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OLIVEIRA, Pedro Aires, Fernando Tavares Pimenta
and Aurora Almada e Santos (eds.)

The Liberation of Portuguese Africa, 1961–1975:

International Exile and Solidarity,

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This book brings together twelve chapters that study international exile and solidarity with liberation movements in the formerly Portuguese-colonized African countries of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, between 1961 and 1975. Each chapter – with one exception – focuses on a city and the book as a whole opens a window onto questions of geography, political, diplomatic and military strategies, media infrastructure, urban space, and the conditions of life experienced by individuals within exiled liberation movements. Several chapters detail the tensions and challenges of local politics and the dangers faced by individuals living in exile. Overall, the book offers a textured sense of the precariousness of daily life and of politicking in exile. The facts and experiences of exile and solidarity shaped movements, individual actors' lives, and political and diplomatic relations in post-colonial Africa, beyond the borders of the countries the movements represented.

As Oliveira, Pimenta, and Almada e Santos note in their introduction, this new set of histories emerges alongside

other works focusing on the international aspects of the national liberation movements of Portuguese-speaking African countries and on the international challenges faced by the *Estado Novo*. In Portugal, FCT (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia) funding has facilitated this shift and supported a new generation of scholars, some of whom are of African descent. In other words, structural and institutional changes, as well as evolving research agendas, have made this initiative possible. The availability of new archives, not to mention broader historiographical shifts in studying the Cold War, the post-Bandung period, the emergence of the Third World, and changes in writing diplomatic history have made this book possible and welcome.

Unlike other books, this one tightens its research focus to cities – ranging from imperial metropolises to Third World cities to Eastern bloc cities – that were key to the survival of liberation movements. Cities offered haven and a set of connections to networks of State and non-State actors. These chapters, written by an international group of authors, examine

Leopoldville (today's Kinshasa), Brazzaville, Conakry, Dar es Salaam, Cairo, Casablanca, Algiers, Moscow, New York City, São Paulo, London, and Paris. Norrie McQueen's description, in the book's afterword, of these cities as constituting a series of concentric circles provides a useful visual – and perhaps conceptual – heuristic. The connections are both nested, locally rooted, and radiating outward. The authors and editors offer another metaphor: 'hubs.' This image helps readers visualize the mobility and variety of connections that liberation movements and exiled people could plug into in urban centers, which they, in turn, dynamized.

Of particular interest is how the editors have brought together work on places that are both familiar sites of exile – such as Brazzaville and Leopoldville in the case of the Angolan liberation movements (e.g., the FNLA – Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, and the MPLA – Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) or Dar Es Salaam in the case of Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) in Mozambique – with those that are often mentioned but not fully explored in the extant literature – such as Beijing, Casablanca, Cairo, London, Moscow, or São Paulo. Here, we see McQueen's description of concentric circles at its most effective. Even locations where activity was limited in duration, such as the activities of MABLA (Movimento Afro-Brasileiro pró-Libertação de Angola) in São Paulo or the circulation of translated literature in Beijing, reverberate across time and

connect to other struggles *in situ*. By placing these less enduring activities in a frame with activities in other places with a denser presence, readers see that connecting small actions allows historians to tell larger stories.

In addition to contributing to the international and transnational histories of the liberation movements in Portuguese-speaking Africa, these histories help counterbalance those of the guerrilla movements based in rural areas and liberated zones. Initially generated by the movements themselves in conversation with journalists visiting the liberated zones and frontlines, work on the liberation movements in armed action and the establishment of proto-State infrastructures and services became the basis for official movement histories and, indeed, their mythologies. This has been true across southern Africa where armed liberation movements were the last resort of politics in the face of the violence and intransigence of white settler States. Exile movements from military camps and liberated areas have also been the target of recent, necessary critiques. South Africa's ANC (African National Congress) has perhaps received the most criticism but so too have other movements that assumed State power, like Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front) or Namibia's SWAPO (Southwest African People's Organization).

The kinds of urban histories of organizing and solidarity recounted in this book have, in general, been left untold. They are critical to unmaking State mythologies and to offering

people-centered narratives. Political appetites, the elevation of military over political activity in official movement histories, and the challenges of archival access, dispersed sites and materials created the conditions with which authors had to contend. Their creative work in multiple archives and with a variety of sources paid off. These pages show that exiled cities emerge as spaces of both pleasure and risk, sometimes even of mortal threat (see for example the chapters by Barros, Soares Sousa, Pallotti and Tornimbeni, Sun and Yuan). Cities are places where local and foreign non-State actors find each other and often work at a grassroots level on education and advocacy initiatives that challenge the foreign policy of a nation (Almada e Santos, Oliveira, and Pimenta chapters). Some of the experiences of exile – its dangers, friendly and hostile State surveillance, conflict and violence between different movements – fed some of the crises of postcolonial rule (Bittencourt, Mabeke Tali, Machaqueiro, Martins, Telepneva and Zelenova chapters).

In a November 2025 episode of GozaTV, Angolan comedian Tiago Costa interviewed MPLA militant and Angolan Armed Forces general Mbeto Traça about the country's fifty years of independence. Costa asked whether, after so much war, guerrillas in the liberation struggle experienced PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Traça said 'No, we knew what we were fighting for.' Conviction and commitment can offer a kind of protection, a prophylactic against trauma. But still, I agree with Costa that the armed conflict left

physical, sociological, and political scars. We can see some of the effects of colonial violence, of paranoia, and of wartime life, in post-independence rule. Rather than using the individualizing vocabulary of PTSD, we ought to be able to think of such traumas in collective terms and as a shared national problem. The question is: what is the relationship between the kinds of political cultures produced and reproduced in the years after independence and the experiences of individuals and movements in exile during the liberation struggle? This book gives us new material to inform such an analysis.

Editors always face complicated decisions about how to ask authors to shape their work, how to underscore but not overstate thematic continuities, and how to frame the work for a wide swath of readers. In *The Liberation of Portuguese Africa*, the editors carefully chose the word 'cities.' This is not a book about urban space *per se* (though Telepneva and Zelenova give us a sense of that in Moscow), but about how political exiles navigate and use cities as nodes for media production and distribution, for strategic political and diplomatic maneuvering, and for movement-building activity. The editors made another crucial decision: to publish this work, mainly though not entirely written by native Portuguese speakers, in English. As someone who teaches courses on contemporary Africa at a US university and struggles to find relevant material on Lusophone Africa in English, I am especially grateful for this decision. The chapters offer original work, based on archival and oral

historical work, and also accessible and valuable to those unfamiliar with Lusophone Africa, as well as those more well-versed in its histories.

This book review was proofread by Latife Karadag in fulfillment of the curricular internship for the Translation degree at the School of Arts and Humanities (FLUL), University of Lisbon.

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