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# The Ministry of Injustice and No Human Rights in Angola

*Le ministère de l'injustice et des non-droits de l'homme en Angola*

*O Ministério da Injustiça e Sem Direitos Humanos em Angola*

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## Introduction: Human Rights Against Human Rights

- 1 This article contributes to ongoing critical analyses of Human Rights (HR) agendas and their role in the actual promotion of democracy, equality, and justice.<sup>1</sup> As pointed out by Costas Douzinas (e.g. 2000) and other scholars, the universal implementation of HR as a political agenda has not necessarily led to a decrease in violence and the underpinning of human dignity, forcing us to question its effectiveness in terms of struggles for peace, justice, and equality. A similar argument has been made more specifically concerning the development of an African Charter since the 1980s (Shivji 1989, Ouguerouz 2021). In fact, in retrospect, one may question to which extent, or in which terms, the ideology, discourse, and exercise of HR have acted as an obstacle to justice (Winfield 1982) by enabling the triumph of a perfunctory political display over actual, effective implementation.
- 2 This idea of HR preventing HR is ultimately a “functional paradox” in the sense that it can be understood as a political “performative act” (Austin 1962) whereby the declaration of HR intent becomes that act in itself, regardless of its subsequent empirical confirmation. The paradox also exposes how HR are subsumed within a logic of political performativity – or in other words, the integration of HR within symbolic and institutional ‘gestures’ of promotion of statehood – with public acts ranging from celebration, memorialization, and commemoration to pardon and reconciliation, or judicialization. From this perspective, if the performativity of statehood is certainly not a new angle, the introduction of HR into the framework of political praxis enables a critical reflection on the social and political productivity of HR beyond its rhetorical dimension (Slyomovics 2005, Englund 2006, Goodale 2009, Von Schnitzler 2014). When

this happens, HR are invoked and appropriated in the framework of state-citizenship relationships in divergent ways: while citizen and activist movements invoke HR as a tool for the exercise of democracy, autocratic states use HR to reinforce their political and partisan hegemony, or self-perpetuation. As we will see below through the Angolan case, constitutionalism and the justice system are mobilized by these two conflicting sets of agents albeit for distinct and often opposite goals.

- 3 Thus, as argued by Jarrett Zigon (2014), the talk and enactment of HR is also a “performative iteration”, whereby HR, in their repetitive unquestionable proclamation, become a “moral language” that prevails over the actual practice of human rights against political injustice. This theatricality (Derbyshire & Hodson 2008) is a paradoxical and perverse effect whereby the proclamation and performance of HR can obliterate its actual potential to improve the lives of different segments of society.
- 4 Angola is a country with a track record of violent authoritarian governance<sup>2</sup> and a long history of extrajudicial practices (Meneses & Lopes 2012), which has nevertheless invested in high-stakes HR initiatives in the 21st century – most notably the creation in 2012 of a Ministry of Justice and Human Rights<sup>3</sup> and the promotion of a reconciliation commission for victims of political violence (CIVICOP) in 2019. These initiatives are framed under a government-sponsored Strategy for Human Rights, implemented between 2018 and 2022 (MINJUSDH 2018), in accordance with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which came into effect in 1986, as well as other conventions, such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (signed in 2013). In 2023, Angola confirmed its full membership to the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. Despite their democratizing spirit, HR in Angola have been incorporated and subsumed into the “local system” of political governance (Schubert 2017), marked by processes of conflation between the ruling party, the government, and the regime (the so-called Popular Republic of the M – see Blanes 2023a), by an autocratic and autological political culture (*ibid.*), and by a deep refraction between State and citizenship (Tomás 2012). Subsequently, I posit that these recent HR developments must be replaced within a larger context of (in)justice policies and politics that have come to characterize the MPLA’s rule and successful attempts to stay in power since independence.<sup>4</sup>
- 5 In what follows, I will conduct a historical mapping of the trajectories of human rights promotions/violations in Angola, beginning with a focus on the pivotal events that took place in Luanda in the early years of independence (1975-1979), shaping the subsequent trajectory of violence, justice, and HR in the country. This will be followed by an overview of the José Eduardo Dos Santos presidency (1979-2017), which exposed the dual trajectory of HR in the country, in terms of its political implementation and citizens’ experiences. The third section will bring us to the 21st century, with a discussion and critical analysis of what has become the flagship initiative of the era of João Lourenço’s presidency regarding the promotion of Human Rights in Angola, the CIVICOP commission.

## Justice for and Against the People

- 6 Angola’s independence in 1975 was marked by a highly militarized, conflictual, and volatile process, determined by a transition from a liberation war to a virtually

immediate civil war between the former key military actors in the process of independence (see footnote 2), the concomitant introduction of Angola into global Cold War geopolitics (Weissman 1979, Gleijeses 2003, Portella & Leiria 2019), and the resistance against South African military interests in the country (Heywood 2011, Liebenberg *et al.* 2016). In this framework, the process of political establishment involved the implantation of a ‘popular power’ instilled from a Leninist definition of Revolution and State (DEPI 1977). The Law of Popular Power (*Lei do Poder Popular*), approved in the Revolutionary Council (*Conselho da Revolução*) on 5 February 1976, defined a “centralized democracy” (Chapter VI) that subordinated minority to majority, lower to superior levels, and the individual to the majority (art. 37), and imposed the critique and self-critique of behavioural and work attitudes. With regard to the texts that informed Angola’s judicial and constitutional architecture, the MPLA’s governance programme, for instance, drafted in 1966 and approved at an internal conference in 1974, referred to the Social Policy of Justice and Progress as key orientations. However, the first Constitution approved immediately after independence, informed by the Alvor Agreements (negotiated by the MPLA, UNITA, FNLA, and the Portuguese government) and the Fundamental Law that had been drafted before independence in June 1975 (Pinto 2016), played an explicit role in the monolithic conflation of the regime with the MPLA, attributing full executive power to the President, who presided over the Revolution Council (*Conselho da Revolução*). In this respect, while fundamental rights such as the separation of powers and equality in the face of the law were guaranteed (art. 18), these statements cohabited with the explicit concentration of executive power within the MPLA monocracy, which ultimately thwarted the possibility of universal justice (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup>

