

# Doppëlgangers, degenerations and revolutionary feedbacks in Angola

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## ABSTRACT

In this article I describe the emergence of the so-called Revolutionary Movement ("Revú") in Angola, which appeared in 2011 in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork with this movement since 2015, I will debate how this revolutionary emergence is an epistemological feedback against a previous revolutionary process in the country – that of the liberationist and independence movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Invoking concepts of cyclicity (Gonçalves 2017; Blanes 2019) and rhetorical feedback, I will describe an effect of 'mutual epistemology' between both revolutionary processes, through which the perception of one is dynamically determined by the perception of the other. In this framework, more than a mimetic revolutionary semiotic, I will entertain the idea of a 'revolutionary doppëlgangers', the concurrent construction of 'evil twins' as part of a process of political dialectic between regime enablers and oppositionists.

## KEYWORDS

Revolution;  
Angola;  
epistemology;  
rhetorical  
feedback

## Doppëlgangers, degenerações e feedbacks revolucionários em Angola

**RESUMO** Neste artigo descrevo a emergência do chamado Movimento Revolucionário ("Revú") em Angola, que surgiu em 2011 no rescaldo da Primavera Árabe. Com base no meu trabalho de campo etnográfico com este movimento desde 2015, debatorei como esta emergência revolucionária é um feedback epistemológico contra um processo revolucionário anterior no país – o dos movimentos de libertação e de independência nas décadas de 1960 e 1970. Invocando conceitos de ciclicidade (Gonçalves 2017; Blanes 2019) e feedback retórico, descreverei um efeito de "epistemologia mútua" entre ambos os processos revolucionários, através do qual a percepção de um é dinamicamente determinada pela percepção do outro. Neste quadro, mais do que uma semiótica revolucionária mimética, considerarei a ideia de "doppëlgangers revolucionários", a construção simultânea de "gêmeos maus" como parte de um processo de dialética política entre facilitadores do regime e opositores.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**  
Revolução; Angola;  
epistemologia; feedback  
retórico

## INTRODUCTION: TIME FOR REVOLUTION

What is the temporality of revolutions? When do revolutions 'begin' and 'end'? It is often easy to pinpoint what sparks a revolution, when it begins, but not so much when it is over. These are questions that have been posed in political science for quite some time, at least since Proudhon's formulation of a general idea of revolution (1851), but have only recently been explored in anthropology.<sup>1</sup> Through such deconstructions, we realize how the experience of revolution is multifaceted and often concomitant, ranging from intensive outburst to imperceptible change, across different (micro- to macro-) scales: from epochal transformations such as those mapped by Eric Hobsbawm (1972) to more small-scale 'revolutions of everyday life' (Vaneigem 1967). Hobsbawm, in fact, talked about the "dual revolution": the concomitance between specific political processes or 'events' (e.g. 1789-90) and more overarching socio-historical processes (such as the Industrial Revolution).

In his article on the different instances of the Cuban revolution, João Felipe Gonçalves (2017) rightly notes that the problem revolutionary temporality is very much enveloped within semantic formations and their social performance. In other words, it poses Reinhardt Koselleck's (2004) classic problem of semantics of historical time, whereby history (past and future) is 'relocated' according to the present ideology. In this respect, our modern conceptions of revolutionary temporality normally carry ideas of rupture or interruption that nevertheless obscures other perceptions of revolution, such as the historical continuities and feedbacks between revolutionary act and revolutionary act. In this respect, the history of the twentieth century has produced what we could call a revolutionary etymology, by which events taking place in Petrograd in 1905 and 1917 would reverberate through time and space into other anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist or anti-capitalist formations, from Angola and Mozambique to China, India, Peru, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Vietnam and so on.

Looking at the case of Angola, I explore the idea of 'rhetorical feedback' of revolutions, in order to describe how this country's independent political history (since 1975) has unfolded through a set of revolutionary semantic formations that have reverberated into each other in a process of mutual confrontation and at the same time mutual definition. Thus, by rhetorical feedback I am vaguely invoking a Hegelian logic of historical dialectics, but without incorporating a necessary synthesis.

