Escola de Sociologia e Políticas Públicas

The plateau of trials: modern ethnicity in Angola

Vasco Martins

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de

Doutor em Estudos Africanos

Orientador:
Fernando José Pereira Florêncio
Doutor em Estudos Africanos, Professor Auxiliar, Departamento de Ciências da Vida,
Universidade de Coimbra

Agosto, 2015

ISCTE IUL
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Escola de Sociologia e Políticas Públicas

The plateau of trials: modern ethnicity in Angola

Vasco Martins

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de

Doutor em Estudos Africanos

Júri:
Doutora Helena Maria Barroso Carvalho, Professora Auxiliar do ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
Doutor José Carlos Gaspar Venâncio, Professor Catedrático do Departamento de Sociologia da Universidade da Beira Interior
Doutor Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, Professor Auxiliar do St. Peters College da Universidade de Oxford
Doutor Manuel António de Medeiros Ennes Ferreira, Professor Auxiliar do Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão
Doutor Eduardo Costa Dias Martins, Professor Auxiliar do ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
Doutora Ana Lúcia Lopes de Sá, Professora Auxiliar Convidada do ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
Doutor Fernando José Pereira Florêncio, Professor Auxiliar da Faculdade de Ciência e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra (Orientador)

Agosto, 2015

Acknowledgements

The profession of an academic is many times regarded as solitary work. There is some truth to this statement, especially if like me, one spends most of the time reading, writing and agonising over countless editions at home. However, there is an uncountable amount of people involved in bringing a PhD thesis to life, people to whom I am most grateful.

During the duration of my PhD programme I have benefitted from a scholarship provided by the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia. This allowed me to be free of financial preoccupations at a time when financial preoccupations affected everyone around me. Without this scholarship it would have been impossible to even think about this project. Now that it is finished, I am nothing but extremely grateful to the FCT.

To my supervisor Fernando Florêncio, my deepest gratitude. For the travels, the advice, the lessons, all the revisions and the countless hours speaking and sharing stories about Angola. I honestly could not have asked for a better advisor.

Preparing to travel and live in Angola is filled with such great financial and logistical obstacles that one encounters them without even setting foot on an airplane. I remember vividly the difficulties of applying to a visa to enter Angola, a fairly complex, expensive and bureaucratic endeavour that alone took me one month to complete. Fortunately, after several contacts with negative or no reply whatsoever I was able to get both an invitation and fieldwork assistance during my stay by the good people at ADRA-Angola and its office in Huambo. My greatest thanks to Dr. Belarmino Jelembi, Director Maria La Salette and Tio Bernardino, friend, translator, storyteller and companion of many travels and witness to several successes and failures.

During my stay in Angola I was lucky to have met Inge van Cauwenberg. Having lived in Angola for nearly two decades, Inge provided me with many invaluable contacts, essentially pulling my fieldwork from the rut of missed calls, failed encounters, strange faces and countless political queries. Most importantly, Inge extended her trust to the people I was to interview, often uncomfortable to talk about my research topic, fearful of my identity and unwilling to revisit the

recent past. Through Inge I must also thank Development Workshop-Huambo, which allowed me to use one of their offices to conduct interviews, organise notes and think about tomorrow.

My thanks also go to a friend of my family, whose name I refrain from revealing, for arranging accommodation and picking me at the airport (a vital part of travelling to Angola). Much of my time outside work was spent at his house with our bellies full and our feet in the water. I met many good people during my stay in Huambo. Too many stories and funny episodes prevent me from knowing what to write here. It won't be long before we meet again. Tokassikumossi!

On a more personal note, I must thank my true companion, Rita Guerreiro. She never wavered after suffering through four years of my many ramblings, doubts and hours of explaining and talking about Angola. I am happy that I could have shared some of Angola with her. A word of gratitude to my parents, whose constant support and conviction of success throughout the years enabled me to get to this point. To my friends, thank you for helping with revisions. Having to endure lengthy explanations of Ovimbundu history was no small feat.

Finally, a much needed word about funding. Although funds are available they are still deeply insufficient, especially considering the very expensive cost of living and travelling to and inside Angola. An old Ovimbundu proverb says: "the turtle does not climb the tree on its own. Someone must put it there." As of this date, recent cuts to research funding and research centres are creating deeper obstacles to the advancement of science in Portugal, forcing not only researchers and scholars to look elsewhere for opportunity but also terminating some of the opportunities my Angolan peers had in conducting their research in Portugal.

I was told by someone in Huambo that it is good that I'm doing research about the Ovimbundu for they don't know anything about themselves. Although a small contribution, this work is about them and for them. My most honest wishes for peace in our time.

Resumo

Esta dissertação trata a etnicidade moderna dos Ovimbundu do planalto central de Angola, revelando o modo como as conceções de etnicidade dessa população foram alteradas por processos de modernização, frequentemente introduzidos por elementos externos ao grupo, e como esta modernização étnica veio a desempenhar um papel crítico, depois da independência do país.

Este trabalho, seguindo um contraste na literatura existente entre a atribuição de uma importância bastante significativa à etnicidade na agência humana ou a minimização do seu impacto face a outros elementos explicativos, posiciona-se entre as duas abordagens, isto é, encontra um argumento comum entre as duas vertentes literárias. É adotada uma abordagem construtivista, patente em toda a tese e comumente utilizada em estudos académicos, que permite uma análise da etnicidade moderna dos Ovimbundu, cruzando as várias influências a que a população do planalto central esteve exposta com a sua própria agência e capacidade de imaginar e seguir novas ideias associadas à modernização. Começa então a surgir um paradigma, fruto das experiências apreendidas durante o colonialismo, influenciadas por processos de evangelização e colonização, que permitem uma compreensão mais clara e completa de aspetos relacionados com a organização dos movimentos políticos, a própria guerra civil e outros referentes a reconciliação no pós-guerra, integração e formação do estado. Ganha forma a ideia de que, ao longo da exposição dos argumentos, a construção e imaginação de identidades políticas dependem muito dos vários processos de modernização étnica, que são ainda influentes na vida das pessoas na Angola contemporânea.

Abstract

This thesis is a study about the modern ethnicity of the Ovimbundu of the central highlands of Angola. It shows how Ovimbundu conceptions of ethnicity became altered and enhanced by processes of modernisation, usually introduced by foreign agents, and how this modernisation came to play a critical role after independence.

Following a contrast in existing literature between either the attribution of vital importance to ethnicity in human agency or the downplay of it in favour of other elements, this work may be positioned in the middle, that is, it finds common ground with both arguments. I follow a constructivist approach, patent throughout the thesis and much used by many academic studies, which enables the analysis of Ovimbundu modern ethnicity by crossing the several influences the people of the central highlands were exposed to with their own agency and capacity to imagine and follow new ideas, mostly associated with modernisation. A paradigm begins emerging, one that recurs to the experiences apprehended during colonialism, influenced by processes of evangelisation and colonisation, which allow a clearer and more complete comprehension of aspects pertaining to the organisation of the political movements, the civil-war and issues related with post-war reconciliation, integration and state-formation. It becomes clear that the construction and imagination of political identities was much dependent upon processes of ethnic modernisation, which are still influential in people's lives in contemporary Angola.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS i

RESUMO iii

ABSTRACT iv

INTRODUCTION 1

Methodology 22

Organisation of chapters 27

CHAPTER 1. Religious missions in the central highlands 31

1.1 The influence of Protestantism 35

1.2 Catholic schooling and modernity 69

CHAPTER 2. Ethnic ramifications of colonial agency 83

2.1 Indirect rule 88

2.2 Moral ethnicity and early political tribalism 107

CHAPTER 3. The Ovimbundu and the liberation war 127

3.1 Early Ovimbundu anti-colonial nationalism 132

3.2 The Ovimbundu in the ethnicisation of the conflict 144

CHAPTER 4. Ovimbundu political ethnicity under UNITA 161

4.1 The ethnic mobilization of UNITA 165

4.2 UNITA and the modern imagination of Ovimbundu 191

CHAPTER 5. Integration and citizenship 221

5.1 On integration and reconciliation 223

5.2 On citizenship and nationalism 252

CONCLUSION 261

BIBLIOGRAPHY 269

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study about the Ovimbundu of the central highlands of Angola, encompassing a period of almost a century. The object of this study is the impact of modernisation in Ovimbundu ethnicity through a historical overview. It intends to clarify the centrality of ethnicity in human agency and in socio-political organization by covering the most important changes that challenged the established norms of this group in the 20th century. As such, the relevance of this study is multidimensional. Not only does it provide new historical outlooks but it also advances insights into the contemporary challenges and anxieties the Ovimbundu are experiencing, touching upon issues of ethnic consciousness, mobilization and solidarity, reconciliation, integration and citizenship.

Until this date, there exist no studies of modern ethnicity singularly focused on the Ovimbundu. This thesis looks to cover that gap. While most research available does make reference to modernity and ethnicity, both concepts are usually not the object of analysis, since greater importance is frequently given to thematically specific subjects, usually the historiography of the group, studies of colonial administration and Christian influence or the civil war. This thesis presents a different approach by utilising modern ethnicity as a central framework to evaluate particular aspects of Ovimbundu history, essentially examining the impact of historical processes upon ethnicity. The aim is to understand how specific processes and shifts in structure – towards modernity - have shaped Ovimbundu ethnicity and how the Ovimbundu responded to these changes in order to examine the results of these developments in both conflict and post-conflict contexts. It is a study intended to provide a more inclusive framework for the study of ethnicity in Angola, one that intends to evaluate the centrality of ethnicity while clarifying some of its myths and preconceptions. It is an important addition to Angolan studies, and African studies in general, one that recovers the concept of ethnicity and modernity and examines it in a new light while taking into consideration aspects of recent Angolan history that will definitely help in providing a solid background for other upcoming studies and scholarly analysis.

Angolan studies, in comparison to studies of other African countries, particularly Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Zimbabwe or DRC studies, to mention but a few, are significantly underdeveloped. Ease of access to conduct fieldwork after the end of the war and Angola's rise as an important actor in regional and international affairs, alongside its fast growing economy, have attracted the attention of researchers and scholars of many domains to its study. As such, although embryonic, Angolan studies are composed of a patchwork of very important research. While there is still much to be understood and explained, what characterises Angolan studies is an effort to build the research foundations scholars of other African countries – those that did not experience conflict and difficulties of access – already enjoy. Angolan studies have yet to provide unique dimensions of analysis or even defy established dogmas in the African studies discipline. I suspect its possible contribution to be immense.

Among Angolan studies, those focusing on the Ovimbundu or their region of habitation, the central highlands (*planalto central*), begin, like in so many African countries, with studies and publications produced by explorers and anthropologists, by the colonial state and Christian missionaries. Serpa Pinto documented his journeys through the area, as did Silva Porto and László Magyar. These journeys allowed the documentation of geographic and human positions in the area, aiding in military conquest and colonial administrative expansion. Although it is many times asserted that there exists little documentation available on Angola, the colonial state did gather information, as did people interested in that territory. For instance, three tomes named Angolana (documentação sobre Angola) published by the Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola and the Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, mainly pertaining to correspondence sent between various actors, not only European but also African, reflecting the various processes and perceptions of colonial expansion, as well as the methods of co-optation of African elites but also the immense problems the endeavour carried, ridden with disease and revolt, are a single example of the availability of information.[1] Growing Christian interest in the region also helped

[1] Maria da Conceição Neto notes that in fact there exists a significant amount of information about Angola. The bibliography section of her PhD dissertation attests to this and is a prime example of the availability of material regarding not only Angola but the central highlands specifically. See Neto, Maria

in the production of literature, especially by the hand of Protestant missionaries. John Tucker, Lawrence Anderson and especially Gladwin Murray Childs, whose work is still one of the best sources of information of the time concerning the Ovimbundu – although published in 1949 –, represent very important additions to our understanding of this people and the impact of the Christian endeavour at the time. Much more documentation exists, written by scholars, colonial officials and Christian missionaries, stored in many archives around the world, particularly in Portugal, France, Switzerland, Canada and the USA, as well as Angola. Historians also began researching colonial expansion, capitalism, class and slavery. René Pélissier and Clarence-Smith Gervaise produced a series of publications on these themes. Already at the last decades of the colonial period many other authors appear. José Redinha, the Portuguese anthropologist, Merran McCulloch, Wilfrid D. Hambly or Adrian C. Edwards, writing about Ovimbundu life with an anthropological and sociological take. Herman Pössinger provided an important contribution to the study of agrarian policies and its effects on peasant life in the central highlands. Franz Heimer and the contributors in "Social change in Angola", especially Douglas Wheeler and Diane Christensen's "Rise with one mind", a study about the Bailundo revolt of 1902, made the problematic of ethnic homogeneity particularly salient and opened the path for contestation and renewed thought about these matters. Not less relevant were the efforts to record and publish Ovimbundu grammars, proverbs and tales, issued by individuals, colonial institutions and Christian missions. Merlin Ennis, José Francisco Valente and Basilio Tchikale's work all added contributions to the understanding of Ovimbundu knowledge and experience that are still yet to be integrated in larger studies about Ovimbundu morality, experience and wisdom. More recently Development Workshop, an Angolan NGO, published a book on Ovimbundu tales and proverbs about the resolution of conflicts, crucial information - albeit in very raw form - to start enquiring about Ovimbundu morality and historical experience.

The liberation war and ensuing civil war further incentivised research in Angolan studies, attracting a number of foreign academics interested in the rise of Angolan nationalism. Basil

---

da Conceição (2012), *In and out of town: A social history of Huambo (Angola) 1902-1961*, PhD thesis in History, London, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, pp. 298-340.

Davidson's "The eye of the storm", alongside René Pélissier's "La colonie du minotaure", John Marcum's two tomes "Angolan revolution", Gerald Bender's "Angola under the Portuguese", David Birmingham "Frontline nationalism" are some of the central publications to any analysis of that period. Many non-academic books and testimonies have also been published, mostly personal accounts of those who witnessed historical events, as well as fiction novels by Angolan writers. Recently, important actors during the Angolan civil war began publishing their memoirs, namely Jardo Muekalia, Alcides Sakala, Samuel Chiwale, Miguel N'zau Puna or Ivo Carreia. Personal correspondence and authored books have also added to the available list of publications, stemming from Jonas Savimbi's books to the very interesting compilation of Lucio Lara's correspondence during the early days of the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), besides tomes compiling speeches of Angolan leaders, particularly those of Jonas Savimbi and José Eduardo dos Santos.

This patchwork of publications has, more recently, provided enough material for academics to engage with and produce scientific work. With regards to the Ovimbundu and the central highlands, Maria da Conceição Neto's many papers and conference talks, besides a brilliant, informative PhD thesis, have significantly helped in demystifying historical incongruences and laying the groundwork for further analysis of the region. Linda Heywood's work also figures as a very important contribution, especially two articles and a book based on intense archive work in Angola. Of crucial mention is Christine Messiant's work, composed of a wide array of studies of which three books are today acknowledged as among the very best about Angola, "1961" and a compilation of some of her works in "L'Angola postcolonial" volumes 1 and 2. Her research on ethnicity, contesting many of the findings of the 1960s and 70s, especially those of René Pélissier and John Marcum, certainly opened a new path that made a study about modern ethnicity possible. This momentum was continued in the 21st century, with the work of Christopher Cramer, Didier Péclard, Justin Pearce or Assis Malaquias, in published articles, unpublished PhD thesis and books, which have given tremendous advancement to the understanding of the problematics and consequences of evangelisation in the central highlands,

the relationship between political movements and people, collective memory, inequality and ethnicity, and civil war dynamics.

It is noteworthy to mention that most of these recent studies – apart from Malaquias' – contest earlier findings about the centrality of ethnicity in the Angolan civil war. This thesis does not attempt to revive former understandings of the importance of ethnicity in the civil war but rather examine its underlying impulses to understand how uses of ethnicity, even when proper ethnic divisions may not be established, have influenced the life of the Ovimbundu before, during and after the conflicts. Although I do agree with the downplay of the importance of ethnicity, or at least its ambiguity in the face of other perhaps more revealing elements, I also recognise that not only it may still provide additional value in understanding Angolan and particularly Ovimbundu history but it is also an important factor to explain conflict and post-conflict dynamics. In essence, although ethnicity may have never been a central factor in Ovimbundu agency it cannot be completely excluded from any study of this people. If specific events were overwhelmingly ethnic in nature, like the electoral violence registered during the 1992 elections, they were certainly instilled by previous processes, revealing not simple spontaneous manifestations of ethnic targeted violence but rather complex historical and social constructions that defined the ethnic landscape of Angola during that period.

There exists today enough informative background and conceptual clarity to begin tracing the modernisation and politicisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity, even if studies of the historiography of the group are rare and significantly underdeveloped, virtually only produced and disputed by a handful of authors, most already mentioned. Fortunately, there exist an overwhelming number of studies about modern ethnicity in Africa to allow an informative assessment, even though ethnicity only became a central subject for scholars of Africa after the first independences, in the 1950s and 60s. In this realm John Lonsdale traces five different academic approaches to the politics of African ethnicity since the 1950s, when it first began appearing on scientific studies.[2]

---

[2] Lonsdale, John (1994), "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism", in Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (eds.), *Inventions and boundaries: historical and anthropological approaches to the study of ethnicity and nationalism*, Roskilde, International Development Studies, Roskilde University. For other important

Firstly, since during much of the colonial period it was accepted that Africans were politically organised in tribal units, scholars were firstly drawn into modernisation theory when thinking about post-colonial nation-building. With the success and reach of African nationalist movements, their inclusive agendas and national projects, many scholars were led to consider that the processes of modernisation Africans had been subjected to during and after colonial rule would weaken traditional tribal hierarchies and allegiances. In the face of the social, economic and political changes across the societal spectrum, it was assumed that modernity would be embraced and parochial tribalism relinquished as a memory of a fast receding past. Modernisation theory became the go to approach of the early post-independence studies. As Vail observed, "the general paradigm of "modernisation" appealed to almost every political viewpoint. For almost every observer nationalism seemed progressive and laudable, while ethnicity – or, as it was usually termed, "tribalism" – was retrogressive and divisive."[3]

Modernisation theory, accepting the idea that pre-colonial Africa had, above all, been a land of tribes, defended that modernity, mainly through capitalism, bureaucracy, urbanisation and literacy had certainly modernised African life. In this, urban sociology played a crucial role: "The reasons are plain enough: urban centres were the arenas of social encounter and competition, where group labels came to structure the rivalries over a host of scarce resources: jobs, school places, land plots, trade licenses. Novel forms of social consciousness took form around these struggles, which attracted attention and some original explorations."[4] But as the "tribal" label was soon erased from the lexicon, in great part due to works such as Aidan Southall's and Frederik Barth's[5], a shift which reflected a transformation in perceptions of the phenomenon[6], novel forms

---

publications in the francophone world see Amselle, Jean-Loup and Elikia M'Bokolo (2007), *Au Coeur de l'ethnie: ethnie, tribalism et État en Afrique*, Découverte, (original edition 1985); Chrétien, Jean-Pierre and Gérar Prunier (dir.) (1989), *Les ethnies ont une histoire*, Paris, Karthala.

[3] Vail, Leroy (ed.) (1989), *The creation of tribalism in southern Africa*, Oxford, James Currey, p.2.

[4] Young, Crawford (1986), "Nationalism, ethnicity and class in Africa: a retrospective", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 103, p. 444.

[5] See Southall, Aidan W. (1970), "The illusion of tribe", in Peter W. Gutkind (ed.), *The passing of tribal man in Africa*, Leiden, E. J. Brill; and Barth, Frederik (1969), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference*, Universitetsforlaget.

of consciousness took root in scholarly discourse. In particular, African ethnicity, in either urban or rural spaces, was understood not as inflexibly tribal, with rigid boundaries and simple static organisation systems, but rather fruit of very complex “interlocking, overlapping, multiple collective identities”.[7] This lead to the conclusion, as Berman argues, that “the development of African historical research over the past forty years, which has transformed understanding of both pre-colonial and colonial societies, has not been fully effectively assimilated in the various versions of modernisation theory and political development theory, which remain largely based on erroneous assumptions about “traditional society” and misconceptions of the “colonial legacy”.[8]

Modernisation theory wrongly assumed that ethnicity was more salient among those who had been less exposed to modernity, namely the rural peasantry. In essence, those who stood closer to “modernity centres” would tend to forget their ancient ethnic (formerly tribal) ways and gradually be integrated in the modern institutions of colonial and post-colonial states. But as Jean-François Bayart argues, ethnicity cannot be divorced from the changes of this century: urbanisation, the construction of a new communication network, the introduction of new relationships of production, and the increase in migratory and commercial movements.[9] As Berman continues, “the accumulating weight of evidence shows that African ethnicity and its relationship to politics is new, not old: a response to capitalist modernity shaped by similar forces to those related to the development of ethnic nationalism in Europe since the late nineteenth century, but encountered in distinct African and colonial circumstances.”[10] It was the ability of creating new responses to capitalist modernity that made ethnicity thrive, far from the primordial iterations of tribal or traditional life. This became more evident since, as Vail notes, African

---

[6] Young, Crawford, “Nationalism, ethnicity and class”, p. 444.

[7] Southall, Aidan, “The illusion of tribe”, p. 44.

[8] Berman, Bruce (1998), “Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism”, *African Affairs*, 97, p. 30.

[9] Bayart, Jean-François (2009), *The state in Africa: the politics of the belly*, Cambridge, Polity Press, (Second Edition), p. 50.

[10] Berman, Bruce, “Ethnicity, patronage and the African state”, p. 308.

nationalist movements were largely unable to create a progressive vision beyond anti-colonial rhetoric able to encompass ethnic manifestations, mainly due to the economic development discourse that usually only benefited the dominant political classes and possessed little popular appeal. The result was a distancing of Africans from state structures, which brought new life to ethnic or regional movements who came to be seen as "attractive alternatives to the dominant political parties with their demands for uncomplaining obedience from the governed."[11] Political elites, frustrated by these developments and influenced by modernisation theory, deemed this to be the tribalism of the backward masses.

Nevertheless, already in 1950s, George Balandier denied that ethnic groups were receding, unappealing forms of human society. Looking at religious movements in Bacongo society, in Congo, Balandier notes how these had the option to "break away and set up camp elsewhere so that they could continue to practice their religion in freedom", revealing processes of a wider reaction to the colonial situation. "The group reacted on the plane where it felt itself to be most directly threatened – that of its fundamental beliefs and attitudes." This reaction, continues Balandier, "allowed the Congolese religious movements to bring about a revival of initiative and, at the same time, an attempt to reorganise society. They helped to counteract the processes responsible for the breakdown of communities and the weakening of cohesion. (…) More or less consciously, the new movements sought to restore the broken ties and rebuild the community." In this way, an entire ethnic group began to discover a sense of unity and became conscious of its position. Thus, the only way it could recreate itself socially was by opposing all forms of foreign authority. This led Balandier to conclude that "at a time when new forms of organization are the order of the day, when new economic and social relations are being established, certain fundamental ways of life and collective attitudes ensure a basis of stability, and serve as a kind of retreat."[12] In essence, Balandier explained tribalism as a mode of resistance to capitalist exploitation and state oppression, understanding tribe not as an inevitably "emptying

[11] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 2.

[12] Balandier, Georges (1970), *The sociology of black Africa: social dynamics in Central Africa*, London, Praeger Publishers, pp. 462-465.

barrel but a careful reconstructed refuge, a local moral order, that sheltered one from the disorders caused by racist state power and externally dominated markets."[13]

Jean-François Bayart referred to this as the "exit option". According to this author, it continues to be "a viable strategy whose persistence is evident in the political arena which, when taken to extremes, leads to territorial sanctuaries. (…) In their actions they double up the state root system with their own networks and provide logistical support to the "exit option", all the more appreciated as the stagnation of the official economy forces the "little men" to fall back on other social solidarities."[14] Although Bayart was not specifically referring to ethnic groups but also to other social categories, particularly religious sects and groups, his "exit option" approach does match Balandier's understanding of ethnicity as a mode of social resistance from exploitation and oppression, as Lonsdale observed. In its extreme forms, the "exit option" may threaten the spatial hold of the state. The Angolan civil war – or other secessionist conflicts or wars with very salient social divides (i.e. Nigerian civil war) –, is a clear example of this, although unlike some religious movements, the "exit option" taken by *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) in the Angolan context did not ignore the state but rather attempted to subverted it in order to achieve its control. These models of resistance and "exit" contest the main underpinnings of modernisation theory. Like Lonsdale concluded, "if Africa is a continent of frustrated modernisation, in which increasing numbers of its people feel that, despite seizing the political kingdom, not much has been added to them, it may be entirely rational to withdraw from national politics and markets. Ethnicity can be a local triumph over national failure."[15]

The third academic approach to the politics of ethnicity in Africa was to explain ethnicity away as a by-product of colonialism, with several important nuances. This approach is based on the concept that the colonial state's power to divide-and-rule was unprecedented in pre-colonial Africa and its arbitrary divisions, particularly in territorial administration and labour stereotyping

---

[13] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism", p. 133.

[14] Bayart, Jean François, "The state in Africa", p. 256.

[15] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity", p. 134.

were much responsible for the "creation of tribes". It is perhaps better explained by John Illife's contextualization that "the British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework."[16] The colonial framework of interaction and administration with Africans was, in virtually all colonised Africa, indirect-rule.[17] Indirect-rule generally sponsored "tribal" or ethnic conceptions of society through the exercise of customary law and the power it attributed to African chiefs, literally making them a part of the colonial state apparatus. In Angola, the Estatuto Político, Civil e Criminal dos Indígenas and the Reforma Administrativa Ultramarina were particularly responsible for such dynamics. Divisions were traced between those who were under civil law and those indigenous Africans who were subject to customary law, which was imposed by an African chief empowered by the colonial state to that end. By supporting African chiefs and the rules of customary law, colonialism essentially preserved but also encouraged the transformation of ethnic traditions, which promoted local, as opposed to broader loyalties. Colonial conceptions of ethnic division of labour, based on the assumption that some "tribes" were more predisposed for specific occupations, also based on geographic conditions – soil fertility, rainfall or access to markets – alongside the work of Christian missionaries, especially in the codification of African languages and the promotion of education, functioned as the crystallisation of ethnic identities. As already mentioned in Iliffe's words, the African reaction was to appropriate the identities Europeans had bestowed upon them for themselves.

This was so because in large part colonialism severely limited the social and economic advancement of Africans, mainly possible through the colonial structures and needs of the colonial state, which left labour recruitment to African chiefs. These were ultimately able to adapt African custom and tradition to match European expectations in order to meet colonial demands. The conclusion of this approach was that ethnicity could be instrumentalised. Real material benefits, mostly associated with modernity, incentivised Africans to use tribes, or ethnic

---

[16] Iliffe, John (1979), *A modern history of Tanganyika*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 318.

[17] See Mamdani, Mahmood (1996), *Citizen and subject: contemporary African and the legacy of late colonialism*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, pp. 86-87.

groups, not necessarily as modern refuges as Balandier had determined, but also as a means of access to state power as much as withdrawal from it. Ethnic groups came to represent "coalitions which have been formed as part of rational efforts to secure benefits created by the forces of modernisation - benefits which are desired but scarce – hence why they tend to compete with each other."[18] This helped to crystallise group organisation and identity, which were being used as weapons for appropriation of power rather than, as Balandier argued, for social resistance or moral defence. Nevertheless, Vail criticises this approach for three main reasons: first, it fails to explain why in a particular territory throughout which the colonial state employed divide-and-rule policies, ethnic consciousness developed unevenly; second, it tends to depict Africans as little more than either collaborating dupes or naive and gullible people, a situation which empirical evidence fails to corroborate; finally, it does not explain the persistence of tribalism or its close kin, regionalism, in the post-colonial era. These shortcomings lead Vail to conclude that the "clever blandishments of subtle European administrators are clearly insufficient to explain either the origins of ethnic consciousness or its continuing appeal today."[19]

Nonetheless, the dominant academic discourse during the 1970s and 1980s was focused on the assertion of structuralist and materialist – usually Marxist – interpretations of African society. Coleman and Halisi's assessment of Africanist political science applied to much other scholarly work in Africa "issues of class, dependency, and political economy, the emerging omnibus code words of the new epoch".[20] Within these contents, ethnicity was often viewed as a particularly regrettable "false consciousness", to be trivialised, dismissed or disparaged.[21] On the materialist perspective, Atkinson writes that if it did not promote work on ethnicity, it was much less suited or inclined to explore Africa's pre-colonial past, exactly the lacuna Crawford Young

[18] Bates, Robert (1983), "Modernisation, ethnic competition, and the rationality of politics in contemporary Africa", p. 152, in Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola (eds.), *State versus ethnic claims: African policy dilemmas*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press.

[19] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 4.

[20] Atkinson, Ronald (1999), "The (re)construction of ethnicity in Africa: extending the chronology, conceptualization and discourse", p. 20, in Yeros, Paris (ed.), *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press.

[21] Atkinson, Ronald, "The (re)construction of ethnicity", p. 20.

deemed the tyranny of the present that permeates political science[22] Lonsdale is ever more assertive towards the materialist perspective, the Marxist modernisation theory, noting how Marxists did not need to ask why ethnicity should be so effective as a form of false consciousness and that they were naively optimistic about the attractiveness of a worker or peasant class identity to poor Africans.[23] The strength of ethnicity caught many off guard, hence why only in the late 1980s and especially after the Rwandan genocide of 1994 did ethnicity gain a preponderant role in social science.[24] This does not mean that it was not a powerful force in African societies prior to the 1980s. As Atkinson explains, "the inclination to minimise ethnicity in Africanist scholarship persisted despite the surge of ethnic consciousness across Africa in the wake of the failed political and economic premises of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle. Within a few short years of independence, early hopes gave way to the political entrenchment and material enrichment of dominant political classes, most often in the form of one-party states or military rules."[25] As a consequence, Vail argues, "in effect the revitalization of tribalism was structured into the one-party system by the very fact of that system's existence. Ethnicity became the home of the opposition in states where class consciousness was largely undeveloped. Ethnic particularism has consequently continued to bedevil efforts to build nations to the specifications of the ruling party for the past two decades or more."[26] But more than a resource of political opposition, it became clear that ethnicity was important for the entire spectrum of the political class. As Berman observes, even as they "ritually denounce tribalism, African politicians, in the open secret of African politics, sedulously attend to the maintenance of the ethnic networks of patronage that are the basis of their power."[27] Many one-party states, even with Marxist ideologies like the MPLA-PT, still maintained patronage networks of support, not ethnically

[22] Atkinson, Ronald, "The (re)construction of ethnicity", p. 29. See Young, Crawford, (1994), *The African colonial state in comparative perspective*, New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 10.

[23] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity", pp. 135-136.

[24] Particularly since 1989, a year marked by an outpouring of work on ethnicity. See Atkinson, Ronald, "The (re)construction of ethnicity", p. 27-28, for an in-depth exposition of publications since that period.

[25] Atkinson, Ronald, "The (re)construction of ethnicity", p. 20.

[26] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p.2.

[27] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 306.

specific but certainly regionally established.[28] It was against this evidence that the premise holding ethnicity as a "false consciousness", supposedly masquerading class struggles, was generally dropped in academic discourse.

Finally, already in the early 1990s ethnic studies became overwhelmingly influenced by publications concerning nationalism, notably those of Ernest Geller, *Nations and nationalism*, Eric Hobsbawn's *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The invention of tradition*, particularly Ranger's chapter on this widely read book, and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined communities*. Much based on these works, scholars began to equate ethnicity with nationalism, similarly emphasizing the role of "modern" elements – different from the premises of modernisation theory –, particularly literacy, in the construction of the "imagined communities" or "invented traditions", that is, national and collective identities, modern conceptions that became a major feature in subsequent representations of ethnicity.[29] This was based on the modern approaches to the theories of nationalism, which deny the pre-modern ancestry of ethnicity and nationalism and, more importantly, focus on constructivism, the mainstream theory on academic studies of ethnicity. It essentially began by making a broad utilisation of Anderson's "imagined communities" concept[30] to scrutinise the impact of modernity in ethnicity through structures different from those of the pre-colonial period.

John Breuilly noted that nationalism was above all about politics. Since politics is about power and in the modern world power is lastly achieved by control of the state, nationalism is related to the objective of controlling state power. John Markakis makes a similar comparison with ethnicity. Since ethnicity became prominent due to its political manifestations, it has the same relation to the state as nationalism, that is, its objectives are to obtain and use state power in

---

[28] Messiant, Christine (2008), *L'Angola postcolonial. I. guerre et paix sans démocratisation*, Éditions Karthala, pp. 53.

[29] Atkinson, Ronald, "The (re)construction of ethnicity", p. 29. This is one of the reasons pointed by Atkinson to justify the focus of ethnic studies on the recent past and too little on the pre-colonial period.

[30] Also of Terence Ranger's invention of tradition, until the author reverted to the uses of imagination instead of invention.

order to gain access to the resources commanded by the state.[31] This approach, by equating ethnicity with nationalism, made the ground-breaking advancement of allowing disputes of power to be scrutinised politically and socially both within the internal and external dimensions of ethnicity. In this perspective, Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale came to produce some of the finest works in African ethnicity literature.

Terence Ranger writes that Berman's work, much like Lonsdale's, are different for the importance they attribute to internal dialectics of identity.[32] Like the 19th century nationalisms in Europe, this wave of writings in African ethnicity sees pre-colonial societies as experiencing processes of identity differentiation, class formation and material accumulation, in essence vigorously ridden with lively conflict before colonialism or capitalism made its mark. They deny many of the static, traditional and communalistic approaches of previous years in favour of more factual versions, which they were able to explore as historians began researching pre-colonial ethnicity. Berman acknowledges that differences in the deployment and management of structures affected the nature of the relationship between the colonial state and indigenous Africans by fruit of variances in structure and control that produced or nurtured different historical scopes of ethnic politics.[33] Different structures produced by dissimilar colonial models enacted different African responses. However, the link between colonial structures and African ethnicities is always apparent:

> "The social construction of modern forms of ethnicity in Africa is conterminous with the development of the structure and culture of colonialism. The structural characteristics of the colonial state, an apparatus of authoritarian bureaucratic control, and of the colonial political economy, based on African cash-crops and wage labour in capitalist commodity

[31] Markakis, John (1999), "Nationalism and ethnicity in the horn of Africa", p. 72, in Paris Yeros (ed.), *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press.

[32] Ranger, Terrence (1993), "The invention of tradition revisited", p. 35, in Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa,* London, Macmillan.

[33] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 313.

and labour markets, radically, albeit only partially, transformed the structural and spatial organisation of African societies."[34]

The proposition here is to look at colonialism as a factor of additional complexity, not of novel creation or invention. When looking at the pervasive contradictions between capitalist accumulation and state bureaucratic control to explain the endurance of ethnic and kinship framework of patron-client relations in colonial and post-colonial Africa, Berman is ultimately recognising the crucial importance of African agency. This author notes how a growing mass of dispossessed and impoverished Kikuyu in the face of African accumulation and capitalist pressure confronted the leadership of the chiefs and the developing petty bourgeoisie over the authenticity of Kikuyu-ness, over the character of the imagined community.[35] They were after all, in the 1940s, a deeply divided people, increasingly in conflict among themselves as well as with the colonial political and economic order.[36] Invoking Anderson's "imagined communities", Berman traces political changes and economic and social developments, particularly that of literacy, to evaluate the strength of nationalism in Mau Mau and Kikuyu leadership. The lesson to take from Berman's assessment is the critical notion that the internal dimensions of ethnicity are far more important than any other theoretical approach has given it credit for.

Internal conflict in African societies have both supported and eroded collaboration with the colonial state at different times. The latter was always influenced by African interests, not an omnipresent powerful actor but rather an agent tangling between control and crisis.[37] Steven Feierman underlines the unpredictability of the encounter between the colonial state and Africans, underscoring that while the colonial state could determine who in African society

---

[34] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", pp. 312-313.

[35] Berman, Bruce (1997), "Nationalism, ethnicity and modernity: the paradox of Mau Mau", p. 666, in, Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher Steiner, (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers.

[36] Berman, Bruce, "Nationalism, ethnicity and modernity", p. 665.

[37] Berman, Bruce (1990), *Control and crisis in colonial Kenya: the dialectic of domination*, London, James Currey Ltd.

introduced the terms of political debate, they could never determine where that debate would end.[38] This was so because much of the debate occurred within internal arenas of morality and virtue that came to define the character of the imagined community.

John Lonsdale is perhaps the most relevant author in analysing internal expressions of ethnicity, essentially by looking at issues of morality, virtue, reputation and inequality in the internal dialogue between Africans. The author recognises three widely acknowledged processes that contributed to the politicisation of African ethnicity, much fruit of constructivist approaches to the modernisation of ethnicity: a division of labour strategized by colonialism; the power provided to African chiefs, which made them props of colonial administration, not without consequences to African ethnicity; and no less important, Christian evangelisation, mainly by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. These three processes not only eroded the basis of African moral economies but also contributed to the modernisation of ethnicity, that is, they sponsored the politicisation of ethnicity, essentially shaping a new imagining of the ethnic group as a much broader and identifiable social unit. The novel element in Lonsdale's work is his addition of a fourth approach to modern and political ethnicity, one internally situated that observes the transition from "moral economy" to "moral ethnicity". Based on Ernest Renan's assertion that nations are daily plebiscites, Lonsdale underscores similarities between tribes and nations in the sense that they are changing moral arenas of political debate. Moral contests, debates of morality and virtue and discourses of citizenship and leadership was what Lonsdale found to be vital to the Kikuyu, who during the Mau Mau rebellion "fought as much for virtue as for freedom"[39].

As such, Lonsdale is interested in the moral debate animated by the new forms of competition and inequality, fruit of capitalist distortions to moral economy systems, which led people to argue as much about community reputation, personal esteem and virtue as about moral obligations, social and political rights and access to land and property. This approach differs from

---

[38] Feierman, Steven (1990), *Peasant intellectuals: anthropology and history in Tanzania*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, p. 124.

[39] Lonsdale, John (1992), "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 317, in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (eds.), *Unhappy Valley: conflict in Kenya and Africa. Book two: violence and ethnicity*, Oxford, James Currey.

the previous approaches to African ethnicity in the sense that it does not understand ethnicity as a negative element, much less a "false consciousness" one. The discourse of moral ethnicity, the author observes, produces ideas, ideas which animate communities that require power. This power, according to Lonsdale, can be used to detract positive examples to inform rights and obligations, civic virtue and participation, but also to contest forms of citizenship and leadership. Contests of citizenship can inform the legitimacy of external rule and demand internal accountability. In this widely acknowledged perspective, ethnicity is not fruit of primitive backwardness, of static inorganic or traditional organisation or unthinking conformity, but rather a dynamic force of engagement, able to test claims of leadership that also infuse territorial political imagination.[40] In essence, moral ethnicity, a concept that can virtually be exported to every ethnic group or nation in the world, "is the nearest Kenya has to a national memory and a watchful political culture"[41].

Like Berman and Feierman, Lonsdale emphasises the externality of the colonial state in the debate over moral ethnicity – even if it was firstly framed by colonial structures – noting how white rulers did not enjoy moral mastery.[42] Yet, since not all elements of ethnicity pertain to internal arenas of debate, Lonsdale distinguishes moral ethnicity, the internal dimension of ethnicity, from political tribalism, the external dimension, so much exploited and perhaps invented by the colonial state. On the one hand the author recognises the crucial importance of an internal arena of debate, specifically African, where morality is challenged and reshaped; on the other hand, he also notes the presence of an external "tribal" like composition, where competition for the access of state resources is held, under the established frameworks (of the invented tribes) of the colonial state. Although clearly separated, the issue of moral ethnicity degenerating into political tribalism still remains opened and unresolved.[43]

---

[40] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 268.
[41] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 467.
[42] Lonsdale. John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 323.
[43] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity", p. 141.

These are the overall theoretical underpinnings used in this thesis. I will use ethnicity much like Lonsdale does, essentially to describe a "common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour a system of moral meaning and ethnic reputation within a more or less imagined community."[44] I also follow his assumption that the nature and variability of ethnicity allows for old concepts to keep reappearing and overlapping.[45] As such, some of the approaches to modern ethnicity presented, especially the note on the colonial state as a demanding agent of African ethnic identity, as well as its internal and external dimensions, underlined by the concept of moral ethnicity, are utilised when the evidence so permits and indicates.

With regards to modernity, I start with Paul Brass's assertion that the "process of development of communities from ethnic categories is particularly associated with the early stages of modernisation in multi-ethnic societies where languages have not yet become standardised, where religious groups have not become highly structured and compartmentalised, and where social fragmentation is prevalent"[46]. Looking at this interception between ethnicity and modernity, there emerges a clear parallel between Brass's statement and the early stages of Ovimbundu ethnic modernisation (which was never homogeneous neither in its pace nor in its reach, but above all situational), since Umbundu language was neither standardised nor codified, religious groups in the case of Christianity had not become highly structured and compartmentalised, and social fragmentation had been extremely high between the various ethnic groups of Angola and even between the Ovimbundu themselves by the end of the 19th century.[47]

In this sense modernity has a relative dimension. Here I adopt the concept as another scholar of Angola has used it, Maria da Conceição Neto. Neto deems modernity as an "attitude in

---

[44] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity", p. 132.

[45] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity", p. 131.

[46] Brass, Paul (1991), Ethnicity *and Nationalism: theory and comparison*, Sage Publications, p. 22.

[47] The conquest of the central highlands by the Portuguese military forces and the diplomatic issues between the kingdom of M'Balundu and Viye illustrate the deep divisions within Ovimbundu society. See Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", pp. 67-70; and Heywood, Linda (2000), *Contested power in Angola: 1840s to the present*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, pp. 19-33.

the face of social transformations – in favour of change or opposed to conservativism; in favour of social mobility and opposed to the maintenance of any rigid inherited stratifications (casts, orders or classes); in favour of the rights of the individual, considering him his own subject and not just part of a group (which he obviously continues to belong). This implies the possibility of making different options than the "traditional ones" in economic activity, religion, education. Modernity, in this sense, is not historically linear."[48]

The options available in "traditional" society are indeed different from the ones in modern society in many levels. Samuel Huntington emphasises the capacity of modern society in knowledge accumulation, in better health and longer life expectancy. But more relevant to this study are the shifts in social roles in families and other primary groups, supplemented in modern society by consciously organized secondary associations with specific functions, and the diversification of economic activity, from technically simple occupations to complex ones, where the level of occupational skill and the ratio of capital to labour are much higher than in traditional society. At the economic level, the transition towards modern society is characterised by a decline in the importance of subsistence agriculture in favour of commercial agriculture, commonly cash-crop, but also industrial and other non-agricultural activities[49].

Looking at the British imposition of modernity, their own public project and defining virtue, Lonsdale invokes Jomo Kenyatta's example to pragmatically approach the issue of modernity in African thought and experience, noting how "the advantages conferred by new knowledge and markets were as morally disruptive as new state oppressions" and how Kenyatta

---

[48] Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Entre a tradição e a modernidade: os Ovimbundu do planalto central à luz da história", *Ngola, Revista de Estudos Sociais*, 1, Luanda, p. 193.

[49] Huntington, Samuel P. (1971), "The change to change: modernisation, development, and politics", *Comparative Politics*, 3, p. 287. Huntington also speaks of the "traditional" man as passive and acquiescent, expecting continuity both in nature and society. This is a view I do not endorse nor agree with, especially since this "traditional" man has been much less passive than was previously considered. See for example, Richard Rathbone, "West Africa: modernity and modernisation", in Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (eds.), *African modernities: entangled meanings in current debate*, Oxford, James Currey.

"believed that both cut people off from the censorious guidance of their local humanity". The author continues to refer that "Kikuyu elders felt the world was falling apart. Kenyatta attributed their moral panic to a familiar litany of ritual amnesia, social disorder, personal failure"[50], especially noting how moral rules were broken with impunity, for in place of unified tribal morality there was a "welter of disturbing influences, rules and sanctions, whose net result is that a Gikuyu does not know what he may or may not, ought or ought not, to do or believe, but which leaves him in no doubt at all about having broken the original morality of his people."[51]

This is perhaps the mainstream acknowledgement of the impact and disruption of modernity in African moral value. However, the Ovimbundu, as is seen throughout this thesis, especially in chapters one and two, had a similar yet particular experience. Although they were, and may very well still be, frequently devoted to agriculture, their social and economic history must also be described by their intense focus on commerce in both slave trading and commodity exchange, which led Linda Heywood to use the term "entrepreneurial" in relation to this people[52], denoting not confusion or restlessness but rather rapid adaptation, sometimes referred to as the "Ovimbundu miracle".[53]

What is perhaps more relevant and obvious to any approach of modernity as a social and economic force of change, is that it is, above all, a non-linear historical process, gradually affecting and changing individuals, families, clans and societies. To speak of the modernisation of the Ovimbundu is to speak of at least three centuries of trade and internal competition, not only among themselves and among their kingdoms, but also with Portuguese traders, firstly in coastal regions and later in the very hinterland of the central highlands, as well as with other

---

[50] Lonsdale, John (2002), "Jomo Kenyatta, God and the modern world", p. 38, in Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (eds.), *African modernities: entangled meanings in current debate*, Oxford, James Currey.

[51] John Lonsdale is quoting Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing mount Kenya* (1938), in Lonsdale, John "Jomo Kenyatta, God and the modern world", p. 38.

[52] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power in Angola", p. 114.

[53] Pössinger, Herman (1973), "Interrelations between economic and social change in rural Africa: the case of the Ovimbundu of Angola", p. 38, in Franz-Wilhelm Heimer (ed.), *Social change in Angola*, Weltforum Verlag.

African peoples. In this modernisation process, the very intense and crucial impact of Christianisation, particularly Protestant, is beyond obvious, particularly in access to health care, new forms of social and economic organisation, and above all, the very element that majorly defines modernity, literacy. Literacy is what scholars of nationalism deem, the "minimal requirement for full citizenship, for effective moral membership of a modern community."[54] It is one of the elements of congregation, the one that not only makes modernisation attractive but also begins infusing a conception of mutual belonging and moral community, in essence, the very first stages of the "nation", or, in this case, ethnic group. The Ovimbundu have been incredibly proactive in their search for literacy, which, albeit not at first, led them towards Christian missionaries, as seen in chapter one.

The one element that emerges from the decade long development of the approaches to modern ethnicity referred above, alongside this brief exposition of the concept of modernity, is that, while the concept is still important, the central role in ethnic modernisation lies in African agency. Frederick Cooper is right in arguing that "if we start out with an assumption of an "incommensurable" difference between a package of Western modernity and alternative packages rooted in African or Asian communities, the possible trajectories of political action, past and future, are narrowed from the start."[55] The colonial question is indeed not the modernity question, as colonial modernity tends to "flatten history, elevating messy histories into a consistent project and underplaying the efforts of colonized people to deflect and appropriate elements of colonizing policies."[56] Nevertheless, colonialism is still a vital ingredient. Its structures, alongside non-colonial modernity, as it patent throughout this thesis, have had an absolute value in the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity.

---

[54] Gellner, Ernest (1994), "Nationalism and modernisation", p. 55, in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, D. (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

[55] Cooper, Frederick (2005), *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 116.

[56] Cooper, Frederick, "Colonialism in question", pp.116-117.

METHODOLOGY

This work deals with two concepts, modernity and ethnicity. It aims at generally covering a century of social change by tracing those events that produced profound transformations in Ovimbundu life. To achieve this I have relied on a number of theoretical studies about modernity and ethnicity, most already mentioned, intertwined with primary sources collected during fieldwork in the central highlands of Angola as well as with a plethora of secondary sources, from academic works, mainly books and articles, to other sources that helped delineating and setting a framework that allowed me to work a distinct problem, that of modern ethnicity and of post-colonial and post-conflict ethnic relations of a particular group, the Ovimbundu.

I spent a total of three months in the central highlands, mostly in the province of Huambo, between January and May 2013, conducting research. A manageable small scale territorial region was targeted for field study, the central highlands of Angola, considered to hold a segment of the Ovimbundu less historically heterogeneous - in its nevertheless great diversity - than the entirety of the ethnic group.

The methodological approach utilised was qualitative research, in the form of participant-observation, in particular the collection of life stories[57]. Participant-observation is the principal method of investigation used in anthropology and in certain sociological studies, usually used in localised regions. I focused singularly on participant-observation – never engaging in other methodologies for data collection – mainly for two reasons. Firstly, ethnic studies developed as a component of area studies very recently, mainly in the 1970s and 80s. As a consequence, available information in archives previous to the appearance of this field of study was gathered and registered without considering its holistic components, usually making singular references to tribe, region or religion, rarely ethnic group. Secondly, due to its subjective nature, I believe

[57] I do not fully examine nor expose people's life stories in this thesis. They were a tool, an instrumental part of data collection, since through life stories I was able to engage particular topics that would otherwise have been very difficult if asked directly. See pp. 29-30 for a better description of the use of life stories in data collection.

ethnicity can only be properly analysed through this specific methodology. Quantitative studies, even though frequently utilised by academics for the study of ethnicity, completely dismiss the essence of emotion and emphasis of people's speech during field experience which the researcher could otherwise convene in his exposition by adopting a qualitative approach. Ethnicity is as much about emotion and attachment as it is about politics, and the researcher must always be aware of this. I agree with Robert Burgess in that researchers "need to share in the lives and activities of those whom they study and take roles which are effective in the setting under study. They need to learn the language that is used in the setting, to remember actions and speech and to gather data from a range of individuals in a range of social situations. In this respect, participant observers need to understand the skills that they require and the roles that they take in research settings."[58]

I became an active participant observer, or better yet, an observer as participant.[59] I was unable to participate in instances where ethnicity was debated, politicised or used to define someone in simple conversation. Trust became an issue early on. I was, however, able to "observe" people talking or making comments about issues pertinent to my research topic but never really able to engage in lively, open discussions. As a consequence, most data was either collected in field notes or in the form of interviews, mostly scheduled. As such, oral history was the main venue where data stemmed and was collected from, particularly approached by the exposition of life stories.

The strength of collecting life stories is that it allows the gathering of a sample of the experience of a community. This experience was handled through an indirect autobiography, where life stories centred not necessarily around a person but rather upon the person's experience and memory during a certain historical event.[60] The essential instrument to the collection of life stories, as they are not apprehended in regular social contexts, is the interview. Life stories

---

[58] Burgess, Robert (1982), *Fieldwork: a sourcebook and field manual*, George Allen Unwin, p. 45.

[59] Burgess, Robert, "Fieldwork", p. 45.

[60] See Poirier, Jean, Simone Clapier-Valladon and Paul Raybaut (1995), *Histórias de vida: teoria e prática*, Oeiras, Celta Editora, p. 46.

enabled a semi-structured interview, where the interviewee would usually begin by stating his name and birthplace and begin speaking of his family, education and professional occupation. I encouraged interviewees to speak in chronological fashion, as I was aware that while the issue of Christianity or life as an infant in the village or town would be unavoidable, the conversation would eventually steer towards the topics of colonialism, the liberation struggle or the civil war. When reaching each of these themes, I proceeded to ask specific questions. Upon deviation, I usually interrupted the conversation to ask where the interviewee was when an important event took place. This allowed the interviewee a free speech and flow of ideas, usually of several minutes without interruption, while also enabling me to stop and dwell on matters that had more meaning to this study.

I was fortuned enough to meet good people that allowed me to use their contacts, mostly of family, friends and work colleagues, while also assuring interviewees that I was not involved in Angolan politics in any way and that my interest was purely scientific. This snowball sampling allowed me many times to speak with people living in rural areas that would travel to Huambo in business or personal affairs, whom otherwise I would not have been able to contact considering my severe limitations to travel around the central highlands. It provided an invaluable geographic diversity in source collection.

Most interviews were conducted in urban or peri-urban areas, mainly in Huambo, Bailundo and Kuito, with the above mentioned caveat of being able to interview people travelling to Huambo from distant regions within the central highlands. Interviews conducted in rural areas soon revealed communications problems, since many did not speak fluent Portuguese. My inability to speak or understand Umbundu, which I consider a grave fault when researching ethnicity, meant that the person translating was able to adapt the conversation in line with previous conversations I had with him, which tended to contaminate data and render parts of interviews unusable. Data collected also suffered from people's lack of knowledge or precision about events and dates.

I made considerable efforts to avoid collecting information from people that could be considered elites, particularly those engaged in politics, always preferring to speak with the

"common man". This was a difficult task, since many either considered themselves not to be well versed in history or politics to tell me their story, or simple referred me to government officials. Nevertheless, the focus on the grassroots population became a central subject of analysis, since after a few conversations I found that elites, or people with access to political and economic power in the central highlands, are hindered neither by ethnic markers nor by stereotypes of negative moral conceptions, at least not inside that region. It is in the grassroots people, the farmer and the low level public servant, that one begins finding the importance of ethnic identity, especially for social mobility, in the form of ethnic stereotypes, derived from personal or family connections. In addition, elites are also very heavily influenced by the ruling party's views on several topics and have a political agenda that serves their interests, which restrained their willingness to explore specific aspects of their life that fall into the scope of this thesis. In fact, a decade after the end of the civil war, public discourse has adopted the MPLA party line, I suspect for individual self-preservation. The amount of time elapsed since significant periods, for example, the start of the liberation war, also hindered my ability to explore specific topics. Most interviewees were often too young to recall specific periods or simply able to retell stories passed orally by their family members, not experienced in first person.

Nonetheless, the greatest obstacle in primary data collection was the very political nature of my query. All contacts made would question precisely what my work was about and refrain from participate when keywords such as "history", "Ovimbundu history", "UNITA" or even "political" and "social" change were referred. Themes that mention ethnicity or a particular ethnic group in Angola are still a taboo. Not only is it a topic profoundly associated with war divisions but also contested by the MPLA government for many years. People avoid speaking of ethnicity openly fruit of a generalised self-censorship epitomised by the government's slogan "um só povo, uma só nação" (one people, one nation). The MPLA and the Angolan government have always attempted to distance their position from any direct association with a specific ethnic group. The reasoning lies with the MPLA's multicultural, yet heavily "anti-tribal" background.[61]

---

[61] Mabeko Tali identifies the Conferência Inter-regional de Militantes (Inter-regional conference of militants) as the moment the MPLA formally eschewed ethnic, tribal, regional and socio-cultural realities

To speak of the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Angola is to directly defy the status-quo, since that has traditionally been the banner of the opposition, or so popular thinking goes. As such, while MPLA supporters refrained from exploring anything that escaped official party lines, UNITA supporters would become too suspicious of my intentions and refuse to speak with me. One Catholic priest sent me SMS apologising for not being more cooperative, hinting he had had problems in the past.

The degree of control and fear people have of speaking about the war is still very much apparent and revelatory. While some keywords would immediately turn people's interest away from my work, I have found that specific words would also loosen tension and get interviewees more comfortable, particularly those who openly support either political party. For instance, when speaking with someone who clearly supported the MPLA, referring to the "camarada Presidente" instead of José Eduardo dos Santos while absolutely refraining from using the words "UNITA" or "Jonas Savimbi", opting instead for "the opposition" or "him" (ele) would go long way in loosening tension. The same strategy I believed worked with UNITA supporters. At one time I spent roughly fifteen minutes trying to speak with a former UNITA captain to no avail, only to produce one of the most interesting interviews after I referred to Jonas Savimbi as "o mais velho" and spoke of certain aspects of Jamba, essentially showing some knowledge about UNITA's history.

My position as a researcher must also be emphasised. I question whether or not my personal history and nationality provided certain advantages. Besides the ease that comes with sharing the same language, people's attitudes and interest changed considerably after I revealed my ancestors' long history in the city of Lubango. In addition, regardless of the recent diplomatic issues that have emerged between Portugal and Angola, some of the Angolans who accepted my calls for interviews or interacted with me did so in a very positive light. Curiously, I was many times welcomed for being Portuguese. I am afraid my Angolan colleagues experience greater obstacles to pose the same questions I did.

---

and particularities. See Tali, Mabeko (2001), *Dissidências e poder de estado: o MPLA perante si próprio (1962-1977),* Luanda, Editorial Nzila, p. 152.

Since interviewee anonymity was sometimes requested I have decided to preserve the anonymity of all my interviewees, referring only to their professional occupation and providing the place and date the interview took place. All interviews were part of data collected by me and held in audio format.

ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS

Chapters in this thesis are organised in order to reflect both the relevance of colonialism and other forms of modernity while allowing space to acknowledge African agency and response to modernity processes and colonial structures. Since it would be incoherent to address modern ethnicity – already a multi-layered process influenced by historical and other events –, without resorting to a historical approach, especially if one is to avoid the mistakes of the past - even if this thesis does not approach the important pre-colonial period - the chapters and its many arguments are organised and progress in chronological fashion. As Young notes, “conceptual capture of the past inevitably requires its periodization.”[62]

Chapter one is clear on the separation of colonialism and modernity. It looks at the influence of Protestantism in the central highlands by tracing four general categories that contributed to the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity, which ran parallel to Christian evangelisation. Firstly, a rather unpreoccupied division of the territory, which helped in the imagination of the territorial and cultural boundaries; secondly, the codification of language and posterior edification of an education system, which promoted literacy and grew to be the most desired element among the Ovimbundu; thirdly, the administrative adaptations the Protestants made, largely combining Ovimbundu social structure and village organisation with “modern”, western biased new systems of control and organisation; finally, Protestant activity began nurturing a new type of elite, one different from previous Ovimbundu elites, not only educated and able to adapt to the economic and social structures of the colonial state but also allowed to

[62] Young, Crawford, “The African colonial state”, p. 10.

transmute between the modern and the traditional worlds. The second section of the first chapter looks at Catholic sponsored modernity. It examines particular differences between Protestant and Catholic missionary activity while also noting similarities, especially in the offering of services and assistance as forms of seduction. More importantly, it notes how while the use of Umbundu language was commonly forbidden in Catholic contexts, differences between Catholic high and low clergy allowed the Ovimbundu certain cultural and linguistic liberties when interacting with the latter.

Adding to the impact of Christian evangelization in the central highlands, the second chapter examines the role of African chiefs and the colonial state in Ovimbundu modern ethnicity. It sets out by acknowledging that the framework of interaction between the colonial state and the African population was indirect rule. It then traces the impact of two elements much related to modern ethnicity: the introduction of a capitalist system and migrant labour. With regards to capitalism, although the novelty of private ownership opposed Africans to customary frameworks of rights of access and distribution of land, much land was still accessed and distributed under land tenure practices, at least until the later colonial period. But the growing presence of Portuguese trade shops created a demand of products the Ovimbundu were keen on answering. Consequently, new sources of income began altering patterns of rights and responsibilities, upsetting the balance of household income and contesting the relations between generations and genders, disrupting age-old moral economy systems. Adding to the imploding Ovimbundu structure was the distancing of a massive number of able-bodied men away from family and land due to migrant labour, who came to rely on African chiefs' control of events at home, revealing preponderant dynamics in the acceptance of the new modern ethnic message. The starting question in the second section of this chapter is whether through its imposed changes, colonialism shaped the ethnic landscape of Angola by sponsoring shifts in structure that created ethnic cleavages, fruit of modernisation processes, thus changing patterns of group relation. It was in the external prism, through the experiences of migrant workers away from home, that the colonial state can be said to have created the conditions for the alteration of the

ethnic landscape of the country, by forcing people of different linguistic, regional and ethnic backgrounds to interact in modern frameworks.

Chapter three beings looking at the political implications of processes of modernisation in Ovimbundu ethnicity. It traces some of the early anti-colonial movements organised by Ovimbundu people, mainly intellectuals, in an attempt to evaluate the centrality of ethnicity and of sub-national agendas in these organisations. It begins exploring the reasons for the Ovimbundu's lack of participation in the liberation war and how the colonial state's propaganda explored the social and economic debilities of the Ovimbundu to co-opt their support, and began articulating the expression Bailundo in reference to this group. The second section chases the creation of UPA as a sub-nationalist organisation and explores its impact not only in the formulation of a national party system with ethnic characteristics but also the very nefarious consequences it produced to a massive number of Ovimbundu, mostly men, engaged in migrant labour. It assesses the Ovimbundu answer to the massacres perpetrated by the UPA by examining the political response of the Ovimbundu elites. The chapter is concluded by analysing the presence of the Ovimbundu in the UPA/FNLA, particularly that of Jonas Savimbi, and how disillusionment with the movement's objectives and leadership lead to an internal contestation that would eventually open space for the creation of a third nationalist front against Portuguese colonialism, mostly Ovimbundu and led by Jonas Savimbi, UNITA.

Chapter four traces Ovimbundu ethnic mobilisation by UNITA immediately after independence, in pursuit of planned elections, until the return to war in late 1992. It looks at the playing of what is commonly referred to as the "ethnic card", the use of ethnic characteristics to mobilise a particular ethnic group to follow a political cause, but not without discussing its various shortcomings and popular misconceptions, especially by crossing ideological and political convictions with the attractive use of ethnicity to enlarge party support. The second section, acknowledging the practical limitations of the modern "tribe" paradigm prompted by colonialism, favours a more nuanced approach by attempting to reveal whether the success of UNITA in mobilising the Ovimbundu was much due to the adoption of this paradigm – which invoked popular grievances and nostalgia for communalism and fair moral economies – by filling

what Ranger terms the “empty-boxes”[63] of ethnic identity colonialism left in blank, with familiar meaning, thus creating an identity for the “UNITA people”.

Chapter five follows the questions opened in the last section of the previous chapter in what concerns the issue of citizenship. It begins by showcasing several testimonies regarding reconciliation and reintegration into society collected during fieldwork to set a workable frame that allows the exploration of citizenship, much through the lenses of Egin Isin's logic of alterity. It argues that the Ovimbundu ethnic group is not excluded in Angolan society but subject to a dual relationship enclosed within the stranger – citizen dichotomy. This opens way for the second section of the chapter, which dwells upon issues of citizenship and perceptions of citizenship in post-war Angola, considering the modern ethnicity model presented throughout the thesis. It concludes the arguments made in previous chapters that in the Ovimbundu case, ethnicity is used to provide information and may dictate people’s rights and access to citizenship.

[63] Ranger, Terence, “The invention of tradition revisited”, p. 27.

