

## ***Conflating the Party and the Nation in Angolan Monuments***

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*Since coming to power in 1975, Angola's MPLA government has constructed monuments to commemorate its victories against foreign intervention and rival nationalist movements. By analyzing the narratives in four Angolan monuments – the Heroínas Monument, the Martyrs of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale Monument, and the Agostinho Neto Monuments in Luanda and Huambo – this paper argues that the dominant narratives conflate the party (MPLA) with the nation and, as a result, ignore the perspectives and memories of fellow Angolans who supported competing nationalist movements.*

### INTRODUCTION

Angola as an independent political entity is a relatively recent creation. The country gained independence in 1975. Divisions amongst Angolan nationalists fighting for independence meant that three movements based on regional, linguistic, and cultural differences developed. Failure to unite led to a contested independence and a civil war fueled by foreign intervention. Thus, it was a politically divided Angola that achieved independence on 11 November 1975. The MPLA (Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola), with its urban base, and the aid of Cuban troops and Soviet armaments, defeated a coalition of U.S. and South African-backed rival nationalist movements, the FNLA (Front for the National Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (the Union for the Independence of the Totality of Angola). Thereafter, the MPLA set out to create a new independent Angolan nationalism. The Portuguese language, the liberation struggle itself, and colonial-era borders–‘*Todo o povo Angolano de Cabinda ao Cunene*’ [All the Angolan people From Cabinda to Cunene]–became hallmarks of a new national unity. Shared suffering under colonialism, the

liberation war, the treachery of certain of the foreign forces that intervened, and the heroism of Agostinho Neto, 'the father of the nation', became central tenets in the MPLA's nationalist narrative for independent Angola. Because the moment of independence was not one of consensus or a shared founding moment, but one of military confrontation, the victorious MPLA imposed a particular nationalist narrative that distorted actual events and did not allow dissenting or contradictory voices. The official narrative dismissed the rival FNLA and UNITA nationalist movements as enemies of "the people" and enshrined lies about the genesis of the anti-colonial struggle and opponents of the MPLA as the true history.<sup>1</sup> The deep divisions and warfare among rival nationalist movements, and even within the MPLA itself, were thus elided in favor of a constructed and exclusivist narrative emphasizing how the people, led by the MPLA, overcame Portuguese colonialism and foreign intervention to achieve independence.

In Angola, the fact that the war preceding independence continued as a civil war for most of the period between 1975 and 2002, further entrenched the MPLA's version as the hegemonic narrative of Angolan nationalism. Angolans never united around a shared foundational moment and the civil war further fractured Angolans. In 2001, before the end of the civil war, historian Patrick Chabal wrote that, 'Angola

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Messiant, 'Em Angola, até o passado é imprevisível': A experiência de uma investigação sobre o nacionalismo angolano e, em particular, o MPLA: fontes, crítica, necessidades actuais da investigação' in *Actas do II Seminário Internacional sobre A História de Angola Construindo o Passado Angolano: As Fontes e a Sua Interpretação* (Edição: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 2000), p. 815; Justin Pearce, "Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics" in *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 41, No. 1 (2015), pp. 103-119; Jon Schubert, "2002, Year Zero: History as Anti-Politics in the 'New Angola'" in *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 41, No. 4 (2015), pp. 1-18.

does not yet exist as a nation state'.<sup>2</sup> Along the same lines, it was only after the military vanquishing of UNITA in 2002 that Angola was, 'in the words of MPLA historic figure Lopo do Nascimento, "truly reunified"'.<sup>3</sup> Didier Péclard argues that in the wake of its military defeat during the civil war context of 1975-77, UNITA used 'a broad narrative of exclusion according to which UNITA stood for those who had not only been unjustly excluded from power at independence but also pushed (again) to the margins of society in much the same way as had been the case during colonial times'.<sup>4</sup> This 'narrative of exclusion' combined with suspicion of the creole elites in the MPLA bolstered UNITA's legitimacy among its supporters. Péclard's analysis highlights why so many Angolans have felt alienated from the MPLA's nationalist narrative. In the late 2000s, Justin Pearce found that 'interviews made clear that each of the conflicts was associated with a distinct set of narratives about Angolan history, about the role of the two political movements within this history and the relationships of the movements to the Angolan people'.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this presentation is to analyze Angola's official nationalism, with its hegemonic assertions and silences, through the lens of monuments. The MPLA set out to consecrate its leaders as the Angola's sole heroes and its military victories as overcoming perfidious foreign intervention. However, an exciting hermeneutical aspect of monuments is that despite their physical fixity, their