## DEGENERATION AND RE-GENERATION

In 1992, the prized Angolan writer Pepetela published his famous fiction novel *A Geração da Utopia* (*The Generation of Utopia*), in which he narrates the vital paths

<sup>1</sup> | In 2017, for instance, the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting held in Washington DC hosted a panel on "The Beginnings and Ends of Revolution: Longue-Durée Continuities and Disrupted Legacies of the Russian Revolution and its 'Peripheries'". This is not to say that revolution has not been subject to anthropological inquiry (see e.g. Worsley 1961; Feuchtwang 1989; Starn 1995; Grubacic and Graeber 2004; Thomassen 2012; Shah 2014; Tomás 2016; Gonçalves 2017; Holbraad 2017).

of several protagonists of the liberation war that preceded the proclamation of Angola's independence in 1975 – fictional characters but nevertheless representing known ‘archetypes’ of Angola's socio-political history, as it were: those who later became elite in the new independent system, and those who recognized a repetition of the mistakes of the past and chose to step down. Throughout the book, he focuses on their trajectories in post-independence Angola: how Vítor (or Mundial), for instance, left his idealist student youth and his guerrilla sacrificial ethos to become a greedy, parasitic capitalist; or how Aníbal (or Sábio), the heroic guerilla leader, slowly and quietly retreats from the spotlight and engages in self-exile (see Marcon 2011; Machado 2020).

Beyond the felicitous wordplay with the concept of “generation” (as an index of both temporal transition *and* productive creativity), what we read in the book is in fact a story of disenchantment, of the ‘degeneration’ (*degeneração*) of utopia in Angola, a process by which the liberationist and revolutionary expectations of the newly independent Angolans progressively became the story marked by the installation of a single party rule led by the MPLA – in what would begin as a self-proclaimed socialist regime aligned with the soviet bloc, but eventually became a militarized, muscular authoritarian, ‘state-capitalist’ governance masked as a reformed social democracy, in a process eventually described as one “from Afro-Stalinism to wild capitalism” (Hodges 2001).<sup>2</sup>

This process is partly explained by the fact that Angola experienced decades of violent rule (including a decade-long civil war) that outlawed any expression of opposition and dissent as treasons against what became known in the local political sphere as the ‘New Angola’, the phantasmagoric promise of an independent, modern and rich country (Schubert 2017).<sup>3</sup> And in second place, by the self-perpetuating tactics of the MPLA that incorporated external (soviet and especially Cuban) and internal (purges, vigilance, corruption) mechanisms. In this respect, in the years that followed the reforms that took place in 1992, the political process in Angola was one in which the ideological and material infrastructure of the post-independence revolutionary socialist regime was deconstructed<sup>4</sup> and the path was paved toward an oil and diamond fueled state capitalism. But at the same time, the ‘master narrative’ of the revolutionary utopian New Angola persisted in the official spiel, alongside tropes such as ‘progress’, ‘unity’, ‘peace’ and ‘national reconstruction’. This transition also converged into constant anti-memory and depolitization tactics on behalf of the state unto its citizens (Péclard 2013; Schubert 2017), and the progressive refraction of state and citizen worldviews (Tomás 2012). The result is a centralizing ideal of ‘unity’ that has conflated party (*partido*), regime (*regime*) and nation (*nação*) into a socializing slogan – “MPLA é o Povo, o Povo é o MPLA” (MPLA is the people, the people are the MPLA).

However, in 2011, a turn of events shifted things around. In the aftermath of

2 | Angola reached independence in 1975, after 14 years of war against the Portuguese colony. The military campaigns were led by three factions – MPLA, UNITA and UPA-FNLA – which sought international support from different sides of the Cold War: while the MPLA emerged within the communist and socialist bloc, UNITA and UPA-FNLA sought support from USA and other regional powers. In 1974, after the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, this country's imperial project dismantled and the Portuguese progressively withdrew and negotiated the Angolan independence with the three factions. The MPLA immediately rose to power after a complex and polemic peace treaty, and instated a “Popular Republic” of socialist fabric (See e.g. Serrano 2008). Apart from the first president Agostinho Neto in the early days of independence (1975–1979), the country has only known one president up to the summer of 2017 (José Eduardo dos Santos), and no other party has governed in any instance in Angola apart from the MPLA.

3 | Here, it should be noted that Pepetela was, ironically, an active part of the process. Alongside other popular Angolan authors such as José Luandino Vieira, he participated in the so-called Comissão das Lágrimas (“The Committee of Tears”), an ad hoc inquisitorial process that emerged in the framework of the “Fraccionismo” event of 1977 and condemned several Angolans to jail and/or execution. Pepetela has consistently denied his participation in the Comissão, but this statement is rejected by survivors and orphans of the event. See below for more on this process.

4 | The MPLA abandoned its Marxist ideology in its third congress in 1990, and the country transitioned into a multipartisan “social democracy” in 1992 (see e.g. António 2015). However, and interestingly enough, it is still a member of the Socialist International.

the Arab Spring, several Angolan youths began to mobilize and contest the self-perpetuating government, establishing a protest route that began to contest the hegemonic political and epistemological narrative in Angola (see e.g. Blanes 2015, 2016). Throughout 2011 until 2015, they promoted several demonstrations that, despite the constant repression on behalf of police and military forces, raised national and international awareness to the situation in the country. Many such mobilizations became known as the Revolutionary Movement (“Revú”), an umbrella term that, as I explain below, aggregates heterodox confluences that converge in one single point: the destitution of the regime and its then president, José Eduardo dos Santos.<sup>5</sup> While a pol-sci analysis would hardly concur with the idea that there is a revolution in process in Angola today, the trope of revolution seems to have regained a new currency in the Angolan political landscape.