CHAPTER 1

RELIGIOUS MISSIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the first developments of Ovimbundu[64] modern ethnicity by looking at the impact and influence of Christian missions as enabling forces in the promotion and shaping of modern ethnic identity, from the first decades of the 20th century until 1961, the year the liberation struggle began.

The positioning of Ovimbundu modernisation in relation to the impact of Protestantism in the central highlands, besides setting a workable framework to examine Ovimbundu ethnic development, allows the introduction of two vital elements of analysis: firstly, it permits a complete focus on shifting and evolving ethnic categories or criteria – rather than mistakenly looking at them as solid, inflexible, primordial concepts - due to modernisation itself, in the Ovimbundu case, language and territory, religion, ancestry and blood ties, of which the first two are of crucial importance; secondly, it enables the addition of an exterior force providing the impulse of modernity, that is, the work of intellectuals[65], the agent that not only triggers the intersection between ethnicity and modernisation, but also organises ethnic culture and helps create solidarity. These intellectuals, according to Vail, "could be European missionaries, as the studies of Harries, Ranger, Vail and White, and Roberts make clear, or, as Harries, Vail and White, Jewsiewicki and Papstein show, they could be European anthropologists and historians."[66] In central highlands of Angola, these intellectuals were indeed missionaries, but American and Canadian missionaries, even though certain aspects of these processes of ethnic development by

---

[64] Although the Ovimbundu are here treated as a rather homogenous group, this is always done through an external outlook, with the presence of the 'other' in mind. On its own the identity of this group, like all group identities, is disruptive and prone to difference and division along many cleavages.

[65] Eric Hobsbawm, Terrance Ranger, Bruce Berman, John Lonsdale, Leroy Vail [et. al.] and others recognize the crucial importance of intellectuals in the development and dissemination of the ethnic message in Africa. Virtually all modernist scholars of ethnicity and nationalism consider intellectuals to be crucial in the dissemination/mobilization of the ethnic/national message.

[66] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 11.

foreign actors can be verified in the activities of the Catholic church, as will later be argued in the last section of this chapter. These missionaries were themselves "often instrumental in providing the cultural symbols that could be organised into a cultural identity, especially a written language and a researched written history. They had the skills to reduce hitherto unwritten languages to written forms, thereby delivering the pedigrees that the new "tribes" required for acceptance."[67] But their work went vastly beyond the intellectual perspective. New forms of political, social and economic organization were also introduced by Christian missionaries, in most part Protestant, some recovered from Ovimbundu past others imported from modern western thought.

The impact the arrival of Christian missionaries had in the minds and daily lives of the Ovimbundu is undeniable, perhaps comparable only to the military conquest of the region in the late 19th century, beginning of the 20th century. Maria da Conceição Neto notes that "from the late nineteenth century, missionaries of all sorts saw central Angola and especially the Ovimbundu as very receptive to social and cultural changes", a fact that would make "the region a Protestant-Catholic spiritual battlefield."[68]

Immediately after the military conquest of the region, financial, human and political constraints severely delayed the expansion of Portuguese bureaucratic order and, more importantly, actual occupation and administration. Religious missions were the first to capitalize on this power vacuum, able to fill the voids left by the conquered Ovimbundu kingdoms when the bureaucratic expansion and overall presence of the colonial state struggled to grow. As the colonial state was mainly strong around cities and in other administration posts (*postos de administração)* but rather weak or absent in rural spaces, missionaries and traditional authorities completed the gap between ruled and ruler. As such, religious missions created an influential niche in this relationship by providing many of the services the colonial state was not able to operate, while enjoying its permission to conduct evangelisation work. Missionaries would serve

[67] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 11.
[68] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 178.

as communication bridges between state officials and Africans, often even "attorneys"[69], alongside African chiefs, *sobas*, who would also inform state officials, administrators and *chefes de posto*, about events and problems in their region. But the statute missionaries achieved among the Ovimbundu and other groups in Angola was not always of a benefactor, nor was the process of evangelisation without several issues at its start. In fact, missionaries rapidly understood that their religion would not be so easily introduced among the African population, since among other factors they already had their own deities and belief systems. Hence, in order to attract people to be able to preach the word of God missionaries invested in the creation of schools and health centres. The Ovimbundu rapidly understood this approach as a means to become "modern", inherently instilled by the various material benefits they could access by visiting Christian missions. Heywood points that many Ovimbundu were indeed using the missionaries as a "ticket to assimilation, and broke their ties with the missions as soon as they found better-paying jobs in trading houses."[70] The constant pursuing of the benefits of modernity profoundly characterizes the relationship between the Ovimbundu and the Christian missions during this period.

Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries understood that only through a system of trade-offs, by providing goods and services in exchange for new adherents to their religion would they be able to quicken the evangelisation process initiated in the late 19th century. Consequently, in regions where missions had a much deeper interaction with Africans, the assimilationist[71] agenda

---

[69] Missionary John Tucker was an example of this bridging between the Ovimbundu Protestants and the colonial authorities, not with several problems. See Heywood, "Contested power", p. 57. Also, "They [New State officials] relied on the missionaries to plead their [the Ovimbundu's] cases with *chefes [de posto]* and other government officials, to register births, obtain death and marriage certificates, to fill out their assimilation papers, and to respond to other official demands", in Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 116.

[70] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 52.

[71]. Adriano Moreira sponsored a different approach to that of straightforward assimilation. He proposed a unitary judicial system, where the rights and rituals of natives would be respected through the application of different laws to both natives and Europeans all within the same judicial system. The integration of natives should be done progressively. For example, Moreira proposed that during the first stages of colonialism native jurisdictions should be maintained, the access by the natives to European judicial institutions should not be encouraged and a native criminal code should be organized, effectively

of the Portuguese colonial state was partially taken over by religious missions, running an endeavour often contrary to state expectations in the Protestant case[72], although the Catholic Church ran an operation intrinsically connected to the colonial state, especially after the Missionary Accord of 1940. As a result, different ways of assimilating, that is, "civilising", were put together by the Catholic Church and its counterpart, the Protestant missions. In general, religious missions began a process of assimilation through adaptation of daily routines and cultures, shrouded under the cloak of evangelisation. Proof of this resides in the fact that missions became small villages, equipped with churches, schools and even small health centres in order to attract people, as mentioned above. As such, the evangelising ways of these missions were never singularly focused on the spread of Christianity alone. Their entire philosophy rested upon teaching Africans what Christians thought of as being correct, of importing certain ways and mannerisms - often western - into the local fold. From the contact with the missionaries many Africans began adopting western clothing, new housing, and labour and hygiene methods and eventually began sending their children to school, understanding that western modernity was what gave the Portuguese their power.

In broad terms, this was the off-set of evangelisation in the central highlands. While some areas had a much deeper contact with Christianity than others, the process had, nevertheless, different outcomes depending on whether the Catholic Church or Protestant missions were the main centre of "modernisation" in the area.

---

separating, and protecting, natives from harsher European criminal law. See Moreira, Adriano (1955), *Administração da justiça aos indígenas*, Agência Geral do Ultramar, pp. 71-75. Moreira's take on assimilation and modernisation contrasts that of Protestantism, which implemented a much more straightforward approach, especially towards a freer education but also in terms of job opportunities. Protestantism enabled, especially through their systems of education, an unofficial integration and ways of combating the exclusion imposed by the Native Statutes.

[72] Didier Péclard states that in the colonial context Protestant activity was viewed as "denationalisating", incapable of producing "true Portuguese", reflecting the fears of a state already inclined to look at Protestant missions as the origin of a nationalist conspiracy. See Péclard, Didiér (1998), "Eu sou Americano: dynamiques du champ missionarie dans le planalto central angolais au XXe siècle", *Lusotopie*, p. 357.

THE INFLUENCE OF PROTESTANTISM

Protestantism was at the very centre of the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity since it arrived in the central highlands at the end of the 19th century. It came with the idea of creating a new kingdom of God in Africa, a project which rapidly evolved into absorbing African customs through western assimilation, redefining what became considered right and wrong, accepted and sinful, backward or enlightened. Childs writes about these ideas quite straightforwardly, acknowledging that "the village is the key to an educational or mission approach to the Ovimbundu", while discussing the "problems of building a new structure upon a solid foundation", the "adaptation or adoption of Bantu culture elements", and the importance of kinship, a force to be "widely utilized by the church until a new order can be built upon the firm foundations of the old." Childs was convinced that the "tribe" of God the church was calling into being in Africa had to be rooted firmly in the soil of its own social heritages, or it would fall apart into its components and create uprooted individuals.[73]

Through much of this work and mixture of the traditional and the modern, the new Ovimbundu converts under Protestant influence and guidance began assuming a new vision of life, uphold by a new system of beliefs and norms. Under colonial circumstances, this process was not all negative, since on the one hand their Christian values, their western education and modernity permitted an easy integration in Catholic settings, neighbourhoods and schools; on the other hand they were able to live side by side with non-converts who professed traditional Ovimbundu customs and beliefs and applied methods of governing life and labour as their forefathers did, albeit limited by colonial rule. These Ovimbundu Protestants were able to navigate both the traditional and the modern, and represented the faction of the Ovimbundu better able to extract and combine characteristics from both worlds, a true bricolage, ultimately creating a new modern Ovimbundu ethnicity. However, their veracious appetite for the benefits of modernity was restrained by conservative Protestant ideologies, namely a belief in rurality as

---

[73] Gladwyn, Murray Childs (1949), *Umbundu kinship and character*, Oxford University Press, pp.63-74.

means of escaping the sinful ways of the urban centres[74] – prostitution and alcohol – hard-work, monogamous households, and an "obligation" to work in the mission as compensation for their education.

There were, however, tensions when navigating both the traditional and the modern worlds, especially under an unforgiving colonial regime. Sakaita and Loth Savimbi's story, Jonas Savimbi's grandfather and father respectively, are especially enlightening of this duality. As Fred Bridgland explains:

> "When Sakaita, who for the rest of his life brooded with resentment at his treatment by the Portuguese, heard that Loth planned to go to [Protestant] mission school he forbade what he saw as a sell-out to the whites and their religion: Sakaita was an animist, not a Christian. Loth nevertheless went ahead and thus became estranged from Sakaita for 20 years"[75]

Loth became what Christine Messiant brilliantly called *nouveaux assimilée*[76], those who adopted western modernity in the 20th century, as opposed to the *ancién assimilée*, peoples and families mainly around the coastal areas of Angola. When requesting assimilated status, Loth "did it in a manner and with the determination that, whatever happened, it would not diminish his devotion to his own people and that he would advance their welfare, the good points of their culture, in every possible way."[77] The expression "the good points of their culture", emphasis on the "good", is interesting insofar as it permits the choosing of particular elements of Ovimbundu culture, what appeared to be the "good" elements to Loth, while using the opportunities of Portuguese culture, understood to be the opportunities of the modern world. The "their" might also signify a degree of distance from traditional Ovimbundu culture, as Loth was able to discern between the "good" and the "bad" parts of it. Loth's embrace of modernity and his wish of

---

[74] Péclard, Didier (1999), "Amanhã para ser homem: missions chrétiennes et formation du sujet colonial en Angola central au XX siècle", *Editions Karthala*, 74, pp. 116-117.

[75] Bridgland, Fred (1986), *Jonas Savimbi: a key to Africa*, Mainstream Publishing Co. Limited, p. 33.

[76] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", pp. 39-46.

[77] Bridgland, Fred, "Jonas Savimbi", p. 35.

advancing his people's welfare is perhaps more evident in the amount of schools and churches he opened:

> "He paid his debts and used some of the rest of his money to establish a small church in a grass hut. It served as a primary school during the rest of the week, staffed by one of the Dondi graduates. (…) eventually there were "Savimbi" schools and churches all along the Benguela railway in central Angola, earning for Loth's family a prominent and respected position among their fellow Ovimbundu"[78]

By this time Loth Savimbi could easily fit Vail's "cultural broker", the intellectual mission educated African spreading the modern "new" and the traditional "good" that ultimately composed modern Ovimbundu ethnicity, disseminating it along the Benguela railway, cutting across the central highlands. Loth's experience is paralleled by Jesse Chipenda, a mission educated Ovimbundu who can also be considered a "cultural broker". The elements that permitted both Loth and Jesse the use of their abilities as "cultural brokers" through the fusion of their traditional preoccupations and modern methods may be found in the argument Lawrence Henderson makes, himself a Protestant reverend, with regard to the "tribal" character of Protestantism.[79] Indeed, it was through these "tribal" characteristics of the work of Protestantism that modernity most easily took root among the Ovimbundu. As such, centred upon Henderson's descriptions, the impact of Protestantism in the formation of a modern ethnic Ovimbundu identity is here planned in a four pronged axis:

- Territorial delimitation and religious socialization
- The coding of language and religion
- The administrative importance of Protestantism
- Creation of modern elites in the protestant missions

---

[78] Bridgland, Fred, "Jonas Savimbi", p. 36.

[79] Henderson, Lawrence (1971), "Protestantism: a tribal religion?", pp. 61-80 in Robert T. Parsons (ed.), *Windows on Africa*, E. J. Brill-Leiden.

Territorial delimitation and religious socialization

Embedded in the European concepts of nation-state, as well as in the epistemological tendencies of anthropologists and missionaries in identifying, cataloguing and delimitating languages, ethnic groups and territories[80], Protestant missions in Africa set out to perform a territorial division of labour as to better compartmentalize and administer the peoples and territories they had to evangelise. Angola is a clear example of this process, since for each one of the three major ethnic groups of the country – the Bacongo, Ovimbundu and Ambundu – a different mission was attributed. The Baptist Missionary Society of the United Kingdom of Great Britain created its mission in the north of Angola in 1878, where it worked with the Bacongo people. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent its missionaries to Bailundo and Bié between 1879 and 1881. It was later joined by the Congregational Foreign Missionary Society of British North America from Canada (CCFMS), followed by Swiss missionaries, Seventh Day Adventists and Plymouth Brethren[81], totalling the major religious Protestant orders operating in the central highlands. Finally in 1885, missionaries from the Episcopal Methodist Church of the United States of America arrived at Luanda and its hinterland, where they would work with the Ambundu people. These were the broad dividing lines of evangelisation Protestantism traced, grounded above all by what was understood as the common ethno-linguistic characteristics of each group. Henderson comments on this division,

---

[80] Looking at the study and classification of African linguistics, Patrick Harries argues the methodology used by Europeans and missionaries – often the same person - rested upon a "belief in the primordialness of language dovetailed with the view, dominant in Europe at the time, that language was the major determinant of modes and patterns of thought. It was believed that people who spoke a common language possessed a similar code through which they interpreted the world. This equipped them with an ethos (almost a soul), that, consciously or unconsciously, bound them as a tribe or nation." See Harries, Patrick (1988), "The roots of ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa", *African Affairs*, 87, p. 39.

[81] Péclard, Didier (1998), "Religion and politics in Angola: the Church, the Colonial State and the Emergence of Angolan Nationalism, 1940-1961", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 28, p. 171.

arguing that it was not meant to divide the Angolan territory in administrative units, although in practice that was what happened:

> "The division of territory and the attribution of spheres of occupation included the delimitation of borders on one hand, and the non-interference on the affairs of others on the other. Protestant missionary agencies did not enter in formal accords do divide Angola in spheres of occupation, although in practice, each mission became propriety of a determined territory."[82]

It is within the dimension of delimitating territory by unit of evangelization to work with a particular group of people that a modern concept of Ovimbundu territory is defined. The travels of missionaries and catechists throughout this territory helped delimitating not only the cultural living space of the group but, more importantly, the ethno-linguistic borders of each ethnic group. Benedict Anderson's "administrative pilgrimage" is particularly apposite in this case. It were the travels of these missionaries, pastors or catechists that provided the territorial base for new "imagined communities" in which natives could come to see themselves as "nationals", that is Ovimbundu, as opposed to other local denominations, enabling the imagining of a "national" (in this case ethnic) community.[83] Yet, for the Ovimbundu, this has been the norm not the exception, as before the colonial conquest of the central highlands, large Ovimbundu caravans were already travelling back and forth southern Africa to collect rubber to trade in Benguela. The difference between the rubber trade caravanning experience and the missionaries and catechists' movements across the central highlands lies in the very notions of modernity – of belonging and being part of an identifiable unit, derived from the concept of modern nation-state – not available as such during the former period. Voluntarily or not, African missionaries and catechists came to transmit a politically modern message when encountering people linguistically and ethnically familiar, yet

---

[82] Henderson, Lawrence (1990), *A Igreja em Angola: um rio com várias correntes*, Além-Mar, p. 84.
[83] Anderson, Benedict (1983), *Imagined communities*, Verso, p, 140.

unknown to them. This process occurred mainly along the Benguela railway, especially when catechists and other school-leavers moved from place to place, in search of better paid work:

> "Those who were trained to be pastors became missionaries, and built Christian villages throughout the highlands, establishing model Christian communities along the railroad"[84]

The economic importance of the railroad pulled many Ovimbundu Protestants – and Catholics - to find work across its length. These people would eventually open schools where students from various Ovimbundu regions could mingle, interact and share experiences.[85] As Birmingham argues,

> "Each [of the three main missions] created a network of school-leavers who knew each other intimately and could travel with confidence through the length and breadth of their own mission fief. They rarely, however, crossed boundaries into the other zones and had little or no contact with other Protestant churches. Indeed, they were more likely to be acquainted with local Catholics than with Protestants from other regions. Protestant missions, which provided the most important source of educated leadership, were thus responsible to some degree for the three-way partition that occurred in the national leadership."[86]

Didier Péclard refers to David Birmingham's argument concluding that, if the author is indeed correct, then "regional bonds superseded other, especially religious or denominational, links", as Angolan Protestants, through their various activities, would probably be more "more

---

[84] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 55.

[85] The story of Loth Savimbi is a classic case of this Christian modern approach to spread education and religion.

[86] Birmingham, David (1992), *Frontline nationalism in Angola and Mozambique*, Africa World Press, Inc., p. 24.

regionally if not ethnically aware"[87]. Indeed, that might have been the case since regionalism and ethnicity often intersect. The existence of common elements of language, social organization and experience between the various Ovimbundu students would only add a deeper comprehension of both concepts of region and ethnic group. Nevertheless, this does not mean there were not contacts or tensions between the various ethnic groups of Angola and between the Ovimbundu themselves. Externally, in what concerns the fluidity of cultural borders, Péclard affirms that "the symbolic as well as material meaningful boundaries of those very regions or ethnic groups constantly changed in the process of the missionaries' evangelising ouevre"[88], which may have opened space for inter-ethnic dialogue. However, internally, that is, inside the central highlands, intra-regional tensions between Ovimbundu from different parts of the highlands were also a reality, a heritage of old rivalries between kingdoms. Heywood tells of a group of students from Kamundongo, Bié, who angrily withdrew from the Currie Institute in the Dondi mission, convinced that the missionaries were favouring students from Bailundo.[89]

Birmingham's argument, however relevant, refers only to school-leavers, that is, people who had the opportunity to study in either a Catholic or Protestant school and had a profession which enabled them to travel throughout their "mission fief". Yet, the great majority of the Ovimbundu did not have this same opportunity, which in fact reduces those who had the chance to study and travel, that is, to experience portions of the imagined community, to a very small minority. Even though these students would become the intellectual elites, the "cultural brokers" of modern ethnicity, additional evidence must be provided to understand how not the minority of educated Ovimbundu but the majority illiterate Ovimbundu, mainly rural farmers and migrant workers, felt and understood their own ethnic congruence as well as the cultural borders of their own ethno-regional space. Unfortunately there exists no recorded data to specifically understand this embryonic mental conception referent to the notion ordinary Ovimbundu had of ethnic borders, more so if we consider that ethnicity only became conceptually relevant to academic

---

[87] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola, p. 174.
[88] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola, p. 174.
[89] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 56.

analysis in the late 1960's early 70's. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the occupation of many Ovimbundu, who in the beginning of the 20th century were becoming proletarian, transitioning to an economy of cash-cropping[90], with little financial return, the greater portion of Ovimbundu people would most likely not have been able to study – learn to read and write - or travel around the central highlands with ease. The exception might lie among those Ovimbundu - converted to Protestantism - living in the villages along the railway, or in the cities near Catholic centres. But difference may not simply be traced between Christianised and non-converts in what concerns ethnic modernisation. Differences in the process of modernisation also appear between the two sects, especially related to the liberal character of education. While Protestant missionaries taught people how to read and write and honed these skills, Catholics were more focused on teaching people how to speak Portuguese, to read and write simply to understand sermons and be able to read the bible. But among Protestants, the bible was a crucial element in the modernisation process.

> "The culture of bible studies started being much more generalized in protestant environments, not in catholic ones. There were no biblical studies among the Catholics. And it was the biblical studies that ended up awakening people to other things. To retreat from what was bad and embrace what was good."[91]

---

[90] See Pössinger, Herman (1986), "A transformação da sociedade umbundu desde o colapso do comércio das caravanas", *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, 4 and 5, pp. 75-158.

[91] Interview 21. Adrian Hastings, takes the impact of the bible to new levels, by arguing that the "specific root of nationalism does not lie in the circumstances of post-Enlightenment modernity. On the contrary, it lies rather in the impact of the Bible, of vernacular literature and of the two combined in creating a politically stable ethnicity, effectively "imagined" by its members across a unique mythology". See Hastings, Adrian (1997), *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, p. 151. In the Ovimbundu case, as will be seen in the next section, there was no vernacular literature to tell the "tale" of the group. Nevertheless, all other aspects of ethnic modernisation, including territory delimitation, the codification of language and the very nature of education, besides an administrative apparatus reinvented and reshaped, were extremely influential..

Biblical studies may have enabled the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity, allowing people to think abstractly about the juncture between the traditional and the modern, the good and the bad, through a Christian lens, grounded on the reflections learned from biblical studies and in the interaction with the missionaries.[92]

Nevertheless, even though ethnic modernisation was evolving openly, it appears to have had little or no effect in ethnic solidarity. If these Protestant villages are to be considered the epitome of fast paced modernisation among the various influences the Ovimbundu were exposed to, solidarity between Protestant converts still appears to be more grounded on Christian values than on notions of kinship, even though this kinship is referred to at the village level, not only at the family (blood) level:

> "It was a matter of emancipation, of awakening to the realities of the epoch. In the Protestant side people had more solidarity in protecting each other. We are from the same village, have the same religious expression, of course I have the obligation to watch over you and you for me. Anything that favours me I might call you, so I don't progress alone."[93]

The great majority of Ovimbundu people, living far from the railway, must have kept the established notions of localism, of kinship centred in blood and local common ancestry. "As one sekulu explained in the early twentieth century, 'in our Umbundu country people do not build together unless we are blood relatives".[94] These notions of strict kinship allied with the prevalence of local affinities, as opposed to regional – even at the village level - or broader ethnic allegiances appear to have been the greatest obstacle in the wider acknowledgment of an

---

[92] Patrick Harries noted this with regards to the compilation of dictionaries of Thonga language. "A new vocabulary provided people with not only the means to express biblical, educational and liturgical ideas, but also wide sweeping new concepts such as scientific truth and error." Harries, Patrick, "The roots of ethnicity", p. 43.

[93] Interview 21.

[94] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 9.

Ovimbundu imagined community. Ovimbundu history is filled with experiences as plural and vast as they are different, making it impossible to outline a single pattern of ethnic modernisation. The various religious influences this group was exposed to produced an intangible amount of personal and group experiences that changed the way ethnicity, or ethnic solidarity, was understood and acted upon.

However, an element that served to consolidate the idea of a common Ovimbundu ethnicity was the interaction between Protestants and Catholics which, as Birmingham argues, was more likely than between Protestants from different ethnic regions. Adrian Edwards states that relations were friendly between people of all religious beliefs. Christians and pagans cooperated in marriages and funerals. Even in certain (traditional) rituals related to burials and commemorations of common ancestry Christians participated, justifying their presence as a merely social function, devoid of any religious significance[95].

Recurring to Samuel Chiwale's autobiography, himself an Ovimbundu, former student in Protestant missions and today member of parliament, the interaction between Catholic and Protestant students, even animists is noticeable, not only when finishing school but still as students. As Chiwale recalls:

> "My father warned me to this fact: he remembered me that boys from the evangelical [Protestant] mission were prohibited to mingle with the Catholics. (…) Such prohibitive posture would not end there; it would extend to those who did not profess any of the two religions, that is, atheists and animists, as they were designated."[96]

However,

[95] Edwards, Adrian C. (1962), *The Ovimbundu under two sovereignties*, International African Institute, pp. 82-86.

[96] Chiwale, Samuel (2008), *Cruzei-me com a história*, Sextante Editora, p.17.

"Sports disputes with the students of the seminary [Seminário Menor do Quipeio, Catholic] were frequent; we would often go to the football field of the seminary. Other times, they would come to us. There were always very busy competitions. Football fields did not have, obviously, benches so people would remain in the sides. When a goal occurred, or someone would jink, it was total hilarity."[97]

Chiwale's father's warning made little to impede contact between Catholics and Protestants, in their greatest majority, Ovimbundu. Referring, not without irony, to that fact that his father always knew how to "disentangle the profane from the religious: not only did he preside over certain traditional rites, as his function of *regedor* [*soba*] dictated, as he taught, whenever necessary, catechesis", Chiwale admits that it was his boldness which later allowed him to relate with every social strata of that community.[98] The author uses the expression bold as there was a "pattern of territorial organization that tended to keep mission flocks apart, building their own villages, going to their own schools and promoting same-denomination marriages"[99]. But even in urban centres, where the Catholic Church was most influential, distinctions of religious differences were not common. "In town, Protestants shared neighbourhoods with both "pagans" and Catholics and there is no evidence for conflicts based on religious allegiance".[100] More than sharing neighbourhoods in cities, whichever division there was between Catholics and Protestants seems to have been frequently put aside when the benefits of modernity – in this case, education, and consequently, future employment – were under consideration:

"The Catholic Church had many primary schools, called "officialised schools". As these had the advantage of their studies being recognized by the state, many of the Protestant

[97] Chiwale, Samuel, "Cruzei-me", p.22.
[98] Chiwale, Samuel, "Cruzei-me", p. 17.
[99] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 179.
[100] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 179. In the rural areas there emerged a difference between Protestant and Catholic villages, mentioned in the last section of this chapter. Nevertheless, no evidence was found to point to any type of discrimination or exclusion between both parts.

> brothers were welcomed in the Catholic Church so they could educate themselves and value their studies. My elder brothers had to study with their Protestant companions in the Catholic Church. (…) I still recall in my school, in my municipality, where I finished my secondary studies, in Bela Vista, I saw many protestant brothers studying in the school of the nuns, where they could complete secondary schooling, and ended doing fine, both in the church and in the state. There was cooperation between the Catholic and the Protestant church, above all related to the valorisation of the natives. That which was not allowed in the Protestant schools [further education], those who could would send their children to the Catholic Church, to get education. The concrete case of the Teresian sisters, in Bela Vista, today Catchiungo, many Protestant brothers had to go there to study, and were not discriminated by the Catholics, they did not tell them to return to their institutes only because they were not Catholic. There was union because the development of the Angolan man was at stake, so that tomorrow he could assume his responsibilities." [101]

Nonetheless, the issue remains that this appears to only occur with people connected to Christian missions. Hypothetically, ordinary Ovimbundu devoid of daily exposure to Christianity and missionary activity would most likely not have shared this mind-set. More likely, the idea of imagined community the majority of the Ovimbundu had was probably formulated by the news and experiences many of these school-leavers and catechists carried and disseminated, by passing through villages and socializing with people.[102] This was perhaps how the ethnic imagined-community of the Ovimbundu began to be disseminated, instilled by "cultural-brokers", travelling Protestant and Catholic agents, respected by many village people and elders due to their modern behaviour and thought, who would deepen ideas of ethno-linguistic relatedness by communicating in Umbundu, telling tales of other villages which many

[101] Interview 1.

[102] The return of migrant workers is also important in this dynamic, especially when telling about their experiences in different ethno-linguistic regions.

could identify with and discussing the common problems Africans were experiencing under colonialism at the time.

The coding of language and education

Aiming to create the kingdom of God in Africa, the evangelisation of the people of the central highlands awoke the necessity of the missionaries to learn and speak the language of the land, codified in the written word so they could teach the gospel translated in Umbundu. Henderson states that when Protestant missionaries reached Bailundo in 1881, Reverend William Henry Sanders dedicated to the "study of Umbundu language, putting in writing, which was, in fact, essential to preach the gospel and implant the church among the Umbundu, in the centre of Angola".[103] The author continues, "connected with the primordial role attributed to the laymen, was the importance the Protestants gave to spread the scriptures to all members. Thus, Protestant missions considered the translation of the scriptures as one of the primary and more important steps given to implement the church."[104]

But missionaries were instrumental not only in the codification and teaching of Umbundu language but also in the collection of Ovimbundu traditions, customs and other anthropological assets. The codification of language, and consequent interpretation (and probable reinvention or adaptation) of Ovimbundu culture and customs – possibly not deliberated - can be found in a small number of documents. Gladwyn Murray Childs, author of reference for any study of this ethnic group, Protestant missionary (former director of the Currie Institution at the Dondi mission) and a PhD in Anthropology, authored a few books which serve as an example of the registry, in written language, of the culture of this group by Protestant missionaries. Interpreting of stories and the daily life of the Ovimbundu, Childs published three books, *The Ovimbundu of Angola* (1934), *Umbundu kinship and character* (1949) and *The kingdom of Wambu: a tentative chronology* (1964). Written by the hand of a Protestant missionary, the works of Reverend Childs are still today essential to the study of the Ovimbundu. His uncle, Merlin Ennis, also put together

[103] Henderson, Lawrence, "A igreja em Angola", p. 67.
[104] Henderson, Lawrence, "A igreja em Angola", p. 86.

a book entitled *Umbundu: folk tales from Angola* (1962), a registry translated to English although without the original tales in Umbundu language and a cultural interpretation of the various stories, legends and myths. Due to the lack of explicative texts accompanying this author's translation, John Messenger, in his revision of the works of Ennis states that without the original texts there is no way to determine if there was any type of censuring or reconstruction or the possibility to evaluate the quantity of stylistic redefinition that could have been made by the author[105]. Even though the works of Childs and Ennis are not the translated bookmarks of Ovimbundu history, traditions and customs, - or the only examples[106] - they do serve to present a sample of the fact that the Protestant missionaries where very active in coding in the written word the various elements related to Ovimbundu experience.

The majority of studies concerning ethnicity in Africa argue that the development of the ethnic consciousness of a group is instigated by intellectuals capable of providing the basic materials to craft the new ethnic idea, that is, any type of "cultural broker" or "elite" that develops and spreads the language and religion of the people. In the Ovimbundu case, these intellectuals were the foreign missionaries in Protestant missions, accompanied by the newly educated Angolan catechists, who disseminated their ideas by opening schools, especially throughout the Benguela railway, as mentioned earlier.

> "missionaries themselves were often instrumental in providing the cultural symbols that could be organized into a cultural identity, especially a written language and a researched

[105] Messenger, John (1963), "Ethnology: Umbundu Folk Tales from Angola, Merlin Ennis (collector and translator), comparative analysis by Albert B. Lord", *American Anthropologist*, vol. 65, 2, pp. 470-471.

[106] Publications concerning the Ovimbundu were always published late during the colonial period and more centred on documenting traditions, customs and especially proverbs. This tendency is exemplified, among others, by the works of Valente, José Francisco (1964), who published an Umbundu grammar, *Gramática Umbundu: a língua do centro de Angola*, Lisboa: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar; or Tchikale, Basilio (2011), who also published a book titled *Sabedoria popular dos Ovimbundu: 630 provérbios em Umbundu,* Editorial Kilombelombe. Earlier publications regarding this theme were essentially written by protestant pastors, for example Hastings, Daniel (1933), *Ovimbundu beliefs and practices*, PhD thesis, Kennedy School of Missions; McCulloch, Merran (1952), *The Ovimbundu of Angola*, International African Institute.

> written history. (…) It was the missionaries who chose what the proper form of the language would be, thus serving both to further unify and to produce divisions by establishing firm boundaries. In addition to creating written languages, missionaries were instrumental in creating cultural identities through their specification of "custom" and "tradition" and by writing "tribal" histories"[107]

Yet, missionary activity in Angola lacked a crucial ingredient, if one assumes the validity of the model of development of modern ethnicity, an ingredient Berman, Vail [et.al] and others found vital in other parts of Africa, especially in Anglophone Africa. That was the research and writing of "tribal" history, a proposed version of pre-colonial history that informed, by default, European administrators of the history and relations of power between the groups they had to administer. The problem with this approach resides in from whose point of view is this history told and how it was manipulated to fit the power desires of one or more African chiefs and kings.[108] This work was never conducted in the central highlands[109], mainly for two reasons: on the one hand because the colonial state was not particularly interested in the historical, social and political aspects of African life[110]; on the other hand, missionaries were dedicated to the study of

---

[107] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", pp. 11-12.

[108] Vail and White's discussion about these matters concerning Tumbuka history in Malawi is particularly enlightening of these processes. See Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 156.

[109] Henderson writes that demand for literature was so great that even the added difficulties and cost of diglot – obligation by law of having to print materials in Portuguese besides Umbundu – did not restrict greatly the publication and distribution of Umbundu literature. See "Protestantism: a tribal religion?", p. 70. Even though this printed literature reveals the importance people attributed to reading, especially in Umbundu, these documents were nothing more than the New Testament and other texts of religious significance, never a researched history of the Ovimbundu.

[110] During the colonial period historical interest never seemed to take root among students of Portuguese Africa. On the contrary, naturalist oriented ethnographies and anthropometries and later political treaties about Portugal's luso-tropical inclination, culminating in Gilberto Freyre's research, were always inclined towards preventing racial miscegenation, in order to avoid the contamination of race and culture or, mainly after the Second World War, to emphasize a colonial humanistic nature grounded in the Portuguese propensity for miscegenation, civilization and conversion to Christianity, an argument recurrently used to defend the country's right to have possessions in Africa. For a brief exposition of these

Ovimbundu proverbs and folk tales with the objective of penetrating their moral space in order to conceptualize and better introduce their Christian message, as not to counter specific characteristics of Ovimbundu tradition and custom. Even though they did leave a codified written language, they certainly never provided a researched written history of the people of that region. Thus, in this modernisation model, written and interpretative history's role in solidifying the new ethnic message in the central highlands was not disseminated, its function largely substituted by education, though not as effective.

> "The Ovimbundu desire to imitate and learn from Europeans; it is from the missionaries that they have most opportunity of learning, and it is in the African clergy that they have the most clear evidence that this learning from Europeans will bring them results."[111]

There always was an intersecting dichotomy[112] between the traditional and the modern, the western and the African, the rural and the urban, and this was especially true in the pursuit of education. Schooling was perhaps the one element all Ovimbundu, regardless of religious or regional background always acknowledged.

Already at the end of the 19th century, the Ovimbundu kings' desire for education is patent, as noticeable in correspondence between several *sobas* and Portuguese colonial administrators. One letter sent to the governor of Angola on the 30th of October 1884, from the Secretary-general of the government in Luanda, sending instructions to the Catholic Portuguese mission in Bié and Bailundo, in order to prepare the people to accept the doctrines and principles that interest the religion of the state and the sovereignty of the Portuguese nation, mentions that

---

concepts see Duro dos Santos, Gonçalo (2012), "The birth of physical anthropology in late imperial Portugal", Vol. 53, No. 5, *Current Anthropology*.

[111] Edwards, Adrian C., "The Ovimbundu", p. 86.

[112] Maria da Conceição Neto's historical approach to the city of Huambo is the exact reflection of this intersection, a constant continuity between the urban and the rural "in a city whose economy relied almost entirely in peasant production" since "trade and transportation were the main activities of Portuguese settlers throughout the period, with only marginal investments in industry". See Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 16.

one missionary should remain in each *sobado* so that the requests of the *sobas* to provide primary education to their relatives are fulfilled.[113] Another letter, from the Governor-general to the Minister and Secretary of State of Maritime and Ultramarine Affairs, exposes the Governor of Benguela informed that the King of Bié wished for two of his sons to be educated in Europe, at the expense of the Portuguese government, one of them his favourite and probable successor. Interestingly, the "boys" were "to learn agronomy, fencing, shooting with bow and arrow, gymnastics, riding a horse, "everything" but those merely speculative doctrines which were taught to the sons of the King of Congo and Manoel Puna that made them useless individuals and who the people they were supposed to govern began despising".[114]

This search for means to improve their education is still visible today and was so under Portuguese administration, an objective much encouraged by African catechists and missionaries. This encouragement to study and better their lives can be read in Jardo Muekalia's book *Angola, a Segunda Revolução*, who mentions the work of his father, a Protestant pastor who would,

> "captivate his audience by preaching in Umbundu and Portuguese in a mix of evangelization and conscious awareness of the social condition of his members. Appealing to education as a passport for dignity, of loving one self and the next. He created a program of alphabetization for adults and said it was never too late to learn. Many time cults took place outside, bellow the shadow of leafy trees, as the congregation didn't fit in the church"[115]

However, the alphabetisation of Africans, enabled by the codification of the language, in this case Umbundu, also introduced terms specific to European conceptions of African social organization, centred upon the nation-state. Patrick Harries found that "terms like Gwamba or

[113] Angolana (Documentação sobre Angola) II (1883-1887) (1971), *Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola/Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos* p. 267.
[114] Angolana (Documentação sobre Angola) II (1883-1887), pp. 391-392.
[115] Muekalia, Jardo (2010), *Angola: a segunda revolução*, Sextante Editora, p. 15.

Thonga, Ronga and Tswa were introduced to express the existence at the conceptual level, of inclusive linguistics and political groups ("tribes", "nations") that had never existed in the mental world of the people upon whom they were imposed. As Vail (et. al.) argues,

> "European missionaries, assuming that Africans properly belonged to "tribes", incorporated into the curricula of their mission schools the lesson that the pupils had clear ethnic identities, backing up this lesson with studies of language and "tribal custom" in the vernacular. (…) mission education socialized the young into accepting a tribal membership, and to be a member of a "tribe" became "modern" and fashionable through its close association with education."[116]

By the mid-1940s and 1950s, writes Heywood, Ovimbundu pastors, deacons and catechists supervised hundreds of native churches and Christian villages. They began imposing new standards of behaviour and adopted rules for expelling "backsliders" from the churches and villages, also imposing new behaviour patterns of agriculture, hygiene, child care and better housing upon Christian households. More importantly, and in congruence with Vail's words, it were they who,

> "Unlike the Ovimbundu Catholics who had to conform to an already established catholic standard of behavior, Ovimbundu Protestants developed their own standards of behavior within an evolving social order influenced by both Protestant teachings and by Ovimbundu beliefs and customs. Protestant pastors, teachers, deacons, and deaconesses devised new ways of adapting Ovimbundu beliefs and customs to the demand of their new faith. The fact that the Ovimbundu were trailblazers in establishing villages and in converting non-Christian villages opened up many opportunities for adapting the old beliefs to the new realities."[117]

---

[116] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 12.
[117] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 109.

This way, not only the codification of Umbundu language, but the writing, teaching and sometimes reinventing of what was "tribal", "traditional" or customary, played into the assimilation of the thought and behaviour of foreign protestant missionaries – contrary to the project of Portuguese assimilation – of what was or should be the new Ovimbundu men, above all, profoundly Christian but alien to the many sinful ways of western civilization and urbanization.

Cultural barriers were in fact destroyed by the Ovimbundu Protestants. Heywood states that older social norms that distinguished free born and slaves were broken, as well as giving up the right to own slaves or adopting new attitudes towards neighbours. This, continues the author, was the product of a levelling process that came from western education mainly at the Means School and the Currie Institute in Dondi, "providing the impetus towards the full integration of those Ovimbundu and neighboring Africans from unfree backgrounds into the Protestant community."[118]

It is in the codification of language, in education as well as in the use and teaching of Umbundu by both foreign and Ovimbundu Protestants that the basis of ethnic modernisation resides. But the lack of a researched history raised obstacles in the pace and crystallization of the ethnic message. Without historical records that would inform not only about the past basis of their ethnic unity or, at least, imagined community but also about their relation with other groups in Angola, the Ovimbundu did not come to nurture the idea of being a solid, cohesive group. This fact alone permitted the continuation of Ovimbundu localism, which on its own never enabled the widening of feelings of kinship to the ethno-regional community.

The dissemination of the new ethnic message was based on other means of modernisation than what could be presented as historical fact. Not only language and education, but also administrative schemes based on cultural familiarities with older norms, permitted a smoother

[118] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 109.

adaptation to new realities and encouraged the fusion of the traditional and the modern, yet without really promoting the idea of a supposed age old ethnic community in a singular territory.

The administrative importance of Protestantism

The pinnacle of Protestant sponsored modernisation was grounded in daily contact. It were the real tangible changes people could see and experience first-hand, often in elements that diminished the gap between the "civilized white man" and the traditional African, that led the Ovimbundu to seek modernisation through the guise of Christianisation. This daily experiencing of new modern content was seminally achieved by Protestantism, by reshaping traditional Ovimbundu village organization and incorporating it into modern protestant ones, enabling a wide ethnic reinterpretation of the old and its transformation to the new, hence why some authors state Protestant villages resembled old Ovimbundu villages in both origin and functioning.[119]

The destruction and replacement of former royal lineages, allowed missionaries to have a greater role in the management of daily live, many even assuming the functions of African authorities in these Protestant villages. The catechist began performing "many of the same functions as the non-Christian *sekulu*, serving as the representative of the people to the *chefe* (secular head) and the pastor (spiritual head) collecting taxes, sending out people to perform roadwork or contract labour, and providing policemen and soldiers to the *chefe*".[120] This new position peaked into traditional Ovimbundu life and permitted catechists a co-optation between the traditional and the modern, fitted with real administrative power to implement the new ethnic message, not just by preaching and writing.[121] "Like the leaders of other villages, he also gave permission to villagers to open up new fields and establish new buildings and he settled disputes.

---

[119] For more see Heywood, "Contested power", p. 111.

[120] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 111.

[121] Didier Péclard notes that the attitude of Protestant missionaries over traditional Ovimbundu society was much more ambiguous than they admitted, since not everything was good to take from Ovimbundu culture. In the model of education he proposed, Childs did not hesitate to separate the "wheat from the chaff." That way, the rites of initiation of the youth, which he saw as an import on Ovimbundu culture, should be replaced by Christian youth camps. See Péclard, Didier, "Eu sou americano", p.372.

This meant, as one missionary observed in 1942, that the catechists were the ones who determined "what changes in native laws and customs were necessary by the new Christian standards. The precedents they set did far more to modify Ovimbundu customary law than government fiat."[122] Protestants, in the villages they established – often seen as a stronghold of education for many Ovimbundu -, had the power to navigate the traditional and the modern worlds and actually craft, not on paper but through daily action and modern direct administrative methods, the new ethnic, as is evident in Heywood's quote.

The creation of villages allowed Protestant pastors and catechists to emulate aspects of traditional villages, familiar to their new adherents, while introducing Christian morality and belief alongside the often contradictory demands of the colonial state. Lawrence Henderson reports on how missionaries raised the structures of evangelization in the central highlands,

> "The CIEAC (Concelho das Igrejas Evangélicas de Angola Central) closely followed the model of the social structure of the umbundu. The missionary station assumed the functions of the *ombala*, which was the village of the king, and during the colonial period the missionary was, in fact, the king. Dependent of the missionary stations were affiliated missions, which corresponded to the *atumbu* governed by the chiefs. As work increased and expanded and some leaders were appointed, these affiliated missions became pastoral centres. The other Christian villages, as happened in the traditional umbundu villages, were governed by the elders."[123]

Adrian Edwards reinforces these ideas by recalling an episode when one of his assistants, explaining how the *Mwekalia*[124] choose the new chief, compares it to the way the Bishop of New

---

[122] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 111.
[123] Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 230.
[124] The Mwekalia "is the first representative and speaker of the population of the kingdom. All problems and demands are firstly reported to him before the king. Upon these questions he must formulate opinions and judgments, present them to the king and work so justice can be administrated. His importance is such that he must prevent the king's excesses, says Daniel Hastings 'should the chief be angry and start out

Lisbon chooses a priest.[125] Most symbolically, the *onjango*, the central building of any Ovimbundu village, usually frequented by the elders and young males during the pre-colonial period, became the chapel, the school, the court and a recreation centre where standard Umbundu was used by catechists, which ultimately enhanced the distinctiveness of Ovimbundu Protestants. This, Heywood argues, was because Ovimbundu Protestants lived side by side with their non-converted kin[126], which enabled a closer look at older traditions and the adaptation of customs and beliefs into their own Christian norms.

Closely following the traditional social structure of the Ovimbundu, the agency of Protestantism in the central highlands claimed upon itself not only a model of administration familiar to the Ovimbundu – a safe haven of sorts - but also soothed the physical and psychological violence of transitioning towards a modern lifestyle, by adapting, dependent on its purposes, a structure that would allow the Ovimbundu to experience a daily routine and a hierarchy of authority not radically different from what they had experienced before.

Leroy Vail comments on this primordial interpretation of psychological security, albeit not without criticism. The primordial premise relates to ethnicity by defending that the ethnic group is where the individual is most comfortable at, and thus any change to the ethnic community will also spill into the psychological realm. It argues that people had an orientation and a real necessity to maintain their traditional values in an age of rapid social and political change, ultimately defending that,

> "Pre-capitalist and pre-colonial hierarchies and elements of order in social life were undermined by the growth of capitalist relations and the impact of colonialism, thereby

---

revenge, this man will lie in the path so that the chief dare not pass over his body. That would be like passing over the dead bodies of all his people, and might lead to revolt and deposition". See Florêncio, Fernando (2010), "No reino da toupeira: as autoridades tradicionais do M'Balundo e o estado Angolano", in Florêncio, Fernando (et. al), *Vozes do Universo Rural: reescrevendo o Estado em África*, Gerpress, p. 95.

[125] Edwards, Adrian C., "The Ovimbundu", p. 87.

[126] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", pp. 111-112.

> depriving people of social and psychological security. As a result, in a hostile world they have instead sought security through the invocation of a lost past of firm values as a way of recreating a life in which they can achieve emotional and, even, perhaps, physical safety. Ethnic identity provides a comforting sense of brotherhood and rootlessness."[127]

Primordialists may be right in assuming that perhaps not the ethnic community, but the closest kinship, or the visible community – people known to each other – may be where the individual is most psychologically comfortable at. Yet, albeit relevant, this was certainly not the main factor that motivated people to reside in Protestant villages. The primordialist take on ethnicity does not presuppose a continuous interaction between the traditional and the modern since the first encounter of both forces. By doing so, it excludes the absolutely vital element of African agency, in this case, by ignoring the longing Africans had to experience western education. Even when disregarding education, the reference to physical safety is much more central in Ovimbundu agency than mere belonging or psychological comfort, although the latter cannot be excluded. A symbiosis between protecting oneself and one's family while continuously searching for opportunities and ways of modern social advancement is a much more attractive and real motivation to explain the success of Protestant villages than the simple psychological comfort of ethnicity, be it the "clan" or perhaps even the family.

Hence, on the one hand, by recycling the structures of the former Ovimbundu kingdoms, Protestant missionaries established a political order where the fears instilled by traumas derived from a violent break with the past, in addition to the radical and inevitable changes stemming from the process of modernisation, could be soothed by the figure of the missionary, who according to Péclard, would not necessarily assume the position of the *osoma*, but of someone with the same potential[128], and by Christianity, which would serve as a religious "blanket" in

---

[127] Vail, Leroy (1997), "Ethnicity in Southern African history", p. 57, in Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation*, Blackwell Publishers.

[128] Péclard, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 371. Yet, Péclard disagrees with Henderson in that the latter attributes too much importance to the influence of Christian missions over Ovimbundu life. Péclard

support of the "soul", sometimes even substituting Ovimbundu spiritual elements. On the other hand, the reference to physical safety relates to the fact that many Ovimbundu sought refuge in the Protestant missions as means to escape the violence and social control of the colonial state, namely in matters of forced labour or *contrato*, especially those in connection with royal lineages, the former political hierarchies of Ovimbundu kingdoms. Physical violence, imprisonment or *contrato,* account for very real and much less vague reasons to interpret the adherence to Protestant villages, especially by the former elites.

In time, the success of this Christian administration was such that it established the basis for an almost exclusive Ovimbundu representation and leadership within the religious scene operating in the central highlands. [129] This is present in Henderson, when stating that,

> "The great freedom of actions the missionaries gave to the church is illustrated in the behaviour of Walter Currie, the pioneering Canadian missionary in Chissamba, who would only attend the Chissamba church's work reunions when invited."[130]

The same reference can be found in Adrian Edwards,

> "The white missionaries exercise only a supervisory role over the work of the Native Church which is responsible for pastoral activity in the villages. The African clergy of the Native Church are entirely dependent financially on their people. (…) The relative autonomy of the Umbundu Native Church vis-à-vis the white missionaries and the

---

notes that while Henderson attributed a key role to Christian missions in maintaining social, political, judicial and cultural cohesion of Ovimbundu society, the cultural, historical and political patrimony of the Ovimbundu was much more impenetrable to Christians than Henderson accounts for. For a more in-depth explanation see Péclard, Didier (2015), *Les incertitutes de la nation en Angola: aux raciness sociales de l'Unita*, Paris: Éditions KARTHALA, pp. 129-138.

[129] Heywood states that unlike the Catholic missions the Protestant missions "trained Ovimbundu pastors, catechists, teachers, nurses, and others (…) held leadership positions in missions, churches, schools, seminaries, hospitals, and other clinics." See Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 106.

[130] Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 231.

> disintegration of the traditional system of authority have given judicial powers to its officials. Dr. Childs has written in a recent article: "In Angola… the breakdown of traditional authority has been so rapid that the social life of the villages is now very near to complete anarchy… the missions and churches have been compelled to take over. Church leaders – catechists, deacons, and pastors – have taken on judicial functions. Church meetings, both local and regional, have become courts and councils."[131]

It is this freedom of movement and autonomy permitted to Ovimbundu missionaries and pastors, among them Jesse Chiúla Chipenda, Paulino Ngonga, Enoque Gomes e Frederico Mussili – delegates to the Umbundu Ecclesiastic Council[132] – that is at the genesis of the edification of a system which would unite many Ovimbundu, independent of region, where not only religious elites could mingle and were represented but also people of faith, pastors and catechists, besides other ordinary people from different social strata, mostly peasants.

The fact that the Association of Umbundu Churches - Ohongele Yakongelo Umbundu – could be created already in 1913, initially composed of the churches founded by the ABCFM and the CCFMS, and that there existed an Umbundu Ecclesiastic Council, which in the beginning had separate meetings from the Missionary Council, establishes a predicate of religious administrative passage, with all that entailed, to a specific well delineated ethnic group, objectively enounced in the very designation of the Association of Churches and Ecclesiastic Council by the term "Umbundu"[133].

It was under the scrutiny of Portuguese colonial administration, not without opposition and several obstacles, that all these developments took shape. Such liberty is, among other elements, explained by the very late expansion of Portuguese bureaucracy in the central

---

[131] Edwards, Adrian C., "The Ovimbundu", p. 83.

[132] Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 233.

[133] This pan-Ovimbundu initiative would later be extinct with the creation of the Council of Evangelical Churches of Central Angola. "The first name suggested was Church of Christ in Central Angola (…) Church of Christ was supposed to avoid the use of denominational titles susceptible of creating divisions". See Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 233.

highlands, which in reality revealed an incapacity justified by the lack of financial and human resources to "colonise" this region the same way it did with other regions in Angola and Africa, especially before the 1950's. Adrian Edwards explains this slow bureaucratic expansion, stating that

> "Despite such expressions of loyalty as the singing of the Portuguese national anthem at village parties the "government" is too distant and shadowy for the Ovimbundu to have much knowledge of it. Nor has the post tried effectively to build up new types of bureaucratic authority in the villages – the government headmen are not given sufficient backing or responsibility by the post to do more than execute orders. Hence, the establishment of new types of grouping and leadership at the local level has been the work of the missions, and it is through the missions that these new groupings are articulated on to the total Angolan social system. The missionaries, who provide this articulation between the "civilized" society and the local organization of the natives, form the section of the "civilized" population which most satisfies, in its relations with the people, the expectations of the Africans."[134]

This element in particular allowed Protestant missionaries to assume a greater role in administration, education and even in solving disputes. Judicial power, transferred from the "native" society to the "civilised" community, meant that any dispute needed to be resolved by someone considered "civilised", upon threat of the case being taken to the nearest post of Portuguese administration, which was often too distant. This individual would frequently be someone from religious missions, who acted as guardians of Ovimbundu public interest against the pressures of the local chief or the governor.[135]

---

[134] Edwards, Adrian C., "The Ovimbundu", p. 87.

[135] Edwards, Adrian C., "The Ovimbundu", p. 157. This, however, does not exclude the role and centrality of traditional authorities. It rather implies a dual system of legitimacy, of people who had power to intervene, in the eyes of the population. Péclard already adverted against readings solely centred on the loss of autonomy of the Ovimbundu kingdoms to Christian missions (see footnote 128). Moreover, much

An additional factor that further restricted Portuguese bureaucracy related to the idea well spread among Protestants that Christianization in the central highlands should commence in the rural spaces, as urban areas were exposed to sinful practices, namely prostitution, alcohol (mainly rum) and other elements censured by the Protestants, as already mentioned. In fact, both Portuguese administration and the Catholic Church exerted a more solid social control in the cities, not in the rural areas, where administration was indirect, particularly challenging or even absent. This blueprint of action perfectly matched Ovimbundu lifestyle, which at the post-caravanning period could be widely characterized by a necessary connection to land and rural life as the principal means of subsistence and survival.

To be sure, as Péclard argues, Protestant missions developed a system that did not ignore Ovimbundu culture, since their message was destined to integrate this group's culture with religious, social and political modernity. Nonetheless, this frame would be incomplete without noting that the model of traditional Ovimbundu Protestant culture did not rhyme with Africanity: the defence of Ovimbundu culture was associated with the defence of black Africa, and negritude against the perils of assimilation and urban areas. It was this combination of geographic references and cultural and racial backgrounds that brought up Ovimbundu Protestant elites.[136]

Creation of modern elites in the Protestant missions

The elements of ethnic modernisation described above unlocked one last facet, the creation of new elites among the Ovimbundu, under Protestant influence. The initial objective of Protestantism was to capacitate the Ovimbundu with enough education so they could firstly read the gospel and secondly administer and create new parishes and churches in the central plateau. Working in religious missions, in colonial administration and later in the very roots of the liberation movements, the great majority of Ovimbundu leaders and elites came from the privileged education offered in the religious missions, especially Protestant, where above all, they

---

of the Ovimbundu population was Catholic or non-converted, people who relied on catechists, priests and traditional authorities and had little contact with Protestant missionaries.

[136] Péclard, Didier, "Eu sou Americano", p. 373.

were deeper in contact with the benefits of modernity. This modern apparatus had the peculiarity of serving as a support base for these Ovimbundu elites to pursue their own political agenda, mostly characterized by anti-colonial sentiment, much like other groups in Angola. It provided a voice to expose feelings of revolt regarding the politics of racial segregation and forced labour which particularly affected the Ovimbundu under colonialism, while promoting the need to defend blackness and Africanity, but not necessarily traditionalism. In sum, it provided an agenda constructed exactly by what they had learned from the modernisation of their own ethnicity under Protestantism. As Vail comments,

> "missionaries educated local Africans who then themselves served as the most important force in shaping the new ethnic ideologies. These people – usually men – were keenly aware of the forces that were pulling apart their societies and, with the examples of nationalism in Europe derived from their own mission education before them, they sought to craft similar local movements as a means of countering these problems. Despite their western style education, they realized that such a construct would best be understood and accepted if it were put in a cultural idiom easily accessible to the people. Thus, in formulating their new ideologies, they looked to the local area's past for possible raw material for their new intellectual bricolage."[137]

There is an interesting parallel between Protestant modernity and Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony that may provide a further explanation to the Protestant dynamic regarding the crafting of this new intellectual bricolage. Protestant missionaries must have had the same questions in mind as Gramsci did in the early 20th century. Was it possible to start identifying the latent elements that would lead to the creation of a [Ovimbundu Christian protestant *ethos*] proletarian civilisation or culture? Did the elements for an art, philosophy and

[137] Vail, Leroy, "Creation of tribalism", p. 12.

morality (standard) specific to the [Ovimbundu] working class already exist?[138] As Gramsci concluded, and also true in the case of the Ovimbundu and Protestantism, both questions could be answered positively.

Protestantism in the central highlands did craft what would become a cultural hegemony, mainly in the newly created Protestant villages, backed by catechists and pastors. Its hegemony can be equated with the bourgeoisie values, of what became “common sense”, directly against the backdrop of Ovimbundu norms and morality, which Gramsci treats as the proletariat cultural revolution. In fact, bourgeoisie culture can be equated with the Protestant approach in Africa in terms of the massification of its acceptance. The twist resided in that Protestantism reversed Gramsci’s theory. It crafted and implemented a “new culture” that would thrive upon an already established previous one, contrary to the proletariat Cultural Revolution in Western Europe Gramsci defended which did not occur. In this sense, Protestantism assumed the proletariat challenge of Cultural Revolution and thrived, transforming it into the sort of accepted and desirable culture the bourgeoisie maintained. Its great triumph was that this new culture was not reserved to the intellectuals. This is argued by Gramsci when looking at western cultural hegemony over other world cultures:

> “It is not important that this movement had its origins in mediocre philosophical works, or at best, in works that were not philosophical masterpieces. What matters is that a new way of conceiving the world and man is born and that this conception is no longer reserved to the great intellectuals, to professional philosophers, but tends rather to become a popular, mass phenomenon, with a concretely world-wide character, capable of modifying (even if the result includes hybrid combinations) popular thought and mummified popular culture”[139]

---

[138] Forgacs, David (ed.) (1988), *A Gramsci Reader, Selected Writings 1916-1935*, Lawrence and Wishart Limited, p. 70.

[139] Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (eds. and translators) (1999), *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Essential Classics in Politics: Antonio Gramsci, The Electric Book Company Ltd, p. 765.

Much like the cultural socialist based revolution, what remained of non-converted Ovimbundu culture[140] was not able to supersede the Protestant approach, mainly because the desire for modernity was much entrenched in Ovimbundu thought. Contrary to the bourgeois values which were already prevalent in 19th and 20th century western Europe, the modern ideology of Protestantism, even without being prevalent and widespread, was understood as a higher force in a hierarchy of "superior and inferior" cultures underlined by colonialism, where the power of the white man became the power desired and the one offered by Protestantism.

The combination of this cultural hegemony and the modernity desire of the Ovimbundu encouraged a political awareness not common among this group. In fact, education received in Protestant missions ended up assuming a crucial role in the promotion of African emancipation, both ethnic and political, and, consequently, became linked with the liberation struggle. Jaka Jamba, in a debate organized by Rádio Ecclesia, demonstrates this situation,

> "I also want to corroborate the role the church had in the liberation struggle. It is true that the noble mission of the church is not to be politically active. But I would like to speak, from personal experience, of the great role played by [both] the churches in the promotion of the Angolan men. In the concrete case of Angola, in the central highlands, we had a very painful colonial situation. In what concerns education there were two systems. There was, on the one hand, the official schooling and on the other what was called at the time the rudimentary system, which was provided by the [protestant] churches. A great effort was made by the latter, so the great majority of people who serve Angola today from that area

---

[140] The term non-converted is used as it is impossible to speak of an untouched, "puerile" Ovimbundu "traditional" culture. Gramsci picks this in his conception of hegemony, "influenced by the concepts of "prestige" and "radiation of innovations" in historical linguistics (…) These terms designated the process by which speakers of one form of a language exert an influence over others, changing the way the latter speak, either by simple everyday contact or through the mediation of the education system and other channels of communication. Gramsci extends this process from language to other relations of political and cultural influence of an "active", "expansive" and consensual rather than a passive, mechanical or merely coercive kind." See Forgacs, David, "A Gramsci Reader", p. 324.

[the central highlands], rose from the work made by the missionaries, often in very difficult conditions. (…) On the other hand, we cannot fail to mention the role of the Catholic Church in the central highlands. Personally, we had an education similar to the missions, my father was the director of the mission in (protestant) [imperceptible] (…) additionally, we also studied in the Teresian School. (…) We [politicians] are the product of all of this work. If we later went to study at university it was due to the subsidies we got from the missions, in my case in the evangelical [protestant] missions. But there were also other initiatives in other areas aiming to raise the cultural level of the populations." [141]

The crucial role of the churches and missions - Catholic or Protestant - in the modernisation of the Ovimbundu, and as a consequence in the emancipation of their ethnic consciousness is clear in Jaka Jamba's speech. A deep association with the ethno-linguistic territory of the Ovimbundu is patent when Jamba refers to the "us" in the central highlands, and to those people "who serve Angola today from that area". This mission related political emancipation and intellectual preparation can also be found in Dom Damata Mourisca's statements, Bishop Emeritus in Uíge, when referring that,

"The church educated people, with its schools, because a country without education won't move ahead, and all this we are now seeing, it is fruit of a mentality, of a culture, of an intellectual preparation, and in this aspect the church had a positive contribution, it educated people, people to make the revolution and independence of Angola." [142]

Dom Damata Mourisca in his quality of representative of the Angolan Catholic Church goes even further than Jaka Jamba, by stating that the church did prepare and educate people so

[141] "Debate Informativo: Como valorizar mais a objectividade da história da independência do país?", *Radio Ecclesia*, 2013, 12 Novembro 2012. Accessed on the 15th January. Available at http://www.radioecclesia.org/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=items&cid=208%3Aaudio&id=11262&Itemid=663&popup=1#.VdHK8flVhBe

[142] Op. Cit.

the independence of Angola could be achieved. It is, nonetheless, difficult to accept that the Catholic Church was focused in preparing and educating the Ovimbundu and other groups in Angola so they could reach political emancipation when considering the church's relationship with the colonial state.[143] In fact, the reason why Jaka Jamba mentions most elites "who serve Angola from that area rose from the work made by the missionaries" and not the Catholic church is due to the fact that in the Protestant missions they did not have to go through the very strict social and cultural controls that occurred in urban areas and in the Catholic missions, even though many Ovimbundu had both a Protestant and Catholic education.

