubert noted, relegated to second place the 15 March 1961, the date of the beginning of the war in northern Angola led by the FNLA, which for Portugal marks the beginning of the colonial war, from a bank holiday to a day of celebration, with the intention of remembering the 'expansion of the armed struggle for national liberation'; at the same time that it promoted 4 February 1961, the day of the attacks on several points of colonial power in Luanda, including the São Paulo prison, which the MPLA claims authorship of, to be a bank holiday and the day of the beginning of the liberation struggle.¹²

In fact, the contents of the generality of celebrations, especially of independence, but also days of celebration, from the day of the National Hero, which is Agostinho Neto, to the Youth Day which commemorates the life of Hoji ya Henda, or Women's Day, which remembers the Heroines of Angola, are dates that celebrate figures and events solely related to the history of MPLA.

The symbols of the state, the names of streets and schools, the semiotics of the currency and the flag, the lyrics of the anthem with references to the heroes of the 4 February, following a Marxist-Leninist tendency ontologically adapted to an

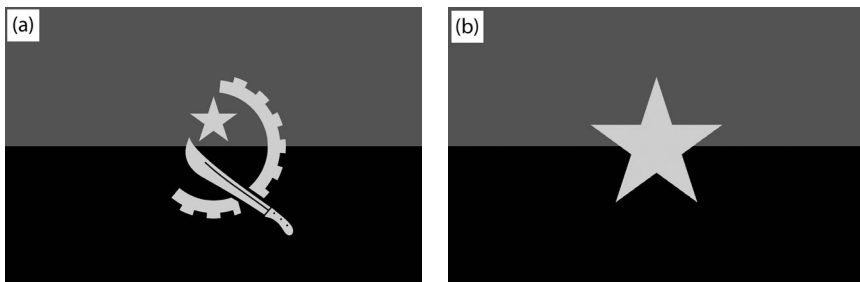


Figure 2.1 (a) Flag of the Republic of Angola. (b) Flag of the MPLA.

African context based on the logic of revolution, popular power and the construction of a new man, are some of the elements that aimed to position the MPLA as the dominant force with a hegemonic political identity.

Since 1975, one of the MPLA's main objectives was to establish and disseminate its own historical narratives, which included the mnemonic removal of all opponents, internal and external, in an attempt to shape and adapt public memory about the liberation struggle. To do this it embarked on a 'partisan nation-building process in an effort to secure hegemony. School syllabuses, the media and the political education carried out by the MPLA presented the party as the embodiment of the Angolan nation.'¹³ This political body, which defined the party-state, defended its unity above all by silencing controversial aspects, such as the internal purging of the 27 of May or the case of Matias Migueis, but also dissidences, such as the Eastern Revolt or the Active Revolt, or even Viriato da Cruz and Mário Pinto de Andrade.¹⁴ However, the overwhelming majority of these partisan national elements, as well as the narrowing of history and memory in favour of a single homogenised and hegemonic version, are above all an original figure of the 1970s and 1980s that has been prolonged over time.

Elsewhere I developed the concept of gradations of memory, a concept that aides in conciliating the contrasts of 'memories that deviate in certain respects from the hegemonic narrative without contradicting, negating or colliding with it entirely, but mostly assuming a less politicized stance.'¹⁵ The concept proposes new ways of reading politics of memory by showing that a memory or collection of memories are 'never binary and exclusive but always comprise(s) multiple locations along a spectrum, creating gradations that do not entirely challenge ossified narratives but may not accord with them either.'¹⁶ Gradations of memory are particularly useful to analyse products and practices of memory in a diachronic fashion, when subjected to changes in the political regime and the inevitable passage of time, two elements that I argue, are essential to analyse the political character of a memory, given its mutability and metamorphic tendency. As such, the concept raises important questions regarding the impact of democracy and democratic rule in memory making, questions that are central to this chapter. What were the impacts brought by the establishment of a democratic regime in post-1992 Angola? Did democracy encourage the MPLA to adopt mechanisms of mnemonic pluralism or did it maintain the adaptation of memory in favour of a politicised history?

