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Accusation and Legitimacy in the Civil War in Angola

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Abstract

This article analyses the main categories of accusation found in the speeches of leaders from the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) during the Civil War in Angola (1975-2002). Seeking to understand the entanglements between the global and local dimensions of the conflict, we argue that the accusations made by Agostinho Neto (MPLA), José Eduardo dos Santos (MPLA), and Jonas Savimbi (UNITA) aimed to delegitimize the 'other' in the act of claiming legitimacy to occupy the state. This is achieved through the opposition between accusatory categories attributed to the 'other' and their inverse, categories attributed to the person making the accusation. We thereby show how the understanding of political conflicts in general, and the conflict in Angola specifically, can be illuminated through the analysis of categories whose linguistic dimension is entangled with historically constituted social positionalities.

Keywords: Angola; colonialism and postcolonialism; civil war; accusation; differentiation.

Acusação e Legitimidade na Guerra Civil em Angola

Resumo

Este artigo analisa os principais designadores de alteridade presentes nos discursos das lideranças do Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) e da União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (Unita) durante a guerra civil em Angola (1975-2002). No esforço de compreendermos os imbricamentos entre as dimensões globais e locais do conflito, argumentamos que as acusações proferidas por Agostinho Neto (MPLA), José Eduardo dos Santos (MPLA) e Jonas Savimbi (Unita) buscam deslegitimar o "outro" em sua reivindicação de legitimidade para ocupar o estado. Isso é feito a partir da contraposição entre categorias acusatórias atribuídas ao "outro" e o oposto destas, atribuídas a quem faz a acusação. Mostramos, assim, como a compreensão de conflitos políticos em geral, e do conflito angolano em específico, pode ser iluminada por meio da análise de categorias cuja dimensão linguística se imbrica com posicionalidades sociais historicamente constituídas.

Palavras-chave: Angola; colonialismo e pós-colonialismo; guerra civil; acusação; diferenciação.



Accusation and Legitimacy in the Civil War in Angola¹

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Luísa Tui Sampaio

In this article we analyse the categories of accusation contained in the discourses of leaders from Angola's main political movements during the country's civil war (1975-2002): the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).² The speeches made by Agostinho Neto (MPLA), José Eduardo dos Santos (MPLA) and Jonas Savimbi (UNITA) oppose the MPLA and UNITA by constituting the place of the 'other' through accusatory categories. Seeking to understand the entanglements between global and local dimensions of the conflict, we argue that the accusations made by Agostinho Neto (MPLA), José Eduardo dos Santos (MPLA) and Jonas Savimbi (UNITA) aimed to delegitimize the 'other' while claiming their own legitimacy to occupy the state. This is achieved by opposing accusatory categories attributed to the 'other' with their inverse, categories attributed to the movement making the accusation. By taking into account the multiple processes of differentiation articulated in the speeches of leaders from the MPLA and UNITA in order to fix or displace an 'other' to be politically delegitimized, we aim to show how the understanding of political conflicts generally, and the conflict in Angola specifically, necessarily involves an engagement with categories whose linguistic dimension is entangled with historically constituted social positionalities.

A large number of the studies on the civil war in Angola (1975-2002) are concerned with the international dimension of the conflict (Steenkamp, 1983; Virmani, 1989; Schoor, 1989; Windrich, 1992; Monje, 1995; Wright, 1997; Shubin & Tokarev, 2001; Weigert, 2011; Miller, 2012; Miller, 2013). These analyses focus on the issues surrounding the Cold War, especially the clash between socialism and capitalism, and the alignment between Angolan liberation movements and the main world powers of the period: the Soviet Union and the United States of America. These viewpoints describe the conflict as the outcome of the rivalry between the two superpowers, as though the clashes between the MPLA and UNITA were the result of an overlapping of the interests and positionings of the USSR and the USA, respectively. For Kennedy (1987) and Wright (1997), US intervention in Angola through the funding of UNITA's guerrilla movement was designed to inflict a military defeat on the USSR. According to Monje (1995), a victory for the MPLA, allied in Angola with the USSR and Cuba, would swing the balance of the Cold War in favour of the socialist block, while Virmani (1989) attributes the Soviet influence to the MPLA's transition from a national liberation movement into a party. Shubin and Tokarev (2001), for their part, foreground the USSR's actions in the Angolan context in detriment to the agency of the MPLA. Windrich (1992) explains the results of the elections in Angola as the outcome of the persuasive power of the US media. Miller (2012, 2013), in a variation of this externalist view of the conflict, attributes its continuation, in part, to the attempt by South Africa, an ally of the United States, to safeguard the privileges of the white population under the apartheid regime.

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² TN: In Portuguese, the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* and the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*, respectively.

Without doubt, the analyses cited above tell us much about Angola's insertion in the global geopolitics of the period. But while the confrontations of the Cold War had a considerable impact on local events, it needs to be recognized that the Angolan Civil War was not merely a by-product of the geopolitical forces with which, as it unfolded, it became intertwined. As we suggest in the analysis that follows, the conflict was also overdetermined by local conditioning factors. Taking our lead from works showing that civil wars in general, and Angola's in particular, can only be comprehended by taking the local context into consideration (Marcum, 1978; Heywood, 1989; Bittencourt, 1993; Heywood, 2008; Guimarães, 2001; Schlee, 2002; Brinkman, 2005; Cramer, 2005; Messiant, 2006; Messiant, 2008; Schlee, 2008; Péclard, 2015; Oliveira, 2017; Pearce, 2017), we propose to examine the conflict through an ethnographic exploration of its discursive dimensions. What correlations can be established between the political divisions encountered during the civil war in Angola and the disputes between distinct social positionalities in the Angolan context? We analyse these correlations via the unstable relationship maintained between the categories of accusation utilized by leaders in the conflict and historically constituted social places. In this sense, our analysis explores the continuities and ruptures that these categories establish with colonial and postcolonial positionalities.

