



FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS  
CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES  
ENFANTS D'EMPIRES ET POSTMÉMOIRES EUROPÉENNES

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*Intervalo* (from series *Guruê*) | 2014 | Filipe Branquinho

## DECLARATION OF WAR 2

Vasco Luís Curado

When I was called up in 1969, my expertise was in Special Operations. I trained a combat group in Santa Margarida,. Me and my group of 25 men went to Guinea. I did a lot of guerrilla warfare and trips to the bush. We were Rangers, and well prepared. We securitised the new settlements where Guinean communities were living in adobe houses to be further away from the terrorists and closer to us. Politicians called it reordering.

I was active in the bush for eighteen months, until I was injured in Contabane. We had information that the PAIGC was going to destroy one of the new native villages. The plan was to ambush the enemy



forces. I took command of a combat group whose lieutenants were ill, took with me another five of my own men and ten African militias who knew the lay of the land. It was almost 40 men in total. We were advancing along the ridge to avoid the mines. I had four or five hand grenades and a Winchester with the pipes sawed off, which gave a more scattered shot. I was armed like that because in the group I was always the furthest white man forward. I saw the militias run to the back. Shortly after, it happened: I see a guerrilla aiming the RPG-7 grenade launcher to my face, I shot the Winchester, I must have caught him, but he also fired, the grenade hits the ground next to me ... I took a lot of shrapnel that broke up my left thigh, I also had shrapnel in my right thigh and arm. My camouflage was broken, burned. I didn't see the wounds, but a soldier told me: "You're fucked, lieutenant." Then I saw that there was bleeding, that bits of tissue from my thigh were on the floor. I touched the bone. The soldier made me a ligature. They launched two or three more rockets at us, and I and three soldiers hid in the grass, a way away from one other. The enemy was pounding the ground, closing the siege. I could hear them clapping to get the Kalashnikovs reloaded. I knew they didn't take prisoners. I had an unexploded grenade, I was going to die but I'd kill some of them first. I lay for two hours like that, losing blood, holding the grenade, with barely the strength to do even that. I was surrounded and certain that I was going to die, that death was only minutes away ... Our Air Force bombed, which gave us strength. It was the *Fiats*, I remember seeing the shots, they were dropping 250-kilo bombs. They were also battering the area with 10.7 mortars from Aldeia Formosa, because they thought I was dead so were doing as much damage as they could. This went on until our troops appeared to retrieve my corpse. Two soldiers from my combat group, who had stayed at the barracks, found me. They took the grenade out of my hand, I was about to faint. I was evacuated by helicopter to Bissau on the same day. I've blanked out the helicopter completely, I don't remember anything about it. I learned later that the enemy had 150 men; we hadn't thought it would be so many, I only saw two or three. I could have led my men into big trouble, I volunteered for this operation, and blame myself for it. They say I was too keen for most of the company's operations. They operated on me, I was hospitalized for five months, until the end of the commission. A week before I left, I went to visit the native communities in the villages.

I have a commendation from the brigadier-general of the Guinea territorial command for my military and leadership qualities, my actions in combat and for fulfilling my duty during the operation in which I was seriously injured.



When I was demobbed in Lisbon, I returned to my course in Agronomic Engineering. Today I am a retired forestry engineer.

In the early days after returning home to my village, I would wake up in the middle of the night and grope around in the dark, feeling along the wall, for the Winchester. I had moments of extreme anxiety, which I thought was because I was tired and sleeping badly. Twenty years ago, I began experiencing bouts of crying and feelings of deep sadness. I take medication. I have nightmares, my wife says that I toss and turn in my sleep. When I worked in forestry services, I had to resign every three or four years, out of fatigue, boredom, anxiety, insomnia, those bouts of crying, and a deep sense of sadness, especially in the morning. These cycles of exhaustion forced me to resign. I needed downtime to rest, took indefinite leave for periods of two or three months at a time.

I rarely sleep for four hours straight. If I wake up from a nightmare, it will take me about two hours to go back to sleep. I sit at table with my back to the wall, especially at night. I sit in the back row at the cinema. Ever since I came back from the colonies, I sleep with a revolver by my head whenever I am home alone.

I have a great marriage. I have two sons and a 28-year-old daughter who still lives with us, she's our rock. We live on a farm in the forest. It's a tradition in my family. I have friends but I don't do much with them. I spend time with my grandchildren, reading, walking.

Translated by [Alexandra Reza](#)

[Vasco Luís Curado](#) is a writer and psychologist. His novel *The Ghost Country* (Don Quixote Publications, 2015) addresses colonial society, the war and Angolan independence.