During almost 30 years of civil war the MPLA managed to maintain control of the government even when its capacity to materialise a state apparatus and bureaucracy in conflict areas was weak. In the areas it controlled, especially the cities and coastal areas, the MPLA installed a one-party regime guided by its own distinctive socialism, a regime that lasted until its Third Congress in 1992, when it definitively abandoned the socialist model in favour of a democratic regime with a market economy. In this phase of Angola's history, an economy of memory emerged, configured by the activation or deactivation of mnemonic narratives depending on short-term political needs.¹⁷ The political transition of the early 1990s in Angola did more than abolish the socialist model and its cultural practices. It challenged and altered the regime of memory, created new forms and rules of invocation for

the same memories and, most importantly, de-emphasised the liberation script that had been central in memory making during previous decades.¹⁸ As in several other countries, in the 1990s Angola also became a market democracy oriented towards international capitalism, a regime that found little value in invoking the memory of the liberation struggle.

Jay Winter states that ‘the process of democratisation incurs the termination of socially acceptable silences about what happened in the pre-democratic period,’ although he concedes that there have been cases where silence has been followed by ‘completely ambiguous narratives of the regimes’ crimes.¹⁹ Angola’s case seems to follow the proposal of silence and ambiguity with the past. A critical reading of the liberal promises of democracy suggests that the impact of democratisation processes – as normative albeit illusive, procedural forms of openness and plural discussion – upon the Angolan regime of memory requires better conceptualisation. The subordination of the memories of Angola’s liberation struggle in the democratic period must be analysed considering a holistic, yet pragmatic reading of the forces and limitations that constituted the very process of democratic state formation. One example is illustrative of this need: Angolan sources working in the Ministry of Education in 1991/1992 spoke of a paralysis of the services when it became necessary to democratise the school curricula away from the MPLA’s single party narrative. Lacking sufficient information and human resources to update history textbooks, the solution found was to remove the entire section on the liberation struggle rather than adding new content to diversify the previous heroic narrative focused on the MPLA’s contribution.²⁰ In the early 1990s, sufficient studies published on the Angolan liberation struggle did not exist. What information was available was scattered and remained politically sensitive. This example demonstrates that the explanatory power of politics of memory in reading the political intention to silence or celebrate specific themes can be determined by very pragmatic, institutional and, indeed, human limitations.

Nevertheless, major memory frameworks continue to be guided by political decisions. Winter is right when concluding that ‘democracies also have their silences, and they are probably more insidious because they seem to be forced without visible coercion.’²¹ Indeed, from the moment Angola abandoned the socialist model and became a market economy, many aspects of society began to change. Tony Hodges described the democratic transition as ‘taking place in a moral and ideological vacuum due to the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism,’ which ended up producing a ‘form of capitalism in which a handful of prominent families, politically linked to the regime (now firmly anchored in the presidency rather than the former “vanguard party”), exploited opportunities for self-enrichment.’²² The democratic process, which translated into greater political control of the MPLA over Angolan society, especially after the civil war, gradually faded the memory of the liberation struggle, which no longer matched neither the narratives of the economic liberalism the Angolan government sought to implement in Angola nor the historical reality of the country, which had been engulfed in a civil war that lasted 27 years. The public space occupied by the narrative of the liberation struggle was replaced by new *raison d’être* more attractive to the political elites, as was the construction

of a country open to international markets with development prospects that promised to rival the United Arab Emirates and the Asian tigers. The end of the war had finally made possible the unbridled development the Angolan government so desperately sought, relegating the urgencies of reconciliation to second place, and, at the bottom of the list of priorities, attention to the plurality of memories that constitute the history of the liberation struggle other than the one it vehiculated. The next section unpacks the silences and controversies of histories and memories other than those of the MPLA cosmology.

The logics of silence: the FNLA and UNITA

The memory policies of the FNLA and UNITA are defined differently, not only between them but especially in relation to the historical memory made official by the MPLA. If on the part of the FNLA, there is an open opposition to the mnemonic hegemony of the MPLA, assuming a format of counter-memory, for UNITA the silencing imposed upon it by the MPLA's liberation script is not really contested. In stark contrast to the FNLA, and little concerned with the controversies of the liberation period, UNITA has a vested interest in focusing the narrative elsewhere on another equally fracturing topic of recent Angolan history, that of claiming authorship for the transition to democracy.