Civil war and (anti)colonialism: continuities and ruptures

A fundamental aspect of political mobilization in Angola during the civil war involved recourse to the category of the *povo angolano*, the 'Angolan people'.³ But while the expression was extensively employed by both the MPLA and UNITA, it is essential to comprehend that the discursive effects of its use are connected both to the political context in question and to the internal disputes related to regional, ethnic, racial and class differentiations in Angola. These differentiations, in turn, emerged in the context of Portuguese colonialism – or more specifically, the political and economic changes that resulted in the New State (1933-1974): expansion, centralization and integration of the administrative control of the colonies, associated with a denial of their autonomy, and combined with the intensification of production for exportation and the shift towards economic protectionism (Davidson, 1974; MacQueen, 1997). It was under this regime that were introduced legal distinctions between whites and blacks; ethnic-regional distinctions based on the relations established with the colonizer; the opposition between rural and urban; the social stratifications that led to the formation of elites in the cities and missions, which would later become linked to the nationalist movements.⁴

Mobilizations against colonialism emerged in multiple forms and were based on diverse modes of action, like meetings of small political groups and the dissemination of nationalist ideas (Marcum, 1969). The repression of Portugal's Salazarist dictatorship, added to the lack of political structures that might allow the participation of Angolans in the colonial state, are factors that established the Angolan elites as organizers of the national liberation movement, which emerged relatively disconnected from the colonial society in Angola (MacQueen, 1997). The anticolonial mobilization was organised in Portugal by Angolan students living in the country and by Portuguese opposed to the Salazarist regime in a context of a dictatorship that heavily repressed any kind of political articulation (Bittencourt, 1999). These circumstances point both to the distance between the fight for national liberation organized from abroad and the inhabitants of the colony, and to the difficulty of consolidating a stable alliance between anticolonial political movements and sections of the Angolan population not belonging to the elite.

³ Italics will be used to indicate the terms and expressions of Angolan leaders found in the analysed sources.

⁴ It is undeniable, for example, that a degree of continuity exists between the colonial elites and the elites that dominated the Central Highlands of Angola in the period preceding the Bailundo War. Nor were the racial distinctions created with the implementation of the *indigenato* (see below). However, the colonial regime solidified processes of differentiation previously more open to pragmatic malleability.

As we shall see, in addition to hindering the independentist organisation and facilitating the repression of the colonial state, this disarticulation also had profound effects on the post-independence period.

A landmark in terms of the establishment of liberation movements was the *Processo dos 50*, ‘Trial of Fifty,’ dated 1959, when a series of political activists from Luanda were jailed by the PIDE (the Portuguese state police).⁵ On February 4, 1961, a group formed mainly by members of the MPLA met to organise a takeover of the Military Prison, the 7th Police Station and the Angola National Radio in the capital. This coordinated action resulted in the release of the prisoners, a victory subsequently claimed by the movement (Bittencourt, 1999; Mabeko-Tali, 2001). The ‘Trial of Fifty,’ combined with its avantgarde image in the anticolonial struggle, articulated primarily by Luanda’s city-dwelling literate elites, proved to be a major political triumph for the MPLA, becoming one of the essential arguments underlying its discursive insistence on the legitimacy of the movement exercising the power of the state. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that, in parallel to the attacks and mobilizations occurring in Angola, many of the articulations involved in the formation of the liberation movements took place abroad, where there was support both for specific war strategies and for the military and academic training of Angolans.⁶ These articulations would extend into the postcolonial period in the form of financial, political and military support for the movements during the civil war.

From the effervescence of organizations working towards Angola’s liberation (see Wheeler & Péliissier, 2009), three main movements emerged during the period of anticolonial struggles: the United People of Angola (*União das Populações de Angola*: UPA), founded by Holden Roberto in 1954, which in 1961 would unite with another anticolonial movement to become the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA); UNITA, a splinter organization of the FNLA founded in 1966 under the leadership of Jonas Savimbi, who would remain at its head until the end of the civil war in 2002; and the MPLA, founded in 1956 and led by Agostinho Neto until his death in 1979 and by José Eduardo dos Santos from 1979 to 2017. The political strategy of all three liberation movements was to mobilize the *povo angolano* through the divulgation of nationalist ideas via political propaganda and the speeches made by their respective leaders. Insofar as these speeches were given from distinct positions, they had diverse repercussions among the sections of the population that the generalizing expression *povo angolano* was intended to encompass.

Part of the literature that examines the emergence of the liberation movements in Angola points to the regional nature of their connections, linking them to a specific elite, ethnic group and religion. Following this schema, the MPLA was concentrated in Luanda and Malange, encompassed the Ambundu (popularly known too as the Kimbundu) and were Methodist; UNITA was linked to southern Angola, especially the Central Highlands, inhabited by the Ovimbundu, and was Congregationalist; FNLA originated from northern Angola and the Congo, inhabited by the Bakongo, and was Baptist. However, this form of schematizing the political organizations fails to account for the complexity involved in the formation of these movements, marked by “fusions and coagulations” (Oliveira, 2017, p. 40) between small local organisations and by the attempt to incorporate elements originating from diverse regions of Angola to counter accusations of regionalism, elitism or tribalism made by other movements. It is undeniable, however, that the antagonistic movements were constituted around regional elites formed in the context of colonialism: in Luanda, the so-called ‘assimilated’

5 TN: *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*, the International and State Defence Police.

6 In terms of the relationship between political militancy and academic training, time spent in Portugal was a decisive factor for most members of the movements’ elites, many of whom passed through the Home for Students of the Empire (the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*: see Castelo & Bandeira, 2017). In Africa, the anticolonial movements were backed by countries like Algeria, Tanzania, the Republic of the Congo, and Zambia. China provided military training, arms and resources to the MPLA, UNITA and the FNLA.

7 In Portuguese, the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*. Although the FNLA was one of the liberation movements central to the struggle for independence, its weakening in the post-independence period disqualified it as a potential claimant of the place of the state.

(*assimilados*) of the first and second waves (Messiant, 2006) supplied the main leaders of the MPLA, while most of UNITA's leaders were formed in the Protestant missions of the Central Highlands (Péclard, 1998 and 2015; Dulley, 2017).

Re-examining the context in which the liberation movements were constituted is important since the movements leading the anticolonial struggle would assume the role of political parties in the post-independence era. In making this observation, our intention is not to establish fixed positions or periods. On the contrary, we wish to make evident continuities that are recurrently evoked in the analysed discourses. The civil war in Angola did not begin immediately after independence, given that the clashes between the movements date from the anticolonial struggle. The Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*) on April 25, 1974, marked the overthrow of the Salazarist dictatorship in Portugal. In Angola, these events led to negotiations for independence involving the three movements. On January 15, 1975, they signed the Alvor Agreement with the Portuguese government, setting a date for independence and establishing a transitional government to be administered by all three movements in conjunction. However, the war of liberation gave way to the civil war the same year, 1975, triggered by the rush to seize control of the state between the MPLA, which received political-military support from the USSR and Cuba, and the FNLA, allied with South Africa and the United States. Although UNITA was still concentrated in the country's south in 1975, it would grow in strength as the FNLA weakened and UNITA gained support from the United States and South Africa from 1976 on. This established a battleground between the MPLA and UNITA that would last 27 years. The geopolitical alliances in the Cold War context certainly provided the movements with financial and military resources. As we argue, though, the specificities of how the conflict developed on the ground are deeply interwoven with the formation of Angolan society.

