

Intra-Nationalist Fighting in the Angolan Liberation Struggle: Exploring the Case of the Eastern Front (1966-1974)

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Abstract

In this article, I examine the intra-nationalist rivalry between Angolan anticolonial guerrillas during the Liberation Struggle (1966-1974), paying particular attention to the personal war experiences of rural communities on the Eastern Front. This is done through a prosopographical approach based on archival research of interrogation transcripts from the Intelligence Service of the Portuguese State Police (PIDE-DGS) of guerrillas and civilians captured by the colonial authorities or who abandoned life in the bush under the control of the liberation movements. Contributing to the rich scholarly literature on African liberation movements, this article sheds light on how the permanent civil war between nationalist guerrillas reinforced the instrumentalization of violence against civilians, significantly affected the anticolonial struggle, and reverberated in the Angolan decolonization process (1974-1975).

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Introduction

The fragmented nature of early Angolan nationalism resulted in a crowded anticolonial arena rife with divisions, rivalries, and competitive dynamics. The Eastern Front of the Angolan liberation struggle was no exception to these phenomena and, upon its debut in 1966, quickly became the scene of military clashes for control of territory and population between the armed guerrillas of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, MPLA), the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, UNITA), and, to a lesser extent, the National Liberation Front of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, FNLA). Following the decolonization process, and the unilateral declarations of the Angolan People's Republic (RPA) and the Angolan People's Democratic Republic (RPDA) on November 11, 1975, this aspect intensified and became international, perpetuating an ongoing de facto civil war that paralleled the War of National Liberation for nearly a decade.

During the struggle for independence, "Fratricidal War" was a common term used in the political bulletins of Angolan liberation movements to describe military clashes between nationalist guerrillas. This deviation from the anticolonial goals was vehemently denounced by each movement, with rival organizations often accused of "unpatriotic" and "counter revolutionary" activities that were "tantamount to full scale civil war".¹ Despite the repeated occurrence of these direct military confrontations during the armed struggle, the existing literature has paid little attention to this subject, generally focusing more on the chronology of the Angolan Civil War, on which there is already an extensive and transdisciplinary bibliography (Beck 2012; Florêncio 2016; Hodges 2001; Malaquias 2007; Martins 2022; Pearce 2015; Roque 2017; Tvedten 1997; Weigert 2011). The works that have dealt directly with the chronology of the Angolan War of Liberation do not systematically address the question of the "Fratricidal War" (Guimarães 2001; Marcum 1978).

There are, however, a few exceptions in the historiography that deserve mention. Jean Martial Arsène Mbah was the first historian to devote an independent study to the rivalries between Angolan liberation movements (Mbah 2010). Mbah's analysis, however, focuses mainly on the political dimension of the competition between the FNLA and the MPLA rather than on the military clashes that took place during the anticolonial struggle. The work of Carlos Pacheco is complex in

¹ Arquivo de História Social (hereafter AHS)/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 55/ Le MPLA Denonce, 1967: 2; AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 71/ Kwacha, No. 2, 1969: 4; AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 71/ Kwacha, No. 4, 1970: 2; AHS/ ICS/ AHS/ MNA/ 14/ MPLA, 10th Year of Armed Struggle, 1970: 4; AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ MPLA, Informações aos Militantes, 1970: 4, 21.

nature and is guided by a biased narrative strategy that aims to attribute all the negative actions of the MPLA collective to the individual responsibility of Agostinho Neto, with the clear objective of biographical demonization (See Fonseca 2020). Nonetheless, it offers some important contributions about the intra-nationalist fighting on the Northern and Eastern Fronts, drawing on extensive archival research (Pacheco 2016: 247-281, 593-602). The more balanced approach on the MPLA by Jean Michel Mabeko-Tali also opens a door to examine the question of the “Fratricidal War” (Tali 2018: 197, 224, 250).

This study focuses on the military competition between nationalist guerrillas on the Eastern Front, as a distinct dimension of the Angolan Liberation Struggle (1961-1974) and as a defining phase in the strengthening of internal rivalries that had far-reaching reverberations during the Civil War (1975-2002). This is primarily addressed through a prosopographical approach based on personal memoirs and interrogation transcripts from the Intelligence Services of the Portuguese State Police (PIDE-DGS) from the National Archive of Torre do Tombo (ANTT). The PIDE-DGS functioned in Angola as one of the most important instruments of repression of Portuguese colonialism against African nationalist organizations (See Mateus 2004). The historical archive produced by the police agency reflects this intelligence role and contains extensive information on Angolan anticolonial organizations. An interesting category of information in this archive are the individual interrogation reports of guerrillas and civilians who were captured by the colonial authorities or who abandoned life in the bush under the control of the liberation movements. This allows for a unique prosopographical approach that enables the reconstruction of the personal histories of anticolonial actors in the guerrillas and the relationships between the guerrillas and the rural communities. Other archival materials used include reports produced by the Portuguese military housed at the ANTT, the Archive of National Defense (ADN) and the Historical Archive of the Presidency of the Republic (AHPR). Supporting materials such as political pamphlets and wartime communiqués are also drawn upon to express the perspectives and political identities of each liberation movement – from the Archive of the Mário Soares Foundation (AFMS), the Tchiweka Documentation Association (ATD) and the Social History Archive (AHS).

Using this rich set of sources, this article pays particular attention to the complex individual trajectories that reflect the dynamics of the intra-nationalist fighting, such as direct military confrontations, competition for resources, territory and communities, and the development of forced recruitment schemes. The article argues that the guerrillas' internal military competition was *de facto* a civil war, which at several moments completely eclipsed the priority of the armed anticol-

nial struggle and significantly increased the instrumentalization of violence against the civilian population.

The Race for the Eastern Front (1964-1966)

Zambia's independence in October 1964 paved the way for the further spread of armed liberation struggles against colonial and white minority regimes in southern Africa. Due to its geographic location in the interior of the continent, bordering Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, and South West Africa, the assumption of power by a black majority government in Lusaka led by Kenneth Kaunda meant the opening of some 2,500 kilometres of contiguous border with white-ruled Africa, greatly expanding the strategic military options of armed liberation movements operating in those countries (See Chongo 2016). For the Angolan guerrillas, this meant an opportunity to advance inland from the eastern border, which intensified the tripartite competition between the FNLA, MPLA and UNITA for the inauguration of the desired second front against Portuguese colonialism.²

The first front of the armed struggle in Angola was launched on March 15, 1961, in the north of the country by the Union of the Populations of Angola (UPA), a movement that merged with the Democratic Party of Angola (PDA) in 1962 to form the FNLA under the leadership of Holden Roberto. The FNLA can be described as a nationalist, politically conservative movement whose intelligentsia was closely linked to the Baptist churches in Congo Kinshasa and which had a strong base in the Bakongo ethnic group living in northern Angola (Tali 2023: 31-41). The MPLA joined the armed struggle on the Northern Front at the end of 1961. The founding history of the MPLA is disputed. The movement officially claims to have been founded in 1956, thus claiming primogeniture among the Angolan liberation movements. However, it appears that the organization was founded in 1960 by Viriato da Cruz, the former leader of the Communist Party of Angola (PCA) (Pacheco 1997: 33-39; Tali 2019: 75-85). The MPLA was Marxist in orientation and although most of its leadership belonged to the Kimbundu ethnic group, there were also several white and mixed-race members. From 1962, the movement was led by Agostinho Neto, who became the first