The FNLA is the only party capable of politically challenging the MPLA's hegemonic domination over the history of the liberation struggle, since during the entire period of the war it fought against Portuguese colonialism – and against the MPLA – having succeeded in militarily occupying large areas of Angola's territory. In fact, from the coloniser's point of view, the FNLA was always a threat on a par with, and sometimes more urgent than, the MPLA itself. The army it created, the Army of National Liberation of Angola (Exército de Libertação Nacional de Angola), directly supported by the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, later Zaire, in the person of President Mobutu Sese Seko, had always presented a significant threat and a point of constant tension during the war. However, it is in the conflict between the MPLA and FNLA during the first years of the liberation war that the dispute over the memory and legacy of the liberation struggle originates.

Douglas Wheeler and René Pélissier argue that 'the mistrust and hatred accumulated in 1961 weighed heavily on Angola's future.'²³ A mistrust and a hatred that manifested not only between Angolans and the Portuguese but between Angolan liberation movements. Two aspects, in particular, characterise the FNLA's mistrust and opposition to the MPLA: one genealogical, concerned with autochthony, another diplomatic and military.

For several years during the liberation struggle, the FNLA's legitimisation narrative was based on contesting the MPLA's credibility on racial grounds. The movement accused the MPLA of having colonial roots, of being led by the children of the colonialists, assimilated and privileged, denying it any Angolanness and consequently removing the nationalist character from its struggle.²⁴ The FNLA used the presence of white and mestizo individuals in the MPLA to characterise it as a

movement that sought to preserve Portuguese colonial presence in Angola, casting a dangerous shadow over its nationalist legitimacy and anti-colonial aspirations. Albeit one of the most central accusations made by the FNLA, no memory lingers of this politically discrediting narrative. The mnemonic narrative that does endure and pushes the MPLA to subordinate the historical memories of the UPA/FNLA is based on old logics, not only of exasperated diplomatic competition, but also on the UPA/FNLA's blockage to the MPLA's military actions to fight Portuguese colonialism, and even on the perverse physical elimination of guerrillas and militants.²⁵

The material needs of conducting a guerrilla struggle and the obligation to resort to diplomatic sponsorship to wage war against a colonial regime were met by the support the movements obtained from other countries. The most obvious way of achieving this, particularly at a time the alignments of the Cold War had not yet penetrated the nationalist dynamics of the country, was through the recognition of the Organisation of African Unity – today the African Union – which indicated to its member states which movement should be supported financially, diplomatically and materially. Holden Roberto, former leader of the FNLA, called it the war for recognition, the war the movements waged among themselves to gain political, diplomatic and military space, a destructive competition between the UPA/FNLA and the MPLA. This period of Angola's recent history is marked by the continuing deterioration of relations between these two movements, damaged by the brutality of military conflict, political intrigue and disputes over legitimacy. Adding to the animosity between the two movements are the very complex events of 1975, not only in the context of the transitional government, but above all the prelude to civil war in Luanda in the same year already with the involvement of various regional and international actors. With the expulsion of the FNLA and UNITA by the MPLA from Luanda in 1975, and after the failure of their military offensive to prevent the MPLA's declaration of independence, the FNLA became a spent force, both militarily and politically. Considering the continuing decline of the FNLA's political importance in contemporary Angolan society, one of its most vocal points of contestation has been against the MPLA's alleged marginalisation and sometimes exclusion of its role in the national liberation struggle. This is the founding premise that informs the mnemonic contestation spearheaded by the FNLA during national commemorative dates and events.

Cardina defines counter-memories as 'a memory that is not only defined as different and subaltern in relation to certain dominant memories, but also capable of challenging the topics through which certain readings become hegemonic.'²⁶ This is a useful premise to analyse how the FNLA seeks to claim its legitimacy as a precursor to national liberation. Struggling to generate any substantial political opposition due to its marginal influence in the Angolan political arena, the FNLA resorts to history, mainly to what it perceives to be the MPLA's exaggerated claims about the extent of its social mobilisation and military capabilities during the liberation war. This has been the predominant theme in the very few memory products produced about the FNLA. It is evident in the book *O Pai do Nacionalismo Angolano* by João Paulo Nganga, in Holden Roberto's and Ngola Kabangu's statements in the documentary *A Guerra* directed by Joaquim Furtado for RTP1, and in the various

statements the party has produced about national holidays, heroes, decorations and other events of national importance, including national independence, as discussed above.²⁷ These counter-memories are configured as narratives that aim to challenge the MPLA's hegemonic readings of Angolan history, although they have a limited reach, tied to the FNLA's scant political influence and therefore little capacity for signification and projection in the public sphere.