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Chabal, *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land Angola Since the Civil War* (London: Hurst & Co., 2015), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Didier Péclard, 'UNITA and the Moral Economy of Exclusion in Angola, 1966-1977', in Eric Morier-Genoud (eds), *Sure Road? Nationalisms in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Justin Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975-2002* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12.

meanings are still fluid and open to interpretation. To this end, Duncan S. Bell's concept of a 'mythscape' is a useful lens. He defines a mythscape as: 'the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated, and reconstructed constantly'.<sup>6</sup> In my discussion I will discuss four monuments in Angola's mythscape that celebrate Angola's first president and the MPLA's military victories: the Heroínas Monument (1986), monuments honoring Agostinho Neto (Luanda, 2000 and Huambo, 2016), and the Cuito Cuanavale Monument (begun 2014, expected completion 2017). The monuments' relatively recent dates reflect the extent to which Angolan nationalism is currently under construction.<sup>7</sup> Each contributes to the MPLA's nationalist history of itself as Angola's liberators from colonialism and defenders against foreign aggression. Contributions by rival nationalist movements–FNLA and UNITA–and their supporters are downplayed or portrayed as colluding with foreign invaders to undermine independence.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, activists have claimed two of the monuments under discussion as focal points for rallying supporters and challenging the MPLA's hegemony. These alternative, counter-hegemonic, and ephemeral uses of the monumental spaces raises interesting possibilities for the negotiation of Angola's mythscape.

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<sup>6</sup>Duncan S. A. Bell, 'Mythscape: memory, mythology, and national identity,' *British Journal of Sociology*, 54:1 (2003), 63.

<sup>7</sup>Miguel Domingos Bembe, 'Os vectores da construção da nação angolana e a função do Estado', *Mulemba – Revista Angolana de Ciências Sociais*, Novembro 21, Vol. III, N. 6 (2013), 172.

<sup>8</sup> Angolan nationalism, with its silences and partial nature, has interesting parallels with Zimbabwean nationalism. For more on the Zimbabwean case, see Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor & Terence Ranger, *Violence & Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

## HEROÍNAS

One of the earliest MPLA war monuments is the Heroínas Monument, which uses Angolan women as symbols of MPLA nationalism. The monument is located in the landscaped median of Ho Chi Minh Avenue in Luanda and dedicated to five female MPLA *guerrilla* fighters who were captured by FNLA troops on 2 March 1967 and later died in prison. The five women integrated the 130-member Esquadrão [squadron] Camy in 1966.<sup>9</sup> In late 1966, the MPLA sent the Esquadrão Camy to join comrades fighting in the region north of Luanda. Due to a severe lack of food and having difficulty reaching their FAPLA comrades, a contingent of roughly twenty soldiers of Esquadrão Camy turned back for an arduous, overland trek to their base at Camp Kalunga in Congo-Brazzaville. After being captured in 1967, they were imprisoned, reportedly tortured, and died.

The MPLA publicized the women's arrest and imprisonment in its magazine *Vitória ou Morte* [Victory or Death] as early as 18 April 1967 and demanded their release.<sup>10</sup> The Organization of Angolan Women (OMA), the MPLA's women's league, publicized the plight of the heroínas and listed their imprisonment as 'a new crime against the fight of the Angolan people'.<sup>11</sup> Images of the women, alongside other women martyrs to revolution, circulated among solidarity and anti-colonial movements. [Image] After their deaths the heroínas joined an almost exclusively male pantheon of MPLA/national liberation heroes.