In many ways, this currency can be summed up in the opposition between an ‘old’ (socialist, liberationist) and a ‘new’ (activist, citizen, human rights) revolution. This article tackles precisely the ‘returns and setbacks’ (Gonçalves 2017) in the space in between the ‘old’ and ‘new’, addressing what I call the ‘doppelgänger effect’, a process of rhetorical feedback that binds them together. In other words, I will discuss how the Angolan Revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is built upon a recognition of an ‘evil twin’ – a former socialist revolution that has degenerated – while at the same time has been accused of ‘betrayal’ of the revolutionary mindset that made the Angolan independence possible.<sup>6</sup>

I use the idea of doppelgänger – literally, “double-goer” in German, but usually referring to people who are “look-alikes” – somewhat in the sense that Fyodor Dostoyevsky explores in his novella *The Double* (1846), about a man, Golyadkin, who encounters his double (*dvoynik*), a man who looks exactly like him but behaves in an opposite fashion (confident, extroverted). The novella describes their evolving relationship, until the ‘double’ Golyadkin ‘takes over’ the original Golyadkin’s life and pushes him into a psychotic outburst that makes him see several replicas of himself. He ends up interned in an asylum. Here I will speculate that the old and new revolutions in Angola bear a similar relationship to the one between the original and the double Golyadkin: of mutual replication and redefinition, with complex consequences. In this respect, the Revú revolution, while based in the epistemological deconstruction of the old revolution, cannot be understood without its simultaneous connection and referral to it.

5 | In 2017, José Eduardo dos Santos decided not to run for presidency, and designated a successor, João Lourenço, who became the new president of the Republic of Angola. Despite some interesting ruptures from the Santos cabinet, the effects of this transition are still to be appreciated.

6 | This, however, implies a dialogic methodology that will only partially be fulfilled here, as it would require a book-length project.

**Figure 1** | Agostinho Neto, Lúcio Lara and others in the proclamation of Angolan independence, 11 November 1975, in what is now the Largo 1º de Maio in Luanda. Photo: author’s personal archive.



## OLD REVOLUTIONS

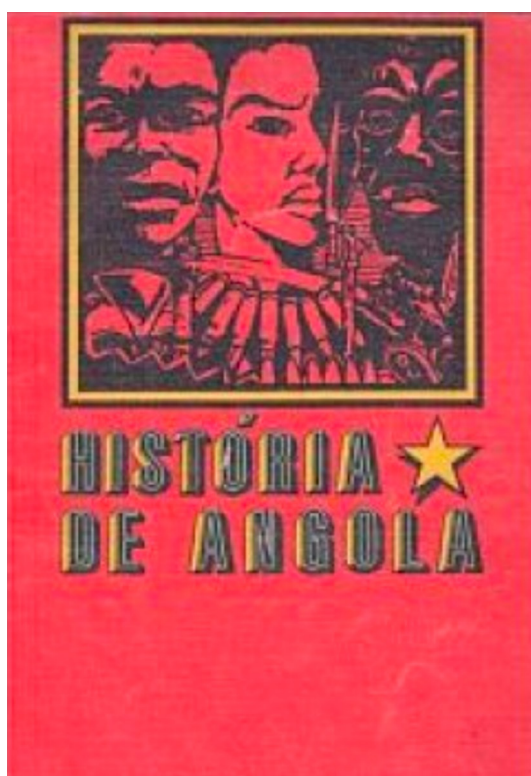
So, what is, then, the ‘old revolution’ that we talk about regarding Angola? Ideologically speaking, one can identify it as part of the post-independence route followed by the ‘victorious’ version of the MPLA, intimately connected to Cuba and the Soviet bloc policies. From this perspective, ideologically it inherits a revolutionary genealogy that can be quite explicitly traced to the socialist international movement and in particular to the Soviet Revolution and its unfolding unto post-World War twentieth century transnational geopolitics (e.g. the Cold War). It also incorporated other localized components, which include an anti-colonialist stance, an Afro-centered discourse and a heightened sense of nationalism, akin to the debates unfolding in post-independence Africa (see e.g. Wilder 2015). These were thus times of revolutionary ‘explosion’ (Marcum 1969) and ‘whirlwind’ (Muekalia 2010), to which all Angolans were voluntarily or involuntarily coopted into. The rupturist ethos imposed a temporal ideology (Ssorin-Tchaikov 2017) that equally outlawed African ‘traditionalism’, and imposed a ‘victorious history’ (Benjamin 1968), a narrative automaton that expressed the revolutionary outlook of a particular leadership within the ruling party. One striking example of this is the famous booklet *História de Angola*, published by the MPLA in the year of the Angolan independence (MPLA 1975 – see figure 2), which establishes the rupturist revolutionary narrative, to the extent



of devoting more pages to the future of the country and the continent than to the actual history of Angola. We read about the necessity of “liquidating the sequelae of regionalism and tribalism”, and of promoting “a true national culture enriched by the revolutionary cultural conquests” (Blanes and Paxe 2015: 70).