² Eastern Angola also shares a border with Congo Kinshasa, which had been independent since 1960. However, the use of the Katanga region as a logistical platform for FNLA guerrilla activities in Angola was politically sensitive for Cyrille Adoula's government in the Congo. The Portuguese government had openly supported Katangese secessionism to destabilize the region, and after the fall of Moïse Tshombé's separatist government, several Katangese gendarmes sought asylum in Angola and joined the Portuguese armed forces. As a result, Adoula was particularly wary of allowing the FNLA to open a war front from Katanga at this time, fearing that it would create a provocative pretext for an incursion by the gendarmes into Katangese territory with the military backing of Portugal. See Nascimento 2015 and Kennes 2016.

president of independent Angola in 1975. UNITA was founded in 1966 by a group of FNLA dissidents from the south of Angola under the leadership of Jonas Savimbi. During the anticolonial struggle, the movement ideological program was Maoist in nature and its leadership consisted mainly of members of the Ovimbundu ethnic group (Tali 2023: 61-67). As this article will show, the founding of UNITA is closely linked to the opening of the Eastern Front.

The FNLA was arguably the movement best positioned to take advantage of the new regional opportunities brought about by the end of colonial rule in Zambia, as it pioneered the creation of a political infrastructure in that country. By 1964, Holden Roberto had established a working relationship with Kaunda, and the United National Independence Party (UNIP) provided significant logistical support in setting up delegations, propaganda offices, and recruitment centres for the FNLA in Lusaka.³ But 1964 was also a year of crisis for the organization. In July, the resignation of the foreign minister of the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE), Jonas Savimbi, led to a major breakaway of FNLA members from southern Angola, from which the Friends of the Angola Manifesto (AMANGOLA), the embryo of UNITA, emerged.⁴ The split weakened the movement and led to a loss of FNLA influence and presence in Zambia, which was largely absorbed by other Angolan liberation movements.

The MPLA was a major beneficiary of the FNLA's internal dissent. By 1965, Neto's movement occupied the same political infrastructures that Holden had inaugurated in Lusaka a year earlier, and it also succeeded in absorbing into its own ranks most of the FNLA network that existed in the city.⁵ For the MPLA, the opening of a second front in the east (Third Military Region) was crucial to fulfil the strategic ambition of occupying a corridor inside Angola that linked to the Northern Front (First Military Region), through the creation of the so called Agostinho Neto Route (Tali 2018: 193-194) - inspired by the successful North Vietnamese logistical experience with the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It also allowed the movement to escape the significant constraints its armed struggle faced in the north, where it was forced to transit through hostile territory in Congo Kinshasa to reach the Angolan northern border. The Kinshasa government supported the FNLA, and the MPLA troops' itinerary in the country was frequently attacked by Holden's guerrillas - another important dimension of the "Fratricidal War" that

³ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (hereafter ANTT)/ SCCIA/ L123/ RS N^o118/ 9JUL64 a 15JUL64: 22; ANTT/ SCCIA/ L121/ RS N^o108/ 30ABR64 a 6MAI64: 23.

⁴ Arquivo da Fundação Mário Soares (hereafter AFMS)/ Fundo Mário Pinto de Andrade/ Pasta 0438.002.013/ Why we Quitted the UPA and the GRAE of Mr.Holden Roberto, 1965: 1.

⁵ ANTT/ SCCIA/ L128/ RS N^o163/ 20MAI65 a 26MAI65: 11; ANTT/ SCCIA/ L127/ RS N^o154/ 18MAR65 a 24MAR65: 8-9.

is too complex to be adequately addressed in this article and deserves a separate study. Neto's movement, however, maintained good relations with Congo Brazzaville, where much of the leadership lived in exile (Silva 2014: 176-178). The country bordered the Angolan enclave of Cabinda and served as a logistical base from which the MPLA managed to wage an armed struggle against the Portuguese troops stationed there - with rather mixed results in mobilizing the Cabinda population (Tali 2018: 192). Therefore, the opening of a front in eastern Angola was an opportunity for the MPLA leadership to shift the anticolonial struggle geographically from two stagnant war fronts and regain the initiative in the war against Portuguese colonialism.

During this period (1964-1965), the AMANGOLA split, which emerged from the FNLA, was in the process of creating the third major Angolan liberation movement: UNITA. To this end, Jonas Savimbi sent fighters to the People's Republic of China for military training, with the goal of creating a core of guerrilla commanders who possessed the leadership skills necessary to direct the armed struggle (Ribeiro 2023: 64-68). Like the MPLA, AMANGOLA benefited from the collapse of the FNLA in Zambia by absorbing some 140 members from Holden's organization and managing to build close ties with the Angolan exile community in Lusaka.⁶ In early 1966, the "Black Chinese" guerrillas, as they were later popularized by the press,⁷ infiltrated the Angolan eastern border from their Zambian bases and organized a political conference at which the formation of UNITA was officially sealed. The movement was strategically announced by Savimbi on March 13, 1966, in Muangai, a small village in the heart of Angola, thus claiming a link between the creation of UNITA and the opening of the Eastern Front.⁸ This founding history was of central importance for the representation of UNITA's anti-colonial legitimacy by emphasising its indigenous Angolan character. UNITA's foundation in Angola set it apart from its rivals, the FNLA and the MPLA, which had been founded in exile.

Concerning the anticolonial struggle, both the MPLA and UNITA claimed to have inaugurated the Eastern Front. A statement by the Directive Committee of Neto's organization claimed that the MPLA had started the war in the East, and that UNITA had only entered the area in December 1966 with the sole aim of "sowing confusion" and "sabotaging the MPLA's struggle".⁹ The MPLA's

⁶ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093 Zâmbia, 1965: 666-667.

⁷ Associação Tchiweka de Documentação (hereafter ATD)/ ALL/ C0124.003.033/ With the 'Black Chinese' in Angola, 1971: 1.

⁸ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093/O que é a UNITA e os seus esforços para a Libertação de Angola, 1966: 309-314.