The Dondi Protestant mission is the most central example of this cultural and political, albeit severely limited, liberty. Fruit of an agreement made by several Protestant missions in the region – albeit not all – so students who had finished primary education could continue their studies, the Dondi mission, many times referred by colonial authorities as a nest of nationalist subversion, was the biggest step in enabling an almost exclusively ethnic, politically aware elite, all in the name of African emancipation.

The colonial regime, preoccupied with any heave of subversion, had always attempted to strictly control African elites.[144] The fact that official teaching was limited to state schools in conjunction with the Catholic Church worked to the fulfilment of the state's main objective of censuring the ethnic and political emancipation of the various peoples of Angola. Colonial jittering became aimed at institutions like the Dondi mission - created in 1914 and made administrative centre in 1957 -, which functioned as the very heart of Congregationalist missions

---

[143] There were, however, exceptions to this case especially concerning the relationship between foreign priests and the Ovimbundu, a matter addressed in the second section of this chapter.

[144] Linda Heywood refers that Norton de Matos was one of the governors in Angola who lead efforts to contain the emergence of Ovimbundu protestant as a magnet of United Ovimbundu opposition to the colonial enterprise. In 1925 he refused appeals by Protestants asking that local chiefs stopped sending students with primary education and African protestant pastors to forced labour, "*contrato*", and also to stop the compulsory recruitment of catechists to the colonial army. These were some of the policies, especially compulsory recruitment to the armed forces that aimed at forcing the assimilation of Ovimbundu Protestants into Portuguese ways, repressing at the same time the growing ethnic solidary among the Ovimbundu. See Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", pp. 56-58.

in matters of education, through the Currie Institute, the Secondary Technical School, and the Means School for girls. More than an important point of passage, these teaching institutions became the destiny of those elites being formed by the Protestants.[145]

What is most relevant in missions like Dondi is that it enabled the creation of elites which, much like the catechists and pastors, were also able to navigate the traditional and the modern with extreme ease. Their influence was much stronger when, like many in UNITA, especially its leader, they could trace their heredity back to the royal lineages of the pre-colonial period. Some of the descendants of these royal lineages, in the second of third generation, would later fill the ranks of nationalist movements, many occupying top positions. As Heywood explains,

> "The first graduates of Dondi became the railway workers, pastors, clerks and teachers who gave stimulus to numerous protestant congregations in the central highlands, especially in the settlements that sprang along the Benguela railway beyond the central highlands, in Lobito and other urban coastal areas of Angola, and in neighbouring countries where Ovimbundu Protestants settled. (…) Among this dynamic group of protestant Ovimbundu were Loth Malheiro Savimbi and Jesse Chipenda, whose sons Jonas Savimbi and Jesse and Daniel Chipenda would play a major role in the anticolonial struggle and the growth of modern Ovimbundu nationalism."

But the synergy between Protestantism and the Ovimbundu was not always facilitated. When exchanging letters with the MPLA, before joining the FNLA, Jonas Savimbi, imbued with the Marxist influences of the time, typical of liberation movements, expressed doubts and contempt at Protestant intentions:

> "Personally, I don't fear names, be them communist, animist or atheist. What is true for me is that Christianity is nothing more than the loyal companion of colonialism. If I fight

[145] Péclard, Didier, "Eu sou Americano", p. 370.

> against the latter, ready to give my life for that struggle, I cannot excuse the former. I have a scholarship provided by American missionaries. In Portugal I always had problems regarding my Christian faith. When I left [Portugal] under mysterious circumstances, the missionaries were unanimous in not letting me go, but when the time came they knew nothing and some paternalistically, who understood the strength that motivates me in cutting the religious myth which tailed colonialism, be it through Concordats with the Holy See, peace treaties with America or NATO, tried to keep me within the missionary sphere. (…) The truth is, the immediate reaction was to propose through doubtful organizations my departure to America, so they could re-educate me 'sur place".

Their new intellectuality and political awareness allowed some Ovimbundu to understand and recover older doubts regarding the intentions of Protestantism. For some like Jonas Savimbi these doubts proved to reside in the different yet still assimilationist approach of Protestantism, always ready to reshape unpopular ideologies. This reshaping also parallels the loss of the ethnic elements of tradition Savimbi's father Loth had been struggling with conserving decades before when facing the influence of Protestantism and what could be gained through their modern methods. This was perhaps, alongside the transition to modernity, the great gift Protestantism left Ovimbundu elites, the ability to become politically aware and, consequently, active agents against the same forces tearing apart their societies, including Protestantism itself.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLING AND MODERNITY

The Catholic Church did not have the same approach with regards to modernity and ethnicity as Protestantism had among the Ovimbundu. Its influence, slow to spread, was defined against Protestant presence and in conjuncture with the colonial state. Although the church had been engaged in the process of evangelising African people in the Angolan central highlands since the late 19th century, the best part of the first half of the 20th century was mainly characterised by several setbacks and difficulties which heavily strained Catholic expansion.

Since the very first attempts to open a Catholic mission in Bié, which date back to the beginning of 1890, also closing by the end of the same year, to the shutting down of the Catholic mission of Bailundo in 1889, Catholic expansion in the central highlands was never territorially even. The Bailundo Catholic mission perfectly exemplifies the resistance of the Ovimbundu to the establishment of a new religion. In contacts made between the Bishop of Angola and Congo and Father Lecomte, the latter explains how people destroyed the mission, the chapel and the school in Bailundo due to the bad behaviour of Father Bernardo[146], who was trying to establish the mission there since 1887. Only in 1896 did Bailundo have some sort of Catholic missionary activity, pushed by the French Holy Ghost Fathers – the largest male Catholic order in Angola -, hereafter Spiritans, under the supervision of Father Lecomte from Caconda.[147]

Maria da Conceição Neto, aware of these difficulties, questions what would lead people to trade their beliefs for a new one when their religion was already adapted to their ways of life, in essence, why would the Ovimbundu choose another way to conceive god? The author argues that people were connected to their traditions and still in possession of a way of life that enabled survivability and thus not interested in exchanging it for simple religious compensations. Yet, Neto continues, like Protestant missionaries, the Catholic Church, aware of such resistances, also used schooling and health assistance to attract the population.

> "In what concerns schooling, initially more of a protestant activity, since catholic missionaries did not see it as indispensable (except the catechesis school), they soon realized that in this domain they had to compete with the Protestants. After the 40's they became much more involved, shielded by the Missionary Accord with the Portuguese state, which attributed them wide responsibilities in the education of the natives"[148]

---

[146] Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 75.

[147] Neto, Maria da Conceição (1994), "Comércio, religião e política no sertão de Benguela: o Bailundo de Ekwikwi II (1876-1893), *Fontes & Estudos*, 1, Luanda, pp. 101-118.

[148] Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Entre a tradição e a modernidade", p. 210.

This said, two strategic axis broadly set the pace for Catholic influence in the area, besides the desire and necessity to convert non-Christians to its faith: the need to counter Protestant expansion, especially in Bié, pressured by the Portuguese government in the face of German and British expansion in the region, mainly after Livingstone's travels; and its relationship with the Portuguese colonial state, which is divided in two phases, the Portuguese First Republic and the period of the Estado Novo. The First Republic's "threats of replacing Catholic missions with 'Portuguese lay missions" was "no more than a parenthesis in the history of church-state relationship", since "the trend of collaboration was again confirmed when Salazar came to power in 1926."[149] With Salazar in power in Portugal, the offset of Catholic expansion in the central highlands began to change, especially with the signature of a Concordat and a Missionary Accord, which was complemented by a Missionary Statute. These documents allowed important developments which would eventually completely turn the pace of Catholic presence in the region, especially by having missions and missionary corporations "subsidised by the State".[150] The creation in 1940 of a new Diocese in Huambo contributed immensely to the revamping of the Catholic Church's presence in the central highlands, having had in 1960 – one year before the nationalist revolts in the north of the country – more than "330 African priests and 300 seminarians studying to be ordained".[151] The mentioned Concordat of 1940 between the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church and the Missionary Accord provided the church with a very clear advantage in comparison with the Protestant missions operating in the central highlands. The creation of the Diocese in Nova Lisboa (Huambo)[152] transformed the city "into the epicentre of an African Catholic network of catechists, school teachers, seminarians, priests and nuns".[153] As a result, the Anuário Pontifício of the Vatican indicated, in 1960, that 69% of the population of Huambo was Catholic, in contrast with 27% Protestants, and 44% Catholics and

---

[149] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 8.
[150] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 9.
[151] Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", pp. 130-131.
[152] In 1960 there were dioceses in Nova Lisboa (Huambo), Silva Porto (Kuito), Sá da Bandeira (Lubango) and Malanje.
[153] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 32.

30% Protestants in Bié.[154] Even though these statistics published by the Vatican must not be considered to their fullest extent, they do serve to provide the idea that associated with the colonial state and its resources, by 1960 the Catholic Church was able to "convert" many Africans to Catholic Christianity, although the proper religious identification of people in Angola and in the African continent in general is much more complex than sheer numbers can elucidate.[155] In exchange of full state support to its enterprise, the Catholic Church became intensely associated with the colonial state, its evangelization methods almost indistinguishable from the prospects and final objective of assimilating the natives through "Portugalisation". This was mainly done within the Church's system of education.

In the Concordat and the missionary accord Portugal entrusted the Catholic Church with the task of creating a system to educate the African population. However, even though the Missionary Statute of 1941 demanded that missionaries sent to Angola should always be, whenever possible, Portuguese, as they were "expected to take an active part in the "Portugalisation" of the "natives", a "constant lack in missionary vocations within Portugal itself forced the church to rely, sometimes heavily, on foreign personnel: Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Belgian, French, mainly in the service of the Holy Ghost Fathers [Spiritans], the order that always dominated the Catholic missionary scene in Angola."[156]

The introduction of foreign missionaries in Angola, people with "different ideas about the place of the church in the political realm as well as theological and politico-religious traditions" brought about what would become the dominant trend within the Catholic Church in Angola, a division between: the Portuguese church, rarely "very active in the missions field", since it had "concentrated in providing parish services for settlers and had left the converting and nurturing of black subjects to foreign priests or Protestants"; and the foreign missionaries, who thought the colonial state was more interested in limiting their "own freedom of action than with allegedly

---

[154] Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 138.

[155] Lawrence Henderson states, "there are many Christians, but good ones are rare (...) almost all return to their ancient pagan ways." See Henderson, Lawrence, "A Igreja em Angola", p. 110.

[156] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 168.

contributing to the emancipation of the natives."[157] These foreign missionaries were the people "black Angolans mostly encountered", Catholics who "stemmed from a theological, social and political tradition which insisted on "the respect of profane values and popular culture" as well as on the "unavoidably political aspects of the role of the church and of the different religious actors".[158] As Péclard notes,

> "The high and low clergy had divergent views on colonialism. Both groups – inasmuch one can speak of groups in this case – evolved in different intellectual, symbolic and ideological frameworks, and their representations of the role of the church among "native" populations varied accordingly. Whereas priests and missionaries tended to put great emphasis, as their publications show, on social and political matters, bishops analysed colonialism through a very abstract and detached lens; (…) The "deep ideological opposition" that ran between priests and bishops was not only expressed in discourse, but also reproduced in missionary practices."[159]

It is not the scope of this study to analyse the church's wider role and influence in the central highlands but rather to look at its relevance in the ethnic modernisation of the Ovimbundu. In this sense, and since the Portuguese church in Angola, especially its high clergy, was more focused on the "portugalisation" and civilisation of the natives, the analysis turns to the grass roots work of foreign missionaries and the church's low clergy – both foreign and Portuguese – as the central aspect of ethnic modernisation.

Looking at ethnic modernisation, the most important ethnic related elements permitted by the Catholic Church were the use of Umbundu language, under the supervision of the low clergy, and the consequences derived from the necessity of converting Africans to Christianity by

[157] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 169.
[158] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 169.
[159] Péclard, Didier, "Religion and politics in Angola", p. 169.

ordaining Ovimbundu priests, which ultimately led to a territorial conception of evangelisation not dissimilar from that of Protestantism.

In what concerns language, not only Umbundu but all "native" languages were threatened in 1921 with the publishing of decree 77 by the high commissioner of Angola, José Mendes Ribeiro Norton de Matos, regulating the establishment and functioning of all missions. While article 2 forbade the teaching of native languages in schools, article 3 allowed the use of native languages for oral religious instruction and as help during the elementary period of teaching Portuguese language. This legislation reflected on the low clergy's two main activities, in official Catholic education, attributed exclusively to Portuguese priests, as teaching was done in Portuguese due to other languages being forbidden by the state, and in the evangelisation and spread of the Holy word, which was regularly done in Portuguese or in Umbundu in the central highlands, also by Portuguese and foreign priests.

> "Portuguese language was mandatory except for the teaching of religion and Catholic missions were responsible for training "native" teachers with the obligation of using only Portuguese training personnel. In all other activities, foreign missionaries could be used if necessary but they would formally have to declare to accept the rule of Portuguese laws and courts."[160]

Considering the severely restricted access the Ovimbundu in general had to official Catholic education, the interaction between the Catholic Church and the members of this group, especially in the rural regions, was more likely grounded on the evangelisation and spread of the Holy word, which by law permitted the use of Umbundu. Interviews point to the need this low clergy had to learn Umbundu, mainly for sermons and mass when these could not be done in Portuguese:

---

[160] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 184.

"Priests made an effort to know the local language so that they could spread the gospel. And through that the people here were able to understand them. It would be difficult without doing so."[161]

This effort to learn the local language was absolutely necessary for the success of Catholic missionary evangelisation. Here emerges a clear correlation between speaking the local language and attracting people to the mission:

"Many Portuguese missionaries, even bishops, could not communicate in the language of their congregation. In a mission he had to use a translator, and eventually he shows he's not one of the people. In order to interest people to adhere, they had to communicate in their language. This ended up attracting more people."[162]

Another interviewee confirming the centrality of Umbundu language in Catholic missionary activities provides clues pointing to the use of the ethno-linguistic identity of people, this time by the Catholic Church, to better distribute labour:

"White priests, missionaries, would stay there [in villages] with the so called gentiles. He could live there and learn Umbundu. But he always had a catechist. The priest would speak and the catechist would translate. In time, they had to ordain priests who spoke the same language [as the people]. When the priest is Kimbundu, he goes to the seminary, they know his native tongue is Kimbundu, so he is sent to Bengo or Malange."[163]

It was not the Church's plan to voluntarily divide the Angolan ethno-linguistic territory by ethnic group as Protestantism inadvertently did. However, possibly motivated by pragmatism,

[161] Interview 20.
[162] Interview 21.
[163] Interview 10.

and much like Protestantism, it did contribute to the creation of an Ovimbundu imagined community, through the travels of catechists and priests, even though interaction between people of different ethnic groups was much more common in the Catholic Church:

> "Due to the vast extension of the territory of Umbundu linguistic expression, people who were in Benguela did their missionary activity in the north of Huíla, where Umbundu is also spoken. They travelled a lot inside the territory of Umbundu expression. (…) [Nevertheless] religious missionaries, they could stay in zones of different linguistic expression. Kimbundu missionaries, many stayed in Huambo, Benguela, Lubango, Cunene."[164]

Ovimbundu Catholic missionaries would be sent to villages within the territory Umbundu of linguistic expression not due to ethnic or cultural background but due to their mastery of Umbundu language, which was one of the main factors in deciding the success of the implementation of the church. Yet, if new ordained priests were sent to areas where their native tongue was spoken, the congruence between the elements of ethnicity, regionalism and language, this time sponsored by the Catholic Church, cannot be ignored. If a priest spoke Kimbundu and was sent to Bengo or Malange, traditionally Ambundu areas, Ovimbundu priests were also sent, albeit non-exclusively, to Ovimbundu areas.

Nevertheless, the rigidity of this linguistically inspired territorial allocation of African priests and catechists is not similar to that conjured by Protestantism, especially because non-Ovimbundu priests working in the central highlands appear to have been common. Since the only place of theological instruction was in Huambo, the city amalgamated people of different ethnic backgrounds who went there to study. After completing their education many returned to their diocese of origin, but some remained in Huambo. The Catholic Church was more permeable to the open interaction between Catholics from different ethnic regions, even at the cultural level.

---

[164] Interview 21.

> "Some wrote songs in their own languages and taught them to their communities. I know Kimbundu people who taught Kimbundu songs where they did their missionary activities. For example in [the neighbourhood, *bairro*] of Santo António, in Huambo, that locality is peripheral, peri-urban. There are people who speak Portuguese of course, but the public in its majority speaks the local language [Umbundu]. But people also sing in Kimbundu, because the missionary taught. He translated, so people knew the meaning of what they were singing."[165]

Nevertheless, similar to Protestantism albeit without the concept of territorial division in mind, the Catholic Church did sponsor the travels of Catholic Ovimbundu within their own ethno-regional space. This fact alone promoted a type of "administrative pilgrimage" not so different from the one Protestants were experiencing, a "pilgrimage" that above all – and for reasons of poor communication routes and great distances – failed to include the entirety of the Angolan people and territory but often reduced it to the space of the ethnic group. Like the experiences of Protestant Ovimbundu missionaries, it enabled the imagining of a group of people who shared a common culture and language, the appreciation that a person from Bailundo or Andulo, among many places, is not so different from other Ovimbundu, especially when contact with an exterior ethnic element, for example a Kimbundu priest working in the central highlands, was possible.

Language and labour allocation were not the only ethnic related elements regulated by the Catholic Church. Catholic modernisation, or the simple break with tradition, implied that customs were to be observed, under close scrutiny, so that old practices and traditions could be broken and adapted. As Neto argues,

[165] Interview 21.

> "Keeping people apart from old practices demanded substantial changes in everyday life. The daily routine and Sunday activities in a typical Catholic catechism school implied a good length of time spent in religious activities. Every morning the catechist or the sekulu of the school gathered at the chapel-school all the baptized and catechumens, children and adults, for morning prayers before the catechism lesson. In the evening, after working in the fields or in town, they gathered again for another catechism lesson, collective recitation of the rosary and an evening prayer. Umbundu language was the norm, with occasionally hymns in Portuguese or even Latin. Evening meetings could also be preceded by dancing and singing nonreligious songs or be used for public announcements, as before in the "pagan" ocila (the central open space in villages for meetings and dances, which were suppressed in Christian villages)."[166]

Protestantism certainly expressed more willingness in reinventing Ovimbundu norms, in seizing the "good", banishing the "bad" and disseminating the new ethnic message, ultimately dictating the terms of the transition to modernity, an aspect the Catholic Church and its strict hierarchical rules were unable to conform with. For one, Protestants helped Africanize the liturgy and shape the standards of behaviour, by promoting the teaching of new ideas in agriculture, hygiene, child care and better (not new) housing.[167] Considering Neto's description of the daily routine in a Catholic school, there appears to be no junction between the old and the new, the modern and traditional practices, as there was in Protestant missions. Morning prayers, catechism lessons, recitation of the rosary and evening prayers, dancing and singing of non-religious songs, probably in Umbundu, although common, are a far cry from the modern elements Protestants were able to introduce in traditional life. Heywood states that "the protestant influenced beliefs retained so much more of the older Ovimbundu beliefs and customs that they soon spread to

[166] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p.202.
[167] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 109.

Ovimbundu Catholics and non-Christians alike."[168] This, according to one interviewee, sprang visible differences between Protestant and Catholic villages:

> "Some villages began competing due to religious differences, but not in a violent way, no. Villages began exhibiting differences due to the faith they professed. Those villages that had Protestants doing their missionary activities were quicker in modernizing in relation to the Catholic villages."[169]

It is important to note that these differences between Protestant and Catholic missionary processes may not always reflect a more inclusive approach by the Protestants to Ovimbundu culture in contrast with a conservative take on these values by the Catholic church, but simply a different methodology of evangelisation. As Neto argues in the case of Protestantism, "the adoption of Christianity inevitably weakened the power of chiefs in the long term, creating another source of authority and denying them the role of intermediaries with the sacred; altered family structure, with immediate reflection on the education of children, heritage, family conflicts; obliged the abandonment of rituals associated with demonic things; for the same reason celebrations were substituted and dancing was prohibited, to the point of creating differences in the spatial organization of Christian and non-Christian villages."[170] It ultimately serves to underline the argument that both branches of Christianity were conservative in their approach to Ovimbundu culture. The difference resided in Protestantism being more inclined to use Ovimbundu tradition to advance its agenda among this people, which mixed with modernity began shaping a new modern Ovimbundu ethnicity. The fact that celebrations and dancing were substituted and prohibited in some Protestant missions while in some Catholic schools "evening meetings could also be preceded by dancing and singing nonreligious songs" – probably allowed

---

[168] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 110.

[169] Interview 21.

[170] Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Hóspedes incómodos: Portugueses e Americanos no Bailundo no último quartel do século XX", *Encontro de Povos e Culturas em Angola; actas do seminário, Luanda 3 a 6 de Abril 1995*, Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, p. 385.

by the low clergy - perfectly exemplifies the immense diversity of experiences in the application of Christian norms and values, be them Catholic or Protestant.

Unsurprisingly, the stance of the Catholic Church, synthetized as widely oriented towards evangelisation with strong elements of "portugalisation", dedicated to uphold conceptions of Portugal's territorial and colonial unity alongside the gospel, was unable to escape, even through the low clergy, its conservative spirit. As Neto points,

> "The Catholic Church had long been associated with Iberian expansion, despite occasional state-church conflicts, and nineteenth-century missionary revival was again valuable to counteract the advance of (foreign) Protestant missions in the context of the Scramble for Africa. Lack of missionaries forced Portugal to rely on foreigners like the French Holy Ghost Fathers (or Spiritans), the most influential and, for decades, the only male order in Angola. Despite occasional suspicion about their loyalty, the Spiritans got public recognition from the state not only for their spiritual work but for their help in expanding "Portuguese civilization" and defeating African rebels. Their missions often provided accommodation and intelligence to Portuguese military campaigns, although some individual missionaries would rather have avoided doing that."[171]

As such, in contrast with Protestantism, the traditional cultural elements of the Ovimbundu people were, overall, if not censured, silenced or ignored, starting with banning their language in schools and shaping daily activities. Even though the role of Portuguese and foreign "low clergy" must not be excluded as a step towards the acceptance of certain ethnic elements, profoundly different from what was to be the strict assimilation, Christianization and "portugalisation" of Africans in the central highlands, it was apparently still too conservative to sprout the same process of ethnic modernisation Protestant missionaries achieved. Perhaps more relevant were the low clergy's suggestions of political emancipation, of a future independent Angola. One

[171] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", pp. 180-181.

interviewee tells of this aspect of political emancipation, of priests encouraging Africans to study because the country would in the future be governed by Angolans:

> "I still remember conversations I had with my father, who studied in catholic missions around 1930/40. My father said at the time, in those fires [at night, away from colonial sight] in the missions, the missionaries would tell them it was important to study, as sooner or later the country would be governed by Angolans themselves. Foreign catholic priests, mainly alsacians, which at the time called the attention of students to study because sooner or later independence would come. And I still recall my father, mainly on weekends, he would take his bags where he kept books and magazines with pictures of those countries that were already independent, mainly those countries of English and French language."[172]

Away from Portuguese authorities, this low clergy would not be so strict and allow manifestations of local culture and language – gatherings around a fire at night, "freer" use of Umbundu language – while advising their Ovimbundu followers to choose the path of education, as they would be the ruling elites of the future of the country, hence, already speculating a glimpse of political independence from Portugal. This was the dual modus operandi of the Catholic Church in relation to the Ovimbundu, either ignoring culture and strictly imposing Portuguese cultural norms or enabling cultural manifestations and even nurturing ideas of political independence, yet never engaged in reinventing and modernising what was traditional as strongly as Protestantism.

However, the most important factor, cross-cutting all the Protestant and Catholic influences, is the crucial aspect of Ovimbundu agency, regardless of the outcome. In this sense, Maria da Conceição Neto is fundamentally right when arguing that,

[172] Interview 1.

> "we could consider that [the Ovimbundu] have manifested in their historical path an extraordinary interest in seizing opportunities, be they what they may, sometimes paying a high price or with very negative consequences considering society as a whole. Yet always seizing opportunities to ascend, to advance in life or simply to know other worlds."[173]

These aspects, Neto continues, are in fact what characterise modernity. And without doubt, these were the elements the Ovimbundu kept and still continue to search for in the many sectors of society, which at the time, were better provided in Catholic schools and in Protestant missions. The fact that many Christians were considered bad Christians, as they would always return to their pagan ways, serves only to solidify the idea that Africans tended to use missions in order to have access to the benefits of modernity available there, from healthcare and education to clothing, gun powder or rum. For many it effectively worked as a clientele network, where services were traded for supporting the Christianisation process and a degree of assimilation was maintained, possibly only apparently, but not without being properly "negotiated" beforehand, never blindly accepting Christian values without some sort of material or service in return. If the profits of being Christian and frequenting missions were not provided, then Africans would soon return to their "pagan ways". This was one of the problematic issues that affected Catholic expansion in the central highlands and in Angola in the first part of the 20th century.

Obviously, some Ovimbundu in the central highlands would have had more access to Catholicism than others, who would probably not know about Christianity. The staggering amount of different experiences is overwhelming enough to dismiss any generalization. Nevertheless, in what concerns the Catholic Church, the religious trend that assaulted the central highlands through education and evangelisation, with "low clergy" priests playing a particular role in allowing the perpetuation of cultural aspects of the Ovimbundu, mainly language, was always seen through the prism of modernity by the Ovimbundu, with the consequent positive and negative impacts on their societies.

---

[173] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "Entre a tradição e a modernidade", p. 198.

CHAPTER 2

ETHNIC RAMIFICATIONS OF COLONIAL AGENCY

So far, it has been demonstrated that Christian evangelisation was heavily intertwined with the development of a literate intelligentsia, able to combine African tradition and European modernity to interpret and adapt Ovimbundu ethnicity, especially custom, in order to assert influence over sections of the population, thereby providing a modernisation experience filled with ethnic elements. These mission educated intellectuals, alongside African chiefs[174], represented the linkage between the colonial state and ordinary population. While the intellectuals provided the essence of the modern ethnic message, outside Protestant and Catholic villages African authorities personified the representatives of the state, a clientelistic relation of dependence that also proved to have crucial consequences in the development of modern Ovimbundu ethnicity.

---

[174] The difference between state promoted African auxiliaries and traditional lineage authorities lies with the distinction made by the colonial state. In fact the state could appoint as African chiefs either African auxiliaries, with or without royal lineage, or traditional authorities, traditionally descendants of recognised royal lineages. While traditional authorities could be legitimate at large, due to their embodiment of the spirits of the ancestors, African auxiliaries, unless they had lineage, would not be so easily integrated into the system of "traditional" organisation. This could eventually change dependent on whether they could perform their spiritual role accordingly. If there were no droughts and enough rain for crops to grow, if no catastrophes took place, these non-lineage auxiliaries could be recognised legitimate by the African population, since the spirits had bestowed good fortune upon them. Since both auxiliaries and traditional authorities could only assume a chiefly position by being appointed by the state, and since the study of traditional authorities is out of the scope of this study, hereafter the term African chiefs, will be used to portray either African auxiliaries or traditional authorities recognised by the state. This, however, should not be confused with village chiefs/heads, usually elders, who responded to African chiefs to a certain extent. For more see Florêncio, Fernando (2005), *Á procura dos mambo vaNdau: estado e autoridades tradicionais em Moçambique*, Lisboa, ICS; Nieuwaal, E. A. Rouveroy van (1999), "Chieftancy in Africa: three facts of a hybrid role", in E. A. Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Djik van Rijk (eds.), *African chieftaincy in a new socio-political landscape*, Leiden, African Studies Centre; Perrot, Claude-Hélène and François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar (eds.) (2003), *Le retour des rois: les autorités traditionnelles et l'État en Afrique contemporaine*, Paris, Karthala.

The works of Leroy Vail, Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (et. al.) are particularly apposite to help decode the role of the state and African chiefs in the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity. Theirs is the decryption of the relationship between the colonial state and African chiefs, its impact on the development of modern ethnicity and the rich debate of moral ethnicity and political tribalism, mostly under indirect rule. Bruce Berman sums the relationship between the colonial state in Africa and its "subjects" by arguing that,

> "By authoritatively defining rules of behaviour that specified for Africans what was required, prohibited and permitted, the colonial state structured the choices of individuals by constructing social, economic and political situations; assigning individual roles and identities; and defining the goals, strategies and behaviours. In so doing, that state delineated the strategic contexts in which ethnicity was or was not salient, and moulded the choices of political actors with regard to both the ascriptive markers of ethnicity and the organizational forms in which it was expressed."[175]

The context in which ethnicity became salient or not was due to the involvement of African chiefs in the application of an indirect rule system of governing African life, by relying on these authorities as representatives and intermediaries between the population and the colonial state. Legislation was enacted and modern forms of political organization and communication were deployed to allow this form of colonial government to control all aspects of "indigenous" life, a process that benefited immensely by the creation of clienteles and modern mechanisms of population control.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the need to have African intermediaries to administer the subordinate peoples was crucial to maintain the symbology and figure of authority the population should respect and acknowledge. It was not sufficient to have intellectuals interested in recovering and registering the language and history of the Ovimbundu. An

[175] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 313.

institutional framework was required to articulate the new ethnic message, and this was achieved through indirect rule.

Mahmood Mamdani raises an interesting debate about indirect rule - which he considers decentralized despotism -, the colonial powers' principal answer to the native question. Mamdani asks if the indirect rule system was inevitably a consequence of the lack of European personnel available and the extreme difficulty of communication over long distances. Both facts were real and indeed compelling, but as the author states they "ignore the African personnel – recruited from educated middle strata – and already available to European powers". According to this author, both arguments "ignore the decisive shift in policy orientation" as "they dropped the alliance with literate Africans and began a search for culturally more legitimate allies".[176] In Angola and other Portuguese colonies this was epitomised and officialised with the enactment of the first Native Statute of 1929, which *de facto* excluded Africans from much political, social and economic life. As such, Mamdani continues, "in Portuguese colonies in the nineteenth century, the mestizos "dominated commerce" and provided "military commanders and civil governors". Many were "men of education". Their fortunes were eclipsed in the twentieth century when "their position was continually depressed".[177] Although the Ovimbundu never enjoyed a close or privileged position in the colonial administrative ranks, this philosophical principle of exclusion had an extremely heavy impact upon them, mainly viewed as nothing more than extremely cheap labour, a perception intensified by the pace of white settlement in the central highlands after the Second World War.

This is a noteworthy consideration, especially because indirect rule in Angola has to be framed as both an ideologically preference, the "political shift" Mamdani speaks of, while also noting the practical realities of Portuguese colonisation, which was much reflected upon the two

---

[176] Mamdani, Mahmood, "Citizen and subject", p. 72-74.

[177] Mamdani, Mahmood, "Citizen and subject", p. 75.

arguments exposed, the lack of personnel and extreme difficulties of communication and governing.[178]

In the system of indirect rule, African chiefs were of central importance. In the Angolan case, a mixed power system shared between the *chefes de posto* and the *sobas* projected a new sort of political authority. Writing enabled the creation of censuses and lists, courts and records, which permitted a greater level of surveillance and control of the population to both the administrators and the *sobas*.[179] Yet, administrators were frequently in charge of large areas and had little information and personnel available. Philip Havik calls this the colonial paradox, how to combine the perceived need for an intermediary layer of administration (i.e. to administrate large geographical areas and/or constituencies, fill gaps left by lack of personnel, and as source of information) with that of exercising control over often highly dispersed populations under their jurisdiction (in order to extract taxes, crops and labour) at the lowest possible financial and political cost.[180]

African chiefs had already been used as auxiliaries during the military campaigns of the 19th and early 20th century. Yet, the role they played in colonial administration became crucial, since the *sobas* were the ones who knew the underlying African dynamics beneath the mask of colonial administration. Their knowledge of ethnic traditions, customary practices and social hierarchies provided both them and the colonial state with invaluable means of control and social engineering to infiltrate African society and advance their interests at will, furthering their position or at least keeping African agency at bay. They had an access to people that

[178] One of the main issues that differs the British application of indirect rule with the one used here in the Portuguese case was the fact that, as Mamdani tells it, British administrators were able to interpret policy and readapt it to the local circumstances. On the contrary, Portuguese administration had to follow strict guide rules, mainly those contained in the *Reforma Administrative Ultramarina* of 1933 and the Native Statutes of 1929 and 1954. One additional element refers to the creation of "tribal" chiefs to rule over "tribes" who had no chiefly authority. Again, in the central highlands of Angola, the pre-colonial systems of rule were simply used and reshaped, as African hierarchies of authority already existed.

[179] *Reforma administrativa ultramarina* e *reforma do ministério das colónias* of 1933 already established the duty of *chefes de posto* to provide statistical and other data to administrators regarding their regions.

[180] Havik, Philip (2011), "Direct or indirect rule? Reconsidering the roles of appointed chiefs and native employees in Portuguese West Africa", Africana Studia, p. 42.

administrators and *chefes de posto* did not have and were not able to understand. They became the most direct authority available for the ordinary population, responsible for implementing the orders of administrators, often to their own benefit and in despotic fashion, but also in solving popular disputes and claims, frequently manipulating and creating new ethnic apparatuses to suit their needs.

But not only indirect rule had an impact upon the ethnicity of the Ovimbundu. New dynamics of land access, perverse colonial effects on Ovimbundu moral economy and most importantly migrant labour, were also fundamental factors in changing the patterns of Ovimbundu social and economic organization. While forced labour was a constant common practice in Angola, land expropriation through white settlement only became a problem later in the colonial period. As such, unlike other African ethnic groups, in what concerns land the Ovimbundu were not necessarily forced to rearrange their social and political organisation in order to negotiate with the colonial state the means of distribution and access to land. Only during the late colonial period did the Ovimbundu begin to lose their land, but this only started after an Ovimbundu expansion in search for new lands, forcing the relocation of families away from the villages. This factor parallels forced labour in as much as both concepts determine a distancing of people from their village of origin to a new place where a number of years could be spent without returning to their origins. It is the intersection of these two factors that instils profound deviations to Ovimbundu moral economy and consequently Ovimbundu ethnicity. Here lies the third and last factor of Vail's model concerning the development of ethnic consciousness, the appeal ethnicity had to ordinary African men. In fact, the most important factor of ethnic appeal to ordinary Ovimbundu men was caused by this distance from family and land, the two elements that forced them to negotiate with African chiefs in order to regain a measure of control upon their families and land. By doing so, they would need to integrate, thus legitimising the complex modern ethnic apparatus created by these same African chiefs, aimed at recreating traditions and customs under close inspection by the colonial state and its legislation.

This said, this chapter is divided in two sections, one focusing on the impact of indirect rule in the ethnic modernisation of the Ovimbundu, mainly by looking at African agency and the

uses of ethnicity through indirect rule mechanisms of colonialism; another looking at the dynamics of migrant labour, new forms of land access and moral economy in the enhancement of Ovimbundu ethnicity, especially through the acceptance of a new ethnic way of life that suited both intervening parts – ordinary people and African authorities – interests.

INDIRECT RULE

Berman states that the most important political relationship in the colonial state was the alliance between European district administrators and the chiefs of administrative sub-divisions and village headmen beneath them, since these were the essential linkage between the colonial state and African societies.[181] Portugal had in fact been using Ovimbundu collaborators since the campaigns to conquer the Ovimbundu kingdoms, and kept doing so after "pacification". Colonial presence and infrastructure was built near the old *ombalas*, close to African authority, and colonial legislation allowed *sobas* and *sekulus* to maintain many of their pre-colonial functions with several restrictions, yet including not only representation but also daily tasks such as hearings in their own courts, distribution of land, settling land claims, receiving customary gifts and even imposing fines and fees on villagers.[182]

Maria da Conceição Neto argues that indirect rule was dependent upon old or reshaped African chieftaincies which were destroyed or seriously undermined by military conquest, taxation and the taking over of their former functions, while Christianisation undermined their

---

[181] Berman enumerates three importance consequences of this linkage, stemming from making patron/client relations the fundamental source of access to the state and its resources, but also, as in pre-colonial society, the fundamental relationship between ordinary people and those with wealth and power; the reliance on chiefs and headmen exposed the colonial state to the linkage of the exchange networks of rural society and implicated it in the factional conflicts of lineage and clan and; made chiefs and headmen, through their active pursuit of wealth, principal subjects of both local challenges to the colonial state and the active internal politics and class conflicts of ethnic construction. See Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 317.

[182] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", pp. 33-36.

spiritual role.[183] In fact, as Philip Havik mentions, "after an initial phase marked by military campaigns and conquests in African territories claimed by the Portuguese monarchy (…) which was completed by about 1915, those appointed in chiefly roles were mostly African auxiliaries who had fought on the European side."[184] This overlaps with Neto's argument that African chieftaincies were either destroyed or seriously undermined by military conquest, as it was not required or necessarily the case that these new African auxiliaries were descendant of the former traditional lineages, that is, that these African auxiliaries were the old traditional authorities. They could be appointed by the state but in cases be strangers among the communities they were to work with, which produced tensions often quelled by the imposition of force. Nevertheless, descendent or not of royal lineages, these new appointed chiefs could be recognized as legitimate by their local community if they managed to maintain their traditional role in everyday life, an "overlapping of ties and interests that would strongly define the complex networks of allegiance that largely shaped and informed colonial policies and practices, but also internal, local and regional power relations."[185]

The position of these African chiefs had several checks and balances imposed by the state. Ferreira Diniz defined a *regulado* – in Angola, *sobado* - as "understood to be a group of villages subordinated to a native chief, on the condition that this relation between chief and subjects is confirmed by tradition and by the government of the province/colony."[186] This was legislated in *Cartas Orgânicas* that defined the statutes and determined the responsibilities of native affairs departments, introduced in Angola in 1917. These chiefs who represented the closest authority to Africans and exercised authority over village heads were assisted by clerks, interpreters and African police, *cipaios*, to conduct their orders. They were also to "receive schooling, learn Portuguese, be well-dressed, be housed in "official" residences that distinguished them from their subjects and enhanced their status and prestige, and be supplied with tools and seeds for

---

[183] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 276.
[184] Havik, Philip, "Direct or indirect rule", p. 34.
[185] Havik, Philip, "Direct or indirect rule", p. 35.
[186] Ferreira Diniz quoted in Havik, Philip, "Direct or indirect rule", p. 35.

cultivation, in addition to the remuneration and bonuses they received by law. While their loyalty should be rewarded, if they strayed and failed to comply with their duties, they were to be punished, since [as a Guinea-Bissau governor explained] "that is how we should treat them, because that is the way one deals with children."[187]

The 1933 Overseas Administration Reform confirmed the role of African chiefs in keeping law and order and controlling the movement of people, yet without autonomy to deal with criminal matters of greater importance. As can be read in article 94 of this legislative piece,

> "In each native *regedoria* exerts authority over the gentile populations a native *regedor*. In each group of villages or village this authority shall be trusted to a chief of group of villages or village. The exercise of the functions of the gentile authority is usually remunerated. The regedores and chiefs of group or of village perform the functions local use attributes them, when not contrary to national sovereignty. The obedience of the population results from tradition; it will be maintained as long as it respects the principles and interests of Portuguese administration to the satisfaction of the government."[188]

This was renewed in 1954 with the publication of the last version of the Native Statute, until its abolishment in 1961. Article 10 reads,

> "to each native regedoria exerts authority among the native populations a native regedor. The regedores and chiefs of group and settlements perform functions attributed to local use, with the limitations established in this diploma. The obedience the populations have for them is the resultant of tradition and will be maintained as long as it respects the principles and interests of administration."[189]

---

[187] Havik, Philip, "Direct or indirect rule", p. 37.

[188] *Reforma administrativa ultramarina e reforma do ministério das colónias (1942)*, Imprensa nacional de Lisboa, p.63.

[189] "Reforma administrativa ultramarina", p. 13.

Legislation was also clear in matters of traditional succession. It was hereditary and according to local custom but the government held the right to choose among the closest family when the successor was not in sync with the administration.[190] Obedience by the population was also that which resulted from tradition, even when tradition was not maintained and succession rights were not respected, as they countered colonial interests.

By law, African chiefs came to perform all the functions attributed to local custom except if said otherwise in the Native Statute or the RAU. They were also elected according to local custom, albeit dependent upon the local administrator's consent. Even crimes were punished using local law, although crimes with no legislation to consent upon were punished by common colonial law. In effect, all this legislation meant that many ordinary Ovimbundu rarely needed to be in contact with colonial administrators, since many of the tasks were relegated to African chiefs. Indirect rule assumed by the colonial state left many of the services of daily management to African chiefs, the *sobas*. The concern of many of these former rulers/newly appointees was to find ways of gaining or retaining their lost power, by "collaborating" directly with the Portuguese authorities.[191] Nominations of *sekulus* and *sobas* believed to be lenient to colonial authority were promoted by the colonial regime[192], mainly to help gather men for labour, often forced, and warfare, aiding in providing military expertise to help the Portuguese conquer the remaining antagonistic forces to its rule in Angola.[193] This was also an essential element in disrupting any remaining voices of dissent and rebellion among Africans, since a great portion of the African traditional lineage leadership was substituted by African chiefs favourable to Portuguese rule.

---

[190] "Reforma administrativa ultramarina", p. 64.

[191] Havik, Philip, "Direct or indirect rule", p. 34. .

[192] See for example articles 96, 97 and 98 of the "Reforma administrative ultramarina", p. 64.

[193] The colonial state pitted the Ovimbundu against other groups by using them several instances in Angola history against other groups, a fact that would generate largely negative stereotypes concerning the Ovimbundu, commonly known as the "Bailundos" or "Bailundo workers", that still resonates in contemporary Angola.

It was the establishment of these intermediaries between the colonial administration and the ruled peoples, with all the mentioned rights and obligations under colonial legislation that according to Vail provided the institutional framework for the articulation of the new ethnic message. The author continues,

> "cultural ideals could be actualized in the day-to-day workings of African administrators under indirect rule, which made ethnic identity to be specified not only by written histories, grammars, and accounts of traditional customs produced by local cultural brokers, but also by the actual operation of the administrative mechanisms of indirect rule. This aspect of the development of ethnic identity was the consequence of the dynamic interaction of African initiative with the expectations of European administrators and forward-looking missionaries."[194]

Hence, under indirect rule, ethnic consciousness should in essence be enhanced by African initiative, by using and adapting ethnicity or the concept of "tribe" for their own purposes, in congruence with the European administrators" understanding of what Africans and their "tribes" should be. John Iliffe suggested that because Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes, Africans built tribes to belong to.[195] This notion is particularly apposite here, and pends verification. Vail rightly states that "communication between the European administrators and subordinate Africans was distinctly tribal in its tone and content. Africans were talked to in terms deemed suitable, and these terms were ethnic."[196] Since Iliffe's first proposition, that Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes appears to be valid, it opens the most crucial question of whether the Ovimbundu worked to build a tribe to belong to. This, as Vail argued, is best verifiable by looking at African initiative at work in congruence with European conceptions of rule.

---

[194] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", pp.13-14.
[195] Iliffe, John, "A modern history of Tanganyika", p. 324.
[196] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", pp. 12-13.

African initiative must be divided between that conducted by African chiefs and by ordinary people. Problems rose from the very fact that African chiefs did use the system to augment their power, especially in what concerned tax collection. In 1913, in a famous *Circular*, Norton de Matos urged administrative staff of the *Circunscrições* and *Capitanias-mores* to use only proper administrative staff to collect tax, referring to the abusive actions of local (Portuguese) traders and *cipaios*.[197] Neto cites Simão Laboreiro, an administrator in Angola who noted that "as long as a certain percentage of the money collected in one area went to the administrative staff, to auxiliaries and to the *olosekulu* and *olosoma*, abuse was inevitable."[198] Indeed, African chiefs, but also village heads and Portuguese traders had the incentive of collecting taxes since they were given a "commission" upon the amount collected.

Havik explains that chiefs or village heads would be ordered to present a certain number of workers; if they failed to do so, guards (*cipaios*) would be sent in to round people up, using violent means if deemed necessary, because they did not know how else to do so, or simply out of malice".[199] It is, however, important to notice that these African authorities were also subjected to immense pressure under colonial administration to fulfil their orders or be punished, usually physically, which made them keenly aware of their role. Jeremy Ball describes these pressures: "*sobas*, who answered to the local *chefe de posto*, delivered specified number of men to serve as *contratados*. If a *soba* failed to fulfil the request he faced disciplinary action, including being beaten. João Ndamba remembers, for example, a *soba* from Chibungo who received 200 *palmatórias* (whippings), divided equally between his hands and feet, and as a result spent nine months in bed recuperating."[200]

---

[197] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 111.

[198] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 112.

[199] Havik, Philip, "Direct or indirect rule", p. 43.

[200] Ball, Jeremy (2006), "I escaped in a coffin": remembering Angolan forced labor from the 1940s", *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, n. 9-10, p.10. Florêncio advances that *sekulus*, not *sobas*, were the ones responsible for gathering men for labour. These were also sanctioned for failing to provide enough men to forced labour. The soba was physically sanctioned by the chefe de posto and the sekulu by the cipaio. See Florêncio, Fernando, "No reino da toupeira", p. 111.

Nevertheless, they did have a contribution in the perpetuation of old elements towards a reshaped ethnic idea. The pressures African chiefs were subject to made them stricken control over the population to fulfil colonial demands, a control usually enforced through the invocation of what was customary or traditional. Vail suggests that pre-colonial custom was replaced by a new ethnic apparatus, led by these new African chiefs, yet empowered by migrant workers, who had an interest in controlling events in their villages concerning family and land:

> "it was for very real reasons of exercising at least a measure of control over land and women, thereby bringing at least a measure of peace to their minds, that African men welcomed the new ethnic ideologies which involved augmenting powers of chiefs in a situation of rapid social decay. (…) Men came to think of themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group because the ethnic apparatus of the rural area – the chiefs, the traditional courts, petty bourgeois intellectuals, and the systematized traditional values of the tribe as embodied in the ethnic ideology – worked to preserve the very substantial interests which these men had in their home areas."[201]

Terence Ranger already noted that custom was the more reshaped when Europeans thought to be respecting its principles[202], and Berman notes that this was evident in customary law, in governing issues as marriage and access to land and property, which was administered by chiefs[203], allowing them to control not only the allocation of resources but the processes in which these resources were to be obtained. Since land was distributed by chiefs, peasant rights to land but also to other resources were dependent upon their ability to sustain claims to kin, client and ethnic affiliation through the chiefs[204]. Migrant workers, displaced from their village and land,

---

[201] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 15.

[202] Ranger, Terence (1983), "The invention of tradition in colonial Africa", p. 250, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge University Press.

[203] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 312.

[204] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 317 In the Ovimbundu case, apart from migrant workers, kinship and ethnic affiliation do not appear to be the principal vehicles to lay claims

had an added interest in relying on these authorities, by abiding to ethnic traditions such as offerings to keep interested parties away from their land until their return. Upon their return, migrants and soldiers would bring back *ocimbandas*[205] which they offered to the *sekulus*, pastors, or catechists for their services at weddings, funerals and initiation ceremonies[206] – proving the spiritual link was never broken. Other aspects of Ovimbundu customary law regarding bride price, gender roles and division of labour, residence, inheritance and land practices were also alive in villages and even urban slums.[207]

Nonetheless, was the framework of obligations and incentives laid down by indirect rule and African chiefs sufficient or central to ordinary African's initiative in order to continue the dissemination of the modern ethnic message? In essence, was ethnicity central in African agency under specific colonial circumstances? A look at ordinary people's initiative in dealing or circumventing colonial legislation under indirect rule may shed light upon the uses and importance of ethnicity in daily life. Neto already hinted upon the possibility of the Ovimbundu using unofficial ways to escape the socio-economic pressures they were suffering due to the limitations of colonial legislation, by both Portuguese administrators and African authorities, as the indirect rule system suggests.

---

upon resources. As it will be shown, Ovimbundu expansion away from the village core in search for new arable lands may have corroded kinship ties at the village level, which consequently left no room for ethnic affiliation.

[205] Heywood uses the term *ocimbanda* as a sort of gift, offered to *sekulus* and *sobas*, in general to African chiefs and Protestant people. See, Heywood, Linda, "Contested Power", p. 120. However, the term *ocimbanda* is wrongly used. *Ocimbanda*, or *ochimbanda*, refers to a person, a *curandeiro*, "healer", also referred in Portuguese as *kimbandeiro*, a well-known term depicting a person who "heals" using traditional methods. The Dicionário Português-Umbundu translates *curandeiro* as *ochimbanda*, further clearing the concept (see, Dicionário Português-Umbundu by Grégoire Le Guennec and José Francisco Valente for the proper definition of *ocimbanda)*. It is nevertheless noteworthy to state that Heywood does correctly use the term *ocimbanda* throughout the book, but not when referring to the gifts migrant workers offered to those in a position of power.

[206] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 120.

[207] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 120.

> "In the search for a way out of the indigenato constraints, "natives" used migration, deception, tax evasion and every possibility offered by the system. Application of Portuguese citizenship implied cultural assimilation but it was mainly a strategy to improve family life and did not necessarily result in political accommodation, let alone in the rejection of an "African identity". Despite obvious advantages, the position of black "citizens" in closer contact with whites, to whom skin colour was a social asset, made them even more "race" conscious and resentful of colonial rule"[208]

Field work conducted for this research did not reveal the existence of ethnic elements in African initiative to circumvent the *indigenato* or other legislative constraints, especially forced labour and taxation, or in the request to obtain citizenship. This may be explained by the fact that the persistence of the Native Statute made personal legal status – assimilated or non-assimilated status – more important a social marker than ethnicity, occupation, education or religion.[209]

This lack of attachment towards a wider sense of kinship (i.e. at the village level[210]) may impose the desire for the benefits of modernity, including status, at a higher scale than ethnic affiliation alone. Being seen as modern or adopting modern behaviour appears to be more central than any advantage to be gained from ethnic association or organisation based on common ancestry, real or perceived, apart from family.

After the conquest of the central highlands, leaderless or with a different leadership – influenced by Christianity –, the Ovimbundu seem to have relinquished any "nationalist" attitude

---

[208] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", pp. 288-289.

[209] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 290. Cramer also points to social status as an important element throughout the Angolan conflict. "Arguably the war in Angola has always been, as it were, a war of position. In other words, what drove allegiance and commitment to conflict - at least among the elites - was a desperate struggle for social position, with expectations and resentments born chiefly out of historical and material formations of social identities. See Cramer, Christopher (2006), *Civil war is not a stupid thing: accounting for violence in developing countries*, Hurst and Company, London, pp. 162-163.

[210] Kinship was the strongest at the family level, as is still today. Yet, on the village level, a real and visible, as opposed to imagined community, kinship did not serve as a prime indicator of solidarity.

of open protest like that of the Bailundo Revolt, that is, any open and ethnic based confrontation against the pressures of the colonial state. Since *sobas* and *sekulus* retained some of their powers – both political and spiritual – and parts of the traditional Ovimbundu hierarchy were adapted and still in effect due to indirect rule, the closest symbol of authority remained African in its core, even if these were controlled by a foreign power which did not physically interact with the ordinary population on a mass scale. A system of dependencies between the *chefes de posto* and African chiefs had to be maintained - especially in what concerned labour quotas –, and although many were in fact beaten and publicly humiliated by colonial administration, this system of trade-offs left in effect no strong reason to agitate and mobilize the population directly against colonial administration.

This generalized lack of resistance may be based on the continuity of the socio-economic discrepancy between the Ovimbundu in both the pre-colonial and the colonial periods, which simply encouraged each family or "clan" to "singularly" look for ways to enhance their status. The continuation of this socio-economic discrepancy is confirmed by Neto, who defends that in many aspects, namely trade and labour recruitment, there was no straight line dividing the recent past (before the 1902 campaign) and the present as it was in the 1910s, a situation that would come to change with the coming of the Republic in 1910, which promoted measures against slavery and moved against slave-like labour conditions in Angola.[211] Taxation, one of the main policies for imposing colonial sovereignty in African societies was also not new in central Angola. Pre-colonial "caravan leaders used part of their goods to pay chiefs wherever they went for business, or simply to be allowed to pass through. Hunters, peasants and villagers at large had to give a specific part of their production to their chiefs."[212]

This said, the importance of transcending the mythological notion of the relatively egalitarian tribal community is, indeed, transcendental. Colonialism, through modernity and capitalism, brought new ways of inequality unto African societies but this inequality was not introduced into a purely egalitarian system. As Bruce Berman argues,

---

[211] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 82.
[212] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 111.

> "what historical research now richly documents is the complex differentiations of wealth and power within all African societies, even those stateless societies that proved such a puzzle to European colonizers. African communities were pervaded by relations of dominance and dependence, based on patriarchal power exercised across differences of gender and generation, lineages and clans, languages and cultures. (…) The power relations of pre-colonial Africa were typically of patrons and clients."[213]

Moreover, Ovimbundu kingdoms in their greater ethno-linguistic, military and economic geographical fringes of influence "were multi-lingual and multi-cultural, pulling together diverse communities under political sovereignties [each kingdom] of widely varying effectiveness."[214] The absorption of Nganguela slaves by many Ovimbundu kingdoms and chieftaincies is proof of that. Above all, "ethno-cultural construction was constantly present, an ambiguous and conflict-ridden process through which people struggled to create islands of order and meaning within the flux and turbulence around them."[215] The Ovimbundu never claimed or truly attempted to be a homogenised ethnic group but always had several factions which fought between themselves and both cooperated and protested colonialism at the same time. Some have always understood advantage at the expense of others, and this appears to have held truth for both the pre-colonial period and most of the 20th century. Hence why African initiative did not engage in ethnic solidarity as means to escape or circumvent colonial legislation and daily pressure. Since all were under the same law, personal affiliations, family attachments and local influences were perhaps a more effective way of escaping colonial constraints than ethnic association. This premise unequivocally summons Lonsdale's argument that "tribe" was the imagined community against which the morality of new inequality was bound to be tested.[216] If shared ethnicity or imagined kinship did not channel the moral debate into inter-group assistance and aid in times of

---

[213] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 310.
[214] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 311.
[215] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 311.
[216] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 316.

difficulty, would it mean that the Ovimbundu failed to find among their peers the necessary means to promote equality or reduce inequality, thus failing Lonsdale's test? Or, on the other hand, would it point to such insignificant ethnic solidarity among the members of this group, so residual that methods other than the evocation of common kinship were preferable when finding support or protection to circumvent the legal pressures they were exposed to?

Indeed, whatever protection or escape there was from colonial pressure seems to have been provided by Christians, both Europeans and Ovimbundu, and Portuguese traders, but not based on ethnic reasons, even though the possibility must not be completely excluded in future investigation. Two interviewees characterise the specificities of such protection:

> "Our parents were peasants. They did not have enough money to send their children to school. So they had to come up with a mechanism. One of them was the missionaries, who patronized a child who showed intelligence, this regarding the payment of school expenses. It was the same in the catholic and protestant church. Many Angolans completed the 5th and 6th year at the Seminário Maior thanks to godfathers, missionaries or wealthy businessmen who liked a person and would patronize. This to be able to get citizenship, which was official after 1961. But before they had to be connected with people, traders, for example Portuguese, those justified the patronization."[217]

A second interviewee also refers to Christian missions but pursues the idea that Portuguese traders also served as a way out for Africans to escape colonial impositions, especially forced labour, *contrato*, albeit with a very different objective:

> "Some priests had children. These children would go to the seminary. I had a nephew who was son of a priest. But this was forbidden. The father would appear as godfather of course. Even with the lady at the registry, when explaining who's the child was, he would provide

[217] Interview 4.

a different name, so the registry wouldn't know. But he provided an allowance, and supported. If he did not support, they had to send the child to the mission, otherwise they would get him to the *contrato*. Churches helped protect children from the *contrato* and Portuguese conscription, to fight the turras. (…) This influence, there were friendships, and the priest sometimes had an inclination. He protected, and afterward these children became missionaries, got education, and formed more priests. In this network where he takes, protects and teaches, is where the Seminary appears. (…) [Portuguese traders] protected but as a servant. He would be the godfather so the child would not go [to the *contrato*]. The child would go to school, but only until the 4th year, then would not continue studying."[218]

Neto refers to the same idea. Protection provided by godfathers, according to these interviewees, traders and priests, worked in a client-patron fashion, by advancing commercial interests and defending personal relationships.

"The colonial system generated unofficial ways of climbing the social ladder, with personal relationships and shared commercial interests used to circumvent the lack of legal opportunities. Examples were client-patron ties, the protection of godchildren by godparents, or informal schooling set up by literate native or civilized blacks."[219]

John Marcum mentions this element of informal schooling adding that,

"Beginning in 1950 a number of senior African students attending the Christ the King Seminary at Nova Lisboa, who normally spent their annual vacation period in leisure at a rural mission, decided to use this time to organize a program of general education for people living in nearby villages located outside the Bailundu town of Luimbale. There they

[218] Interview 10.

[219] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 284.

> taught everything from the Bible to public hygiene and threw in discussions on the principles of racial equality for good measure."[220]

The debate about racial equality certainly had more to do with the rights of "natives" and the distribution and access to modern resources, than necessarily with the ethnic group in any shape or form.

The lack of ethnic elements to circumvent legal constraints is patent, as no straightforward evidence was found to suggest that Ovimbundu initiative fomented the creation of a "tribe" to belong to swayed by the group's interaction with European or African auxiliaries. The exploitative and often abusive actions of colonial administrators, *chefes de posto* and African chiefs does not appear to have nurtured a predilection to seek refuge in ethnic solidarity among people of the same group. The only protection given based on the group or, better yet, on the village level, never under a sense of ethnic consciousness, was between chiefs and migrant workers functioning in a system of trade-offs, a protection to safeguard the latter's interests at home but never given to the person directly through ethnic association. As such, according to Vail's model, only European expectations may prove to have instilled the development of Ovimbundu ethnic identity, as African initiative did not nurture a modern ethnic consciousness among the Ovimbundu in its interaction with the state.

European colonial administrators certainly thought Africans were organized and living in primordial, rural societies, under the aegis of tribes, and acted and legislated accordingly. Article 93 of the Overseas Administrative Reform makes clear that territorial administration should determine the limits of each *regedoria* or *sobado* so each indigenous territory coincided with colonial administration posts, and that this information should be collected by administrators through contacts with the population as to diminish any errors or doubts.[221] Indeed, in the beginning it appeared that tax collection and census did coincide with local chiefdoms and their

---

[220] Marcum, John (1969), *The Angolan revolution Vol. 1 (1950-1962)*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p. 105.

[221] "Reforma administrativa ultramarina", p. 63.

subdivisions, since taxpayers were registered under the name of their *olosoma* and *olosekulu*.[222] Adjustments were also often made, so that the coincidence between administrative and African areas was made clearer. Neto writes about some of these adjustments, considering changes to administrative maps, translated on the ground through taxation control, into a new territorialisation of African chiefdoms and a redefinition of former hierarchies.

> "In March 1911 the peoples of Cachissapa, Tchapungo, Sachitumbo and Caveto were told to go and pay their taxes not in Huambo but in Sambu, because they were Sambu *soma's* subjects "before the establishment of our authority over these lands" and there was no reason to change that tradition "as far as it did not go against our sovereignty and civilizing laws". Similarly, in March 1911 the Cuima administration was informed that *"soba* de Mama and peoples subordinate to him" had always been dependent on Wambu and so they should pay their taxes to the Huambo administration and not to Cuima."[223]

Communication between Portuguese administrators and Africans was certainly tribal both in tone and content, if we consider these episodes. Almost ten years after the conquest, with all the tremendous changes it brought the Ovimbundu, colonial administrators were still referring to pre-colonial polities as frameworks for people's identification. This might have had some resonance, since the impact of the reorganisation of administrative legitimacies between *sobados* must be taken with cautious reservations, as the spiritual link people had with their village heads and elders, embodiments of their ancestors, was probably only affected by Christianisation and not by colonial administrative boundary redrawing. Nevertheless, what is important is the language used in describing people's origins and belonging and the application of these descriptions in daily administration. Although some of these areas actually purport to real places of African sovereignty, former kingdoms, others were invented with the clear aim of controlling movement, collecting tax and recruiting for labour. This was perhaps more evident near town, as

[222] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p 107.

[223] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p 108.

“new *olosekulu* and *olosoma* emerged on the town’s outskirts and it is not clear what was induced by the colonial state and what was a spontaneous form of regrouping and creating hierarchies in a new environment.”[224]

The paternalistic idea that the African was not able to govern himself, and therefore needed the guidance of Europeans was engrained in the minds of administrators and *chefes de posto*. Even though many were versed in “years of experience in Africa”, they still dealt with *sobas* as people who were in a perpetual cocoon of primordiality. But the “tribe” was not of their creation. They simply adapted it, and by doing so, blocked any possibility for African free agency. Above all, due to these preconceptions colonial authorities ultimately failed to notice changes in Ovimbundu life. As Pössinger argues:

> “An antiquate administrative system, characterized by civil servants who had not even noticed the continuous changes on the socio-economic pattern of the Ovimbundu. Their paternalism led the administrators to consider the Africans as perennial children incapable of maturing and becoming responsible human beings. For decades they tried to maintain and to force upon the Ovimbundu a hierarchical pattern considered as specifically Mbundu and based on the power of chiefs and clan leaders - a pattern which had in effect been obsolete for a long time.”[225]

Much like Berman argues, “this concern with ethnicity, expressed in the conviction that Africans were people who naturally belonged to “tribes”, reflected strongly the cultural formation of the European cadres of the colonial states. Between 1890 and 1914 the haphazardly recruited officials of the early expansion of colonial rule were replaced by elite corps recruited from the first universities and military academies of the metropolis. These men represented in themselves the culmination of more than a century of European nation and state-building, an overseas

---

[224] Neto, Maria da Conceição, “In and out of town”, p 108.