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**Figure 2 |** Cover of MPLA book on the history of Angola (1975).  
Source: author’ personal archive.



Beyond the ideological and discursive components, in practice the liberationist revolution also entailed a complex and violent internal political process that not only eliminated other possible revolutionary projects within the partisan opposition in Angola (namely from other political parties such as UNITA and FNLA – see e.g. Muekalia 2010; Fernando 2012; Pearce 2015) as well as within the ruling party. This was the case of the *Revolta de Leste* (Eastern Revolt) *Revolta Activa* (Active Revolution) and the *Fraccionismo* (factionalism) events. These three processes coincide in that they were movements of contestation from within of the MPLA leadership – then personified in the figures of the president Agostinho Neto and his entourage Iko Carreira and Lúcio Lara –, which began even before independence in the first two cases. They also coincide in that they were all violently repressed by that same leadership, to the point of their virtual physical elimination, either through incarcer-

ation and torture, either through elimination. The case of the so-called *Fraccionismo* is perhaps the most notorious and tragic one, inasmuch as it implied mass incarcerations, tortures and executions of dozens of thousands of followers of a faction led by Nito Alves, José Van Dúnem, Sita Valles and others who accused the leadership of replicating the colonial political and economic privileges (see e.g. Mateus and Mateus 1999; Pawson 2016; Figueiredo 2017). This faction, while it did not contest Agostinho Neto’s leadership per se, criticized many of the cabinet’s policies, to the point of calling for a popular demonstration against it. In response, Neto’s entente framed their contestation as factionalism and an attempted coup d’état, and publicly authorized an extrajudicial solution. To this day, we don’t know what happened to Van Dúnem, Alves and Valles, as well as thousands of their followers. Their bodies have never been recovered.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 3** | Announcement in the *Jornal de Angola*, May 1977, calling for a hunt-down of the leaders of the so-called *Fraccionismo* process. Source: author’s personal archive.



The event, whose perpetrators remain unaccounted for to this day, significantly affected the social and political development in Angola, in particular its unfolding into an autocratic regime, governing through military tactics. In this respect, it is a perfect example of what we call the ‘sovietization of revolution’,<sup>8</sup> i.e. the reductionist imposition of a triumphant, hegemonic version of revolution unto what was actually a plural process of multiple liberationist and revolutionary processes, here symbolized by the triumph of the Bolsheviks (and later Stalin) and the subsequent elimination of ‘dissident’ versions of the revolution, such as those embodied by Trotsky, for

<sup>7</sup> In 2019, the current Angolan president João Lourenço promoted a reconciliation initiative addressed to victims of political violence in the country, known as CIVICOP. This included several actions such as public apologies and the search and identification of the remains of victims of, among other things, the 27th of May 1977 events. The excavation allegedly identified the remains of Nito Alves and returned them to his surviving family in a highly publicized ceremony. However, the forensic investigation has been contentious, and contested by many, putting the findings into question (see Blanes 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere we also described these early moments of Angolan independence as involving a ‘sovietization of the social’ (Blanes and Paxe 2015), referring to how these ideologies translated into specific organizations of social, professional and political relationships (see Neto 1978).

instance. Similarly, the revolutionary process in Angola also implied a reduction, by way of physical elimination, of the multiple liberationist and rupturist stances into Agostinho Neto's hegemonic version.<sup>9</sup>

The consequence of this was what has been often described as the ‘New Angola’. Broadly speaking, the New Angola is the imagination of a prosperous, modern post-war country, fueled in a first instance by socialist independence, but which would perpetuate until decades later, with the booming capitalist management signaling a new, rich southern Atlantic lifestyle that replicated a ‘modern’ secular Angolan nationhood and citizenship (see e.g. Oliveira 2014; Blanes and Paxe 2015; Schubert 2017). From this perspective, the New Angola is at the same time and quite paradoxically a remnant of the post-independence, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary moment (Malaquias 2007) and a renewed capitalist utopia (Jameson 1979) – exposing ‘two Lenins’, to paraphrase Nikolai Ssorin-Tchaikoff's recent description of the heterochronies of the Soviet Revolution (2017).