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<sup>9</sup> The names of the five heroínas are Deolinda Rodrigues de Almeida, Irene Cohen de Brito Teixeira, Lucrécia Paim, Teresa Afonso Gomes, and Engrácia dos Santos.

<sup>10</sup> Limbânia Jimenez Rodríguez, *Heroínas de Angola* (Luanda: Mayamba Editora, 2010), 149.

<sup>11</sup> Rodríguez, *Heroínas*, 149.

On 2 March 1986 the government dedicated the monument, which features a central plinth topped with statues of three women: one with a hoe, another carrying an ammunition box, while the third slings an automatic rifle. **[Image]** An inscription on the monument's central plinth casts the women in a long tradition of women fighters: 'They follow in the tradition of N'jinga and of so many other historical figures who fought colonialism and foreign domination with tenacious resistance.'<sup>12</sup> The women are dressed in the *panos* typical of rural Angolan women, rather than the military uniforms they wore as *guerrilla* fighters. Margarida Paredes argues that the decision to depict the heroínas in *panos* served to redomesticate them and thus dampen expectations arising from ideas about gender equality and women's emancipation as part of the revolution.<sup>13</sup> Many women who fought for independence say that women are not recognized for their contributions to the war effort beyond the largely symbolic recognition of the heroínas.<sup>14</sup> Women war veterans, for example, who fought for all three of the nationalist movements have had difficulty accessing financial assistance awarded to ex-combatants.<sup>15</sup> The decision in 1986 to wrap the figures atop the plinth of the Heroínas monument in a *pano* reflects the societal expectation that after the war women assume their traditional roles as wives and mothers. The MPLA's decision to redomesticate the *guerrillas* is especially striking given the radical possibilities that fighting for liberation opened up for thousands of Angolan women. Deolinda Rodrigues, one of

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<sup>12</sup> Heroínas Monument, Luanda. Translation is by the author.

<sup>13</sup> Margarida Paredes, *Combater Duas Vezes Mulheres na Luta Armada em Angola* (Vila do Conde: Verso da História, 2015), pp. 110-111.

<sup>14</sup> Marissa J. Moorman, "Intimating Nationalism: Gender in the MPLA's maquis," *Angola e as Angolanas memoria, sociedade e cultura*, Edited by Selma Pantoja, Edvaldo A. Bergamo, Ana Claudia da Silva (São Paulo: Editora Intermeios, 2016), 187.

<sup>15</sup> Paredes, *Combater Duas Vezes*, p. 242.

the heroínas, wrote in her diary in 1964, that she rejected the discrimination against women in the revolution: “Will the Revolution obligate me to marry? Is this necessary? [...] Nobody is able to force me to marry.[...]they want to make believe that being single is painful, shameful, or the devil.”<sup>16</sup> Rodrigues rejected the pressure to marry and eventually become one of the first women *guerrillas*. And yet, the monument sends a clear message to Angolan women about their place within the post-war landscape. The messaging, especially when take with depictions of women in other prominent monuments, supports Anne McClintock’s argument that “women [were] typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency.”<sup>17</sup>

The fact that the heroínas are celebrated as MPLA heroes alienates women (and men) who supported the FNLA or UNITA during the liberation war and civil war. The date of the heroínas capture, March 2, is a national holiday, the Day of the Angolan Woman [*o Dia da Mulher Angolana*], although UNITA supporters generally do not celebrate the holiday.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, women’s rights activists have reclaimed the monument as a place to stage counter-protests against the MPLA’s policies that target women’s freedom. For example, on March 18, 2017, opponents of a bill in the Angolan Parliament to make all abortions, without exception, illegal, led a protest march

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<sup>16</sup> Deolinda Rodrigues, *Diário de um exílio sem regresso* (Luanda: Nzila, 2003), 52 and 65. Cited in Margarida Paredes, “Deolinda Rodrigues, da Família Metodista à Família MPLA, o Papel da Cultura na Política,” *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* Vol 20 (2010), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven Nationalism, Gender and Race,” in *Imperial Leather Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 354.