[225] Pössinger, Herman, “Interrelations between economic and social change” p. 47. Pössinger treats the singular of Ovimbundu as Mbundu, not to confuse with the Ambundu whose language is Kimbundu.

extension of the upper levels of metropolitan service. Both their nationalism and their bureaucratic culture had a crucial impact on the formation of African ethnicity."[226] Marcelo Caetano, one of the most important theorizers of Portuguese colonialism and the greatest architect of cadre formation, wrote after being deposed, as late as 1975,

> "It was evident, for those who knew the Overseas, that the African territories, above all situated in a desolated and depopulated continent, in an economic and civilizational primitive phase, inhabited by tribes from the stone age, could not be governed by the laws that through centuries of crafting had adjusted to the life of European Portugal population"[227]

It is clear that the interaction between European authority and Africans, be them chiefs or ordinary people, was conducted upon the principle that Africans were naturally tribal. The language and content used was tribal, and so was the form of political organization, inspired upon what colonialism knew regarding "traditional" African organization. But the absence of ethnic initiative among Africans to cooperate and help each other under the new norms dictated little change in terms of the development of a wide encompassing ethnic identity. Vail's model entails a synergy between African initiative and European expectations of African life under an indirect rule administration, in constant interaction to produce a new modern ethnic consciousness. Yet, this was not the case among the Ovimbundu. Perhaps the repressive system of Portuguese colonialism - and the trade-off dependencies between colonial administrators and African authorities - was so brutal to the members of this group that the focus on survivability through blood-based kinship was the only option available, forced to ignore other ethnic markers as language, custom, tradition or group ancestry.[228] It is noteworthy to include the notion that while

---

[226] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 318.

[227] Caetano, Marcelo (1975), *Depoimento*, Distribuidora Record, p. 18.

[228] It was recurrent for women to be expelled to the backyard as non-family when administrators or *chefes de posto* conducted house inspections as part of the assimilation process, something that vexed elders and was particularly resented. See Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 286.

colonialism treated Africans as “tribal”, it did see in “tribalism” a potential force of opposition, one which had to be dismantled. The inclusion of customary law in the new “tribal” order under colonialism served exactly, as Mamdani argues, to contain the “culturally civilized native”, who was becoming a growing political threat, by subjugating him to the customary sovereignty of the African chiefs, “precisely when changing conditions were fast eroding their role and status”[229]. Thus, not only migrant workers enhanced the role of new African chiefs but the colonial state was also responsible for their ethnic empowerment, exactly when the “culturally civilized natives” could mobilize the “tribe” to enact any sort of “peasant” revolt. The very principle of assimilation introduced with the Native Statute of 1929 reinforces this premise of division and exclusion. Africans had to pass a series of tests, adopt western behaviour and be able to read and write, among many other things, in order to be considered assimilated and thus be granted Portuguese citizenship. Those who remained in a “tribal” state – virtually all of the African population - had to abide to a bureaucratic authoritative power imposed upon their lives by a mixture of indirect ruling with very direct mechanisms of modern political domination and control. Those who were able to become “assimilated” usually grew culturally apart from their group, mainly by employment opportunities in town and, apart from African pastors and priests, were no longer able to integrate in their rural village of origin for a variety of reasons.[230]

These factors contributed to delaying the emergence of a new modern identity - focused on a unitary concept of group based on the western nation-state -, thus enabling the prevalence of localism and local belonging above the idea of a not salient and possibly not relevant in daily life “imagined community”. John Lonsdale argues that while demands for tax and labour, new roads, markets, education and peace brought oppression and opportunity and allowed Africans to test new networks which lessened the dependence upon their small community for material and moral refreshment or for political authority, consequently waning local patriotism as wider loyalties

[229] Mamdani, Mahmood, “Citizen and subject”, p. 92.

[230] Many were simply unwelcomed due to their Portuguese ways, which drew them apart from African traditional belief systems. Others preferred to live in villages where they had no family, as a way of maintaining a civilised appearance but also, as referred in interviews, to escape from having to provide for other members than the nuclear family alone.

grew. Yet, apart from migrant labourers the great majority of the Ovimbundu, perhaps with the exception of the CFB workers, do not appear to have experienced or been fully engaged in these new networks – especially education – consequently not waning local patriotism, at least not as openly as Lonsdale proposes. What was proved with the migrant workers initiative in recreating ethnic custom, alongside African chiefs, was that the Ovimbundu frequently looked for ways to improve social mobility, only abiding by the ethnic element when it best suited their interests, and not at great value for the rest of the group.

Ovimbundu culture was never collective or monolithic. Its local character, translated in different contexts of cultural development, not necessarily intertwining, appears to have remained a reality for the better part of the first half of the 20th century. As Heywood states,

> "nowhere, however, had New State policies led to the dominance of Portuguese culture among the Ovimbundu. Instead, various Ovimbundu groups – assimilados, converts caught between African and European cultures, unassimilated "bush" Ovimbundu, and young Protestant and Catholic converts who tried desperately to adopt Portuguese norms – had in their own way kept Ovimbundu culture and beliefs alive and given new life to the communities."

The heterogeneous characteristic of these redefinitions and reinventions of culture by various groups of Ovimbundu people under different social and religious influences had the effect of diversifying and diluting the pre-colonial meanings of many of these customs[231], but not of converging its adherents under a modern ethnic identity. Hence, the emotive power of the

[231] One interviewee symbolically tells the story of the Chiganji, the "clown" who performed the circumcision ceremony, a story that characterizes the elasticity of tradition. "Chinganji, typically traditional came from the east and stopped in Sambo. Sambo sold the clown [Portuguese for Chinganji] because they thought he was not a person, sold him to Bailundo. The men of Bailundo were passionate about the dance and the rhythm of the drumming of the clown, and bought the clown. When they put the clown there, he felt hungry and thirsty. At night the clown escaped and returned [to Sambo]. It became a commercial conflict. Because they bought but the clown escaped. Because the clown had a mask no one knew who he was." Interview 10.

cultural symbols and identities of kinship and "home" were never transferred to larger social collectivities, the Ovimbundu umbrella, in the context of the development of colonial states and markets. Contrary to Berman's annotation, to the Ovimbundu and until independence ethnicity did not provide individuals and groups with their most important political resource in the competition for the scarce goods of modernity, as well as for access to local resources of land and labour[232], save for migrant workers. To the majority of the Ovimbundu population, ethnicity appears not to have been an eligible instrument for collective action and representation, since from the start the community was ill defined and devoid of all-encompassing collective symbols and common narratives. In fact, this transference of identities of kinship and home only appeared with the coming of the "Bailundo worker", a *sulano*, an identity attributed to migrant Ovimbundu workers - thus not voluntarily assumed or negotiated -, unrepresentative of the group, that served as an external stereotype in the later civil conflict. But before the civil war, crucial changes took place in the central highlands, especially between the inter-war period and the 1960's, with regard to land ownership and migrant labour. The fact maize and migrant labour were the main contributions of central Angola to the colonial economy speak highly of the importance of these two factors, land and labour, in shaping Ovimbundu society.[233]

MORAL ETHNICITY AND EARLY POLITICAL TRIBALISM

In his study of language and ethnic cleavages in Zambia, Daniel Posner goes further than the denominational primordial interpretations of the colonial instrumentalisation of ethnicity, while also circumventing issues of colonial ethnic boundary drawing or the creation of "new" ethnic groups, by asking a more crucial question: how was colonialism, if ever, responsible for shaping the contemporary landscape of ethnic cleavages? The interest of this approach to this study resides in understanding how the colonial enterprise promoted changing patterns of group relation creating ethnic cleavages and what social, economic and political circumstances dictated

[232] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 331.
[233] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 95.

and influenced the rise of such ethnic cleavages. Posner argues it was the changing shape of the ethnic landscape, not group identities themselves, that were the cause of conflict.[234] The present case study may very well match Posner's description.

In Angola, colonialism promoted ethnic cleavages by creating specific settings that fundamentally altered people's social and economic lives. Colonial public and private requirements were responsible for the changing shape of the ethnic landscape in Angola, due to the two overwhelming and consequent forces disrupting and changing African societies: modernity and capitalism. If modernity was consented and pursued by the Ovimbundu, the development of an unfair, often brutal, capitalist system was not.

The exposure of the Ovimbundu to waged labour, in a capitalist economy, meant large portions of the population would no longer be dedicated to cash cropping, but sell the entirety of their labour to an employer. As such, "as more people worked for a wage or produced for sale, so kinship ties weakened, household hierarchies of age and gender dissolved, the tutelage of local gods and ancestors decayed and the power of chiefs declined."[235] In Angola, the profound changes associated with the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity, especially concerning labour – and proletarianisation –, are best understood through the concept of moral ethnicity, the "discursive and political arena within which ethnic identities emerged out of the renegotiation of the bounds of political community and authority, the social rights and obligations of moral economy and the rights of access to land and property".[236] Among the Ovimbundu the renegotiation of the bounds of political community and authority is perhaps best exemplified by the power attributed to African authorities under colonial legislation as well as in the ways to augment this power through reshaping and exploiting custom, already discussed in the previous section. It was in this discursive and political arena that real tangible mutations to Ovimbundu

---

[234] Posner, Daniel (2001), "The colonial origins of ethnic cleavages: the case of linguistic divisions in Zambia", prepared for *LiCEP 3*, Harvard University, 23-25 March 2001. See also Posner, Daniel (2005), *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa*, Cambridge University Press.

[235] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 276.

[236] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 324.

identity began to appear, fruit of constant renegotiation between the various internal and external forces that composed and influenced Ovimbundu society.

The novelty of private ownership led some Ovimbundu to buy land, opposing them to the customary framework of rights of access and distribution of land. Yet, these customary rights were not widely threatened[237], ultimately diverting the issue of land from the greater moral ethnic debate. As Heywood states,

> "Those Ordinary Ovimbundu who wanted to buy land became unable to do so because *sobas* and *sekulus* frustrated their efforts in an attempt to protect their rights to distribute lineage lands. They also feared the growth of a class of Ovimbundu property owners who could challenge some of their privileges. Moreover, many chefes also did not support the idea of the growth of an Ovimbundu Kulak class. In 1935 only 12,834 hectars of the land Ovimbundu farmed were privately owned, while 503,885 hectars were farmed under land tenure practices in existence prior to the establishment of the New State."[238]

Even though land could be privately owned at a price, most was still being accessed and distributed under land tenure practices in existence before the New State and its legislation, that is, under customary law. This in effect would have meant that kinship rights had to be strengthened in order to maintain claims to land parcels. Yet, such was not the case in Angola, nor was loss of African held arable land a particularly important issue, at least not until the very late period of colonialism. Neto argues that land expropriation in the 1910s and 1920s was not a problem in Huambo, except for some *olonaka*, the fertile lowlands by the streams.[239] In fact, during the early twentieth century the economic survival of rural communities was not threatened

---

[237] For a brief informative exposition of the impact of colonial policy in land tenure in Africa see Colson, Elizabeth (1971), "The impact of the colonial period on the definition of land rights", pp. 193-212, in Victor Turner (ed.), *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, vol. 3, Cambridge University Press.

[238] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power ", pp. 81-82.

[239] For more on the *olonaka* see Pössinger transformation of Umbundu society.

by large scale land expropriation but by taxation and coercive labour.[240] Gladwyn Murray Childs writes, as of 1949, that Portuguese colonialism has not herded Africans to reserves like in other places in Africa nor has white land occupation been on a scale sufficiently grand to encroach the land needed by Africans except in a few localities:

> "Whatever else may be said, however, it is good to be able to report that at the present time the Ovimbundu have their land. This fact has been a very important factor in their transition from the occupations of warfare and of trade to the more settled agricultural life. And it is the possession and cultivation of land which provides a minimum basis for those who are also able to engage in any sort of trade, either commercial or one of the handicrafts."[241]

Childs makes a reference to the fact that given the slow pace of land occupation by white settlement, the Ovimbundu had time to readapt to their new economic position, which by the time was massively dedicated to agriculture.[242] Herman Pössinger stated that the transformation of the Ovimbundu into farmers was simultaneous and almost in a symbiosis with the establishment of a relatively dense network of small Portuguese commercial houses.[243] It seems it was mainly the increasing demands of produce by Portuguese traders and not necessarily a sudden loss of land that led the Ovimbundu to disperse from large villages in search for new bigger land parcels –

---

[240] It was later (mostly during the 60s and early 70s) that the rural population of central Angola experienced growing impoverishment, under the combined effects of white settlement, growing labour demands from European farmers, mining and fisheries, ecological strain due to deforestation, population growth and more intensive farming without adequate soil protection. See Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 138.

[241] Murray Childs, Gladwin, "Umbundu kinship and character", pp. 216-17.

[242] Christine Messiant states that after 1945 the settlement of white farmers pushed the Ovimbundu to poorer lands, which triggered their expansion in search for new lands in the 1950s. Since European settlement was slow in the central highlands, it did not give way to a massive expropriation of land like that of the coffee producing regions of the northern parts of the country. See Messiant, Christine (2006), *1961. L'Angola colonial, histoire et société: les prémisses du mouvement nationaliste*, P. Schlettwein Publishing, p. 364.

[243] Pössinger, Herman, "Interrelations between economic and social change", p. 43.

hence why kinship need not be strengthened with regards to land –, an expansion maintained for two generations, in some cases as late as 1957.[244] These post-World War II years, up until the late period of colonialism, are generally characterised by a continuous focus on agriculture and search for new lands as the main labour occupations of the Ovimbundu. As Pössinger continues,

> "Owning sufficient land thus became such an important factor that the search for new land introduced a new economic and social pattern among the Ovimbundu. At first the intensive search for land and the consequent explosive dispersion of the population was based on the clan as the migration unit. The political connections of emigrating clans with their former chieftains normally did not last very long and were often dissolved from the very beginning. With the increasing scarcity of land the clans began to withdraw further and further from their old places, creating small villages with new chiefs. An inevitable consequence was a weakening of the political power of the old chiefs."[245]

Although Pössinger's account is particularly descriptive of economic and social criteria, his insight does not account for spiritual and moral dependencies and connections between *sobas* and ordinary Ovimbundu. While it is true that the search for new and larger plots of land led to an Ovimbundu expansion away from the village, this distance was bridged by a continuous spiritual link, exerted by the belief – not entirely substituted or extinguished by Christianity - that *sobas* were responsible for good and bad fortune, that is, enough rain for crops, health and other necessary elements for traditional agriculture, alongside the fear instilled by the magic-religious power of the latter, which served as an instrument of control. Certain characteristics regarding

---

[244] Pössinger states that even though these migrations were grounded in the *Osongo*, that is, the clan, and new lands were considered communitarian much like in Ovimbundu tradition, the individualizing effect of monetary economy began manifesting, introducing a new commercial agriculture which, at a growing pace, assumed European rural family characteristics, especially in what concerns private land possession. See Pössinger, Herman (1986), "A transformação da sociedade umbundu", p. 77.

[245] Pössinger, Herman, "Interrelations between economic and social change", p. 39.

hierarchy, structure and socio-economic organization were indeed significantly altered with this expansion, but not the sense of belonging or local identity.

Searching for new lands may not have disrupted the local sense of belonging but it certainly did undermine moral economy at the village level. The fact that the Ovimbundu were relatively able to maintain land ownership until the late colonial period functioned to steer the wider moral ethnic debate away from issues of land to the social obligations of moral economy. Changes to moral economy provoked great disruptions not only at the village level but also in the Ovimbundu household, as the new economic circumstances destroyed the traditional household structures of age and gender. The often tenuous and contested relations between generations and genders were upset by new sources of money income through migrant labour and cash cropping, as well as by the efforts of chiefs and elders to extend their control of land and labour through the self-interested codification of customary law.[246] Indeed, Ovimbundu society was also heavily marked by the distancing of a massive number of able-bodied men from their region of origin, especially in the 1960s, through migrant labour, usually undertaken by men but also women and children for a certain amount of time, usually measured in years.[247] This distance of a massive number of able-bodied men from their families and villages brought the necessity to maintain control of events connected to land and family at home, as mentioned in the previous section. Pössinger, referring to the disintegration of the traditional Ovimbundu family mentions a "specific kind of prostitution, tolerated and occasionally stimulated by the absent husbands", since it "often assures a fairly high indemnification to the husband who comes home from a

---

[246] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 324-325. It is important to note that before colonialism, during the rubber trade period, traditional Ovimbundu moral economies had already been challenged by the effects of new sources of income.

[247] Although many were sent to forced labour in São Tomé e Príncipe, the account of their experience does not appear as valid criteria to Ovimbundu ethnicity in this study, since due to the nature of forced labour in São Tomé, alongside deportations for incarceration, an individual's stay in the island could last well more than a decade. Moreover, their experience was vastly different from the one this study attempts to encapsulate. While also representing a minority among the Ovimbundu of the central highlands, the prolonged distance from their region of origin does not fit the framework here established, which is one entailing an individual's migration and return to village and family as carrier of new social norms and conceptions and representations of the political and ethnic space.

labour contract and can prove that another man in the meantime committed adultery with his wife."[248] This was obviously not common and sanctioned by state authorities, Christian churches and African chiefs[249], hence why vagrancy among women and children was instrumentalised by a "Native Labour Code" to ascertain control through forced labour.[250] Jeremy Ball states that "women with only rudimentary tools and no pay were forced to build roads causing them to abandon their fields, and thus impacting negatively on food production".[251] Since children were also taken to build roads, these households were in effect emptied of a workforce to farm the fields that fed the family while men were away.[252]

This disruption of the Ovimbundu's moral economy scheme – based upon the destruction of household and village structures spurred by labour demands – was exactly the type of event migrant labourers[253] were eager to control, usually by abiding to the new ethnic customary law laid down by African authorities. As such, ethnicity appealed strongly to ordinary African men "because it aided them in bringing a measure of control to the difficult situations in which they found themselves in their day-to-day life. The word "control" is crucial. It was the element of control embedded in tribal ideologies that especially appealed to migrant workers, removed from their land and families and working in far distant places. The new ideologies stressed the

---

[248] Pössinger, Herman, "Interrelations between economic and social change", p. 48.

[249] Florêncio states that most cases judged by customary courts pertained to adultery and witchcraft. Florêncio, Fernando, "No reino da toupeira", p. 114.

[250] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 63.

[251] Ball, Jeremy, "I escaped in a coffin", pp. 65-66.

[252] Wheeler, Douglas (2005), "The forced labour "system" in Angola, 1903-1947: reassessing origins and persistence in the context of colonial consolidation, economic growth and reform failures", Trabalho Forçado Africano – experiências coloniais comparadas*, Colecção Estudos Africanos*, Campo das Letras – Editores S.A., p. 375.

[253] The term migrant is used instead of forced because, contrary to popular perception, labour could be both forced and voluntary, composed of abductions and forced relocations in the case of forced labour, the most common type, or fruit of growing impoverishment, in what concerned voluntary migrant labour. When forced, the capitalist relation between employer and labourer was broken, but the pursuit of modernity among migrants was present, especially among those who were able to return home and bring meagre dividends – after paying their taxes – but important goods back to their village, goods connoted with a "higher" social status (owning a bicycle, radio, sewing machine, oxbow, plough, etc.).

historical integrity of the tribe and its land and, especially the sanctity of the family and its right to land."[254] This need to control had the effect of legitimising the new ethnic ideologies. As Vail explains,

> "Ethnic ideologies helped to provide the control necessary to minimize migrants' natural anxieties about what occurred at home. In the system of indirect rule, the chiefs were of central importance. It was they, with their new official histories, their new censuses and lists, their new courts and records, all of which employed for the first time that most fundamentally powerful invention, writing, who were now able to exercise a greatly increased degree of surveillance over both women and land in the absence of the men. It was they who brought into daily practice those "rediscovered traditions" which emphasized control in the name of "custom". (…) African men and their lineages accepted that it was in their essential interest to support the new structures of chiefs, their courts, and their educated petty bourgeois spokesmen and agents. It was also for this reason that men, when returning at the end of their contracts from the mines or farms or plantations, gave chiefs gifts that constituted one of their most important sources of income. The good chief was a proxy who protected the interests of the migrant workers and, for that, they were ready – if not eager – to reward him materially."[255]

Ethnicity operated in effect as a means of modern control. As mentioned before, it worked through a coordination of dependencies and trade-offs that made the entire system function. If indeed migrant workers were forced to legitimize the new modern ethnic ideologies being crafted by African authorities, these same authorities also had to fulfil their colonial orders in order to maintain power, and this meant control had to be enforced not only on the migrant's families and

[254] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 14.

[255] Vail, Leroy, "The creation of tribalism", p. 15. One interviewee states that after teaching a person to read and write in a given village, that person was responsible for registering the names of individuals, family members and descendants. Interview 21. Additionally, the gifts Vail refers were already mentioned in the previous section, the gifts migrant workers brought and gave African auxiliaries.

lands, but also upon the migrant himself, even if he was working at long distances from home. Jeremy Ball mentions a *soba* in Quilengues who held a man's cattle as collateral to ensure that he fulfilled his period of service. A *contratado* who fled thus risked forfeiting his family's collective wealth.[256] In essence, African authorities under the indirect rule system were dependent on both the colonial administration and ordinary African men. They had to employ a system of dependencies and arrangements, much based on redefining the ethnic apparatus at home, mainly manipulating what was "customary", to retain their position. As such, men could be forced to undertake "*contrato*", fruit of colonial labour quotas, while knowing that their families and lands were being controlled by the African chiefs, usually the soba. This ensured the migrant's interests during his physical absence.[257]

There is a solid parallelism between the renegotiation of the bounds of political community and authority imposed by the indirect rule system and the disruption of moral economy schemes affected by colonial agency. African chiefs by committing to colonial orders contributed to the overwhelming disruption of Ovimbundu traditional moral economy. It was however in the rural world, not the urban, where customary control was more assertive and changes to ethnicity became more apparent.[258]

---

[256] Ball, Jeremy, "I escaped in a coffin", p. 70.

[257] Fialho Feliciano notes that the relationship between migrants and African chiefs became ambivalent with the former's access to capital and modern goods. This author argues that monetarisation, autonomy and individualisation created conditions that led elders to lose their capacity to control work force, production and the accumulation of capital, at time forcing them to use new strategies to assure the service of the youth. Migrants upon returning would give part of the money they earned to chiefs, which allowed the latter to retain some power. Nevertheless, Fialho finds that within the colonial economic framework and the introduction of capitalism the old socio-cultural matrix was weakened since many young men no longer felt obligated to stay under the elders' control. Kin relations became monetarised and certain obligations of cooperation in labour and traditional marriage customs were broken. See Feliciano, José Fialho (1998), *Antropologia económica dos Thonga do Sul de Moçambique*, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, pp. 274-290.

[258] Even though both rural and urban dimensions are here used as causes of somewhat distinct ethnic and modern experiences, the distinctive lines of division between the urban and the rural were often vague. The distinction mainly lies on the control African chiefs had in rural areas, much reduced in town.

Migration to the urban areas of the central highlands certainly brought important ethnic changes to the urbanite segment of the Ovimbundu population. Urbanisation did have an effect on modern Ovimbundu ethnicity, especially in the conception of modern modes of production and labour organisation, provoked by "capitalist" relations. Migration to urban areas entailed a process of "modernisation" not so common in rural spaces. Neto argues that "many aspects of material life (housing, cooking, water carrying or sanitation) were for the majority of [Huambo's] inhabitants not so distant from the rural world" but the "exposure to European ways of life and the opportunities to move between jobs were undeniably characteristics of the urban experience. Clothes, hair styling, naming, leisure activities: all were directed to making the distinction visible."[259] However, as shown in previous sections of this study, there is a blatant difference between what was understood as social status and mobility and what was actually related to ethnic modernity. These two concepts did not necessarily intercept, nor were they mutually exclusive. In predominantly Ovimbundu cities, urbanites became perhaps more detached from ethnicity – which was still central albeit less salient in the urban setting - and more focused on social progress, not unlike the desire of many rural people, except in town opportunities were more prevalent. In all likelihood, after migrating to the cities, these urbanites no longer became exposed to the constant ethnic related changes spearheaded by African authorities occurring in the rural spaces. Devoid of the obligation of having to negotiate within this new ideological framework freed established urbanites from the shackles of, at least direct, ethnic (new customary) control. This is certainly true if it is considered that: on the one hand, the dependence upon African chiefs to control "natives" in town was much less frequent, since the 1954 Native Statute "treated urban "natives" and villagers "no longer integrated in traditional political organizations as one group"[260]; on the other hand, and as consequence of the former point, they were not personally involved in the renewing ethnic apparatus constantly being drawn by African authorities in the villages, under the pretext of the colonial interpretation of "customary". In essence, in town Ovimbundu urbanites were able to escape participation in the traditional, rural

---

[259] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 26.
[260] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 264.

moral ethnic debate. Here lies a common colonial distinction between those "detribalized natives", modern, uprooted and alienated, and those who lived under a set of "customary" rules and laws.[261]

However, as Posner argued, it were not group identities that changed the ethnic landscape, that is, it were not the internal changes spurred by moral ethnicity that altered the ethnic landscape of the country but the external socio-economic circumstances set by colonialism, mainly related to migrant labour.

Ovimbundu ethnicity, influenced by the intersection between modernity and capitalism, became more salient in contexts of migrant labour, instilled by specific social, economic and political settings here discussed. Neto argued that taxation and coercive labour were the main instruments used to force African villagers to serve colonial economic interests[262]. In what concerns ethnicity, coercive or migrant labour became the most important factor where colonial agency, not necessarily purposed or foreseen, vividly altered and instilled Ovimbundu ethnic thought in contexts external to the central highlands. This labour based modern trade occurred mainly in the large rural agricultural enterprises in the Northern provinces, in fisheries in Benguela and Lobito, and in mines in South Africa and Rhodesia, the most common destinations of Ovimbundu migrant labour.

Scholars of Angola have usually considered that migrant labour was both the product of force, through a series of legal stratagems and trickeries that made labour compulsory, and of generalised impoverishment.[263] Indeed, impoverishment could have been one of the reasons that

---

[261] The severe limitations of this categorical distinction are apparent, considering that migration to both urban or other rural areas was, if not forced, intensely motivated by the desire of escaping a precarious situation and pursuing the benefits of modernity.

[262] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 109-110.

[263] See for example, Messiant, Christine, "1961", pp. 363-366; Pössinger, Herman, "Interrelations between economic and social change", pp. 47-48. Neto proposes a different view on the matter, one that considers not the endemic impoverishment of the entire society, but both prosperity and impoverishment, opportunity and abuse as all parts of the colonial experience of the people of the central highlands. See Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", pp. 101-102.

accelerated Ovimbundu proletarianization. Pössinger assumes the decline of natural soil fertility and land shortage as the two elements that forced the Ovimbundu to accept waged labour:

> "When the remaining land held by the Ovimbundu – diminishing in size and declining in quality – yielded ever decreasing harvests, the final steps towards proletarianization was inevitable: the Ovimbundu became wage labourers on the huge European or smaller African coffee plantations in the Northern districts of Angola (Cuanza Norte and Uíge) (…) Their agriculture was rededicated to a scarce subsistence economy and once again became the responsibility of the women. The men and adolescent sons travelled to the north on labor contracts which lasted for a year and which were normally renewed several times."[264]

These two factors, if one is to account land loss, left in effect many Ovimbundu men unemployed, which would make them the perfect candidates for the *contrato*, since law stated that all able men who couldn't convince local officials they were able to take care of their families had to work for a white employer for nine months a year.[265]

Impoverishment, land loss, decay of natural soils and unemployment were all reasons for the Ovimbundu to undertake migrant labour, if not forced. Yet, it must also be seen as a preferred activity or simply the only option available considering the dynamics of labour "recruitment" through trader debt. Voluntary or preferred migrant labour may be seen as a manifestation of modernity, especially when considering the desire of Africans to imitate Europeans and the occupation of these Europeans, focused on trading and administrative work, rarely engaged in agriculture, which was beginning to be seen as a menial occupation. Waged migrant labourers were able to possess goods those who were dedicated to traditional farming were simply not. This, alongside coercive labour and below average salaries in the central highlands meant that a massive amount of Ovimbundu would end up working outside their region or village of origin. The numbers alone are staggering. Pössinger considers that between 80.000 to 100.000 men were

[264] Pössinger, Herman, "Interrelations between economic and social change", p. 47-48.
[265] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 74.

annually moving to the North of Angola.[266] Heywood, adds that in "1961 there were some 78.000 Ovimbundu migrants in the north, and by 1965, about 100.000 Ovimbundu males, one quarter of the able-bodied men, worked as migrant laborers on the northern coffee plantations. Another 75.000 worked in other plantations in the territory. Colonial officials also recruited about 35.000 Ovimbundu to work in the mines of Namibia, South Africa and Zambia."[267] Neto clarifies that "despite its powerful imprint on present-day Angolan social memory, massive numbers of "contract" workers from Huambo to the northern regions were more a feature of the 1960s. In 1962 the Huambo district supplied more than 46 percent of all "contract workers" (*contratados*) in Angola, representing 13 percent of Huambo's population. In 1967 coffee plantations absorbed 85 percent of contract workers leaving Huambo, with the secondary and tertiary sectors needing fewer due to more free migrants, many from Huambo too. By then, transportation and labour conditions had changed enough to make *contratado* work attractive in a zone where salaries were well below Angolan average[268]. On the eve of independence, about 120,000 workers left the Central Plateau every year to the northern coffee plantations, the costal fisheries, the eastern diamond mines and a few more places. The situation in the 1950s, however, was very far from that."[269]

Indeed, the 1960s marked the beginning of tremendous changes for all Ovimbundu, not simply sections of the populace. This decade is characterised by two utterly important coincidental factors: growing impoverishment and the desire to acquire modern goods, which left many unemployed and thus ripe for forced or migrant labour and the beginning of the liberation struggle in the northern provinces. Migrant labour produced, especially in the 1960s, a new transformation in Ovimbundu society, which would bring both exogenous – shaping the perception others had about the Ovimbundu – and endogenous - related to the Ovimbundu -

---

[266] Pössinger, Herman, "Interrelations between economic and social change", p. 48.

[267] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 138.

[268] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 255.

[269] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", pp. 254-255. Neto explains that in 1965 the average wage in Huambo was half that in Luanda and inferior to most other regions, since war did not have the positive effect on rural salaries in central Angola that it had in the north.

impacts, motivated by the distance of an overwhelming amount of men away from their villages and families. Migrant labour had an impact both at the ethnic home and, more importantly, in the areas migration flowed to. The exposure of migrant and forced workers to other regions, other languages and other peoples was crucial in shaping not only Ovimbundu ethnicity but provided an additional element in the changing shape of the ethnic landscape of the country.[270] Ovimbundu migrants found themselves in the company of workers form other ethnic groups, but not necessarily in direct competition, which attenuated the economic rivalry component in their relationship. There evolved, however, a different type of competition, one connecting the political and social realms and realities of different ethnic groups. This new element, and considering the nationalist backlash against colonialism in March 1961[271], which also took the lives of countless Ovimbundu, is best understood through the concept of political tribalism, a consequence of the economic circumstances and demands of colonialism, which unequivocally changed the social and political understanding Angolan ethnic groups had of each other and of the Ovimbundu, thus altering the ethnic status quo, or, landscape of the country.

Bruce Berman advances four points to explain the causes for the manifestation of political tribalism, which he considers as being shaped by the asymmetry of relations that developed between various groups in several contexts of the colonial situation.[272] Berman's first cause of political tribalism is connected to the "primary imbalance of power between Europeans and all African communities, justified by European claims to racial-cultural superiority. Colonial power and racism presented a challenge to which indigenous societies had to respond, both in terms of establishing a claim for the value and dignity of indigenous culture and custom, and in deciding what to take from European cultures and what to preserve of indigenous traditions – precisely the

---

[270] It is, however, important to mention that usually ethnic competition was key in creating ethnic cleavages in Africa, especially when the association between ethnicity and class became well delineated, which was not often. Interestingly enough, in Angola ethnic competition does not appear to be a significant problem during colonialism.

[271] The events of the start of the liberation war and the role of the Ovimbundu are discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

[272] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 328.

two dimensions of the conservative modernisation imagined by the literate intelligentsia." This was mainly achieved by Protestant "cultural brokers" and spread to various parts of the central highlands, already explained in the previous chapter. It was this very dynamic that enabled ethnic modernisation and allowed the conception of the ethnic unit based not on loose "tribal" association but on the belonging referent to nation-state membership. Berman had already noted that "the structures and practices of the colonial state, its demarcation of political boundaries and classification of people, as well as European expectations about African cultures and institutions, contained African political processes within the categories of "tribe" and encouraged Africans to think ethnically."[273] From this perspective, Berman also connects urbanisation to political tribalism. The author argues that "the movement of labour from rural areas as a result of the growth of both state and markets made urban areas, in particular, into cockpits of ethnic contact and differentiation. This was yet another arena of ethnic construction that was linked to rural societies, but urban ethnicities were also flexible and situational, and did not necessarily correspond exactly to rural ethnic groups."[274] Yet, urban areas, either inside or outside the central highlands and until independence, were not the "cockpits of ethnic contact and differentiation" Berman speaks of. This is so because each of the three main ethnic regions of Angola had their own particular economic and labour dynamics, not necessarily depending on each other.

Birmingham had already referred to Angola as "in effect a confederation of three colonies in Portuguese west Africa", mainly for social and economic reasons.[275] During the first half of the 20th century, especially before 1961, the country could be roughly divided into three main economic and labour regions: the Benguela corridor, especially the CFB railway (*Caminho de Ferro de Benguela*) where many Ovimbundu found job opportunities; Luanda's very commercial hub and its hinterland, where the Ambundu were the primary receivers of revenue; and the

---

[273] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 323.
[274] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 329.
[275] Birmingham, David, "Frontline nationalism", p. 24.

northern provinces, were the Bacongo kept commercial ties with groups in former Zaire[276]. This regional labour division meant that the Ovimbundu either worked inside the central highlands, mostly at the CFB, in cash crop farming or fisheries in Benguela, or migrated to other parts of the country, most likely the Northern provinces and the Luanda hinterland, besides migration to other neighbouring African countries. As a consequence of this division of labour, Angolan groups did not necessarily have to look for employment in other parts of the country. In what concerns the Ovimbundu, many residing near the CFB[277] were able to find positions there. Yet, viable alternatives were usually cash-cropping or migrant labour, the most common option, which mainly led the Ovimbundu to rural, not urban settings. This is one of the main factors to explain why Huambo and other Angolan cities during the first half of the 20th century did not harbour the variety of ethnicities Berman proposes. Also, for this exact same justification, Berman's third point about the causes of political tribalism, which reads, "the uneven development of capitalist production and markets introduced significant and growing economic differentials between regions and groups, including internal differentiations in class formation, that led to competition and conflict between ethnic communities for access to the benefits of colonialism and patronage resources"[278], cannot be applied in its totality to the Angolan case. John Lonsdale also speaks of uneven development as one of the political and economic flaws of colonial states:

> "they governed district by district, rather than a whole territory, and fostered uneven development. (…) the unequal results were much the same. Some people were nearer coasts and markets than others or had more rainfall; some chiefs had welcomed rather than barred missionaries; or their young men had gone out to work on the railway. Such random

[276] Birmingham, David, "Frontline nationalism", pp. 25-26. See also Minter, William (1994), *Apartheid's contras: an inquiry into the roots of war in Angola and Mozambique*, Witwatersrand University Press, pp. 84-85.

[277] For a brief history of the CFB see Romariz Santos Silva, Elísio (2008), *Companhia do Caminho de Benguela: Uma história sucinta da sua formação e desenvolvimento*, (Lisboa, 2008), available at https://sites.google.com/site/cfbumahistoriasucinta/#TOC-A-G-nese

[278] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 328-329.

disparities were converted into self-reinforcing hierarchies of advantage and decline by colonial markets in labour and produce. Political tribalism was the common result."[279]

Berman and Lonsdale's arguments about the rise of political tribalism can be applied as an additional cause, but not the direct source of the political tribalism involving the Ovimbundu. At first, it were not the regional disparities produced by modernisation and uneven development of capitalist markets across regions that incited political tribalism in Angola, although they would later play a key role in the attribution of negative stereotypes. Rather, labour migration, as means to escape impoverishment, in addition to localism, which strangled the national idea, was the main factor that led to political tribalism.[280] This was so because the majority of Angolans only began operating under the national instead of the local idea during the late years of colonialism. Since each ethnic region was its own economic stronghold, economic differentials between regions were not manifested through ethnic competition for the benefits of modernity, which left little room to regionalism or regional competition based on economic markers. Moreover, the lack of political collective representation and awareness that scarred Angolan ethnic groups during most of the 20th century alongside deficient means of communication, which debilitated the spread of information, meant any ethnic vertical hierarchy of access to modern benefits - i.e. one ethnic group more "advanced" than others, apart from white Europeans – was not popularly widespread. As such, it is only in the daily contact of people from different ethnic groups, sponsored by labour migration to other rural parts of Angola, namely to the Northern provinces, that the clues pointing to Berman's definition of the causes of political tribalism begin to appear. The above mentioned macroeconomic dimension meant those who did not leave their region of

[279] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 277.

[280] One adjacent explanation is suggested by Christine Messiant, who notes that the conditions upon which the Ovimbundu were working, characterized by linguistic isolation and physical isolation from the houses of the farmers, did not sponsor their insertion in the local communities. Messiant, Christine, "1961", p. 365.

origin did not share the same socio-economic space with other ethnic groups, which ultimately did not sponsor ethnic competition between them.[281]

The coincidence of the beginning of the liberation war and the start of mass migration of Ovimbundu to the northern provinces of Angola, all in the early 60s, although not related events, represent a milestone in the generalised attribution of negative stereotypes to the Ovimbundu, the kick-start of political tribalism. The particularity of migrant labour was that it was mostly in demand by the colonial administration, enacted by African chiefs ordered to meet labour quotas through *cipaios* sent to collect men or European traders devising ways to exploit African labour. Such association with the colonial enterprise began crafting, in the eyes of the colonial state and other Angolan groups, the image of the Ovimbundu not only as an exploitable workforce, but most importantly as a non-protesting, circumstance abiding workforce, not "interested" in rebellions or anti-colonial struggles. Accompanied by the idea that the Ovimbundu were prone to work in agriculture, these assumptions introduced a modern class-related factor in the ethnic imagination of Angolans, the stereotyping of an entire group of people as being submissive and predisposed to a singular labour occupation, which allowed the reckless, popular yet unofficial, colonial attribution of labour "vocations". These stereotypes are approached in Berman's final point about political tribalism, which contends that "the colonial states' strategy of fragmentation and isolation of distinct triable units promoted ethnic competition and conflict. This was reinforced in many colonies by a hierarchical ordering and the labour or production specialization

---

[281] The economic division of labour is argued by Horowitz as an alternative to other economic theories that attempt to explain ethnic conflict by arguing that competition for jobs and business opportunities pit ethnic groups against each other because of fears of remaining backward or losing the balance of economic power. However, matching the division of labour presented above, the theory of economic division of labour defends that economic conflict does not tend to occur along ethnic lines, or better yet, economic conflicts may not coincide with ethnic conflicts. Horowitz argues this is so because ethnic groups tend to have different niches of labour, that is, and in the case of Angola, ethnic groups do not share the same professional and economic spaces or lines of work. This is not to say that ethnicity may not be a reflection of those economic interests, although it is difficult to tie significant aspects of ethnic conflict to economic interests. See Horowitz, Donald (1985), *Ethnic groups in conflict*, University of California Press, pp. 105-134.

of different African societies as martial peoples, trading and administrative groups, cash crop farmers, migrant labourers, etc expressed in sharply drawn ethnic stereotypes."[282]

This process does not appear to have been voluntary or planned in Angola, as there were a number of circumstances pushing the Ovimbundu to migrant labour, not simply colonial convenience or policy. Nevertheless, under colonialism, and through not necessarily honest capitalist relations between labourer and patron, the Ovimbundu became stereotyped as being hard-workers and extremely obedient, the Bailundo workers, in essence, an immense labour force that could easily be tapped by colonial authorities to accelerate the development of the colony's public and private sectors.

[282] Berman, Bruce, "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state", p. 328.

CHAPTER 3

THE OVIMBUNDU AND THE LIBERATION WAR

The start of the liberation war in March 1961 had profound effects on the way Angolan ethnic groups relate to each other. Before 1961, as mentioned in the last chapter, ethnic animosities involving the Ovimbundu appeared to be restricted to those working in the northern plantations, where socialisation – not necessarily competition - with people of other groups was required. After the events of 1961 and accounting the political stance of the UPA, the liberation war incrementally gained ethnic contours. Ethnicity and region of origin began dictating identity markers used for political differentiation, which ultimately promoted party mobilization along ethnic lines.

Many authors prefer to downplay the importance of ethnicity in the political and popular organisation of the Angolan civil war. Usually mentioned in essentialist fashion, many studies of Angola don't address ethnicity directly but do include it in many arguments. References are made in passing to simplify ethnic elements, as to recognising their importance but in a crude manner. Mostly, the relationship between Angolan ethnic groups and political parties is provided and quickly overlooked. The axis equating the MPLA with the Ambundu, UNITA with the Ovimbundu or the FNLA with the Bacongo[283] is a fairly familiar scenario to any reader of Angola. This chapter attempts to provide a clearer perspective to these categorical considerations by focusing on the position of the Ovimbundu during and after the events of March 1961 but

[283] Schubert, Benedict (2000), *A Guerra e as Igrejas: Angola 1961–1991* Basel, P. Schlettwein Publishing. For the specific link between the Ovimbundu and UNITA, see Malaquias, Assis (2007), *Rebels and Robbers: Violence in post colonial Angola*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala. Earlier studies have also reproduced this dichotomy: see Marcum, John (1969), *Angolan Revolution Volume 1,* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press and Marcum, John (1978), *Angolan Revolution Volume 2: exile politics and guerrilla warfare, 1962-1976,* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press; Pélissier, René (1978), *La colonie du minotaure: nationalisms et révoltes en Angola*, 1926–1961, Orgeval, Pélissier; Heywood, Linda (1989), "UNITA and Ethnic Nationalism in Angola", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 1, pp. 47–66.

before the creation of UNITA, encompassing an important period of Angolan history in which ethnicity was crucial in influencing the events that would follow.

For years one of the thorniest issues between the Ovimbundu and Angolan society was not only their non-involvement in the liberation war but in fact their supposed support to the colonial state and against the militias fighting the Portuguese regime. However, as patent in the first section, their unwillingness to rebel was not grounded on acceptance or support to the colonial regime. There existed several elements, stemming from geographical, social and perhaps even psychological factors that impeded the Ovimbundu to join the liberation war. Additionally, the strength of the colonial state, its repressive and propaganda machine and the inability of many Angolans to relate to each other under an Angolan banner also served to further dissipate any solidarity and rebellious character the Ovimbundu could have expressed. They did create organisations and associations, mostly composed by Ovimbundu people, though their objective, distant from ethno nationalist considerations, was not to overthrow the colonial state but rather to challenge it by organising gatherings where politics was discussed, a prohibited, illegal activity at the time. Some of these organisations were created as a response to colonial propaganda and mobilization in favour of the regime, mainly by students and people connected to Christian churches and missions, angered by the obligation of having to publicly defend and support the Portuguese colonial concept while aware of the appalling living conditions many Angolans were subjected to. But as much as these associations were majorly composed of people from a single ethnic group, their ethnic character must not be overemphasized, as other factors hold a more nuanced approach to explain this lack of ethnic diversity.

Ethnic diversity and division are the predominant focus of John Marcum and René Pélissier to explain the fragmentation of Angolan nationalism into several fronts, rooted in divergences between the UPA/FNLA, the MPLA and Jonas Savimbi and his supporters, although other factors are also advanced. Even though there is much truth to their analysis, the most widely recognised approach to the fragmentation of Angolan nationalism is the one advanced by Christine Messiant, who argues this fragmentation had much more to do with elite struggles for

political power and representation than to a product of ethnic division.[284] Messiant's approach is entirely acceptable in this thesis, especially because it looks at the role of elites and not necessarily at the "grassroots" people. Yet, it is important to underline that this chapter does not attempt to be an alternative approach to the fragmentation of nationalism in Angola. Its attention lies solely on the ethnic related inputs made salient during this period and its influences upon the perception of the political identity of the Ovimbundu. The two premises, the fragmentation of nationalism in Angola as a by-product of elite power struggles and the ethnic approach to this fragmentation are both useful and exactly what is proposed in the second section of this chapter. It mixes both premises, defending that power struggles were – with exceptions – the focus of elites, producing latent ethnic configurations manifested at the bottom due to the instrumentalisation of ethnicity for political benefit.

Evidently, Ovimbundu agency alone cannot solely account for the ethnicisation of the conflict that ensued from March 1961 onwards, with fluctuating degrees of intensity and salience. The ethno-nationalist project of the UPNA, later UPA/FNLA, became the trigger of the ethnicisation of politics, or better yet, of the politicisation of tribalism within a society already aware of its ethnic animosities but surely not prepared to navigate its political tensions. What ensued were episodes of extreme violence that had the effect of further polarising ethnic groups and creating popular conceptions of predestined party "belonging", further incentivising the organisation of political movements to fall along ethnic and regional lines. The idea that an Ovimbundu would not thrive in the UPA or the MPLA was especially present among Ovimbundu migrants, mainly working in the northern regions of Angola during the early 1960s or living in Léopoldville, that is, close to the centres of Bacongo power. Yet, contrary to what could be expected, Ovimbundu elites did not share this ethnically biased thought process and some joined the ranks of UPA, only to discover the ethnocentrism reigning among the UPA leadership and its inability or unwillingness to project military power inside Angola would not fulfil their aspirations, alongside, some say, their desires to free their regions of origin from colonialism. As

[284] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", p. 39.

such, the creation and political project of the UPNA/UPA, which introduced ethnicity into the fold by attempting to restore the ancient kingdom of Congo and massively recruiting among Bacongo people is here referred, in order to understand the experiences of Ovimbundu displaced from home when UPA began its attacks on March 1961 - mostly migrant workers - and the positioning of Ovimbundu elites, who adhered to UPA only to find that the continuing ethnicisation of the party system required a "southern" focused political movement.

The ethnicisation of politics, usually termed political tribalism, became a widespread phenomenon in post-colonial Africa. With the end of colonial rule, many African societies became politically organised through cultural or ethnic lines. Although in some these divisions were more salient and ran deeper than others – like the Congo, Uganda, Kenya or Nigeria – what were ethnic, linguistic and cultural boundaries and identities appeared to have more resonance and appeal among ordinary people than the colonial boundaries reflecting a nation that did not exist for many Africans.[285] In those countries where decolonisation was achieved through conflict, as was Angola, these boundaries and identities were utilised by liberation movements to widen their support base and to provide a foothold inside a particular region of the country as means of representation and political presence. Angolan liberation movements derived their popular support from sub-national structures, mainly constituted by ethno-regional and linguistic groups, yet the territorial integrity of the state laid down by colonialism was challenged only by one movement and for a brief period of time.[286] Generally, ethnicity was instrumentalised for political mobilization and utilised in different phases to support a war that had soon grown far larger than whatever ethno-political alignments existed. What came to differ the most were the national projects, policies, ideologies and visions of ethnicity and nation each movement had

[285] This was often the result of democratic practices, which as Patrick Chabal puts it, served African countries badly, since "democratic practice, particularly local and national elections, exacerbated regional, ethnic and religious cleavages simply because it was representative, and access to power on a democratic basis is competitive." See Chabal, Patrick (ed.) (1986), *Political domination in Africa: reflections on the limits of power*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 5-9.

[286] Fernando Guimarães observes the emergence of a common political goal of self-determination for Angola amidst the ethnic heterogeneity of its peoples. See Guimarães, Fernando (2001), *The origins of the Angolan civil war: foreign intervention and domestic conflict*, Macmillan Press Ltd., p. 32.

envisioned for the entirety of Angola, not only for its ethnic support base and not in ethno-nationalist fashion. This fealty to Angolan territorial nationalism reveals, above all, the underdevelopment of cultural sub-nationalisms in the country, especially when compared with other groups in Africa like the Baganda.[287]

Nevertheless, with the support of this myriad of underdeveloped sub-nationalisms, mildly regionally established by porous ethno-linguistic boundaries and economic centres, one liberation movement in particular, UPNA/UPA, forced the foundation of an incipient party system in Angola that reflected ethnic alignments alongside political ideologies in the years following independence. Horowitz notes that there is a tendency for political parties to be organised along ethnic lines, assessing that "once one party organizes along ethnic lines, others are inclined to followed suit."[288] This is valid for many conflicts that present ethnic elements, mainly derived from the nature of politics and the pursuit of power. In the Angolan case, the word "inclined" may very well be replaced with "steered" or perhaps even "compelled", especially when considering the political aims of the UPNA and UPA, which had an inclusive membership, at least officially, but a very specific sub-nationalist goal. Horowitz dispels the myth of open membership and inclusion, by arguing that "membership clauses alone are not the test of an ethnic party, and neither are the original intentions of the party's founders. The National Convention of Nigerian citizens became an Igbo party however much it aspired to retain pan-ethnic support. Even some limited heterogeneity of membership and support is not the measure. (…) a small fraction of support from another ethnic group can provide at best a bit of leaven, insufficient to divert a party from the interests of the group that provides its overwhelming support."[289] Indeed, upon their formation, most Angolan liberation movements claimed inclusiveness based on a broad membership. Yet, these movements utilised the support of individuals from other ethnic groups as a shield from accusations of ethnocentrism, while relying upon the overwhelming support of their primary or base group, not for the advancement of its

---

[287] Horowitz, Donald, "Ethnic groups in conflict", p. 250-251.

[288] Horowitz, Donald, "Ethnic groups in conflict", p. 306.

[289] Horowitz, Donald, "Ethnic groups in conflict", p. 292.

own interests, but rather for the provision of power to attain political representation in the international arena. Even though their leadership could have members of other ethnic groups, each of the three liberation movements built their support base on ethnic and regional grounds in order to advance their own program at the national level. For instance, although the UPA's decision to nominate an Ambundu to conduct its first legal political campaign among Angolan immigrants is indicative of the party's resolve to transcend its ethnic origins[290], it did not dissuade this movement from heavily mobilizing Bacongo refugees in the Congo. This said party support distribution was undoubtedly much more ethnically based than what was required by membership. Even though all three liberation movements had members of several ethnic groups in their leadership composition, what is absolutely significant is which group they choose to mobilize - or showed a natural predisposition to mobilize – and why this mobilization, based on ethnic elements, made sense to those who joined their ranks. The inclusion of individuals of other ethnic groups to leadership positions in all movements appears to have been done with political gains in mind, not fruit of "innocent" recruitment. In this aspect, Ovimbundu elites held a preponderant role, seen by both the UPA/FNLA and the MPLA as the key to unlock the peasant potential of the central highlands.

EARLY OVIMBUNDU ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONALISM

Several circumstances can be advanced to explain why, at the heat of African independencies, the participation of the Ovimbundu masses in the Angolan liberation war was

[290] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 84.

practically non-existent.[291] At their heart lies the strength of the colonial state, its army and its police, the PIDE[292], besides other geographical, social and perhaps even psychological factors.

The start of the liberation war, unleashed by the UPA attacks of March 1961, alongside fears of generalised anti-colonial mobilisation, served as the tipping point for the colonial state to respond with a legal reform package which included the abolition of the Native Statute, of forced labour and forced cultivation, in order to decelerate adherence to the liberation movements.[293] While at first these reforms should have changed many aspects of the lives of the Ovimbundu, Neto observes that although it did have some positive impacts on the social mobility of many Africans, especially in the rise of the black school population albeit limited by the resources of each family, rapid urban expansion kept wages low while in the hinterland land availability diminished and soil exploitation affected agriculture, resulting in the flow of migrant workers to the northern and coastal regions of Angola reaching unprecedented levels.[294] The abolition of the Native Statute, finally granting citizenship rights to all Angolans regardless of colour or religion, permitted Africans to choose between traditional and civil, or Portuguese, law. Yet, those who choose civil law, not only saw their taxes increase very significantly, but alongside debt with European traders, European economic competition and a degree of land deprivation ended being pushed to undertake migrant labour without any type of coercion.[295]

Land deprivation was partially the product of the resettlements policy. Gerald Bender suggests that colonial panic of large anti-colonial uprisings was the source of this policy, that is, the resettlement of the population into "hastily constructed villages comprising about 100 to 500

---

[291] Many of the reasons have already been addressed by Justin Pearce and will only be briefly mentioned here. For more see, Pearce, Justin (2011), *Control, ideology and identity in civil war: The Angolan Central Highlands 1965-2002*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, pp. 68-81.

[292] PIDE, the *Polícia Internacional de Defesa do Estado*, was a repressive police force created by the New State. Although being considered a political police, it also had many other functions related to the security of the state, both in Portugal and its colonies.

[293] Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity in civil war", p. 71.

[294] Neto, Maria da Conceição, "In and out of town", p. 293.

[295] Clarence-Smith, Gervaise (1985), *O terceiro império Português (1825-1975)*, Teorema, p. 226.

family dwellings"[296] in order to create distance between them and the liberation movements, which did more to spur revolt among the resettled, largely based on the effects it had on crop production[297], than whatever positive gains were accomplished by the legal reforms in terms of preventing anti-colonial mobilisation. Clarence-Smith estimates that a million people in Angola had been resettled by the early 1970s but does not provide particular numbers for the central highlands. Away from home, both in settlements and in migrant work, their fields unploughed and family sustenance threatened, the resettlements policy did more to help the liberation movement's agenda than to pursue the state's objective of working with the peasantry against the guerrillas.[298] Still, all things considered, whatever signs of insurgency existed among the Ovimbundu masses, overly exaggerated by the colonial state, they were all too incipient to be morphed into a viable anti-colonial revolt, as will be discussed later. In fact, Pearce's field work suggests exactly this, that "whatever the defects of the reform plans of the 1960s, they had a positive impact on popular memory of the period, at least in the rural areas of Huambo province."[299] Memory may at times be an unreliable indicator, as the author himself suggests, but it does reflect the lack of information the Ovimbundu had about the revolts at the time. If this absence of information about the movements can be explained by the lack of access the guerrillas had to the Ovimbundu population before 1974, counting only with small incursions in the eastern

---

[296] Bender, Gerald (1978), *Angola under the Portuguese: the myth and the reality*, University of California Press, p. 179. See Bender for the consequences of the resettlement policy on land farming.

[297] Bender, Gerald, "Angola under the Portuguese", p. 180. These resettlements may have attenuated localism, the local belonging many Ovimbundu felt towards their village and region. Forced to cooperate with other people residing in the settlements who shared their culture, language and customs might have had the positive benefit of proposing a new sense of identity, one especially grounded in region of origin.

[298] Bender notes that most young men were drafted into the colonial army or "recruited" to work as labourers on the coffee plantations in the North, which left an unusually high percentage of elderly men, women and children to work the fields, in essence helping destroy the basis of the Ovimbundu moral economy, as was explained in the previous chapter. See Bender, Gerald, "Angola under the Portuguese", p. 186. For the antagonising of Ovimbundu peasants see Birmingham, David, "Frontline nationalism", p. 47.

[299] Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity in civil war", p. 72.

regions of Bié in 1967[300], and the actions of the PIDE, other geographical, social and psychological issues are also crucial to explain the Ovimbundu's unwillingness and delayed participation in the war. PIDE crackdown on any suspicious and subversive anti-colonial activity, of which early Ovimbundu associations were victims of, may have been vital, alongside their geographical position, entrenched in the heart of Angola without neighbouring states to escape to, to account for much of the Ovimbundu's lack of participation in the anti-colonial conflict. This "landlocked" condition became an insurmountable obstacle, which would deter the willingness of the people of the central highlands to fight the colonial regime.

Marcum advances another perspective, explaining that what distinguished the nationalism of the southern half of Angola was precisely the absence of an early and sizeable regrouping abroad of political activists, students, and *émigrés* with a separately identifiable stream of nationalism.[301] For a considerable period the few external representatives of nationalist currents within the Ovimbundu, Chokwe and related areas tended to ally themselves with the rural peasant nationalists of the northern Bacongo stream, as seen in the case of Savimbi and other Ovimbundu in the UPA/GRAE.[302] It would, however, be precipitated to take the absence of a group of Ovimbundu forming a different stream of nationalism from that of the UPA/GRAE as a signal of uneven development, of not developing their own movement sooner due to a lesser exposure to modernity than those living in coastal areas or regions with strong European and colonial presence. This is not the case with the Ovimbundu, since foreign influence, albeit Protestant, but also Catholic, besides a strong European presence in Nova Lisboa, was very significant. The fact that the Ovimbundu continued to speak Umbundu as their primary language in many sections of society must not be considered as lacking in modernity nor does the lack of Ovimbundu people

---

[300] Bender, Gerald, "Angola under the Portuguese", p. 185.

[301] Heywood also makes this distinction, noting the Ovimbundu lacked the national and international stature of the two northern leaders (Agostinho Neto and Holden Roberto). See Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 162.

[302] Marcum, John, "Angolan Revolution, vol. 1". p. 101. For the early relationship between Jonas Savimbi, UPA and the MPLA see Lara, Lúcio (1998), *Um amplo movimento…: itinerário do MPLA através de documentos e anotações*, Lúcio e Ruth Lara, pp. 571-589.

studying abroad, in comparison with other groups, serve as a reliable indicator of "backwardness", especially considering their relentless pursuit of education, albeit at a lower level. The control of information, insufficient monetary resources available and great geographic distances, alongside the dynamics of the colonial labour economy and the nature of Protestant education, which at times strained the advancement towards higher education by requiring students to work in its missions, are much more reliable factors to explain the late blooming of Ovimbundu intellectuals with a higher education from abroad than is the thesis of uneven development.

Additionally, on the psychological realm, one interviewee refers to the effects of the war against the Ovimbundu kingdoms as an episode still present in Ovimbundu imaginary, adding the socio-psychological inheritance of having been defeated and occupied by the Portuguese at the turn of the 20th century:

> "The last war of occupation of the central highlands of Huambo, the war of Candungo, Ambo, built the psychological threat for this people of the central highlands in relation to the Portuguese colonial presence. It was such a terrible war, so outstanding in the Ovimbundu spirit that in fact they had no big interest to openly battle the Portuguese again. The hoisting of the Portuguese flag here had psychological consequences which lasted several years, until the mental tissue recomposed to allow new endowments."[303]

Moreover, the social condition of being Angolan or Portuguese, that is, assimilated, of being native black or black Portuguese, was also preponderant. It is clear that those who fathered the generation of Angolans who would later fight colonialism, in their time preferred not to rebel against the Portuguese. Although they did feel the African appeal, which is clearly patent in the life of Loth Savimbi as mentioned in the first chapter, their pursuit for the benefits of modernity by imitating what was western or even "white" discouraged them to pursue any open rebellion

[303] Interview 1.

against colonialism. Nevertheless, Linda Heywood suggests the contribution of the older generation of Ovimbundu, mainly Protestants, prepared the way and "did much to heighten ethnic and political consciousness among young Ovimbundu. Members of the younger generation of Ovimbundu Protestants benefited immensely from the educational advances, and from the organizational experience of their parents in schools, churches and other institutions that they helped to found and operate."[304] Their use of Umbundu language was also crucial in providing a measure of ethnic identity to the younger generations. As Heywood continues,

> "The continuing use of Umbundu in formal and informal settings allowed them to maintain a deep sense of pride and solidarity with their fellow Ovimbundu. Many Protestant Ovimbundu parents who continued the habit of teaching the young through fables and history used Umbundu to teach values and pass on histories of the old Ovimbundu kingdoms to their children. Many of these histories highlighted the exploits of their own forebears who resisted the Portuguese. (…) the stories that the older generation told their children, recalling the heady days of Ovimbundu commercial success; these together with the pride in their language and the closeness of family life helped the young generation to identify with their proud past."[305]

This generation of Ovimbundu who would become the nationalists, influenced by their experiences in Protestant households, were exposed to elements crucial to maintain ethnic salience. As Heywood noted, this Protestant generation was not only born of assimilated or somewhat modernised parents, which provided them with the ability to speak Portuguese, and more importantly, oriented them towards focusing seriously on education, but also were well aware of the importance of their language, of a golden past filled with stories of success, resistance and heroes, all critical ingredients in the building or maintaining strong ethnic identities.

---

[304] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 155.
[305] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 155.

The groups of people who attempted to challenge colonial rule were mainly composed of university graduates, seminary and high school students, Protestant pastors and others in exile.[306] What is important about this segment of the Ovimbundu population, and according to Heywood, is that not only did most appear to be Protestant but their experiences differed significantly from those of anti-colonial groups in the Luanda region and its hinterland and in the northern areas of the country in two fundamental ways. Firstly,

> "Ovimbundu Protestants who led the struggle were the children of educated Ovimbundu who exercised a level of responsibility in the community that their Catholic, Methodist and Baptist counterparts did not. They were the Ovimbundu who pioneered and directed Protestant schools, clinics, churches, hospitals, and other institutions that existed in the central and southern parts of the colony. (…) many Ovimbundu were able to maintain stronger ties with the masses of their fellow Ovimbundu than members of the Kimbundu and Kongo elite could with their fellow Kimbundu and Kongo"[307]

Secondly,

> "another difference between the Ovimbundu Protestant whose members joined the anti-colonial struggle and their counterparts in the North, in particular those in the Kimbundu region was their ability to speak Umbundu, the language of the masses of Ovimbundu. Unlike many Kimbundu who only knew Portuguese, all Ovimbundu Protestants knew both Umbundu and Portuguese"[308]

Heywood may very well be referring to the social backgrounds of those who created and joined UNITA than to all the associations created by the Ovimbundu prior to this party's

---

[306] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 151.
[307] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 154.
[308] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", pp. 154-155.

foundation. Yet, in what concerns the Ovimbundu, either in UNITA or previous organisations, their social experiences and backgrounds were very similar, especially with regards to their religious allegiances.

Small groups of educated Ovimbundu, with Christian – both Catholic and Protestant – educations, did express what could be considered anti-colonial, nationalist sentiments before the start of the liberation war. Of the associations created by these Ovimbundu, none survived and rarely managed to operate for a significant time, usually falling victims of PIDE intelligence and crackdown. There were eight important groups, almost exclusively Ovimbundu, that attempted to gather and discuss politics, but as far as it is known none had a preponderant ethnic or nationalist ideal. They were the *Grupo Avante* in Bié[309], *Grupo Ohio* in Lobito and *Olonguende* in Bailundo, three distinct groups that served as forums for the dissemination and popularization of nationalist sentiments created by sixty young people associated with the Protestant-run Dondi Institute as a reaction to state-sponsored public demonstrations[310]; the *Organização Cultural dos Angolanos* – OCA[311]; the *União das Populações do Sul de Angola* – UPSA; the *Comité Secreto Revolucionário do Sul de Angola*; and the *Juventude Cristã de Angola* – JCA.