During the first years of independence, the New Angola translated into specific policies, such as the attempted (yet not so successful) reconversion of the colonial economic infrastructure and the nationalization of land property, after the forced evictions and expropriations that occurred in the eve of independence. Secondly, a highly centralized political and economic project, alphabetization campaigns (through the *Comissão Nacional de Alfabetização*), a pedagogy of ‘reconstruction’ and the enactment of a secularized, ‘modern’ civil society that extended from within the party and into the state and citizenship through the so-called *comités* – eventually known as ‘specialty committees’ and progressively replacing other forms of citizen association and mobilization, such as unions, with party and regime-sponsored movements such as the OMA (Women's Organization of Angola), UNTA (National Union of Angolan Workers), the Angolan Pioneer Organization (OPA, the children's organization), and the JMPLA (Youth of MPLA).

Another cornerstone was the promotion of militancy through militarism, as it were. The precarious sovereignty of the newly independent Angola, motivated by the civil war against the FNLA and especially UNITA that ensued a few months after the declaration of independence, and the lurking presence of foreign interests in the country (e.g. South Africa, Cuba, USA, USSR), created a situation in which governance was enacted through military means, and thus political opposition against the MPLA meant attacking the government and, by extension, the country. In this framework, post-independent revolutionary Angola also enabled a socio-political ‘culture’ based on what is known in Angola as the *generais* (generals), through which the old military leaders of both the liberation and civil wars, the ‘heroes of the revolution’, were compensated with political and economic privilege, and thus became elite – ministers, parliamentary members, land owners, businessmen, etc. (see e.g. Marques 2011). Subsequently, the revolution became elite and power.

9 | Many of the fractures and confrontations in the MPLA that led up to the 1977 events of *Fracçãoismo* also involved ideological discussions regarding the ‘correct revolutionary path’, with adepts of Maoism confronting ‘Sovietists’, and so on (Figueiredo 2017). While this was common in the first years of the party, adequately described as an ‘ample front’ (*frente ampla*), what happened after independence virtually eliminated internal debate and plural coexistence within the MPLA.



However, if until 2002 (date of the armistice that put an end to almost thirty years of conflict) the civil war also enabled a pretext for the ‘muscular’ – physically repressive and controlling – governance performed by the MPLA, after that date, despite the long-sought experience of peace longed by Angolans, the situation slowly and barely changed for the majority of them. In particular if we consider the economic and financial boom experienced in Angola in the years that followed, which according to many did not translate into an increase of their wellbeing, but rather into an increasing gap between the country’s richer and poorer (Oliveira 2014).

## **NEW REVOLUTIONS**

Thus, it is precisely through this acknowledgement that the critique of the ‘old revolution’ emerged. In 2015, C., a friend and a teacher at the Agostinho Neto University who is sympathetic to the Revú cause, put it to me in the following way, somewhat reminiscent of Chinua Achebe’s famous novel: “everything is falling apart, and the current regime is rotting away” (*o regime está a cair de podre*). The ‘regime’ that C. was talking about referred to two planes: on the one hand, the specific regime of the governing party MPLA; but also the more generalized moral regime of independent Angola, that once began as a revolutionary utopia but experienced, throughout the decades, a process of political, social, and cultural degeneration that led, among other things, to systemic corruption, conformity, and especially self-censorship and living with fear against the government’s authoritarian rule (Blanes 2019).

This space of critique emerged in 2011, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, after which several citizen activist movements began to stage demonstrations against the government, and denounce its impositions, enforcements and inequalities. This began with one particular ‘event’ that took place on March 7<sup>th</sup> of that year, which inaugurated an attempt to create a new political praxis of public demonstrations against the MPLA regime, consciously using the urban topography as a space for political statement. On that occasion in 2011, a demonstration had been called by an anonymous Facebook profile with the pseudonym Agostinho Jonas Roberto dos Santos,<sup>10</sup> to protest against the everlasting rule of president José Eduardo dos Santos, on the verge of completing his 32<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year of government. This was not the first call for a public demonstration in Angola (see Mukuta and Fortuna 2011), but the history of muscular reactions on behalf of the state forces – using the pretexts of combatting vandalism and threats to public order to conduct beatings, tortures and arrests – was a strong deterrent. However, this particular call earned an unexpected level of publicity due to the fact that it was presented as the “first national protest against the government”, and also that a few weeks earlier, in a hip hop concert held at the Cine Atlântico, one of the artists (Luaty Beirão, aka Brigadeiro Matafrakuzx)

<sup>10</sup> | The name is an ironic composite of the main political protagonists of Angolan independent history: Agostinho Neto, Jonas Savimbi, Holden Roberto and José Eduardo dos Santos.

openly challenged the president to step down and announced that his "deadline had expired". A video of this intervention leaked into social media, and the event gained virtual traction.<sup>11</sup> As a result, despite the fact that the protest was scheduled to take place at the Largo 1º de Maio (see Figure 1) at midnight, several independent media showed up to cover the event. As for protesters, only 17 people showed up. But a strong police apparatus surrounded the square and arrested all those present, including the journalists. After being taken to the nearby police station, they were detained and released the next morning at 10AM.