<sup>18</sup> Paredes, *Combater Duas Vezes*, p. 111.

through Luanda culminating at the Heroínas Monument.<sup>19</sup> The protestors reclaimed the heroínas as trailblazers who challenged the MPLA's gender inequality and patriarchy.

### **Agostinho Neto Monuments**

Angola's first president, Agostinho Neto, is memorialized in two prominent monuments in Luanda as well as in multiple monuments located in provincial capitals.<sup>20</sup> Since independence, the MPLA has made a point to celebrate Neto as the nation's founding father and modern Angola's first hero.<sup>21</sup> Given Neto's early death in 1979, after only four years in office, he is often equated with the aspirations of the early years of independence to create a more humane and economically just Angolan society. The most significant of these monuments is the Agostinho Neto Mausoleum and Cultural Center (1982/2014), a 120-meter tower in Luanda's Praia do Bispo neighborhood. The MPLA commissioned the monument from the USSR in 1982 and it reflects a Soviet modernist style, with many likening it to a rocket ship in its appearance. **[Image]** It sat unfinished during the long civil war, but in 2014, a North Korean construction firm finished a full rehabilitation of the site, which is now open to the public.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Angola: Respect Women's Right to March," March 17, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> For a critical assessment of the Agostinho Neto Monument in Huambo – erected on the plinth of the colonial-era monument to the founder of Huambo [Nova Lisboa], Norton de Matos – see Orlando Castro, 'Agora Chamam-lhe Interesse Histórico', *folha 8* (8 de Janeiro de 2016) (<http://jornalf8.net/2016/agora-chamam-lhe-interesse-historico/>).

<sup>21</sup> For an interesting study analysis of memorialization of Kwameh Nkrumah in Ghana, see Kodzo Gavua, 'Monuments and Negotiations of Power in Ghana', in Derek Peterson (ed.) *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 97-112.

<sup>22</sup> North Korean firms have constructed several prominent monuments in southern Africa, including both Zimbabwe's and Namibia's Heroes' Acre Monuments. For more on these monuments, see Richard Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Post Colony. African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*



A second Neto Monument, inaugurated in 2000, sits on the spot where the first president proclaimed Angolan independence on 11 November 1975. The location, Independence Square (Largo de Independência), sits in a major traffic circle not far from the Heroínas Monument on the edge of central Luanda. During the 1980s the site showcased a monument “consisting of two armored vehicles, a Soviet vehicle on top of a South African vehicle in the manner of one animal attacking and subduing another: a representation of the MPLA’s victory over its enemies.”<sup>23</sup> The monument consists of a 6.5 meter bronze statue of Neto with his right arm raised, atop an 11.5 meter base with four 2 x 7 meter mosaic panels. **[Images 9-12].** The panels depict scenes of Angolans breaking the chains of slavery, taking up arms to defeat colonial occupation, and advancing towards peace, led by the image of a mother and child. The imagery of the mother recalls the MPLA’s invocation after independence that “the MPLA is the People, the People are the MPLA” and the idea that all Angolans should embrace the “MPLA family”.<sup>24</sup> By implication, if one did not support the MPLA, then one was not Angolan. The maternal depiction of Angolan women communicates expected gender roles for

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(London: Zed Books, 1998), 83; Heroes’ Acre Committee, ‘The Unknown Soldier. Inauguration of Heroes’ Acre, 26 August 2002’ (Windhoek: Heroes’ Acre Committee, 2002); and Heike Becker, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010” *Africa* Vol. 81, No. 4 (2011): 525. Also see, ‘North Korea’s “biggest” export - giant statues’, *BBC News* (16 February 2016) (<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35569277>) On 30 November 2016 the United Nations Security Council banned the export of monument by the North Korean regime as part of Security Council Resolution 2321, Greg Myre, ‘For Autocrats in Need of Statues, North Korea Is No Longer An Option’, National Public Radio. (<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/11/30/503884102/for-autocrats-in-need-of-statues-north-korea-is-no-longer-an-option>).