- 7 Such texts, aggregated under the concept of “revolutionary justice” (*justiça revolucionária* – INA 1978), were subjected unto a martial logic, which had a strict disciplinary culture<sup>6</sup> and, for instance, placed the death penalty under the aegis of President Agostinho Neto, as was already the case in the Combatant Discipline Law (*Lei de Disciplina do Combatente*) of 1970. While the death penalty initially only applied to military personnel, after a legislative revision in 1978 (Law no. 3/78), the jurisdiction extended to civilians. Its operative infrastructure was the People’s Revolutionary Court (*Tribunal Popular Revolucionário*), set up in 1976 (Law no. 7/76) as separate from the civil court system, thus enabling multiple express death sentences and executions of crimes within and beyond the military realm, with no accountability beyond the MPLA Revolution Council. Up until the 1980s, dozens of Angolans were executed under the aegis of the TPR (AI 1985).
- 8 From this perspective, one can talk about a culture of martial, vindictive justice, inspired by a politico-military conjugation that culminated in the events of 1976 and 1977. In June 1977, Agostinho Neto announced what he called a “dictatorship for the benefit of the people” that would grant the MPLA leadership full judicial decision and waive, when necessary, any sort of due process (see Fig. 1). Thus, if during the liberation period (1961-1975) the debate on HR in Angola was an active part of the process of constructing an international diplomatic consensus against Portuguese imperialism and towards Angola’s independence,<sup>7</sup> after independence, the subject virtually disappeared, both from the texts and public debate.

Fig. 1



Front page of the *Jornal de Angola*, 9 June 1977, with public statements by Agostinho Neto: "In the name of the People we will establish a dictatorship exercised by the MPLA for the good of the people" and "We will not use the usual process, which would not be fair. We will dictate a sentence!"

Source: Author's personal archive.

- 9 One central aspect of this process was the creation, in November of 1975 (the very month of Angola's independence), of the DISA or Directorate of Information and Security of Angola (*Direcção de Informação e Segurança de Angola*), a secret service structure aiming to "defend and consolidate independence and national unity, and protect the revolutionary conquests of the people, while promoting the re-education of those elements that might threaten those objectives [...] as well as to combat any acts or activities against the Constitutional Law, against the State and against the MPLA".<sup>8</sup> This constitutional text is another example of how the project of statehood was one of conflation of (MPLA) party and regime (see Blanes 2023a) from the onset. Furthermore, as Paula Roque points out, DISA was a structure that reported directly to Agostinho Neto, its director (Ludy Kissassunda) ranking on a par with governmental ministers. The service's scope by far exceeded that of collecting and processing information: it was a centralized, militarized security apparatus that fed into the judicial and extrajudicial 'justice' system during these years (Roque 2021: 99-100, see also Franco 2014).
- 10 The centrality of a performative justice in the newly born government became evident in June 1976, in what became one of the main public judicial processes of the first year of Angolan independent life: the *Julgamento dos Mercenários*, or Trial of the Mercenaries (see Hoover 1977, Lockwood 1977, Roebuck & Burchett 1977, Heywood 2011, Venter 2017).<sup>9</sup> After capturing a group of foreign mercenaries – nine British, three North American and one Irish – fighting for the FNLA in the civil war, the MPLA regime staged a five-day public trial (11-16 June) of the "dogs of war" (Hoover 1977), or "whores of war" (Roebuck & Burchett 1977). The process included five judges, one of whom (Orlando Rodrigues) was also the Director of Angolan Television (Lockwood 1977: 185), while three others belonged to the MPLA's army, FAPLA (*Forças Armadas Populares de*

*Libertação de Angola* or People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola). The prosecutor (*procurador*) was Manuel Rui Monteiro, one of the main figureheads of Angolan literature and a lawyer by training. Needless to add that the trial was broadcast on public television, with extensive coverage by the official newspaper *Jornal de Angola*. The event also included foreign observers from North and South America, Africa and Europe (Lockwood 1977). Despite the formal performance as a trial, it was clear from the start that the verdicts, at least for the recognition of guilt, were a foregone conclusion. On 9 June, thousands of Angolans marched through Luanda holding posters demanding the death penalty for those about to be judged (Rookes 2021: 60). By the end of the month, the sentences were passed, and, by July of the same year, four of the mercenaries were executed by firing squad in the Grafanil area, while the others were condemned to sentences between 16 and 30 years of imprisonment.<sup>10</sup>

Fig. 2



Still from the Trial of the Mercenaries, June 1976.

Source: Ephemera Archive.

- 11 Regardless of our assessment of the justice imparted in the process, what becomes clear is the logic of performance at stake in its exercise. However, while the mercenaries were at least granted some form of enactment of a public trial, the same did not happen to other actors accused of 'treason' or crimes during this period. This was the case of the so-called *fraccionismo* events that took place just a few months after the Trial of the Mercenaries, in May 1977 (Mateus & Mateus 2007). By late 1976, just one year after the declaration of independence, significant conflicts emerged within the MPLA leadership, mostly regarding the possibility of creating a truly decolonized independent state and the tensions between revolutionary and petit-bourgeois social forces within the MPLA.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically, a group led by Nito Alves, a former liberation combatant of the First Politico-Military Region and Minister of the Interior (1975-1976) and then member of

the Central Committee, contested several decisions exercised by Agostinho Neto's cabinet. While the figure of Neto himself was not directly challenged, criticism was directed towards his entourage (Iko Carreira, Lúcio Lara), accused of being corrupt and of deviating from a purely socialist governance. While it is impossible to cover all the different aspects of this conflict in this text,<sup>12</sup> the increasing tension led to the unrest of 27 May 1977, when a group of Nito supporters attached to the 9th Military Brigade invaded the São Paulo prison, while another group occupied Radio Nacional and called for a popular demonstration against the current situation in the country. The attempted demonstration was quickly countered by the intervention of the Cuban military in support of Neto, and the uprising was deemed unsuccessful.<sup>13</sup> In his initial public statement, Neto called for peace and reconciliation. However, the discovery of the bodies of eight high-ranking military officials allegedly close to Neto and his entourage – commonly referred to as “the commanders” – who had been held hostage by Alves supporters led to a public call by Neto for a witch hunt against the group spearheaded by Alves, José Van Dúnem, Sita Valles, and others.<sup>14</sup> Retaliation grew to the extent of leading to the arrest, detainment, torture, and execution of thousands of actual and suspected supporters of the *fraccionistas*. Reports include mass executions, death flights, continued torture, imprisonment with no due process, and concentration camps that lasted until 1979.

