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Revolution, Morality, and Heroism in Angola

Vasco Martins | ORCID: 0000-0001-6205-4053

Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal

Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

vascomartins@ces.uc.pt

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Abstract

This article explores the political uses of frameworks of heroism in Angola. It argues that after independence and governing a country it had to decolonize, the MPLA promoted a specific political morality and civic virtue by referencing its own heroes and heroines. It used its youth, women, and children's party organizations as vehicles to indoctrinate society in the new revolutionary values and behaviours. Yet, after an immense work of signification, the archive on heroism and morality, specific to a political period, was made obsolete due to the political changes after the turn to democracy and end of the civil war.

Keywords

colonialism – independence – revolution – morality – virtue – heroism

Resumo

O artigo analisa os usos políticos de exemplos de heroísmo em Angola. Após a independência, e a governar um país que tinha de descolonizar, o MPLA promoveu uma moralidade política e virtude cívica sustentadas pelos seus modelos de heroísmo. Para as operacionalizar, serviu-se das suas organizações de jovens, mulheres e crianças

enquanto veículos de doutrinação dos novos valores e comportamentos revolucionários. No entanto, depois de um imenso trabalho de significação, o arquivo de heroísmo e moralidade, referente a um período político distinto, tornou-se obsoleto devido às mudanças de regime e ao fim da guerra-civil.

Palavras-chave

colonialismo – independência – revolução – moralidade – virtude – heroísmo

1 Introduction

From Julius Nyerere to Kwame Nkrumah, Samora Machel, and Jomo Kenyatta, independence heroes have inspired scholars to study their practice and legacy (see Fouéré 2015; Ahlman, 2017; Rantala 2016; Angelo 2020). When it comes to historical leaders, particularly after revolutions and dramatic societal breaks, they have “almost everywhere in the developing world helped set a dramatic course” (Rotberg, 2012: 7). Yet, as Wale Adebani and Ebenezer Obadare point out, if “the nature of African politics can be illuminated by a focus on individual rulers, leaders and regimes,” it may also constitute a problem “when it results in a neglect of broader national and transnational structures and institutions” (2016: 3–4). Few other contemporary African thinkers have made this connection clearer as Ndlovu-Gatsheni in the book *Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe*, a volume that “captures and interrogates various aspects of Mugabeism while at the same time shedding light on complex and contested historical milieu, complicated power dynamics, and difficult political practices as well as the equally contested idea of Zimbabwe from different vantage points” (2013: 18). The underpinnings wrapped up in Mugabeism, particularly the contrast between anti-colonial rhetoric and decolonial agendas, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni well asserts (2013: 5–8), hold much in common with its African counterparts, as Moore points out (2013: 30).

The processes of decolonization and revolution in Angola and elsewhere in Africa, from Ghana to Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, or Zimbabwe, among others, have historically been led by anti-colonial symbols, figures that often enjoyed immense domestic and international support. While their political practice was not without controversy, individuals like Robert Mugabe, Nelson Mandela, or Kenneth Kaunda, who became heroes or villains in their specific contexts, whether or not capable of escaping the logics of Eurocentric

epistemological practice, were nevertheless able to exert immense power in reshaping their societies.¹ Although their legacy remains trapped in a postcolonial complex, grounded in an anti-colonial (as opposed to decolonial) rhetoric that perpetuates a form of situating memory designed in the west after World War I, as Richard Werbner affirms (Werbner, 1998: 8), they did develop, albeit with varying degrees of salience, a “broad and nebulous framework of flexible moral concepts that individuals and collectivities can use to adopt different agendas,” as Marie Aude Fouéré indicates regarding Ujamaa politics in Tanzania (2015: 33).

The issues of political morality, revolutionary virtue, and decolonial conduct, although somewhat explored in African contexts, have largely been missing with regard to Portugal’s former colonies in the continent.² While the last decades have been prolific in exploring colonialism in the former Portuguese empire (Castelo 1999; Jerónimo 2015; Monteiro 2023), literature on the post-independence period of the countries that succeeded it, particularly regarding Angola and Mozambique, has focused on the pressing issues of its times, be it the civil conflict (Pearce, 2015; Martins, 2021a; Genoud et al. 2018) the process of postcolonial state-building (Roque, 2022; Soares Oliveira 2015), or the politics of development and economic growth (Ferreira 2006), among other topics. Few scholarly works have been produced on the topics that this article delineates, that is, the politics of morality and virtue in post-independence revolutionary lusophone contexts.³

Fouéré’s reference serves to frame heroism in Angola not simply as biographical account but as a consequent historical practice of power, and, more specifically, as birthing of a politics of virtue and morality. I propose reading heroism in Angola through Robert Baker’s assertion that revolutionary morality is disseminated either by popular “dos and don’ts or by stories of moral heroes and immoral villains” (2019: 17). The notion that moral heroes and immoral villains set the properties of “do and don’ts,” particularly in revolutionary contexts, points to the question posed by this article: what frameworks of morality and virtue did the Angolan revolution instil in the public, how they were institutionally operationalized, and to what end?

1 This is an ongoing debate between proponents of decoloniality, like Ndlovu-Gatsheni, and opponents of some of its applications (Taiwo 2022).