<sup>23</sup> Justin Pearce, “Contesting the Past in Angolan Politics,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 41, 1 (2015), p. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Margarida Paredes, “Deolinda Rodrigues, da Família Metodista à Família MPLA, o Papel da Cultura na Política,” *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 20 (2010), p. 23.

Angolan women and echoes similar maternal depictions at other war monuments, such as the Kifangondo Monument outside Luanda.

By constructing Neto monuments across Angola, the MPLA clearly aims to solidify his legacy as Angola's founding father. In this historical narrative there is neither room for the leaders of Angola's other two nationalist movements nor space for critique of Neto's decisions as president. Given the hegemonic assertions of the monument, it is fascinating that pro-democracy youth activists and MPLA critics have appropriated the Neto Monument in Independence Square as a gathering place. On March 7, 2011, anonymous organizers circulated "internet posters featuring a picture of President dos Santos with a message written across it: *Demonstration Against Joseduardizada Dictatorship: Angola says enough to 32 years of tyranny and bad governance.*"<sup>25</sup> The organizers called on people to gather at the Neto Monument in Independence Square, where a "the huge barrage of heavily armed military and security personnel" met only 17 demonstrators who were arrested. In spite of the repression, the monument has become a gathering space for critics of the regime fed up with corruption, unemployment, and poor living conditions. The relatively small numbers of protesters results from the climate of fear and repression prevailing in Angola today, in spite of the outward appearance of a functioning democracy with free elections. Demonstrators are routinely beaten by police during anti-government rallies. According to Luaty Beirão, a rapper and critic of the government, "It's hard for us to put more than 30 people out on the streets...So, normally, people with so much power shouldn't be concerned about us. Why bother? I think they're

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<sup>25</sup> Paulo Conceição João Faria, "The Dawning of Angola's Citizenship Revolution: A Quest for Inclusionary Politics," *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 39, 2 (2013), 305-306.

afraid that if they let us, we will quickly pass from 30 to 3,000. I think they're very, very nervous."<sup>26</sup> Youth protests are now the most significant challenge to the MPLA's hegemony in Angolan society. They have created a revolutionary movement, Central 7311, in memory of the protests of 7 March 2011.<sup>27</sup>

The Neto Monument in Luanda is similar to Neto monuments erected in multiple provincial capitals across Angola. In Huambo (formerly Nova Lisboa), for example, the government unveiled a Neto Monument in 2016. The monument sits in the center of Agostinho Neto Square, the site of the colonial-era monument to Governor Norton de Matos designed by architect Lucínio Cruz and dedicated in 1955 after the former governor's death. UNITA, which proclaimed Huambo as its short-lived capital for three months from late 1975 to early 1976, tore down the statue in the weeks after independence. **[Image 5]**. The dethroned Norton de Matos statue, now bullet ridden and without its pedestal, has been put up in the Jardim da Cultura, a few hundred meters from its old location at the center of Praça Manuel de Arriaga (now Praça Agostinho Neto).<sup>28</sup> The decision to erect another Neto monument reflects the MPLA's refusal to recognize or celebrate leaders from other nationalist movements or outside the small confines of the party's pantheon of heroes. As Angolan journalist Orlando Castro writes, "The regime's system of inclusion is, in fact, a joke...If the MPLA is Angola and Angola is the MPLA then there is only one national hero."<sup>29</sup> The Neto statue in Huambo reflects the MPLA's

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<sup>26</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, "Angola's 'Omnipresent' Leader Won't Run Again. But Will He Relinquish Power?" *New York Times* May 20, 2017. INSERT URL, retrieved on May 23, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Faria, "The Dawning of Angola's Citizenship Revolution," 306. See, for example, Central Angola 7311, <https://centralangola7311.net>

<sup>28</sup> Património de Influência Portuguesa, [www.hpip.org](http://www.hpip.org)

<sup>29</sup> Orlando Castro, "Agora Chamam-lhe Interesse Histórico" *folha 8*, 8 de Janeiro de 2016.

commitment to extol the greatness of MPLA leaders as a means of legitimating its rule and creating a dominant and shared national mythscape. The decision to erect a monument to Neto in the center of Huambo, the most important urban center in the central highlands, is striking because the central highlands was long the base of UNITA's support. Huambo was also the only major Angola city to fall under UNITA control, for three months in late 1975 to early 1976 and again for more than a year between 1993 and 1994.