In both scenarios, the struggle for liberation and the civil war, there were conflicts, an absence of cooperation and claims of pioneerism made by the movements, which were based on antagonisms and divisions of areas of operation (Marcum, 1969; Messiant, 2008). The continuation of the contradictions already present in the struggles for liberation was reflected in the projection, by both the MPLA and UNITA, of an *enemy* to be combatted (Oliveira, 2017). This involved the utilization of categories of accusation that can be traced back to the colonial period, insofar as the accusatory discourses emphasize the ruptures with the past proposed by the antagonistic parties as part of their construction of a narrative about themselves. The accusations made by the leaders of the movements depict the *enemy* as a continuation of the colonial system by accusing them of reproducing the distinctions of race, ethnicity, regionality and class that characterized Portuguese rule in Angola. The categories that we analyse below constitute the subjects of the conflict through a double movement insofar as they oppose, in a game of mirrors, a self categorized as legitimate in contrast to an 'other' presented as an *enemy*. There is, therefore, a feedback loop between the mobilization of the categories by the movements and their analytic apprehension: while the categories are mobilized by the leaders through the accusations made against the 'other,' and in so doing they resort to the discursive arsenal inherited from colonialism, our analysis, in focusing on these categories, apprehends them via their relationship to the social positionalities found in the pre and post-independence periods.

In their speeches, Jonas Savimbi, Agostinho Neto and José Eduardo dos Santos employ the categories of *inimigo* (enemy), *neocolonizador* (neocolonizer), *imperialista* (imperialist), *racista* (racist) and *tribalista* (tribalist). Through these labels, many of which refer to the alliances established with outside agents, the leader making the speech proposes an image of the 'other' that contrasts with the image presented of themselves: as someone who, by opposing everything related to colonialism and imperialism, has the capacity to destroy them. The accusatory categories thus contrast the image of a negative past with the image of a positive new future, in which the person making the speech acts out his capacity to exercise the power of the state by differentiating himself from the oppressive external agent. The analysis that we propose here is concerned with the relation between the designations applied to the subjects in question and their association with social positionalities

under dispute in the context of the civil war in Angola. By contrasting an image of the self with an image of the 'other' through the use of categories like *imperialismo* or *liberdade* (liberty or freedom) and thereby evoking, respectively, the ideas of the colonial past and the liberated future, these discourses establish an inevitable relationship with the local sociocultural and historical formation. Based on this observation, then, we argue the need to pay close attention to the imbrication between the so-called internal and external factors involved in the conflict.

Understanding the context to which an enunciation refers is essential to elucidating the effects produced by the categories in their different modes of historical articulation (McClintock, 2010). In exploring the continuities and ruptures between the 'colonial' and the 'postcolonial,' it is important to take into account the transformations introduced into colonial society by the *indigenato*, a regime implanted by the Portuguese administration that remained in force in both Angola and Mozambique from 1926 to 1961. The objective of the *indigenato* was to delimit and fix the social and political localization of the black African population, thus enabling the discrimination of the subjects of colonialism whose labour force could be appropriated (cf. Bender, 1978; Castelo, 1998; Messiant, 2006; Neto, 2012; Cahen, 2012). To this end, the inhabitants of the colonies were classified into two hierarchized categories: 'citizens' (*cidadãos*) and 'indigenous people' (*indígenas*). 'Citizens' were those considered 'civilized;' an 'indigenous person,' in theory, could become a 'citizen' through a process of 'assimilation' (*assimilação*) of the Portuguese culture. In this case, the person would become an *assimilado*, 'assimilated.' The possibility of 'assimilation' was limited to men, given that women, if they were not white, could only achieve the same status by marrying with white or 'assimilated' men. In this regime, white people occupied a priori the position of 'civilized people,' irrespective of their level of schooling or social class. But to be considered 'assimilated' and obtain Portuguese citizenship and its benefits, an 'indigenous person' had to demonstrate certain standards of behaviour: speak and write Portuguese fluently; use western clothing; have a fixed address; be Christian; possess a compatible level of schooling and an income to maintain themselves and their family; and possess table manners (Messiant, 2006).

The *indigenato* regime employed a criterion of categorization based on the level of 'civilization,' under which the position of 'indigenous' was marked by a series of constraints. In defining these places, the regime enabled the application of distinct legislation to each category: 'indigenous people' had to pay taxes, faced restriction on their movements, and could be subject to forced labour. What is important for the argument proposed here is that this was one of the instruments through which the Portuguese colonial state institutionalized racism, creating distinctions in the rights and duties between the white and black population. Accusing the other of being a *racist* is one of the categories incorporated into the speeches, especially that of the MPLA, to delegitimize the enemy. This accusation is directly linked to the issue of the building of the Angolan nation, an idea that institutes the need to constitute a population with the same rights. In other words, the accusation of *racist* defines the *inimigo* (enemy) as someone who prioritizes one part of the population in detriment to another, just as the colonizers did. During the civil war, the continuity posed between the *indigenato* regime and the accusation of being a *racist* reworks the categories of accusation for the construction of an *enemy* who resembles the colonial past: while the accusation is maintained, it also transforms in relation to its target and context.

Focusing closely on the speeches of Angola's political leaders during the civil war period entails understanding how the frontiers imposed by colonialism are reworked by these subjects, revealing the agency of Angolans themselves, the relations established by them and the maintenance or subversion of colonial hierarchies. It also means paying close attention to the subtleties of the power games, considering the dislocations that occur in the gaps in the structure. McClintock (2010) shows how categories, on being mobilized, affect the experiences of subjects at the same time as they consolidate an image in relation to what they designate: the categories of designation emerge and become concrete in social relations. Methodologically, therefore, we propose to concentrate here on the relationship between the categories of accusation enunciated and the

positions occupied by the subjects who made use of them. The labels given to themselves and their opponents by Agostinho Neto, José Eduardo dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi indicate the strategies to which they resorted in order to legitimize their ideas and parties. However, this was not done in a merely instrumental manner, since the demarcation of positions through the labels employed locates their political action via the specific place that they occupy in the social fabric. What the two political movements share is their self-positioning in favour of the interests and wishes of the *povo angolano*, while depicting the ‘other,’ the *enemy*, as working against them.