While little is known of many of these groups, the last organisation in particular represents a wider attempt at some sort of political or social organization, both of which express, at least in their designation, pan-ethnic approaches. The JCA was a "secret society", working for only eight months, aiming to organize a program of religious and political education among youths in and about Nova Lisboa.[312] This organisation was dismantled by the PIDE in 1960 only to be reconstructed later the same year. Although having once operated in Dundo, Lunda Norte, and afterwards located in Luanda, the JCA's multi-ethnic reach was not wide, since it was "composed

---

[309] A member of Grupo Avante, Julio Cacunda, was especially active in attempting to launch an insurrection. See Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 154, for more on Cacunda.

[310] Heywood, Linda, "Contested Power", p. 159. I have not found evidence linking these three groups to the same leadership. Heywood states that Júlio Cacunda, the *Grupo Avante* secret recruiter managed to establish cells in Luanda, Benguela, Lobito, Bié and Mossamedes, but makes no reference to the other two groups.

[311] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", pp. 108-112.

[312] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 106.

primarily of young Ovimbundu from Nova Lisboa, Benguela and Lobito, as well as southerners from Sá da Bandeira and the Cuanhama country of the far south"[313]. Nevertheless, the fact that the JCA was able to expand to other regions and cities in Angola perhaps makes it the most important Ovimbundu led anti-colonial organisation prior to UNITA. Marcum even speculates the JCA may have been involved in the uprisings on the 4th of January 1961 and states the JCA had contacts with UPA since the latter became "particularly vulnerable to Portuguese retaliation in the Luanda slums, as witness the fact that after the violence had subsidized the "southerners" of the JCA were unable to re-establish contact with it."[314] The JCA would become the first link between Ovimbundu members and UPA. João Chisseva, a member of the JCA, after being transferred to Moxico province in late 1961 joined two former members of the *Grupo Avante* of Bié in creating a group that would adopt no name but would be recognised as the *União das Populações do Sul de Angola*.[315] One additional link between southern Ovimbundu and northern UPA nationalism was the *Comité Secreto Revolucionário do Sul* de Angola, which albeit being a small urban based organisation, did manage to contact Holden Roberto, initiating a collaboration that would eventually lead the GRAE to produce "a number of tracts in Umbundu calling upon the Ovimbundu to take up arms and join the revolution."[316] With regards to the other organisation, the OCA was formed as an association for continuing education, led by two prominent Protestants, Julio Afonso and José Belo Chipenda. It mainly debated western culture, tradition and modernity, and exposed people to new ideas and ways of thinking which was considered subversive by the colonial state, yet activities important to the mixing of Ovimbundu moral ethnicity with Angolan nationalism, as will be seen in the next chapter. The OCA was later banned and Julio Afonso arrested by the PIDE.[317]

[313] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 106.
[314] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p, 129.
[315] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 297.
[316] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 298.
[317] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 109; James III, W. Martin (1992), *A political history of the civil war in Angola*, Transaction Publishers, pp. 32-33.

It is clear that most groups created by the Ovimbundu consisted mainly of Ovimbundu people and to a certain extent of other peoples from the southern regions of the country. Nevertheless, tagging these early movements as ethnic or ethnic based when they never gave signs of ethno-nationalist ambitions or of working to favour their own group would be a misconception, as would be to determine that their contribution to the ethnicisation of the Angolan party system was purposed and foreseen, even though these were at large groups mainly composed by Ovimbundu persons. In fact, it would be clearer to assume that these groups were formed primarily by and consisted mainly of Ovimbundu people because Ovimbundu persons shared the same networks, especially within the Protestant sphere, and thus were the easiest ones to recruit. Among internal issues concerning each of these organisations – was their objective to expand or simply to experience politics and agitate? – the need for secrecy, deficient or inaccessible communication routes and difficulty of travel to recruit in other regions are much more attractive explanations for the majority Ovimbundu presence in these early movements than ethnic preference. The people who integrated these movements were nevertheless people with some access to information, who began to have contacts with Congolese and Ghanaian nationalists and who were probably aware of the movements in the north of Angola. Additionally, a minority of Ovimbundu did become aware of these movements, whom the colonial state entitled Communists, Protestants or Bacongo tribalists, ironically by the hand of the state itself as well as through Christian missionaries.[318] After the events of March 1961, the colonial state's propaganda involved organizing public demonstrations of loyalty to the Portuguese state, which revolted many Ovimbundu students who were forced to read public declarations of support to the regime, and the broadcasting of "official" accounts of the events in

[318] Some people had information about the movements. Those who possessed a radio and were able to listen to the MPLA's radio, Angolan Combatente, broadcasting from Brazzaville, alongside some connected to Christian missions and soldiers serving the colonial army possessed meagre knowledge about the political situation. See Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity in civil war", pp. 79-80. My own fieldwork data supports this statement, although interviewees spoke more of the Angola Combatente radio and colonial army soldiers, not of Christian missions, as the principal sections of society with information about political events. It is also noteworthy to point that those who listened to the radio were considered "the elites of the time" by interviewees, exactly due to the fact of possessing a personal radio device.

the north in Umbundu and other southern languages, depicting the UPA as terrorists and criminals. According to Marcum these broadcasts combined anti-Americanism and exhortation to reject the rebels of the north because they were killing loyal "Bailundo" soldiers. The colonial state's propaganda revolved around pitting the Ovimbundu against those groups it considered subversive, mainly the Bacongo "tribalists".

> "Tribalism already existed. This situation [the uprisings in March 1961] deepens tribalism. The Portuguese government tried to use the massacres so the effects of the liberation war didn't spread rapidly to the interior of the country. They put Angolans from here against Angolans who were fighting. (…) The information we had about UPA, FNLA, were people, terrorists, very bad people, when they find someone they don't care [suggesting the person is killed]. (…) here propaganda was against them. Here in the interior there was some revolt against those who were struggling for liberation. Perhaps that was why the war lasted so long. Propaganda was very strong".[319]

Two important points are raised by this interviewee. Firstly, the open recognition that tribalism already existed and colonial propaganda used it to its favour. Secondly, and perhaps because tribalism was present, the interviewee speaks of a revolt against those who were struggling for liberation. This revolt may have translated the mixture of colonial propaganda with the massacre of many Ovimbundu, not only "Bailundo" soldiers but an untold amount of "Bailundo workers", the Ovimbundu farmers who were constantly migrating to work in the northern plantations and who were indiscriminately attacked by the UPA. Yet, overall, the majority of the Ovimbundu population only became aware of the coming political changes near independence. Justin Pearce found that in the central plateau most people were unaware of an existing anti-colonial struggle for the liberation of Angola.[320] In fact, the colonial army "recruited" many Ovimbundu, who were sent to fight the "*turras*", the UPA "terrorists" as the

---

[319] Interview 4.

[320] Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity in civil war", p. 81.

state called them, years before the involvement of the masses of Ovimbundu in the Angolan political scene. As one interviewee ably puts it,

> "A lot of Ovimbundu went to the colonial army, because in those years, the 60s, when the war began, there were more Portuguese to defend the capitalist interests, but many died. So after there were assimilados [after the abolition of the Native Statute in 1961] the Portuguese understood that the Angolans also had to defend the country, as part of the colonial army. The Ovimbundu here in the south, we did our recruitment in Huambo, Lubango, Huíla, but then we had to go to the north. The southern man goes to the north, the northern man comes here to the south, because there he knows the ways and the paths, so the coloniser made these transferences. So we from here, all southern men went to the north and fought in the north, almost in the frontier with the Congo, in Uíge. Now, those who went to the colonial army in Luanda, the majority came here. The objective of the colonial army was to make the defence of the *fazendas* where the *contratados* worked. The majority of them were here and went to Uíge. [Defence was made] so the MPLA and the FNLA didn't take them, otherwise they would join their ranks."[321]

Language was also an obstacle fully exploited by the colonial state. People from the south of Angola "were moved to army posts along the Congolese border in the months just before Congolese independence. Southerners were considered safe there because they did not speak local or neighbouring languages like Kikongo, Lingala or French."[322] This preoccupation with the Ovimbundu joining the liberation movements was matched by the colonial state's encouragement of the notion that the people of central and southern Angola were especially pro-Portuguese. "Reacting to this official view, Rev. McVeigh has commented that by their 'constant reiteration that the Bailundo [and other South Angola people] are loyal, [the Portuguese] hope to divide the

[321] Interview 2.

[322] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", pp. 135-136.

Africans into two camps. They recognize that the most valuable African weapon is unity."[323] This strategy of division implemented by the colonial state in a society already prone to ethnic division was somewhat successful. Ultimately, it created the myth of the loyal, hard-working Ovimbundu, or "Bailundo" – see next section –, an ethnic stereotype based not only on the dynamics of migrant labour[324], which other groups understood as a product of loyalty towards the Portuguese, but also on the inability and unwillingness of the Ovimbundu to rebel. The combination of these two factors, that is, supposed loyalty to the regime and passive or non-rebellious character, alongside UPA's Bacongo based approach, presented grave consequences to many Ovimbundu not only working but also fighting in the colonial army in the north, as was demonstrated by the events of 1961.

THE OVIMBUNDU IN THE ETHNICISATION OF THE CONFLICT

The events of March 1961[325], claimed by the UPA, are tightly connected with political tribalism, or, better yet, ordinary tribalism attaining a political dimension. In fact, the stage for the politicization of ethnicity was set when the UPNA, UPA's predecessor, was created with the political project of restoring the sovereignty of the ancient Kingdom of Congo, the grail of Bacongo nationalism, by people connected or interested in transforming the kingship of the Congo into a more modern institution. This project which lasted approximately more than a year, discussed at length in Marcum[326], was put aside when in 1958 Holden Roberto, participating in the First All-African Peoples Conference taking place in Accra, Ghana, understood that particular project not only invoked little enthusiasm but was criticised as a "tribal anachronism". Roberto heeded the advice and the UPNA leadership changed the name to UPA and called for the national

---

[323] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 154.

[324] See chapter two.

[325] See Pélissier, René "La colonie du minotaure", pp. 472-526, for a considerably in-depth discussion of UPA and the events of 15th March 1961.

[326] See Marcum, John, "Angolan Revolution vol. 1," pp. 63-100. It is important to refer that many of the events that influenced the UPNA/UPA occurred both in Angola and the Congo.

liberation of all Angolans, information that was contained in a pamphlet Roberto circulated during the conference. The party's statutes became inclusive, without discriminating sex, age, ethnic origin or domicile. However, by the time Angolan Bacongo leaders officially extended their political activity across ethnic lines, other two pro-Bacongo parties had emerged, Abako[327] and the MRPC[328], the latter calling for the reunification of all the Bacongo of the Belgian and French Congos, Cabinda, and Portuguese Congo, thereby heightening ethnic particularism. The independence of the Congo, too rapid for the Bacongo secessionists, forced these parties to focus on Congo politics and elections, while still resenting the UPA for its inclusive Angolan and distinctly non-exclusionary Bacongo nationalism. UPA was left to compete with these Bacongo organisations for the support of the same ethnic group (as it would later compete with the MPLA in Léopoldville). Because of this, the position of the UPA in the lower Congo remained precarious, torn by conflicting pulls of ethnic solidarity and by the rival incompatibilities of Congolese and Angolan nationalism.[329]

With the independence of Congo and under Patrice Lumumba's patronage, UPA with Roberto as its leader was allowed to openly recruit among the Angolan Bacongo population exiled there, which eventually swallowed UPA's ranks mainly with people of Bacongo descent. Heavily filled with Bacongo people UPA unleashed the attacks on Portuguese *fazendas* and administration posts on the 15th of March, the first stroke of anti-colonialism which victimised not only many Portuguese people but many more Ovimbundu, who were working in the Northern plantations. Basil Davidson cites Marcos Kassanga, former chief of staff of the UPA, who called a press conference on the 3rd of March 1962 in Léopoldville and declared that the UPA had been responsible for the massacre of Tomás Ferreira's column [an MPLA column] as well as for other crimes of the same kind:

---

[327] Abako – Association pour le maintien, l'unité et l'expansion de la langue Kikongo, created in 1950 initially for the cultural renaissance of all the Bacongo people, both in the French and Portuguese Congos. See Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", pp. 72-73.

[328] MRPC – Mouvement de Regroupement des Populations Congolaises, an offshoot of the Abako calling for the creation of a separate Bacongo state. See Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 73.

[329] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", pp. 75-76.

> "Some days after the beginning of the Angolan people's revolution against the Portuguese domination and slave exploitation, it was turned into a carnage fomented by the leadership of that party whose chief was Holden Roberto. (…) In all aspects the armed struggle unleashed in the north of Angola is a real fratricidal struggle. A figure approaching 8.000 Angolans were savagely massacred by tribal elements of the UPA. (…) the inhumane massacre effected by Angolans against Angolans is born of a blind tribalism which presents itself in four aspects: religious, linguistic, ethnic, and ideological."[330]

While it is impossible to provide specific or perhaps even approximate figures to the number of Ovimbundu massacred during this episode, most secondary sources available do state that in fact many were victimised. It is however extremely important to note that these massacres were not motivated out of cheer tribalism alone, but also based upon the idea that the Ovimbundu were collaborating with the Portuguese. When the Europeans left their plantations in fears of UPA attacks the Ovimbundu, the "Bailundo workers", stayed behind either working or gradually beginning to defend the *fazendas,* usually by not letting militias in. Hélio Felgas states that in "many *fazendas* of the district of Kwanza-North became noticeable the attempts to recruit Bailundos. (…) For the first time, on the dawn of the 10th of April the terrorists attacked with guns and *catanas* a group of Bailundo workers from the *roça* Santa Isabel, near Aldeia Viçosa, in the area of Quitexe. Probably they had given up attempts to recruit them. After the martyrdom of the whites began that of the Bailundos, the only – disarmed –occupants of the *fazendas* where the Europeans had been killed or had escaped, becoming an easy target for the ferocious attacks."[331]

During the UPA attacks in 1961, the recognized enemies were indeed not only the Portuguese but also many Ovimbundu, in indirect fashion, which leads Malaquias to conclude that,

---

[330] Davidson, Basil (1972), *In the eye of the storm: Angola's people*, Anchor Books, pp. 213.

[331] Felgas, Hélio (1968), *Guerra em Angola*, Lisboa, p. 78.

> "UPA actions demonstrated that its national claims hardly went beyond the rhetorical sphere. For example, the attacks that marked its entry into the anti-colonial liberation war targeted both whites and Africans from other communities, particularly members of the Ovimbundu community."[332]

The Bacongo nationalists of UPNA had already disregarded the Ovimbundu and other southern peoples in the past, when Necaca, Pinnock and Robert sent a letter to the American State Department, on the 20th of May 1956, asserting that historically and legally the Portuguese Congo constituted a territory separate from Angola. Referring to Angola as the old kingdom of Ndongo, situated south of the Congo kingdom, sovereignty of the Ambundu people and not the entirety of colonial Angola, to which it had been unjustly joined in 1884, this statement, according to Marcum, overlooked the presence of more than a million and a half Ovimbundu and other ethnic groups. This disregard not only for Ovimbundu inclusion in the Angola UPA was supposed to liberate, with its more than obvious roots in Bacongo nationalism, but also for Ovimbundu life was intensified with the immeasurable violence that ensued. Dalila and Álvaro Mateus cite the account of Severino José, an Ovimbundu who was at the administrative post of Aldeia Viçosa:

> "He had seen being cooked "four military men, to whom they cut the fingers and *matubas*, hanging them in sticks to dry." They organised authentic scenes of cannibalism, starting with the four white soldiers caught in Colua. They made the Bailundos cook them and participate in the feast. (…) The speaker participated in the feast as did other Bailundos, as those who refused to were killed and eaten. The speaker said he saw the death of at least 25 Bailundos."[333]

---

[332] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p. 59.

[333] Mateus, Dalila and Álvaro Mateus, *Angola 61 guerra colonial: causas e consequências*, Texto Editores, p. 131.

The violence perpetrated by the militias was so unconceivable that Holden Roberto, who at the time was in New York, denied the participation of the UPA. Joaquim Pinto de Andrade said the "events must have surpassed the leadership in its violence, because I heard Holden Roberto speaking in Voice of America, saying 'Please, stop this, this cannot be, we have nothing to do with this'. Days later, on the 20th March 1961, during an interview to the New York Times, Roberto "assumed [responsibility], partially not fully, sympathising with the militants who took up machetes, but not totally, since he couldn't, given the barbarity with which things were done."[334]

A documentary series, directed by Francisco Furtado also documents Roberto's surprise and hesitation. In this documentary Roberto is filmed saying,

> "It was something well organised. You must rebel in the *fazendas*, to show that there is in fact forced labour. And we will send television crews to show. That was our initial intention. I left to the United States to be present [at the U.N.] and waited. That happened on the 15th of March, but news only arrived [to the U.S.] on the 17th. I saw images that did not please me. We were surpassed. The events, with those murders in large scale taking place, we were surpassed. But I concluded that it was not an action but a reaction. The people reacted and the reaction was incontrollable. (…) That was why I didn't claim the events sooner. I thought, well what does this mean? And [Franz] Fanon called me and said, if you don't claim it, the MPLA will say it was them that did it. So next day I claimed the events. (…) We were surpassed but someone told me something, a mulatto pastor, old Gurgel. He said those blacks who were killed were worse than the Portuguese. They were known by the people. Their behaviour was undignified, and the people reacted upon them. I understood."[335]

---

[334] Mateus, Dalila and Álvaro Mateus, "Angola 61", p. 143.

[335] A Guerra, Episode 1 - "Massacres da UPA", directed by Joaquim Furtado, 2007.

As mentioned, even though many Ovimbundu – the blacks who "were worse than the Portuguese" – were indiscriminately killed during the months following March 1961, others say UPA attempted to recruit the *contratados*, mostly Ovimbundu, working in the *fazendas*. In the same documentary, Cosmo Manuel, an UPA militant in 1961 explained that,

> "We went to the fazendas to contact the *contratados*. We recruited the *contratados*, they went behind us [joined us]. Now, those who were against, that was not our business."[336]

One interviewee also refers that Ovimbundu migrant workers were often recruited to join the movements:

> "Those who left from here [central highlands] to work in the north, east and south, could easily join the ranks of UNITA, MPLA or the FNLA, and we have clear examples of that"[337]

Yet, the first anti-colonial events of March 1961 show that many Ovimbundu were killed instead of recruited. It was likely the case that knowing so many *contratados* were Ovimbundu, or "Bailundos", the UPA militias believed they were working with the Portuguese and thus against them. This is the opinion of one interviewee:

> "It is evident that the Ovimbundu were massacred and persecuted at that time, because it was thought they were cooperating with the colonial authorities, dominated the principal services in the *fazendas*, were more docile than other peoples, more obedient, did not manifest their rebellion, even though when they did they became too roguish. But I suppose

[336] Ibid.
[337] Interview 1.

> that must have been the reason which led the FNLA to move pressure against the Ovimbundu workers that were in the coffee *fazendas*."[338]

It remains to be known whether this pressure moved against the Ovimbundu was premeditated – which gives it a deeper ethnic nature – or not.[339] Certainly other motivations were at play in the massacres as these episodes cannot simply be seen or explained through the lenses of tribalism alone. At least two other factors are relevant, besides tribalism, and commonly referred. Firstly, the construction of the stereotype of the Bailundo as different from other Angolan peoples, more docile, hard-working and loyal to the Portuguese. This stereotype came to define the Ovimbundu in part due to their massive engagement in migrant labour. Working at the plantations and in other services under the Portuguese colonisers, even sometimes defending their patrimony, many came to believe the "Bailundos" accepted Portuguese rule, hence why they did not rebel against working and living conditions, which also made them the enemy. One interviewee provides a different explanation as to why the Ovimbundu did not rebel and the northerners did:

> "I had an explanation given by Dom Damata Mourisca, something I also read in a book. The people there, in the Uíge region, they had this thing, working for another means you are his slave. So you have less quality, you are despised. You work for another to survive. Because there everyone has royal lineage, consider themselves princes and princesses, they are powerful, can't be salaried. Their system was to buy a product and sell it somewhere else. And so they never are salaried, never are considered to be worth noting. But here, I don't know why, they accept to work for another (…) there they couldn't find those who accepted to work for them [for the plantation owners] as employees. So they came to get

---

[338] Interview 5.

[339] Basil Davidson writes that "others again have affirmed that Holden's men brought and gave orders to kill civilians, white and black, and those who say this include eyewitnesses such as Punza who narrowly escaped with their lives from UPA rebels." See Davidson, Basil, "In the eye of the storm", p. 208-209.

them here, came to get them to work in the fazendas there. It is where this thing, to think that there is a filiation of this people [the Ovimbundu] with the colonialists. When war breaks there, those from here who were there had reasoning. We came here with them [the Portuguese or fazenda owners] we don't know what is on the other side [in UPA]. We came to this region with them. We are at their service to gain bread. And now we'll fight against them? How will it be, if things don't work out, we'll have no place to go. There was this finesse. They understood what it was about, the evolution, but their situation was delicate. How will it end if you start killing them? This was also at the source of thinking those from here were in favour of them [in favour of Portuguese rule]. They didn't know what to do because the situation was extremely delicate."[340]

This fear of rebelling without considering the consequences – both for them and for their families - alongside their acceptance to work for the Portuguese, which others saw as slave labour, accounts for the perceived loyalty characteristic attributed to the Bailundo stereotype. Another interviewee blames the creation of the "Bailundo figure" on uneven development and hints on the colonial state as responsible for creating this stereotype to keep the central highlands free of "terrorist activities", as mentioned earlier.

"Portugal takes the Ovimbundu from their space to the north, to the coffee plantations in the north. The explanation is simple. Firstly, the Ovimbundu are traditionally farmers, and this region [the central highlands] is densely populated. It was here where the coloniser came searching for cheap labour, to the *fazendas* in Kwanza-Sul, Kwanza-Norte, sisal, the coffee *fazendas* in Uíge and other areas. At the time Angolans, the northern part, had lived many years with the Portuguese coloniser. The Ovimbundu taken from their space to the

[340] Interview 20. Birmingham is the only author among consulted works that refers to economic competition, by claiming that "dispossessed black landowners killed the migrant workers from the south of Angola who had been brought in to undercut their wages", a statement that is contrary to this interviewee's words. Birmingham, David, "Frontline nationalism", p. 42.

northern region, the big plantations, they were considered, firstly by the white as labour, and by the Angolans of the northern regions as second class blacks. While the others no longer worked in plantations, the group from here still did that slave labour. So they were regarded as second class Angolans. And this was deliberate."[341]

Nevertheless, the factual reasons for the Ovimbundu to undertake migrant labour were due not to their supposed loyalty to the Portuguese, but because of the several economic shifts and conditions already explained in chapter two.[342] Colonial propaganda also had much to add to this stereotype, based on the state's constant reiteration and belief that the Ovimbundu were different and would not rebel as others did, as suggested in pages 149-150 by the words of Rev. McVeigh. Christine Messiant adds an element already discussed in the first chapter, the Ovimbundu's desire of learning from colonial society, which according to this author was largely sponsored by the Christian missions.[343] Messiant also credits the disintegration of the traditional social organisation of the Ovimbundu as a product and factor of the strong cultural integration of the Ovimbundu in colonial society.[344]

The second factor that shifts the events of March 1961 away from tribalism and may add an explanation to the violence concerns elements pertaining to religion, magic and, some say, drug induced behaviours. José Redinha said, about the 15th of March,

"Deep down, the exploitation of religious factors, the recrudescence of a vague messianism, preached by certain Christian sects, Protestant, which adapted to the religious indigenous

[341] Interview 13. The idea of the Ovimbundu, the Bailundo, as a second class Angolan is especially noteworthy and will be further elaborated in the last chapters of this thesis.

[342] Felgas emphasizes several times that only loyal "natives" were assassinated. The factuality of this supposed loyalty is however highly doubtful, in light of the elements provided. The explanations provided in this paragraph and in chapter 2 are much more accurate than a loyalty little explained, heavily associated with the colonial state's propaganda and not seriously grounded in any economic or social factors.

[343] Messiant, Christine, "1961", pp. 367-368.

[344] Messiant, Christine, "1961", p. 367.

charms in a mixture of *quibanguismo* practiced by them, resulted in this tragic blood ritual. (…) they always attack filled with drugs and that proves that, coldly, they are incapable to proceed like that! Notice that they use little sticks of *feiticeiros* in their belts to protect against bullets, coarse wool cloths. Notice they said the weapons of the white Portuguese did not fire deadly bullets, but hot water. Notice they were promised resurrection."[345]

René Pélissier also speaks of the use of drugs, namely cannabis, and of the power of the "supernatural"[346]. The author notes UPA did not invent anything new in this domain but made use of a very fertile psychological terrain by providing magic "protections", in the form of amulets.[347] Altogether, these practices had the objective of instilling fury and fearlessness upon the militias, which may serve as an additional explanation to the violence unleashed against the Ovimbundu.

After March 1961, the Portuguese army began assuring the safety of the *fazendas*, especially the coffee plantations, restoring the flow of Ovimbundu migration[348]. But the events of March 1961, even though brutal and mixed with tribalism derived from a perceived allegiance to the Portuguese do not appear to have instilled a generalised sense of loss or revolt among the Ovimbundu elites, since some even joined the ranks of UPA.[349] If the Ovimbundu elites did not

---

[345] Mateus, Dalila and Álvaro Mateus, "Angola 61", p. 141.

[346] The association between the 'supernatural' and guerrillas is well documented by David Lan for the Zimbabwean case. Lan traces the involvement of guerrillas with spirit mediums and how arguments, rules and strategies of approach were conducted and ultimately successful. See Lan, David (1985), Guns and spirits: guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe, James Currey Ltd, pp. 136-156.

[347] Pélissier, René, "La colonie du minotaure", pp. 519-520.

[348] This process did take some time. Hélio Felgas notes that although after the 15th and 16th of March the attacks seemed to halt, but in extremely poorly inhabited areas the massacres of Europeans and Africans continued. According to Felgas, lack of information and misinformation concerning the situation in these rural areas led some people to return to their plantations and houses only to be killed by the militias. See Felgas, Hélio, "Guerra em Angola", pp.76-77.

[349] Heywood observes that it was in Brazzaville and Kinshasa, where southern Angolan presence was stronger, that Savimbi emerged as the spokesman for the southerners and a few disgruntled Cabindans and Kongos who were jostling to claim a place in the MPLA and FNLA movements. Yet, the Ovimbundu members, in particular, who believed that the leaders of the MPLA regarded the Bailundos as

pay much heed to these events, probably more focused on the fight against Portuguese colonialism[350], Ovimbundu migrant workers who witnessed and heard first hand tales like the one told by Severino José were certainly influenced by them. Living in an unfamiliar place, outside their region of origin where integration was difficult, culture different and language an obstacle[351] not only boosted but enhanced their perception of ethnic difference, by exacerbating differences between groups and also settling intra-group differences and ideas of locality between these Ovimbundu workers.[352] The events of 1961 in the eyes of these workers, who in general ran away continued working or were recruited or coerced to the colonial army, would later lead them to seek an answer to their anxieties in UNITA, a movement where – in principle and in accordance to their experiences with the UPA – they could be free from political or ethnic based violence and, above all, among their own people.[353] In fact, these workers might have been the first by-

collaborators and traitors, were reluctant to commit themselves fully to the northern movements. This reluctance was based upon their unfamiliarity with the leftist currents that were becoming central to African nationalism, which left them open to external manipulation. This was perhaps one of the reasons that made these Ovimbundu to join UPA. See Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 163.

[350] Fred Bridgland wrote that Savimbi felt a general satisfaction with the UPA revolt, even though Roberto had not closely confined his plans and despite the murder of Ovimbundu people. He interviewed Savimbi who said, "Here at last we were included in an armed struggle, which I saw as the only way forward. And it was being conducted from the bush inside Angola, where we needed to stay and organise in order to ensure the continued support of the people. I believed the excesses were bad, but I thought they could be brought under control once I had time to create a better organisation and we had trained officers of a higher calibre." Bridgland, Fred, "Jonas Savimbi", p. 67. Savimbi made little mention of the death of several Ovimbundu, attributing them not to tribal related divisions and preconceptions but to lack of organisation and better trained officers.

[351] Messiant refers to linguistic isolation and physical isolation from the houses of the plantation as conditions which were not suitable for the integration in local communities. See Messiant, Christine, "1961", p. 365.

[352] Heywood notes that "the Ovimbundu who attempted to join the FNLA or the MPLA surely remembered their experiences during the 1950s, when those who attended schools of conferences organised by Protestant churches were ridiculed by mestiço, Mbundu, or Kongo participants for their lack of urban sophistication and poor command of Portuguese. Heywood, Linda, "UNITA and ethnic nationalism in Angola", p. 52.

[353] Several interviews have shown people speak of UNITA either positively or negatively but always as "their own", the one "that's ours", "here from the south", as opposed to the others or, in the words of one

product of the politicisation of ethnicity. The decision to join a movement that due to their ethno-linguistic background would supposedly have space and shelter while allowing them a degree of representation in what was becoming a chaotic scenery where ethnic, regional and linguistic factors were becoming increasingly central in one's political position, reveals the ethnic inclination of politics at the time.[354] In popular rationale, if the Bacongo had one party to represent them, the Ovimbundu should also have one.[355] In this prism Paulo Faria cites a rough analysis by looking at the launching of UNITA as the "reflection of an "ethnic politics" based on three main ethno-linguistic groups, which lead to three simple equations: Bakongo = Baptist = FNLA; Kimbundu = Methodist = MPLA and Ovimbundu = Congregationalist = UNITA."[356]

Ovimbundu elites were nonetheless well aware of the ethnic divisions in the country, as is patent in their experiences in the UPA/FNLA.[357] Even when it dropped the regional expression "*Norte*" in favour of a more pan-ethnic acronym, the accusation that UPA and later the FNLA was merely a façade to hide Bacongo nationalism would remain until today. After the UPNA was

---

interviewee, the FNLA "full of French", barely Angolans". This does not portray the ethnic preferences or inclinations of UNITA's leadership, but it certainly does manifest an ethnic orientation, probably more salient among migrant workers who were exposed to ethnic based violence in the north and thus looked for a party where they would be among their own.

[354] Migrant workers living and working in the north of Angola moved back to the central highlands when the civil war began and immediately joined UNITA. See Heywood, Linda, "UNITA and ethnic nationalism", p. 55. Birmingham notes this interest in UNITA was a "symptom of disillusionment and failure in the first two political movements", based on a third socio-economic network of sub-national interests with its original focus on the highlands of the south. Birmingham, David, "Frontline nationalism", p. 43.

[355] This concept of party ethnocentrism was also an issue instilling ethnic animosities between the UPA and the MPLA. On the one hand, MPLA partisans in the UPA areas became receptive to that party's charges that the UPA "had ordered the killing of assimilados, was antimulatto, or was motivated by Bakongo tribalism." On the other hand, UPA was accused of being anti-Ambundu because all the Ambundu joined the MPLA, or anti-MPLA, because the MPLA was not a Bacongo party. See Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", pp. 217-218.

[356] Faria, Paulo (2013), *The post-war Angola: public sphere, political regime and democracy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 128.

[357] As Birmingham noted, "the UNITA leadership first experienced the politics of exile in the north, where it found nepotism and ethnic exclusiveness but little sign of national dynamism." See Birmingham, David, "Frontline nationalism", p. 43.

created to fight for the emancipation of the Bacongo community, this community, "and, for that matter, most other Angolans, regarded UPNA and its subsequent incarnations as an organization whose main objective was the restoration of the ancient Kongo kingdom in northern Angola. Consequently, its main constituency and, later, FNLA's, remained almost exclusively restricted to the Bakongo community. UPNA failed to expand its constituency, but not for lack of trying."[358] Compromising the essence of what UPNA was created for, Roberto in his efforts to make the UPA leadership more ethnically representative sponsored the recruitment of non-Bacongo persons to the movement. He chose as the party's new vice-president Rosário Neto, the Mbundu exile who had conducted UPA's first political campaign in Léopoldville at the time of Congolese independence, as mentioned earlier, and included mulattos, as is the case of Aníbal de Melo, who became the party's political director.[359] His decision to contact Jonas Savimbi was also part of the effort to make UPA politically pan-ethnic, a justification which, like Horowitz stated, does not make the party less ethnic nor does it serve to encapsulate the support of other ethnic groups. However, by attempting to present a more ethnically inclusive movement Roberto laid the dynamics of a sub-party system of allegiances based not primarily on party membership but largely upon, though not only, the ethno-regional background of those who held a leadership position inside the movement. The entry of Jonas Savimbi to secretary-general of UPA in late 1961 had already influenced "other Angolan students in Europe to join the party and thus helped counterbalance what some people considered to be the UPA's anti-intellectual or exclusively rural orientation."[360] But disagreements with Holden Roberto regarding the conduction of the liberation struggle led

> "Savimbi's followers in the FNLA/GRAE to form a distinct unit known as the "Opposition Group" because it challenged Roberto on many issues. It comprised several different tribes

---

[358] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p. 58. Malaquias also notes that outside the Bacongo region of northern Angola, FNLA came to be regarded as a group of foreigners masquerading as a liberation movement. See p. 62.

[359] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 134.

[360] Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution, vol. 1", p. 245.

> as opposed to Roberto's continued bias towards his own Bakongo. Many Ovimbundu had joined the FNLA/GRAE along with some Chokwes, Nganguelas and Seles tribesmen and OUA recognition had raised their expectations that Roberto would extend the war beyond the North and penetrate their areas in the centre and south. When they perceived a "slowdown of the war imposed by Roberto", 325 of them tried to desert from the FNLA/GRAE's training and logistics camp at Kinkuzu (…) another 65 Ovimbundu deserters managed to reach Leopoldville. They angrily confronted Roberto, who responded by having them thrown into prison by Congolese forces."[361]

Although Bridgland does not specifically state the ethnic background of the 325 "southerners" who attempted to desert from the Kinzuzu training camp, he does state that 65 Ovimbundu did escape and reached Leopoldville. Heywood also writes about this Opposition Group stating that Savimbi formed this group within the FNLA and included Jorge Isaac Sangumba, Smart Chata, Nicolau Buangu, the Reverend Marcolino Nahana, and Jeremias Kussia, Miguel N'Zau Puna and Ernesto Mulato.[362] In July 1964, Savimbi and the Opposition Group, which included 168 soldiers, left the FNLA/GRAE. Heywood states that Savimbi had the full support of the frustrated Ovimbundu exile leadership when he read the resignation address to the assembly. The author defends the idea that Savimbi and the Ovimbundu were focused on opening an eastern front that would later enable them to penetrate their own ethno-regional areas, as

[361] Bridgland, Fred, "Jonas Savimbi", p. 73. Bridgland cites Savimbi when the latter during an interview said "In the 'Opposition Group' we believed it was a mistake to elevate the principle of military resistance above all others. We needed to grasp that although it would be necessary to use weapons, any real permanence would be achieved through political struggle. But we could not make Roberto see our point of view." See Bridgland, Fred, "Jonas Savimbi" p. 74.

[362] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 164. Jeremias Kussia, Jonas Savimbi and other nationalists would later create UNITA. Many members of the Opposition Group also joined UNITA and held high positions in its hierarchy.

means to protect southern interests and work to secure parity for party positions for their members within the movements, a plan which was not in line with Roberto's objectives.[363]

The creation of the Opposition Group, mostly by people from the south of Angola, not necessarily Ovimbundu, was partially the result of Roberto's need to broaden UPA to include more people from other ethnic groups. This backlashed with the creation of these ethno-regional sub-party clusters, which owned their allegiance to leaders like Savimbi, who already had a number of followers, not only Ovimbundu nor exclusively southerners, but not to Roberto or UPA/FNLA/GRAE. The manifesto issued by Amangola – *Amigos de Angola* – in Brazzaville on December 1964, a group composed of twenty-four predominantly Ovimbundu, already pro-Savimbi nationalists, which called upon exiled Angolans to move back inside their country and mobilize the masses for guerrilla warfare not only speaks of Savimbi's influence but also of a growing disillusionment with the strategy Roberto had delineated for UPA, specifically his refusal to commit troops and position the leadership inside Angola. This element alone became one of the most pressing issues tainting Savimbi and his followers' presence in the UPA/GRAE.

When Savimbi left the GRAE in 1964, he pointed four main reasons for his decision: firstly, he condemned the lack of progress in the anti-colonial struggle, which could not be made with individuals like Roberto, who had surrendered to American interests; secondly, Savimbi pointed to the lack of unity among the nationalist movement; thirdly, GRAE leadership included mainly family members and people originating from Roberto's region; fourthly, Savimbi bemoaned the dismantlement of the revolutionary army and the end of military activities in the interior of Angola.[364] All reasons are valid and reflect the state of affairs in UPA at the time, especially the last, which became UNITA's enduring argument to explain its difference and

---

[363] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power". pp. 163-164. Heywood states that Savimbi regarded his appointment as Secretary-General of the UPA as a first step towards fulfilling his ambition of becoming the leading spokesman for southern, and, in particular, Ovimbundu in the anticolonial struggle, even though acknowledging that he tried to influence FNLA policy by pressing the leadership to commit troops to fight inside Angola with the peasantry. Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 163. Nonetheless, the ideal of committing to fight inside Angola with the peasantry reveals a strategic position perhaps more related to guerrilla tactics than to ethnic representation alone.

[364] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p. 61.

strength. Yet, both the second and third reasons presented by Savimbi for leaving the GRAE can easily pertain to ethnic issues inside that party. In this realm Heywood goes further than Malaquias in the relevance attributed to political tribalism inside UPA, noting that Roberto did more to advance himself as a businessman and to encourage claims of Congo regional and ethnic separateness than to promote Angolan nationalism.[365]

Regardless of the weight attributed to tribalism to explain the split between many people from the south of Angola from UPA/FNLA, the accusations of tribalism and of favouring Bacongo people would endure, even when the UPA joined forces with the PDA, Partido Democrático de Angola[366], to form the FNLA in March 1962. The ethnic identity of its members was still composed majorly by Bacongos with a Protestant, Baptist background. These ethnic inclinations constituted the source of some of the problems Roberto encountered with Jonas Savimbi. Their relationship broke down at the Cairo Conference of Heads of State and Government, when in July 1964 Savimbi accused Roberto of nepotism and tribalism, of filling the GRAE with people of Bacongo descent. Roberto's response was also shrouded in tribalism accusations, condemning Savimbi for promoting munity among Ovimbundu soldiers in Kinkuzu, referring to the attempted desertion of the 325 southerners, mentioned earlier.

By the time Savimbi left the GRAE the ethnic elements of the party system were already established in the Angolan political scene. The congregation of many Ovimbundu and other southern people around Savimbi says more of the inner works of UPA/FNLA than of Savimbi's ethnic inclination, at least during this initial stage. Additionally, the suspicion that the MPLA

---

[365] Heywood, Linda, "Contested Power", p. 154.

[366] The PDA's ethnic inclinations were not different from those of the UPA. Marcum writes the PDA attempted to be a conciliator between UPA and the MPLA and expected that if Portugal agreed to Angolan self-determination, it would use the period of political transition to build up the position of both the MPLA and the "southerners", because it would consider these two groups to be Portuguese in cultural orientation. Before their fusion into the FNLA the PDA favoured a three-party coalition in which they might hold the balance of power, and envisioned some sort of entente with the UPA in order to avoid aggravating the north-south cleavage in Angolan nationalism. See Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 1", p. 236. Notice the use of the north-south cleavage concept in a competition between the MPLA and the UPA, parties whose members are typically from the centre-north and north of the country, certainly not the south.

expected young southerners to help expand their bases beyond the urban and Ambundu regions but did not intend them to play a leading role in the party's organization constricted their options.[367] These ethnic elements alongside a Maoist inclination towards how guerrilla warfare should be conducted in Angola led the majority of these southern nationalists to create a third movement, one that would be suspicious of both the FNLA and the MPLA's ethnic implications and would continually sneer at what it believed to be the self-entitled ethnic and racial superiority of both these movements in relation to them. Interestingly enough, these sentiments were already present in the Opposition Group, a group that could be considered the prelude of UNITA. The mixture of southern ethnicities was already present, although majorly composed of Ovimbundu people, as were the ideological premises and strategic thought of conducting the liberation war inside Angola and among the peasantry. Based on these considerations, and given the growing ethno-politicisation of the liberation movements, it became obvious to these southerners that in order to fulfil their objectives, they had to create a movement that would mobilize the untapped potential of the peasantry, which lay dormant in the central highlands.

[367] Heywood, Linda, "Contested power", p. 163.

CHAPTER 4

OVIMBUNDU POLITICAL ETHNICITY UNDER UNITA

The ethnicisation of the Angolan conflict during the first years of the liberation war is important to evaluate the crucial relationship the Ovimbundu would come to have with UNITA upon independence. The plays of power politics enacted in the FNLA/GRAE, much based on social criteria, especially ethno-linguistic elements, and the uneasiness and rivalry that derived from what Messiant termed the *anciée assimilée* – who were at the helm of the MPLA leadership – and the *nouveaux assimilée*, especially but no only in the MPLA, created tensions that pushed the Ovimbundu in the FNLA to create their own alternative movement, disillusioned by Roberto's anti-colonial strategies and his Bacongo and clan-based preferences, while unwilling to accept the role of the creoles and mulattos of the capital, that is, the MPLA. Already in the Opposition Group created within the FNLA the clues of what would become UNITA's social, political, geographic and ideological influences became apparent. The enormous untapped potential of numerous Ovimbundu peasants, migrant workers and elites became an easy attraction to prepare the electoral process foreseen in the Alvor Accords.[368]

Virtually all authors note the connection UNITA developed with the Ovimbundu during the period surrounding independence, generally between 1974 and 1976. Malaquias understands that by creating UNITA, Savimbi sought, first and foremost, to give a revolutionary political voice to the Ovimbundu, although noting that notwithstanding this ethnic rationale, UNITA was inextricably associated with his determination and vision.[369] Messiant noting that this relationship only developed around the independence period, when UNITA won a significant support among the Ovimbundu population, adds that only the struggle between the MPLA and UNITA progressively and partially introduced an ethnic dimension. This was derived from territorial

---

[368] As seen in chapter 3, some Ovimbundu were not involved in the liberation war and even fought in the Portuguese side.

[369] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p 65.

divisions and the conflict itself, eventually confirming the Ovimbundu as the hegemonic group in the party. Linda Heywood at one point invoked the pre-colonial political legacy of the Ovimbundu to explain their allegiance to UNITA and Savimbi, despite repression and abuse.[370] Heywood's invocation of the hunter and blacksmith king paradigm, an ethno-symbolist consideration, contrasts with William Minter's strictly modernist stance. While the former attributes the success of UNITA's mobilisation and appeal on the basis of Ovimbundu ethnicity and Savimbi's intimate knowledge of pre-colonial history, ideology and folktales and his use of traditional languages in his dealings with the population, the latter author defends that UNITA's leadership deliberately shaped a regional appeal for political reasons and electoral calculations, not motivated by ethno-nationalist intentions. Dissimilar to Heywood's inclusion of social, religious – both traditional and Protestant – ethnic and regional elements in UNITA's ethnic mobilisation, Minter looks at the Angolan case as a conflict which involved cultural characteristics natural of a heterogenic society that interact with war even if not at its source. In this sense, ethnic and cultural reflections become salient because loyalties are tested and the strength of national sentiments and competing claims to represent the nation are under strain.[371] Other authors are even less concerned with ethnicity and more with regional politics, memory and networks of political activation. In this sphere, Pearce looks at the practical implications of the relationship between people and political movements without a necessary linkage between the former's ethnicity and the latter's appeal on this basis, matching Cramer's downplay of the importance of ethnicity in the conflict.[372]

These are two relatively different approaches to the same thematic, with points of contention but also of agreement. What these approaches expose is a larger debate, one that considers the instrumentalisation of tradition and ethnicity by political parties, based on

---

[370] Heywood, Linda (1998), "Towards an understanding of modern political ideology in Africa: the case of the Ovimbundu of Angola", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1.
[371] Minter, William, "Apartheid's contras", p. 62.
[372] See Pearce, Justin (2011), *Control, ideology and identity in civil war: The Angolan Central Highlands 1965-2002*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, and Cramer, Christopher (2006), *Civil war is not a stupid thing: accounting for violence in developing countries*, Hurst and Company.

modernist conceptions of ethnicity and nationalism, and one that invokes the ethno-symbolism of culture, tradition and ancestry to denote a particular sentiment of belonging to a group, thus its own avenue for political mobilisation, sometimes even simmering with primordial conceptions of psychological safety and belonging. In particular, the question is whether there were pre-colonial elements that helped connect the Ovimbundu to UNITA like Heywood argued or, like Messiant defends, there was nothing linear or natural in the relationship between the Ovimbundu and UNITA and that their hegemony in this party was caused by the effects of war and the development of the state power of the MPLA.[373] Considering these two stances, the interest of this chapter lies in how Ovimbundu discourse regarding anxieties and aspirations towards the question of citizenship in an independent Angola inspired political agency, and whether these debates pertaining to moral ethnicity triggered their hegemonic participation and support to UNITA.

To cross these different understandings of Ovimbundu support to UNITA with field data further adds news avenues of debate, especially since primary data collected raises arguments in both directions, that is, the natural and linear premise in conjunction with the unnatural and calculated adherence and mobilisation of the Ovimbundu to UNITA. This brief exposure of material is telling of the differences in approach and importance of ethnicity in the Ovimbundu's entry in Angolan politics. It is, however, out of the scope of this chapter to provide a unique interpretation of these premises. What is of interest is how UNITA mobilised the Ovimbundu, how political, geographic and social loyalties played out throughout the conflict up until 1992, and what it represented to the Ovimbundu within the spectre of intra-group debate, moral ethnicity, and to wider Angolan nationalism, particularly in the contestation of power with the MPLA. As such section one of this chapter traces Ovimbundu ethnic mobilisation by UNITA immediately after independence, in pursuit of planned elections, until the return to war in late 1992. It looks at the playing of what is commonly referred to as the "ethnic card", the use of ethnic characteristics to mobilise a particular ethnic group to follow a political cause, but not

[373] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", p. 46.

without discussing its various shortcomings and popular misconceptions, especially by crossing ideological and political convictions with the attractive use of ethnicity to enlarge party support. This section will then look at the political and social circumstances of the Ovimbundu before the elections of 1992 proposed by the Bicesse peace accords and how the events registered during and immediately after these elections dimmed the legitimacy and support the Ovimbundu gave to UNITA. This historical approach to changes in the uses of ethnicity will then open the arena for a more theoretical debate. The second section looks at "tribes" as an ideological construct sponsored by colonialism through the simplification of African history, the emergence of tribal hierarchies as sub-structures of the colonial state and the introduction of literacy as way of promoting local tongues rather than a *lingua franca* by Christian evangelisation, all processes discussed in chapters one and two. Challenging the heavy conceptual limitations of the modern "tribe" paradigm advanced by colonialism by favouring more nuanced approaches, this section attempts to reveal whether the success of UNITA in mobilising the Ovimbundu was much due to the adoption of this paradigm – which invoked popular grievances and nostalgia for communalism and fair moral economies – by filling what Ranger terms the "empty-boxes"[374] of ethnic identity colonialism left in blank, with familiar meaning, thus creating an identity for the "UNITA people". It may be that this liberation movement possessed the intellectual capabilities ethnic "patriarchs" lacked during the colonial period to build upon the ethnic identity structures nurtured by colonialism, thus encouraging the imagination of a modern identity, profoundly southern and heavily based upon Ovimbundu ethnicity. This modern meaning of "being Ovimbundu" would however come under dispute. While UNITA was able to capitalise and absorb much of the group's moral ethnic debate into its own internal dialectics, creating a profound confusion between where Ovimbundu boundaries ended and the party began, those Ovimbundu who did not join the party would also argue for different concepts of virtue and citizenship, thus contesting and imagining dissimilar forms of identity.[375] But if UNITA was

[374] Ranger, Terence, "The invention of tradition", p. 27.

[375] Anthony Cohen writes about these issues of interpretation and meaning. Cohen argues that members of the same community use their experiences to interpret symbols and rituals differently, ultimately

indeed able to transport the debate that advanced and gave moral meaning to what was Ovimbundu identity into its own identity fold, the explanation of such a process will shed further light into the historical creation and use of negative ethnic stereotypes, the main argument of the last chapter of this thesis.

THE ETHNIC MOBILIZATION OF UNITA

It was after leaving the FNLA/GRAE in 1964 that many Ovimbundu and other people of southern ethnicities, congregated around Savimbi, created UNITA in 1966, in Muangai, province of Moxico. The ethnicisation of politics during the first stages of the liberation war encouraged common Angolans to use ethnicity, language or region of origin as ascribing markers for individual political activation, many joining the party they considered "their own". But even though UNITA's leadership was primarily composed of Ovimbundu, the party's support only became overwhelmingly connected with this ethnic group between 1974 and 1976. Still, this generalization must never be overemphasized. While for some ideology was a more important element for political membership than ethnicity, others devoid of salient ethnic or ideological motivations simply joined one or the other movement because family, friends and social interactions influenced their decision. In this respect, Messiant, Cramer and Pearce downplay the importance of ethnicity as a determinant of conflict, focusing on alternative elements that best pave the way for lesser essentialist approaches, namely elite power struggles, forms of inequality,

---

producing different meanings. Those Ovimbundu who followed the MPLA and saw representations of their culture apprehended by UNITA, had to interpret and produce new meanings to interpret their experiences. The fact that many stopped speaking Umbundu or teaching the language to their children is a clear example of this. It is not a reversal, as Cohen calls it, since the cultural and ritualistic elements are not as profound as Cohen refers to them. But it is still a redefinition of the meaning of "Ovimbunduness" that although different for each member of the community, its overarching aspects and thematic still had to be adapted to the ideological position of the MPLA. See Cohen, Anthony (1989), *The symbolic construction of community*, Routledge, pp. 11-38.

popular memory and the interaction between geography and political presence.[376] Balancing between all these different approaches, each with its own singularities and strong points is a complicated task. It may very well be impossible to ascertain the exact motivations that led Angolans to join any particular movement at any given time or to have changed or forfeited political allegiance altogether throughout recent Angolan history. Many of these recent studies have the advantage of downplaying the role of ethnicity that served for so many essentialist explanations during the 1960s and 1970s, in the Angolan case epitomised by the works of John Marcum and Rene Pélissier.[377] Ethnicity does have a central role in scrutinising political membership and allegiance, but a role that is important insofar as a party's support can be said to derive in significant measure from a specific ethnic group. Much like Horowitz notes, "it is how the party's support is distributed, and not how the ethnic group's support is distributed, that is decisive".[378] Some of the confusion surrounding the strengths and weaknesses of the ethnic argument derive exactly from common misunderstandings of the interplay between ethnic group and political party. A more nuanced approach based on Horowitz arguments would rapidly suggest that UNITA did not include the support of the entire Ovimbundu ethnic group, but the support it had still remained overwhelmingly Ovimbundu. Horowitz defines an ethnically based party as deriving its support overwhelmingly from an identifiable ethnic group (or cluster of ethnic groups) and serving the interests of that group.[379] If this definition is accepted, it becomes unclear whether UNITA could in fact be conceptualised as an ethnic party. Messiant certainly disagrees with the ethnic tag to UNITA. This author defends that the only original ethnic dimension, even partial, of the Angolan nationalist movements resulted from the situation of the Bacongo, which permitted the continuation of an exceptional ethnic consciousness when compared to that of the other two great groups[380], the Ovimbundu and the Ambundu. Messiant

[376] Cramer, Christopher, "Civil war is not a stupid thing", p. 161; Pearce, Justin, "Control ideology and identity", pp. 33-34; Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial" pp. 38-29.

[377] See Marcum, John, "Angolan Revolution vol. 1" and Pélissier, René, "La colonie du minotaure".

[378] Horowitz, Donald, "Ethnic groups in conflict", p. 293.

[379] Horowitz, Donald, "Ethnic groups in conflict", p. 291.

[380] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", p. 38.

turned away from essentialist explanations of conflict and noted that more than the product of ethnic opposition, the division of Angolan nationalism must be analysed as translating elite competition for power[381], as mentioned at the beginning of chapter three. Yet, Messiant's focus on high-politics (or Cramer's[382]) may not necessarily exclude popular perceptions of ethnic and regional belonging and how these influenced party membership. That is to say, the agency and perception of the popular masses must also be included, perhaps not on Messiant's analysis of the division of Angolan nationalism, but certainly on the importance of ethnicity and regionalism in ascribing party membership. In this realm Horowitz provides a measure of illumination, by arguing that there is a tendency for political parties to be organised along ethnic lines – obliging others to follow suit, as mentioned in page 137 – and that the strength of this tendency is illustrated by its ability to overcome the preferences of political leaders in two important respects:

> "First, ethnic party systems can and do emerge contrary to the convictions of the principal party leaders. Party leaders may genuinely believe that ethnic divisions are not very important, that they only obscure issues that ought to concern (and unify) a nationalist party. A wholly ethnic party system may come into being despite such ideological convictions. Second, party leaders oriented toward the electoral process typically have a strong preference for strategies calculated to produce electoral victory; (…) to be sure, they may need to make compromises with their own beliefs or the beliefs of key supporters along the way."[383]

This said, both Messiant's elite power struggle argument and the popular perceptions of party membership through the invocation of ethnic and regional markers approach become not mutually exclusive. Clarification of this paradox resides in how UNITA mobilised and operated the masses. In fact, it was the methodology adopted to mobilise the masses, by recurring to

---

[381] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", p. 39.

[382] Cramer, Christopher, "Civil war is not a stupid thing", pp. 161-162.

[383] Horowitz, Donald, "Ethnic groups in conflict", p.306.

familiar aspects of ethnic identity, especially language, that lead UNITA leaders, who may have genuinely believed ethnic divisions were not important[384], to adopt straightforward calculations that would in principle produce electoral victory ahead of the elections predicted in the Alvor accords, which never took place. This methodology was meant to single out and work with the most populous Angolan ethnic group in hopes that representing large numbers of people would give UNITA a strong political position both in the negotiations for independence and the elections. Malaquias explains UNITA's political strategy quite straightforwardly:

---

[384] In a telling, grass roots example, Leon Dash cites an episode where Samuel Chiwale is irritated by the story of one civilian UNITA delegate that criticizes "political organizers, called commissars, who prefer to work in their own tribal areas. He said however, that in some areas UNITA civilian assemblies, usually made up of four villages, did not want political commissars from other tribes. Standing to respond, Chiwale angrily said, 'This will not be tolerated. This is tribalism and we don't want it. The main problem between the political commissar and the masses is that when he arrives at a village he acts as if he is the god, the king-' Loud applause erupted among the civilian delegates at this remark. 'The people represent this and it gets translated into tribalism if he is from a different tribe. There is fault on both sides.' The applause died." See Leon Dash reporting for the Washington Post, "UNITA's congress: self-criticism deep in a hidden forest", (Washington Post, (13th August 1977). Nevertheless, in a different article to the same newspaper, Leon Dash records Jonas Savimbi saying "True, tribalism is divisionism, (…) but the tribal structure is the lifeblood of Africa. You can draw from this structure the will and support of the people." Dash continues to write that Savimbi told him "when he is trying to convert a new tribe to his cause he will send in tribesmen who are already in UNITA. 'These men already know their customs, how they look at the world outside their tribe, how to approach the chiefs and the elders who held tremendous influence in traditional tribal societies." "After winning a tribe over, Savimbi said 'Then we start the long process of nationalization. It requires a lot of patience and hours, days, weeks, months of endless discussions and meetings. You are trying to get a man to switch from thinking of himself as Cuanhama to thinking of himself first as an Angolan. It's very complicated." See Leon Dash reporting to the Washington Post, "A long march – politics taught by fable", (Washington Post, 11th August 1977). This is an important duality UNITA had used since the beginning, presenting itself as a modern political party yet with a strong, rooted traditionalist inclination. Leon Dash's reports certainly remind Eugene Weber's study of the nationalisation of France, in Weber, Eugene (1976), *Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernisation of rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford University Press. As will be seen in the second section of this chapter, both are not mutually exclusive but rather easily incorporated into a social movement.

> "before UNITA was created in 1966, the majority Ovimbundu community did not have a liberation movement to call their own. Savimbi understood that, as the leader of a liberation movement representing the Ovimbundu, he would be guaranteed his place at the negotiating table whenever Portugal eventually decided to initiate a process of disengagement. On this score, Savimbi was correct. But Savimbi also believed, incorrectly, that prominent positions for himself and for his organization were assured in post-colonial structures of governance so long as they were involved in, and somehow survived, the anti-colonial war. In other words, Savimbi's basic strategy was based on a false numbers game – the Ovimbundu represented the majority, UNITA represented the Ovimbundu, Savimbi led UNITA, and therefore he was destined to rule Angola."[385]

Malaquias' political analysis simply regards the Ovimbundu as means to an end, the instrument that would allow Savimbi and UNITA a place in the newly independent government of Angola, thus completely devoid of collective or individual aspiration, agency or initiative. But Ovimbundu people did not automatically follow UNITA. Apart from a few intellectuals, there is no real tangible evidence to suggest any sort of ethno-nationalist aspirations by the Ovimbundu, much to the contrary, as seen in chapter three. In fact, UNITA had to engage in intense political campaigning and awareness in the central highlands, following its "numbers game" strategy, in order to mobilise the Ovimbundu. If there is a distinction to be made between high-political struggle and popular uses of ethnicity and regionalism, confirming the tendency Horowitz speaks of while including Messiant's widely acknowledged thesis, it resides on the contents of UNITA's political message to the Ovimbundu, that is, how it appealed and mobilised the Ovimbundu and whether ethnicity was a preponderant element in such mobilisation. In this respect, by taking advantage of the ethnic orientations that were engulfing Angolan liberation movements, especially produced by the FNLA[386], two fundamental approaches were conceptualised by Savimbi and the UNITA leadership, political arguments and methods that would allow an easy

---

[385] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p. 68.

[386] See chapter 3.

mobilisation of the great masses of Ovimbundu upon independence. These two approaches, in essence ideological and political positions, were the "theory of great numbers", as referred by Malaquias, and the "correction of the errors of history".

The political thought of UNITA's leadership, at the time of the signature of the Alvor Accords of 1975, was to implement what Jonas Savimbi came to define as the "theory of great numbers", (*teoria dos grandes números)*, a strategy which took into its core a specific ethnic group and region, relegating the national spectre of the entirety of Angolan people as a second, albeit relevant, priority. As one UNITA official in the central highlands explained,

> "In 1975 UNITA's strategy abided to the logic of the great numbers. The Alvor Accord was signed, it predicted the realisation of elections 10 months after, we were in January, and so in October we should have elections, to choose the constituent assembly and the government itself. UNITA understood that it had to bet. What was the region of the country with most population? At that time, in the colonial time, Angola had 7 million people, more or else. But 42% of Angolans were Ovimbundu, they were concentrated in the province of Huambo. In fact the most populous province during the colonial period was Huambo. They were concentrated in Huambo, Bié and Benguela. It was there where UNITA focused. Independently of the national effort, to win the elections you have to have the majority. So it focused its mobilisation in this region. In fact, the massive adhesion of the Ovimbundu to UNITA was made in 74/75 with the entrance of the movements. The problem of the predominance of certain people [ethnic groups] in other movements, for example in the FNLA and the MPLA, already existed. But in UNITA's concrete case it only happened in 74/75. UNITA understood that to win the elections it had to win the centre region. It represented 40% of Angolans. If Angolans were almost 7 million, or slightly less than that, 3 million more or less were from this region in the centre. It was necessary to win the centre of the country." [387]

[387] Interview 13.

This UNITA official acknowledges Malaquias' argument and advances that there already existed ethnic alignments in other movements and that UNITA was the last one to do so, suggesting it was not the first movement to associate itself with an ethnic group, as mentioned in chapter three. Malaquias argues that "UNITA confidently expected to win the election because the Ovimbundu – its main support base – represent the major ethno linguistic group. UNITA, therefore, did little to attract other segments of the population, including those that were not traditionally associated with the two other major parties."[388] This political strategy tailored for the mobilization of the centre region due to its population density, was forged by the manipulation and instrumentalisation of the ethno-linguistic contents of Ovimbundu culture, while enjoying the advantage of negative racial stereotypes towards the MPLA. As an MPLA administrator in Huambo province elucidates,

> "The MPLA had the problem of having white, mulato and black individuals. The initial idea was that the struggle was against the whites. Because of the education available at the time, when the whites left, the impression was that we were being colonised not by the Portuguese but by the whites [in the MPLA]. It was racism. When the MPLA appeared, with whites individuals in its leadership, this also reduced its acceptance, only after a few rallies, with Agostinho Neto speaking, other leaders also, people realised he was right. And so they began joining the MPLA. When UNITA began speaking, speaking but in Umbundu, speaking well but in Umbundu, the language of the land, with proverbs and everything, the elders, women here, who barely understood Portuguese opted to join it. Now the FNLA here was not well accepted, in this region. The FNLA, with that Portuguese of French type, then Lingala, it did not have much acceptance. But UNITA began to have because of Umbundu. And then Savimbi was a person who spoke Umbundu with quality, with proverbs and everything. When the elders heard him speaking, with the proverbs, they

[388] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and Robbers", p. 101.