The Neto Monument in Huambo is a singular and strategic figure representing the MPLA's victory in the civil war against UNITA. It is a claiming of space in central Huambo that proclaims the MPLA and Neto as Angola's rightful leaders. These power dynamics are essential to the decision to erect the Neto monument in Huambo.

### **Cuito Cuanavale Monument**

The MPLA led the first large-scale commemoration in 2008 of the twentieth anniversary of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. In July 2017, the MPLA plans to inaugurate a monument to the "Victory of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale," the latest of its war monuments.<sup>30</sup> The monument celebrates a victory of FAPLA (People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola) and FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces, Cuba) over SADF (South African Defense Forces) and UNITA forces on 23 March 1988. In the MPLA's official history, the victory at Cuito Cuanavale is interpreted as

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<sup>30</sup> The Angolan government budgeted Euro 12.3 million to complete the monument. Orlando Castro, "Como Hitler, Matar e Mentir," *Folha 8*, 6 de Abril de 2017. <http://jornalf8.net/2017/hitler-matar-mentir/>

a major turning point in southern Africa. Nelson Mandela, who in a speech said, Cuito Cuanavale “destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor...[and] inspired the fighting masses of South Africa...Cuito Cuanavale was the turning point for the liberation of our continent–and of my people–from the scourge of apartheid.”<sup>31</sup>

The battle of Cuito Cuanavale was really a series of battles between 12 July 1987 and March 1988 near the town of Cuito Cuanavale in southeastern Angola. In July 1987, FAPLA launched a major offensive against UNITA’s base at Mavinga in southeastern Angola. The SADF intervened to stop FAPLA’s advance and by early November 1987 had cornered FAPLA in Cuito Cuanavale. In response, the U.N. Security Council demanded that the SADF withdraw from Angola. The SADF did not withdraw, but held back a decisive attack on FAPLA at Cuito. In the meantime, Cuban President Fidel Castro decided to send thousands of additional troops, MIG-23 fighter planes, and tanks to help FAPLA. The strategy worked. The SADF and UNITA forces launched their last, unsuccessful attack on Cuito March 23, 1988. The Cuban/FAPLA defenses held. As a result, South Africa decided to withdraw its troops and UNITA retreated to its Mavinga base. In August, the South Africans agreed to a cease-fire in which their troops would leave Angolan territory before September 1, 1988; and in December the New York Accords initiated a process for free elections in Namibia, the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, and negotiations between the MPLA and UNITA to usher in democratic reforms.

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<sup>31</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), p. 519. For a first-hand account of the battle from a Cuban soldier, see Rubén G. Jiménez Gomez, *Cuito Cuanavale Crónica de uma Batalha* (Luanda: Mayamba Editora, 2014).

The monument itself is a 35-meter-high pyramid consisting of two levels. At the entrance statues of two soldiers, one MPLA and the other Cuban, stand with their interlocking arms raised and holding the outline of Angola with a star at Cuito Cuanavale. The pyramid houses an unfinished library and museum set to display war materials utilized by FAPLA and FAR troops and captured weaponry.

Currently, one critical lacuna in the Cuito Cuanavale Monument is any mention of Angola's civil war or the reasons UNITA troops fought at Cuito. Once again, Angola's civil war is elided in favor of a simplistic narrative in which the MPLA fought off foreign aggression. The UNITA soldiers who fought and died at Cuito receive no commemoration. In fact, UNITA did not, as far as I know, report publicly how many soldiers died at Cuito.<sup>32</sup>