- 12 While the leaders of the insurrection and other supporters of the group were captured within days following the events of 27 May and immediately executed with no trial, their ‘verdict’ was profusely displayed in the Angolan media, which diligently conveyed the MPLA leadership’s narrative and instructions concerning the events.<sup>15</sup> This included the presentation of “evidence” and the publication of public “confessions” by the middle-ranked dissidents before they were executed – as was the case with Rui Coelho and Pedro Fortunato, who were also executed in a matter of days. Just a few days later, the national television channel broadcast a “documentary” entitled *O Golpe do 27 de Maio*, with the account of the “discovery” of the missing commanders and their horrible fate, offering a reconstruction of events and the conclusion. Soon later, a handwritten “confession” by Nito Alves emerged in the media, where he took responsibility for the elimination of the commanders.
- 13 To this, the coverage of the events also added a vox pop narrative, incorporating the opinions of both anonymous citizens and multiple grassroots organizations on the *fraccionismo* – all in the same tone and calling for the execution of the “traitors” with no trial (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3



Vox pop: "They should all be killed with no pardon or much sentimentalism." *Jornal de Angola*, 7 June 1977.

Source: author's personal archive.

- 14 An extrajudicial committee was set up to make the leadership members who had not immediately been murdered "confess".<sup>16</sup> However, hundreds or thousands of Nito Alves' supporters were not even granted a chance to attend the commission and were simply imprisoned and executed. Many more spent time in prison and concentration camps to be released two years later with no formal justification for their arrest. From my interviews with survivors, orphans, and family members of the deceased,<sup>17</sup> it appears the large majority of those arrested, tortured, or executed in the process were never officially informed of the reasons for their punishment. The motivations included mere proximity to the protagonists of the insurrection, either through family, work, or residence. From this perspective, following a reference from Linda Heywood (2011), we could say that in the early years of Angolan independence, and specifically in 1977, the idea of justice was performed through an extensive and excessive track record of "civilian casualties". Here, we acknowledge that the political configuration of the regime not only enabled a judicial and an extrajudicial system, but also conjured national media into a mediatized praxis.

## Human Rights: A Dual Itinerary

- 15 In 1979, two years after the events of 27 May, a set of relevant proceedings took place: the *fraccionista* process was concluded and the Conselho da Revolução decided to close DISA down in response to several internal and external accusations of violence and abuse, within and beyond the events of 27 May (Roque P. 2021).<sup>18</sup> The same year, Neto passed away in Moscow and was succeeded by a then discreet and younger cadre, José Eduardo Dos Santos. While the civil war, Cold War, South African pressure, and militarized governance continued, Dos Santos slowly implemented a process of structural economic, political, and judicial reforms that culminated in the recognition of Angola as a social democratic regime in the 1990s. This was established through the Constitutional Law of 1992, which was designed through the Bicesse Accords between the Angolan government and UNITA in 1991. The accords set out a path to peace, initiated a politico-judicial reform towards a multi-party system, and paved the way towards the first general elections in Angola, to be held in 1992. In this framework, a

constitutionalist regime was inaugurated by establishing a Supreme Court, replaced in 2008 by the current Constitutional Court. Subsequently, this process also took place in a context of transnational dialogue towards a peacebuilding environment in Angola, supervised by the UNAVEM (United Nations Verification Mission) campaigns promoted by the United Nations in agreement with the Angolan state. In this framework, a first mission (UNAVEM I) was established in 1988 to oversee the withdrawal of Cuban troops and infrastructure from Angola until 1991.

- 16 However, the transition abruptly ended with the post-election confrontations, after UNITA refused to recognize the results – which had placed both Jonas Savimbi and Dos Santos within the 40% vote range – due to a lack of transparency in the process and poor international (namely UN) supervision. Subsequent negotiations fell apart after government troops and MPLA-sponsored militias attacked UNITA's demobilized troops and supporters in Luanda – in what became known by many as the Halloween Massacre (*Massacre do Dia das Bruxas* – see Roque F. 2021), resulting in the estimated deaths of thousands of UNITA supporters (see NSHR 2000: 9, Roque F. 2021: 46) as well as of party leaders Jeremias Chitunda, Salupeto Pena, and Alicerces Mango (AI 1993). In the aftermath of the post-electoral repression, other massacres and persecutions took place in the form of ethnic persecutions – such as the deaths of hundreds of UNITA detainees in containers in Namibe and Tombwa in January 1993, or the *Sexta-feira Sangrenta* (Bloody Friday) events, in which Angolans or Congolese migrants of Bakongo ethnicity were persecuted and killed by militias, after a rumour spread concerning an alleged attempt to murder José Eduardo Dos Santos (Mabeko-Tali 1995).
- 17 The Lusaka protocol of 1994, an agreement towards a national reconciliation process through the demobilization of UNITA military, proved unsuccessful and could not prevent the continuation of the civil war (Correia 1996, Messiant 2004). In this period, two UN missions (UNAVEM II, III) took place, initially to monitor the expected transition towards peace and the electoral process (UNAVEM II, 1991-1995) and then to attempt to reestablish a path to peace as part of the Lusaka protocol (UNAVEM III and MONUA, 1996-1999). As the civil war unfolded throughout the 1990s, these missions were ultimately a failure in terms not only of the end of the war but also of the promotion of basic human rights (Guyot & Vines 2014, see also Anstee 1996 for a personalistic account of the process).
- 18 In 2002, after the death of UNITA's long-time leader Savimbi in a battle with FAPLA troops in Moxico (Fernando 2012, Pearce 2015, Martins 2021, the Angolan civil war finally ended and, through the Memorandum of Luena, a peace deal was negotiated between the two main contenders, MPLA and UNITA. This included a blanket amnesty that, despite helping lower political tensions and further the disarmament process, did not include a post-justice strategy, leaving a multitude of war crimes unaccounted for, among which the 1993 massacres (van Wijk 2012). This paved the way towards an era of “national reconstruction” led by the “architect of peace” José Eduardo Dos Santos and boosted by oil revenues (Péclard 2008, Oliveira 2015, Schubert 2017). So began the years of peace and prosperity in Angola.

Fig. 4



"40 Years of National Independence. Long Live Angola, Long Live Peace."

Photo © Ruy Llera Blanes, 11 November 2015.