UNITA's official narrative of the liberation struggle differs from that of the other two movements for very particular reasons. Aware of its own controversies, UNITA prefers to claim the epithet of 'founder of Angolan democracy,' a claim that silences its timid military opposition to Portuguese colonialism. However, the party proudly displays its liberation credentials when referring to one dimension in particular, the political thought it developed during that period and informed the Muangai Declaration, a political document woven at the time of its foundation as a liberation movement in 1966 in Muangai, Moxico province. The Muangai Declaration, a document still relevant today both as a narrative mechanism and a political project for Angola, symbolises UNITA's most vivid link to the history of the liberation struggle and the most central format of politicisation of its own memory of the struggle. Muangai is governed by five inalienable principles, which the movement and the party have always defended and referenced:

- 1 Freedom and total independence for men and for the mother country;
- 2 Democracy ensured by the vote of the people through various political parties;
- 3 Sovereignty expressed and impregnated in the will of the people to have friends and allies, always prioritising the interests of Angolans;
- 4 Equality among all Angolans in the Country of their birth;
- 5 In the search of economic solutions, prioritise the countryside to benefit the city.

At the basis of Muangai was Jonas Savimbi's political thought, informed by an ideological format of liberation different from the generality of the cases that constituted liberation movements in Southern Africa, more aligned with Marxism-Leninism, as was the case with the MPLA. UNITA found in Maoism answers for organisation, mobilisation and philosophies of alliance-seeking, as it took on a strong dimension of black socialism and Africanism during the 1960s and 1970s. Between advances and retreats, contradictions and volte-faces, UNITA worked relentlessly to become a popular epitome of democracy in Angola in the 1980s, largely due to its association with the United States. Muangai survived through all these most troubled times of Angola's recent history and is today increasingly invoked by various sectors of Angolan society as a true alternative to the MPLA's rule.²⁸

Although there is no official written history of UNITA during the Angolan liberation struggle, the movement had time to develop politically and mobilise the population in its areas of intervention without much interference from the colonial state. Its first attack against Portuguese colonialism took place on 25 December 1966, against a military compound in Teixeira de Sousa (today Luau). It is noteworthy that the attack of December 25 became a bank holiday for a short time,

ironically legislated during the Transitional Government by Angola's High Commissioner Silva Cardoso on 3 February 1975, and accepted by the representatives of the three liberation movements:

Considering that it is the duty of the transitional government of Angola to praise the primordial deeds carried out during the national liberation struggle by the three liberation movements, the FNLA, the MPLA and UNITA; having in consideration the historical meaning to the liberation struggle of Angola the dates: 4 February 1961, attack to the prisons of Luanda, directed by the MPLA; 15 March 1961, generalised attack in the north of Angola directed by the UPA (FNLA); 25 December 1966, attack to Teixeira de Sousa, directed by UNITA. Using the faculty conferred by [chapters II and III](#) of the Alvor Agreement, the Transitional Government decrees and I promulgate the following: Sole Article – The 4th of February, the 15th of March and the 25th of December are considered holidays throughout the national territory, and workers are entitled to their wages. Approved by the Council of Ministers – Johnny Eduardo, Lopo do Nascimento and José N'Dele. The High Commissioner, General Silva Cardoso.²⁹

Although the date figured as a bank holiday during the brief period of the transitional government that was formed after the Alvor Agreements, it never rivalled the 4 February or 15 March.

Throughout the liberation struggle UNITA was, in military terms, a force with little operational capacity, mainly due to its very limited access to weapons, although the movement did count successes in terms of popular mobilisation. However, there is a controversial episode that accompanies the history and contribution of UNITA to the liberation struggle against Portuguese colonialism, a history constantly refuted by its militants and cadres, but sufficiently well documented, which alludes to the non-aggression pact and subsequent collaboration agreement UNITA negotiated with the Portuguese armed forces in the 1970s. The pact entailed that UNITA would attack MPLA and FNLA camps and groups but not Portuguese troops under any pretext; assigned an implementation area to UNITA, which UNITA guerrillas and Portuguese troops could not violate; stipulated that if UNITA had knowledge of the location of enemy camps of other movements it should inform the Portuguese forces; and the Portuguese authorities pledged to provide support to the population and to UNITA residents in the area.³⁰