> would easily join. Now the MPLA also spoke well, but MPLA was Portuguese, and because it also had some white people, so it was liberating but still comes with those [white people], this complicated. Only now there is some difference, but in the beginning, in 74/75, the MPLA was not very well accepted because of this position, of working with [people of other] colours. UNITA was more accepted because of tribalism, people here because of Umbundu, Umbundu proverbs, UNITA was more accepted." [389]

Another interviewee, a UNITA official, speaks of the same form of cultural mobilisation yet emphasizes the personal and affective connection people have to language:

> "Fortunately, Dr. Savimbi was a great polyglot. When he was fighting in the East of Angola, he learned Quioco well, learned Nganguela. Before that he already knew Umbundu, since he is from Bié, which is the centre. The best way for you to touch the heart of the African is to speak his language, to value his culture. Dr Savimbi arriving at Huambo spoke Portuguese, then Umbundu. After, Agostinho Neto goes for instance to Bié, only speaks in Portuguese, has to have an interpreter. The affective connection is completely depersonalised. While mobilising, one has to dominate psychology, the masses of great numbers. The speaker needs to identify with the audience. When you manifest something that has a connection with the people you are speaking to, you'll be more easily heard than if you show yourself as a stranger. So, UNITA's secret in 75 to convince the people of the centre was to first mobilise the elites in Huambo, Bié, Benguela, who identified with UNITA, by sending people who already identified with UNITA during colonialism. People like Dr. Jaka Jamba."[390]

The weight of Umbundu language in the relationship between UNITA and the Ovimbundu masses is apparent. The UNITA leadership was certainly aware of this power, both in terms of

---

[389] Interview 4.
[390] Interview 13.

simplifying communication and even appealing to matters of the psychological or affective realm. But could language really be considered a trump in ethnic mobilisation considering the circumstances at the time? It would have perhaps been pointless for UNITA to use Portuguese language in political rallies and speeches in the central highlands when both it and the Ovimbundu – the receptor – possessed a common, more comprehensible and central language, Umbundu. It may certainly not instil the imagination of the nation or solidify national unity when political actors use regional languages instead of the official one, the *lingua franca*, which was a by-product of colonialism. And considering the circumstances of the time, national building as a force to produce a nation-state regardless of ideology, was not high at the agenda of any liberation movement.[391] As such, the use of the language of a particular ethnic group by the leadership of a political party should not be quickly dismissed as ethnic mobilisation, especially since the party's leadership was also overwhelmingly Ovimbundu, and as such, it was also their language. However, the effects the use of Umbundu language produced in the popular masses may have been entirely different from those the UNITA leadership intended to be, that is, political mobilisation but not association with a specific group.

Language was certainly crucial in Ovimbundu acceptance and adherence to UNITA, at least from the perspective of the popular masses. It was already suggested that the conjunction between the ethnicisation of politics and the use of language for political mobilisation had the effect of steering the popular masses of each ethnic group to the movement that not only was better represented in their region but also expressed in a specific language, mostly in the case of the FNLA and UNITA, not so concerning the MPLA. In an interview Justin Pearce conducted with Abel Chivukuvuku, the latter says political adhesion was the result of different geographic poles of power. As cited by Pearce, "UNITA didn't even need to mobilise as such. People just felt "this is our organisation". I think it happened the same way in Luanda [with the MPLA], or in

[391] The MPLA's nation-building project was heavily ideological, relying on the formation of a new man, a different take from the concept of nation-building here utilised.

Uige, Mbanza Congo [with the FNLA] – people just felt, "this is our organisation". And for the fact that the elites of the area just joined, everybody joined."[392]

Reading Chivukuvuku's words, there's a sense that people "naturally" began joining the movement that was in their region and better represented their set of identities. Yet, much like Christine Messiant argued, there was nothing linear or natural between the strength of the ethnic identity of a population and their political organisation. While looking ahead to the elections foreseen in the Alvor Accords in 1975, Messiant notes that Savimbi's movement played the ethnic card in full force, but regardless of the sympathies UNITA benefited among the Ovimbundu, mainly within Protestant missions where their Ovimbundu leaders came from, it did not win the support of the Ovimbundu population. It was only with the violence of war in the central highlands and the amplitude of repression of UNITA, and then that of the MPLA when it retook power in those territories occupied by the former, that this movement gained its first ethnic anchor.[393]

Messiant speaks of the sympathies UNITA enjoyed among Ovimbundu Protestants and the repressions and violence of war as the factors that gave UNITA its first ethnic "anchor". In what concerns religious socialization, the better part of UNITA leaders studied in Protestant missions, mainly at Dondi, which congregated many students from the region. This circumstance enabled UNITA to easily aggregate around it several members of this religious confession based on personal affinity and religious socialisation. As noted by one interviewee,

> "A great part of the leaders of UNITA studied in evangelical [Protestant] missions. This is a factor of psychology and influence. Because they studied in evangelical missions they could easily aggregate around them people who were also part of that religious confession. (…) The liberation movements had a character, to a certain point, of religious influence. This influence that continued after independence, [led] massively, a good part, to adhere to

[392] Abel Chivukuvuku's citation is found in Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity", p. 84. This citation stems entirely from Pearce's own interviews and not from my own data.

[393] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", pp. 46-47.

UNITA. I remember in 1975-76 when war begins and UNITA is expelled from the city, a good part of the youth connected to the evangelical church, all went to the bush. [And the people with the Catholic Church?] It did not register the same behaviour. Some also went, but not as many as the evangelical church, because in terms of social and political psychology, if the leader is of that religious confession [Protestant, Congregationalist], there is a greater possibility that members of that confession accompany the leader, which was in fact what happened. Many missions became devoid of their youth because they joined UNITA when it went back to guerrilla, and Catholics also went. (…) And that resulted, if a member takes another member, others members will follow. It is because of this that in fact after independence almost this part of the south becomes much more connoted to UNITA than to the other movements. It were the circumstances of sympathy but also religious circumstances."[394]

An additional aspect to the elements of religion and violence mentioned by Messiant was the incorporation of many of the elites of the central highlands to UNITA, as one interviewee noted when asked about UNITA's mobilization:

"This aspect has much to do with cultural affinities, especially the aspect of lineages, clans, and I believe Jonas Savimbi was able to explore this very well to mobilise the Ovimbundu to his political project. Because he had a profound knowledge of the culture of the people in this region and began identifying the principal elites, the families who at the time had their children in school, some in university, and he grabbed this youth, gave them education, also military education, then sent them to other countries [to study and work], and so began recruiting the principal elites of the central highlands to his cause. Afterwards, these elites would also "drag" other families to the same cause. I believe he learnt this very well with the Chinese, because his organisation was very much based on the comprehension Mao Tse

[394] Interview 5.

> Tsung had of clans with his cultural revolution. From this point of view Savimbi mobilised the elites of the central highlands but that also created profound divisions, because if some elites accompanied Jonas Savimbi, others also joined the MPLA, the case of Marcolino Moco, the Mutekas, Albano Machado and others."[395]

Thus, UNITA's popular mobilisation became, voluntarily or not, based upon the use of language, particularly the crucial importance and mastery of Umbundu proverbs, the sympathies it enjoyed among Ovimbundu Protestants and the incorporation of this group's elites. But as Messiant noted, the connection between the party and the Ovimbundu stemmed above all, from the effects violence.

When crossing the notion that violence may have pushed the Ovimbundu to UNITA rather than to the MPLA, because, as the author suggests, it was violence that gave UNITA its ethnic anchor, two important elements are apparent. Firstly, the intensity of UNITA's political campaign in comparison to that of the MPLA, and secondly the external inputs that allowed the mental organisation of the conflict based on simple historical evidence. Minter argued that war tests loyalties and engulfs cultural difference. If so, cultural affinity rather than ideology or political programs, which had no time to be properly developed and implemented, in the face of violence and repression from both sides, would suggest many Ovimbundu steered towards UNITA by making a political decision, choosing – when choice was permitted – what seemed to be the lesser of two evils. If violence and repression became the common *modus operandi* of both movements, cultural affinity may have been one of the elements to convince many that UNITA was the lesser evil. As explained above, the intensity of UNITA's campaign was always directed towards the goal of achieving "great numbers". In his book "Angola, a resistência em busca de uma nova nação", Savimbi, while defending that the theory of great numbers was not in any way

[395] Interview 5. Justin Pearce also notes that "UNITA adherents were motivated by a desire for national liberation, but their choice of UNITA was more likely to be determined by the movement's rootedness in a certain stratum of Planalto society rather than by any particular programme of action promised by UNITA." See Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity", p. 84.

a call to regionalism or tribalism, understood that since the MPLA was attempting "in vain to entice the populations of the centre, east and south of the country to, with their strength, crush our resistance", UNITA needed "large dozens of thousands of soldiers" which in order to arm required "a number of people fifty times higher". As Savimbi put it, "to feed dozens of thousands of soldiers, we need millions of peasants."[396] This gigantic mobilisation of "millions" of people was, beyond "cultural" affinity, in part incentivised by growing violence and repression, and in part fruit of lack of option or alternative:

> "Some of those families already had a lot of information, that there were other movements. So they made their option, but there are also circumstantial aspects, especially in 1975, when the movements begin quarrelling and UNITA occupies the city of Huambo and others in the centre south. Obviously many intellectuals at the time did not have an alternative, whether liking or not, they had to embrace whoever was governing the region."[397]

The duality between party and region became increasingly apparent when attributing political identity. Pearce writes that the "delimitation of territory between the MPLA and UNITA before August [1975] was established without organised military confrontations, either between the two movements and the Portuguese or between the MPLA and UNITA. (…) the dominant movement in each region gradually assumed state functions from an ever-diminishing Portuguese military and administrative presence. Violence took the form of skirmishes between the soldiers of different movements, or attacks on civilians who, correctly or incorrectly, were assumed on the basis of their regional origins to be associated with an opposing movement", leading the author to conclude that the "de facto division of Angolan territory that had occurred by the end of August

[396] Savimbi, Jonas (1979), *Angola: resistência em buscar de uma nova nação*, Edição da Agência Portuguesa de Revistas, Lisboa, p. 9.
[397] Interview 5.

1975 was the result of local political mobilisation and decisions taken autonomously by the leadership in each movement."[398]

An additional element that pushed many Ovimbundu towards UNITA was a series of external inputs derived from recent historical experience into collective memory. These inputs continuously reinforced the connection between party and ethnic group by recalling the killing of several "Bailundos" during the events of 1961 in the Northern regions of the country and the expulsion of UNITA and many Ovimbundu from Luanda in 1975, who in turn grouped and formed huge caravans to take refuge in Huambo. Savimbi made several references to these events in public speeches, speaking of the "Pica Pau" massacres[399] or of how "they", that is, UNITA's people, overwhelmingly Ovimbundu, were expelled from Luanda and attacked in the cities. Recent history was used to signal that the less evil movement for the Ovimbundu would be UNITA, or at least, that was what seemed to have transpired given their meagre understanding of politics. On the other hand, those who actively followed UNITA specifically spoke of inter-group inequalities, of different "postures", as a consequence of colonial modernisation, which typically starts in coastal regions, patent in the under development thesis.

> "Meanwhile, we evolved until 1975, a period under a regime of exclusion terminated, of subjugation, it was another apartheid regime, not typically as it was lived in South African, but there was discrimination. In 75 with the 11th of November began another regime of exclusion. This regime of exclusion directed in 1975 by the single-party, the fact that it was a single-party already indicates exclusion of other forces. That time we had three forces that fought the colonial power. The fact that the MPLA choose a mono-party system it was clearly assuming a regime of political and ideological exclusion. There was, I can say, a certain deepening of cultural exclusion, ethnic discrimination, because let's see. I say the

[398] Pearce, Justin, "Control ideology and identity", p. 100. This is the violence and repression of UNITA followed by that of the MPLA when it retook power in those territories occupied by the former movement Messiant spoke of, cited in page 180.

[399] Although little information can be found about this event it reportedly refers to the killing of people affected to UNITA in June 1974 by the MPLA at UNITA's committee in Luanda.

> conflict had historical causes, but also political and cultural. There is a time difference in terms of colonisation. Colonisation in the north of Angola, in the coastal areas, was done 300-400 years ago. We must see that Luanda is 400 and something, 430 years old. Huambo only now is 100 years. Means the time shared between [the colonist and] the people of the centre of Angola or the south and east, and the people of the north, above all the coastal areas, there is a great difference in terms of stages of colonisation. This long experience of the peoples of the north with the colonialist, and the narrow experience of the people of the centre, above all of the central highlands, the Ovimbundu, with the colonialist, left a difference in terms of posture."[400]

These inequalities were particularly addressed through Savimbi's logic of "correcting the errors of history". According to this argument, the Ovimbundu (the "*Bailundos*") were the most explored and excluded ethnic group in Angola during the colonial period, victims of enslavement in the coffee plantations, in the mines and in the fisheries, under the "*contrato*", ultimately doing the "heavy lifting" in what concerns the development of the country. As one interviewee puts it,

> "Savimbi always said it was necessary to rectify the errors of history. At a point he developed a theory, taking into account labour conditions in the coffee *fazendas* and mines at the time, in which the "*Bailundos*" and people from the centre were being enslaved, serving the north of the country, and that it was necessary to rectify this error, according to him."[401]

However, recent historical analysis makes clear that this supposed exploitation of the Ovimbundu by colonial authority is based on a fake, or at least dishonest, historical grievance.[402]

---

[400] Interview 13.

[401] interview 5.

[402] Maria da Conceição Neto is insistent on this premise. This author acknowledges that the "exploited Umbundu stereotype was consciously instrumentalised by Portuguese colonialism, in a divide-to-rule fashion, a stereotype also utilized by Jonas Savimbi in a 'politically dangerous manipulation'. It is a

The Ovimbundu were not specifically targeted as a second class group nor were they singled out for specific labour occupations, although colonial authorities did presuppose a predisposition towards agriculture during the very late years of colonialism. For much of the colonial period, the Ovimbundu were not only farmers but also massively involved in many commercial activities, including slave raiding and trading. Only in the last decades of colonial rule, perhaps even more congruently after the start of the liberation war, did the stereotype of the loyal, willing Bailundo as cheap, exploitative labour began to circulate. This said, there appears to be no real ethnic stratification model inherent in the "errors of history" argument. On the contrary, it directly exposes UNITA in playing the "ethnic card" not only to mobilise but, in opposition to the type of political mobilisation explained earlier, to attempt to represent a specific, yet fake, grievance of a particular ethnic group.

The success of this fake ethnic grievance in popular mobilisation appears to be ambiguous at best. Data shows that apart from one interviewee, who attributes the Ovimbundu's preference for UNITA as a result of the disastrous agricultural policies enacted by the MPLA after independence – which may very well be connected to a profound disillusionment with the MPLA's planned economy based upon state distribution through the "lojas do povo" –, all others advance either ideology, in the context of the cold-war, cultural association or the circumstances of war and violence, of having nowhere to run and being forced to follow a particular movement to escape direct conflict, as the main reasons for the overwhelming presence of Ovimbundu in UNITA's support base. During field work some interviewees referred the "errors of history" concept as something UNITA, not them, argued for, while those who presented themselves as politically neutral mainly referred to the conflict as having pushed them either to UNITA or

---

wrong interpretation of history, one that may perhaps be understood by people in Luanda, Uíge or Kwanza Norte, familiar with the term "Bailundo", but certainly not in other eastern and southern provinces, where the Ovimbundu behaved with a certain arrogance and superiority, namely in relation to the Nganguela and the Mwila." Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Entre a tradição e a modernidade", p. 197. In this sense, and looking at Feierman's analysis of the persistence of political discourses, the "Bailundo" stereotype is certainly a novel invention, not an enduring political discourse by which people explained political events pertaining to culture, tradition or history. See Feierman, Steven, "Peasant intellectuals*",* pp. 9-13.

MPLA controlled areas, by taking refuge in Benguela or Luanda or by escaping to the countryside where UNITA was to avoid the conflict in the cities after independence.

During the first sixteen years of conflict, until 1992, ethnicity, although present, was not one of the most central elements of war. This was so because ethnicity was rarely utilised in high-politics. During this phase, it remained an instrument for popular mobilisation and discussion, rarely for high-political debate, that is, it was one of the elements linking the masses to the party, but not remotely part of the high-political debate. As such, Ovimbundu adherence to UNITA, mildly based on ethno-political alignments, became represented by territorial political identities. This led historians of Angola to equate ethnicity with territory by arguing that there came to be "ethnic bastions" and "zones of influence", where liberation movements began exercising administrative control – replacing the retracting colonial administration –, firmly divided by ethnic salience and territorial control.[403] Evidence for this conclusion stemmed from both the MPLA and UNITA accusing each other of the "balkanisation" of Angola, from events in Luanda and especially because people's political identity was assumed based on regional origin. There were indeed ethnic distinctive characteristics between the three liberation movements, which together with the influence each exerted in separate regions eventually led to a territorial division of the country during the summer of 1975. However, this territorial division was triggered not by a firm sub-nationalist agenda, one focused on retaking those ethnic regions that may be considered "homeland", but rather by the evacuation of the entire colonial administration and the opening of pockets of political power which were gradually filled by each movement. If one considers the territorial circumstances and political mobilisation agendas during the liberation war, it becomes plausible to argue that each movement attempted to gain the most political capital by filling the blanks left by a rapidly departing colonial administration, not by creating territorial sub-nationalisms but by offering services to the population it aimed to captivate. Nevertheless, violence remains a much more accurate concept to explain the overlap between

---

[403] See Marcum, John, "The Angolan Revolution vol 2", p. 263. Like Pearce, Justin, "Control ideology and identity", p. 94, I also follow Marcum's territorial division without subscribing the weight of ethnicity onto this division.

ethnic region and the positioning of political movements than are projections of potential ethnic sub-nationalisms or the effects of service provision, notwithstanding the importance of the latter. As Justin Pearce rightly argues,

> "The establishment of monopolies of force caused politics to become territorialised: people, including those who were unconnected with any political movement, began to associate zones of Angola with a particular movement: "UNITA was in Huambo, the MPLA was in Luanda". As a consequence of this territorialisation, people found themselves labelled as "belonging" to one or another movement regardless of what views they might have held and this tendency to associate territory and people with a political movement in popular and official discourses continued throughout the war."[404]

According to this author the politics of territorialisation in the central highlands shifted again when the MPLA took control of the coastal regions and the cities, forcing UNITA to operate around the cities, in rural areas and later establishing its headquarters in Jamba. By this time UNITA was no longer "in Huambo" but rather in "bush", while the MPLA was in the cities. Regardless of their own sympathy or ideology many Ovimbundu in the rural regions were categorised as either UNITA or MPLA because their geographical position during specific periods of the Angolan conflict dictated their supposed allegiance or collaboration. People's political identity shifted according to whichever movement controlled a specific region at any given time, what Pearce called the "territorialisation of conflict". Many would present themselves as either UNITA or MPLA supporters when their village was occupied by one or the other movement, although during the course of the war suspicions and accusations of collaboration increased and altered this simple perception of political identity based upon region.

These shifting territorial identities became differently understood between regions. If the socio-political division in the central highlands was between the "MPLA people" residing in the

---

[404] Pearce, Justin (2012), "Control, politics and identity in the Angolan civil war", *African Affairs*, 111, 4, p. 451-452.

cities and the “UNITA people” in the “bush”, outside the central highlands social polarization seems to encompass more criteria, as elements of perceived political affiliation were paralleled by ethnicity and regionalism. Accordingly, the people from the central highlands, especially Ovimbundu, would be connoted to UNITA regardless of whether they lived in the “bush” or in town, or actually supported any political movement. Pearce notes that the eviction of “the MPLA from the central highlands by August 1975 was due to popular mobilisation rather than military strength, and the same is true for the MPLA’s control of Luanda.”[405] These evictions were not necessarily based on ethnic identity. They did not consist of an expulsion of non-Ovimbundu by Ovimbundu, although the overwhelming support each movement enjoyed among specific groups did serve to confuse and add a latent ethnic dimension to these events in 1975. Only during the 1992 elections predicted in the Bicesse Accords of 1991, did ethnicity become a relevant and violent force in shaping the division of Angolans, mainly based upon ethnic and regional origin.

National unity before the 1992 elections was in many ways no different than the one existent before independence. Paralleling the 1975 electoral expectations, and given the circumstances of yet again another frail, western style “winner-takes-all”[406] democratization process, UNITA made electoral calculations based on “ethnic” numbers. But the importance people attributed to ethnicity as an identity and political marker should have waned when it became substituted by territorial identities – especially since the presence and support from people of different regions to all three movements increased during the war – or even by the politics of race, opposing black to mixed race Angolans, one of UNITA’s most enduring critiques to the MPLA. Interviewees also referred that the first sixteen years of war served for Angolans to “know each other” and to become familiar with one another, winding down political tribalism. Some even stated tribalism was “no more” after this period. Yet, the immediate days after the first round of elections in 1992 registered perhaps the most violent episodes of the war in Luanda and other cities, proving that ethnicity did not wane but was in fact a latent, enduring force, specifically in multi-ethnic settings.

---

[405] Pearce, Justin, “Control, ideology and identity in civil war”, p. 94.
[406] Malaquias, Assis, “Rebels and Robbers”, p. 139.

Evidence to the significance of ethnicity during this period is, although taboo in Angolan society, still accessible. Margaret Anstee writes about a conversation between Jonas Savimbi and John Flynn, the British Ambassador to Angola days before the outbreak of generalized war during the 1992 elections. Reportedly during this conversation Savimbi made certain ethnic references, of which one is of particular interest: "We are Ovimbundu. We've lived 300 years under humiliation from the north, from the Van Dúnem and others. We have had enough. The Ovimbundu are 100% behind me and I'm prepared to die for them. (…) Dos Santos is not even Angolan, he is from São Tomé. We cannot live under the *mulatos* and the *Kimbundus*"[407], a quote which certainly refers to the concept of rectifying the errors of history. Savimbi's words and his idea of correcting the errors of history serve as a reminder of Lonsdale's suggestion that "ethnicity was a question of honour within what have become tribes before it was a weapon of conflict between them."[408]

Malaquias notes how "Savimbi failed to make the leap from authoritarian guerrilla leader to post-civil war statesman" considering that "his use of inflammatory rhetoric and veiled threats against MPLA members and sympathizers, people from ethnic groups other than his own as well as whites and mixed raced Angolans, alienated an increasing number of people."[409] Not only that, but what this author deems UNITA's physical violence also played a role in Ovimbundu disillusionment with the party. One interviewee in particular refers to this topic, when arguing that,

> "There came a time when the ideal of the Ovimbundu people and all that of which Savimbi started off with began to fade. He began to force people to stay [under UNITA]. Those who did not wish to stay were killed, considered a traitor to the ethnic group and to culture, to the homeland, and were killed. All this stopped being

---

[407] Anstee, Margaret (1996), *Orphan of the Cold War: The inside story of the collapse of the Angolan peace process,* Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 277.

[408] Lonsdale, John, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau", p. 317

[409] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and Robbers", p. 156.

> the story of a people or an ethnic group and became a struggle for power between two political powers, completely out of touch with the wishes of the people, be them the Ovimbundu or the Ambundu"[410]

The ideal that UNITA represented honour and virtue in a struggle against inequality and perhaps even carrying a sense of "historical justice" that captivated some Ovimbundu during the 1974-76 period was replaced by a disillusionment with the party mainly due to its social control through violent and repressive methods. People were not free to leave UNITA much less to join the MPLA. The latter nevertheless was always keen on its attempts to seduce the people of the central highlands, a strategy patent during the 1992 electoral campaign. Anstee recalls a conversion with Daniel Chipenda, a politician who was "born into a leading Ovimbundu family" and was a member of the MPLA, although his political career characterized what this top UN official considered to be a "bewildering *voltes face* so typical of Angola." Anstee met Chipenda in the eve of the MPLA party's congress and told him of rumours circulating regarding his nomination as Vice-President to attract the Ovimbundu vote, as the MPLA did not have any leader from the south. Chipenda laughed and noted how "the MPLA underestimate Savimbi. They are thinking like Europeans, not Africans, and have been in power for too long." Chipenda continued to argue that if this preconception was not corrected, any plans of using him to gather Ovimbundu voters would hardly have any success. [411] Chipenda knew the Ovimbundu valued their culture and language, thus mentioning the MPLA was underestimating Savimbi's capacity for popular mobilisation. This might provide an insight into the ways the MPLA thought about this ethnic group. Here rages a long held battle between Africanism and modernity, about the resilience of old cultures and national languages, which were considered backward, tongues of older times pertaining to sub-development, when facing the colonial heritage left to a multiracial city-based elite, who spoke Portuguese, had an above average education and had little in common with the rural Angolan peasant.

---

[410] Interview 16.

[411] Anstee, Margaret, "Orphan of the Cold War", p. 188.

This same strategy was used by the government when nominating Marcolino Moco, an Ovimbundu and former MPLA Secretary-General, Prime-Minister in 1993, a move which spurred heavy anti-Ovimbundu protest in Luanda, purportedly driven by the MPLA's *Movimento Espontâneo* ("Spontaneous Movement"). The *Movimento Espontâneo* refers to the MPLA's policy of *poder popular*, "people's power", which ultimately enabled civilian defence after the 1992 elections. The main idea behind this concept of "civilian defence" was to mobilise the population to defend the cities against any UNITA attack. It was through this concept that militias in Luanda were created and armed, something already experimented during the first part of the civil war with the Public Defence Organization (*Organização de Defesa Pública - ODP*), which served the two-pronged purpose of civilian "military" readiness and political propaganda. Referring to UNITA's surprise attack on the town of Catete on 20 July 1999, Malaquias informs that one of the reasons the movement was not able to sustain pressure in Luanda was due to "the civilian population in Luanda being heavily armed as a result of the government's distribution of surplus army rifles to its sympathizers in the aftermath of the electoral fiasco in 1992."[412] The same author makes a similar comment when comparing the fighting in Luanda in 1975 and in 1992, also referring to the fact that Ambundu civilians were armed in order to expel both UNITA and the FNLA from Luanda in 1975, a process repeated in 1992 "killing hundreds of non-Kimbundu persons in the process."[413] This reference to non-Kimbundu persons is of vital importance in delineating the perception others had of the Ovimbundu at the time, particularly their association with UNITA. One interview in particular touching upon this period of post-electoral violence in Luanda exposed that many Ovimbundu were persecuted and killed independently of their militancy or political support, revealing that even Ovimbundu connected with political parties other than UNITA in Luanda were persecuted for speaking Umbundu, or not being able to speak Kimbundu.

[412] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p. 107.
[413] Malaquias, Assis, "Rebels and robbers", p. 170.

> "Information was coming through the radio, BBC at that time, South Africa also informed, Vorgen also reported, Rádio Ecclesia. So through that a lot of people knew the reality of what was happening, because in 92, I think that, because the government saw the way the Ovimbundu, here from the centre, received UNITA [in Luanda]. After the elections they started chasing man by man. At the time it really was a manhunt. It was a form of retaliation. Does not mean that all who died were with UNITA. But because of speaking Umbundu and because of them [the Ovimbundu] being the ones who received the leadership in 92 [UNITA's leadership in Luanda], it became a huge problem."[414]

Karl Maier provides a daunting description of the consequences of allegedly being a UNITA supporter during those days, of being "from the wrong part of the country" or speaking the "wrong language", when speaking with Ovimbundu in *musseques,* who were "shoot in the feet so they wouldn't run away", and reporting the existence of mass graves and evidence of summary executions in the cemetery of Camama.[415] The author also reveals a letter "written by Father Adelino Simões, a Roman Catholic priest, detailing the effects of *limpeza* (cleansing) in the town of Viana", which contains several accounts pertaining to heinous crimes that "shout to the heavens", where the priest purposely accentuates that people of "Umbundu ethnicity" (but also Bacongo) were killed, "reason: for being UNITA."[416] Anstee also writes that General António dos Santos França, "N'Dalu", the Government's Chief of Delegation in the CCPM[417], said it was "essential to reinforce the police because the great part of the pro-MPLA population wants revenges and there are pillages. There are people dying in the *musseques*"[418], a quote

---

[414] Interview 7.

[415] Maier, Karl (1996), *Angola: promises and lies*, Serif, p. 118-123.

[416] Maier, Karl, "Angola", p. 124-127.

[417] Comissão Conjunta Político Militar

[418] Anstee, Margaret, *Orphan of the Cold War*, p. 288

which could be crossed with UNITA's General "Bock" insisting on the "moderate behaviour of UNITA while in Lobito Ovimbundu are being killed like dogs."[419]

However, contrary to Savimbi's wishes to represent the Ovimbundu against the "humiliation of the north", these massacres failed to provide a steady political support to UNITA. Continuous internal repression and violence and above all, the return to war, created a great rift between UNITA and those Ovimbundu who followed it. More specifically, the burning of villages is constantly referred as a great factor for disillusionment:

> "Today many Angolans from this area do not accept UNITA because of the destruction of villages. In the beginning because of Umbundu they were accepted, but then came that period of war in which some were dragged to the bush with UNITA. There they were also maltreated, then came the problem of burning villages, all that. The village where the UNITA soldier was born, he gets there also burns. All of this provoked a great revolt against him [Savimbi]. They saw, there was enchantment. Speaks Umbundu, but does not defend the well-being of the Umbundus."[420]

Accusing someone of allegiance to one of the warring parts, often to solve personal issues referred to as "envy" (*invejas*) was also extremely common:

> "This conflict, the dispute of provinces, create a lot of trouble, because people were either with one or the other [movement]. When the government entered there was a problem. When the other side [UNITA] also came was another problem. Then people appeared who would influence both parts to do wrong against their own family, to betray. [Based on what?] Envy. For example, me, my brother works in the police, so when the opposition [UNITA] arrived, only to show that I" m a good person in relation to others [more supportive of the party] I would say my brother was in the police. So he'd be "grilled" and

[419] Ibid., p. 285.
[420] Interview 4.

killed. This happened in both sides. And created enormous troubles, a lot of people could not return to their regions of origin because of these treasons. It was really issues of revenge from one side, because UNITA did not destroy goods, it really was a feeling of the people, to betray each other, because if there were goods as there have been in the last years, when there is a political campaign, some parties give this and that, it would have been another thing. But that time was war, there were no gifts, some people did that out of fear, others to betray because of suspicions."[421]

Besides these attempts of befriending the party that entered their region even against family members, perhaps in pursuit of personal safety, possession of specific foods were also used as an indicator of party membership or support, especially salt and fish, products which came from the coastal regions controlled by the MPLA.[422]

"When the government retreats from here, a lot of people stayed. If the neighbour is a sympathiser [of UNITA] sees or hears that someone is eating salt, he goes directly to the committee [of UNITA] to complain, the neighbour must have influences in the MPLA because he has salt. C*onfusão* also rose from dry fish. I'm here grilling dry fish, the smell will extend. Who's grilling fish? At that time the person was caught. But this was among UNITA sympathisers, many disappeared because of this. Because the military people [who came and occupied homes] did not know their neighbours. I for instance, even being MPLA although I am Ovimbundu, I had to hide very well, because [they would accuse me] that individual worked for the MPLA. Wizardry we also heard about, that there [in Jamba] wizards were burnt. (…) he [Savimbi] as leader of the Ovimbundu and those [accusations], everyone trusted the leader, because the leader did the defence of the tribe. So why was he serving against the tribe? That element is no longer good. [The leader of UNITA was seen as the leader of the Ovimbundu?] Yes. [And this violence pushes many Ovimbundu away

[421] Interview 7.

[422] See Brinkman, Inge (2003), "War and identity in Angola: two case-studies", *Lusotopie*, pp. 195-221.

from UNITA?] Exactly! (…) In 93/94, when UNITA was here, there was that man hunt [also derived from accusations] so you're MPLA but you are Ovimbundu, they will arrest you. This made a lot of people to shift to the MPLA."[423]

As is noticeable in this interviewee's words, there were many and varied sources of confrontation other than ethnicity, especially since it did not run parallel to party membership. Even though the interviewee considers the leader of UNITA to also be the leader of the Ovimbundu, people contested this leadership and changed parties when he failed to use his powers – political and others – to the benefit of his "tribe".

Like Cramer notes, ethnicity was not a very powerful determinant of conflict and the conflict did not take the form of ethnic cleansing, despite the ethnic targeting of Ovimbundu in the battle for Luanda in late 1992.[424] Ethnic identity was not an evenly distributed source of mobilisation, but, as argued, alongside region of origin, still provided one of the most mainstream concepts for the attribution, without negotiation or consent, of political identity to others. To be sure, ethnicity and regional provenience ended up assuming a central role in recklessly tagging and distributing political identity. People can define their identities in several ways and did so throughout the civil war. But the recurring theme is that those not interested in politics did become connoted with a given party because of their region of origin or ethno-linguistic background. In Angola "politics is clear. If you are not with party A it is because you're with party B. No one believes you don't have a party. Don't believe it, it is a lie"[425], meaning everyone is associated to a political party, either by choice or by external imposition through perception. This was the very linear attitude held by both parties' militants in the 1992 elections with disastrous consequences, resulting in the violent culmination of the very historical and social divisions which polarized Angolan society since the colonial period.

---

[423] Interview 2. The same argument is made by Brinkman, Inge, "War and identity in Angola", pp. 195-221.
[424] Cramer, Christopher, "Civil war is not a stupid thing", p. 162.
[425] Interview 8.

UNITA AND THE MODERN IMAGINATION OF OVIMBUNDU

By now the reader may doubt whether it would have been pertinent to have presented a deeper conceptualisation of the origins and dynamics of Ovimbundu modern ethnicity earlier in the thesis. Indeed, it could have been and many aspects pertaining to these processes have already deserved attention, but its pertinence and value is perhaps better explained when important data has already been discussed and in the chapter that introduced the element that triggered the political emancipation and organisation of the Ovimbundu, UNITA. This is what this section addresses, by attempting to tie the several theoretical knots that have so far been noted but not thoroughly discussed.

Of the various theoretical approaches available to the study of tribe and ethnicity developed in the last three or four decades[426], Lonsdale's conception of moral ethnicity and political tribalism is by far the less ambiguous and more inclusive, as already illustrated in the introduction of this thesis. I begin with John Lonsdale's notion of how processes of colonisation led ethnic groups to become politicised, eventually becoming "political tribes", more self-conscious and competitive:

> "In the last half-century before colonial conquest, the intensification and spread of slave-raiding strengthened dynastic and other group – not necessarily ethnic – consciousness. In the colonial era, ethnic nationalism then developed as a creative response to industrialisation, urbanisation and the intensification of state power. Ethnic groups became political tribes: had they been put in Europe we would have called them nationalities."[427]

[426] For brief expositions of these materials see Leroy Vail, "The creation of tribalism in southern Africa" and Lentz, Carola (1995), "Tribalism and ethnicity in Africa: a review of four decades of Anglophone research", *Cah. Sci. hum.* 31, 2, or Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity", pp. 131-150.
[427] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism", p. 137.

The author continues by identifying three processes that contributed to the politicisation of ethnic groups: (1) labour markets became generalised which led people to compete for the same resources of employment, urban shelter and security. As a consequence, their linguistic and cultural differences began to matter, also much due to colonial labour stereotypes; (2) colonialism created a system of domination of Africans over Africans, by using "tribal hierarchies" as props of the colonial state itself, thereby legitimizing these same hierarchies; (3) Christian evangelisation codified the language and introduced literacy which promoted local languages, not a *lingua franca*. To these, Lonsdale adds a forth, the changes to moral economies spurred by the introduction of colonial capitalism which forced people to debate the new forms of inequality within increasingly explicit moral ethnicities, a theme already discussed in the introduction.

These processes have been widely studied and much literature exists about them. However, applying them to the Ovimbundu as Lonsdale described in relation to the Kikuyu would not produce a clearer or deeper conceptualisation, since the Ovimbundu lived their own particular circumstances, which invoke processes of a different nature. From Lonsdale's work premises can be detracted and were indeed detracted in previous chapters. The origins of the Ovimbundu "tribe" were in fact based upon some of the processes Lonsdale refers, but not necessarily all. As previously elaborated, neither labour markets nor urbanisation were the most central elements to spur competition with other groups and enhance the Ovimbundu's sense of linguistic and cultural difference. Even though these differences were already equated in pre-colonial times, in non-ethnic fashion, capitalist competition was not a homogenised denominator for establishing difference between groups, although the premise holds its ground in relation to those engaged in migrant labour, representing a significant part of the Ovimbundu population. On the other hand, the second and third processes mentioned by Lonsdale can and were crucial in the imaginative creation of the Ovimbundu tribe, already discussed in chapters two and one respectively. Colonial agency did redefine "tribal hierarchies" spearheaded by the dynamics of indirect-rule mentioned in chapter two, which eventually created new legitimate props to the colonial state. Additionally, as seen in chapter one, Christian evangelisation, particularly Protestant, codified the language, reutilised traditional administration and organisation while

producing a new type of elite. In conjunction, these processes in conjunction began transforming moral economies, largely spurred by the introduction of colonial capitalism which demanded new forms of social organisation and announced new forms of inequality that led the Ovimbundu to revamp, contest and rearrange their moral ethnic debate. However, as Ranger argues, "the production of "tribes" was essentially a device to delegate the definition and operation of social morality away from the colonial state. Under such circumstances the significance of being "Ndebele" or "Kikuyu" was bound to be a matter of internal struggle. Its imagination could not be left to the patriarchs – in the Ovimbundu's case, the Protestants to a degree, and the African chiefs –, especially as they rarely commanded the intellectual tools required to shape "tribal" discourse."[428] This is a particularly crucial argument, one that defers the "production of tribes" away from colonialism into the very heart of African discourse, through the daily debating of those abrasive elements that together helped to decipher what was the internal significance of being "Ndebele", "Kikuyu" or "Ovimbundu". Here I subscribe Ranger's shift away from invention to imagining, particularly when the author looks for deeper explanations than those connected with "European classifications and inventions of race, or tribe and language", which "in effect created a series of empty-boxes, with bounded walls but without content."[429] Ranger acknowledges that these processes played an important part in the first stages of inventing "Ndebele" and many other ethnic identities, but that these are really first-stage explanations. According to this author, it was all very well to write off "the Ndebele" or "the Kikuyu", but to give meaning to that identity was a much more complex and contested business.[430] Indeed, it cannot be argued that Portuguese colonialism was successful at creating ethnic or tribal identities but rather boundaries or "empty-boxes" as Ranger finds among the Ndebele and can be found

---

[428] Ranger, Terence, "The invention of tradition revisited", p. 27. In the Ovimbundu's particular case, I would argue that the Protestants in particular did possess the intellectual tools to shape "tribal" discourse. What they lacked was the political space to make these changes wide and endure among the masses of the Ovimbundu population, constantly countered by the colonial state's suspicions and monitoring of their activities.

[429] Ranger, Terence, "The invention of tradition revisited", p. 27.

[430] Ranger, Terence, "The invention of tradition revisited", p. 27.

among other ethnic groups under colonialism, albeit with differing intensities and saliences. Chapter two of this thesis particularly refutes this idea, mainly by proving that Ovimbundu agency did not instil the imagination of ethnic or tribal conceptions of life and organisation, nor was ethnicity central in Ovimbundu agency, especially when attempting to circumvent the impositions of the *indigenato* policy. Chapter three has also contested the manifestation of Ovimbundu sub-nationalism, which perhaps could have been possible if these colonial categorisations had been successful, when political space permitted such endeavours, either before or after independence. Only under the influence of Protestantism, through processes referred in chapter one, emerge the roots of the invention of the "tribe", but still in a very small scale, certainly not open to the great masses of Ovimbundu by reasons pertaining to colonial supervision and lack of political space.

Even though the very nature of the "empty-box" concept makes it impossible to define the reach and influence of the colonial paradigm of "tribe" in Ovimbundu thought, deep influences did exist and were passed on between Portuguese colonialism, Protestant modernisation and the Ovimbundu. Since the "empty-box" concept is not monolithic and cannot be utilised in absolute terms, Feierman's annotation that "a single local culture, superficially homogenous, includes many streams of discourse, each located in the differentiated organisation of intellectuals"[431] is by far the most balanced theoretical approach. This said, simple heuristics would suggest that these "empty-boxes", superficially homogenous, did include many and varied streams of discourse and that these were in accordance to the organisation of intellectuals. Protestant intellectuals in the central highlands were certainly the most effective in reshaping the old and inventing a "new". Migrant workers, recruited under colonial stereotypes of labour allocation and opportunity, who upon return abided to the "patriarchal" hierarchies composed of African chiefs under loose colonial control, also opened spaces for the reshaping of moral ethnic meaning. But for the majority of the Ovimbundu, mostly peasants, European classifications of race, tribe and language were all either too distant or too ineffective. Nevertheless, this colonially inspired

[431] Feierman, Steven, "Peasant intellectuals", p. 33.

conception of tribe was not simply erased after independence but rather apprehended and used by those most influenced – and had more to gain – by it, Protestants, migrant workers and some educated urbanised people. The great majority of UNITA's leadership at the time of its foundation and for years after independence was composed of individuals with rather homogenous social and educational experiences. Most located their home somewhere in the central highlands, where they were born, raised and educated, in large part in Protestant missions and schools. The importance of their experience with the Protestants, who allowed and cultivated different mind sets than that of those with the Catholic church, in some aspects closer to non-converted Ovimbundu culture, worked to enhance not only their sense of modernisation but most importantly their conception of the western nation-state. It nurtured a vision of the Ovimbundu not necessarily as a loose ethno-linguistic group subject to many streams of discourse and organisation, but more as an ethnic entity with recognisable regional and linguistic boundaries, similar to that of the nation-state, a conception which became all too apparent in the mobilisation UNITA made in accordance to the planned elections in the Alvor Accords. These mostly intellectual individuals who came to form this liberation movement, unlike the peasants and traditional authorities during colonialism and Protestant intellectuals who had no political space, had the intellectual capacity and popular legitimacy to bring the colonial paradigm of tribe and ethnic identity into life. The politicisation of ethnicity after independence, the popular mobilisation of liberation movements and UNITA's intense campaigning of political awareness among the Ovimbundu and other groups' peasantry were the circumstances that allowed processes of structuring and homogenising of ethnicity that served to fill the "empty-boxes" left by colonialism, through the combination of internal debates about rights, obligations and ideals with the suggestion of external tribalism. The colonially invented "tribe" paradigm, with all its conceptual limitations, provided enough raw material to craft a workable basis upon which UNITA was in fact able to adapt – or create – a new ethnic identity, usually termed by the expression "UNITA's people", thus solidifying its electoral project.[432] Since the circumstances of

[432] In this UNITA differed from the MPLA since this movement did not allow space for ethnic or regional manifestations and from the FNLA due to its intense focus on the politicisation of the peasantry, instead of

war and the presence of liberation movements did not leave much space for the Ovimbundu to fill these "empty-boxes" free of political pressure and violence, many were pushed into the new "empty-box" identity UNITA created and began imagining, by absorbing meanings and characteristics of Ovimbundu and other group's discourses under an identity expressed by the term "UNITA's people", profoundly "southern" and often sharing common suspicions and aspirations. These processes were made legitimate due to the amount of Ovimbundu elites, not only Protestant but also important families, present in the UNITA leadership, allowing the transportation and reinvention of Ovimbundu characteristics and discourses to UNITA. In this aspect, discourse is crucial. Feierman argues that "long term continuity and active creation are in fact compatible. Even when forms of discourse are inherited from the past, the peasant must make an active decision to say that they are meaningful at this moment, to select a particular form of discourse as opposed to other possible forms, and to shape the inherited language anew to explain current problems."[433] UNITA did precisely that, it made an active decision by selecting and shaping particular forms of discourse – mostly from the late colonial period, mainly by referring to the stereotype of the exploited Ovimbundu or "Bailundo[434] – as opposed to other

---

simply recruiting and providing military training. Marcum notes that "UNITA's leaders emphasized the need to organize and act from the base of a politically educated peasantry", and sent revolutionaries that "to overcome peasant suspicion of newcomers and new ideas" (…) "had to share the adversities of peasant a life". In pastoral communities of eastern Angola, "UNITA assumed the role of protector of African women and African cattle against ravage and theft by colonial forces." See Marcum, John, "Angolan revolution vol. 2", pp. 167-168. The recognition that socio-cultural characteristics were essential in political awareness and in imparting a clear sense of socio-political purpose was always very present in UNITA's strategy and of great importance in its mobilization in the central highlands.

[433] Feierman, Steven, "Peasant intellectuals", p. 3.

[434] Soares de Oliveira writes that "For all of Savimbi's opportunism, there were constant themes to his long pursuit of absolute power. He built upon deep-seated town-country divisions and a sense of victimhood and social resentment against Luanda and its Europeanized elites, whether phrased as a Maoist peasant's war, as payback for the forced labour system of the colonial era, or in chauvinistic terms for Ovimbundu and other 'African' audiences." The author also acknowledges that "UNITA's message had traction in part because it opened up an alternative path towards Angolan modernity, which the Protestant missions had already put forward, that did not entail the 'detribalization' (and implicit convergence with elite culture) preached by the MPLA. Dismissed in the cities as 'primitives from the bush', UNITA supporters in turn demonized the 'minority regime' of the Creole bourgeoisie as 'non-Angolan". See

possible forms to explain current problems. The fact that many Ovimbundu leaders and chiefs joined the party gave UNITA a discourse and a political legitimacy which eventually allowed it to slowly incorporate and assume the role of the "tribe", absorbing its social rights and responsibilities while rendering it less important as a political structure, since it shifted its importance onto itself.[435] The legitimacy UNITA gained to form discourse stemmed from its leadership's social weight and reputation, sometimes accompanied by recognisable lineage ancestry. Feierman asks the central question of who authorizes discourse or practical activity with authority, that is, who succeeds in defining a set of issues or a course of action as the appropriate one. In this, Feierman recurs to reputation. As he sees it, "each person has a sphere of competent knowledge, but not all knowledge is equal in its weight within society, in its capacity to move people towards collective action, or to create authoritative discourse."[436] Many in the UNITA leadership possessed this social weight that enabled and convinced collective action. In addition, the party's hierarchies became composed not only of new elites but also of traditional Ovimbundu hierarchies, of *sobas* and *sekulus* with or without lineage that during colonialism commanded respect – although there exist exceptions to this respect – and were called to represent the people under their control, mostly peasants. This incorporation of ethnic and "tribal" aspects into the party was achieved through a number of factors some of which were already put in effect during the 1974/76 mobilisation period: the incorporation and co-optation of colonial African leaders and chiefs, or "patriarchs", mostly traditional authorities and Protestants; the proposition of following a new leadership that represented the pinnacle of Ovimbundu modernity – especially in education – while possessing traditional knowledge (discourse) and royal lineage; the constant reiteration of familiar cultural contents; a determined approach to the defence and use of African languages; the reshaping of moral economy systems, especially in

---

Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo (2015), *Magnificent and beggar land: Angola since the civil war*, Hurst and Company, p. 13.

[435] Not dissimilar to what Feierman finds among the peasantry in Tanzania, in that "their discourse of democracy and technical competence was then shaped by the new government of bureaucrats, one in which the peasant intellectuals had little role". Feierman, Steven "Peasant intellectuals", p. 26.

[436] Feierman, Steven, "Peasants intellectuals", p. 31.

Jamba[437]; the provision of various health and social services; the intensity of the political speech and; a high degree of social control through repressive and "supernatural"[438] methods.

Some of these factors - and more - constitute the elements that Lonsdale discovered were central in arguments and debates that created and shaped moral ethnicity. They allowed UNITA to legitimately process internal accountability and to critic external ideologies of order by reshaping domestic controversy in order to define a new civic virtue for an independent Angola, in essence attempting to dictate what the nation was.[439] Additionally, during the late 1970s and for most of the 1980s UNITA was particularly able to communicate those issues that so resonated with many Ovimbundu, especially with migrant workers, Protestants and the elites of the central highlands, mainly pertaining to those episodes of mockery and contempt they were victims of by other groups, thus creating a powerful alternative that promised an independent Angola where people from the south would not be considered backward.[440] Messiant notes how particularities of morality and dignity were for the majority of the Ovimbundu only represented in UNITA, the only party capable of putting an end to the forms of inequality they had been experiencing under colonialism:

---

[437] Usually a people devoted to agriculture, the Ovimbundu who went to Jamba found little farming land available due to the region's proximity to the Kalahari Desert, which in turn reshaped moral economies, consequence of the organisation of a vertical system with the party – as a distributor – not the African chief, at the top.

[438] "Supernatural" is a euro-centric conception of understanding these elements. However, the term is used strictly for clarity purposes. Its conceptual meaning should be disregarded.

[439] Soares de Oliveira makes a similar analysis regarding the MPLA, noting that "For almost half a century, rival social groups had competing ideas of Angola, of what the country was, should aspire to become, and who should lead it. Now, the vast legitimacy afforded by the war victory, the establishment of political order for the first time, and the unprecedented oil boom jointly meant that only one of these competing ideas of Angola would hold sway. The MPLA would get to dictate what the nation is." Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", p. 18.

[440] The other groups in this case were generally characterised as the creoles, those who defined themselves as non-natives due to their proximity with Portuguese culture and administration. See Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", pp. 7-9, for a brief but informative exposition of the history of the creoles vis-à-vis other Angolans.

> "For the majority of the Ovimbundu, even if they did not know it well, UNITA came to represent the only way to put an end to the contempt and condescendence they were witnessing, to refuse the misery of the people, to recuperate their dignity. If the support of most Protestant churches in Ovimbundu country to UNITA is explained by the same type of solidarity the Methodist church held in relation to the MPLA (…) the position of benevolent neutrality accorded to UNITA by the majority of bishops and great majority of Ovimbundu priests and catechists of the Catholic church seems to stem from the same protest against the situation of the Ovimbundu and the perception of UNITA as the only possible representative of the dignity of this people."[441]

When asked about the use of Umbundu language in out-of-region contexts – for instance, in Luanda – and whether there were negative stereotypes for its use, one interviewee said,

> "There was that thing that people who speak national languages are backward, they laughed in your face, but then the political issue was never resolved, which is that tribalism, this thing of ethnicities. Even today in Luanda and in the north of the country, people still say the Sulano, the Umbundu, the Ovimbundu is *matumbo*, is backward, because they don't live things the same way they do. He's not so aggressive, not so frontal. It is usually said, maybe because the Ovimbundu were the ones who made war the longest all this time, for the defense of their interests and all that. People attribute the responsibility of this war to Savimbi, but we cannot forget there was person following an ideal, which was UNITA's ideal, it can be said like this. There was a leader, there was a person that lead all those ideals."[442]

Another interviewee spoke of being treated as a foreigner in Luanda before going to the bush with UNITA:

---

[441] Messiant, Christine, "L'Angola postcolonial", p. 74.
[442] Interview 16.

> "I remember in the 80s before going to the bush, when we went to Luanda, we were really foreigners. Inside the country you were a foreigner. You were treated as Umbundu, Bailundo, who come from the bush. You were coming from another city but were treated as coming from the bush."[443]

Living memories of a time when the group's intellectuals were goaded in cosmopolitan constructs by those they understood to be supportive of colonial prejudice animated discourse by debating grievance. UNITA's speeches and debates about the state, government, health, education, civic participation, labour, dignity, etc., evoked the anxieties the Ovimbundu had not only before but particularly after independence. In fact, virtually all field data collected, whether referent to this period or not, is about inclusion, representation, citizenship and civic virtue. People never defended an ethnic nationalism, the ethnic interest, a return to a golden age or the superiority of their traditions or language, but rather always looked back at the teachings of their parents, to their social experiences, to what they learned and to their customs to complain about contemporary issues. The varied conclusions of their moral debates seem to always represent the basis upon which conceptions of social virtue can be detracted and used to criticise themes like injustice or inequality. In this sense, the background of UNITA's leadership made them exceptionally well positioned to process these anxieties in the form of political struggle, a factor that had a tremendous impact upon its audience and allowed the large numbers approach, which in theory would assure high voting turnout in the projected elections of both 1975 and 1992.

Indeed, what UNITA spoke for during the first sixteen years of war, especially when looking at the incorporation of "Ovimbunduness" into UNITA through the processes explained above, was not ethnicity but rather citizenship and civic virtue. Lonsdale argued that "to debate civic virtue was to define ethnic identity."[444] Looking at Kikuyu nationalism during the colonial period Lonsdale finds that neither ethnic distinction nor tribal rivalry was central to their theme but

---

[443] Interview 9.

[444] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 268.

rather citizenship under an alien regime. The meagre examples of Ovimbundu "nationalism" provided in the first section of the third chapter are indeed much more concerned with citizenship under an alien regime than with ethnic distinction or rivalry. During the colonial period, civic virtue for the Ovimbundu was largely attainable through a proper education, the guarantor of citizenship, as it was the central factor that included so many more social elements. Colonial legislation, especially the Native Statute (1929-1961), was in great part responsible for this idea. Education would allow assimilation, which in turn allowed formal employment or the purchase of land, enriching the individual and those around him, thus enhancing one's social reputation but also obligation and responsibility. While the number of assimilated Ovimbundu was indeed brutally insignificant, the pursuit of education was not forfeited at any point.[445] Even today in the central highlands, an individual's honour and reputation are enhanced by his education, which showcase his "standing" in society, although the economic boom the country has been experiencing in the last years has brought significant changes, since opportunities are today not necessarily dependent upon one's education.[446]

Much aware of these dynamics, UNITA was able to appease uncertainty and fear by presenting a solid alternative in a time of profound change and doubt. The provision of social services[447], including education, and the sponsoring of many students to go study abroad – much like the Portuguese had done in the 19th century – were particularly relevant in captivating the elites of the central highlands. This helped UNITA create a proper alternative, not a puppet movement, but one with men and women of honour and reputation, certainly well-educated for their time, leading people to generally acknowledge their capacity to lead and govern. In addition, the fact that it was able to produce people with quality education through the structures it created carried immense virtue. The experience of many non-combatants who studied in Jamba is helpful to illustrate not only access to education but also the pride and honour associated with it. One

---

[445] See chapter 1, pp. 56-57.

[446] One interviewee notes that unmarried former students of seminaries and Protestant schools, like him, are "a catch", often coveted by women. Interview 21.

[447] See Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity", pp. 111-117, for more on people's perceptions of governance and service provision in UNITA areas, particularly in the city of Huambo.

interviewee speaks greatly of education in Jamba, whilst suggesting that people who studied there are overall much better prepared academically:

> "When I studied, to complete the 10th grade I needed a certificate in order to go to school [state school], and there my colleagues never believed I finished 9th grade in one of those schools [state schools], they thought I had the *médio* [12th grade] at least, and was only starting [10th] because of a professional course, because I wrote well, read well, my exams were always good grades, and so one colleague who completed the *médio* in Cuba said that I didn't study here and insisted many times for me to tell him. Then, at the beginning of the year I had to tell him, brother, I didn't study here. Because he only believed I had studied in the mission. And finally I told him, because he was pushing: "the way you are, you don't have this culture of ours". That [in Jamba] was real education, people with the 9th grade there could go to college without a problem, it was really like this. (…) People knew the value of that school and really took advantage of it. I learned French, Latin from 7th until 9th, I knew how to decline, but lost it."[448]

Above all, education meant empowerment for many who in the past could never be considered "big men", it represented a way to escape the forms and networks of clientelism – for instance, to African chiefs or white patrons – which could be limiting their social mobility. Like Lonsdale argues, with capitalism "big men might become official chiefs and thus careless of their clients; but weaker members of society, poor men and women generally, might also acquire unprecedented bargaining power by engaging in wage-work elsewhere or by going to school. These new social competitions fostered new arguments about what forms of achievement made one a good member of the local community. Competition in community service harked back to the social morality of an imaginatively more virtuous, and thus communalistic, past. Moreover, this civic virtue was now debated within the standardised biblical vernaculars that began to

[448] Interview 7.

constitute ethnic groups: in all these ways, ethnicity acquired patriotism, a distinctively modern consciousness."[449] Indeed, already seen during colonialism, the disruption of pre-colonial forms of hierarchy and the introduction of colonial capitalism, which allowed wage-work through the form of migrant work and cash-cropping, also destroyed many of the social obligations people had to each other.[450] Post-independence Angola experienced much the same and obliged new adaptations. Ovimbundu holders of localised social capital in the central highlands and elsewhere could now easily be priests and pastors, teachers, businessmen, policemen and administrators, politicians and generals, known to be UNITA or MPLA supporters, besides very few chiefs like the former king of Bailundo[451]. But weaker members of the Ovimbundu group were also awarded new forms of bargaining power, ultimately redefining much of the moral ethnic debate about the shape and content of citizenship and virtue. These new bargaining powers allowed some Ovimbundu in MPLA areas in the central highlands to enter local administration, by working in schools, in the police, in municipalities or even in high political office, allowing processes of dilution of their imagined citizenship into the national arena, generally by following instructions from Luanda. Their successful integration in the MPLA society in a context of uncertainty, enabled forms of internal ethnic contestation, based on local and perhaps political understandings of citizenship and civic virtue tightly connected to ethnic identity. The denial that the majority of Ovimbundu followed UNITA's ideals was, and still is, particularly contested by many who support the MPLA. Debates of moral ethnicity in the central highlands became somewhat centred on the evaluation of the benefits and virtues of citizenship in either the MPLA or UNITA society. This became problematic because, as Lonsdale argues in relation to the Kikuyu, "while contestants backed their claims with allusions to the uncouth ways of the other", "the vital issue

---

[449] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism", p. 139.

[450] This has much to do with the destruction of moral economies, explained in chapter 2, in pp. 114-116.

[451] Augusto Katchiopololo, enthroned as Ekwikwi IV of Bailundo, occupied very relevant political positions, having even been a member of the Central Committee of the MPLA, the highest political rank in the party. See Florêncio, Fernando (2009), "Un reino, dos reyes: diferentes legitimidades en Bailundo (Angola)", in Farré, Albert and Jordi Tomàs (coord.), *Procesos de reconciliación posbélica en África subsahariana*, Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals.

was that of citizenship under and alien regime, what obligations it demanded, what rights it conferred. At the time, citizenship had an ethnic dimension:

> First, ethnic identity was the reverse of what it is often said to be, unthinking conformity. Second, arguments over domestic civic virtue tested claims to provide external political leadership. Finally, contests about tribal identity did not exclude and may have kindled a territorial, "Kenyan" political imagination then."[452]

Indeed, it was within the internal sphere of Ovimbundu ethnicity that ferocious debates and antagonistic stances were held in reference to the divisions of the civil war. It were the different understandings of domestic virtue and their projection to national citizenship that allowed a highly politicised, fully influenced by propaganda, contestation of leadership, between what some understood to be the racist UNITA who sought support from apartheid South Africa while others argued against the deliverance of the country to Soviet imperialism by MPLA politicians who never left Luanda. This deep contestation was nevertheless successful in kindling the imagination of an overarching Angolan space. The debate was always about the political and social projects each party argued for the country, not to ethnic regions nor as ethnic social resistances as Balandier saw them.[453] One interviewee shows how the different political economies of both sides, particularly that of the MPLA, were at the heart of these debates:

> "At that time the MPLA was here [in Huambo], it was the mono-party so people did not have certain rights, because in a mono-party a person cannot buy a car, can't have commerce, had to limit to that policy. Then we had the so called "lojas do povo", you went there, find rice and soap. But you can't just eat rice and soap, you need other things. So you made a monthly expense and only got those two things. Now, where will you find the others? Because you can't have commerce, because the state is the commerce. You can't

[452] Lonsdale, John "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 268.
[453] Balandier, George (1955), *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, Paris.

> have a car. If you already had transport to work you couldn't have a personal car. So people started, because of the transition from the colonial era to this period. In the colonial period, depending on my abilities, I could buy a car, but now in this new process [communism] I can't buy one. The car I had could be taken from me, because I did not have the right to own a car. That shook people a little bit, because they transitioned from the colonial era to the new era. At that time during colonialism there were already intellectuals, black, *mestiço* and white engineers. So when this new transition began complicating life for many people, and also because of the tribal situation, some started adhering to UNITA. In UNITA you still couldn't [own things], but because its leadership was capitalist, many began thinking, because even during the sixteen years [of war], because of this situation we were experiencing [under communism], many were already thinking about the other side [UNITA]."[454]

This was a typical issue of the rights and obligations of citizenship apprehended by people under the different political forces, one which exploited equality in stark contrast with the one that promised advancement while passively enjoying "tribal" affections. But if in MPLA controlled areas the lack of economic opportunities appears to have allowed an internal debate concerning citizenship, for the masses who followed UNITA, these debates were largely controlled and defined by the party, commonly through repressive social control, rarely by grass-roots people or "traditional structures". Consequently, internal party competition for status and reputation, in addition to the acknowledgment of UNITA's virtue to govern, often expressed in Umbundu, the "standardised biblical vernacular" language of the Ovimbundu, allowed patriotism to be upheld not for the distant state in Luanda, but the one state with its capital in Jamba, whose president was Savimbi. For these Ovimbundu, UNITA materialised a state, a system of education, health and other social provisions closer to any they had experienced during colonialism, the only form of modern bureaucratic state they knew. This patriotism could

[454] Interview 2.

certainly acquire an ethnic façade, the political tribalism Lonsdale knows can degenerate from positive uses of moral ethnicity. Yet, it also entails that Ovimbundu notions of virtue and achievement were a dynamic form of approaching and debating citizenship, by transporting their sense of civic virtue into a new Angola; that arguments over domestic civic virtue tested claims that illuminated the legitimacy of political leadership; and that Ovimbundu identity, through conceptions of citizenship, certainly did not exclude the political imagination of an Angola.

For those with UNITA, the entire debate about citizenship, external political leadership and the political imagination of an independent Angola began to rest entirely upon the ideals of UNITA's leadership, particularly shouldered by Jonas Savimbi, mainly until the late 1980's. It was Savimbi who began adapting and translating what Ovimbundu and "southern" citizenship could look like in an independent Angola, with its core in Africanity, language, tradition, equality and liberty[455]; it was him who took the reins of Ovimbundu moral ethnicity to contest external political leadership by denouncing the new forms of inequality the MPLA would supposedly implement, the exploitation of the southern man by the northerner; and it was certainly him who began crafting the nation-building myth that robbed significant aspects of Ovimbundu experience and imagination to contextualise an Angola deeply contrary to that of the MPLA.

The deep antagonism that existed between UNITA and the MPLA was visible in their social, economic and political projects for the country, which were fundamentally different and prone to clash.[456] Their very nature was antagonistic and mutually exclusive, especially at the high-end

[455] Leon Dash reported that "Savimbi personally teaches a month-long course to his guerrillas in political organization and Angolan culture." George Chikoti, today Minister of External Affairs, at the time 22, said "The main things Savimbi taught us were Angolan culture, social life and how to create a government of the majority black peasants to rule the country." See Leon Dash reporting for the Washington Post, "A long march – politics taught by fable", Washington Post, 11th August 1977. This may have been much more focused on Ovimbundu and southern culture and social life than on an abstract Angolan culture.