⁹ AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 55/ Le MPLA Denonce, 1967: 2.

rhetoric also referred to the FNLA as a “tribal group supported by the Americans” and UNITA as “another tribal group of puppets” that was “financed by the Anglo-Saxons” and led by an “ambitious opportunist”.¹⁰

Similarly, UNITA’s political bulletin *Kwacha* claimed that the movement had been the first organization to establish a presence in the region, declared that “the MPLA’s claims about the Eastern Front are totally unfounded and false”, and denounced the activities of other “Angolan groups” aimed at “confusing the genuine struggle” and intensifying the “fratricidal war”.¹¹ According to the UNITA propaganda bulletin’s account, the activities of Savimbi’s guerrilla caused “panic” not only among the “Portuguese colonialists” but also among “two other Angolan groups” seeking “hegemony over Angolan nationalism”.¹² In February 1967, at a press conference in Lusaka, Savimbi expressed the same hegemonic and exclusivist discourse that the MPLA was accused of when he mentioned that there was “another party” besides his movement, the “mulatto party” and declared that “UNITA will gain power in Angola” and “rule Angola”.¹³ This competitive rhetoric was also adopted by the FNLA, the last of the three movements to join the Eastern Front. During the 4th anniversary celebrations of Zambian independence in 1968, Holden Roberto declared that he would send his guerrillas to eastern Angola to put an end to the activities of the MPLA and UNITA.¹⁴

Tensions between Angolan liberation movements were not limited to mutual accusations in propagandistic literature and political speeches. The East was the scene of a four-sided military struggle for control of territory and population between the FNLA, the MPLA, UNITA, and the colonial regime. The first signs of this contest appeared in Zambia, where the MPLA enjoyed the advantage of open political support from the Lusaka government. In September 1966, a delegate sent by Neto’s movement called on Kaunda to expel UNITA members from the country, a proposal the Zambian president rejected by suggesting the formation of a united front between the two organizations.¹⁵ Yet, despite this

¹⁰ AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 61/ XV Anniversary, 1972: 19; AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 61/ People’s War in Angola, 1972: 6-7.

¹¹ AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 71/ *Kwacha*, No. 4, 1970: 1-2; AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 71/ *Kwacha-Special Issue*, No. 2, 1969: 6.

¹² AHS/ ICS/ FJL/ MNA/ 71/ *Kwacha*, No. 4, 1970: 2.

¹³ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ Luso/ P. Inf/ P. 2197/ NT6951/Conferência Feita em Lusaka na Quinta-Feira, 24 de Fevereiro de 1967, pelo Dr. Jonas Savimbi, Chefe do Partido da UNITA, no seu regresso de Angola, onde esteve 4 Meses, 1967: 482.

¹⁴ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093/ Zâmbia: Apoio ao GRAE, 1968: 170.

¹⁵ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ Luso/ P. Inf/ P. 2197/ NT6951/ Assunto: Jonas Sidónio Malheiro Savimbi, 1966: 525.

seemingly conciliatory stance by Kaunda, Zambian authorities clearly favoured the MPLA over UNITA. An illustrative example of this took place in the border region of Sikongo, a strategic transit zone for guerrillas and military equipment near the Angolan border, where the Zambian army was instructed not to interfere with the MPLA but to obstruct UNITA forces whenever possible.¹⁶

Despite the political and logistical advantages, the MPLA enjoyed in Zambia, Neto's guerrillas were on UNITA's trail in 1967.¹⁷ Savimbi's forces were already moving through various Angolan eastern rural communities when the MPLA guerrillas arrived, attempting to establish contacts with the population in order to mobilize them politically for their cause. This situation did not go unnoticed by the Portuguese military intelligence service, which in 1967 confirmed UNITA's geographic vanguard role but also the ability of the MPLA forces to easily overtake them in rear areas: "It seems, however, that from the border strip, UNITA was displaced by the MPLA in the areas where it 'worked', which led that party to advance rapidly inland, unwittingly paving the way for the MPLA, which, better armed and organized, could more easily win over the population already contaminated by UNITA."¹⁸ Direct military confrontations between the two forces occurred when the MPLA encountered territorial cores where UNITA's guerrillas had a permanent presence, rather than a temporary one, as another 1968 intelligence report asserted: "[UNITA] was, however, driven out of all regions where the MPLA had gained a foothold, with successive clashes between the two parties in areas where the MPLA expanded."¹⁹

In this context, rural communities in eastern Angola were often the subject of violence. Military competition between liberation movements meant that guerrillas resorted to forced recruitment and intimidation tactics to gain the cooperation of civilians, who were sometimes already politically "mobilized" by a rival group. The colonial regime's coercive tactics, such as the introduction of the unpopular aldeamento system,²⁰ also led to an intensification of violence through the forced relocation of entire communities to strategically located

¹⁶ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ Luso/ P. Inf/ P. 2197/ NT6951/ Assunto: Zâmbia, Actividades do IN, 1967: 457.

¹⁷ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. Dolisie/ Vol. 2/NT 2721/ Relatório Extraordinário N°03/73-DINF2ª(GEP), 1973: 53.

¹⁸ Arquivo da Defesa Nacional (hereafter ADN) /SGDN/F002/ S02/ S007-002/ C01/ N° 28 CCFA-SUPINTREP, 1973: Capítulo I, Anexo C, 2.

¹⁹ ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP – Informações/ Caixa 587/ Pasta 20/ Relatório Especial de Informações N° 12, 1968: 2.

²⁰ The aldeamento system was a program employed by the Portuguese counterinsurgency doctrine that relocated civilians to settlements under colonial administration in order to separate the population from the guerrillas. A similar strategy was used by the French in Algeria, the British in Malaya, and the Americans in South Vietnam, with mixed success in the short term but consistently effective in antagonizing peasant communities in the long term. See Cann 1997 and Pinto da Cruz 2022.

hamlets to limit the guerrillas' ability to mobilize the civilian population (See Coelho 2003).

Personal War Experiences (1966-1970)

This part of the article will focus on the personal dimension of the "Fratricidal War" on the Eastern Front, drawing primarily on PIDE-DGS transcripts, and on supporting material such as captured contemporary correspondence and published memoirs. The individual testimonies of the PIDE-DGS are composed of two categories of people: those captured during the Portuguese army's offensive operations against the liberation movements and those who deserted the guerrilla life in the bush and voluntarily surrendered to the colonial authorities. It is important to acknowledge the inherent challenges posed by the use of these sources in tracing the path of Angolan actors. It should be noted that the transcripts in question are not interviews, but rather police interrogations. The actors' personal opinions and feelings about the "Fratricidal War" are not known. Their story is limited to reporting what they did, what they saw, what others, usually in a leadership position, said or ordered them to do. The main objective of the police agents was to obtain valuable information that could be used at the operational level by the Portuguese army. Locations of guerrilla camps, number and variety of weapons, command structures, and logistical networks are the main categories of information that the PIDE-DGS sought to discover in detail through these interrogations. The richness of these sources makes it possible to explore a more personal dimension of the competition between liberation movements on the ground and examine how the daily lives of civilians were directly affected by the intra-nationalist rivalry.

The overwhelming majority of people in the testimonies analysed were farmers living in rural communities in the provinces of Bié, Cuando-Cubango, Lunda (now divided in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul) and Moxico. As a rule, the civilians' testimonies are less detailed than those of the guerrillas. However, the individual stories of the guerrillas also provide some important insights into civilian life, as they all had prior experience in the camps as a liberated population under the administration of the movements before being integrated into the military ranks. Women's personal experiences are underrepresented in these sources, and when they are presented, it is usually in very little detail and sometimes not even mentioned by name.