The first evidence that something highly irregular and controversial had taken place appeared in a publication of the magazine *Afrique-Asie*, directed by Aquino de Bragança, in an article titled 'Un document explosive – Angola: la longue trahison de L'U.N.I.T.A.'³¹ The article presented four letters exchanged between Jonas Savimbi, the founder of UNITA and Portuguese army officials.³²

The theme was explored by William Minter in the book *Operation Timber: pages from the Savimbi dossier*, in which the author analyses a series of letters exchanged between Jonas Savimbi and the Portuguese armed forces, correspondence that was mediated by Portuguese loggers who operated in the forests of Moxico,

UNITA's only area of influence during the liberation struggle and the site where the battles between the movements and the Portuguese army took place after 1968. The loggers were the first point of contact between UNITA and the Portuguese military, so the latter called their contacts with UNITA's leader Operation Timber.

Minter describes four phases that marked this relationship: the search for negotiation between September and October 1971; the formalisation of the pact between November 1971 and February 1972; the pact put into practice, between September 1972 and May 1973; and finally, friction and reconciliation between January and June 1974, a period that exceeds the *coup d'état* of 25 April 1974 in Portugal. Towards the end of the war, the agreement was violated by UNITA, which began to attack Portuguese forces. This last phase marks the end of Operation Timber and the beginning of negotiations, first through a timber merchant named Zeca Oliveira and a priest named António Araújo de Oliveira, which eventually led to the ceasefire between UNITA and the Portuguese army, signed in June 1974, the first signing of a ceasefire between an Angolan liberation movement and the Portuguese armed forces.³³

According to historian Mabeko-Tali there were contacts between Jonas Savimbi and the military leaders of the MPLA after the Inter-Regional Conference in 1974 which the latter organised in the east of Angola. In these contacts, Jonas Savimbi made an ideological approach to the MPLA, which, according to Mabeko-Tali, was not followed up, since 'the MPLA was perfectly aware of UNITA's collaboration with the colonial troops, but was probably unaware of its scope.'³⁴ After the publication of the letters by *Afrique-Asie* magazine, only a month after the ceasefire was signed, the MPLA accused UNITA of being a Portuguese creation and Savimbi a 'puppet of Lisbon,' which made any possibility of coalition or rapprochement with the MPLA impossible. On its side, UNITA has always denied any association with Portuguese colonialism. In the documentary *A Guerra*, produced more than 30 years after the end of Operation Timber, Samuel Chiwale, one of UNITA's major figures and founder of the movement in 1966, states that,

A truce between UNITA and the Portuguese army? I cannot confirm because there never was one. (...) Letters written by Dr Savimbi to Zeca, to Acácio, who were loggers? I can confirm. Even for João, I confirm. But to the Portuguese army? Never, this is a lie.³⁵

Since UNITA was accepted as one of the movements representing the Angolan people by the Portuguese state in the Alvor Accords, it managed to publicly affirm itself as a legitimate liberation movement, a virtue vehemently contested by the MPLA since independence with more or less intensity depending on the political context. But Angolan society never had a comprehensive debate on Operation Timber and its historical and political significance beyond the occasional discussion in more or less closed academic circles. Each party tends to recite their scripted monologue without room for the presentation of evidence, accusation, contradiction or independent arbitration. However, 11 years after the end of the civil war, in 2013, at a time UNITA was beginning to reorganise itself, its contribution as a

liberation movement began to timidly re-enter the public sphere, partly motivated by Isaiás Samakuva's 2013 speech at the Opening of the III Ordinary Meeting of the Political Commission, in which he contested the MPLA's historical memory in an unorthodox manner:

Three movements fought, arms in hand, for Angola's independence. Of these, only one retained the word 'independence' in its name. The other two used the word liberation to designate their objectives: Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola and Frente Nacional para Libertação de Angola. By adopting the name União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), UNITA brought to the attention of the political community two fundamental values for the construction of the Angolan nation: independence and national unity.³⁶