[456] In direct opposition to the Angolan nation UNITA imagined, Soares de Oliveira notes how the MPLA conceives the nation, "whom it includes and excludes, its social and geographical biases – directly affects its state-building and development agenda for the country as a whole. (…) It conceives a country first and foremost as the historical product of Portuguese imperialism. The focus is very much on 'Angola' to the detriment of the 'Africa' of most twentieth-century African and diaspora intellectuals. The MPLA may use figures of the African past as nationalist tropes but it doesn't exalt the pre-colonial world as the direct

political debate. It was an antagonistic conception of state, power, of rights and obligations, of culture, language and education, of tradition and history.

As mentioned above, UNITA and many of its followers were always too suspicious of several aspects that characterised state power in Luanda, the MPLA's power. Its one-party Marxist-Leninist political ideology, its absent or very basic command of African languages and especially the fact that it had white and *mestiço* leaders, creoles, which UNITA saw as a continuation of colonial rule, represented far too many foreign aspects for the assurance of the rights of the people in UNITA's regions, be them the elites or mass population.[457] Indeed, if they had been victims of contempt and mockery not only by the colonialists but also by their fellow Angolans, what different rights would be conferred to them in an independent Angola? Jonas Savimbi in a speech given at Jamba to the students of the Liceu Comandante Samanjolo, before the 7th Congress of UNITA illustrates very well the contestation of the external leadership of the MPLA in relation to the people of the south:

---

antecedent of contemporary Angola. It acknowledges that the territory has no pre-colonial unity, and sees the experience of Portuguese rule and the Portuguese language as the common threads of an otherwise immensely diverse patchwork of cultures. Moreover, the MPLA sees the cultural and political convergence of 'Angola' as a work in progress. Some parts of the country and society represent 'Angola' more than others. Luanda and the long-colonized areas that enjoy privileged access to the outside world constitute the pinnacle of both what is 'modern' and 'national' and the historical 'Angolan' culture favoured by the MPLA. This is undergirded by an unstated standard of civilization whereby some Angolans, by their Portuguese language proficiency and 'cosmopolitan' deportment, hold a higher status, while others whose behaviour and culture are, in one word, more 'African' are deemed to be backward and of lesser social import." See Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", pp. 18-19.

[457] At one point, during a UNITA congress, after Samuel Chiwale's remark that "everyone in the bush, soldiers and civilians, are fighting Neto's friends, the Cubans, so everything will be better for black Angolans. Neto must die" at the time Secretary General Miguel N'Zau Puna reportedly said, "The person here who doesn't understand that UNITA is fighting for the black Angolan is a traitor. We must also fight tribalism, regionalism and alcoholism." These two UNITA officials were followed by Jonas Savimbi, who argued that "We must not be colonized again. (…) The Portuguese, who knew all the ways of the people, went out, and do you think Neto, who is also Portuguese, can win the war?" According to Leon Dash, besides warfare, a central theme of the congress was black nationalism, the rejection of Neto's multiracial government in favour of black rule for black Angola. See Leon Dash reporting for the Washington Post, "UNITA's congress: self-criticism deep in a hidden forest", Washington Post, 13th August 1977.

“You only have two choices, either you vote UNITA or you vote MPLA. Who votes UNITA votes for the future, who votes MPLA votes for the past. (…) Who votes for the MPLA for the past, discrimination between the man of the north and the man of the south, that is the policy of the MPLA. The expression Baia [equivalent to Bailundo] comes from where, if not from tribalism and discrimination? Those who want an end to the expression Baia cannot vote for the MPLA, have to vote for UNITA which does not accept tribal barriers. Eduardo dos Santos lied! It was him, it was Eduardo dos Santos who said, the Ochimbundu will never enter the *bureau político*, because this [Angola] is not Nigeria! And I will repeat. You cannot say, the Kaluchazi can’t enter the *bureau político*, the Chokwe can’t enter the *bureau político*. You can say António, José, Joel can’t enter because he is not capable. But if you say a tribe cannot enter, you cannot be the chief of Angola. And those who vote for the MPLA, vote for discrimination, vote for divisions among us, vote for the weakening of the country, weakens the institutions that Angola creates. Angola is a big country, and deserves a different posture. But those who vote for UNITA will be voting for a future that you can build with your own hands.”[458]

During the same speech Savimbi takes the problematic of external leadership head on and doubts the credentials of the president of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, to lead the country, which perfectly exemplifies the very nature of contestation between the two political forces, an opposition between Africanity and modernism and urban-cosmopolitanism:

“You cannot be slaves of the MPLA. How can the MPLA say that Eduardo dos Santos was born playing football in the streets of the *sanzala* in Sambizanga, afterwards he went to São Tomé and then returned to Sambizanga. He never visited another province, does not know Angola. He doesn’t. Where did he live in Angola? He’s confusing Sambizanga with

[458] Speech available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7-bjkcgg-w, accessed on the 5th of March 2015.

> Angola. And it's not true. But we with our own feet walked from the border with Zambia, we walked the entire East."[459]

Several other examples exist of Savimbi relating to the Ovimbundu population and other of UNITA's people by invoking their sense of Africanity, encouraging the imagination of their place not only in Angola but in the world, in a clear nation-building exercise:

> "We are used to hearing that vernacular languages, traditional culture, all that is divisionism. That is not true! Angolan patriotism cannot be invented. Those who attempted to do so already lost. They are starting again and will restart with us. Where then, does patriotism come from? It has to come from what we know. How can we love Angola if we don't love our village, our parents, our brothers, our family, our province? Nationalism cannot be built upon nothing. (…) There is no place for me abroad. Never was! My village, the rivers of my land, the mountains of my land, my family, my former colleagues at Dondi, in the Maristas school, all of that constitutes for me what best there is in my life, what I may not sacrifice. There aren't! There aren't rivers as strong, singing so well of the glories of our past, like the rivers of my land. I don't understand the language of the rivers in Switzerland. They don't speak to me. Don't know me. I'm foreign and stay permanently foreign. But the mountains of my land speak with me. This is the safeguard of our cultural values."[460]

With time, the party truly constituted an identity of UNITA's people, supremely suffused with ethnic elements of "southern" groups, mainly Ovimbundu, through the discourse of the rights of citizenship that was at the root of ideological contestation during the Angolan civil war. Nevertheless, although this romantic presentation of UNITA's political agenda may have rarely been at the top of the leadership's preoccupations, it most certainly resonated among many

---

[459] Ibid.

[460] Savimbi, Jonas (1986), *Por um futuro melhor*, Editora Nova Nórdica/Tempo, pp. 83-84.

Ovimbundu who saw in UNITA and Savimbi not only a representation of their anxieties and sufferings but also an echo of the themes of their own debates and discussions, above all a party that had experienced and understood the forms of inequality that were destroying their moral fabric and would hinder their social advancement.[461] Consequently, while UNITA was forming a party and involved in a struggle political in nature, many Ovimbundu who followed the party were also interested in seeking a novel form of ethnic leadership. Feierman finds that "when peasants organize political movements, or when they reflect on collective experience, they speak about how politics can be ordered to bring life rather than death, to bring prosperity rather than hunger, and to bring justice rather than inequality. The means for achieving these are defined by peasants themselves. It is peasants who draw upon a rich variety of past forms of political language; it is peasants who create new political discourse."[462] Even if the founders of UNITA could not be considered peasants[463], the peasants they sought to mobilise certainly understood

---

[461] Leon Dash tells of Soba Ephrai, an Ovimbundu, saying he joined UNITA (…) because Savimbi has been here during the suffering and understands what we need." While interviewing Emilio Ndombe Ciguaki, which Dash describes as "one of the three paramount chiefs of the Ovimbundu, the tribe's highest-ranking political position", the chief reportedly explains that he supports UNITA "because Savimbi is the only man who can understand the Ovimbundu's suffering under colonial rule", and that Agostinho Neto "is Angolan but he stayed a long time in Europe and married a white woman and doesn't care or know about the Ovimbundu's life. He's a Kimbundu." See Leon Dash reporting to the Washington Post, "A long march – politics taught by fable", Washington Post, 11th August 1977. However, this does not exclude the fact that others were not so keen on novel forms of ethnic leadership and were forced, often kidnapped, by UNITA and taken to Jamba.

[462] Feierman, Steven, "Peasants intellectuals", p. 3.

[463] Steven Feierman recurs to parts of Gramsci's explanation of intellectuals, that there exist a minimum of creative intellectual activity in any physical work or even in the most degraded and mechanical occupations, to elaborate his own interpretation. The idea is that "all people are therefore intellectuals, but not all people have the social function of intellectuals, a function that is directive, organizational, or educative. Feierman, Steven, "Peasant intellectuals", p. 18. For purposes of clarity, I have not considered peasants or African chiefs to be intellectuals, reserving the category to a few Christian and "assimilated" Ovimbundu who had studied and were engaged in intellectual activity. However I do not mean to exclude Gramsci's and Feierman's stance on the matter. Peasants and chiefs can be considered intellectuals yet not necessarily engaged in the social function of intellectuals. Allowing a certain intellectual creativity to peasants and African chiefs – which in truth they had and can be found in the dynamics of indirect rule explained in chapter 2 –, confirms their ability to create movements, reflect on collective experience, draw

their discourse through the lenses Feierman refers to and began crafting discourse in accordance. These debates about life and death, famine and abundance, leadership legitimacy and opportunity, were themes which more often than not matched UNITA's ideals regarding citizenship, virtue and justice, thus successfully informing identity.

In addition, the discourse about good, evil and legitimacy was also intensely connected to the dynamics pertaining to the "supernatural", to magic powers and wizardry. The "supernatural" was the one factor not considered in the "empty-boxes" left behind by European classifications and categorisations that allowed the imagination of "tribes", the one the colonial state never fully comprehended nor could control, yet one of vital impact in Ovimbundu moral ethnicity. Yet again, liberation movements, particularly the FNLA and UNITA, were able to capitalise on this immense power, both for self – even personal - promotion and social control. What many called Savimbi's personality cult, around the figure of the "*mais velho*" (elder) and "*pai* Savimbi" (father Savimbi), was much implemented upon the incorporation of typically Ovimbundu – and other – "supernatural" powers upon the leader, Savimbi himself. "Supernatural" magic powers and their mastery were always a crucial aspect of Ovimbundu discourse and virtue. This was so because mastery over the occult provided not only a capital of social control that *osomas*, *sekulus* and other leaders had been using for centuries but, most importantly, it established a link between past generations, where the depositories of knowledge and experience reside, depositories that could only be accessed by people of recognisable magic prowess – mostly *osomas* and *sekulus* – accessible when circumstances, usually of unrest and peril, so dictated.

UNITA was able to incorporate this power into its fold in two important ways: firstly, unlike many people in the MPLA, it was already familiar with the "supernatural". If the Protestant ethos helped inform parts of the new southern identity UNITA redefined, their leaders' relationship with non-converted Ovimbundu, which allowed a continuous contact not only with tradition but also with the "supernatural", provided the experience to design it as an instrument of captivation and control. Secondly, much like the colonial state before it, UNITA began replacing the *sekulus*

---

upon past forms of political language or create discourse, elements I argue they brought to UNITA, thus facilitating the mobilization of the Ovimbundu.

and *sobas*, whether former African auxiliaries or lineage chiefs, with individuals loyal to it and to its leader[464], who followed the party's instructions and nurtured the idea of Savimbi as a powerful magician. The social and spiritual power of the *sekulu* became a political instrument to the party's leader. Through its appointed *sekulus* and *sobas*, the party was able to use the social capital derived from the "supernatural", in order to provide legitimacy, reputation, continuous adherence and support. As it was, if Savimbi was able to contact and master the "supernatural", surely the ancestors had bestowed upon him great power, and one must follow him. Many still look at the props Savimbi used to wear, his several rings, his cane, the cloth around his waist, as protections. However, field data did not register accounts of Savimbi being personally engaged in magical arts, but instances where *sekulus* and *sobas* made use of such powers to his profit and safeguard. One interviewee told of a time when the people in Bailundo, a place especially strong in these matters, had to recur to the *osoma*, Ekwikwi III, to perform magical arts to escape an aerial bombardment by the FAA:

> "When UNITA was in Bailundo, the Migs came and he [Ekwikwi III] promised Dr. Savimbi that he would not help him because he was UNITA. No. He would help because he [Savimbi] was governing Bailundo and governing well. So the enemy would never reach it. And that, you could see we were military. We picked up the intersection [the radio signal], the pilots said, we are seeing the sea. That's because Bailundo was transformed into the sea. Water really. Pilots could not see [the village]. Water, water, just water. Then there

[464] Fernando Florêncio notes continuities between the colonial period and the practices of movements with regards to African chiefs. Referring to the village of Bailundo, Florêncio argues that the colonial practice of using African chiefs as elements of control and regulation of social life was also put in effect by UNITA, also through indirect rule. As a consequence, Florêncio finds that "traditional authorities in M'Balundo confront and compete with a plurality of local actors", among them the MPLA and UNITA. The case between Utondossi II and Ekwikwi IV is particularly illustrative of this tendency, two men who became *osoma inene* of Bailundo when different movements controlled the village. See Florêncio, Fernando, "No reino da toupeira", pp. 168-169. One interviewee says this replacement of African chiefs was very significant after 1992 in the central highlands: "UNITA enters Huambo and finds a soba nominated by the MPLA. That soba loses his rights, because he is not trusted by the party. [UNITA] nominated a new soba." Interview 2.

were scripts in the mountain [in the stone in Bailundo, the *akokotas*] that only he [Ekwikwi III] could decipher. He really said this is like this and this. It was such that the last time Dr. Savimbi travelled abroad they started beautifying the village, and in tradition when the chief leaves one shouldn't do that. That created such a serious situation that the plane Dr. Savimbi was in almost malfunctioned above Angola, as soon as it entered Angolan air space. So the king noted that Dr. Savimbi was in peril. He went to the mountain, everyone saw, stayed there doing that tradition. The king did his tradition and Dr. Savimbi landed very safely in Bailundo. As soon as he left the plane the pilot noticed how it was, it escaped burning. The pilot himself could not understand how he landed in Bailundo. And from there, Dr. Savimbi went to the roundabout, where there was a tribune, where speeches were given, and spoke to the population telling them not to do the same next time, because it was very dangerous. When the chief leaves, the soba or the king, one must never cut trees. If it wasn't the king we would all have died. At that time it would have been another tragedy for the leadership of UNITA. Then the king also spoke. He began explaining the steps taken, how he found out the plane was in jeopardy, how he "maintained" the plane until it landed. In that time the king was very powerful."[465]

Most western readers would surely conclude that UNITA arranged the situation with the *osoma* of Bailundo, instrumentalising his "supernatural" powers, so people would perceive Savimbi as a strong man, a person who could escape near death situations, thus favoured and deserving of spiritual aid. Religious considerations aside, what is of interest here are a few important elements referred in this quote. First, the fact that the *osoma* made it explicit to the people that he would help not because he was a UNITA supporter but because Savimbi was governing Bailundo well, which firmly established the bond between these two figures without any resort to politics but rather to the acceptance of positive work and of Savimbi's familiarity and legitimacy in the eyes of Ekwikwi III. Secondly, it was Savimbi who firstly addressed the

[465] Interview 9.

population after the plane episode, not the *osoma*. Only after, did the *osoma* also speak. And it was Savimbi the interviewee considered the "chief" that left Bailundo before the incident, equating him to a *sekulu* or *osoma*, hence why one mustn't cut the trees. These episodes and the legitimacy they provide to a leader was exactly the type of "supernatural" capital UNITA sought to control.

In a context of post-colonial civil war, to allow "tribal" identity to kindle the imagination of citizenship, motivated by specific forms of identity, may negatively contribute to instil the national idea. Pearce noted that "for many people the process whereby they became attached to a political movement was not contingent on holding a particular set of political beliefs. In this sense, the formation of a relationship between an individual and a political movement had much in common with the formation of national or ethnic identity: it was less an expression of political choice than the acceptance of membership on an imagined community."[466] Instead of reaching the stage where it can be a force for good, by forcing different debates about civic virtue and community to clash in order to provide new, more equitable demands on state power, it led each contestant to create its own state, by pulling the existent one apart, and proceeding to "illuminate what is "our own" darkening the shadow of "the other".[467]

It was the clash between what is "ours and theirs" in the competition to build political community that transformed the moral ethnic debate into political tribalism, "that unprincipled and divisive competition for state power by members of the political class who claim to speak for unified ethnic communities"[468], when military contestation was to give way to national elections. The 1992 elections represent a case of political contestation and intrigue at the top degenerating into political tribalism, perhaps the only time the conflict truly assumed an ethnic character. The internal "southern" - also Ovimbundu - moral debate of the type of society UNITA wanted to create clashed with that of the MPLA's, rendering both mutually exclusive, as they may still be

[466] Pearce, Justin, "Control, ideology and identity in civil war", p. 329.
[467] Lonsdale, John, "The moral economy of the Mau Mau", p. 267.
[468] Kopp, Jacqueline (2002), "Can moral ethnicity trump political tribalism? The struggle for land and nation in Kenya", *African Studies*, 61, 2, p. 269.

today. As mentioned, it was during the height of open ethnic violence after the first round of elections, especially in Luanda and Lobito that Savimbi officially took upon himself the ethnic banner, as can be read in Margaret Anstee's Cold War Orphans, cited in page 190. Savimbi's political authority rested on the civic virtue of personal achievement, in his excellent command of Umbundu language, his supposed mastery over the "supernatural", his understanding and defence of Ovimbundu anxieties and aspirations. By following UNITA many acknowledged his achievements as virtues, the virtues of a leader. But repression and violence, through the burning of villages or the physical elimination of opponents, contested the scope of power and legitimacy this virtue authorized. Still, to the extent that opinions are subjective and divided on this matter, one interviewee argues that the massacres and the violence perpetrated by UNITA were thought of by people as natural characteristics of the violence of war, and that many are still loyal to the party:

> "The opposition party also committed great errors in his area. It was the maltreatment of his people. But not even that made people change their "shirt". There are people, the greater part, everyone really, sometimes we speak, between the youth, it is not necessary to lie, our party is only one. [And the burnings?] A problem of war, for war it was normal. There is that consciousness. Because some people lost their parents, siblings, close people, and did not change. I know of a lot of people."[469]

There exist uncountable grievances against UNITA's actions in the central highlands. As mentioned before, people can define their identities in several ways and did so throughout the civil war. Neither Savimbi nor UNITA represented the Ovimbundu at any stage, nor was their ideal as a people the same. The Ovimbundu are not a homogenised group – nor is any other social group –, nor were their aspirations, their imagination of citizenship or understandings of

---

[469] Interview 8.

virtue the same.[470] Moreover, there is little evidence, apart from the ethnic targeting of Ovimbundu in the battle for Luanda in late 1992, that political tribalism was central in the Angolan conflict. That is to say, not all causes for conflict stem from clashes referent to moral ethnicity.

There certainly exist an insurmountable higher number of instances where ethnicity was not relevant in decision-making and agency. Internal political intrigue within UNITA may not purport to debates of moral ethnicity, as even though UNITA came to portray much of the moral debate of the "southern", of UNITA's people, it still remained by large a political party. Episodes like the reported elimination of Tito Chinguji and Wilson dos Santos must not purport to internal quarrels typical of moral ethnicity but rather to political struggles. On the other hand, the burning of women and their families considered to be witches perhaps could, as it points to the "supernatural" convictions used by politicians "who won a contest of civic virtue" within their constituency but had to "supress the multi-vocal debates of moral ethnicity that would otherwise carry on behind their backs."[471] Other debates may pertain to both, that is, they tend to influence political struggles and hierarchies through the invocation of rights of participation with a "tribal" sometimes "clanique" take. Issues of regionalism inside UNITA, as interviewees speak of them, are a good example of this dynamic:

---

[470] Cramer not only notes that UNITA did not have unanimous support in Ovimbundu areas, and rightly so, but also calls the idea of the Ovimbundu as a homogenous group with shared traditions and convergent interests based on a common culture mythical, mainly by going back to the notion that the Ovimbundu population come from an aggregation of twenty-two chiefdoms formed in the seventeenth century around the central highlands. See Cramer, Christopher, "Civil war is not a stupid thing", p. 162. While the lack of unanimity towards UNITA is generally acknowledged, Cramer's argument of the Ovimbundu's homogeneity as mythical justified by recalling pre-colonial divisions may not be so accurate. They are certainly not only not homogenous but prone to internal clashes and issues of intra-regionalism. Yet, there is an idea of the Ovimbundu, namely the "Umbundu" as a linguistic ethos, especially when facing the "other". This may very well be a political notion fruit of much propaganda but it is nevertheless imbued with cultural, especially linguistic and regional, elements that present difference when the "other" is present, a notion salient independently of political identity and allegiance. Nevertheless, this brief note is not incompatible with Cramer's larger argument that ethnicity, among other elements, taken individually, is not a plausible account for the origins and characteristics of the Angolan conflict.

[471] Lonsdale, John, "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism", p. 141.

"So what came to dissatisfy a little the Ovimbundu? Him being the leader, these massacres, when he began burning villages. So he is ours [leader] but again he cuts our heads? And then inside [UNITA] there was also tribalism, between people from Bié and Huambo, because the leader was from Bié. The highest cadres in UNITA are Bié and Cuando Cubando. People from Huambo did not have very good positions. For example, if it was an element from Cunene, you are Cuanhama, so you wouldn't have much acceptance there. (…) then colours, because some Ovimbundu are *mulatos*. That one with that colour cannot rise. A person sacrifices but they nominate between themselves. You are not from our ethnic group, there is no point. That bothered many elements of UNITA."[472]

Another interviewee, a former captain in FALA, denies these regional divisions inside UNITA:

"It was really that thing that men from Bié thought that because Dr. Savimbi was from Bié they were all related. Either way, even now when your boss is related to you, you can feel a little more at ease. And the other the chief has to put him at ease. But in UNITA I don't remember this happening much, because the men from Huambo had more power than the men from Bié, but there was always that thing, the men from Huambo had more power than the men from Bié who felt closer to Dr. Savimbi. It was a thing that complicated. For example, General Gato, Alcides Sakala, they are all from Bailundo, Huambo, they really are, Abel Chivukuvuku, all of them had power in UNITA and are from Bailundo. And that continued until now, people from Huambo practically have power in UNITA. While the leader is from Bié, which is Samakuva, but the people around him, those who enrich UNITA are all from Huambo, Luanda, lots of people from there. (…) It's like that, if the chief is related to a person, he will try to get closer and in truth that happens all over the

[472] Interview 2.

world. He is related to me, you try to get closer, but he also has to be open to non-relatives. If people were favoured? No."[473]

To conclude, it is difficult to trace a dividing line between what is the domain of moral ethnicity and what pertains to the internal political discourse that still shaped identity but had little or nothing to do with ethnicity. Both concepts certainly interacted at different periods, especially at those times when ethnicity was most salient, perhaps when many Ovimbundu became closer to the state, during 1975 with independence and 1992 with the elections. The search for a different social order capable of encompassing individual worth, respectful of traditional social conceptions, conducted in Umbundu language and knowledge – through the invocation of both traditional proverbs and biblical interpretations taught by Protestantism –, in a struggle to find place and opportunity, in an alien world constructed by colonialism and hijacked by what many understood to be the MPLA's neo-colonial practices was, in essence, what fuelled the imagination of citizenship for many Ovimbundu in an independent Angola and what UNITA sought to represent. In this, the existence of various streams of internal debate that surround the thematic of ethnicity, mainly those pertaining to morality, citizenship, honour and reputation, capable of producing identity and influencing agency and, as consequence, political choice, is undeniable. It is perhaps for these reasons that some argue for a natural predisposition of the Ovimbundu to join UNITA while others revert to the non-linearity of the interaction between ethnic group and political party. From the arguments made in this section, both can be correct if they perceive UNITA as an Angolan – thus national – political party with the intellectual capacity to understand and instrumentalise the discourse of inequality and grievance of a particular section of the Angolan population and Ovimbundu ethnic group – not the totality but certainly the majority – made in ethnic terms and in Umbundu, in an attempt to enter a contest of power in the form of electoral calculation. What restricts this interpretation in terms of chronological order is the use of violence and repression. If it was violence that gave UNITA its first ethnic anchor right

[473] Interview 9.

after independence, it was also violence that disillusioned many Ovimbundu with the party after the 1992 elections.

CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

So far I have attempted to delineate the processes of modernisation and politicisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity, essentially tracing the roots of modernity and its impact on ethnicity. I have underlined the idea that the Ovimbundu were not successfully integrated in the broader national space of the colonial state and traced particular events that not only provided an image of the Ovimbundu as an "other", perhaps a "stranger", but also attempted to show that this "otherness" had very relevant impacts on the politicisation of the group, in wider Angolan politics and in the politics of identity the members of this group came to be framed with. This chapter deals with the concept of "otherness" in post-war contexts, where ethnicity, albeit being one of several identity elements, is considered to have an impact in social and political integration, social mobility and access to state resources. In fact, what became abundantly clear throughout chapter four was the intense dispute of forms of citizenship between the two competing parties during the Angolan civil war. As such, the relevance of forms and perceptions of citizenship is undeniable, especially since it allows the enquiry of particularities of Ovimbundu modern ethnicity – after decades of conflict – in post-war settings, in order to evaluate reintegration and citizenship, yet, short of nation-building.

After the elections of 1992 and the consequent return to war, the years that followed were characterised by several political and military stages and international involvement to achieve peace in Angola. In 1994 the Lusaka Protocol was signed in hopes of ending the civil war and starting a reconciliation process, largely through the proposition of political integration and an amnesty. The implementation of this agreement was marked by the failure of negotiations and localised skirmishes ensued, albeit to a stalemate. When in 1998 the Angolan government decided that military action was the single option to end the conflict, it launched a massive military operation in 1999, conquering the last bastions of UNITA presence in the central highlands which led to the escape and eventual death of Jonas Savimbi in February 2002 and the

signing a Memorandum of Understanding in Luena in April 4, dictating the end of the civil war. But contrary to what could be ascertained, events during the 1990s, apart from the 1992 elections, have little to add in terms of explaining the relationship between the Ovimbundu, Angolan society and UNITA. In fact, the 1990s were overwhelmingly characterised by war weariness and a deep disillusionment with UNITA, not by novel forms of ethnic mobilization or expropriation. Even though UNITA's mobilization became openly on ethnic grounds, with a massive use of Umbundu language – although the party did incorporate a surprising number of Bacongo people previously in the FNLA, after the 1993 massacre in Luanda – these appeals did not deepen the already established perception that the Ovimbundu were intimately connected to UNITA, even though many opposed it after the 1992 elections. In essence, it was a decade that further divided Angolan society, a division based primarily not necessarily on political identity, as it had been during the 1970s and 80s, but on elite power struggles, frequently against the desires of the population, as was clearly shown by popular resistance against UNITA's retaking of the city of Huambo in 1993 and during the siege to the city of Kuito, Bié. Above all, this disillusionment with UNITA showed that many Ovimbundu were no longer willing to continue suffering through a war they no longer understood or felt necessary, by following a party which also imposed its degree of violence upon its own members. This said the first section of this chapter deals with the political consequences of being Ovimbundu in the immediate post-war period, which may attribute them with a political identity linked to UNITA. It shows how reconciliation and integration after many decades of war was not without its problems, especially given the perception that the Ovimbundu were, and are, UNITA supporters, thus deepening their own sense of marginalization. Several parts of interviews are used in this first section, mainly pertaining to the people's return from the bush into the cities, the differences between people in these two sides of the fence, to issues of post-war integration, social and political reconciliation and the use of negative stereotypes. I focus specifically on these negative stereotypes, grounded on ethnic and regional identities, in order to conceptualise three epithets popularly used that serve as informative conceptions of the "other", the Ovimbundu. This section is concluded by showing that there indeed exist dynamics of generating difference in relation to the Ovimbundu that may –

depending on context – serve to limit their social mobility. This limitation is constructed abstractly and although adding to the Ovimbundu's own sense of marginalization in post-war Angola – a marginalization which assumes various shapes and languages and supposedly includes the entire spectrum of the political class –, may be inserted in a pattern of power relations that interviewees deemed to be akin to a pyramidal hierarchy of access to power and to the resources of the state, where the political elite is at the top and opposition parties and the rural populations are at the bottom.

This last chapter is concluded with a brief exposition of the interaction between ethnicity and citizenship in post-war Angola, mainly by looking at power-relations between the Ovimbundu and the MPLA state as they have been described by interviewees referred in the first section. The issue of citizenship in Angola is shown to be tightly connected with how the MPLA extended its reach to the entire country after the war and how it had to integrate and accommodate a sector of the population that was never under its control since independence. The concept of exclusion is purposely avoided in favour of a more nuanced approach, provided by Egin Isin's logics of alterity. It is due to the generation and perpetuation of difference that the Ovimbundu may be considered both citizens and strangers at the same time. This duality is examined against the backdrop of the party-state's political and social grasp on the country and the challenges it experienced in order to include many who were strangers to its rule into its fold. It finally concludes that processes of post-war state formation and the inherited dynamics of the civil-war, especially the dynamics of ethno-regional identities explained in the first section, serve to inform the rights of citizenship – and thus access to the state -, a citizenship that must first pass through membership in the MPLA in order to be considered citizenship in the Angolan state.

ON INTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION

Right after the end of the civil war in Angola, the country emerged not only completely different from what it set out after independence, but, more importantly, it emerged with one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP) in the African continent. While there

was no desire to revert policy choices back to the immediate post-independence period urgency lay in deciding how to proceed with the incredible amount of IDP's, particularly those who were in the bush with UNITA. After all, albeit without a leader and with a cease-fire and peace accords signed, they still represented the enemy and were still heavily armed.

After so many decades of war, the Angolan government was finally focused on entering the bandwagon of reconstruction and development. Yet, to begin it, the issue of integrating these people first had to be addressed. As such, three phases can generally be traced that attempted to do so: firstly, the government of Angola in the person of President José Eduardo dos Santos declared an amnesty, a general pardon to all those who fought for UNITA, which the government had always considered to be a rebel group; secondly, UNITA's soldiers, usually accompanied by their families, were grouped in cantonments, disarmed and finally free to integrate the new Angolan society; thirdly, and as a consequence, hundreds of thousands of people began returning to their villages and cities, back from the bush.

The most positive aspect of the immediate post-war period in Angola was the general pardon and apparent commitment to embrace the other "side", something many in the MPLA still evoke not only to emphasize their leader's great capacity for compromise and peace-making, often deemed the *arquitecto da paz* (architect of peace), but also UNITA's ungratefulness for the government's pardon, which could have been provided through the barrel of a gun. The popular expression "*irmãos desavindos*", enemy brothers, that began circulating already during the war, came to symbolize not only national unity and belonging but also the tragedy and futility of war. It was meant to say that those who battled in the past were still brothers and one needs to pardon family.

On the surface, it appeared Angolans, too weary of conflict, were able to generally come together and accept reconciliation. No longer did Angola preoccupy international institutions and foreign governments, apart from a few NGO's concerned with the amount of landmines and IDP's in the country. Yet, as will be demonstrated in this section, this reconciliation and integration was not without its problems. Even though there appeared to occur little skirmishes and acts of vengeance, it simply shows that grievance did not manifest on the realm of physical

violence. Only by encompassing more criteria can one begin to find the clues to analyse the success or failure of post-war processes of reconciliation and integration for the Ovimbundu, since these processes are not only threatened by physical violence.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge that, besides several speeches and commitments to peace, reconciliation and reconstruction, the Angolan government never officialised a committee to achieve such goals, worlds apart far from the efforts of post-apartheid South Africa. Angolans were essentially left to settle their differences and engage in a new age to rebuild a new Angola without any sort of official reconciliation framework. As one interviewee shows,

> "Since the war ended there were some contradictions, for instance you killed my family. But that had to be forgotten, an amnesty. Even if someone killed, they would come back. The MPLA government itself said UNITA's men are coming in. We here and the one who killed, we have to support these people because they are also arriving impaired. That was the policy the MPLA adopted, that the people arriving from the bush were to join the community. Death was no longer accepted. [So that was the policy that allowed some kind of understanding between the two parts?] Yes. For instance you and me, we are brothers. You're on the other side and I'm here in this one. Now that my brother came, even if he killed, I have to take him as my brother, because if I kill more the government will go against me. This [revenge killings] lasted a little bit, this hatred. The men were coming, that one killed I shall also eliminate him. This happened, there were deaths. But it began ending little by little."[474]

This interviewee speaks of the reconciliation policy of the government as a norm, a rule to follow. People returning from years in the bush were to be embraced and integrated into the "community". But if those returning are framed in family or community terms, as this interviewee did, most likely in the central highlands the majority would be Ovimbundu people. If

---

[474] Interview 2.

this premise is accepted the next logical step would be to ask about the connection between having a common ethnicity – ethnic solidarity – and peaceful reconciliation. One interviewee acknowledged the former had a positive contribution on the latter but delineated differences in reconciliation between people of different ethnic groups:

> "[Did a shared language and culture help to appease political difference between those who came from the bush and those in town?] They united! That guy with the MPLA speaks Umbundu, we are from the same region! Sometimes they even returned to the same *kimbo*! I'm an official in the armed forces, former FAPLA. General ***[475] is my cousin, we are building a fazenda. His father is my father's brother. [I told him] "You are general there [in UNITA], but here I'm your elder. This chunk [of land] is mine, that is yours. "You're right." "I thought you had all died". So were in this phase now".[476]

In some cases, family may have provided a support basis for a smoother reconciliation, especially since Angolans were generally left to resolve their differences without any formal support. A mantle of apparent amnesia and forgiveness was set to allow the frantic development the government wanted to pursue. However, many Ovimbundu – as seen largely connoted with the losing side – did not find reconciliation and integration in the new Angola instantaneous or facile, beginning with the process of cantonment. As one NGO worker comments,

> "Many people did not return spontaneously. A good part went through the areas of cantonment. Civilians and soldiers, though normally it would only have been the soldiers, but since the soldiers travelled with their families, where should the family go while he was cantoned? So normally these areas of cantonment were really big villages, where you'd find children, women, disabled people, everything. There was also a group of soldiers. Now UNITA says they only had 23.000 demobilized soldiers in this province [of Huambo]. But

---

[475] General's identity reserved.

[476] Interview 10.

in the areas of cantonment I think Huambo had at least 70.000 thousand people. Obviously not everyone was demobilized here, they could have gone to Luanda, Benguela, various areas, besides being integrated in the FAA [Forças Armadas de Angola[477]]. But there still were many people in the cantonment areas. Although many were anxious to return, they were also scared of what they would find, who they will find. They were promised things, some pans, money, but they were not getting them. So it was very difficult for them to leave the cantonment areas. In some areas they were literally forced. The area of Menga which is Kwanza-Sul [province] is geographically Kwanza-Sul but to the FAA it belonged to Huambo, because the bridge over the Kwanza River was broken and also because a good amount of cantoned people were from Huambo anyway. That area they burned. One day the government went there and burned everything to force people to go back [to Huambo]."[478]

This interviewee argues that the government provided cantonment but ultimately forced people to resettle to their places of origin, advancing the idea that people would be better integrated there. Indeed, either in rural or urban spaces, many could have family members waiting, a house or land that once belonged to their forefathers or even a *soba* who could recognise them or remember their ancestors. But the idea that people were not able to return to their place of origin was a common theme in many interviews. Indeed, one does not need to travel much in the central highlands to realize that new villages have germinated to accommodate many who are not able to return:

"I saw, less than three weeks ago. I saw one on my way to Bailundo, but the one I asked about was in Bié. I asked a young man what it was, because we had asked help to be taken to a certain point. I noticed he was Tchokwe [therefore, not from the central plateau]. He was saying they came and stayed there because they could no longer return [to their place

[477] Angolan Armed Forces.
[478] Interview 14.

of origin]. Much of this situation is political. In the village where I have built houses, I noticed people from both sides, but they manage to work together."[479]

Some were not able to return to their place of origin exactly because they were no longer accepted in their family or "community". As one MPLA official noted,

"What really helped was the message of the comrade President of the Republic, of reconciliation, of peace consolidation. This message was repeated many times. The MPLA structure had guidelines, all of the *comités de acção* [local committees] to promote this tranquillity in tribute to peace. But in the villages, the neighbourhoods, families, now this is diminishing but the first years after the war there were conflicts. Some who had been in the bush as UNITA soldiers for example, were not able to join their families, because during the war some went to their village and killed, did things. So returning was not easy. If you go around Huambo [province] you can find some new villages built near the roads. Many of these new villages belong to people who were soldiers. But soldiers in other regions, for example Bié and other places. Due to the problems they have there, they were not able to return, they were rejected. So they had to build their houses here. There are villages like that. There were a lot of people who went to the bush and when they came back, due to the government's policy, were reconciled, entered and built in peace. But some were not able to return to their place of origin due to these types of situations." [480]

To avoid the consequences of past behaviour many decided to settle in the cities, since in a city one may enjoy greater anonymity:

"A lot of people took the decision to settle down in the city of Huambo because in a big city it is always easier to hide a little, always easier to find a *biscate* [a temporary low paid

[479] Interview 6.
[480] Interview 4.

job] without being seen as belonging to a particular party or being new in the area. Because who in the Cacilhas [a neighbourhood in Huambo] knows people from Kandinba? Nobody does. You can leave Kandinba and look for work in Cacilhas. If they ask you, you can say you lived in Kandinba but you lost your job there because your employer said this and that, so you may still find work. A lot of people came here [to the city of Huambo] because of this. Some were also recruited by organizations, because we knew some had education, were motivated and all that, but to the rest was very difficult, people could wait years to be recruit into the public service. Then they were recruited into levels. People who were nurses during the colonial period but had the 4th degree of the colonial school, all of a sudden were considered nurses with the contemporary 4th degree. And the 4th degree of the colonial period cannot be compared with the 4th degree of today. Then, a person with thirty years of [work] experience would suddenly lose all antiquity. So their wages were at 10, 11 thousand kwanzas [approximately 100 dollars], as a nurse assistant, that sort of thing. It was really difficult. Many of these people are still studying to be able to rise a bit."[481]

But regardless of geographic context, urban, peri-urban or rural, interviewees always noted that people's political options in the past are generally still meaningful in the post-war period. While referring to the civil war interviewees were strict on geographic divisions, between an urban-rural or better yet, a city-bush axis, when referring to the post-war period they never made such distinctions. They generally referred to "they" (or "we") as the ones coming back and provided their opinion on integration and reconciliation without mentioning any geographic dynamics. One interviewee did refer to people who lived in the city and went to the bush with UNITA but were nonetheless unwelcomed upon return:

"They were accepted normally, language [in common] also gave certain fluency to the people who came from the other side, they were recognized, but it is a very slow process.

[481] Interview 14.

> You can see, every now and then, when there is a small protest, [someone quickly complains] they [UNITA] are the ones who killed us. This exists. This taint will not end today. I don't think so. I know people who lived in the cities but went to the other side [to the bush with UNITA], so they were not welcomed [upon return]. [Do they experience difficulties in finding work?] That is it. I really feel there are difficulties in their integration in society. (…) I have a cousin who is from the other side, came from the bush, even though he's not from here [Huambo or the central highlands], he speaks this language, and he's always a little marginalised. Well…not really because he lets himself [he's not proactive] and the others should also be opened, but depends on the person (…) most of them [who came from the bush] are working as moto taxi drivers, but there are those who studied so they also have their place. But that taint will not end today, because I have also heard people saying, they are with UNITA, they came from the bush. It never stopped."[482]

One UNITA supporter attributes this difficulty in integration to politics, in particular to the connotation people have with the party.

> "When people returned [from the bush] they thought they would find a different society. Since UNITA had that fall in 1992, many leaders and generals dead, others incorporated in the FAA, it lost everything, so it had to restart. (…) UNITA lost the war and that was that, those who are connoted with the flag of UNITA practically do not have any chance, it was necessary a lot of sweat, a lot of struggle. Now, some went to the army, to the police and others remained as they were. Only a small amount made it. Those who are not in the police or in the FAA, only a small amount made it, because there is no opportunity."[483]

The connotation with the "flag of UNITA" is perhaps the most common issue pointed by those interviewed, who at any given time were with the movement, to explain hindrances in their

[482] Interview 6.
[483] Interview 9.

social mobility, alongside the suggestion that the government remains utterly corrupt. One interesting fact is that this political connotation does not appear to require personal acquaintance with a person in order to generate "otherness". The connotation with UNITA is essentially built upon specific criteria that informs and serves to attribute political identity to people, not necessary pending upon ethnic background. For instance, the abilities one typically learns when growing up in rural settings:

> "When I arrived at Negage [in Uíge Province] it had already been occupied by the MPLA government. People would no longer dare to go hunting. Where they had survived many years by hunting and actually liked to eat game meat, it became very hard to hunt. I was invited to have dinner at someone's house. I was laughing and asking what the food was because if it wasn't good I wouldn't go. He said no, you'll see. And I was always joking asking him what it was. When I arrived at his house it was game meat. I was very happy but he said I mustn't tell anybody because there those who ate game meat were considered to be UNITA and could suffer with that. Those who can hunt are UNITA."[484]

Difference was constructed upon a myriad of markers. Answering the question of whether people who came from the bush were in any way different from the ones living in town one interviewee remarked,

> "A lot a difference really, because also in political terms, many people from both sides, when they saw the other, they were different. For example, there was a period here when it was said that those who were in the bush had tails. This really happened. That they were monkeys and what not. So when these people came here [to the city of Huambo] they found these obstacles, many said our culture there [in UNITA areas] was different. Between brothers there was familiarity, good friendship. Things began changing from 2004/2005 to

---

[484] Interview 14.

this date. For example, one could not, in any way, say that you were on the other side [UNITA's side]. You would automatically lose opportunities. This is still recurrent, exclusion, we lived a period of very strong exclusion. So many families to this day are not solidary, they can't understand that if some people went and others stayed, it was because of a greater cause, not fruit of free choice, but obliged to follow that trail. Some families are not able to mingle due to this fact. I said some people are not able to return to their place of origin due to the many wrongs they committed, so families and society became very upset but during these last years there has been a sort of equilibrium."[485]

The attribution of animal characteristics to people was a common way of generating (or maintaining) "otherness".

"The malignancy the MPLA began creating, educating people as if those who came from the bush were animals. Were animals, have tails, only do bad things. Those who were born in the 70s and lived the entire sixteen wars [the first sixteen years of war] with the MPLA were educated like this, that UNITA were animals. Many were not aware that their brothers and uncles went to the bush. But when Dr. Savimbi came people began noticing, he was a very nice person. Those here in Huambo, Andulo or Uige saw Dr. Savimbi, with all this sympathy, the conversations, he liked to speak with the youth, cheered, played, ran, people saw him running, giving money, they saw that what they were told was not true. Even this war of 1994 when we withdrew and left from Huambo to Bailundo, many young people went to the army who had nothing to do with UNITA. When they finally realized that it was all a lie, after all UNITA was for peace, for democracy, for unity and national reconciliation, they had to abandon the MPLA."[486]

[485] Interview 7.
[486] Interview 9.

These interviews show that people still have points of contention but alongside the MPLA/UNITA binary. Whether with the MPLA, UNITA or simply running from the war, they all refer to politics – not ethnicity – as the crucial element at the centre of the dispute. Proof of this is that all interviewees refer to the "people" on the other side, "UNITA people", not to the Ovimbundu, the Nganguela or the Tchokwe in particular. I have already noted in chapter two that Ovimbundu ethnicity during colonialism was very rarely a defining element in people's agency despite of all the processes of modernisation they experienced. There exists continuity in this. After the war, ethnic solidarity did not serve as a firm base for understanding and rapprochement. Only one interviewee mentioned language as an incentive for positive integration but quickly shifted to family as the basic unit of integration. However, people who have family ties or grew up in the same area hardly need to recur to common ethnicity as a primary ground for reconciliation. Family does appear to be the closest, primary basic unit of post-war integration, but as noted not without several constraints. The government's pardon and firm message of reconciliation also helped clear the enmity among many. But what is relevant here is that among Ovimbundu strangers, even those from the same city, ethnicity did not appear to have been salient in reconciliation, certainly not as valid as political membership or personal history.

Nevertheless, the attribution of political identities is a constant reality. As these interviews show, in Angola identity is primarily attributed on political grounds but based on secondary characteristics thought to ascribe party membership to an individual or to a group of people. Secondary because to attribute political identity to a group of people one needs to encompass other salient markers, thus entering the realm of history, language, region of origin, ethnicity and religion, among others. A more complex dynamic emerges when politics calls upon these markers, especially ethnicity, to generate "otherness". In fact, the creation of a mental picture of the "other" through the ascription of animal characteristics was only one of the simplest among other complex ways of differentiating people.

The political "other" in post-war Angola, with relation to the Ovimbundu, appears to be built around two sets of criteria pertaining to socio-political and ethno-regional elements.[487] Interview evidence suggests a two-fold analysis. On the one hand, difference generated inside the central highlands, based on socio-political background; on the other hand, difference generated outside the central highlands, based on ethno-regional background. Among the Ovimbundu in the central highlands, the attribution of socio-political identities after the war continued to distinguish the "UNITA people" from the "MPLA people". Social identities merged into political identities: being a member of the Igreja Evangélica Congregacional de Angola (IECA) or having an assumed UNITA supporter among family members appears to have been enough for the attribution of a political identity. One of the specific characteristics attributed to "UNITA people" was the ability to speak Umbundu fluently. Many who remained in the cities of the central highlands during the war, under MPLA control, are generally not able to speak Umbundu as well as those who went with UNITA.[488] For those in the cities during the period of civil war and much after it, even today, speaking the vernacular languages was considered backward, devoid of modernity. Schools did not and still do not teach the national languages to their students. Urban parents would prohibit or not encourage their children to speak Umbundu, leaving them able to learn their language only when taught by the *mais velhos* (elders), usually grandparents. Behavioural characteristics, as seen, were also involved in this attribution of socio-political identity. These pertained to the specific skills one typically learns in rural or "bush" areas. "People who were able to hunt, gather foods, honey, who knew which plants and mushrooms were edible, which plants contain portions of salt, would be suspected of having been "UNITA people".[489]

---

[487] These considerations as well as the epithets that derive from them have been addressed in my work elsewhere. See Martins, Vasco (2015), "Ovimbundu identity attributions in post-war Angola", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 4, pp. 853-867.

[488] UNITA promoted the use of national languages. One woman said that she was able to learn Latin, French and Umbundu during her schooling in Jamba. Other national languages, albeit mostly southern, were also available for students to study. Interview 7. See also Brinkman, Inge, "War and Identity in Angola", pp. 216–17.

[489] Interview 14.

Outside the central highlands the attribution of identities becomes more diffuse. Ethno-regional elements are more salient, due to the regional and cultural diversity in cities outside the central highlands, especially in Luanda. Socio-political elements are also much less personal and straightforward, as an Ovimbundu person in Luanda or any other city is largely anonymous, his family name unknown. But political inclination can easily be revealed when discussing politics with friends and neighbours, or attending political rallies.

> "It is only now that this language is stopping. The bailundos, the bailundos. All those who came from the south to Luanda were called bailundo, sulanos, this brought great tribalism into the fold. But now we [the church] are fighting, because this is no longer possible, there is no need to keep this."[490]

Outside the central highlands, the attribution of ethno-regional identities appears to be much more associated with labour allocation. Many Ovimbundu are still recruited to work in farms and plantations:

> "When I went to work at our *fazenda* in Uíge, I came looking for workers here [in the central highlands], and took them there, because I knew they are good farmers and more humble than the people from Uíge."

Even though there is no basis to connect class and ethnicity in the Ovimbundu case, the idea that the "bailundo workers" (*trabalhadores bailundos*) are naturally predisposed to work in this type of occupation is still current.

The regional division here exposed serves to underline a set of three identity concepts attributed to the Ovimbundu that appeared widely in the interviews. These identity concepts were not applied consistently. While in certain contexts some connotations might be utilized

[490] Interview 12.

pejoratively, even as means of exclusion in their most extremist form, others simply served to define "first impressions". These identity constructs influenced, although did not necessarily dictate, the overall interaction between people with different ethno-regional and sociopolitical backgrounds.

The first connotation, the only one to include both socio-political identity attributions inside the central highlands and outside based on ethno-regional criteria, is "kwacha". "Kwacha" is an Umbundu word roughly translated as "to awaken". It was widely used by UNITA during the guerrilla war as means of mobilisation and of "awakening" people to the struggle at hand, especially against "Russian and Cuban imperialism". People would be called "kwachas", whether they were *Forças Armadas de Libertação de Angola* (FALA) soldiers, members of UNITA, or simply people from the central highlands, a reference that lingers today. One interviewee describes the attribution of this connotation based on socio-political identity and ethno-regional conceptions:

> "Once a renowned singer told me this: 'You can be who you are, you can speak at Parliament in the name of the MPLA. José Eduardo likes you, gave you a house, gave you a car, but I'll tell you something, just because you are from Huambo, you are kwacha, you are UNITA. You can be MPLA, but when you are there [in Luanda], because you are Umbundu, they will not have a good heart with you. You are kwacha.' I believed him."[491]

The second and third connotations – used outside the central highlands – are "bailundo" and "sulano", both referring to a specific region but also to an ethnic group, in essence, to an ethno-regional background. "Bailundo" refers not specifically to the old kingdom of M'Balundu, but rather to a people in general, the Ovimbundu. It stems from the colonial period, when the "bailundo workers" would be recruited or forced to work in the very public and private enterprises associated with the white patron or with the colonial state. [492] This left a mark on the

[491] Interview 10.

[492] This stereotype was already mentioned in chapter three.

opinion that many have of this ethnic group, accusing them of never rebelling, being "humble" and passive, while also implying different processes of modernisation.[493] "A person who cannot drive, or does not know how to use a lift"[494] are some of the characteristics attributed to the "bailundos", a pejorative term to refer to this group.

> "If you're in the north, in Luanda, everyone who is not from the north is called Bailundos, in a pejorative way. People from Huambo still feel inferior. And what's worse, I think you are informed of this, in the National Assembly a MPLA deputy had the nerve to call UNITA deputies Sulanos, but really pejoratively and in contempt."[495]

The third connotation, "sulano", refers to the general south of the country. Even though the Ovimbundu are by far the largest (albeit not the only) ethnic group inhabiting the centre–west regions of Angola – not the south – the use of the "sulano" expression tends to be associated with them.[496] The "povo do sul" was, for many years, the "povo da UNITA", or UNITA's people. However, "sulano", alongside the expression "povo da UNITA" – a term frequently used by UNITA itself – seems silently to encompass both the Tchokwe and the Nganguela ethnic groups. Yet, much like the "kwacha" connotation, the Ovimbundu connection with "sulano" and "povo da UNITA" appears to be the one to linger in post-war Angola.

> "In Luanda you hit someone they immediately say you're from the south, because you hit, the [violent] attitude of the sulanos. Also when I worked for Handicap [after the war], I worked with some Bacongo people, they really said, you sulanos broke a cane, you

---

[493] See chapter three.
[494] Interview 15.
[495] Interview 13.
[496] The term itself may imply a political distinction. The real south of Angola is sparsely populated. It is constituted mainly of desert and savannah, and is home to peoples who were not represented politically in the civil war as a group. Although the central highlands are located in the centre–west part of the country, they are in fact the most densely populated area south of Luanda.

> Ovimbundu, because what happens there in the north, the government itself, people say sulanos can never govern Angola. All this enters people's heads. (…) Some people sell their dignity for a meagre 1000 kwanzas. They forget patriotism, to love one's land. We are influenced by material commodities, because today there aren't many Angolans who have a feeling of preserving their own dignity. If someone shows, here take this because you have to do this. He'll accept because of economic circumstances. Everything to stand out."[497]

This connotation overlaps with that of the "bailundo". It considerably simplifies the perception of ethno-regional backgrounds, by converting all these perceived identities into an Ovimbundu–"bailundo"–"sulano" axis. Revealed in its most extreme form, all Ovimbundu are "bailundo" or "sulano" and, as a consequence, UNITA. However, this convergence of connotations crystallising in the Ovimbundu–UNITA connection seems to apply only in specific sets. Indeed, the "bailundo" or "sulano" tags do not have as implicit a political reference as the "kwacha" connotation. The first two appear to express backwardness, lack of modernity or people who are willing to work for nothing, never rebel or protest. The terms are, and were used in the past, for manual labourers, often in agriculture, which is considered a menial occupation. Yet, the "kwacha" political connotation, as one interviewee argues, is introduced when an Ovimbundu criticises Angolan politics, immediately tagging him as "opposition", but also mixed with the other two connotations. Hence, whenever any political criticism is made, all three connotations are fused into a single straightforward identity attribution:

> "we can't go to Luanda and say something wrong about the government, the president or the regime. There will be no analysis besides "you are UNITA". If you are sulano you are UNITA".[498]

[497] Interview 7.
[498] Interview 16.

> “Today it is almost impossible to separate cultural issues from political ones. It shouldn’t be that way but unfortunately it is. This is the dividing barrier. It is almost impossible to separate. I’ll give you an example. If you are introduced to a group of people in Luanda they’ll say this: this is Francisco, he has this many years, he’s studying this and that and he is from Huambo. For many people they’ll think, “oh this one is from Huambo, he is with UNITA”. [Will they act accordingly or will it depend on their political views?] It will depend on their political views, that is what they do. [So party association is more salient than any sort of tribalism?] The two things are associated. I can be with the MPLA but the fact that I’m from the south that will make it as I’m always connoted as being closer to UNITA than with the MPLA. I can give 150% of my knowledge and time, I can dedicate myself 100% to the party. But upon the hour of recognition and promotion or when more delicate issues need to be addressed I can be excluded simply from being from here.”[499]

One UNITA official in Huambo contextualised these dynamics into different tiers of citizenship, which according to him severely limit social mobility:

> “I consider that this phase, the post-independence period, the Ovimbundu group is still very much marginalised. So you have an idea, if you’re in the north, in Luanda, everyone who is not from the north is called Bailundos, in a pejorative way. People from Huambo still feel inferior. And what’s worse, I think you are informed of this, in the National Assembly a MPLA deputy had the nerve to call UNITA deputies Sulanos, but really pejoratively and in contempt. When a deputy says this in a sovereign institution, you can imagine in what kind of country we are. For them the Ovimbundu, the sulanos generally, the Quiocos, the Bacongo, the Nganguela, the Cuanhama are all backward, they don’t figure in the first line of society. But this is how the leaders, the Angolan political elite thinks. (…) Unfortunately there are people, above all those with little education, that have to go to other areas, to the

[499] Interview 15.

> fazendas. What is shocking is that if you go to Luanda now, those ladies that clean the streets, they are from this region [Huambo or central highlands]. They are Ovimbundu. It is the same logic as during the colonial period. Some are from Malange, others from Benguela, other areas. The people employed in cleaning services in Luanda are from these areas. No one is from Luanda. This is deliberate. So unfortunately this allows the mentality of some groups to prevail, that the Ovimbundu are second class, third class Angolans. I really consider this a strategy of the actual leadership of the country. The political family, the presidential family, is on another level [within the first, second and third class spectrum]. The MPLA in certain ways is also in another dimension. After that the MPLA in other regions. Then comes UNITA, because they seem not to be Angolan citizens. They are second class, third class people. This situation is real."[500]

This UNITA official firmly bases issues of "otherness" in the politics of ethnicity and regionalism. He depicts a social stratum where, besides the President's family at the top, the MPLA in Luanda comes first, the MPLA in other regions comes second and finally people from others regions and UNITA's people come last. There may be a pattern here, but I suspect not so dramatic or prone to exclusion. The most common grievance I have found among the Ovimbundu interviewed from either party in the central highlands was the sense that the MPLA government does not provide them with the same opportunities as it does to people of other regions and ethnic backgrounds, particularly those in Luanda. Why this is so, for many, resides on the basis of their connotation with UNITA, a connotation that is asserted in ethno-regional and socio-political criteria.

Regionalism, and by consequence ethnicity, is mentioned as one key element for difference. Interviewees spoke of the case of Paulo Kassoma, a MPLA politician born in Luanda to Ovimbundu parents, widely known in the country, who was once the governor of the province

[500] Interview 13.

of Huambo and prime-minister of Angola. Some believe he was never able to further climb the party ladder because of his ethno-regional background:

> "But the north is like that, you'll see it will be hard for us to have a president from the south, it will be hard. This has to globalize, there must be a psychological struggle. We must put a great maestro, educated, to fight so we can have a president from here. But there in the central committee of the MPLA, he only needs to be from Huambo [to be rejected], we have Paulo Kassoma. He was prime-minister, vice-president of the National Assembly, now deputy, but he was prime-minister. At the time they took him down, there was a prime-minister and a president. If they're going to put a vice-president in this new structure, he should be the one, as prime-minister, to ascend to vice-president of Angola, not take him down from prime-minister to the assembly [to deputy]. It was like that. Because Kassoma is Umbundu, his parents are Umbundu, his ethnicity is from here. When he came here [as governor of the province of Huambo] Huambo grew. Today he is boss in the MPLA, everything passes through him, he rose to be deputy, he's in charge of the central committee, when a person goes to be prime-minister he evaluates. Everything goes through him. But he never reaches the top. He stays there, is honest, works well, he could reach higher. Now we have Manuel Vicente, but Manuel Vicente does not have more qualifications than Kassoma."[501]

The idea that an Ovimbundu person may climb high in the MPLA is not new. But the impression that the same person will never reach the "top" and will always stay behind working for the benefit of others is common in the central highlands:

> "They're behind the top, they never appear. [So there is no tribalism?] There is, there really is. [Exemplifying] I know the southern man is good, I'll put him as assistant. He'll never

[501] Interview 10.

appear [publicly]. Then the boss is removed, the assistant remains an assistant and I'll put another person from the north to the top position. The assistant always remains there, he won't rise, just push up the other from the north. It is always like that. Only if there is no one does the vice [assistant] rises. But we already know the parties are related to each area. So you won't be sad. Because you know what is happening, Angolans know that our political parties are tribal. And it is normal that that happens. I believe if one day another party goes [to power], he'll work the same way. It is a cycle. [So no one party can unite everyone?] Hardly. Maybe were waiting for CASA-CE. Maybe. (…) the three parties were really created because of tribalism. Tribalism created the parties, were from the south we'll take one party. Those from the north, that one is their party, etc."[502]

This rationale is used to describe many other Ovimbundu elites in the MPLA, as one UNITA official comments:

"[Someone said because a person is Ovimbundu he'll never reach the top, he'll always remain an assistant?] I'll tell you one thing, they are in a subordinate condition. [Is that the case of Paulo Kassoma?] Great, and I'll give you more examples. The issue of the Minister of Foreign Affairs [Georges Chicoti, formerly with UNITA], the issue of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. You can officially hold the title but have no power. The Chief of Staff of the FAA has no powers, General Nunda. Firstly he was an assistant for many years. He wasn't rising because he is UNITA, or originated from UNITA. Moreover, he is Ovimbundu. In this case we figuratively broke those barriers of political and tribal origin. He was put as Chief of Staff. But was also given two assistants which reduce his power. People know they are figurines [akin to puppets]. The same issue with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Chicoti. He is officially the top chief of Angolan diplomacy, but everyone knows he has no power. The ones who manage power are the others. The same

[502] Interview 8.

thing in relation to Mr. Kassoma. The MPLA has to free itself from these ghosts, these tribal divisions, this is not what matters."[503]

To some of my interviewees, mostly those who were or are UNITA members, regionalism seems to be not only patent in political positions. Economic and social development at the provincial level, continues this UNITA official, is also a matter of concern:

"We need to promote, to incentivise people to better their education. Access to education. But this education the regime denies in other areas. You will understand, here is the state budget [for 2013] I am a deputy for the national assembly. Education at the kindergarten level, the government is providing 140 thousand dollars. For the entire country. 140 thousand dollars. 14 million kwanzas, this is not possible. If nationwide we have 140 thousand dollars, imagine the more discriminated areas. And worse, public investments in Huambo have decreased, in Bié have decreased, other provinces, the provinces of the centre south were the more affected with the approval of this state budget. This is deliberate. Other provinces are also not doing well. The essential stays in Luanda. But not in administration or social governance. No, it remains concentrated. This is the problem we have. The Ovimbundu are really considered second class citizens, are considered workers of the most basic services, worthy for those menial jobs. [Meaning a stratification of sorts?] That is really, that is the big truth. That really happens. Leaders who don't have the capacity to look at this problem as a national problem only make mistakes. But while we have the MPLA governing, the group I don't mean the MPLA because it isn't the MPLA which is governing. One or two families are governing. While this posture remains as a governing strategy for the management of power, things will only get worse. The great majority of soldiers of FALA and FAPLA, are also from here, the centre region. So, the Ovimbundu are good to be soldiers and cleaning employees in Luanda. When it becomes

[503] Interview 13. See also Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", p. 170.

necessary for one to become a minister, it needs to be a weak ministry, only for the English to see [meaning it is a façade], to transmit the idea that the government is national."[504]

Another interviewee also believes certain districts where Umbundu is spoken have little support for development, but notes positive changes in this respect:

[Do you think economic and social development at the regional level reflects ethnic difference?] I won't say no, supposedly yes even though UNITA is much weaker. But I believe that also has a big connection to the little support for the development to the provinces which speak Umbundu. One example of this is the district [*município*] of Chicala-Choloanga. It has a comuna called Samboto which is one of the least supported by the government, including the NGO's, through all these years. The NGO's only go where the government allows them to go. So there were always impediments for them to go to those areas. After the war ended people settled there. There were only two NGO's working there, which were ***[505] and DW, which built a school and nothing else. No one really took interest in that area because all the people who settled there are people who came from the bush. But supposedly yes, the little support to these provinces of Benguela, Huambo, mainly Huambo, is due to that, to that exclusion. (…) Now they have established a policy of using the local workforce, so things are beginning to work. Throughout all these years a lot changed, people changed, we have younger people a little bit more open minded, like our administrator [of the city of Huambo], who is changing this a little. Also people who come from Luanda created work difficulties because they need a house, they're always away with their family and do not meet their obligations [meaning local people may be preferred]."[506]

---

[504] Interview 13.
[505] Person's anonymity reserved.
[506] Interview 13.