- 19 After the 2002 armistice, it took eight years to transform the Constitutional Law into an actual Constitution. In this respect, regarding HR, the 2010 Constitution was perceived as a "new order" (Miranda 2010, Inocêncio 2015, Gouveia 2017, Silva 2019), departing from the Constitutional Law of 1992 by clearly stating the primacy of "fundamental rights" against economic and financial principles (Miranda 2010: 16). It affirmed the dignity of the human person as the foundation of the Republic (arts. 1 and 236) and the State's obligation to respect, guarantee, and enforce fundamental rights (arts. 2, 21, 236), in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international instruments of protection (art. 26) working towards the immediate binding of rights, freedoms, and guarantees (art. 28). The 2010 Constitution consecrated public freedoms (arts. 36, 40, 41, 43 to 48, and 58) and guaranteed personal freedom within the law and criminal procedure (arts. 64 to 67). It also removed the statute of limitations for genocide and crimes against humanity (art. 61). However, as Jorge Miranda points out, the Constitution was also a "dubious" text, in terms of the concentration of executive power in the hands of the President of the Republic and of the primacy of "national security" over other rights (Miranda 2010: 39, Pestana 2011).
- 20 In any case, throughout the Dos Santos presidency, HR in Angola experienced the first steps in terms of their introduction into the process of rhetorical performativization, punctuated by the violent justice logic characterizing the current situation. In other words, while HR were continuously and successfully integrated within governance and diplomatic procedures in Angola, a succession of human rights violations continued to occur and remain unaddressed. This duality feeds into the idea of a "performatized HR regime" that operates in divergence with the physical enactment of governance, as we will demonstrate below. What follows is a partial list of human rights violations

identified between 1979 and today, mediated by the transition from a situation of civil war (up to 2002) to a situation of peace (2002-to date).<sup>19</sup> Although I shall not explore any of the cases mentioned in depth, this list is intended to expose the breadth and width of accusations of HR violations, expanding from the capital Luanda to other cities and rural contexts.

- Restrictions on freedom of press and expression (HRW 2006, Cruz 2016), for instance through the forced closure of opposition broadcasters such as UNITA's Radio Vorgan (HRW 1999) or through the persecution of independent journalists critical of the regime, as was the case with Rafael Marques (AI 2000).
- Restrictions on freedom of association, demonstration, and public participation, both in relation to demands for independence or sovereignty in Cabinda or Lunda Norte (HRW 1999, AI 2010, Friends of Angola 2018) and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring events, which sparked a wave of youth activist mobilization in Angola (AI 2013, 2014; see Blanes 2019, 2021, 2023a).
- Child exploitation, abuse, and trafficking, for instance as part of war activities (HRW 1996a, 2003).
- Violation of laws of war, for instance through arms trade (HRW 1994, 1996b).
- Police and security abuse, extrajudicial killings of civilians on behalf of security forces (AI 2007), for instance in the context of the Cabinda conflict (AI 1998, HRW 2005), the diamond industry (Global Witness 1998, AJPD 2019) or the crackdown on street vendor activity (HRW 2013).
- No due process in imprisonment and judicial procedures (Mosaiko 2020), for instance in relation to Cabinda (HRW 1999, 2009) or Lunda Norte (AI 2010), human rights activists (Blanes 2023a), or journalists (AI 2008).
- No human dignity in the handling of irregular migrants or refugees, namely from the DR Congo (HRW 2012, Omunga 2020).
- Restrictions on the right to housing through forced evictions and insecure land tenure (AI 2003, 2004, 2019a; Foley 2007; HRW 2007; SOS Habitat 2014).
- Corruption, namely in relation to oil revenues (HRW 2010), public-private alliances (AJPD 2018), and the mismanagement of public funds (HRW 2005).
- Discrimination on religious grounds (AI 2020; see Blanes 2015a, 2015b).
- Extreme poverty, food insecurity, health inequality, for instance in relation to land grabbing and the obstruction of traditional livelihoods (AI 2019b).
- Gender inequality, sexual violence (HRW 2012, Omunga *et al.* 2018).
- Environmental crimes related to industrial extraction activities or the abandonment of infrastructural (Blanes *et al.* 2022).
- Irregular elections (HRW 2010, AI 2022, Nhamirre 2022, USAID, ABA & ARISA 2022).

<sup>21</sup> While this list is based on the work of Angolan and international civic organizations and NGOs, these violations must also be understood in the context of longstanding interactions between the Angolan state and international civic or national/supranational institutions (among which the UN initiatives noted above). These interactions include official deeds of the Angolan regime ranging from acts and statements of collaboration, the ratification of treaties, and the acceptance of recommendations to the denial of accusations, persecutory actions against accusers, or mere silence. In this trajectory, concomitant to the track record exposed above, Angola was progressively incorporating an HR governance and rhetoric towards the production of the projection of a democratic state. For instance, throughout the early 2000s, during negotiations between the Angolan government and a financial assistance

programme, Angola committed to the external monitoring of its use of oil revenues, identified by HR organizations as the main resource used to fund the war on behalf of the MPLA (HRW 2000, 2001). A few years later, the Republic of Angola was finally elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, in 2007, which accelerated Angola's adherence to international treaties (AJPD 2010), but also spurred a debate concerning the country's uneasy relation with international institutions concerning the supervision and reporting of HR observance in the country (see AJPD 2010, CIVICUS 2019). The process culminated with the inauguration in 2012 of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the Angolan parliament restructured and revised the judicial architecture towards the more expansive recognition and framing of HR protection, both in terms of the adherence to international protocols and treaties mentioned in the beginning of this article, and the development of a national legal framework. This was the case for the following legal instruments: the 2011 Law against Domestic Violence (Law 25/11), the 2012 Law on the Protection and Comprehensive Development of Children (Law 25/12), or the 2020 Law for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses, Defendants and their Families (Law 1/20).

- 22 Combining the list above with the different governmental actions described afterwards, it is easy to note a dual history regarding the trajectory of HR in Angola, one that follows a logic of refraction between performance and implementation. Thus, while the accusations of HR violations continued, the Angolan regime was able to perform a progressive policy towards an agenda that met international standards – at least in principle. In what follows, I focus on two recent examples that have marked Angola's trajectory since the 2002 armistice: the state of HR after the implementation of the 2010 Constitution and the recent CIVICOP initiative.

## The Testing of the Constitution

- 23 The 2010 Constitution was internationally praised for its concern towards HR, namely regarding the freedom of speech and the right to assembly.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly enough, it was around the same time that the effectiveness of the human rights rhetoric in the text was significantly tested, in particular concerning the freedom of expression and assembly. From 2011, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, several Angolan youths began mobilizing to demand more democracy, financial justice, and human rights, loosely referred to as the *Revú* (revolutionary) movement (Blanes 2019, 2021, 2023a). An attempted demonstration to be held in Luanda's First of May Square on 7 March 2011 was framed as the first demonstration in Angolan history to demand the removal of President José Eduardo Dos Santos. However, this event, and most ensuing attempted demonstrations, were met with repressive abortive actions from the government's security forces (Blanes 2023a).
- 24 The crux of this confrontation was the interpretation and exercise of Article 47 of the 2010 Constitution, regarding the right to assembly and demonstration. While, prior to the 2010 Constitution, attempts at demonstrating were easily and consistently repressed by the police and security forces (see e.g. Mukuta & Fortuna 2011, Blanes 2016, Pawson 2016), the constitutional revision incorporated an explicit formulation guaranteeing the right to demonstrate, provided local authorities were informed beforehand. However, as mentioned above, the vast majority of initiatives to protest against the Angolan regime by exercising the right to assembly, demonstration, and

freedom of expression were either barred, obstructed, or violently dispersed by the security or police forces, which was usually justified by the rhetoric of “disturbing public order” or “challenging national security” (see Blanes 2016, 2023a for a chronology).