Several parts of the speech followed the points outlined in the Muangai Declaration 47 years after its creation. Samakuva stated that since its foundation in 1966 UNITA had identified the MPLA as being against Angolan independence and against the unity of Angolans; and, as in 1975, 'the economic structure of Angola is unbalanced. It is externally supported and outward looking when protecting the interests of the dictatorship.'³⁷ As Pearce puts it, Samakuva 'frames the contemporary political situation in Angola as the subjugation of a nation by an alien power. This places UNITA in a role in which political opposition merges with national liberation.'³⁸ This is the narrative UNITA uses when referring to the memory of the national liberation struggle. Unlike the other two movements, it focuses not on the episodes, deeds and heroes of the struggle, but rather on the political defence it made and continues to make of national independence – enmeshed with democratic credentials – of the economic sovereignty of the Angolan people and of equality without exception for all Angolans, elements which feature in the Muangai declaration. Mungai continues to represent the main reason allowing UNITA to claim a place in the memory of national liberation, a place that it fills not with the memories of strong military action but with political ideology and indeed, a project for a truly independent Angola.

Conclusion

A comprehensive reading of the MPLA's memory policies reveals that it has constituted itself as a monolithic memory block, opaque to the Angolan collective, eagerly devoted to present itself sanitised of polemics to guarantee the continuity of its political legitimacy. The cleansing of historical polemics and controversies, and the replacement and silencing of the memory of the genesis of the nation, promoted the creation of a dominant memory, procedurally democratic, but closed in itself, a memory that aims to reward the winner of all conflicts, dissidences and controversies without ever exploring and explaining them, symbolised in the eyes of the population as an MPLA cosmology. The reason why this hegemonic narrative remains prominent is due to the weakness of its contestants, the FNLA and UNITA, in either

harnessing sufficient political power in present times to vehemently contest it – in the case of the FNLA – or in actually being able to resort to solid credentials in what concerns the participation in the liberation struggle in the case of UNITA. To add more geological dust to this complex archaeology, UNITA enmeshes liberation with democracy and with its very particular project for Angola, in the form of the Muangai declaration. The result is a mnemonic opposition with little teeth that is thoroughly mixed with Angola's post-independence predicaments, a complicated invocation and use of historical memory that is nevertheless put more in the service of present political disputes than in sorting the history of the country.

Notes

- 1 Christine Messiant, "'Chez nous, même le passé est imprévisible': l'expérience d'une recherche sur le nationalisme angolais," *Lusotopie* 5 (1998): 157–97.
- 2 The 4 February and the 15 March are the dates of two important anti-colonial events whose authorship is claimed by the MPLA and the FNLA, respectively. These events represent a dispute within the politics of memory of Angola, particularly since both are claimed as the starting date of the Angolan armed struggle for national liberation.
- 3 See René Pélissier, *História das Campanhas de Angola: Resistência e Revoltas 1845–1941* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1986).
- 4 Messiant, "Chez nous," 159.
- 5 Messiant, "Chez nous," 161–2.
- 6 João Paulo Borges Coelho, "Politics and Contemporary History in Mozambique: A Set of Epistemological Notes," *Kronos* 39, no. 1 (2013): 10–19.
- 7 Vasco Martins, "Hegemony, Resistance and Gradations of Memory: The Politics of Remembering Angola's Liberation Struggle," *History & Memory* 33, no. 2 (2021): 80–106.
- 8 Terence Ranger, "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 215–34.
- 9 Carlos Pacheco, "Dança macabra de perversidade: conluio com os assassinos de Estado," *Público*, 31 January 2021.
- 10 Messiant, "Chez nous" and Martins, "Hegemony."
- 11 "A verdade histórica procura-se," *Folha* 8, November 20, 2004.
- 12 John Schubert, "2002, Year Zero: History as Anti-Politics in the 'New Angola,'" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 4 (2015): 6.
- 13 Justin Pearce, "Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 107–8.
- 14 On the silencing of factions within the MPLA, such as the dissidence of Viriato da Cruz, the Revolta de Leste or the Revolta Activa (two dissident movements that challenges the presidency of Agostinho Neto in the MPLA) see Jean Michel Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas e lutas sociais: o MPLA perante si próprio, 1960–1977* (Lisboa: Mercado das Letras, 2018). 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* (Alfragide: Texto Editores, 2009).
- 15 Vasco Martins, "Hegemony," 14.
- 16 Vasco Martins, "Hegemony," 20.
- 17 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): 246.
- 18 By regimes of memory, I resort to Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin when noting that 'what is understood as history and as memory is produced by historically