One former refugee in Zambia who returned to Huambo also remained hopeful when telling of his attempts to integrate in Angola:

> "I have tried to enter public service twice, never was accepted. I did the equivalency, as soon as they noted equivalency from Zambia that was enough. Your name won't even be called for the test [to enter public service]. Even if it does, when the result comes your name won't be on it. They say all who went to Zambia are with UNITA. Who is Ovimbundu is with UNITA. This exists today. Even these politicians, when you say you've been to Zambia, their reaction, even their way of speaking changes. You understand that he is thinking that you are with UNITA. When I was with Save the Children (…) my first time working with Save the Children, I suffered attacks from the first-secretary of the MPLA and Dona ***[507]. They always followed me to the office. [What kind of attacks?] To say that you need to have the MPLA membership card because all who work here are with the MPLA and you'll not be safe if you don't have a card. So you have to bring a photograph to have the card. It was an obligation, even I that had arrived a month ago, I had to do it immediately, so I could be at peace. Because they began saying, you arrived from Zambia you are UNITA. And they followed me, but I was not interested, I'm not interested in politics. They kept asking about the photographs. I said I haven't gone to Huambo, when I do I'll take the picture. After that they began to socialize with me, but in the end they understood I was not interested in politics, they understood, but I think deep down they were waiting for me to join UNITA, JURA or a youth movement and start making activities. They were attentive, laughing but waiting for me to cooperate with them. They were controlling my moves."[508]

> "[What of getting equivalency for you studies here? Was it difficult?] It was difficult. It took time. Still, it is hard to survive [even with studies]. Some of us [who migrated to

[507] Person's anonymity reserved.
[508] Interview 19.

> Zambia and returned] have advanced, this time they got it, and those who were already teachers, only this year [2013] were they able to get it [equivalency]. [So Zambian education is not recognised in Angola?] No. You should have considered, all who were in Zambia are with UNITA. [But don't you have your equivalency papers?] Yes I do, I have really tried, this time I had it [the papers], but I don't have morality. [They say] "What? From Zambia? Oh, you have another connection." Even if, just give [*dá só*, meaning even if one pleads]. You do everything, everything goes in, but in the end nothing. But thanks to God, I was making it, one day we will receive. I'm certain of this. Each year that goes by politics is changing and I believe with age we will make it, we will be able to integrate."[509]

Overall, ordinary Ovimbundu believe people appear to rank low in a sort of "hierarchy" of access to the state, the front and only gate to the national economy. Ranking low does not seem to imply an absolute shutdown in social mobility. Rather, it constructs an abstract hierarchical order, which assumes that people associated with UNITA – through the markers described above – should be considered last or be appointed to jobs in less demand. It is obviously dependent upon context and social setting, but many Ovimbundu believe they have fewer opportunities either because they were not born in Luanda or because they are or were in some way associated with UNITA. Many "kupapatas" (motorcycle taxi drivers) in Huambo were actually UNITA people who firmly believe they have no other option of social mobility because of their past and lack of skills, a consequence of years of conflict. Indeed, employment appears to be one of the key elements where these connected ideas manifest themselves.

> "If you are competing for a job with two or three people from Malange, Cabinda, Luanda or other region, you have less probability of getting that job, regardless of your qualifications, no matter how high. You have less probability of getting that job. If you are working for an institution, public private, even in promotions, they look at this [at region of origin]."[510]

[509] Interview 19.
[510] Interview 15.

Social association with people who are UNITA members may also entail consequences, as one UNITA representative in Huambo explains:

> "People in my family are afraid to visit me during the day. They come in the evening, or ask me to meet them in their house or other family members' house. But they are afraid. This is diminishing, this fear, but there is still a lot of it. If you are connected to UNITA you lose rights, have no job, no promotion."[511]

Above all, many Ovimbundu seem to believe that an individual may be privileged or not according to both socio-political and ethno-regional background. While a person's socio-political background remains an important element of identification in the central highlands, stemming from one's assumed political membership in a given party, to church membership or family ties, ethno-regional backgrounds are still the most salient of all. This is especially true for those Ovimbundu who belong to the MPLA, who are either accused of or thought of being "kwachas". When confronted with the idea that surely there would be exceptions and people must be able to escape this dichotomy, interviewees would mostly reflect that there are indeed many Ovimbundu in the government, but those are the "thinkers who stay in the back", supporting the regime but never reaching leadership positions. This was corroborated by a firm belief that the Ovimbundu are educated, hard-working people, and that it is this way because "the white man preferred to educate the southern man, as most conflicts erupted in the north. The northern man was always escaping, crossing borders".[512] There are nuanced but important interactions between these different ideas about Ovimbundu identity. One interviewee outlined the generalisation that emerges from the use of these identity connotations. A hierarchy of access to jobs and opportunities may exist, and an Ovimbundu from the central highlands – "bailundo" or "sulano" – supposedly has fewer opportunities than an Ovimbundu from Luanda. But an Ovimbundu from

[511] Interview 13.

[512] Interview 2.

Luanda can be considered a “kwacha”, thus still having fewer opportunities than an Ambundu from Luanda. When confronted with this framework, the common response of other interviewees to this conclusion was one of acceptance and resignation. Indeed, most Ovimbundu interviewees seem to accept this trend as a given fact, and move on from there to improve their lives. In their search for material advancement, some Ovimbundu have gone as far as denying their roots, an asset that is normally highly valuable in any African setting. Changing birth certificates and family names appears to be an option: “A lot of people who have money, born in the south, have changed their place of birth. They changed their identity, in their identity card to, for instance, Sambizanga”[513]. Changing birthplaces implies that some Ovimbundu do believe that their ethno-regional background is not favourable in multi-ethnic settings. These feelings of social discomfort can produce violent outcomes when people from different ethnic groups or regions interact, as one interviewee suggests:

> “Sometimes we joke with each other, “you were with UNITA, we beat you”, “who you? You were beaten at night!” There is no shock because we are all Ovimbundu. (…) But if an Ambundu says that there will be problems. Where is he from? Luanda? There may be a fight, because he’ll be articulating political tribalism. If he’s from the north, things can turn violent.”[514]

Many of these complaints and arguments appear to match Soares de Oliveira's analysis of the consolidation of the MPLA party-state in the post-war period. Oliveira argues the problem resides in what the party-state is actually willing to offer Angolans:

> “As we have seen, the MPLA has become a mass party, embraced a nation-building rhetoric and seemingly accepted what Justin Pearce calls the challenge of “making everyone povo do *governo*”. In practice, the benefits of the party-state flow through sinuous

[513] Interview 21.

[514] Interview 10.

> channels that exclude most people, most of the time, and as private rather than public goods. The opinion-makers, the educated and the would-be middle classes – in short, "the politically relevant" – are pampered. A string of intermediaries with the masses, exemplified by the *sobas* discussed above, is given a stake of sorts. Everyone else is for the most part dispensed with. The urban poor must be surveyed and entertained, and the more astute amongst them billeted into the lower stratum of the party-state, but they do not have to be bought off or included as whole. The rural poor do not count. Even while the MPLA slowly includes new constituencies, the consolidation of the postwar order is fundamentally premised on exclusion."[515]

There are uncomfortable similarities between Soares de Oliveira's analysis and the paradigm of tiers of citizenship and access to state resources described by the UNITA official cited above. I agree with Oliveira's assessment although the "everyone else" that for the most part is dispensed with appears to be so also on ethnic grounds, among other factors. One interviewee after spending years with UNITA in the bush was captured and integrated into the FAA in 2001, in order to fight his own party. He speaks of this dispensation in party politics terms:

> "I still remember in 2005, we had a normal life, many here even MPLA supporters, family, friends, we had some stability. But the fact that we do not belong to the party, they began breaking us, that thing, that you can't find a job, can't do this and that. They shared everything between them, they entered universities very easily. After they noticed their supporters had higher degrees of education, they created a system of levels of employment or class. Ten years ago, eight, even five years ago it as the *médio* [12th grade]. For you to get a job you need the *médio*. But if you have it and you're not with the party, you won't get it [the job]. Now they've increased, now it's a university education. If you don't have a

---

[515] Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", p. 129.

> university education you will not have any job. This is like the colonial period. For you to be assimilated you needed the 4th degree. (…) this complication exists now. It is better a colonisation than a neo-colonization. Because in colonization you know it is a developed country which came, discovered, so they diminish people. What is happening now is a person who days ago was nothing, now he practically colonizes you. When they have power, he does, he's in charge, and he decides if you are eating today. This is complicated. The MPLA has a colonial system, he practically colonizes the others. And it is not only the *KaLuanda*, it can happen between family members, if one is MPLA and the other UNITA, it already becomes complicated. It is even more complicated when one comes from UNITA, because the other political parties they can humiliate but not too much. The difference between the MPLA and UNITA is complicated. And a lot of people are paying for it. Many also forgot that many went to the bush not by free will, there is no need for the MPLA to make people pay in this way. But this will create a lot of problems, because people now have awakened and think it's time to act. The government has all the possible conditions to end with these differences so the worst does not come to happen. They only need to change the political system, it can continue communist, can continue whatever. But at least think about the future of Angola."[516]

However, the contemporary difference between the MPLA and UNITA to the above mentioned UNITA official is the exclusion derived from the combination of ethnicity and politics:

> "Angola is a plural nation, a plural state. Many ethnicities, many races, many ethnic groups, many languages. Those who want to govern Angola have to know the country they want to govern. They have to know, to respect and promote equality among all peoples. We all should have it. It is not enough to have a pretty constitution with regards to rights. This is

[516] Interview 9.

> not enough. We have to be practical. That is the problem. Now what do we have? The continuation of the colonial philosophy. We have a neo-colonial government. Why? Because some Angolans are considered first class. The regime of exclusion we have, that's why I made reference to two tiers of exclusion. The first motive is exclusion. To enjoy the plenitude of your rights you need to be MPLA. That is the first thing. To have even more rights it is not enough to be MPLA, you need to belong to the core of the governing family, to be a part of President Dos Santos family or very close to it. If you are Angolan and are connected to the presidential family, you have all rights and then some. This is the first motive of exclusion. Then the exclusion of various groups. There is an element referent to colonial history we must acknowledge. It is the base of the foundation of various parties, or various groups, of the various movements. The genesis of these movements. Fortunately Dr. Savimbi was in the FNLA, and before that, at that time, in UPA. He was close to joining the MPLA, but was counselled by the former Foreign Minister of Kenya [not to do so]. Tom Mboya, sent by President Jomo Kenyatta, said he should not join the MPLA. The MPLA was communist and the communist philosophy is contrary to African culture."[517]

This UNITA official again phrases the dynamics of "exclusion" into tiers of citizenship, by constructing a pyramidal model of sorts. Crossing this model with Soares de Oliveira's description of the patronage links of the MPLA one can theoretically identify a "pyramidal" system holding at the top the family of the President and close friends, followed by high ranking military personnel, usually generals and the educated middle-class stratum of MPLA supporters and officials, the MPLA nationwide and finally the political opposition parties and the entire rural world. This "pyramidal" model is categorized by many elements – some already explained – that help to attribute identity to large sections of Angolan society in order to better manage who is to access state resources. Nevertheless, if an abstract "pyramidal" model to evaluate and dictate access to the state is permitted, it may very well pertain not simply to ethnicity or regionalism but

[517] Interview 13.

rather to the complex issue of citizenship in Angola, which still remains high in the political life of the country.

ON CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALISM

For many African states the national question, of who was to belong to the nation and who was not, was posed around the time of independence, often in very complex ways, and continued to be so for several decades. For Angola, due to the divisions established by the civil war, this only became a relevant issue with the end of the conflict in 2002. As with other African states Angola too was "turned on the problems of ensuring perception of equal treatment, measured in terms of resource allocation and the defining of appropriate values and symbols for all the constituent parts of the nation".[518]

Ensuring perception of equal treatment in the access to state resources in theory entails a measure of equal status and citizenship rights to all regardless of background. This perception of equality makes citizenship the element where ethnicity, regionalism and party affiliation congregate, the arena where multi-ethnic states unveil their divisions and do battle. For many of my interviewees, citizenship in the MPLA ecosystem is the card that allows access to the resources of the state, the only gate to the Angolan economy, virtually making it the only way to achieve social mobility. Accordingly, to be an Angolan citizen on the right side of the "fence" is to enjoy a myriad of opportunities that are seemingly inaccessible to many. This lack of access in what concerns the Ovimbundu appears to be built, among other aspects outside the scope of this thesis, upon the identity attributions explained above, the congregation of an Ovimbundu-UNITA axis. But in Angola it is not the centrifugal forces of ethnicity and regionalism that produce discrimination. Instead, discriminatory practices are produced in relation to ethnicity and

[518] Dorman, Sara, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (2007), "Introduction: citizenship and its casualties in Africa", in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL, p.6.

regionalism. They are not the cause of discrimination but rather the target of this, at least perceived, marginalization.

It is well known that ethnicity may severely affect, exclude or threaten national citizenship. How the Ovimbundu experience both citizenship and perhaps "exclusion" from it in Angola remains largely unknown. Hence, it is firstly important to dwell upon the concept of exclusion when it pertains to citizenship. In this realm I use Engin Isin's proposal of preferring a framework pertaining to logics of alterity instead of logics of exclusion. Isin argues against the use of the concept of exclusion as an overarching terminology due to its natural limitations. He notes how the "logic of exclusion presupposes that the excluding and the excluded are conceived as irreconcilable; that the excluded is perceived in purely negative terms, having no property of its own, but merely expressing the absence of the properties of the other; that these properties are essential; that the properties of the excluded are experienced as strange, hidden, frightful, or menacing; that the properties of the excluding are a mere negation of the properties of the other; and the exclusion itself (or confinement or annihilation) is actuated socially."[519] But much of this is no verifiable in the case of the Ovimbundu. They are not conceived as irreconcilable with Angolan society even though at times they may indeed be perceived in negative terms but not purely or always. To assume that they have no property or are expressing the absence of the properties of the other would also represent an error and would widely and incorrectly deny the Ovimbundu subjective property in terms of identity and agency. Additionally, although they may be deemed strange or even frightful and menacing, especially due to their perceived traditional inclination[520], they are certainly not in direct opposition to whomever "other" is constituted. Not only are the properties of the other not a negation of Ovimbundu properties, especially since

---

[519] F. Isin, Egin (2002), *Being political: genealogies of citizenship*, University of Minnesota Press, p. 3.

[520] President José Eduardo dos Santos' argument that the José Kalupeteka followers in Mount Sumi Caàla were reverting to primitive ways and the police action that ensued are revealing of these frightful and menacing properties attributed to the Ovimbundu. See, "PR considera seita "Kalupeteka" uma ameaça à paz e à unidade nacional", *in* Club-K, 20 April 2015, accessed on the 4th August 2015 at http://club-k.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20886:pr-considera-seita-a-luz-do-mundo-uma-ameaca-a-paz-e-a-unidade-nacional&catid=23:politica&lang=pt&Itemid=1123

culture and tradition have little or nothing to do with political identities, but exclusion is also not socially actuated. In fact, the properties of the other are frequently criticized by many Ovimbundu, particularly but not only by those who support UNITA. Essentially, writes Isin, "the logics of exclusion would have us believe in a zero-sum, discrete and binary groups"[521]. It is this binary characteristic of exclusion that imposes limits upon the concept. As such Isin proposes the use of logics of alterity, which are mechanisms of generating and managing "otherness". Logics of alterity are a much more encompassing and nuanced approach, since they "assume overlapping, fluid, contingent, dynamic and reversible boundaries and positions, where agents engage in solidaristic strategies such as recognition and affiliation, agonistic strategies as domination and authorization, or alienating strategies such as disbarment across various positions within the social space."[522] These strategies are applied to investigate citizenship and in doing so "certain categories of otherness that make citizenship itself possible must be considered, which are grouped in three overlapping but distinct forms: strangers, outsiders and aliens."[523]

Of interest to this chapter is the concept of stranger because "strangers are often implicated in a combination of solidaristic and agonistic strategies and technologies".[524] That is to say that, according to most of the interviews here cited, many Ovimbundu are as much recognized and affiliated with by others as they are dominated and pendant of authorizations. Isin recurs to Simmel to note that the stranger is not the one who comes today and goes tomorrow but rather the one who comes today and stays tomorrow. As he explains it, the stranger is "the potential wanderer, who although an insider, interacts as though he is an outsider. (…) Being estranged from a group is a condition of both being a member of the group and being distant from it."[525] If the group in this quote is considered to be the MPLA ecosystem, its supporters and members, then surely many Ovimbundu are estranged from it, since they alter between membership and

---

[521] Isin, Engin, "Being political", p. 30.
[522] Isin, Engin, "Being political", p. 30.
[523] Isin, Engin, "Being political", p. 30. For an explanation of all three forms of categories of otherness see p. 30-33.
[524] Isin, Engin "Being political", p. 31.
[525] Isin, Engin "Being political", p. 30-31.

distance from it. This characterization certainly fits a specific segment of the Ovimbundu, those who are UNITA supporters and members, who generally do not fit or are highly critical of the new Angola referent to the MPLA ecosystem. But the grassroots population in the central highlands, who have little or no access to political power, representation or even social justice, are often inserted in the stranger category and only recognized as citizens when the government requires them to, largely through the activation of patronage networks. But they cannot be considered outsiders. Isin notes subtle differences between the stranger and the outsider category and explains that "strangers are often implicated in a combination of solidaristic and agonistic strategies and technologies, and outsiders often in a combination of agonistic and alienating strategies." Alienating strategies and technologies do not appear to be used in relation to the Ovimbundu by others, much less can they be categorized as aliens in Angola. However, given their distance from the MPLA ecosystem, they can easily be considered strangers implicated in shifting solidaristic and agonistic strategies. Strangers, even though estranged from full citizenship, do belong to the city and are able to associate with citizens. Considering the information provided in this thesis so far, far from being excluded and alienated, the Ovimbundu could be roughly framed as subjected to a citizenship dwindling between the considerations of the logics of alterity, as strangers, and the enjoyment of citizenship rights with limited access when they are needed – usually for electoral purposes - in the new Angola the MPLA is creating, the one where opportunities abound but entrance is limited.

These are neither problems of exclusion nor of national identity versus ethnic identity but problems of alterity, of the generation of "otherness". These conceptions of otherness in relation to citizenship, many times referred by interviewees mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, strike at a fundamental value in Angolan life, the construction of the nation. Citizenship and the logics of alterity are to be framed within a still developing nationalism, which had not the forty years that have passed since independence but the thirteen years of peace to build an all-encompassing national framework.

Turning to the construction of the Angolan nation and the attribution of citizenship, the most critical issue lies not with the Ovimbundu but with the expansion and stretching of the

MPLA's traditional ecosystem to encapsulate all the peoples and regions of Angola. Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, referring to the opportunity the MPLA had after the war to cement its hegemony for the long haul in Angola, argues some of it "pertained to the capacity of the MPLA party-state to digest the debris of the UNITA society and the hinterland world more generally, that is, those who had never been part of the MPLA ecosystem. (…) More insidiously, the MPLA was concerned with the impact of peace in the MPLA society it had controlled since independence."[526] However, much like the principle of plasticity in exact sciences, so too the nation when stretched to fit and include strangers – or outsiders – never reverts to its former form but becomes shaped by new influences, by change, a change the MPLA government seems reluctant to undertake. The strategy appears to be imprisoned by the legacy of a specific historical nationalism, moulded by the civil-war, that constitutes an "us" and a "them" inside the country, defining boundaries of citizenship above or below the level of the state. Above the state, one is a citizen, below a stranger. Yet, the Ovimbundu, mainly those who constituted UNITA's people or live in the rural world, are neither above nor below the state. In fact, like all other Angolan groups, they are both at the same time, that is, they are both citizens and strangers.

To define who is an Angolan is not the question. Unlike other African countries, the problems of citizenship in Angola are abstract, not grounded in segregating constitutional premises but upon power relations established during post-war state formation, informed by the dynamics of the civil-war. Mamdani is right in arguing that the intersection between citizen and subject is much dictated by the nature of post-independence state-formation.[527] In Angola not necessarily post-independence state formation but rather post-war state formation. In the post-war setting, to those Ovimbundu who followed UNITA or are connoted with it in any way, and especially those who reside in rural areas, the distance between them and the continuously

[526] Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", p. 104.

[527] Unlike Mamdani, my reference to the ethnic subject does not imply a degree of sovereignty or political influence on behalf of native authorities or African chiefs. Rather, interviewees although complaining of exclusion many times implied they were both citizens and subjects at the same time since it was their perceived ethnic status that tends to inform citizenship, that is, their ethno-regional background informs and influences citizenship rights.

stretching MPLA ecosystem represents a very wide gap, perhaps as wide as that with the state during colonialism. After the war, the MPLA government had the task of turning former enemies, largely foreign to its state and strangers to its rule into its own citizens. However, these processes were unsurprisingly severely limited by processes of "otherness", grounded in stereotypes and alterity. Samantha Balaton-Chrimes referring to Engin Isin's work argues that "by acknowledging and accounting for the rather messy and iterative social relations through which certain people are rendered meaningful and equal members of a political community, while others occupy all manner of blurry positions in relation to that community Isin provides a critical insight into the constitution of citizenship."[528] This is the type of relationship the above mentioned section of the Ovimbundu maintains with the MPLA with regards to citizenship. They are citizen and stranger, rendered meaningful when needed but not necessarily equal members of a political community, thus occupying a blurry position in relation to the MPLA ecosystem. This may pertain to the very moral ethnicity of the MPLA, the essence of its own moral sphere, where membership through kin or socialization renders one meaningful and ethno-regional and socio-political difference generally informs equality. Hence why interviewees argued those Ovimbundu who are MPLA members are also often strangers to the natural order of this ecosystem.

These Ovimbundu (those who constituted UNITA's people or live in the rural world) and other peoples in similar circumstances, are often strangers, perhaps even aliens, not necessarily in Angola but certainly to the MPLA state ecosystem and have been so for the greater part of independent Angola. The contradiction here is not between state citizenship and ethnic subject as Mamdani put it, but rather between state citizenship and party citizenship. As my interviewees believe and have abundantly showed, the MPLA is content to include them but reluctant to support them. As such, its strategy appears to be one of triage and contention. The party first offers – and requires - partisanship as proof of loyalty before full citizenship. This creates a movement towards the MPLA, perhaps due to co-optation, among those who are not members of the party in power, who do not hold the "cartão" (membership card):

[528] Balaton-Chrimes, Samantha (2015), *Ethnicity, democracy and citizenship in Africa*, Surrey: Ashgate, p.8.

> "To have a job, a good job, you first have to have a MPLA membership card. So we [UNITA] tell people, go get a MPLA membership card. I deliberately say this to people. If someone presents me with a problem at work, "Do you have a card? If not, go get one. When you do the public selection to work in education, you'll easily be selected. Just present the card. Why did the quality of education drop so much in Huambo? Because the MPLA uses the lists of their militants, the JMPLA brings theirs, OMA brings theirs, and they send this to education [to the Ministry of Education]. The person who is recommended by the MPLA, JMPLA or OMA is automatically guaranteed a job, even if he can't teach anything. The country won't develop like this."[529]

Following the dynamic of card possession as a type of identity card to assure citizenship – especially to those which are considered strangers –, the representation of the nation, in the form of state symbols, is also frequently depicted by the flag of the MPLA party, virtually present in all social and political spaces (municipal administrations, party headquarters, villages, towns, etc.). This banal nationalism as Michael Billing[530] called it, or better yet, banal party-nationalism, tends to substitute that of allegiance to the country or the nation, thus simplifying the division and deepening the perception that only through the party does one experience the nation and the state, since outside the party these barely exist. As such, social mobility dependence is logically evolving into a formula of having membership in the MPLA party as key to entering the state economic apparatus. Entrance in the MPLA ecosystem through membership is the minimum requirement to enjoy the rights of national citizenship and nationhood, a nationhood that does not pertain to the Angolan nation but rather to the MPLA nation. It is a mechanism of defence that allows the party to set a series of trials and phases of integration by firstly politicising people into its own fold and finally providing some of the benefits of citizenship. Logics of alterity based upon the perception of political identity function as simplifying mechanisms to differentiate

---

[529] Interview 13.

[530] See Billing, Michael (1995), *Banal nationalism*, SAGE.

citizens from strangers. But this differentiation, far from being binary, is in fact organic and fluid, constituting a two way relation since it allows strangers to become citizens and vice-versa. As one interviewee explained,

> "[So everyone can enter the MPLA, even people who were with UNITA?] Yes. There is a policy orientation of the MPLA, which is for them to enter. We have committees of action in almost every neighbourhood. The order is that when someone from UNITA comes to us, on the contrary, he is praised, well spoken for. Finally, our brother recognised."[531]

Ruth Marshall-Fratania makes an interesting inquiry into the nature of inclusion in citizenship by asserting that the "relationship between foreigner and citizen continues to be thought of in terms of territorialised ethnic spaces, and perpetrates an absolutist conception of the foreigner, or stranger, as anyone from outside these territorialised communities"[532]. This assertion entails a degree of autochthony that has much to do with one's ethnic background, which as seen, informs political identity in Angola. Marshall-Fratania notes that citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire appeared to revert to previous norms of autochthony, those exposed during the nationalist struggle when the glorification of cultural difference and the principal of territorial autochthony was the basis of not only self-determination but also of national belonging, citizenship and authentic identity. This author goes on to cite Ousmane Dembélé, who argues that "in order to affirm his status as Ivorian citizen of a local territory, the autochthone ends up reducing to himself and to his group the attributes of the national citizen. This reduction allows him to return to an absolutist conception of foreigner, who is neither a member of his ethnic group nor a national."[533] This is a mechanism perhaps similar to that which the MPLA state employs, in

---

[531] Interview 4.

[532] Marshall-Fratania, Ruth (2007), "The war of "who is who": autochthony, nationalism and citizenship in the Ivorian crisis", in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL, p. 39.

[533] Ruth Marshall-Fratania citing Ousmane Dembélé, in Ruth Marshall-Fratania, "The war of "who is who", p. 39.

different fashion, to begin asserting difference. The person autochthone to the MPLA ecosystem, usually but not exclusively from Luanda, may reduce national citizenship to the attributes of his group – region of origin, language, personal history and trajectory, behaviour, etc. - thus engaging in an absolutist conception of the foreigner, or in the Ovimbundu's case, of the stranger, which always defines him as such.[534] In post-war Angola citizenship is certainly nowhere near the type of marginalisation found in the concept of Ivoirité, designed to exclude the large Burkinabe and other immigrant populations from voice.[535] But if a degree of autochthony in the MPLA ecosystem may inform citizenship, difference in ethno-regional background also seems to inform the position of others in relation to this ecosystem in matters of citizenship.

There is no doubt that today citizenship in Angola seems to be affected by negative ethnic stereotypes, among many other factors. It abides to a wider nationalism, a civic based citizenship that differentiates subjects and blurs their position by the ascription of ethnic based (and other) assumptions. This was much dictated by political and war dynamics, as seen in previous chapters. To be sure, all Angolans are citizens but some see their citizenship limited by the historical loyalties and allegiances their ethnic group had with a specific political party, one that violently defied the status quo. In this construction, ethnicity is used to detract from the past in order to inform the present about the positioning of their citizenship, mainly as a former and probable continuous opposition to the state and government.

---

[534] Soares de Oliveira described the MPLA as assimilative at the lower levels but "its upper reaches are caste-like and the social distance from the masses remains huge. The MPLA elite is bound together by their trajectories of common socialization rather than primordial identities. But in a society as divided as Angola's, most people who have been socialized into this rarefied atmosphere happen to share a great deal in ethno-regional terms. This means that, though every region and ethnicity is represented in the MPLA higher echelons, there is an over-representation of those from the Mbundu and costal heartland of the party. The role of Ovimbundu cadres in particular is limited and there is a sense that the few top MPLA politicians from the highlands are used as "window dressing". Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo, "Magnificent and beggar land", p. 101.

[535] Young, Crawford (2007),"Nation, ethnicity, and citizenship: dilemmas of democracy and civil order in Africa", in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL, p. 259.

CONCLUSION

Studies of modern ethnicity in Africa usually start when the modern element, be it the colonial state, missionaries or any other agent is introduced and spurs change in people's lives. For this reason, the pre-colonial is often not addressed. Although it perhaps pertains more to the realm of historians than necessarily to sociologists or anthropologists, as Ronald Atkinson makes clear, it is nevertheless relevant.[536] For instance, while the Ovimbundu have come in contact with modernity largely through the elements mentioned above, if modernity is above all equated with swift change, it could be argued, like Maria da Conceição Neto points, that the period of caravan trading during the late 19th century, before colonial conquest, produced very significant and deep changes[537], perhaps as deep as modernity itself. These are important considerations that even though not included in this thesis deserve more attention and should be included in future work.

I have devoted the greater part of this thesis to important events that brought change and contributed to the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity. In this realm I followed many other studies of sub-Saharan Africa that devoted their attention to the same topic. In this endeavour I have referred to authors like Leroy Vail (et.al.), Bruce Berman, John Lonsdale, Steve Feierman or Terence Ranger extensively for theoretical purposes, while also using many studies of Angola available and primary field-data to support my analysis.

In chapter one I have, like many before me, traced the roots of Protestant and Catholic expansion and agency in the central highlands of Angola. Due to much literature available on this theme I have tried to focus singularly upon those aspects that produced direct effects in ethnicity, mainly through modernisation, hence ignoring other novel venues of study that could have been unveiled. My interest rested on the categorisations and changes Christianisation brought into Ovimbundu ethnicity and life in general. I have divided this chapter in two sections, one pertaining to Protestant and the other to Catholic work and influence. The first section traced

---

[536] Atkinson, Ronald (1999), "The (re)construction of ethnicity in Africa: extending the chronology, conceptualization and discourse", in Yeros, Paris (ed.), *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press.

[537] Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Entre a tradição e a modernidade", p. 200.

four broad axis of analysis. It begins by examining the administrative division of the Angolan territory Protestantism conceived, which affected the way Angolan ethnic groups would come to conceive and related to each other. But contrary to other studies of ethnicity in Africa that deal with the topic of Protestantism, I have found that among the Ovimbundu its impact upon ethnic imagination was not as profound. In the central highlands, Protestant and Catholic ideas, ways of life and more importantly morality, appear to have had a constricted meaning. Didier Péclard had already questioned Lawrence Henderson's idea that Protestantism in Africa became a tribal religion, arguing that there can be found certain nuances in this statement. Indeed, while looking at Protestant action, I have found that elements which brought great impact in other societies, particularly those under British rule as Vail (et.al) demonstrated, provoked a lesser modernisation of ethnicity in the case of the Ovimbundu. Specifically, in what concerns the codification of language and most importantly the registry of pre-colonial history – frequently unbalanced and biased in order to empower those who told it –, perhaps due to the small number of missionaries operating in the central highlands, the registry of written history, one that would inform the colonial state about the power relations of the several Angolan groups, did not produce this effect. In the modernisation of the Ovimbundu, the role attributed to written history as an element of ethnic consciousness was replaced by an intense pursuit of education. This focus on education did not inform the balance of power between groups but had a similar effect in modernisation, particularly in how in conjunction with the delimitation of territory and codification of Umbundu in the written word, it began shaping the idea of the group as a novel, unitary invention, an idea that although very much embryonic, successfully planted the seed that much later would allow the group to resemble the European nation-state when seen from the exterior. In time, African elites with Protestant educations able to navigate the modern and the traditional world would conjugate these ideas and interact with Angolan society ultimately conscious of their differences, be them ethnic, regional, racial, religious or linguistic. Absolutely vital to their experience was the ability of not only being able to differentiate the "good" and "bad" elements of both the modern and traditional worlds but also actually being able to incorporate those they understood to be good aspects of both worlds into their new cultural and

intellectual bricolages. In this realm, those closer to the influence of the Catholic Church, mainly its students and people residing in its missions, had both similar and dissimilar experiences. The second section of the first chapter attempts to identify these differences in Catholic and Protestant interaction with Africans. Again, the centrality of Umbundu language and the travels of priests and catechists were also crucial to the expansion of new ideas and new experiences. And again, education is central in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Ovimbundu, even though the former constricted its teachings to the recitation of the rosary and prayers, essentially to religious readings. Control of African life on a daily basis, especially in Catholic missions appears to have been much more common than in Protestant ones. But it must also be noted how not the high-clergy, mainly Bishops living in the cities, but usually foreign low-clergy priests and catechists had a preponderant role in the introduction of modern ideas into African imagination. Much like Protestantism, albeit in differing degrees, this Catholic low-clergy also incentivised Africans to think in group terms and, more importantly, taught about the importance of education since they would eventually be the ones to be called to govern the country. This may have been the greatest success of Christianity among the Ovimbundu, that is, not only the penetration and reshaping of their moral space but also the ability to explain, motivate and consequently influence future events.

Apart from evangelisation, the colonial state also brought elements of modernisation into Ovimbundu experience. Chapter two discusses some of the limitations the colonial state had in expanding its bureaucracy and administration and argues that it had to adopt the model of indirect rule administration in its dealing with the African population. This model meant African chiefs, not European administrators, were, besides Christian missionaries, the authority more closely available to the population. Due to both these facts, the colonial state empowered African chiefs, essentially making them a prop of colonial rule and administration. On their part, these chiefs were able to exploit these newfound powers to recreate aspects of the customary and tradition, all ethnic characteristics, to widen their power often in conjunction with migrant workers in a symbiotic yet ambivalent relationship. Yet, for the majority of the population these ethnic characteristics were not so present in daily life. Chapter two asks a crucial question, of

whether ethnicity was relevant in the daily lives of the Ovimbundu, specifically in the circumvention of the native statute, the piece of legislation that most constricted their social mobility. I found that ethnic arguments and ethnic solidarity were not central in Ovimbundu agency. In fact, other elements prevailed, related to status – of being assimilated or not, which would lead to citizenship and thus economic and social progress –, and education, which could also lead to citizenship. These factors alone were more important to the Ovimbundu than any type of ethnic makeup. However, much like Iliffe argued, the colonial state tended to see Africans through tribal lenses. This idea of African life led European authorities to relate to the Ovimbundu essentially through the concept of tribe, an ideology put in practice when administrative changes had to be conducted. On their part, the Ovimbundu did not create a tribe to belong to. Only one section of this group, those who went to forced or migrant labour usually through the *contrato*, appropriated these "tribal" elements for their own purposes, often in conjunction with African chiefs. The second section of this chapter looked at the experience of migrant workers in external, often foreign places, mainly in the northern plantations of Angola. The argument here is that these migrant workers noticing tribal differences and divisions not only by what they experienced in other regions but also by the commitments they had at home, became keenly aware of the mechanics of the ethnic landscape of Angola, that is, inter-group relationships. These relations were not deepened by processes of urbanisation nor affected by economic competition. In fact, the economy of Angola could easily be divided through the boundaries of the three major ethnic groups. This element alone meant Angolan groups did not have to search for employment in regions other than their own, thus failing to sponsor not only a more preponderant contact between Angolans of different ethnic groups but also never encouraging the birth of an inter-ethnic class system. Because the boom of migrant labour to the northern provinces of the country coincided with the start of the independence war and since competition between the Ovimbundu and other groups did not assume economic characteristics, the ethnic landscape of Angola became moulded by social and political markers, much influenced by the quickly developing political circumstances of the time, eventually opening the gate to political tribalism.

Chapter three begins looking at the phenomenon of political tribalism. Section one attempts to find evidence of ethnic nationalism in early Ovimbundu anti-colonial groups, essentially tracing some of the most relevant organisations created by Ovimbundu people and how they were positioned towards the ethnic question. Relevant parallels are made between the founders of these organisations and the generation of Ovimbundu who followed, also educated in Protestant missions although in company of people with different ethnic backgrounds, albeit usually southern, also involved in colonial contestation. The second section looked at the role of the Ovimbundu in the ethnicisation of the conflict. It asserts the role of the UPNA/UPA in the creation of a political system filled with ethnic characteristics by looking at UPNA's very first political project, the restoration of the ancient kingdom of Congo. This fact alone tainted this political movement for the greater part of the Angolan civil war, also aided by the amount of Bacongo people it was able to recruit, often outside Angola in the Congo. With this in mind I explore the relationship between the Ovimbundu and UPA by attempting to understand the impact the massacres of March 1961 had in Ovimbundu imaginary. The targeting of many Ovimbundu migrant workers thought of being in collusion with the colonial state by UPA guerrillas left a very concrete mark upon the negative ethnic stereotypes of this group and enhanced their own perception of marginalization and "tribal" difference. Other Ovimbundu people in contact with the MPLA or in urban centres would complain of patronisation and condescendence, fruit of their purported backward, usually rural, character. This would later create a great distrust among the Ovimbundu when dealing not only with other groups but also with other political movements. Turning to Jonas Savimbi and other Ovimbundu leaders' inclusion in the UPA/GRAE I found that these massacres played no particular role in their break with the movement. Rather, it were the inner workings of UPA/GRAE and Holden Roberto's personal grip of the movement, which lead to accusations of tribalism and of weak commitment towards the independence war, that lead many Ovimbundu in UPA to follow Jonas Savimbi and create an Opposition Group. Fruit of disillusionment with UPA's and Roberto's leadership and certain they had no place in the MPLA, this Opposition Group became the first meaningful nationalist approach conducted by these Ovimbundu and their leaders, aware that in order to

fulfil their political potential and reach and liberate their region, the central highlands and surrounding areas, a southern approach was needed. It was this Opposition Group, mainly constituted of Ovimbundu people but also of other southern ethnicities, that became the prelude of UNITA, the third approach to Angolan nationalism.

Following the creation of UNITA, chapter four examines the relationship of this movement with the Ovimbundu. It looks at the political mobilization of UNITA around the time of independence and in preparation for the elections which were supposed to take place following the signature of the Alvor Accords. Attempting to trace the ethnic elements in UNITA's mobilization, this section identifies two venues of political mobilization that can be crossed with ethnicity: the theory of great numbers and the correction of the errors of history. Underlining that this focus on the Ovimbundu was not innocent but neither was the inclusion of ethnicity necessarily premeditated but fruit of the social and political circumstances of the time, UNITA would nevertheless gain an ethnic connotation with the Ovimbundu and vice-versa. This was a complex connection, one not natural or linear yet evocative of various cultural and moral elements deemed specific to the Ovimbundu historical experience. As shown, this link between ethnic group and political movement would serve as a legitimating rationale for the ethnic violence that took place in 1992, events that further deepened the association of UNITA with the Ovimbundu even though the latter, weary of the conflict, became increasingly disillusioned with the party and began withdrawing their support. Above all, this brief period of the history of the Angolan civil war saw a spontaneous yet ephemeral shift, when a war intensely grounded on territorial identities became openly ethnic for a brief period of time before reverting to its former dynamic. Yet, my argument is that although territorial identities were always central in the attribution of political identity, specific ethnic and regional elements always paralleled the formulation of this identity. Why this was so is examined in the second section of this chapter. This section is based on a series of theoretical work made by several authors about the production of tribes and ethnic modernisation. Most point to labour markets, economic competition and urbanisation, the creation of "tribal" hierarchies by the colonial state or Christian evangelisation to explain the modern creation of tribes or ethnic groups, all explained

in previous chapters of this thesis. In addition to these elements I used Terence Ranger's concept of "empty box" and John Lonsdale's "moral ethnicity" to develop an argument that posits the linkage between the Ovimbundu and UNITA above the political realm. By referring to moral economies, moral mastery over ethnic imagination or even mastery over the "supernatural", I produce an argument that explains why in effect what came to be known as "UNITA's people" was, in very essential aspects constituted by the incorporation of several elements that could be deemed to constitute "Ovimbunduness". The internal debate over civic virtue, morality, honour, reputation, "good" and "evil" was vital to this symbiosis, or better yet, to the incorporation of Ovimbundu elements to UNITA, a party which was nevertheless already majorly constituted by Ovimbundu people. From the national perspective, these are all arguments that tend to contest the visions of citizenship each party defended for the country during the war. Citizenship was indeed central. It was the arena where the forces of inclusion and exclusion, modernity and tradition, often put in such simple terms as "good" and "evil", did battle. As such, it is to the topic of citizenship that chapter five is devoted to, beginning with an exposition of materials and debates regarding issues of post-war integration and reconciliation in the central highlands of Angola. From the exposition of field data concerning reconciliation and integration it became clear that physical violence was not the only element that could hinder reconciliation and integration. In fact, there are a myriad of obstacles that add complexity to these processes, mostly related to historical experience and political allegiance. For instance, many former soldiers of both sides of the political fence were not able to return to their villages because their families would not accept them, often due to their violent behaviour during the war. This fact alone pushed many of these people to create new villages, often in other regions. But the most common complaint interviewees referred was the connotation with the flag of UNITA. Being associated with UNITA or having been with "UNITA's people" is referred to as one of the biggest obstacles towards social mobility, a rationale often used to attribute political identity to people in accordance to a set of negative stereotypes, which also include ethnic markers. I have developed a framework of analysis that utilises common epithets – *sulano*, *bailundo*, *kwacha* – attributed to the Ovimbundu that associated them with UNITA and tend to both complicate their social

integration and reconciliation with Angolan society and deepen their own perception of being marginalised. This is the basis of the analysis advanced in the second section of this chapter, which looks at citizenship and nationalism. While having shown why the term exclusion is theoretically flawed, opting for the concept of logics of alterity, I attempted to show how the Ovimbundu, or specific sections of this group, may be considered strangers within a fast expanding MPLA ecosystem. Subordinated to the administration of its former enemy, many in UNITA and in the rural space often swing between full citizenship and indifference, frequently regarded as strangers. This is above all a product of post-war state formation, deeply linked with the way the MPLA expanded its administration to envelop the entire country, which meant people alien to its ecosystem also became included. On a macro perspective, this debate refers to a much larger issue pertaining to the construction of the nation. In this realm, the question is not exactly who is to be included or excluded but rather who is closest to the centre and thus fitting to access the resources of the state, as opposed to those who never were positioned at the centre of the MPLA ecosystem and thus deemed, through many elements which also include negative ethnic stereotypes, strangers.

As seen from this brief exposition of content, the entire thesis follows a thread, one generally related to modern ethnicity and political activation in different contexts. Colonialism, civil-war, reconciliation and peace are the inputs that have constantly shifted the way people relate to each other, assume different identities or entirely withdraw from them. But persistently shadowing these events is the very complex web of causes and consequences fruit of human agency at the state or national level. Acknowledging this dimension, I have attempted to follow specific historical changes in Angola that produced the modernisation of Ovimbundu ethnicity within the larger prism of this external dimension, exactly that of colonialism, civil-war, reconciliation and peace. In this sense, ethnicity may very well be the bastard child of historical and political circumstance. But the perspective of illegitimacy is common throughout human history, one that must not be excluded or underestimated from the nature of human life itself.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amselle, Jean-Loup and Elikia M'Bokolo (2007), *Au Coeur de l'ethnie: ethnie, tribalism et État en Afrique*, Découverte, (First edition, 1985).

Anderson, Benedict (1983), *Imagined communities*, Verso.

Angolana (Documentação sobre Angola) II (1883-1887) (1971), *Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola/Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos.*

Anstee, Margaret (1996), *Orphan of the Cold War: The inside story of the collapse of the Angolan peace process,* Palgrave Macmillan.

Atkinson, Ronald (1999), "The (re)construction of ethnicity in Africa: extending the chronology, conceptualization and discourse", in Yeros, Paris (ed.), *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press, pp. 15-44.

Balandier, George (1955), *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, Paris.

Balandier, Georges (1970), *The sociology of black Africa: social dynamics in Central Africa*, London, Praeger Publishers.

Balaton-Chrimes, Samantha (2015), *Ethnicity, democracy and citizenship in Africa*, Surrey: Ashgate.

Ball, Jeremy (2006), "I escaped in a coffin": remembering Angolan forced labor from the 1940s", *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, n. 9-10, pp. 61-75.

Barth, Frederik (1969), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference*, Universitetsforlaget.

Bates, Robert (1983), "Modernisation, ethnic competition, and the rationality of politics in contemporary Africa", in Donald Rothchild and Victor Olorunsola (eds.), *State versus ethnic claims: African policy dilemmas*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, pp. 152-171.

Bayart, Jean-François (2009), *The state in Africa: the politics of the belly*, Cambridge, Polity Press, (Second Edition).

Bender, Gerald (1978), *Angola under the Portuguese: the myth and the reality*, University of California Press.

Berman, Bruce (1990), *Control and crisis in colonial Kenya: the dialectic of domination*, London, James Currey Ltd.

Berman, Bruce (1997), "Nationalism, ethnicity and modernity: the paradox of Mau Mau", in, Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher Steiner, (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 653-670.

Berman, Bruce (1998), "Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism", *African Affairs*, 97, pp. 305-341.

Berman, Bruce and John Lonsdale (1992) (eds.), *Unhappy Valley: conflict in Kenya and Africa. Book two: violence and ethnicity*, Oxford, James Currey.

Billing, Michael (1995), *Banal nationalism*, SAGE.

Birmingham, David (1992), *Frontline nationalism in Angola and Mozambique*, Africa World Press, Inc.

Brass, Paul (1991), Ethnicity *and Nationalism: theory and comparison*, Sage Publications.

Bridgland, Fred (1986), *Jonas Savimbi: a key to Africa*, Mainstream Publishing Co. Limited,

Brinkman, Inge (2003), "War and identity in Angola: two case-studies", *Lusotopie,* pp. 195-221.

Burgess, Robert (1982), *Fieldwork: a sourcebook and field manual*, George Allen Unwin.

Caetano, Marcelo (1975), *Depoimento*, Distribuidora Record.

Chabal, Patrick (ed.) (1986), *Political domination in Africa: reflections on the limits of power*, Cambridge University Press.

Chiwale, Samuel (2008), *Cruzei-me com a história*, Sextante Editora.

Chrétien, Jean-Pierre and Gérar Prunier (1989) (dir.), *Les ethnies ont une histoire*, Paris, Karthala.

Clarence-Smith, Gervaise (1985), *O terceiro império Português (1825-1975)*, Teorema.

Cohen, Anthony (1989), *The symbolic construction of community*, Routledge.

Colson, Elizabeth (1971), "The impact of the colonial period on the definition of land rights", in Victor Turner (ed.), *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, pp. 193-215.

Cooper, Frederick (2005), *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Cramer, Christopher (2006), *Civil war is not a stupid thing: accounting for violence in developing countries*, Hurst and Company, London.

Davidson, Basil (1972), *In the eye of the storm: Angola's people*, Anchor Books.

Dorman, Sara, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (2007), "Introduction: citizenship and its casualties in Africa", in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL, pp. 3-26.

Dorman, Sara, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.) (2007), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL.

Duro dos Santos, Gonçalo (2012), "The birth of physical anthropology in late imperial Portugal", Vol. 53, No. 5, *Current Anthropology*, pp. 33-45.

Edwards, Adrian C. (1962), *The Ovimbundu under two sovereignties*, International African Institute.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) (eds.), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge University Press.

F. Isin, Egin (2002), *Being political: genealogies of citizenship*, University of Minnesota Press.

Faria, Paulo (2013), *The post-war Angola: public sphere, political regime and democracy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Farré, Albert and Jordi Tomàs (2009) (coord.), *Procesos de reconciliación posbélica en África subsahariana*, Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals, pp. 7-16.

Feierman, Steven (1990), *Peasant intellectuals: anthropology and history in Tanzania*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.

Felgas, Hélio (1968), *Guerra em Angola*, Lisboa.

Feliciano, José Fialho (1998), *Antropologia económica dos Thonga do Sul de Moçambique*, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique.

Florêncio, Fernando (2005), *Á procura dos mambo vaNdau: estado e autoridades tradicionais em Moçambique*, Lisboa, ICS.

Florêncio, Fernando (2009), "Un reino, dos reyes: diferentes legitimidades en Bailundo (Angola)", in Farré, Albert and Jordi Tomàs (coord.), *Procesos de reconciliación posbélica en África subsahariana*, Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals, pp.167-189.

Florêncio, Fernando (2010), "No reino da toupeira: as autoridades tradicionais do M'Balundo e o estado Angolano", in Florêncio, Fernando (et. al), *Vozes do Universo Rural: reescrevendo o Estado em África*, Gerpress, pp. 80-175.

Florêncio, Fernando (et. al) (2010), *Vozes do Universo Rural: reescrevendo o Estado em África*, Gerpress.

Forgacs, David (ed.) (1988), *A Gramsci Reader, Selected Writings 1916-1935*, Lawrence and Wishart Limited.

Gellner, Ernest (1994), "Nationalism and modernisation", in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, D. (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 55-63.

Grinker, Roy Richard and Christopher Steiner, (eds.) (1997), *Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers.

Guimarães, Fernando (2001), *The origins of the Angolan civil war: foreign intervention and domestic conflict*, Macmillan Press Ltd.

Gutkind, Peter W. (1970) (ed.), *The passing of tribal man in Africa*, Leiden, E. J. Brill.

Harries, Patrick (1988), "The roots of ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa", *African Affairs*, 87, 346, pp. 25-52.

Hastings, Adrian (1997), *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press.

Hastings, Daniel (1933), *Ovimbundu beliefs and practices*, PhD thesis, Kennedy School of Missions.

Havik, Philip (2010), "Direct or indirect rule? Reconsidering the roles of appointed chiefs and native employees in Portuguese West Africa", Africana Studia, 15, pp. 29-36.

Heimer, Franz-Wilhelm (1972) (ed.), *Social change in Angola*, Weltforum Verlag.

Henderson, Lawrence (1971), "Protestantism: a tribal religion?", in Robert T. Parsons (ed.), *Windows on Africa*, E. J. Brill-Leiden, pp. 61-80.

Henderson, Lawrence (1990), *A Igreja em Angola: um rio com várias correntes*, Além-Mar.

Heywood, Linda (1989), "UNITA and Ethnic Nationalism in Angola", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 1, pp. 47-66.

Heywood, Linda (1998), "Towards an understanding of modern political ideology in Africa: the case of the Ovimbundu of Angola", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, 1, pp. 139-167.

Heywood, Linda (2000), *Contested power in Angola: 1840s to the present*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press.

Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1999) (eds. and translators), *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Essential Classics in Politics: Antonio Gramsci, The Electric Book Company Ltd.

Horowitz, Donald (1985), *Ethnic groups in conflict*, University of California Press.

Huntington, Samuel P. (1971), "The change to change: modernisation, development, and politics", *Comparative Politics*, 3, 3, pp. 283-322.

Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith, D. (1994) (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Iliffe, John (1979), *A modern history of Tanganyika*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

James III, W. Martin (1992), *A political history of the civil war in Angola*, Transaction Publishers.

Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (2002) (eds.), *African modernities: entangled meanings in current debate*, Oxford, James Currey.

Kaarsholm, Preben and Jan Hultin (eds.), *Inventions and boundaries: historical and anthropological approaches to the study of ethnicity and nationalism*, Roskilde, International Development Studies, Roskilde University.

Kopp, Jacqueline (2002), "Can moral ethnicity trump political tribalism? The struggle for land and nation in Kenya", African Studies, 61, 2, pp. 269-294.

Lan, David (1985), Guns and spirits: guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe, James Currey Ltd

Lara, Lúcio (1998), *Um amplo movimento…: itinerário do MPLA através de documentos e anotações*, Lúcio e Ruth Lara.

Lentz, Carola (1995), "Tribalism and ethnicity in Africa: a review of four decades of Anglophone research", *Cah. Sci. hum.* 31, 2, pp. 303-328.

Lonsdale, John (1992), "The moral economy of the Mau Mau: wealth, poverty and civic virtue in Kikuyu political thought", in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (eds.), *Unhappy Valley: conflict in Kenya and Africa. Book two: violence and ethnicity*, Oxford, James Currey, pp. 315-504.

Lonsdale, John (1994), "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism", in Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (eds.), *Inventions and boundaries: historical and anthropological approaches to the study of ethnicity and nationalism*, Roskilde, International Development Studies, Roskilde University, pp. 131-150.

Lonsdale, John (2002), "Jomo Kenyatta, God and the modern world", in Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (eds.), *African modernities: entangled meanings in current debate*, Oxford, James Currey, pp. 31-66.

Maier, Karl (1996), *Angola: promises and lies*, Serif.

Malaquias, Assis (2007), *Rebels and Robbers: Violence in post colonial Angola*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1996), *Citizen and subject: contemporary African and the legacy of late colonialism*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

Marcum, John (1969), *The Angolan revolution Vol. 1: the anatomy of an explosion (1950-1962)*, MIT Press.

Marcum, John (1978), *Angolan Revolution Vol. 2: exile politics and guerrilla warfare, 1962-1976,* MIT Press.

Markakis, John (1999), "Nationalism and ethnicity in the horn of Africa", in Paris Yeros (ed.), *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press, pp. 65-80.

Marshall-Fratania, Ruth (2007), "The war of "who is who": autochthony, nationalism and citizenship in the Ivorian crisis", in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL, pp. 29-67.

Martins, Vasco (2015), "Ovimbundu identity attributions in post-war Angola", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 4, pp. 835-867.

Mateus, Dalila and Álvaro Mateus (2011), *Angola 61 guerra colonial: causas e consequências*, Texto Editores.

McCulloch, Merran (1952), *The Ovimbundu of Angola*, International African Institute.

Messenger, John (1963), "Ethnology: Umbundu Folk Tales from Angola, Merlin Ennis (collector and translator), comparative analysis by Albert B. Lord", *American Anthropologist*, 65, 2, pp. 470-471.

Messiant, Christine (2006), *1961. L'Angola colonial, histoire et société: les prémisses du movement nationaliste*, P. Schlettwein Publishing.

Messiant, Christine (2008), *L'Angola postcolonial. I. guerre et paix sans démocratisation*, Éditions Karthala.

Minter, William (1994), *Apartheid's contras: an inquiry into the roots of war in Angola and Mozambique*, Witwatersrand University Press.

Moreira, Adriano (1955), *Administração da justiça aos indígenas*, Agência Geral do Ultramar

Muekalia, Jardo (2010), *Angola: a segunda revolução*, Sextante Editora.

Murray Childs, Gladwyn (1949), *Umbundu kinship and character*, Oxford University Press.

Neto, Maria da Conceição (1994), "Comércio, religião e política no sertão de Benguela: o Bailundo de Ekwikwi II (1876-1893), *Fontes & Estudos*, 1, Luanda.

Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Entre a tradição e a modernidade: os Ovimbundu do planalto central à luz da história", *Ngola, Revista de Estudos Sociais*, 1, Luanda.

Neto, Maria da Conceição (1997), "Hóspedes incómodos: Portugueses e Americanos no Bailundo no último quartel do século XX", *Encontro de Povos e Culturas em Angola; actas do seminário, Luanda 3 a 6 de Abril 1995*, Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses.

Neto, Maria da Conceição (2012), *In and out of town: A social history of Huambo (Angola) 1902-1961*, PhD thesis in History, London, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Nieuwaal, E. A. Rouveroy van and Djik van Rijk (1999) (eds.), *African chieftancy in a new socio-political landscape*, Leiden, African Studies Centre.

Pearce, Justin (2011), *Control, ideology and identity in civil war: The Angolan Central Highlands 1965-2002*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford.

Pearce, Justin (2012), "Control, politics and identity in the Angolan civil war", *African Affairs*, 111, 4, pp. 442-465.

Péclard, Didiér (1998), "Eu sou Americano: dynamiques du champ missionarie dans le planalto central angolais au XXe siècle", *Lusotopie,* pp. 357-376.

Péclard, Didier (1998), "Religion and politics in Angola: the Church, the Colonial State and the Emergence of Angolan Nationalism, 1940-1961", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28, 2, pp. 160-186.

Péclard, Didier (1999), "Amanhã para ser homem: missions chrétiennes et formation du sujet colonial en Angola central au XX siècle", *Editions Karthala*, 74, pp. 113-129.

Péclard, Didier (2015), *Les incertitudes de la nation en Angola: aux racines sociales de l'Unita*, Paris: Éditions KARTHALA.

Pélissier, René (1978), *La colonie du minotaure: nationalismes et révoltes en Angola*, 1926–1961, Orgeval.

Perrot, Claude-Hélène and François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar (2003) (eds.), *Le retour des rois: les autorités traditionnelles et l'État en Afrique contemporaine*, Paris, Karthala.

Poirier, Jean, Simone Clapier-Valladon and Paul Raybaut (1995), *Histórias de vida: teoria e prática*, Oeiras, Celta Editora.

Posner, Daniel (2001), “The colonial origins of ethnic cleavages: the case of linguistic divisions in Zambia”, prepared for *LiCEP 3*, Harvard University, 23-25 March 2001.

Posner, Daniel (2005), *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa*, Cambridge University Press.

Pössinger, Herman (1973), “Interrelations between economic and social change in rural Africa: the case of the Ovimbundu of Angola”, in Franz-Wilhelm Heimer (ed.), *Social change in Angola*, Weltforum Verlag, pp. 31-52.

Pössinger, Herman (1986), “A transformação da sociedade umbundu desde o colapso do comércio das caravanas”, *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, 4 and 5.

Ranger, Terence (1983), “The invention of tradition in colonial Africa”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 211-262.

Ranger, Terence and Olufemi Vaughan (eds.) (1993), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa,* London, Macmillan.

Ranger, Terrence (1993), “The invention of tradition revisited”, in Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa,* London, Macmillan, pp. 5-50.

Rathbone, Richard (2002), “West Africa: modernity and modernisation”, in Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (eds.), *African modernities: entangled meanings in current debate*, Oxford, James Currey, pp. 18-30.

Reforma administrativa ultramarina e reforma do ministério das colónias (1942), Imprensa nacional de Lisboa.

Robert T. Parsons (1971) (ed.), *Windows on Africa*, E. J. Brill-Leiden.

Romariz Santos Silva, Elísio (2008), *Companhia do Caminho de Benguela: Uma história sucinta da sua formação e desenvolvimento*, Lisboa, available at https://sites.google.com/site/cfbumahistoriasucinta/#TOC-A-G-nese

Rothchild, Donald and Victor Olorunsola (1983) (eds.), *State versus ethnic claims: African policy dilemmas*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press.

Savimbi, Jonas (1979), *Angola: resistência em buscar de uma nova nação*, Edição da Agência Portuguesa de Revistas, Lisboa.

Savimbi, Jonas (1986), *Por um futuro melhor*, Editora Nova Nórdica/Tempo.

Schubert, Benedict (2000), *A Guerra e as Igrejas: Angola 1961–1991* Basel, P. Schlettwein Publishing.

Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo (2015), *Magnificent and beggar land: Angola since the civil war*, Hurst and Company.

Southall, Aidan W. (1970), “The illusion of tribe”, in Peter W. Gutkind (ed.), *The passing of tribal man in Africa*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, pp. 28-50.

Tali, Mabeko (2001), *Dissidências e poder de estado: o MPLA perante si próprio (1962-1977),* Luanda, Editorial Nzila.

Tchikale, Basilio (2011), *Sabedoria popular dos Ovimbundu: 630 provérbios em Umbundu,* Editorial Kilombelombe.

Turner, Victor (ed.) (1971), *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, vol. 3, Cambridge University Press.

Vail, Leroy (1997), "Ethnicity in Southern African history", *in* Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation*, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 52-68.

Vail, Leroy (ed.) (1989), *The creation of tribalism in southern Africa*, Oxford, James Currey.

Valente, José Francisco (1964), *Gramática Umbundu: a língua do centro de Angola*, Lisboa: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar.

Weber, Eugene (1976), *Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernisation of rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford University Press.

Wheeler, Douglas (2005), "The forced labour "system" in Angola, 1903-1947: reassessing origins and persistence in the context of colonial consolidation, economic growth and reform failures", Trabalho Forçado Africano – experiências coloniais comparadas*, Colecção Estudos Africanos*, Campo das Letras – Editores S.A.

Yeros, Paris (ed.) (1999), *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa: constructivist reflections and contemporary politics*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press.

Young, Crawford (1986), "Nationalism, ethnicity and class in Africa: a retrospective", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 103.

Young, Crawford (2007),"Nation, ethnicity, and citizenship: dilemmas of democracy and civil order in Africa", in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammet and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Making nations, creating strangers states and citizenship in Africa*, BRILL, pp. 241-264.

Young, Crawford, (1994), *The African colonial state in comparative perspective*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Media sources:

A Guerra, television documentary directed by Joaquim Furtado, 2007.

Jonas Savimbi's speech in Jamba available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7-bjkcgg-w, accessed on the 5th of March 2015.

Leon Dash reporting for the Washington Post, "A long march – politics taught by fable", Washington Post, 11th August 1977.

Leon Dash reporting for the Washington Post, "UNITA's congress: self-criticism deep in a hidden forest", Washington Post, 13th August 197

Interviews:[538]

Interview number	Location	Date	Occupation	Gender
Interview 1	Huambo	24 January 2013	Public servant	Male
Interview 2	Huambo	29 January 2013	Farmer/NGO worker	Male
Interview 3	near Bailundo	30 January 2013	Farmer	Male
Interview 4	Caàla	1 February 2013	Public servant	Male
Interview 5	Huambo	12 February 2013	NGO worker	Male
Interview 6	near Huambo	14 February 2013	Architect	Male
Interview 7	Huambo	14 February 2013	Umbundu translator	Female
Interview 8	Kuito, Bié	18 February 2013	Public servant	Male
Interview 9	near Huambo	21 February 2013	Former UNITA captain	Male
Interview 10	Huambo	3 March 2013	Musician	Male
Interview 11	Huambo	5 March 2013	Teacher	Male
Interview 12	Bailundo	5 March 2013	Protestant pastor	Male
Interview 13	Huambo	10 March 2013	UNITA official	Male
Interview 14	Huambo	11 March 2013	NGO worker	Female
Interview 15	Huambo	18 March 2013	Teacher	Male
Interview 16	Huambo	20 March 2013	Artist/NGO worker	Female
Interview 17	Huambo	25 March 2013	Unemployed	Male
Interview 18	Huambo	3 April 2013	FAA official	Male
Interview 19	near Huambo	5 April 2013	Zambia immigrant /NGO worker	Male
Interview 20	near Huambo	8 April 2013	Priest/retired	Male
Interview 21	Lisbon	8 April 2014	University lecturer in Huambo	Male

[538] All of the interviews were conducted by the author, who holds the materials in the form of audio files.