2 Loffman also notes that Congolese historiography has “been stuck debating the life and times of a small coterie of political leaders as opposed to broadening its scope of analysis to include what might be termed ‘middle-order’ individuals and their parties” (2020: 263–281).

3 Exceptions include, for example, Martins, 2021; 2022; Jopela, 2017; Rantala, 2016.

After independence in 1975, and in control of the state, the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) developed a revolutionary morality that it disseminated through its grassroots organizations by referencing examples of specific figures, heroes and heroines of the liberation struggle whose conduct the Angolan population was encouraged to follow. To inform its decolonization efforts, during the 1970s and 1980s the party invoked a diverse political and cultural repertoire developed during the armed struggle for national liberation against Portuguese colonialism (1961–1975). These decades were extremely fertile in building the Angolan state and society along socialist lines, through the predicates of the MPLA's particular form of Marxism-Leninism (Mabeko-Tali 2018: 441–442). The number of publications with ideological slogans, public speeches, and pedagogic texts produced during this period highlight the MPLA's proposal for Angolan society. Archival work conducted in Luanda between 2017 and 2020 revealed that virtually all publications produced by the MPLA or by Angolan state media outlets contain an extraordinary number of news, interviews, speeches, opinion articles, and official documents on the implementation of Marxism-Leninism in Angola.⁴ These materials can be divided in two categories. The first focuses on generic pedagogic efforts to educate the population on the predicates of Marxism-Leninism and the struggle against imperialism, capitalism, and the sins of the bourgeoisie within and outside of Africa. The second shows the MPLA involved in a work of signification upon the heroes and heroines of the Angolan liberation struggle.⁵ Signification, that is, the codification of meaning, was produced by promoting the moral properties of specific examples of heroism, an invocation of the MPLA's fallen heroes propagated through its grassroots organizations – the JMPLA (Youth of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), the OMA (Organization of Angolan Women), and the OPA (Organization of the Pioneer of Angola), the youth, women's, and children's sections of the movement, respectively.

The article offers a reading of the political uses of the history and memory of three heroic figures of the MPLA, Hoji ya Henda, Deolinda Rodrigues, and

4 List of publications surveyed in the Lúcio Lara Archive of the ATD: *Angola in Arms* (1969–71); *Boletim do Militante do MPLA* (1964–69); *Boletim de Informação do MPLA* (1969); *Boletim Informativo da JMPLA* (1979); *Boletim Informativo da OMA* (1979–85); *Boletim Informativo do MPLA/MPLA-PT* (1977–81); *O Njango ya Sualali*, the journal of the FAPLA (1968); *Flash sur l'Angola*, a publication by the department of information of the MPLA in French language (1970–72); *Informação ao Militante MPLA* (1970–73); *Henda, Orgão Nacional da Juventude do MPLA* (1976–77); *Jornal Juventude* (first page missing, year unknown); *Lavra e Oficina* (1979–81); *Luta do Povo*, Comitês Henda (1974); *MPLA Informations* (1965–69); *Ngangula*, official bulletin of the OPA (1977–85); *Revista Militar FAPLA* (1979–83); *Vitória ou Morte* (1962–69); *Vitória é Certa* (1973–76).

5 On work of signification see Hall 1982.

Augusto Ngangula, each a patron of an MPLA grassroots organization. I have demonstrated how the MPLA built Angolan official history and memory by invoking a particular liberation script, as Borges Coelho called it (Martins 2021b; Borges Coelho 2002) a total historical explanation that dictates rules to political discourse not dissimilar to the narrative of “patriotic history” in Zimbabwe (Ranger, 2004) or to what Anne Pitcher termed “organised forgetting” in Mozambique (Pitcher, 2006). But more than cementing the state’s official history, the examples of heroism in the MPLA served as a representation of what it had to sacrifice to achieve Angola’s independence.

The article is divided in three sections. The first section discusses the main predicates of the Angolan revolution and the MPLA’s solution for Angola’s postcolonial woes. The second section analyzes three heroic figures, their connection with the MPLA’s organizations and the examples of virtue they provided, which ultimately allowed the construction of a moral universe in support of the Angolan revolution. The last section discusses the changes to the canon of heroism that occurred with the turn to democracy and the end of the civil war in 2002, a time of reshaping the country’s political and economic system.

2 “Under Lenin’s Silent Gaze”⁶

The Angolan revolution was a process initiated by the first anti-colonial armed actions led by two liberation movements – the MPLA and the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) – in the first months of 1961 against Portuguese colonialism in Angola. These actions initiated a war to end Portuguese colonial occupation of Angola that would last until 1975, having been fought by three movements, the two mentioned above and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), which joined the struggle after its creation in 1966.⁷ In Angola, not one but three segments of anti-colonial nationalism developed. The MPLA, in power since independence in 1975, which practiced its own strand of Marxist-Leninist socialism, a movement with Protestant Methodist roots (Péclard 1998) composed of people from all regions of Angola, including mestizos and Angolans of European origin, and supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba in different periods after independence (Hatzy 2015; Peters 2012). The FNLA, a movement with a regional

6 The expression, originally in Portuguese (“Sob o olhar silencioso de Lenine”) was proclaimed by Agostinho Neto during the foundation of the MPLA-Workers Party in 1977 and became historical due to its wide use in several outlets and subsequent speeches.