- specific and contestable systems of knowledge and power and that what history and memory produce as knowledge is also contingent upon the (contestable) systems of knowledge and power that produce them.’ See Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin, ‘Regimes of memory, an introduction,’ in *Memory Cultures: Memory, Subjectivity and Recognition*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 11.
- 19 Jay Winter, “Thinking about Silence,” in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29.
 - 20 Informal, unrecorded conversation with people involved in the revision of the history school curriculum in the beginning of the 1990s, Luanda, 2019.
 - 21 Winter, “Thinking about Silence,” 29.
 - 22 Tony Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil State* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), 21.
 - 23 Douglas Wheeler and René Pélissier, *História de Angola* (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2011), 206.
 - 24 Mabeko-Tali, “Guerrilhas e lutas sociais,” 455.
 - 25 The assassination of the heroines of Angola, particularly of Deolinda Rodrigues who had been a prominent member of the MPLA, is one of the issues that most defined this mnemonic agenda.
 - 26 Miguel Cardina, “Deserção de antigos oficiais alunos da academia militar,” in *As Voltas do Passado: A guerra colonial e as lutas de libertação*, eds. Miguel Cardina and Bruno Sena Martins (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2017), 203.
 - 27 João Paulo N’Ganga, *O pai do nacionalismo Angolano: As memórias de Holden Roberto*, vol. 1, 1923–1974 (São Paulo: Editora Parma, 2008), 135. *A Guerra*, documentary series directed by Joaquim Furtado for the Portuguese national television.
 - 28 On the search for alternatives to the MPLA and the uses of the memory of Jonas Savimbi see Vasco Martins, “‘A nossa lâmpada não se apaga’: The Mnemonic Return of Angola’s Jonas Savimbi,” *African Studies Review* 64, no. 1 (2021): 242–65. On the uses of the Muangai Project, see Justin Pearce, “From Rebellion to Opposition: UNITA’s Social Engagement in Post-War Angola,” *Government and Opposition* 55, no. 3 (2020): 474–89.
 - 29 Paulo Gaião, “O feriado nacional da matança dos colonos brancos em Angola,” *Expresso*, December 17, 2012, https://expresso.pt/blogues/blogue_paulo_gaiao/o-feriado-nacional-da-matanca-dos-colonos-brancos-em-angola=f774386.
 - 30 Emídio Fernando, *Jonas Savimbi: no lado errado da história* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote: 2012), 125. Operation Timber, led by General Bethencourt Rodrigues and Commander Costa Gomes, inflicted a serious military blow to the other nationalist movements, having allowed colonial troops, supported by the PIDE-DGS to eliminate several military bases of the FNLA and the MPLA in the Eastern Front.
 - 31 Jack Bourderie, “Un document explosif – Angola : la longue trahison de L’U.N.I.T.A.,” *Afrique-Asie* 61 (8 July 1974): 7–17.
 - 32 Four letters were published in this volume: letter from Jonas Savimbi to General Luz Cunha on 26 September 1972; letter from Jonas Savimbi to Lieutenant-Colonel Ramires de Oliveira on 25 October 1972; letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Ramires de Oliveira to Jonas Savimbi on 4 November 1972, and letter from Jonas Savimbi to Lieutenant-Colonel Ramires de Oliveira on 7 November 1972.
 - 33 António Oliveira, *O Padre de Savimbi* (Lisbon: Alêtheia, 2017). In it, Oliveira details the encounters he had with Savimbi and other UNITA cadres.
 - 34 Mabeko-Tali, “Guerrilhas e lutas sociais,” 455.
 - 35 Samuel Chiwale’s testimonial to the documentary *A Guerra*.
 - 36 Jorge Eduardo, “Discurso do Presidente Samakuva na Abertura da III Reunião da Comissão Política,” *Portal de Angola*, November 8, 2013, <https://www.portaldeangola.com/2013/11/08/discorso-do-presidente-samakuva-na-abertura-da-iii-reuniao-da-comissao-politica/>.

37 Jorge Eduardo, "Discurso do Presidente Samakuva."

38 Pearce, "From Rebellion to Opposition," 8–9.

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