- 25 Throughout my ethnographic research in Angola, I witnessed first-hand several of these interactions between the state and citizens, in particular within and around the event that was to be known in Angola as the “15+2” case, where, in June 2015, a group of 17 activists was arrested and accused of an attempted *coup d'état* against the government. The trial that followed was criticized by several international organizations and was portrayed as a clear violation of human rights due to the lack of due process and the political manipulation of the judicial system (Blanes 2023a).
- 26 One such occasion took place in October 2015, during which activists and members of NGOs and civic society were promoting solidarity actions in support of the 15+2 activists, some of whom were staging hunger strikes in prison to protest their unlawful detention. After several unsuccessful attempts to encourage demonstrations in the public space, several groups began to promote a different approach, namely by organizing vigils in the premises of Catholic Church buildings.<sup>22</sup> The first actions took place in the Sagrada Familia church in Luanda. Attendees wore white clothes and carried candles and signs in solidarity with the prisoners, under the close surveillance of local police forces. On 12 October, a fourth vigil was scheduled, this time in the Church of São Domingos. According to the flyers and posters distributed for the occasion, the event was to take place in the church building, during mass. On that occasion, I was able to appreciate first-hand how, around 6 p.m., the square in front of the church was completely cleared and occupied by police vans. Shortly after, mass began, and a group of young people stood at the top of the stairs at the entrance to the church, wearing white shirts and carrying small candles. After a few minutes, the police invaded the church's atrium and began to forcibly remove those present. The youths' screams drew the attention of the priest, who momentarily interrupted mass while some of the believers moved outside. I saw three activists being forcefully dragged into the police van, against the timid protests of those witnessing the situation. In the days that followed, while activists on social media denounced the “police invasion” of the Catholic Church premises and the arrest of citizens exercising peaceful religious activity, police force representatives, public officials, and official media outlets condemned the young protesters for “promoting public disorder” (Blanes 2023a).
- 27 This episode illustrates how constitutional rights in Angola are performed or exercised in a highly confrontational landscape, unfolding into a logic of “spatiality of human rights”, as it were (Kestilä 2022). In other words, it draws attention to the material, architectural and topographical dimensions of HR performance (Weizman 2017): while HR ‘work’ on the surface of the Angolan constitutional and political texts, the streets of Luanda and other urban settings are spaces of state violence.

Fig. 5



Police 'inviting' citizens to leave the church during an attempted vigil in solidarity, arresting activists while churchgoers observe.

Photo © Ruy Llera Blanes, 12 November 2015.

Fig. 6



Police barring activists, diplomats, anthropologists, and the families of activists being tried for an alleged *coup d'état* in Angola from entering the court.

Photo © Ruy Llera Blanes, 18 November 2015.

## CIVICOP and the Enactment of Reconciliation

- 28 As mentioned earlier in this text, in 2019, Angolan president João Lourenço launched a novel reconciliation initiative to finally address several of the unresolved episodes and events left unaccounted for throughout Angola's independent history. The initiative became known as CIVICOP – the Commission for the Implementation of the Reconciliation Plan in Memory of the Victims of Political Conflicts. While Lourenço's individual motivations for the initiative were never made explicit, the initiative was generally welcomed and framed precisely within the government's growing investment in HR, of which the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights was the main token.
- 29 Relevantly, the decree that inaugurated the initiative covered violence committed by political movements and parties both in the context of the armed conflict and of internal partisan conflicts. It therefore included victims of the Civil War confrontations as well as victims of the events of 27 May 1977, the latter taking centre stage in the public debates concerning the CIVICOP initiative.
- 30 Under the motto "Embrace and Forgive", the plan proposed building a memorial in Luanda in honour of all the victims of political conflicts in the country. A key moment was provided by President João Lourenço's public apology in May 2021, on behalf of the Angolan regime, to those who had been victims of political violence since independence. In his speech, Lourenço expressed his "sincere regrets" regarding the "disproportionate" actions and the loss of innocent lives in relation to the May 1977

events. He added that it was not the time to “point fingers” but to put an end to the suffering and anguish of the families of those who had never been found. Finally, in an attempt to lessen the charge against the MPLA, he referred to the victims of UNITA sponsored violence, in particular internal persecutions such as those that occurred in the party’s Jamba headquarters in 1983.<sup>23</sup>

- 31 The plan also included the search and identification of victims’ remains and the subsequent issuance of death certificates to their relatives. These were in direct response to the wishes and demands of both family members and various civic organizations that had been formed and organized in Angola and the diaspora in recent years around the events of 27 May 1977. In December 2021, a Commission for the Investigation and Certification of Deaths of Victims of Political Conflicts was set up, with the aim of carrying out the specific work of surveying and identifying the remains located. The culmination of this process, in June 2022, was the public burial of the remains of Nito Alves, Sianuk, Jacob Caetano, and Ilídio Ramalhete – some of the key figures of the ill-fated 27 May events – after their remains and death certificates had been given to their surviving kin. In the public act, military honours were paid to the deceased.

Fig. 7



Screenshot of the TV broadcast of the public burial ceremony of the remains of victims of the events of 27 May, in June 2022.

Source: TPA Online.

- 32 While the act was successful as a reconciliation performance enacting a moment of closure, the critical analysis of the process of investigation, location, and certification of the victims that led to this and other public acts quickly unveiled a plethora of ambiguities.
- 33 First, there was little transparency with regard to the constitution of an independent commission (not including governmental or police agents), from which internationally recognized independent actors such as the International Red Cross, the UN, or independent HR organizations remained excluded. In the case of CIVICOP, the government involved itself as a promoter and coordinator of the process through the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, investigating actions that took place in its own

midst and thus becoming simultaneously a player and an arbiter of the reconciliation process. In fact, until the 2022 elections, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Francisco Queiroz, was concomitantly chair of CIVICOP – a fact that immediately undermined the claimed impartiality of the government/party/regime in the process. After the elections, he was succeeded, in both positions, by Marcy Lopes, former Minister of Territorial Administration.