7 For a more complete history of the Angolan revolution see Marcum 1969; Messiant 2006.

implementation in northern Angola and the lower Congo, mostly associated with ideas of autochthony and tradition, having initially experimented with claims of secession. Finally, UNITA, a movement founded by Jonas Savimbi together with Angolans from the center regions of Angola and Cabinda, linked to African tradition, Maoism, and black socialism in its first years, and later with democracy, given its connections to Christian conservative segments in the United States of America.⁸

After independence in November 1975, the MPLA was able to take control of the state even though the country was already in the throes of a civil war that first pitted the FNLA and UNITA against the MPLA, and finally the latter two movements against one another in one of the most destructive conflicts south of the Sahara (1975–2002). During almost thirty years of civil war, the MPLA retained control of the government, even when its capacity to maintain an administrative and bureaucratic state apparatus in the areas of conflict was practically non-existent. In the areas it controlled, particularly the cities and coastal areas, the MPLA installed a one-party regime that would last until its abolition in 1992, when the party officially abandoned the socialist model in the Third Extraordinary Congress. Thus, the revolutionary process led by the MPLA can be seen as including not only the period of the liberation struggle (1961–1975), but extends until the abandonment of the predicates of the revolution in 1992, marking the first seventeen years of independence. This period of Angola's history was not only fundamental in building an official history (Martins, 2021; Messiant, 1998), but is also indicative of how the MPLA drew on its political experiences and historical memories of the liberation struggle to construct a particular public sphere (Faria 2013: 119–191).

The decolonization process put forward by the MPLA implied creating a new civic virtue sponsored by the contents and moral duties of its revolution. Its central ideological tenets advocated for the emancipation of Angolans from any kind of colonial occupation or exploitation as well as a relentless struggle against international imperialism, in the form of Apartheid South Africa and its military incursions into southern Angola and support for its proxies (UNITA). It also promoted the political and moral condemnation of colonial bourgeois attitudes associated with neo-colonialism, tribalism, racism, corruption, alcoholism, and any kind of dissidence. Amidst these forms of decolonizing society lay not only ideological concerns, but also real and urgent problems derived from the hasty abandonment of the entire Portuguese colonial apparatus, which contributed greatly to Angola's first post-colonial predicaments.

One of the country's very first problems originated in the food production chain. As Birmingham notes, agricultural goods in Angola were produced

8 On the differences between the nationalist movements see Messiant 2006.

on large agro-industrial plantations controlled by Europeans and on African farms in a more concentrated and less industrialized way (1992: 77). With independence came the flight of hundreds of thousands of Europeans and the nationalization of agro-industrial plantations previously under their control. The colonial system was dependent on the transfer of labor from central and southern Angola to northern Angola, based on the logic of contract, which the beginning of the civil war ended as it led to a mass exodus of forced laborers and migrants back to their regions of origin (Martins 2021; Neto 2012). Angola's independence ultimately tore apart the system of African labor exploitation and with it the most common mode of agricultural production and distribution in the country. To address this problem, one of the most important campaigns organized by the MPLA was to mobilize the unemployed urban youth into agricultural brigades, though without much success (see Figure 1).

The failure to recruit workers for the brigades created problems not only for the MPLA but also channelled the revolutionary enthusiasm of the youth "into more comfortable literacy campaigns which did not force them to leave the city" (Birmingham 1992: 77; Figueiredo 2022.). This is a central point, since Angola's urban youth, completely unprepared for rural and agricultural work, were not disconnected from the cultural changes and fashions that stormed the world in the 1960s and 1970s, the new sounds and rhythms, clothes, hair-styles, and hip behaviours. For the leadership of the MPLA, this cultural wave was seen as politically deviant and counterrevolutionary for its mimicking of colonial bourgeois attitudes. Agostinho Neto elaborated this criticism in a speech on December 1978:

The petty-bourgeoisie doesn't like organization. It doesn't like to be organized. It doesn't belong to the Party. It doesn't belong to the OMA. It doesn't belong to the ODP. It doesn't belong to the Pioneers, to the OPA. Doesn't belong to JMPLA. It doesn't like organization. It is a characteristic of the petty-bourgeoisie! Being organized is a terrible embarrassment for an individual, and so he cannot be disciplined. He always wants to be original: to wear his hair long, not to go to the barber, his trousers ill-fitting, and his shirt, the dirtier the better ...! It is a characteristic of the petit-bourgeoisie, to distinguish itself, to show itself as a person who sometimes has good ideas. But they are not capable of being organized. We have to abolish this behaviour and these ideas within the Party, it can't be!⁹

9 Speech by Agostinho Neto published in the *Boletim do Militante do MPLA-Partido do Trabalho*, Year II, no. 49, December, 1978: 13–15. The ODP, the Organization of Popular Defense, was



FIGURE 1 Left: President Agostinho Neto participating in the agricultural brigades. Photograph by Martins. Right: advert incentivizing the youth to join the agricultural brigades
JORNAL HENDA, ORGÃO NACIONAL DA JUVENTUDE DO MPLA, YEAR 1, NO. 1, AUGUST 1976
Note: The advert reads “the basket and bag are symbols of the revolutionary youth in the coffee campaign.”