Individual trajectories in more than one liberation movement are a common pattern in the personal war experiences of both civilians and guerrillas on the Eastern Front. In a sample of twenty-five individual testimonies between 1966

and 1969, eleven individuals stated that the first movement to contact them was UNITA,²¹ and eight stated that it was the MPLA²² (for the remaining six testimonies, the authorship of the initial contacts could not be determined). Of the eleven individuals contacted, abducted, or voluntarily recruited by UNITA, eight later joined the ranks of the MPLA, either as guerrillas or as controlled population.²³ In none of the twenty-five individual trajectories analysed was there a case in which civilians were initially mobilized by the MPLA guerrillas and later integrated into the UNITA apparatus. The opposite, however, proved to be the most common personal trajectory. I argue that this is not due to an unbalanced overrepresentation of these cases in the sources, but rather reflects the reality on the ground. It underscores the idea, mentioned earlier, that UNITA guerrillas acted as a territorial vanguard on the Eastern Front during this period (1966-1970), while the MPLA followed in their wake, demobilizing populations with whom UNITA had already made contact (See Map 1).

²¹ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°65/71-DINF, 1971: 10; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°17/72-DINF, 1972: 78; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°21/72-DINF, 1972: 62; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°26/72-DINF, 1972: 43; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.131.07.68/ NT2749/ N°63/73-DINF/2^a, 1973: 8; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.2996/ NT8109/ N°05/72-DINF, 1972: 81; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.2996/ NT8109/ N°13/72-DINF, 1972: 84; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.2996/ NT8109/ N°14/72-DINF, 1972: 106; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.7480/ NT8195/ N°27/70, 1970: 14; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 9345/ NT8233/ N°31/70, 1970: 45; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 9345/ NT8233/ N°34/70, 1970: 51.

²² ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 26781/ NT8535/ N°24/72-DINF, 1972: 27; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 7480/ NT8195/ Cofuna Dala, 1969: 88; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 7480/ NT8195/ Michai Cambungo "MPLA", 1969: 97; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 7480/ NT8195/ Actividades do Inimigo, 1969: 135-136; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 2996/ NT8109/ Samugango Txingango, 1971: 208; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 130.07.84/ NT2749/ N°4/72-DINF, 1972: 192; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 8345/ NT8233/ N°3/73 1973: 24; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 9345/ NT8233/ Luciano Mazaca, 1969: 121

²³ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°65/71-DINF, 1971: 10-11; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°17/72-DINF, 1972: 78-79; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°21/72-DINF, 1972: 62; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.26781/ NT8535/ N°26/72-DINF, 1972: 43; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.2996/ NT8109/ N°13/72-DINF, 1972: 84; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P.7480/ NT8195/ N°27/70, 1970: 14; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 9345/ NT8233/ N°31/70, 1970: 45-46; ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 9345/ NT8233/ N°34/70, 1970: 51-52.

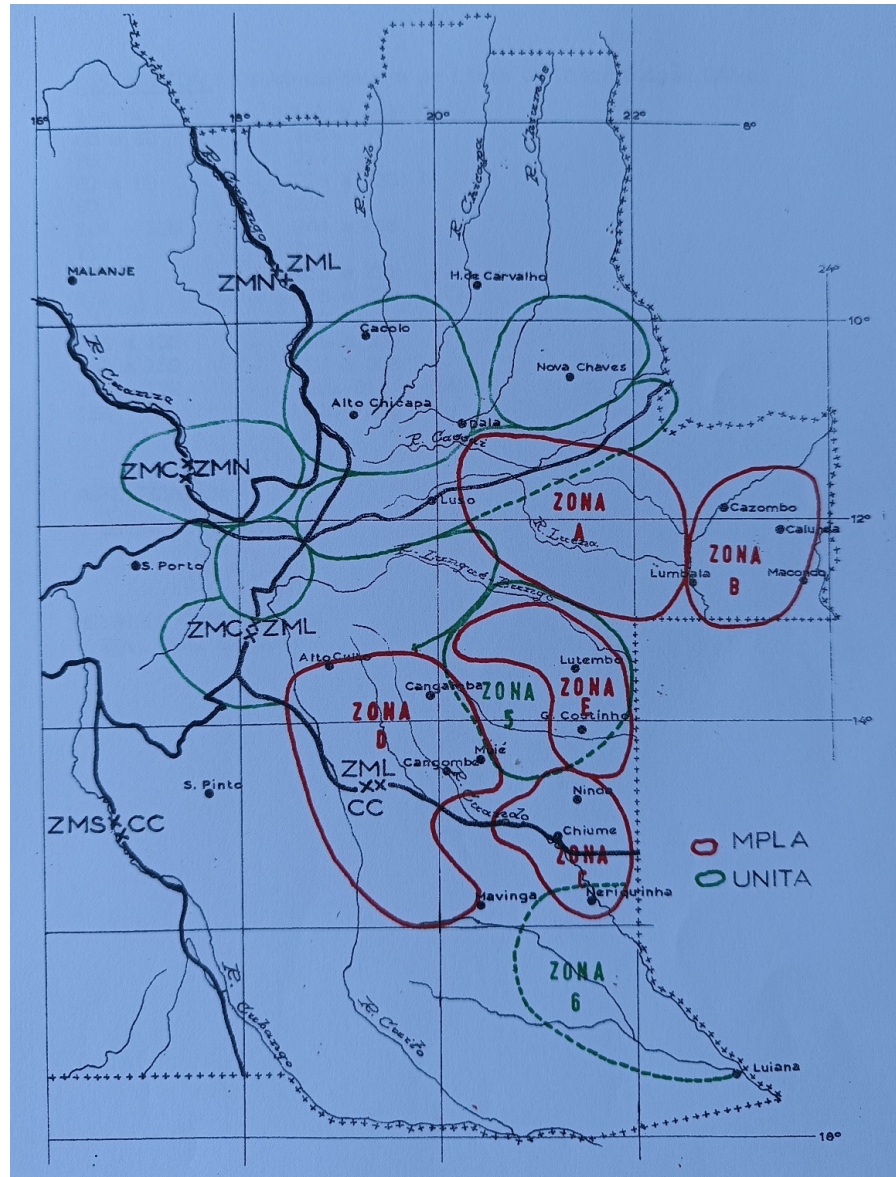


Figure 1: Zones of influence of the guerrillas of the MPLA (Red) and UNITA (Green) in Eastern Angola (July 1968).

Source: ADN/SGDN/2^aREP-I/Cx. 587/Pt. 20/ Relatório Especial de Informações N^o 12: 41.

The transition of these actors from one movement to another was generally accompanied by a violent episode, usually military clashes between nationalist guerrillas that ended in captivity. Despite the state of captivity in which they found themselves, some individuals were successfully integrated and promoted to the military ranks of the organization that had captured them.