- 34 While it is true that, since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reconciliation and truth commissions have adopted very diverse forms and procedures, one transversal and consensual aspect is that their success depends on three factors: information, transparency, and the building of trust. For this to happen, the active participation of the families of the victims and survivors of the events in question is essential. In this case, the families of the victims of 27 May were not directly included in the work of the commission and were only contacted to provide genetic data for the investigation. The current members of CIVICOP have never been publicly announced.
- 35 In any case, the shortcomings of this process are not limited to the composition of the investigation commission. The situation becomes more complex when it comes to the investigation and analytical procedures. Here, despite the abundance of precedence, CIVICOP did not follow any previous recommendations or good practices – both in terms of internationally recognized documents such as the Minnesota Protocol of 1991 or the Istanbul Protocol, adopted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2001, and of geographically close examples of similar commissions in South Africa and Rwanda. Despite the long track record, no such practices were followed by CIVICOP, which, from the onset, emphasized the dimensions of forgiveness and forgetting rather than the search for truth and justice.
- 36 This issue became evident at the end of 2021, when the forensic work phase was carried out. This was understood as being a fundamental part of the reconciliation process, in that the identification and return of the victims' remains would finally bring their relatives a physical and symbolic moment of closure, after decades of not knowing the final fate of their loved ones. First, the process of identifying excavation sites was not at all transparent. Who identified the excavation sites? With what knowledge, sources, and methodology? On 16 November 2021, Angola's national television channel, TPA (*Televisão Pública de Angola*) broadcast a Special Information Report presenting the steps taken in the identification work.<sup>24</sup> In the report, reference was made to the use of "oral testimonies" and to the role played by a Brazilian researcher – the geographer Ary Resende Filho, a professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso – in identifying graves and mass graves using a soil-measuring device. This methodology, however, is not recognized in international forensic practices.
- 37 The Angolan media report disseminated disturbing images of backhoe loaders in action and the manual manipulation of bones for public display. However, it was unclear who was leading the excavation. On 20 March 2022, Minister Francisco Queiroz himself announced to the media the location of ten bodies, including "possibly" those of Nito Alves, Pedro Fortunato, Bakalov, Monstro Immortal, Sita Valles, José Van Dúnem, David Zé, Urbano de Castro, Domingos Barros 'Sabata', Artur Nunes, and finally Júlio and Ilídio Ramalhete. This conviction was to be further verified by cross-referencing genetic data. Of these, despite the "strong possibilities" of identification referred to by the CIVICOP coordinator, only four were later confirmed and returned to their families in the June 2022 ceremony described above. However, no one answered the

question: how did this conviction of “strong possibility” come about? Which sources and indicators made it possible to reach this provisional conclusion?

- 38 The lack of transparency and rigour reached its height in the first months of 2023 when, thanks to an intergovernmental agreement, the Portuguese Government assembled an investigation team to participate in the forensic process. The team arrived in Luanda for a first mission at the end of 2021 and a second one in July 2022, with a view to identifying the remains of Sita Valles, José Van Dúnm, and 36 other deceased persons. The rationale behind the calculation of the number of deceased individuals in this intervention is unknown. In any case, the research team was comprised of international experts in the areas of forensic anthropology (Duarte Nuno Vieira, Eugénia Cunha), genetics, and criminalistics, including a specialist from the Portuguese Judicial Police. However, as explained in the team’s public presentation of the results on 21 March 2023, their work in Luanda was limited to the analysis of bones previously selected by others, none of which, after analysis, corresponded to victims related to the events of 27 May.<sup>25</sup> The team had no information regarding the local identification and excavation procedures and were confronted with the prior manipulation of the bones subject to analysis. In addition, the earth of the site that was presented to the team as the origin of the remains subject to analysis (the Palmeirinhas area in Luanda Sul) did not correspond with the earth observed in the remains themselves.
- 39 Given this conclusion and the lack of information regarding the leaders of the previous identification, excavation, forensic, and laboratory work before the Portuguese team, a legitimate doubt arose: who identified the remains already returned to the families of the victims – for example Nito Alves, Sianouk, Jacob Caetano, and Ilídio Ramalhete, as mentioned above – and how were they authenticated? Despite the issues raised, the Angolan government continued with the plan.

Fig. 8



Public presentation by Duarte Nuno Vieira of the results of the forensic and genetic work performed by the Portuguese research team, held in March 2023.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9NvFP3mEMQ> (accessed 22 March 2023).

- 40 Compared with other cases of violence, reconciliation, truth, and justice in Africa such as South Africa, Rwanda, or Mozambique, in Angola the government adopted a policy

closer to the Rwandan model, where the government unilaterally took charge of the process (see Ferreira 2005). From this perspective, as noted above, in the Angolan case where the party in government is both a stakeholder and protagonist of most of the political violence events included in CIVICOP, achieving a consensus around the notion of ‘truth’ would have required establishing an independent specialized commission not subject to the criteria of the Angolan government and its Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. However, this is not what happened. All the information disclosed so far has been produced and disseminated in a partial way and manipulated by the Angolan government itself. The lack of transparency in the decision-making process, as well as the lack of rigour in the methodology, do not allow for any kind of certainty in the process.

- 41 At a time when there is no clarification or transparency in the process, the question remains: is CIVICOP a genuine process of reconciliation, possibly well-intentioned but lacking in rigour and professionalism? Or does CIVICOP have more immediate political objectives – namely the staging of a policy of transparency and dialogue in light of the Angolan government’s international diplomatic commitments or the August 2022 election? Or is it merely an attempt to control the results and manage the accountability and impunity of the MPLA and its members?

## Conclusion: The Ministry of Injustice and No Human Rights

- 42 In 2004, barely two years after the armistice that ended the Angolan civil war, the then representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Angola and Bolivia, Vegard Bye, gave the opening speech to an event jointly organized by the UN and the National Assembly of Angola. Among other things, he stated:

The people of Angola have been suffering for many years. Its history so far has not allowed it to fully exercise its human rights, whether civic, political or socio-economic, [...] Not even, often, the most fundamental right that is life is observed in the country, which is currently on a historic path towards democracy and the rule of law, walking a tougher distance between principles and compliance with them.<sup>26</sup>

- 43 This statement was shared in a context that was new to Angolan citizens: peace. However, virtually twenty years later, the trajectory of HR in Angola is one of continuity and perpetuation, to this day, of certain praxes that ultimately challenge the very notion of human rights and its ministry. For instance, as argued elsewhere (Blanes 2023b), throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we observed a continuation of the authoritarian mode of governance that was exercised in a state of exception (see also AI 2020, Amundsen & Abreu 2021).
- 44 It is here, in the intersection of constitutional text, judicial practice, political display, and citizen resistance, that what we call the Ministry of Injustice and No Human Rights emerges in Angola. On the one hand, we have identified a culture of political performativity that has incorporated HR as a rhetorical device, along the same lines as the concept of justice that was politically manufactured in the early years of Angolan independence, as seen through the cases of the Trial of the Mercenaries and the events of 27 May 1977. On the other, we have observed that that performativity was cultivated to an extent of virtual disconnection between the rhetorical and the practical dimensions – as we could see with the attempted ‘exercise’ of Article 47 of the 2010

Constitution. This explains how in Angola, a ‘positive’ trajectory of political investment in HR – of which the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights is the token – can cohabit with a growing track record of HR violations in the country. This occurs through a consistent disconnection between HR as a political device and HR as a tool for a democratic exercise of citizenship, as I have tried to demonstrate with the examples of CIVICOP.