In a speech echoing the well-engrained Christian cultural influence in Angola, suspicious and fearful of the dangers of modern urban life – particularly alcohol, prostitution, and vagrancy – discipline became the solution put forward by the MPLA to address the visible lack of devotion to the Angolan

composed of civilians who could be called upon to defend the cities from UNITA or South African attacks.

revolution and to its principal predicates. The MPLA developed a hygienist narrative to counter behaviors deemed unproductive, presented as an effort to fight crime and delinquency (Figueiredo 2021). Hundreds of publications calling for discipline and devotion to its revolution appear in the MPLA's portfolio. Some of these discuss internal problems within the party, indicating discontent with the behaviour of some of its members, particularly the youth. The following passage published in the *Jornal Henda* in November 1976, a year after independence, illustrates these problems:

There are comrades who systematically lack discipline and fail to comply with decisions issued by higher bodies. Other comrades fall into easy comfort and relaxation, then seek unacceptable justifications to justify their inactivity, do not connect with the bases, do not organize Action Groups, do not bother to go to the field, say there is no transport, we have no cadres, etc. Now the lack of spirit of sacrifice and self-indulgence reflects a lack of revolutionary consciousness. There are still comrades, mainly the city youth, who in meetings behave very badly; laughing, bumbling, in an attitude that reflects colonialist education.¹⁰

Discipline and active participation were key components of the MPLA's revolution. As Neto noted, the efforts towards instilling those values were led by a number of party organizations, ranging from the OMA, OPA, and JMPLA to trade unions, farmer's leagues, and neighborhood committees, structures that functioned as mechanisms for the creation of a civil society, a direct though diluted emanation of state power. These organizations operated as resonance boxes mirroring the moral contents of the Angolan revolution in line with the higher orders of the party, its Central Committee and Political Bureau. Membership and participation was politically encouraged and socially scrutinized, precisely because it was there that the new moral codes were transmitted and the new civic virtue learned, configuring a doctrine not far from what Raekstad and Gradin called "prefigurative politics" (2019). Caught in a civil war that was only beginning in the 1980s, the MPLA urgently needed to galvanize society to defend the state it controlled. One of the solutions was to use its own heroes and heroines of the liberation war, figures whose examples of virtue, sacrifice, and morality the population was encouraged to follow. As demonstrated in the next section, to produce a new revolutionary virtue, each of the MPLA's grassroots organizations adopted heroes and heroines of the liberation

10 "A disciplina fortalece a organização," *Jornal Henda, Órgão Nacional da Juventude do MPLA*, year 1, no. 3, 25 November 1976: 3.

struggle as patrons, representative figures whose association with these organizations has survived through varying degrees of salience and silence.

3 Heroes, Heroines, and the “Moral Reserve” of Angola

Angola’s official history carries a wide spectrum of heroes and heroines, people the MPLA often refers to as the country’s “moral reserve.” From Agostinho Neto to Deolinda Rodrigues and Hoji ya Henda, Augusto Ngangula, Valódia, or Gika, to key figures of the liberation struggle made villains due to the early controversies of Angola’s history like Nito Alves and Monstro Imortal.¹¹

After independence, the MPLA realized that to mobilize society for both its political project and for the war it was fighting against UNITA, it had to instill a particular social, political, and cultural revolutionary awareness akin to a Gramscian “cultural hegemony” approach (Hoare and Smith 1971). The societal transformation that was to solidify the Angolan revolution with the MPLA at its helm was funnelled through the examples of heroism of the liberation struggle. The party associated three historical figures with its grassroots organizations. José Mendes de Carvalho “Hoji ya Henda” became the patron representative of the JMPLA. The date of his death, 14 April, was declared Angolan Youth Day. Deolinda Rodrigues assumed the same role for the OMA, which celebrates Angolan Women’s Day on March 2, the day of her capture by the FNLA. For the OPA, although its patron is Agostinho Neto, it commemorates Augusto Ngangula on December 1, the Day of the Angolan Pioneer. Together, these three figures encapsulate essential moral values, the standard of behavior and civic conduct the MPLA sought as role models for the youth, women and children of Angola.

Often described as one of the MPLA’s greatest commanders, Henda was killed in Karipande, Moxico on 14 April 1968 during an assault on a Portuguese military compound (Junior, 2001). Praised for his courage, determination, conviction, and dedication to the emancipation of Angolans, he became an example of seriousness, frankness, and military discipline (Figure 2). The First Assembly of the MPLA in the Eastern Front, which took place over August 25–8, 1968, bestowed Hoji ya Henda with the title “Well-beloved son of the Angolan people and heroic combatant of the MPLA.” During the meeting of

11 Nito Alves and Jacob João Caetano “Monstro Imortal” were commanders in the 1st Political and Military Region of the MPLA. Monstro Imortal led the only MPLA detachment, the “Camilo Cienfuegos,” to successfully reach the 1st region. Both were assassinated after the alleged coup d’état on 27 May 1977.