This was the case of Japão Samussango,²⁴ a farmer who lived in a kimbo²⁵ near the source of the Cuebe River. In 1968, a group of UNITA guerrillas forced the population of the village to relocate near an area they controlled. In late 1969, the MPLA attacked, driving UNITA forces from the area and capturing the population, including Samussango. The community was again relocated to a zone under MPLA control. By May 1971, Samussango was no longer a civilian. He received an old Steyr repeating rifle and was baptized by the guerrilla commander Furioso with the war name Caumba.²⁶

Another illustrative example is the case of Saloche Jamba,²⁷ a migrant worker in the Porto Amboim fisheries, originally from a rural community in the Alto Cuito region. When he returned to the East in 1967, UNITA forces captured him and took him to a guerrilla camp. Not long after this event, Jamba claimed he was captured by a group of 25 armed men from the MPLA who attacked UNITA. He was then integrated as a recruit and trained under the supervision of Chicumune, an experienced MPLA commander who had received military training in the Soviet Union. After completing his recruit training, Jamba was issued a Simonov semi-automatic rifle and a camouflaged uniform and was christened with the war name Agança. After working as a camp guard for several years, Jamba was promoted at an unspecified time to Chefe de Secção (Section Chief) - an officer in the MPLA's guerrilla force who commands one or more groups of soldiers.²⁸

The case of Livingue Muconda²⁹ is also an example of successful integration and promotion after capture by a rival guerrilla group. Muconda was a farmer in the Mucovoto Sobado³⁰ when, in 1966, a group of UNITA soldiers forced him and the population to relocate to the bush under their control. That same year, the MPLA appeared and drove UNITA out of the region, capturing the civilians. In 1968, Muconda was appointed Presidente da Fuba (President of Fuba)³¹ of the

²⁴ Context of the PIDE testimony: Samussango had escaped from an MPLA camp in the bush in October 1972 and voluntarily turned himself in to the colonial authorities.

²⁵ Kimbo is a rural village, usually a small cluster of houses made of sticks and clay with roofs of tall grass (capim). Despite the use of the Portuguese adaptation to "Quimbo" in these sources, I have opted for the Africanised spelling "Kimbo".

²⁶ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 26781/ NT8535/ N°26/72-DINF, 1972: 43-45.

²⁷ Context of the PIDE testimony: Jamba was captured by the Portuguese army in January 1972 when he left the MPLA guerrilla camp without permission to visit his family.

²⁸ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 26781/ NT8535/ N°17/72-DINF, 1972: 78-81

²⁹ Context of the PIDE testimony: Muconda was captured in 1970 when he was surprised by a Portuguese patrol while collecting water at the Lucula River.

³⁰ A Sobado is a territory governed by a Soba (traditional chief), usually composed of several Kimbos.

³¹ Cassava flour, an important staple for both the population and the guerrillas.

MPLA camp - chief of food logistics, who often acted as foreman of the population working in agriculture under guerrilla administration.³²

The orders of the guerrilla commanders also show the state of open war that existed between the liberation movements. A 1970 order from a UNITA commander to the military columns places the Portuguese, the FNLA, and the MPLA in the same category of enemies: "For combat columns one and three, the word is: Attack! Against the Muscovites [MPLA], on to the attack! Against the UPA [FNLA], on to the attack! And against the Tugas [Portuguese], always to the attack! We have no time to lose."³³

Chinoia Vissima,³⁴ a farmer from the village of Donga, recalled a speech by an MPLA commander disregarding UNITA as an anticolonial fighting force. In 1968, a UNITA group led by Canhumbo came through Vissima's village asking for food and claiming they were "waging war against the whites". They returned several times with the same intention, without taking any coercive measures against the community. About two years later, MPLA guerrillas led by Mauinge appeared and drove the rival group out of the region. The commander claimed before the population that "UNITA did not have the war material to wage war against the whites" and that "the MPLA was the one able to wage war because it had a lot of weapons and in this way, it could wage war and take Angola".³⁵ An unnamed woman who voluntarily surrendered to the colonial authorities in the Mucusso region in 1970 also witnessed a speech by an MPLA commander in the camp where she was living, in which he outlined the objective of Neto's forces in the area: "To fight against UNITA until its total annihilation."³⁶

Perhaps even more revealing of the extent of MPLA-UNITA guerrilla rivalry in the bush is the testimony of Teneti Chimona,³⁷ a peasant from the Sobado of Cambuta. Chimona claims he was kidnapped in late 1967 by a group of UNITA soldiers who took him to a camp "with many people", where he worked as a cook until the day he escaped. He and the population were told by the guerrillas that it was "necessary to fight the terrorists of the MPLA, who were as enemies of UNITA as the whites." On another occasion, commander Samuel Chiwale

³² ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 9345/ NT8233/ N°31/70, 1970: 45-47

³³ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.2/NT 9093/ Actividades da UNITA, 1970: 67.

³⁴ Context of the PIDE testimony: Vissima was captured in 1972 along with his wife, two sons, and a niece during an offensive operation by the Portuguese army against the MPLA.

³⁵ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 2996/ NT8109/ N°13/72-DINE, 1972: 83-84.

³⁶ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/SC/P. 6573/Vol.4/ NT 7447/Actividade Terrorista em Angola – Distrito do Cuando Cubango, 1970: 1065-1066.

³⁷ Context of the PIDE testimony: Chimona voluntarily surrendered to the Cangamba police in 1969 after escaping from a UNITA guerrilla camp because he was "tired of life in the bush."

visited the camp and explained that they “should not attack the whites because Savimbi would give instructions on how to conduct the war.”³⁸ Nhachinóia Gueve,³⁹ a peasant woman from the Sobado of Muié, also heard a similar speech from Chiwale in 1968 in the camp where she lived: “As soon as he [Chiwale] arrived at the camp, he ordered everyone to assemble, and distributed words of encouragement, stating that all should unite to better fight the MPLA, the main enemy now. The war against the whites will be for later.”⁴⁰ Samuel Chiwale published a detailed autobiography in 2008 describing his experiences as a UNITA fighter during the Angolan War of Independence and the Angolan Civil War. In this first-person narrative, UNITA is portrayed exclusively in a defensive posture against MPLA attacks during the anticolonial struggle (Chiwale 2008: 169-170). This narrative is consistent with the interview Chiwale gave to the *Zambia Daily Mail* in 1969, in which he claimed that UNITA guerrillas did nothing more than defend themselves in the context of the “Fratricidal War”.⁴¹ However, reports from the Portuguese intelligence services, suggest that Chiwale personally ordered attacks against MPLA guerrilla camps.⁴²

The testimony of Cassanga Rimuanha shows how common these military disputes were. Rimuanha was a farmer from the aldeamento of Tombo, near the town of Umpulo in the province of Bié. In 1970, he, his wife Mutango, his son Vasco, and his daughter Laurinda were captured by an MPLA group while working in the fields and taken to a guerrilla camp near the Cuito River. There he received military training and was equipped with a soviet made PPSH-41 machine gun and baptized with the war name Novo Mundo. Rimuanha spent the next two years as a soldier in the ranks of the MPLA, mobilizing more population for the camp and participating in collective logistical trips to the Zambian border to fetch military equipment, medicine, and salt. In August 1972, during an attack by the African special forces Flechas,⁴³ he used the confusion as an opportunity and fled back with his wife and children to his village in Tombo, where he voluntarily surrendered to the colonial authorities. Rimuanha was particularly cooperative with PIDE agents and spoke at length about guerrilla life. One detail he addressed was the number and cause of fatal casualties he

³⁸ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ P. C.1.UNITA/ NT9093/ Distrito do Moxico: Actividades do In, 1969: 79-80

³⁹ Context of the PIDE testimony: Gueve was captured in 1968 by the African special forces Flechas of the PIDE-DGS.