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## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Dorothée Boulanger, António Tomás, the anonymous reviewers, and Clara dos Santos at *Lusotopie* for helping me structure and improve the text with their careful and insightful comments.
2. The MPLA is the only party that has ruled Angola since its independence in 1975, João Lourenço has been president since 2017, replacing José Eduardo Dos Santos (1942-2022), who spent 38 consecutive years in office after succeeding Agostinho Neto (1922-1979). The MPLA rose

to power in a contested process of transition – the Alvor Agreements – that was questioned by the other parties who had taken part in the liberation war (FNLA and UNITA) and ultimately led to a long civil war between the Angolan government/MPLA and UNITA that lasted until 2002. From the beginning, the MPLA was a self-defined socialist movement, inspired by Marxist-Leninist doctrine (Mabeko-Tali 2018). After the reforms in the 1990s, the regime transitioned into a social democracy, and the MPLA's effective practice and implementation of left-wing ideologies since then is questionable, despite its adhesion to Socialist International (of which it became a full member in 2003).

3. The ministry was created in 2012 to replace the Ministry of Justice and incorporated the previous Secretary of State of Human Rights. The first Ministry of Justice was created one day after the declaration of independence in Angola, on 12 November 1975 (Law no. 1/75). Its first minister was Diógenes Assis Boavida (1927-2012), a former football player, lawyer, and member of the *Processo dos 50* (Trial of Fifty), a group of Angolan nationalists who in the late 1950s were detained and subject to a political trial by the Portuguese colonial authorities. This process raised international awareness regarding the situation in Angola and became the backbone of the anticolonial movement (Cunha 2011, Medina 2013).

4. This research is based on long-term anthropological fieldwork in Angola, notably among political and human rights activists (Blanes 2021, 2023a), and more broadly through diverse investigations and initiatives in Angola over the past fifteen years on religious movements (2007-2015), youth activism in the post-Arab Spring moment (2015-to date), civic responses to environmental disaster in Southwestern Angola (2020-2022), and the memory of the events of 27 May discussed in this paper (2021-to date). This has included a wide set of methodologies ranging from formal interviews to focus groups, spontaneous conversations, participant observation, and archival media research – accounting for the diverse sources referred to in the text.

5. This contradiction was ‘resolved’ with the events of 27 May 1977 described below, which also put an end to the attempted implementation of the power of the people (*poder popular*) that was rehearsed throughout 1975 and 1976 with the Popular Neighborhood Commissions (*Comissões Populares de Bairro*). See Mabeko-Tali (2018: 475 sq.).

6. Interview with a former MPLA combatant, 23 November 2022. Here I am referring specifically to the role of military structures such as the CIRs (Revolutionary Instruction Centers) in the on-site political training of MPLA militants in war zones (Mabeko-Tali 2018).

7. This was for the most part promoted by the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization – created in 1961 in the framework of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People (adopted in 1960, in Resolution 1514 [XV]), which formulated several resolutions advocating the right to self-determination of what the Portuguese empire conveniently termed “overseas provinces” (Wohlgemuth 1963, MacQueen 1997, Santos 2012, Medina 2013) – and in the framework of Portugal’s adherence to the United Nations in 1955 (Medina 2013).

8. As per Decree 3/75 of 29 November 1975, quoted in Roque P. (2021: 99). See also INA (1978).

9. Beyond the two examples explored in this section, other relevant cases should be mentioned: the trial of the UNITA *bombistas* in 1980 or that of FLEC activists in 1982, both of which involved death sentences for the accused (AI 1985).

10. It is important to note that the trial generated international attention, not only because of the nationalities of the accused, but also because of its “exemplary” nature in terms of addressing the criminal responsibility of mercenaries in contexts of war (Lockwood 1977).

11. At this point, it is important to note that the 1977 events were not the first time Neto had faced internal contestation. In previous occasions, a similar response was taken against dissidents. This was the case, for instance, of the repression of internal “dissidents” or militants contesting the Neto leadership, such as the Eastern Revolt (*Revolta de Leste*) of 1969-1974, led by

Daniel Chipenda; the Active Revolt (*Revolta Activa*) of 1974; or former alliances (OCA or Communist Organization of Angola). All these episodes of contestation ended with the imprisonment or persecution of the dissidents (Mabeko-Tali 2018).

12. This ranged from ideological disagreements concerning the socialism that was to be implemented (Sino- or Soviet-based) to accusations of racism against non-black nationalists, of “imperialist interference” and of “bourgeoisie mentality” (see Mabeko-Tali 2018: 533-601). It is also important to note that, throughout 1976, Angola experienced many difficulties in terms of logistics and distribution, which led to widespread food shortages and growing popular discontent, especially in the *musseques* or popular neighborhoods. Finally, there was also a personalistic dimension to the conflict, whereby Nito’s self-confident personality and popularity with “the masses” in Luanda as well as with the Soviets was perceived by many as a threat to Neto’s leadership (Fauvet 1977).

13. While the official MPLA narrative surrounding the events described them as an attempted *coup d’état* or putsch deriving from a factionalist (*fraccionista*) process, some authors have contested this view (Mateus & Mateus 2007, Pawson 2016).

14. See Fig. 1 and Fig. 3. See also *Jornal de Angola*, 31 May 1977, which included a public call to “Tie them down wherever you find them” (*Amarrem-nos onde forem encontrados*).

15. By “Angolan media” we are referring mostly to the three official outlets – the *Jornal de Angola* (print), the Rádio Nacional de Angola (radio), and the Televisão Pública de Angola (TV). Most other media, in particular those who did not convey the official narrative, were shut down between 1975 and 1977. This was the case for *Diário de Luanda*, the Catholic station *Rádio Ecclesia*, and Radio Nacional’s *Kudibanguela* programme, which was deemed too independent. At the time, the MPLA boasted a dedicated Department of Information and Propaganda (DIP).