FIGURE 2 Photograph of “Hoji ya Henda,” available on the official website of the MPLA

the MPLA’s Central Committee on December 2, 1977, Henda was also bestowed the Medal of the Order of the National Hero, alongside Agostinho Neto.¹² His memory and example as a moral hero continue to guide the way the MPLA seeks to relate to the Angolan youth (Martins 2022).

Deolinda Rodrigues was a guerrilla fighter and fierce opponent of colonial racism and oppression, today an iconic symbol of women’s emancipation. After arriving in Congo-Leopoldville in 1962, where the MPLA was based at the time, Deolinda became the only woman in the movement’s Directorate Committee, in charge of social affairs. In 1966, she joined the Kamy Detachment, a MPLA guerrilla squadron sent to resupply the 1st Political-Military Region in the hinterland of Luanda (Rodríguez, 2010). Deolinda was captured on 2 March 1967 and imprisoned at the FNLA base of Kinkuzu, in former Congo-Leopoldville, where she was murdered on an uncertain day in 1968. Her capture and that of her companions sparked an international campaign to exert pressure upon the FNLA for their release (see Figure 3), to no avail. Since then, she became a role model for OMA militants, as hundreds of pamphlets and

12 Fundação Dr. António Agostinho Neto (2018). *António Agostinho Neto, Uma vida por Angola: condecorações e título honoríficos*. Luanda, 8. The Medal Hoji ya Henda was also created to distinguish members of the JMPLA after ten years of service.

**UN NOUVEAU CRIME CONTRE LA LUTTE
HEROIQUE DU PEUPLE ANGOAIS.**

Cinq responsables de l'Organisation de la Femme Angolaise - O.M.A. - DE LINDA RODRIGUES, ENGRACIA dos SANTOS, IRENE COHEN, LUCRÉCIA PAIM et TEREZA AFONSO ont été enlevées à Kamina (Congo-Kinshasa) par les bureaux de l'U.P.A. (aussi connue par FNLA ou "gouvernement révolutionnaire de l'Angola en exil - grae...") le 2 mars dernier.

L'enlèvement de nos vaillantes camarades s'est produit quand elles revenaient d'une mission accomplie auprès de nos sœurs qui combattent contre le colonialisme portugais dans la brousse, à l'intérieur du pays.

Nos camarades se trouvent séquestrées dans les cahots du camp de concentration de Kinkuzu (soi-disant base militaire de l'U.P.A.), vrai cimetière des plus silencieux et des plus conscients nationalistes angolais.



IRENE COHEN



ENGRACIA dos SANTOS



DEOLINDA RODRIGUES



TEREZA AFONSO



LUCRÉCIA PAIM

Nous n'avons aucune nouvelle sur la situation actuelle de nos camarades, mais nous savons qu'elles ont subi des sévices graves et qu'on les a torturées à maintes reprises.

A tous les patriotes angolais,

A tous les amis de la lutte du peuple angolais, l'Organisation de la Femme de l'Angola - O.M.A. - demande de bien vouloir envoyer des protestations et des appels auprès du Gouvernement de la République Démocratique du Congo, pour que ces combattantes soient libérées.

Vive la solidarité entre les femmes du monde entier !
Vive la lutte pour l'indépendance nationale, la paix et l'émancipation des Peuples.
Liberté pour les cinq patriotes angolaises !
Unies nous vaincrons !
La Victoire ou la Mort !

La Direction
de l'O.M.A.

Fait à Brazzaville, le 18 avril 1967

FIGURE 3 Pamphlet produced by the MPLA, printed in Brazzaville, 18 April 1967

communiqués in the MPLA portfolio attest. A prolific writer, Deolinda left a diary (Rodrigues, 2003; 2004) that inspired the documentary film *Langidila* (2015), directed by José Rodrigues and Nguxi dos Santos.

The OPA's role model, Augusto Ngangula, tells the story of a boy who, on his way to an MPLA school, was captured by Portuguese soldiers while in possession of the movement's teaching materials. Interrogated and tortured to reveal the position of MPLA bases in the area, Augusto Ngangula refused to pass information to the Portuguese soldiers who murdered him on 1 December 1968 (Tuta, 2010; see Figure 4). A document published by the Henda Committee