This aborted event, mediated through a process of 'closing down' of an otherwise highly visible and symbolic site in the Luandan landscape (the 1º de Maio Square, for many years the site of official commemoration of Angolan independence), had several consequences in terms of political faring in Angola. For instance, it inaugurated what would be known as the Revolutionary ("Revú") Movement, which advocated (and advocates) for a more 'real' and transparent democracy, for financial justice and equality, for political accountability and for human rights.

The Revús incorporate several different movements of contestation against the regime, including members from artist collectives, journalists, lawyers, university teachers and students, lawyers, etc. In this respect, if a group within this confluence initiated a movement towards the officialization of the Revús,<sup>12</sup> today it remains for the most a de-institutionalized confluence of individuals, groups and platforms that denounce the regime's unfairness and stir debates and events to discuss the political situation in the country. Within this framework, the non-event of March 7th also produced what could be called a tactics of political exposure, by which certain statements, sites and events become political matters of fact. This became visible through two movements: on the one hand, the use of social media, as well as the activism of independent media, which became central to this process of creating a space of visibility and exposure that is alternative to the official media.<sup>13</sup> And on the other hand, it produced the establishment of protest route in Angola's capital Luanda, with continuous demonstrations against the regime and its authoritarianism.<sup>14</sup> In this framework, the city of Luanda, and places like the 1º de Maio in particular, accumulated new, historicized facts beyond the official register (Blanes 2017b). At the same time, the political and historical protagonists of the Angola liberationist revolution, as well as their officialist narrative, were progressively put into question as looters of Angola's material and ideological wealth.

Interestingly enough, through the process of emergence of the Revú movement, eventually the trope of revolution became politically ambiguous and often negatively framed in the local public space. If, on the one hand, "revú" was associated in the mainstream media to political extremism, "youth frustration" and foreign interests (e.g. Soros' Open Society), it also somewhat exhausted the old *revolução* narrative, with the progressive outlawing of dissenting political revolutionary prax-

**11** | See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_mhF7tDoeKg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mhF7tDoeKg). At this point it is important to note that, until this moment, the hip hop and rap community in Angola was one of the few spaces through which protest against the regime was being voiced. Collectives like the Circuito Corrente Conítua or the Terceira Divisão, or rappers like Brigadeiro 10 Pacotes, Brigadeiro Mata Frakus, Carbone Casimiro, Mona Dya Kidi, Bob da Rage Sense and others voiced, mostly in clandestine fashion, their discontent in mixtapes and concerts in places like Elinga or the Quintas do Rap in Cacuaco. See Oliveira S. (2015) and Blanes (2015). It is also important to note that Luaty Beirão is the son of a prominent figure of the MPLA (João Beirão), representing through his activism a "rupture from within the system", as it were.

**12** | In 2012, a group of Revús formed the Revolutionary Movement of Angola - a movement that was not consensual. The movement was short-lived and by 2014 was no longer active. However, in 2015 several local, informal "revolutionary movements" began to emerge in the Luanda neighborhoods (Cazenga, Cacuaco, Viana, etc.) and in Benguela.

**13** | I am referring, in first instance, to the emergence of private, non-governmental independent media in the Angolan space after the political reforms of 1992, with media such as *Agora*, *Imparcial*, *Rádio Despertar*, *Folha 8* and, more recently, digital platforms such as *Club-K*, *Rede Angola* and *Maka Angola* (created by the journalist Rafael Marques). Other platforms such as *Central 7311* stemmed from the Revú movement itself. Likewise, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube also became instruments for this tactic of exposure.

**14** | From March 7th, 2011, until 2015, dozens of demonstrations were organized, the majority of which in the Largo 1º de Maio. However, except the demonstration of April 2nd, 2011, all of them ended in either police crackdown or protester arrest.

**Figure 4 |** The Largo 1º Maio on 7 March 2011, shortly before the police intervention.  
Source: author' personal archive



**Figure 4 |** Poster calling for the demonstration on 7 March 2011. Source: author' personal archive



is. In other words, while the old revolutionaries attempted to outlaw revolution by criminalizing protests (Lima 2013; Buire 2016; Blanes 2021), the new revolutionaries deconstructed the old revolution and its muscular, militarized culture, but at the same time tried to recapture its ‘original spirit’, as it were.