The MPLA's historical narrative seen at the monument and in the government-controlled press celebrates Cuito as a major victory against white supremacy and foreign intervention.<sup>33</sup> As Justin Pearce argues, "the idea of the political movement as the defender of the nation against an alien enemy was the dominant strand in the ideologies of legitimacy on both sides."<sup>34</sup> UNITA saw itself as the defenders of traditional African culture against creoles espousing a foreign ideology (Marxism) and aligned with Cuba. Margarida Paredes notes that in her interviews with former FALA (Forças Armadas de Libertação de Angola; UNITA's

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<sup>32</sup> Gomez, *Cuito Cuanavale Crónica de uma Batalha*, 42-43.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, ANGOP Agência Angola Press, "Cuito Cuanavale Battle turns 29 years," 23 March 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Justin Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975-2002* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 13.

army) soldiers, they “almost always identify the enemy as ‘the Cubans’.”<sup>35</sup> Among FALA soldiers the threat that “the Cubans are invading Angola” motivated the troops, just as the threat of “racist South Africans invading the country” energized FAPLA soldiers.

It is also not clear whether other liberation movements, such as SWAPO’s armed wing, the Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) or the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), fought at Cuito. According to PLAN veterans PLAN soldiers fought at Cuito.<sup>36</sup> Of course, PLAN cooperated with both the MPLA and UNITA in the region, so it may have been possible that PLAN forces fought on both sides of the battle. Given the multiple silences at the Cuito Cuanavale Monument, it is unlikely that any information contradicting the dominant narrative of defeating South Africa will be allowed.

The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale contributed to the withdrawal of South Africa and Cuban troops from Angolan territory, Namibian independence, and the MPLA and UNITA agreeing to negotiations. Unfortunately, the Cuito Cuanavale Monument appears to repeat the practice in other Angolan war monuments of simplifying a complex series of wars to a narrative of the MPLA overcoming foreign intervention from apartheid South Africa.

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<sup>35</sup> Paredes, *Combater Duas Vezes*, p. 376.

<sup>36</sup> G.M. Liswaniso, *Statement by his Excellency G.M. Liswaniso, High Commissioner of the Republic of Namibia to the UK on the commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale*. Bolivar Hall, London. 31 March 2008. Cited in Tjaart Barnard, “Cuito Cuanavale (1987-1988): A Dialogue on Commemoration”, pp. 8-9.

## Conclusion

Monumentality, in essence, is antithetical to the notion of alternative and pluralistic national histories. As a result, non-monumental platforms and spaces have become increasingly important as sites for public or artistic discourse and dissent. For example, online blogs offer one venue for governmental critique and alternative versions of Angolan memory and nationalism. So, while it is not surprising that these alternative narratives would be silenced or excised from the monumental aesthetic, their very censure invites dissidents and critics within Angola to develop new, creative, and more flexible/fluid templates and aesthetics for their commentaries. They are not necessarily suggesting another 'monumental' version of history, but ultimately these other forms of memory require the monumental narrative in order to assert their power as revisions or disputes with the formal narratives. They work, in a sense, in concert with one another to demonstrate both the weaknesses and hegemony of the monumental nationalist aesthetic – a call to skepticism rather than outright dismantling, which would serve as a warning to others about the genre itself.

Paulo Faria identifies a 'counter-public', or resistance, in Angola that "tends to arise, even momentarily, whenever courageous people decide to overcome fear and 'speak up'."<sup>37</sup> In 2011, activists gathered at the Agostinho Neto monument on March 7 and again on 13 and 15 October to challenge MPLA authoritarianism with demands for President Dos Santo to step down and for an end to corruption and poverty. In choosing the Neto Monument to stage demonstrations, activists

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<sup>37</sup> Faria, "The Dawning of Angola's Citizenship Revolution," 294.



demonstrated that mythscapes are dialogical, not fixed. The state's hegemonic discourse (the Neto Monument) is not the final word. It remains to be seen whether these small and transitive openings will overcome the culture of fear and hegemonic modes of nationalism being constructed in independent Angola.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Birmingham, 'Is 'Nationalism' a Feature of Angola's Cultural Identity', in Morier-Genoud (ed.), *Sure Road?*, 220.