Before turning to the analysis of the categories properly speaking, a methodological observation is required: the sources produced by the MPLA are easier to access and better organized since the movement published a large collection of books and compilations of speeches. Although UNITA also produced publications, most of Savimbi’s speeches were documented by the MPLA. Obviously, the continuation of the MPLA in the Angolan government until the present enabled the entity to organize its own history and, simultaneously, attempt to erase the documentation of the *enemy* (cf. Schubert, 2017). It needs to be taken into account, therefore, that the available records index the distinct social positionalities occupied by the MPLA and UNITA both during the civil war and in the post-war period.⁸

“Destroy the old to build the new”⁹

The legitimacy to occupy the Angolan government from Luanda was one of the major objectives contested by the MPLA and UNITA during the civil war years. Both movements demanded this position vis-à-vis civil society through the “management of difference” (Oliveira, 2017, p. 24) in their discursive strategies. Through their discourses, the movements sought to shape collective identities and thereby legitimize their exercise of power. In other words, in addition to the warfare and guerrilla tactics mobilized in the dispute for territory, there was a large discursive investment to acquire hegemonic control over the country. Each of the movements presented different narratives concerning Angola’s history, their own role in independence and their relation to the *povo*, the ‘people.’ While these narratives produced distinct forms of universalizing and managing differences, they converge insofar as they mobilize the same categories. The mirror game takes place, therefore, by means of differential interpretations and accusations produced on the basis of the same category by both sides of the conflict. In this process, the establishment of a division between ‘us and them’ proved central. Discursively, the distinction established between specific labels attributed to each of the parties demarcates which pole is the negative ‘other,’ and which pole refers to the positive ‘us.’ In the discourse of the movements and leaders, the ‘we’ was utilized as an attempt to connect the party to the *people*. As we shall see, one of the mechanisms used in the discourses to create a division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was the association of the ‘other’ with the colonial past and the image of the self with a new future. Connecting the other to the colonial past meant establishing what needed to end and thus could not be associated with legitimate exercise of the power of the state.

One of the spheres in which this took place was related to the position occupied by the colonial elites. The implementation of Christianity in Angola catalysed many of the social changes that unfolded in the context of colonialism (Neto, 1997; Neto, 2012; Heywood, 2000; Messiant, 2006; Dulley, 2010; Dulley, 2015; Péclard, 2015): alterations to the notion of property, family structure and ways of eating, dress and education. Generally speaking, the Catholic church maintained an official discourse in favour of ‘Portugalization’

⁸ The analysis presented here is based on 47 documents containing the speeches of the three leaders. Our research included visits to the Torre do Tombo National Archive and the Lisbon Municipal Archive, as well as consultation of reports, journals, booklets and pamphlets produced by the parties and available in libraries in Angola, Portugal, Brazil, the United States and England.

⁹ Title of a speech by Agostinho Neto (1976a).

(Neto, 2013), which led to the formation of a schooled elite located primarily in the urban centres. Meanwhile the activities of Protestant missions were divided among different ethnolinguistic regions, which contributed to accentuating the regional and cultural boundaries between the new elites (Henderson, 1992; Neto, 2012; Péclard, 2015; Dulley, 2017; Dulley, 2018). Given that the MPLA's birthplace was primarily the capital Luanda, the assimilationist universalism in its discourse is unsurprising, notwithstanding the strong Methodist influence on some of its leadership – Agostinho Neto, for example, was raised in the Methodist church. In the case of UNITA, whose members, including Savimbi, mainly came from the congregational missions on the Central Highlands, there was more of an inclination towards communitarian discourse and the denunciation of the universalism proposed from Luanda.

Many of the speeches given by Agostinho Neto (1974, 1975, 1976a, 1980, 1985) contrast the need for progress with colonialist forms of oppression. His rhetoric presents technical, cultural and political development in a single direction, identifying the objectives of the MPLA's struggle as seizure of political power, the reestablishment of cultural life and disalienation. These objectives are fixed through the definition of an *inimigo* (enemy) of the *povo* (people) and the *luta* (struggle, fight). Equality and fraternity are presented as the base for this development, taken as an urgent task. Such an image is conveyed, for example, in the independence speech given by Neto:

Taking as a principle the unity of all Angola's social classes around the political line and the clear formulation of its objectives, correctly defining allies, friends and enemies, the Angolan People, under the leadership of the MPLA, finally overthrew the Portuguese colonial regime. With the defeat of colonialism and the recognition of our right to independence, materialized at this historical moment, MPLA's basic program has been achieved. So the young POPULAR REPUBLIC OF ANGOLA is born, an expression of the popular will and the outcome of the great sacrifice made by the combatants in our national liberation. (Neto, 1985, pp. 36-37)

The ideals of fraternity and equality, as well as the image of a party that seeks to meet the people's demands, indicate the political tendencies shown by the MPLA in its discourses during the civil war. As Marcum (1969) points out, Neto's speeches emphasized the fight against discrimination, whether racial, ideological, religious or regional in kind. Hence, his rhetoric presents the MPLA as "the main instrument that acted for our country to be free" (Neto, 1975, p. 8) or as the party that fought and defeated Portuguese colonialism. In this way, the MPLA had ensured the fight was won against those forces that attempted to institute *neocolonialism* in Angola, preventing the territory from being invaded again by the *enemy* (Neto, 1976c). Setting out from the accusation of the *enemy* as a *neocolonialist*, Neto's speech establishes a continuity between colonial expropriation by the Portuguese and the support given to UNITA by apartheid South Africa, whose army supported the failed joint attempt of UNITA and the FNLA to install an alternative government based in Huambo, between November 1975 and 1977, in opposition to the government headed by the MPLA from Luanda.

The accusation of *neocolonialist* was widely used by Neto to contrast the MPLA's image with UNITA's: a *neocolonizer* is a colonizer that does not identify with this designation, although their actions amount to a form of colonialism. According to Neto (1974) *neocolonialism* in Africa is the substitution of one of the major axes of colonialism – *racism* – by *imperialism*. Nonetheless, it is via the same notion of *neocolonization* deployed by Neto that Jonas Savimbi (1975d) sets out to delegitimize his own *enemy*, the MPLA, by contrasting the idea of UNITA's future with colonial violence. His discourse holds UNITA to be responsible for the political, economic and social independence of Angola for the Angolan *people*. The place occupied by the political movement appears in Savimbi's discourse accompanied by the function of eliminating the country's *enemies*, depicted as those who mystify and alienate politics, characterizing them as *neocolonizers*. Following this logic, the relation with

colonialism was also linked to the occupation by political movements of structures inherited from the colonial period. On this point, Savimbi refers especially to the exercise of power by the MPLA through the political-administrative structures of Luanda, handed over to the entity by the Portuguese at the time of independence.