Below I’ll exemplify this with the words and experiences of activists regarding ‘old’ and ‘new’ revolutions. The first observation came from Arante Kivuvu, in a conversation we had in 2016 at the Agostinho Neto University.<sup>15</sup> We were talking about his motivations to join activism, and I asked him if he considered that Angola was somehow again in a sort of “colonial situation” (in reference to Georges Balandier’s famous conceptualization). He agreed, saying that the *colono* (colonist) continued in charge, instrumentalizing education, creating mythologies and implementing fear. Back in the day people used to say “*liberdade e terra*” (freedom and land), but today, in the Constitution we learn that the land belongs to the state, i.e. to the elite that handles the country, who removes people from their land at their free will. For Arante, the regime created anarchy in order to continue to steal from the people. “Meanwhile, Angolans continue to live in ignorance, they don’t even understand the concept of citizenship. The state promoted individualism and materialism, and people don’t care any more”. It is therefore necessary to “*libertar a educação*”, liberate education, and thus the mind. But on the meantime, he or she who thinks about these things is a “*frustrado*” (frustrated person). Just like an antivirus, it is necessary to destructure the paradigms installed by the MPLA (November 2016).

15 | All quotes from the conversations below were originally in Portuguese and translated by me.

This emphasis on resetting education and mentality is clearly resonant with former anticolonial stances. A year before this conversation, I was talking in Luanda to another activist, rapper Carbono Casimiro. He told me: “Society is ill, crystalized, in a castle that is rotten on the inside. It has a guard that protects it, so we need to start by removing the shield. (...). Currently, the MPLA needs things to remain rotten. From this perspective, the deficit in education is created on purpose: there is a culture of idiocracy. If we want to organize a new society, we will have to start by re-educating people, not only in academic terms, but also and especially in terms of mentality, addressing the transversal problems, such as corruption, the excessive consumption that is promoted by the mainstream media, etc.” (November 2015).

Both reflections frame a sociological depiction of an ‘anomic’ Angolan society created by the protagonists of the liberationist revolution (Blanes 2019b) that was the steppingstone towards a framework of action. This depiction worked through the dialectical work of projecting of a new revolutionary action in the framework of a rejection of an old revolutionary action. This became clear to me when I met with Mbanza Hamza and learned about his trajectory of involvement with activism. Mbanza was a teacher in the Funda, a neighborhood north of Luanda. After the events of March 2011, he began to travel downtown and connect with the activists that had organized the demonstration. At that time, he called himself “Nós



50” in reference and parallelism to the *Processo dos 50*, when a group of Angolan anticolonialists from the *musseques* (slums) of Luanda were arrested and tried by the Portuguese colonial authorities in the late 1950s. This idea of ‘adopting’ names and figures from struggles of other times was not unheard of – I have met and talked to other activists with similar names, such as Nito Alves and 27 de Maio,<sup>16</sup> for instance. Mbanza himself framed this as a way to “give a new life” to the ideas and “utopias of other times”.

16 | These are references to the *fraccionismo* event of 1977 mentioned above, seen by many as the moment in which the liberationist utopia died.

In this context, for Mbanza, at that time the “utopia” of the activists was simply a “different country.” That is, they wanted change, but they did not know yet how they had no specific plans for a new statehood. They were only certain that civil society was actionless, without alternatives, and that a “physical action” was necessary, because the state created superpowers in its strategy of domination, a web that involves the churches, the schools, etc. Given the political asphyxia exerted by the MPLA, they realized that the traditional parliamentary route was not going to work, other mechanisms were needed to “put a brake”, to put a rein in the government. In this respect, they needed to ‘speak the same language’ as that of the old revolution: confrontation against the security forces’ muscularity. However, this confrontation rejected the methodology of the old revolutionaries – weapons, violence, torture – but instead engaged in bodily exposure as a non-violent political agent before the physical hegemony of the state, to put it in the frontline of demonstrations and protests with the same courage and sacrificial ethos as of those who fought for the country’s independence. This dialectic with the authorities was also marked by enormous intransigence. They have always refused to negotiate with the regime, knowing their “juggling” capacities (*malabarismos*) for defusing protests. They were determined, they fought only with their body, they maintained the dignity, they went to the end in their commitments and announcements. This even being aware that “to confront the system is to sign a death certificate”.