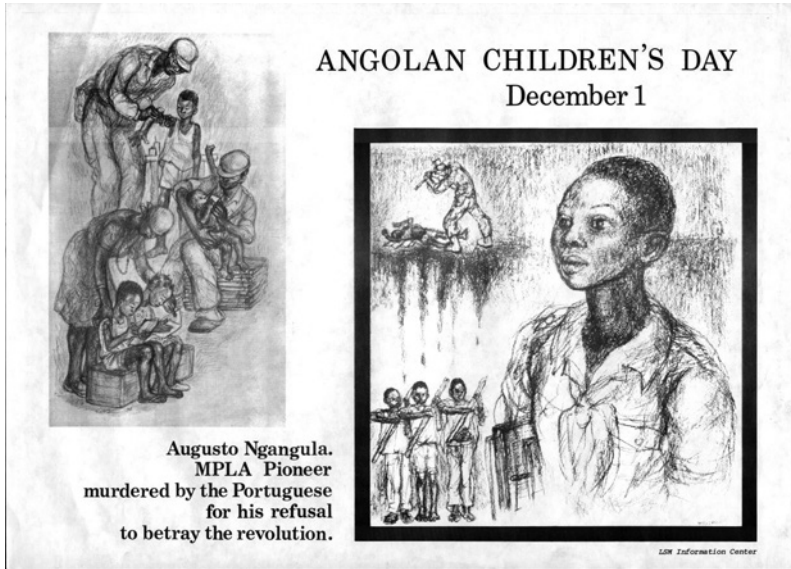


FIGURE 4 Poster of Augusto Ngangula commemorating the Day of the Angolan Pioneer, available in the African Activist Archive. There are no known photographs of Ngangula.

Note: <https://africanactivist.msu.edu/image.php?objectid=210-809-1059>, accessed 2 September 2022.

states that “the boy of 12, a worthy Son of the Angolan People, fell heroically, preferring to die before betraying the MPLA guerrillas.” It concludes by stating that “[i]f all the child combatants, all the pioneers of the MPLA, continue to follow his example of dedication and love for the Revolution, colonialism and imperialism will be crushed.”¹³ The presidency of the MPLA passed order of service 13/69, praising Augusto Ngangula as “an example to be followed by all the pioneers, youth women, and old people of Angola. For his courage and dedication to the struggle of his country, the MPLA Directorate Committee decided to posthumously grant the pioneer Augusto Ngangula the title of Heroic Pioneer of the MPLA.”¹⁴

From the brief biographies presented it becomes apparent that these stories of heroism, dedication, and moral conduct carried the virtues the MPLA sought to see reflected in Angolan youth, women, and children. The work of signification to produce this bricolage was carried out in various formats. The party

13 Comitês Henda, *Augusto Ngangula, filho querido do povo Angolano*, December 1, Day of the Pioneer. Year unknown.

14 *Vitória ou Morte*, Order of Service of the Presidency of the MPLA, nº 13, 3/03/1969.



FIGURE 5 JMPLA and OPA march on 14 April 1978 in Luanda, commemorating the memory of its patron Hoji ya Henda. The headline in the publication reads “Sigamos o exemplo do Comandante Henda na Construção da Pátria Socialista!”
JORNAL DE ANGOLA, 15 APRIL 1978, 6–7

used official celebrations, speeches, monuments and statues, songs, records, and other products and practices of memory to build the public’s admiration of these patron figures. Membership in party organizations was encouraged and socially controlled, since these were exceptional platforms for political education, vehicles for the indoctrination of the civic and moral virtues of their patrons, which represented the best the MPLA had sacrificed for Angola’s independence.¹⁵ While statues to Hoji ya Henda and Deolinda Rodrigues placed in central locations in Luanda became a daily reminder of the Angolan revolution, speeches proffered on dates of national celebration are particularly illustrative of this practice. A piece published by the *Jornal de Angola* on 15 April 1979 states that the Coordinator of the Urban Committee of the MPLA in Luanda, Roberto de Almeida – later vice-president of the party – presided over the Youth Day ceremony that held a parade of JMPLA and OPA members and the deposition of a wreath of flowers in the monument to Henda, a repetition of the commemoration of the previous year (see Figure 5). Speaking to the audience, Almeida said, “beloved son of the Angolan people, Commander Hoji ya Henda, you are still a symbol today! A symbol that has crossed the borders

15 In the OPA, children had to use a uniform, sing a variety of songs, and pledge allegiance to the flag every day before class.

of Angola. You are the symbol of a dignity recovered. You are the symbol of a continent in struggle.”¹⁶

The invocation of heroes and the involvement of the MPLA’s organizations in days of celebration was common practice during the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1981 Angolan Women’s Day celebrations, a member of the OPA read a message invoking “the valuable role played by Angolan women during the two national liberation wars,” and the FAPLA presented a congratulatory message exalting Deolinda, Engrácia, Irene, Teresa, and Lucrecia, “symbols of courage and determination of Angolan women.”¹⁷ The final speech was made by Lúcio Lara, who said “we know that the Angolan mother was the great artisan of our national independence, since the five women who fell at the hands of international imperialism are the firmest model of total surrender to the revolution and the patriotic cause.”¹⁸ The same format of commemoration and virtue invocation was used in the previous year. In 1980, the National Coordinator of the OMA, Ruth Neto, stated:

Our heroic Deolinda, Teresa, Engrácia, Irene and Lucrecia, the first women of the MPLA guerrilla detachments ... Their revolutionary morale served as a stimulus for their comrades to fight during their long captivity in the dungeons of the sadly famous Kinkuzu ... During two years these brave daughters of the Angolan People kept the proper behaviour of militants of MPLA. Neither threats, nor false promises could make them to move away from the Movement’s political line and of the ideals of the true Angolan patriots.¹⁹

Music also became particularly important. In the widely known album *Glória Eterna aos Nossos Heróis* (Eternal Glory to Our Heroes), musician Santocas produced solemn tributes to Hoji ya Henda, Deolinda Rodrigues, and Augusto Ngangula (see Figure 6).