⁴⁰ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093/ Distrito do Moxico: Actividades da UNITA, 1968: 160-161.

⁴¹ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.2/NT 9093/ Zâmbia: Propaganda da UNITA, 1969: 132.

⁴² ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P. C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093/ Distrito do Bié: Actividades da UNITA, 1969: 118-119.

⁴³ For detailed works on the role of Flechas in the Portuguese war effort, see Ângelo 2017; Cann 2013.

witnessed during his experience as an MPLA soldier – From a total of thirteen men that were killed in his military column: five were shot down by the Portuguese troops; four killed by UNITA forces; three died of disease; one was fatally injured in an accident.⁴⁴

The rivalry between the MPLA and UNITA was conveniently exploited and operationally nourished by Portuguese forces through the use of false flag operations. An example of this occurred in May 1970, when a group of Flechas disguised as MPLA guerrillas ambushed UNITA fighters en route to the Lungué-Bungo forests with supplies. The goal of this operation was not only to prevent Savimbi's guerrillas from resupplying, but also to further inflame the rivalry between the two movements.⁴⁵ The next section of this article will look at how Portuguese colonialism exploited the military competition between the MPLA and UNITA to form a tactical alliance with Savimbi (Operation Timber) that resulted in the movement abandoning the anticolonial cause and attacking the MPLA exclusively.

The FNLA also played an active role in the military struggles for population control on the Eastern Front against other nationalist guerrillas, as the personal trajectory of Samugango Txingango⁴⁶ illustrates. Txingango was a farmer in the village of Samugimo when an armed group of the MPLA appeared in 1968 and relocated the community to a zone under their control near the Vanga River, where the population grew cassava to feed the guerrillas. In 1970, the area became a zone of intense conflict when an FNLA patrol intercepted some MPLA soldiers and seized their weapons. The dispute quickly escalated when the MPLA guerrillas ambushed the FNLA days later at the same location, killing seven men. In retaliation, the FNLA attacked the camp where Txingango lived, killing five men and two women, and capturing fourteen people. The MPLA then gathered soldiers from three guerrilla camps and organized a major attack on the FNLA base, which failed and resulted in five deaths among the attackers. After this defeat, the MPLA group moved its camp to the other side of the Vanga River to avoid further retaliation.⁴⁷

Some regions were particularly contested. The section of the Benguela railroad between the town of Cangumbe and the village of Chicala in Moxico was one such area affected by the simultaneous military competition of the three libera-

⁴⁴ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 26781/ NT8535/ N°2191/72-DINF, 1972: 1-34.

⁴⁵ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ Luso/ P. Inf/ P. 2197/ NT6951/ Acção levada a efeito por esta Subdelegação, na Área de Chicala, 1970: 140.

⁴⁶ Context of the PIDE testimony: Txingango was captured by the Portuguese army in 1970 during a raid on an MPLA camp.

⁴⁷ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/ P. 2996/ NT8109/ N°38/71-DINF, 1971: 208-211.

tion movements.⁴⁸ This area, which was immediately north of UNITA's zone of refuge on the upper course of the Lungué-Bungo River,⁴⁹ south of the FNLA zone of influence west of the town of Luena (Marcum 1978: 220), and in the general area of MPLA advances along the Benguela railroad line,⁵⁰ was the confluence point of the three nationalist guerrillas on the Eastern Front. In March 1970, the Portuguese Counter-Subversion Council (CCS)⁵¹ warned of the vulnerability of the area, where some 7,000 civilians were either "affected" by UNITA or "coveted by the MPLA and even by the UPA [FNLA]."⁵² The dispute in this region was essentially about the ability to get the population to behave cooperatively, not about permanent control of the territory. The Angolan guerrillas were militarily incapable of keeping a settlement along the Benguela rail line under their control for an extended period. This was due not only to the strong presence of the colonial administration and military apparatus in the area, but also to the great mobility and consequent rapid reaction capability of Portuguese troops along the railroad infrastructure. For the liberation movements, the villages and towns in the immediate vicinity of the railroad line were operational areas and not zones for permanent occupation.

However, correspondence between guerrillas and individuals in these communities shows that liberation movements succeeded in establishing logistical support networks even in areas where the colonial administration's control was perceived as absolute. This correspondence also shows how fierce the dispute was between the three movements over this section of the Benguela railroad. This was the case with the letters exchanged between the UNITA commander Folha Seca and Benedito, a civilian who lived under colonial administration near Chicala and clandestinely helped the guerrillas with supplies. In June 1970, Benedito alerted the commander to the presence of an MPLA group in Chicala that was preparing to attack UNITA's forces and reported the appearance of a patrol of 140 FNLA guerrillas near Cangumbe.⁵³

⁴⁸ Arquivo Histórico da Presidência da República (hereafter AHPR) / GB1729 / Presidência do Conselho / Secretariado-Geral da Defesa Nacional / Actas do Conselho Superior da Defesa Nacional / Relatório da Situação Político-Subversiva da Província de Angola, 1970: 19.

⁴⁹ ANTT / PIDE-DGS / DA / P. Inf / P. 11.26.1 / NT 1854 / Deliberações tomadas na Reunião Ordinária do dia 29ABR70 do Conselho Distrital de Contra-Subversão do Moxico, 1970: 188.

⁵⁰ ADN/SGDN/F002/ S02/ S007-002/ C01/ N° 28 CCFA-SUPINTREP, 1973: Capítulo I, Anexo C, 5.

⁵¹ The Counter-Subversion Council was composed of representatives of the Portuguese civil administration, military, police, and intelligence services, who met regularly at the district level in Angola to assess the progress of the war.

⁵² ANTT / PIDE-DGS / DA / P. Inf / P. 11.26.1 / NT 1854 / Deliberações tomadas na Reunião Ordinária do dia 18MAR70 do Conselho Distrital de Contra-Subversão do Moxico, 1970: 223.

⁵³ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ Luso/ P. Inf/ P. 2197/ NT6951/ Envio de Documento IN e Resposta dada pelo Colaborador 'Benedito', 1970: 107, 110.