But perhaps this dialectical stance is better expressed in the words of another activist, Nuno Dala, published a book on the ideological frameworks of the “revú” movement (Dala 2016). In his argument of claiming for the legitimacy of revolutionary action in Angola, he reminds the reader of the famous speech by Agostinho Neto in the proclamation of Angolan independence in November 1975:

Colonialism will not fall without a fight. That is why the Angolan people can only be freed through revolutionary war. And this will only be victorious with the reality of a unity front of all anti-imperialist forces in Angola that is not linked to color, social situation, religious creeds and individual tendencies; will be victorious thanks to the formation of a vast POPULAR MOVEMENT FOR THE LIBERATION OF ANGOLA.<sup>17</sup>

17 | “O colonialismo não cairá sem luta. É por isso que o Povo angolano só se poderá libertar pela guerra revolucionária. E esta apenas será vitoriosa com a realidade de uma frente de unidade de todas as forças anti-imperialistas de Angola que não esteja ligada à cor, à situação social, a credos religiosos e tendências individuais; será vitoriosa graças à formação de um vasto MOVIMENTO POPULAR DE LIBERTAÇÃO DE ANGOLA” (Dala 2016: 35).



For Dala, the legitimacy of claiming for a new revolution was the failure of concretization of the original goals of the independence. Therefore, he proposed a speech reconstruction for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

The MPLA's Edwardian regime will not fall without a fight. That is why the Angolan people can only be freed by revolution in the streets, in a process of permanent political contestation and erosion of the regime. And this revolution will only be victorious with the reality of a front of unity of all forces against the Edwardian regime of the MPLA, a front that is not linked to color, social situation, religious creeds and individual tendencies; will be victorious thanks to the formation of a vast POPULAR MOVEMENT TO REMOVE POWER FROM JOSÉ EDUARDO DOS SANTOS AND HIS MPLA.<sup>18</sup>

The references above to Kivuvu, Hamza and Dala were not a product of a random ethnographic assemblage. The three of them were involuntarily involved in a pivotal moment in the “21<sup>st</sup> century revolutionary” logic I am describing here: what became known as the “15+2” process, where a group of 17 Revú activists who were promoting a reading group on revolutionary texts was arrested and accused of attempted coup d'état throughout 2015 and 2016 (Júnior 2018; Blanes 2021). While the problematic conditions of their detainment and the highly contested trial was acknowledged at an international level (see e.g. Amnesty International 2016), their public recognition as political prisoners made the analogy with original anticolonial spirit of the “Processos dos 50” (Cunha 2011) too easy to miss.

18 | “O regime eduardino do MPLA não cairá sem luta. É por isso que o Povo angolano só se poderá libertar pela revolução nas ruas, num processo de contestação política permanente de erosão do regime. E esta revolução apenas será vitoriosa com a realidade de uma frente de unidade de todas as forças contra o regime eduardino do MPLA, uma frente que não esteja ligada à cor, à situação social, a credos religiosos e tendências individuais; será vitoriosa graças à formação de um vasto MOVIMENTO POPULAR DE REMOÇÃO DO PODER DE JOSÉ EDUARDO DOS SANTOS E SEU MPLA” (ibid.).

## Conclusion

My main point in this article is to point out the mutual, dialectical configuration of revolutionary mindsets in Angola. In this respect, the emergence of the idea of a ‘new revolution’ in Angola, with new political and geographical indexicalities (from Cuba and the Soviet bloc to north Africa and international human rights activism) automatically resuscitated the previous one and rendered it as an ‘old’ one. It was also against it that the ‘Revú’ movement appeared, creating at the same time a ‘new Golyadkin’: the resurfacing and replication of the revolution as a political trope in Angola. In this process, we can detect multiple doppelgangers: the original revolution of the liberation wars in the 1960s, the degenerate revolution of post-independence Angola; and the revú revolution of the post-Arab Spring moment, which in turn replicates itself in the original revolution while fighting against the degenerate revolution. Recalling a public statement by the Angolan activist Luaty Beirão when he interrupted a hunger strike, “In Angola, we are all necessary. We are all rev-

olutionary. This is how our country was born, but this time we are fighting for a true social transformation, in peace.” (27 October 2015; see Blanes 2021)

In this respect, it is a similar conundrum as that of the “two Lenins” that Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov recently talked about (2017): the effect of temporality in the replication of political experience, which in turn converges (or rather, diverges) into shifting and mutually connected definitions. Here I think it is useful to turn to João Felipe Gonçalves’ notes on the temporalities and cyclicities of revolutions in Cuba (2017), which unfold through the conjunction of ‘revolution’ as historical/political representation and as everyday experience, rendering it ultimately as a polythetic trope with its own significances and doppelgängers, as it were. And in Angola, this polythetic condition of revolution emerges precisely through the dialogical process generation and degeneration of political utopias.

More generally, the case of Angola reminds us of the complexity of the temporal semantics of revolution, marked by genealogies (e.g. socialist), feedbacks and replications. In this respect, as in other articles (Blanes, 2016, 2019, 2019b, 2021) I argued that the Revú movement has promoted a stance against certain hegemonic configurations of temporality, struggling both against the automaton of history and the idea of its cyclicity or repetition. In doing so, however, they perform constant acts of anamnesis that at the same combats and deconstructs the epistemological ownership of revolution.

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