The judgment on the form of occupying the structures inherited by the colonial state during the postcolonial period was a resource used by the leaders of the movements to demand actions beneficial to the population and at the same time to accuse the *enemy* of continuing the colonial structures. In the MPLA's discourses, UNITA was, throughout the civil war, portrayed as incapable of exercising government. Savimbi, for his part, claims that the MPLA is a *colonial puppet*¹⁰ due to the proximity between the organization and the Portuguese political apparatus in the post-independence period. This accusation is made explicitly in the speech below:

The Portuguese government can continue to play with the MPLA, and the world needs to understand that the Portuguese government is on the MPLA's side, has violated all the agreements, tricked the Angolan people, and tricked the opinion of the African countries who believed in its sincerity. And why? Because the Portuguese government, when it says that the revolution in Portugal is linked to Angola's, has neocolonization in mind. There is no connection. There is one revolution here and another there, and only the leadership of the MPLA allows neocolonization to invade our country to facilitate those who betray democracy in Portugal and govern the country through force and terror. (Savimbi, 1975d, p. 4)

Two points are central to understanding this accusatory strategy: first, during 1975, the power and influence exerted by the left-wing group associated with post-Salazarism in Portugal ensured a certain base of support for the MPLA. Despite the rhetorical disputes that affirmed or denied the relationship between the MPLA and the Lisbon government, the liberation of Angola was announced by Agostinho Neto (MacQueen, 1997). The second point refers to the association between the political movements and specific territories. Angola's independence, proclaimed in a speech by Neto (1985) on November 11, 1975, presents the MPLA as an 'avantgarde force' and establishes the beginning of a regime recognized by Portuguese-speaking African countries, Brazil and the Soviet bloc. In parallel to this event, in Huambo, the main city of the Central Highlands, UNITA, in provisional alliance with the FNLA, proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Angola. This alternative government lasted until 1977 when the forces of UNITA and South Africa were defeated by the forces of the MPLA and the Cuban government, causing UNITA to retreat to the east (Schubert, 1997). A territorial division thus becomes evident in these events, one that dates back to colonialism: generally speaking, the MPLA controlled the Angolan coast, Malange and the area surrounding Luanda, with these being the first regions to be held under Portuguese colonial influence. Meanwhile, UNITA's domain extended principally to the Central Highlands and the 'south' region, which was subjugated by the colonial power only in the twentieth century (Heywood, 2008). The territorial factor is explored by Pearce (2017, p. 80) in terms of the relationship between the locality where the movement is based and the control exerted over this locality and the population resident there. Thus, the discourses during the civil war associate political movement and territory on one hand, and the identity of the populations and the territory they inhabit on the other. Insofar as both movements had national ambitions, though, each would seek to discursively refute the accusations of regionalism or tribalism made against it by the rival movement.

¹⁰ For example: "Falsehood, the kind with which we were colonized, is the same that continues now" (Savimbi, 1975f, p. 5).

“Who is the enemy”¹¹

In order to elaborate an analysis of the rhetoric related to the construction of the *enemy* in the civil war, we need to turn briefly to the Angolan fights for liberation, since the conflicts and divisions between the movements date back to this period at least. MacQueen (1997) relates Angola’s decolonization to the national post-liberation context by proposing a triangular analysis that takes into account the international political system and the changing relation between the superpowers, the political changes taking place in Portugal with the Carnation Revolution in 1974, and Angolan nationalism. While the global context was defined by the Cold War, Portugal after the revolution no longer had the political conditions to perpetuate the colonial order, nor to plan for a neocolonial situation (Mabeko-Tali, 2001). It was in this context that the Angolan movements and parties would align with the world superpowers until the beginning of the 1990s. In terms of Angolan nationalism, to think of the anticolonial struggle in Angola during the 1960s and 1970s as unified would be a mistake. As we noted earlier, there were three main liberation movements who fought against colonialism. However, the antagonisms between them date from the struggle for liberation and eventually led to the civil war.

The disconnection between the movements is observable in their strategies during the anticolonial guerrilla war. Not only were the attacks on Portuguese troops not coordinated, diverse clashes took place between the movements on the battlefield. This bellicose antagonism was compounded by an ideological dispute during this period between the MPLA and the FNLA and, subsequently, between the MPLA and UNITA. Part of this rivalry can be attributed to the action of the Portuguese government, which sought to “open and maintain social and ethnic divisions among the nationalists” (MacQueen, 1997, p. 36), always establishing accords with one movement in detriment to the other whenever possible, thus fuelling the rivalry between them. Also important was the ideological antagonism characteristic of the support given to the movements by the Soviet Union, China and the United States during the Cold War. However, we cannot ignore the fact that internal factors related to the local sociopolitical and historical formation also played a central role in the conflict.

During the war of liberation, the Soviet Union gave financial and military support to the guerrilla operations of the MPLA. At different moments, Maoist China provided military training to the guerrilla forces of the MPLA, the FNLA and UNITA. The FNLA, for its part, was financed by the United States, who saw its leader, Holden Roberto, as the future president of Angola given the communist tendencies of the MPLA. After 1975 and the FNLA’s relative departure from the scene, UNITA began to be supported by the United States and South Africa, while funding of the MPLA was guaranteed by its relations with Cuba, whose involvement in the civil conflict in Angola indirectly garnered the support of the USSR, initially reluctant to intervene (Monje, 1995; Pérvontsev & Dmitrenko, 1987). Oliveira (2017) argues that the alternations in receiving outside assistance reinforce the thesis that the association between the movements and the Cold War powers was determined by a political-economic strategy to sustain the war effort and not just a question of ideological affiliation. However, the speeches given by Angola’s political leaders between 1975 and the end of the 1980s, when international support and UN intervention eventually ceased, evoked such associations. Thus, this amounted to an “ideologized discursive shift” (Oliveira, 2017, p. 88) to insert the global superpowers (the United States and the USSR) in the Angolan context. This shift also enabled the discursive delegitimization of the ‘other,’ which began to be interpreted through the “imperialist associations” (Neto, 1974) attributed precisely on the basis of these external alliances.

In terms of the internal perspective to the conflict, the association of the opposing movement with a country characterized as *imperialist* by both the MPLA and UNITA had the effect of questioning the legitimacy of the other movement’s claim to state power. This effect derived from the accusation that the other was seeking a way to implant *neocolonization*. While there was clearly a complex play of forces in the Cold War era,

¹¹ Citation taken from a speech by Neto (1974, p. 6).

our endeavour here is to think about the Angolan conflict at the confluence between the internal forces that entered into conflict in Angola and the dispute of this territory by rival blocks. Neto (1976a), for instance, claims that a 'blood brotherhood' existed between Cuba and Angola, a strategy that enabled him to maintain Cuban troops in the country without harming his image, at the same time that he emphasized that the same did not apply to the United States, depicted as a reactionary country whose objective was to infiltrate Angola. UNITA, for its part, justified its alliance with the Americans and the apartheid regime in South Africa due to the need to counter the support received from foreign 'communists,' and thus anti-democratic sources, by the MPLA. In their discourses, both the MPLA and UNITA present themselves as the only movement capable of liberating Angola from the *enemies*, *neocolonialism* and *imperialism*. Based on this argument, both movements legitimized their use of violence in contrast to the use of violence by the other, characterized by these three labels and thus able to be eliminated. This is clearly apparent in Santos's speech made on June 5, 1981:

In 1975 South Africans invaded Angola and arrived in Kwanza-South. We could resist thanks to the efforts of our Angolan people and to the international help from our Cuban and Soviet friends and companions. South Africans were brought here by various treacherous Angolans, mostly Unita elements. Today we still perceive growing bonds between this group and South Africa. [...] We must get ready to hit our enemies with more and more force and, naturally this year we have to make all efforts to attack the puppet group Unita, which in some regions of our country practice banditry, massacre populations, destroy and rob their goods, houses, cattle, in short, a series of actions aimed at creating instability. (Santos, 2005, p. 378)¹²

The logic of warfare presented here – defining violence as a form of defence (Pearce, 2017, p. 237) – is recurrent not only in Santos (1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 2005), but also in Neto (1975, 1976a, 1976c, 1985; Neto & Neto, 2011) and Savimbi (1975a, 1975b, 1975d). What differentiates the speeches of Agostinho Neto and Eduardo dos Santos is that those of the former, pronounced during the first phase of the civil war, sought to shape the image of the *enemy* through the use of phrases and expressions like “who is the enemy? Imperialism” (Neto, 1974, p. 7) or “imperialism, the main enemy of our people.”¹³ José Eduardo dos Santos, for his part, reinforced the reasoning behind this image, already associated with UNITA by the MPLA in the previous period. An example of the use of this same strategy in Savimbi's speeches appears in the following excerpt:

The MPLA speaks of UNITA's adherence to the imperialist block. We think of ourselves as an independent liberation movement capable of treating all countries on an equal footing, everyone as friends. What we cannot admit and cannot accept is that Russian chauvinism tries to impose on Angola horses that, despite all the favourable terrain they are winning today, are doomed to lose [...] there are no more lessons to be learned from the new czars of Siberia, [...] we have no alternative but to resist with the same means used by the MPLA, who make war on us. (Savimbi, 1975d, p. 3)

Santos's accusations resort to terms like *fantoche* (puppet) and its derivations (*puppet organization*, *puppet bands*, *puppet group*, *Angolan puppets*); *imperialist* or *agent of imperialism*; *bandits* and *enemy*. The justification for this was supposedly UNITA acting in favour of *imperialism* and the forces of colonization, instituted as a target of the MPLA's struggle and violence, based on the “need for physical combat against enemies” (Neto, 1976a, p. 16) to ensure their elimination and/or expulsion. Accusations of disseminating false information or lies are common in the discourses of both movements. As a rule, their leaders use this type of accusation to

¹² All the speeches of the political leaders have been translated from the original Portuguese, save where, as in this case, the source, an internal party document, was already in English.

¹³ Document consulted at the Amílcar Cabral Intervention Centre for Development (CIDAC) in Lisbon, under this title, without reference to date or publisher.

reconstruct, in substitution of the information relayed by the other side, valid information that legitimizes their own movement. Santos's allegation, made on November 14, 1982, exemplifies this rhetorical movement:

Unita puppet groups face growing difficulties to make their criminal activities accepted, and so they resort to lying, demagoguery and ridiculous propaganda, according to which Angola is not an independent country, but a country colonized by Cubans and Soviets. [...] There is no Cuban or Soviet colonialism nor neo-colonialism. What there is in reality, as there always has been, is an attempt at the neo-colonization of Angola by imperialists. [...] Imperialism and colonialism always used and supported Angolan puppet groups to try to eliminate the MPLA guerrillas, in the North and in the East of the country. (Santos, 2005, pp. 379-80)

In the above excerpt, the MPLA delegitimizes UNITA's argument and replaces it with a truth that situates UNITA in the space previously attributed by the latter to the MPLA. A switch of positionality occurs in the discourse, therefore, transferring the image of the colonizer onto the 'other' and their alliances, while the image of being the target of *imperialism* represents the self and one's own allies. In fact, this procedure is enacted by both sides to characterize the moment in which they find themselves and to refer back to the conflicts between the movements that first began during the struggle for liberation. Occupying the place of the one who speaks the truth is central to legitimizing the exercise of government for both sides. It is also important to invalidate the other's argument through the inversion of the positionality established by the other's discourse.

UNITA resorted to similar accusatory terms when it sought to legitimize its own participation in the civil war. In the words of Savimbi, the conflict that was taking place, causing thousands of victims, was "entirely the responsibility of the MPLA's leadership headed by Dr. Agostinho Neto" (Savimbi, 1975d, p. 2),¹⁴ forcing UNITA to enter the war: "here MPLA is the aggressor and UNITA the victim" (Savimbi, 1975f, p. 3). A similar effect is created by the association of the MPLA with foreign interests, just as the MPLA argued apropos UNITA. The understanding that the "MPLA and its leadership wished to impose on the Angolan people the neocolonization that I consider to be a Russian neo-imperialism" (Savimbi, 1975d, p. 3) is a response to what Savimbi identified as the "lies disseminated" by the MPLA claiming that UNITA was associated with the "imperialist block." In other words, the accusation of *imperialist* levelled by the MPLA against UNITA is questioned by the latter by highlighting the MPLA's association with Russia. Furthermore, the potency of UNITA's ideas is asserted through the appropriation of concepts derived from its foreign associations: liberty, democracy, authenticity. In sum, Jonas Savimbi uses the movement's external links to construct internal discourses that legitimize the movement and its potential (Pearce, 2017, p. 183). For its part, the opposition of the MPLA to these concepts, considered foreign, mainly occurred through a critique of the model of the United States and the association of the latter with South African apartheid, a comparison that imputes UNITA with the stain of being *racist* and *imperialist*.

Beyond the political associations between the two movements and the Cold War powers, elements of a personal kind were also mobilized as factors delegitimizing the leaders of the rival movement. UNITA, for example, adopted the strategy of situating the MPLA as a movement alien to Angola by referring to Agostinho Neto's marriage to a Portuguese woman, Maria Eugênia Neto, thus connecting Neto's leadership to the colonial past. After Neto's death, UNITA would adopt a similar discursive strategy to question José Eduardo dos Santos's experience of the vast territory of Angola (Francisco, 2011). The fact that the latter knew only Luanda and the Portuguese language, unaware of the distinct realities of the country's interior, whose languages he did not speak and whose customs he did not know, were taken to reflect an inability to govern the Angolan territory as a whole, given his lack of knowledge about the country. This was compounded by the accusation, still levelled against Santos today, that he is a native not of Angola but of São Tomé and Príncipe (Schubert, 2017). Such accusations highlight the structural proximity between Luanda's elites and the former Portuguese colonizers,

¹⁴ Another example of this same argument: "Who started the civil war? Hence the answer is always the same, whether they say 'it's Neto' or they say 'it's the MPLA' [...]. It's the MPLA and its leadership who were responsible for the civil war which we now have" (Savimbi, 1975f, p. 1).

a legacy that would be materialized in its acquisition of the state apparatus, historically centralized in Luanda, to the MPLA. One effect of the questioning of the governmental skills of the *enemy*, associated by UNITA with the colonial past, is the vision of a future ‘independent’ and ‘democratic’ state proposed by the latter movement.