16. Here, the dubious role of the so-called *Comissão das Lágrimas* (Committee of Tears) is debated to this day. The Commission was created *ad hoc* to interrogate and assess the level of involvement of those detained regarding *fraccionismo* and 27 May. It contained many popular intellectuals and authors, such as the famous writers Pepetela, José Luandino Vieira, and the afore-mentioned Manuel Rui Monteiro. While some claim that the commission spearheaded the repression, others contend that in fact it prevented many from becoming victims of the retaliation (see Queiroz 2017), and some of those involved later claimed they were used by the regime. While these interrogations were filmed, the footage was never seen again.

17. Interviews held in Lisbon and Luanda from 2021 until today.

18. Law no. 7/79 (art. 2<sup>a</sup>) of 22 June. This led to the complete restructuring of the Ministry of Interior and the dismissal of the core members of the security structure (Roque P. 2021).

19. The reports cited below, and others not mentioned here, are not limited to MPLA-, regime- or government-related violations and also include violations occurring within other political parties, entities, or corporations in Angola. For the purpose of the overall argument, I am restricting the references to the first set of violations involving the government or the regime, where the MPLA is the sole protagonist.

20. While we do not have specific information on the rationale behind the creation of the Ministry, it should be noted that this took place at a time in which Angola was under significant international pressure due to its violent response to citizen protests and demonstrations that were emerging in 2011, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (see next section).

21. One noteworthy example were the statements by Portuguese lawyer and politician Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (later President of the Portuguese Republic), who described the text as of “high quality” and “exhaustive” in its concern with fundamental human rights. *Angonotícias*, 16 April 2010: “Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa qualifica Constituição angolana como sendo muito boa” (accessed 25 April 2010).

22. The rationale behind using the Catholic Church premises was that they could not be considered “public space” anymore, since, through the Concordat signed between the Vatican and the Angolan state, a different principle of jurisdiction would apply.

23. *Deutsche Welle*, 26 May 2019: “João Lourenço pede desculpas pelo 27 de Maio em nome do Estado angolano”, <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/jo%C3%A3o-louren%C3%A7o-pede-desculpas-pelo-27-de-maio-em-nome-do-estado-angolano/a-57676681> (accessed 27 May 2019).

24. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ML2WBinotJg> (accessed 12 December 2021).

25. *Diário de Notícias*, 22 March 2023, “ADN de ossadas desmente governo de Angola. Leia aqui a carta de revolta dos órfãos”: <https://www.dn.pt/internacional/adn-de-ossadas-desmente-governo-de-angola-leia-aqui-a-carta-de-revolta-dos-orfaos-16053382.html> (accessed 22 March 2023).

26. RTP, 8 December 2004, “História do povo angolano não permitiu exercício dos direitos humanos- ONU”, [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/historia-do-povo-angolano-nao-permitiu-exercicio-dos-direitos-humanos-onu\\_n103308](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/historia-do-povo-angolano-nao-permitiu-exercicio-dos-direitos-humanos-onu_n103308) (accessed on 4 October 2020). My translation.

## ABSTRACTS

Angola is one of the few countries in the world that boasts a dedicated Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. But does this translate into a wider implementation of these rights? This article provides a historical overview of the trajectory of Human Rights in Angola through the analysis of different moments and iterations of the performance of (in)justice since the country's independence in November 1975 – from the political trials of the mercenaries in 1976-1977 and the events surrounding 27 May 1977 to the post-electoral massacres and persecutions in 1992 and 1993, the persecution of human rights activists in the post-Arab Spring period and, since 2019, the implementation of a public reconciliation commission (CIVICOP). Through this longitudinal approach, which highlights continuities in the trajectory of Human Rights in Angola in the transition from the 20th to the 21st centuries, I argue that the case of Angola illustrates the paradox of how a governance-based implementation of a Human Rights agenda can actually prevent its enactment and implementation. This is explained through the incorporation and subsumption of Human Rights into political agendas as a performative display.

L'Angola est l'un des rares pays à disposer d'un ministère de la justice et des droits de l'homme. Mais cela se traduit-il par une meilleure application de ces droits ? Cet article donne un aperçu historique de la trajectoire des droits de l'homme en Angola à travers l'analyse des différents moments et itérations des performances de l'(in)justice depuis l'indépendance du pays en novembre 1975 – depuis les procès politiques des mercenaires en 1976-1977 et les événements entourant le 27 mai 1977 jusqu'aux massacres et persécutions post-électorales en 1992 et 1993, la persécution des militants des droits de l'homme dans la période post-printemps arabes et, depuis 2019, la mise en œuvre d'une commission de réconciliation publique (CIVICOP). Grâce à cette approche longitudinale, qui met en évidence les continuités dans la trajectoire des droits de l'homme en Angola lors de la transition du xx<sup>e</sup> au xxi<sup>e</sup> siècle, je soutiens que le cas de l'Angola illustre le paradoxe de la façon dont la mise en œuvre d'un programme de droits de l'homme fondée sur la gouvernance étatique peut en fait empêcher la promulgation et la mise en œuvre de

ces droits. Cela s'explique par l'intégration des droits de l'homme à l'agenda politique en tant qu'affichage performatif.

Angola é um dos poucos países do mundo que tem um ministério dedicado especificamente aos direitos humanos (Ministério da Justiça e Direitos Humanos). Mas será que isto se traduz numa implementação mais abrangente destes direitos? Este artigo fornece uma visão histórica da trajetória dos Direitos Humanos em Angola através da análise de diferentes momentos e iterações da performance da (in)justiça desde a independência do país em Novembro de 1975 – do julgamento político dos mercenários em 1976-1977 e os acontecimentos que rodeiam a 27 de Maio de 1977 aos massacres e perseguições pós-eleitorais em 1992 e 1993, a perseguição dos ativistas dos direitos humanos no período pós- Primavera árabe e, desde 2019, a implementação de uma comissão pública de reconciliação (CIVICOP). Através desta abordagem longitudinal, que destaca as continuidades na trajetória dos Direitos Humanos em Angola na transição do século XX para os séculos XXI, defendendo que o caso de Angola ilustra o paradoxo de como uma implementação governamental de uma agenda dos Direitos Humanos pode na verdade, dificultar a sua promulgação e implementação. Isto é explicado através da incorporação e subjugação dos Direitos Humanos nas agendas políticas como demonstração performativa.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Angola, violence, droits de l'homme, (in)justice, performance

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