16 “Significativa homenagem à memória de Hoji ya Henda,” *Jornal de Angola*, year 4, no. 1333, 15 April 1979.

17 Boletim Informativo da OMA, “2 de Março, dia da mulher Angolana,” 2 March 1981: 5. FAPLA – Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola – was the military wing of the MPLA and the Angolan government during the single-party period.

18 Ibid. Speech by Lúcio Lara.

19 *Boletim Informativo da OMA*, “Declaração feita pela coordenadora nacional da OMA ao dar início à jornada internacional da mulher de 2 a 8 de Março e convocatória ao 1º Congresso da OMA,” no. 14, February, 1980: 8.

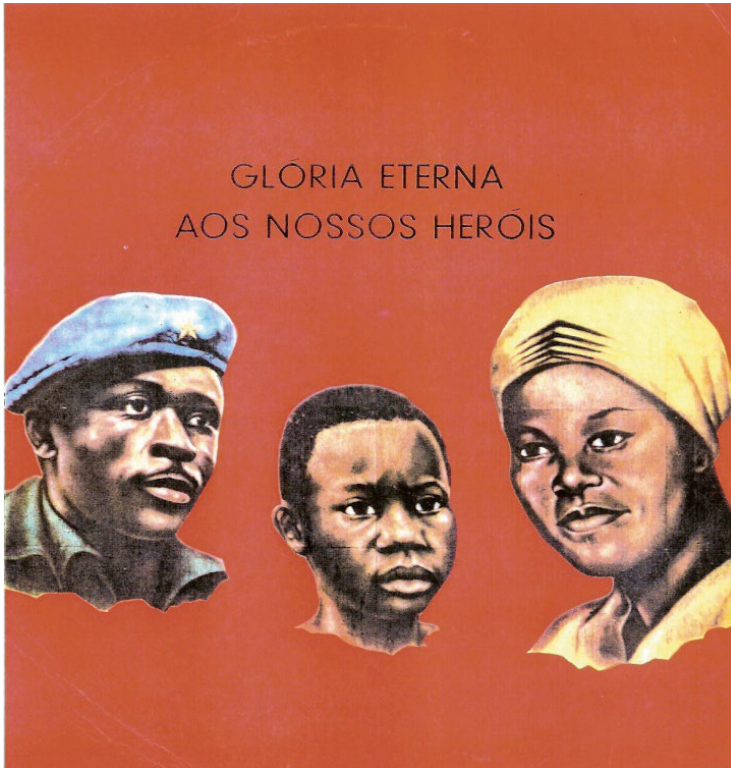


FIGURE 6 Cover of the album *Glória Eterna aos Nossos Heróis*, by Santocas, 1978. In the cover, from left to right, Hoji ya Henda, Augusto Ngangula, and Deolinda Rodrigues

Marissa Moorman interviewed Santocas, who stated that “songs that hailed the heroes of the struggle or promoted party policies were the order of the day” (2008: 177–178). Moorman noted that “the state symbolically claimed music, musicians and entertainment for its nation-building project”, turning what had been a relatively free cultural production of political interference into state-sponsored national values (Moorman, 2008: 181).

The correlation between decolonization, revolutionary conduct, and the work of signification produced upon these historical figures in the construction of a new moral and civic paradigm in Angola is clear. Yet, more than three decades after the end of the revolutionary period, what remains of the moral and civic virtues promoted through these heroes and heroines? The next section discusses the destiny of the MPLA’s heroes after the turn to democratic rule and the end of the civil war.

4 No Country for Old Heroes?

“Angola começa agora,” Angola starts now, was a popular expression used to characterize the political mood in the immediate postwar period in the country (Soares Oliveira, 2015: 5). Schubert calls it the “postwar master narrative” whereby “the end of the war in 2002 functions as Year Zero of the country’s independence” (2016: 30). The notion that true Angolan independence would only start after 2002, since the civil war years were a continuation of the liberation struggle, (the second liberation war as the MPLA terms it), points to a period of wasted time in a country popularly lauded as one of the richest in the world. Post-war development, particularly the reconstruction campaign fueled by very profitable oil prices, symbolizes a break with the past in a country where marginal state-led national reconciliation efforts were undertaken apart from a blanket amnesty issued by presidential decree by dos Santos (Lázaro 2016). After the civil war, the Angolan government was able to fully operationalize, without opposition, its rentier economy heavily dependent on international capitalism, while at the same time expanding its reach across the country by reforming the debris left by UNITA and continually solidifying the power of President dos Santos (Roque 2021: 87–128).

In this often termed “new Angola” (Schubert 2016), the heroes discussed here, those that informed the moral virtue of the revolution during the single-party period, were subjected to several processes of silencing, replacement, and substitution (Martins 2022). Their virtual disappearance from the public sphere, news and opinion articles, school curricula, and national days of celebration made them little known to a population that is extremely young.