In terms of the political strategies of self-presentation adopted by the MPLA and UNITA, a discursive shift can be discerned (Oliveira, 2017, p. 28) between the moment of independence and the post-independence era when the geopolitical rivalries solidified between the parties and their allies in the Cold War context. While in the pre-independence period and at the moment of independence itself, the main *enemy* identified is the Portuguese colonizer, in the post-independence years, with the advent of foreign political-military support until the end of the 1980s, the *enemy* appears associated with *neocolonialism* and with the interests of third parties: namely, the countries financing each movement. These moments of inflection, which become visible through categories that maintain interrelations of continuity and rupture, are associated with the changes in the positions occupied by UNITA and by the MPLA during the civil war. But who was the intended recipient of the accusations mutually exchanged between the movements during the war? Here too the category used by both movements to designate their principal interlocutor coincided: *the Angolan people*.

“Our appeal to the Angolan people”¹⁵

Insofar as both the MPLA and UNITA were formed from educated regional elites associated with the assimilationist colonial system, both found themselves needing to establish a link between the overwhelming majority of Angola’s population, excluded from the assimilation process during the colonial period (Messiant, 2006). The *people* as an object of dispute appear in the leaders’ speeches not only as a source of legitimization, but as a group whom the movements should stand alongside. This becomes visible in the following remarks by Jonas Savimbi:

...we have faith in the people, the Angolan people have faith in us. The children of the Angolans will fight and are already fighting. But those of the MPLA have no faith in this population, they go after the Mozambicans, the Algerians, Russians, Vietnamese, Katangese, Cubans. (Savimbi, 1975e, p.1)

The strategy established here seeks to distance the rival movement, presenting it in a relation of alterity vis-à-vis the Angolan population insofar as it is associated with ‘others’: Mozambicans, Algerians, Russians, Cubans. This produces an atmosphere of a distancing of the MPLA’s interests in relation to the interests of the *people*, while UNITA emerges as the force capable of protecting the Angolan *people* from external threats. Both movements seek to create a ‘we’ through their association with the *people*, an endeavour synthesized in common phrases like: “UNITA is, essentially, on the side of the people” (Savimbi, 1975b) and “who is the people? it’s the MPLA” (Neto, 1976b). In this context, standing alongside the *people* signifies having the legitimacy of power: “power is in whose hands? The people’s. And who gives the orders? It’s the people. And who are the people? It’s the MPLA” (Neto, 1976c, p. 16). If who gives the orders are the *people* and the MPLA is the *people*, the latter appears as the party that governs through the legitimacy conferred to it by the *people*.

The attempt to destructure the rival movement occurs in discourse through labels that create divisions between the movement and the *people*. This tactic proved highly useful during the campaigns for the 1992 elections,¹⁶ the turning point in the civil war preceded by the end of the support received during the Cold War.

¹⁵ Leaflet produced by UNITA’s Central Committee located at the CIDAC in Lisbon, no reference to date or publisher.

¹⁶ The 1992 elections followed the Bicesse Accords, articulated by diverse international actors and signed in 1991 by the MPLA and UNITA in an attempt to terminate the civil conflict with the end of the Cold War (cf. Knudsen et al., 2000; Valentim, 2011). Pearce (2017) and Oliveira (2017) point out that the resumption of the conflict with even greater intensity in 1993 led to it being interpreted by journalists and academics as rooted either in the ethnic rivalry between the elite of the MPLA and UNITA, or driven by the economic interests in oil and diamond exploration that financed the war in the post-elections period (cf. Malaquias, 2007; Cilliers & Dietrich, 2000; Le Billon, 1999; Le Billon, 2001).

In a context in which the accusation of *neocolonialist* had lost meaning and plausibility with the sharp decline in international aid, the mobilization of accusations referring to the ethnic issue and to *tribalism* was central to the production of these divisions. Undeniably, “for decades the composition of the members of each of the movements [...] reflected a relatively accurate division in terms of ethnic and regional affiliation” (Oliveira, 2017, p. 112). Hence, it was necessary for the movements to incorporate representatives from the region associated with the opponent, thereby achieving a greater representation of the Angolan population among their ranks. This would boost their claim to represent the national territory as a whole. But while a consensus existed on the need to represent the entire nation, the history of the movements, profoundly interwoven with the colonial formation of elites, failed to match this ideal.

The discourse of the MPLA, initially allied with socialist ideology, was vehemently opposed to ethnic barriers and *tribalism*, which it frequently attributed to UNITA, associated with the Central Plateau and the Ovimbundu ethnic group. However, with most of its own leaders originating from the region where Kimbundu is historically spoken, it found itself subject to the same accusation from UNITA. In a speech from 1982, Santos already links the accusation of *tribalism* to the colonial past:

...when they attack us in the ideological domain, we must be armed to understand that this is an ideological distortion and we are going to fight it. Whether it is tribalism, or the racist or reactionary who defends the old ideas of colonialism, we must know how to comprehend and detect these ideas and counter them. (Santos, 1982b, p. 43)

During the Cold War, *tribalism* is presented by the MPLA as a recourse used by the *enemy* (*imperialism*) to suppress popular power and impede “our struggle” (Neto, 1976a). Countering this accusation, Savimbi’s speeches emphasize the non-acceptance of tribal barriers within UNITA, arguing that it was the MPLA that had banned the participation of tribes in its party, thus implying that the rival movement was the one establishing discriminations and divisions (UNITA, 1989). Accusing the other movement of being *tribalist* points to the need for a union between the party and the *people*, conceived in a totalized and unified form, as a means to defeat the *enemy* and conquer the state (Neto, 1975).¹⁷ According to UNITA, without a union of this kind, the result would be a weakening of the institutions and of Angola itself, as well as the reversion to an *imperialist* regime that constructs the country from the outside without internal roots (UNITA, 1989). The incapacity of the rival party to end the divisions is also identified, principally by Savimbi (1975d), as an inability to break with the colonial past.

Another accusation linked to colonialism, made by both movements with the intention of distancing their opponent from the *people*, is that of *racism*. Here the colonial legacy is recalled and attributed to the rival movement in distinct forms. When made by the MPLA, the accusation of *racism* is linked to the association between UNITA and South Africa (Santos, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 2005). The military support provided by the South Africans to UNITA until the end of the 1980s was appropriated by the MPLA to associate UNITA with a racist regime, since apartheid was still in force within South Africa. The fact that the apartheid regime officially discriminated against black people on the basis of racist legislation posed a clear contradiction for UNITA, given that the latter was associated with a racist regime while supposedly aiming to break with the structures of colonial domination.¹⁸ UNITA, for its part, the majority of whose leaders were black, accused the MPLA of being a party led by “whites and mulattos” descending from the former colonizer, a somewhat uncomfortable accusation for a socialist party governing an African country with a majority black population in the post-independence era. For Neto (1974), though, there existed a confusion between the *enemy* and the whites on the part of UNITA, a confusion that did not apply to the MPLA, which was based, he argued,

¹⁷ Document encountered at the CIDAC in Lisbon under the title “Imperialism: the main enemy of our people,” no reference to date or publisher.