The delivery of goods purchased by sympathizers and anticolonial activists to the guerrillas was made through middlemen who travelled into the bush. The loggers, whose work often took them through areas under the control of the liberation movements, became an important link in establishing this kind of supply line for the guerrillas - and were also exposed to the dynamics of the "Fratricidal War". João Nunes Gonçalves, a UNITA sympathizer who worked as a logger in the Alto Cuito area, reported in a 1970 letter to commander Leão da Anhara that Neto's movement had burned his timber, and that his fellow loggers were experiencing great difficulties "caused by our common enemy, the MPLA" and that it was in their interest to "eliminate the MPLA from this area." In another letter, João Gonçalves reported that MPLA guerrillas were kidnapping civilians from the village of Nhonga when they went into the fields, and that "they were interrupting the logging operations, threatening to burn the tractors, kill the workers, etc." He ended the letter by asking the UNITA commander to normalize the situation through "active and positive intervention" and assured that the people in the region were "serious supporters of the movement."⁵⁴

Despite the various signs of military competition for territory and population in the East, there were also isolated cases of active cooperation between UNITA and MPLA guerrillas against Portuguese colonialism. One such case occurred in the Cuando-Cubango province in 1967 during a joint attack on the village of Dima, in which the guerrillas from both movements looted several houses and attacked civilian vehicles on the Dima-Mavinga Road. This mixed group of MPLA and UNITA guerrillas stayed together and moved toward Mavinga, where they set up a joint camp near the right bank of the Gombe River.⁵⁵ Another case occurred on April 21, 1968, also in Cuando-Cubango, during an attack on the settlement of Xingango, where a UNITA group requested and received reinforcements from an MPLA camp.⁵⁶ In the same year, in the area of Cazage, in the south of Lunda province, guerrilla groups from both movements, although acting separately, maintained "the best relations with each other, even sharing ammunition, and especially grenades."⁵⁷

These operations seem to have been rather circumstantial, based on the autonomous initiative of local commanders. There is no evidence of a military cooperation agreement between the MPLA and UNITA leaderships. On the

⁵⁴ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/ DA/ Luso/ P. Inf/ P. 2197/ NT6951/ Cópias de Cartas, 1970: 83-89.

⁵⁵ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P.C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093/ Assunto: João António, Agente Subversivo da UNITA, 1967: 263.

⁵⁶ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/DA/P.C.1.UNITA/ Vol.1/NT 9093/ Relatório de Posto, 1968: 216.

⁵⁷ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/SC/P.6573/Vol.2/ NT 7444-7448/Actividade da 'UNITA' e 'MPLA', 1968: 285.

contrary, as we have seen, the history of the liberation struggle on the Eastern Front is characterised by a permanent state of civil war.

Operation Timber and the Eastern Revolt (1971-1974)

In the early 1970s, the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism on the Eastern Front came to a virtual standstill. This was due to the pact Jonas Savimbi had made with the Portuguese army and to internal dissension in the ranks of the MPLA guerrillas, commonly known as the Eastern Revolt, led by Daniel Chipenda. UNITA's alliance with the colonial regime, codenamed Operation Timber, represented a complete departure from the core anticolonial idea out of which the movement had been founded in 1966 and demonstrated the opportunistic tactics Savimbi was willing to employ in order to survive and defeat his rivals, regardless of the reputational consequences - a pattern that characterised much of Savimbi's political and military career. Since William Minter's groundbreaking work (Minter 1988), more recent research on Operation Timber has shed new light on the specifics of the cooperative relationship between the Portuguese military and UNITA guerrillas (Mateus 2004: 199-207; Ribeiro 2022: 117-137; Silva 2014: 188-193). In this section, however, we focus on assessing the implications the establishment of this alliance had on the intensification of the "Fratricidal War" on the Eastern Front.

With the launch of Operation Timber in September 1971, the Portuguese army hoped to "pacify" eastern Angola by militarily neutralizing the MPLA and FNLA and politically integrating UNITA by offering Jonas Savimbi an administrative post in the colonial apparatus.⁵⁸ This long-term goal of ending the insurgency on the Eastern Front ultimately failed. First, because the MPLA guerrillas, although severely weakened and operationally inactive in late 1973, managed to keep their forces relatively intact by retreating to the safety of Zambian territory. Second, because Savimbi was reluctant towards Portuguese proposals to integrate his movement into the colonial apparatus. The UNITA leader preferred to remain autonomous and available only for military cooperation without political subordination. This reluctance ultimately led to the

⁵⁸ ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Situação da UNITA (Estudo), 1973: 3; ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Contactos com Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, "Presidente" da UNITA, 1973: 1; ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Orientação defendida por S.Ex^a. o Ministro do Ultramar, relativamente à Operação Madeira, 1973: 1.

collapse of Operation Timber in January 1974, when the Portuguese army resumed offensive operations against UNITA.⁵⁹

The alliance between UNITA and the Portuguese intensified the “Fratricidal War” on the Eastern Front, as Savimbi’s movement focused exclusively on attacking the other liberation movements, especially the MPLA. In addition, the movement received logistical support from the Portuguese army through the delivery of ammunition, food, and medicine, as well as information on the locations of the MPLA’s guerrilla camps.⁶⁰ UNITA also played an important role in counterinsurgency operations in Zambia that Portuguese troops could not openly exercise – because the movement had no internationally recognized political status, its guerrillas could cross international borders without major diplomatic consequences to destroy MPLA camps in that country.⁶¹ In correspondence with the Portuguese military leadership in September 1972, Jonas Savimbi clearly stated UNITA’s contribution and commitment against the MPLA: “Our position is irreversible. We are no longer interested in the OAU [Organization of African Unity], nor in Zambia, much less in alliances with the MPLA. If certain aspects of UNITA’s policy are not yet clear enough for the governing authorities of Angola and the Nation, there is, however, one fact that cannot be denied: We have actively participated in the weakening of the MPLA in certain areas of the East.”⁶²

After what Portuguese military intelligence called “the spectacular advance by MPLA forces into national territory”⁶³ in 1969, the early 1970s were particularly hard on Neto’s movement, leading to its operational inactivity on the Eastern Front. Operation Timber was a major cause for this standstill, as the MPLA guerrillas faced the dual offensive of the Portuguese army and its UNITA partners from September 1971 to January 1974. This military pressure was accompanied by internal dissension within the ranks of the guerrillas. Signs of dissatisfaction with the harsh forms of discipline demanded by the commanders, most of whom had been imported from the Northern Front cadres, emerged among the MPLA soldiers from eastern Angola. In December 1969, the first

⁵⁹ ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Situação da UNITA: Interpretação de Documentos Capturados, 1973: 4; ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Para o Chefe do Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas: Operação Madeira, 1974: 2-5.

⁶⁰ AFMS/ Fundo Mário Pinto de Andrade/ Pasta 04339.001.002/ Savimbi Desmascarado, 1974: 18-20; ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Contactos com Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, “Presidente” da UNITA, 1973: 3-4.

⁶¹ AFMS/ Fundo Mário Pinto de Andrade/ Pasta 04339.001.002/ Savimbi Desmascarado, 1974: 6-7, 13.