For most Angolans, particularly those born after the 1990s, *Hoji ya Henda* is more associated with the Luanda neighbourhood that bears the same name than with the historical figure. Augusto Ngangula, today a largely unknown figure, exemplifies the kind of sacrifice not to be emulated for those who still know his story.²⁰ Deolinda Rodrigues is, in this respect, a special case, since she is commemorated by various segments of Angolan society, from feminist organizations to myriad newlywed couples who take wedding photographs at Luanda’s well-known Memorial of the Heroines, a monument where the figure of Deolinda stands flanked by four women, the heroines of Angola. But the living memories of these heroes did not simply disappear from public narrative. Their oblivion is closely linked to the political and economic swings of

20 Opinion shared by sources during fieldwork in Angola.

post-colonial Angola, particularly after the civil war. I have shown how Henda fits this proposition. Subjected to a process of anamnesis in the 1970s and 1980s, Henda disappears from public narrative after Angola's democratization in the early 1990s. While in the 2000s he remains silenced, in the 2010s he is actively replaced as the moral example for the youth by the figure of former president dos Santos (Martins 2022).

Deolinda Rodrigues also follows this trend. Margarida Paredes argues that Deolinda has always been marginalized within the party for misogynistic reasons, recovering Deolinda's uncomfortable relationship with the party leadership, who reportedly informed her that she "would not join them in Ghana because she was a woman," which led her to refer to the MPLA as "erudite and masculine" (Paredes 2010: 21). Paredes concludes that

The hyper-representation of heroine that the nation makes of Deolinda Rodrigues contributed to obscure the woman who, through creative writing and in the intimacy of the *Diary* resisted the evangelisation of Protestant missionaries ... [and] dared to express, in the silence of biographical writing, the machismo and male domination of the nationalist movement where she fought. (Paredes 2010: 24)

Without disputing the idiosyncrasies of Angolan patriarchy and Deolinda's experiences as a woman at the head of a visibly male party, I question this idea of hyper-representation. My research reveals that, like *Hoji ya Henda*, Deolinda as a model heroine in Angola is, above all, a figure of the 1970s and 1980s. Like Henda, Deolinda also disappears from public memory from the 1990s onwards. In fact, all three patrons of the MPLA's grassroots organizations were suspended from public sphere after the transition to democracy and the end of the civil war. At this stage of Angola's history emerged an economy of values that ruled their activation or deactivation according to short-term political needs. Angola's transition from popular revolution to rentier capitalism suppressed the liberation script that had been central during previous decades. This period speaks to Tony Hodges's observation that democratic transition took "place in a moral and ideological vacuum due to the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism" (Hodges 2004: 21). This ideological vacuum created silences upon the examples of heroism here debated that formatted the way the MPLA's grassroots organizations act in society. Although important to trace the evolution of moral and civic configurations, the archive on heroism become an old paradigm of a different country in a different time and space. After almost three decades of a destructive war, and an economic boom followed by a severe recession, socialist ideas in Angola have largely

been supplanted by neo-liberal designs. Despite the great work of signification that was carried out over two decades, the moral values and civic virtues of the Angolan revolution as the MPLA designed them were supplanted by new times. Nevertheless, heroes and heroines never stray too far from their original point of memorialization, and Angolans have proven that memories of heroism or villainy can be recovered and invoked in search for solutions for a new civic and moral order (Martins, 2021).

5 Conclusion

This article analyzed the memory of three figures of the MPLA's heroic palette. By correlating their example of morality and virtue with the principles of the Angolan revolution, it showed how the regime sought to install specific values in society through the invocation of the historical memory of heroism. The MPLA's grassroots organizations were crucial in this process. The JMPLA, OMA, and OPA constructed their patrons, Hoji ya Henda, Deolinda Rodrigues, and Augusto Ngangula, respectively, as exemplary models of the behaviour, dedication and spirit of sacrifice that should be mimicked by the youth, women, and children of Angola. A great work of signification was conducted with the publication of hundreds of texts in newspapers, bulletins and magazines, the construction of statues, the celebration of dates, and the production of songs, with the aim of building their heroism and encourage society to follow their moral imperatives. However, the values of the Angolan revolution had a short-lived impact. The heroes of the Angolan revolution no longer fit the new Angola geared towards multiparty democracy and, above all, economic liberalism. In the process, the MPLA's grassroots organizations were stripped of the configurations that had allowed them an articulation with Angolan society. Two decades after the end of the civil war, the archive on heroism in Angola carries little to no political capital, relegated to the pages of history and to passing references on celebration days.

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Bionote/Nota Biográfica*Vasco Martins*

is a researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra and a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto. His research in the field of African studies has focused on issues of citizenship and the politicisation of historical memory in post-colonial and post-war contexts. He is the author of several articles published in international journals and author of the book *Colonialism Ethnicity and War in Angola* (Routledge, 2021).

Vasco Martins

é investigador no Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra e Professor Auxiliar Convidado na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto. O seu trabalho de investigação, na área dos Estudos Africanos, tem-se debruçado sobre questões da cidadania e politização da memória histórica em contextos pós-coloniais e de pós-guerra. É autor de vários artigos sobre estas temáticas e autor do livro *Colonialism Ethnicity and War in Angola* (Routledge, 2021).