¹⁸ On the relationship between colonialism and racism, see Mbembe (2017).

on racial collaboration. Its statute called for “a struggle against the colonial regime, not against a given race, even that of the colonizers” (Mabeko-Tali, 2001).

Thus, the MPLA presented itself as a universalist regime, above racial divisions, at the same time as it identified UNITA as a collaborator with an explicitly racist regime. In response, UNITA also sought to mark its position in relation to the white and mixed-race population: “whites, blacks or mestizos, those who identified with our program and are ready to defend Angola, those who made sacrifices for Angola are Angolans. [...] Whoever identifies with the suffering of this fatherland is Angolan” (Savimbi, 1975a, p. 2). At the moment of independence, Savimbi made a declaration specifically addressed to the whites of Huambo, establishing UNITA as the first to proclaim black, white and mixed-race Angolans, affirming “our non-racist position” (Savimbi, 1975c, p. 2). The attempt to contrast the two movements thus involved attributing the other with the stain of continuing the colonial regime – conceived by both sides as racist – and attributing the self with the capacity to overcome this discriminatory structure.

Regarding the Angolan *people*, Pearce (2017) shows that one of the main tactics used by the movements during the civil war was the political education of the population controlled by them. Thus, more than the voluntary and intentional adherence to a particular party, the political control over determined regions had been the most determinant factor in cultivating a feeling among the population of belonging to one or other movement. Although it is important to emphasize that there existed contingents loyal to a movement outside its territory of control, the labels ‘UNITA people’ or ‘government people’ were common and created an analogy between the acceptance of an ideology and the adherence to the forces controlling the territory. This served as a circumstantial political impulse to the movements: those belonging to the MPLA, or the ‘government,’ were those under its authority, while the inhabitants of the territories occupied by UNITA belonged to the latter. It is no coincidence that during fieldwork¹⁹ we regularly heard the joke that, during the war, whenever a territory was under dispute, on being stopped by a soldier from one of the movements, the Angolans crossed their fingers that they would put their hand in the right pocket and hand over the right document to the authorities – that is, the document confirming that they belonged, as part of the *People*, to the forces checking their identity, and not to the *enemy*.

Final considerations

The end of the Angolan civil war was marked by the death of Jonas Savimbi on February 22, 2002. The discourses of the MPLA after this event constructed an image of this movement as the party responsible for bringing peace to Angola (Soares, 2015; Pearce, 2017; Schubert, 2017; Oliveira, 2017). This discourse was associated with the project of ‘national reconstruction’ of the post-war period led by José Eduardo dos Santos, who left the presidency in September 2017. As the government became associated with Luanda after the independence of Angola, from this moment on the state became increasingly indissociable from the MPLA. Having ended the war, the latter movement started to exert a kind of ownership over the national identity by presenting itself as the movement that not only fought against Portuguese colonialism but also defeated the guerrilla warfare undertaken by the *enemy*, restoring peace to the country.

External factors related to world geopolitics unquestionably had a major influence on the development and termination of the civil conflict in Angola. But as we have argued over the course of analysing the categories articulated in the discourses of Angola’s political leaders, paying attention to language provides an insight into the entanglements of local power relations. These are apprehensible through an analysis of the relation between historically constituted labels and contextually determined social positionalities.

¹⁹ We completed six months fieldwork in total, conducted intermittently between 2014 and 2019. The research was concentrated mainly in Luanda, Huambo and other locations of the Central Highlands.

In the context of the civil war, given Angola's recent independence, the conflict between the colonizing past and future possibilities was latent. In this sense, as we have demonstrated, the political rhetoric sought to articulate these two moments, the negativized past and the future understood as a possibility still to be built. Thus, the negative image associated with the colonial past was attributed by the movements to the 'other,' while the place of the legitimate movement to exercise the power of the state was occupied by the self. The continuities and discontinuities with the colonial past were manifested through categories constituted and transformed in the historical process (McClintock, 2010).

Over this article, we have analysed accusatory practices in the speeches of Jonas Savimbi, Agostinho Neto and José Eduardo dos Santos, configured principally through associations with the colonial past: *imperialist*, *neocolonizer*, *racist*, *tribalist*. These practices sought to delegitimize the other movement by attributing to it a place from which it would be impossible to govern the Angolan nation, transforming it into an *enemy*. These associations with the past were also established through the connection made between the 'other' and its foreign supporters in the Cold War context, a relationship in which a continuation of colonialism was identified. It should be recalled that the categories utilized in the discourses not only marked the turning points in the conflict, as argued by Oliveira (2017) and Pearce (2017), they also made visible the different positionalities occupied by political movements and their elites in this context. As we have shown above, these positionalities and the labels associated with them necessarily link to a colonial process shared in different forms by the MPLA and UNITA. It was the fact that the movements were connected in distinct ways to this process that enabled them, on one hand, to level accusations against the 'other' that, they argued, were inapplicable to themselves and, on the other, to utilize precisely the same categories for this purpose.

As the two movements had emerged in association with distinct regional elites, both found themselves needing to answer the question of how to legitimize their representativity vis-à-vis the Angolan *people*. In this process, they conferred a formal representativity to this idea absent in the colonial period. The *people* appear in the speeches of the three leaders as the people they needed to stand alongside, since they configured and validated the legitimacy of the movement as a representative of Angola. Hence, the arguments made by each movement aimed to connect the *people* to themselves, while simultaneously establishing a distance between the *people* and the 'other,' the *enemy*, through diverse accusations: a *deceiver*, the side responsible for continuing colonialism and starting the civil war. What becomes evident in this kind of narrative is the double movement provoked by the acts of accusation: while this movement can be understood as the construction of a self-image, it also results in an opposite image, qualified as the image of the *enemy* 'other.' These processes of differentiation – processes that specify contrary positions of subjects and groups in the discourses of both the MPLA and UNITA – are informed by categories and hierarchies that can be traced back to colonialism. In our analysis, we have focused on how Angolan subjects negotiated the relations established by themselves and the hierarchies that they mobilized through categories that implied sociopolitical distinctions already existing in the context in question (Spivak, 2010). However, despite the endeavour to differentiate, the categories through which the opposition between the 'us' and the 'other' is realized are mostly the same. The mirror game through which the self and the 'other' is constructed depends, therefore, on a shared language.

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