⁶² AFMS/ Fundo Mário Pinto de Andrade/ Pasta 04339.001.002/ Savimbi Desmascarado, 1974: 18.

⁶³ ADN/SGDN/Fundo 002/ Secção 02/ Série 007-002/ Caixa 01/ Nº 28 CCFA-SUPINTREP: UNITA, 1973: Capítulo I, Anexos, 4.

major, albeit peaceful, demonstration against the privileges and comandismo of those “from the north” occurred, led by Barreiros Freitas Jibóia, and sparked by the execution of a commander from the east by firing squad. In a second phase, in 1972, this discontent took on more serious contours under the leadership of Daniel Chipenda Sango, leading to a split in the ranks of the MPLA guerrillas against the leadership of Agostinho Neto - commonly known as the Eastern Revolt (Tali 2018: 215-229).

In September 1973, Savimbi attempted to exploit the disunity in the MPLA by establishing contacts with the Eastern Revolt in order to integrate the split in UNITA’s ranks.⁶⁴ These contacts ultimately failed.⁶⁵ However, this contributed to the end of the alliance with the colonial regime, as the Portuguese army feared that UNITA would become the hegemonic force on the Eastern Front with the collapse of the MPLA guerrillas and the possibility of an alliance with Chipenda.⁶⁶ Coupled with Savimbi’s unwillingness to accept the proposals for political integration into the colonial administration, Portuguese military strategy changed, the agreement was broken, and the war against UNITA resumed in January 1974.⁶⁷

On the eve of the Carnation Revolution on April 25, 1974,⁶⁸ which marked the beginning of the decolonization process of the Portuguese empire, the strategic situation on the Eastern Front was characterized by the inaction of the MPLA forces and by the offensive operations of the Portuguese army against UNITA guerrilla camps. The Revolution took place after the end of Operation Timber, which gave UNITA back some of its anticolonial legitimacy and guaranteed the movement’s participation in the subsequent decolonization process. The damage to its reputation, however, was done. On July 8, 1974, the French magazine *Afrique-Asie* published official documents on Operation Timber (Bourderie 1974), which UNITA claimed to be a fabrication of the Committee for State

⁶⁴ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/Delegação de Angola/Processo C.1.UNITA/ Vol.2/NT 9093/ [Ilegível], 1973: 16.

⁶⁵ ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Situação da UNITA: Interpretação de Documentos Capturados, 1973: 4.

⁶⁶ ANTT/PIDE-DGS/Delegação de Angola/Processo 1 Leste de Angola 71-74/ Vol.2/NT 9089/ Situação Político-Subversiva no Leste, 1973: 6-7; AHPR/ GB1729/ Presidência do Conselho/ Secretariado-Geral da Defesa Nacional/ Actas do Conselho Superior da Defesa Nacional/ Relato da Sessão de 30 de Novembro, 1973: 22.

⁶⁷ ADN/SGDN/ 2ª REP - Informações/ Secção 164/ Série 0594/ Caixa 11/ UNITA. Operação Madeira/ Para Chefe do Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas: Operação Madeira, 1974: 5.

⁶⁸ Military coup in Lisbon, organized by the left-wing Armed Forces Movement (Movimento das Forças Armadas, MFA), which overthrew the Estado Novo dictatorship that ruled Portugal since 1933. The coup was accompanied by massive popular demonstrations in support of it throughout the country and marked the beginning of a revolutionary process of democratization in Portugal and the decolonization of several Portuguese overseas territories in 1974 and 1975 (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe). See Norrie MacQueen 1997.

Security (KGB) of the Soviet Union (Saldanha 1977: 64, 67; Savimbi 1979: 32), but which clearly proved the movement's collaboration with the colonial authorities. This revelation was immediately exploited by the MPLA for propaganda purposes, when it broadcast the reading of the evidence of Jonas Savimbi's collaboration with the colonial regime over the radio station *Voz da Revolução Conguesa*.⁶⁹

The fluid political context of the post-April 25 Revolution urged the creation of a common national platform among the Angolan movements that had the cohesion and legitimacy to negotiate the terms of independence with Lisbon. However, the decolonization process brought to light the chronic problem of deep-seated rivalries between liberation movements stemming from the "Fratricidal War" and the resulting difficulty in finding formulas for common understanding. These impasses and challenges were diplomatically overcome with difficulty through various bilateral and trilateral agreements, culminating first in the Mombasa Summit and later in the Alvor Agreement of January 15, 1975, which established the conditions for the transition to independence and confirmed that the transfer of sovereignty would be based solely on revolutionary legitimacy.⁷⁰ Rivalries flared up again, however, and by the second quarter of 1975 it was clear that the option of war had taken control of the transition to independence. This internal competition among Angolan guerrillas coincided with the rapid collapse of Portuguese authority prior to the transfer of sovereignty on November 11, 1975, particularly after the escalation of violence that prevented the implementation of the Alvor Agreement - paving the way for the rapid internationalization of a civil war that,⁷¹ with some interruptions, effectively ended with the death of Jonas Savimbi in February 2002.

Conclusion

The Angolan anticolonial struggle was accompanied by a permanent state of civil war between liberation movements, which continued in post-colonial Angola with the active involvement of global and regional state actors. The willingness of the nationalist movements to seek external partners to overcome internal opponents and achieve hegemony had its roots in the Liberation War, as evidenced by the alliance that UNITA was willing to enter with Portuguese colonialism in 1971 despite the consequences for its reputation. The inability to

⁶⁹ ANTT/ SCCIA/ Livro 159/ Relatório de Situação N°640/ 13JUL74 a 20JUL74, 1974: 13.

⁷⁰ AFMS/ FAAM/ Pasta 11007.001/ Acordo entre o Estado Português e a FNLA, MPLA e a UNITA, 1975: 1-20.

⁷¹ On the direct and indirect foreign intervention in the Angolan Civil War, see Gleijeses 2016 and Telepneva 2022.

find formulas of common understanding during the transition to independence is a direct consequence of the lack of a functioning united front against colonialism. At the time of decolonization, the liberation movements not only lacked significant experience in building intra-Angolan coalitions, but they had also actively fought each other militarily during the anticolonial struggle, which exacerbated rivalries and made political dialogue more difficult after the Carnation Revolution.

As this article has demonstrated, the competitive dynamics of the “Fratricidal War” directly affected the daily lives of rural communities in eastern Angola, which were often subjected to coercive measures by the guerrillas. Of the people recruited from these communities, individual trajectories in more than one movement were common, which included traumatic experiences in captivity, but also successful cases of integration and promotion. For the liberation movements, this competition for population revolved around the ability to gain logistical advantages and expand the recruitment pool. Parallel to the “Fratricidal War” however, there were also isolated episodes of military cooperation between the MPLA and UNITA. These exceptions, even if circumstantial, show that Angolan liberation guerrilla groups were at times able to cooperate operationally for the common goal of independence.

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