

Rui Lopes and Natalia Telepneva (Eds.). *Globalizing Independence Struggles of Lusophone Africa: Anticolonial and Postcolonial Politics*. London: Zed Books. 2025. 289 pages.

This is a tightly conceived and well-crafted edited volume. *Globalizing Independence Struggles of Lusophone Africa* offers a compelling frame for better understanding the anticolonial movements that took shape in Portuguese-speaking Africa in the mid-twentieth century. Framing these independence struggles as constitutive rather than peripheral to global decolonising histories, the goal of the volume is to better understand how “specific forms of anticolonial politics and imperial dissolution shaped today’s world order, from the United Nations (UN) to the reification of the nation-state.” The editors achieve this in several ways. First, by emphasising revolution as “ideational power” that carried behind it local contexts, Lusophone Africa can be seen as “constitutive and transformative of the larger history of anticolonialism” (p. 1). Second, the chapters attend to political actors across the ideological spectrum, seeing revolutionary visions and alliances of the left and the right playing out in the region. In this way, we appreciate how this region became a battleground not only for the ideologies of communism and capitalism but also the racial politics of Southern Africa. And while the editors admit that there are decisively more chapters on Angola, the volume does home in on case studies of all parts of Lusophone Africa to show how each tells us more about the larger processes underway in this era.

Part I balances the political “winners and losers” of these revolutions, with two chapters that dig deeper into the individuals who did not emerge as the main leaders after independence – Holden Roberto’s Angolan revolutionary government in exile (GRAE) and the Mozambique Revolutionary Committee (COREMO) – followed by a chapter on undoubtedly the best known and most studied Lusophone African revolutionary, Amílcar Cabral. From Alexander Marino’s opening chapter on Roberto onwards, readers will appreciate why it

is worth detailing the variety of revolutionary approaches taken up by individuals. Roberto's government in exile performed a particular mode of diplomacy witnessed in several contexts of colonial occupation, from Ethiopia to Algeria. Roberto successfully cultivated allies like the United States, and asserted political legitimacy by gaining recognition from the OAU. These assertions did not, in the end, win Roberto and the UPA political leadership over Angola's independence movement. Yet what we learn from the chapter is how those who ascribed to this political approach interacted with other revolutionaries and how they reflected historical political currents across the continent. The "bourgeois revolutionaries" that orbited around the GRAE, for example, built from Garveyite principles that sought to challenge racist exclusion from the world order by succeeding in business and profits. Here we are able to appreciate the long-term importance of Garveyism's uptick across the African continent. And Roberto's interactions in 1958 at the All-African People's Conference (AAPC) – a "conference of clerks" in Marino's shrewd phrasing – showed significant agreement between himself and other delegates when it came to his "anti-tribal, supra-nationalist ideas" (p. 27). The rich detail in this chapter augments our understanding of how the politics of the GRAE gained traction at a particular moment.

From the AAPC, Lazlo Passemier's chapter moves into a study of COREMO's pan-Africanist vision, showing how their Africanist vision of continental liberation mapped itself primarily onto a Southern African orientation. This particular Southern African orientation suggests the need to "recalibrate" the continental vision held by Lusophone African liberation movements. Indeed, several chapters in the book draw attention to Southern Africa as a particularly important optic that scholars should engage with. Pan-African histories have long been dominated by West African leaders and federal projects or, by contrast, the white settler federal projects of the Central African Federation. We still have much to learn about how the racial politics of Southern African struggles played out in distinctive pan-African visions.

Part 2 moves from the ideas of liberation to the networks and strategies mobilised to achieve them. International solidarity is the focus, and the cases show both how international strategy evolved and how far it stretched – not just as a story of Global South solidarity but also to decolonising and liberation movements in Global North hubs like Canada. R. Joseph Parrott's chapter foregrounds two powerful cases – the well-known importance of Global South solidarity with Angola as well as the lesser-known but powerful example of India's invasion of Goa – to show how militarised decolonisation gained traction. As newly independent states and former colonising powers engaged at the UN a

“friction” emerged. The UN was at once a body that enabled discussion of decolonising principles. At the same time, it acquiesced to India’s invasion of Goa and could do little to force Portugal to leave its African colonies. Military action to effect change became increasingly justifiable in these conditions. What emerged, Parrott argues, was an important clarification of the UN’s limits while at the same time affirming its role “institutionalizing Southern challenges to the Northern-dominated international system” (p. 84). The following chapter by Ana Moledo is very much in dialogue with Parrott’s chapter, with documents from seminars and conferences that affirm an attitude of disregard for the UN as a body that could affect change peaceably. While the UN plays a central role in the first two chapters of Part 2, the latter chapters emphasise solidarity networks outside international bodies. These focus, respectively, on Canadian leftist circles organising to connect Angolan liberation with Quebec separatism (Paredes) and South American conservative dictatorships alarmed by the defeat of the FNLA and victory of the MPLA in Angola (Lobato). Lobato explores the “security sector” of South American military, police and civilian organisations that surveilled and suppressed local dissent while also conceiving of their fate in global terms. As Lobato succinctly puts it, more attention needs to be paid to the fact that “If revolution did not respect borders, neither did counterrevolution” (p. 156).

Part 3 begins with a common thread connecting it to Part 2, namely the UN as interlocutor in Portuguese decolonisation. Since the UN’s interest in decolonisation included economic aspects of self-determination, conflicting foreign interests in Portugal’s late colonial development projects played out in the forum of the UN. These conflicting interests played out according to North-South and East-West alignments (Santos). And as a chapter on Polish economic cooperation with Angola shows, these projects that sought to build economic self-determination were prized endeavours for participants. This chapter begins from recent arguments that economic advantage was more important than ideology for Soviet bloc actors in their relations with African actors. To better understand this point, Przemyslaw Gasztold shows how Poland and Angola succeeded in maritime economic cooperation because they were able to put aside ideologically driven cooperation to identify a mutually beneficial terrain. The strength of Part III, as indeed with every other section of the book, is the range of examples and approaches to the subject at hand. In the case of this final section, the focus is upon the relationship between policy and economy in approaches to independence. In a final chapter, we see how the political economy of independence played out in Guinea-Bissau’s film culture. This chapter astutely combines attention to film production and consumption, detailing how the revolutionary regime sought to

“weaponise cinema as an extension of the liberation struggle” not just in its messaging. Rather, film culture was one front for reshaping society to the desired new national culture.

The merits of the volume are numerous. As a non-expert in Portuguese African history, I particularly found Lopes and Telepneva’s introductory chapter to be an indispensable guide to existing scholarship and to how new interventions are being made. The dearth of English-language scholarship on Portuguese-held Africa has long been apparent in volumes about the continent. But the editors bring us up to speed on the historiographical turns in Portuguese-language scholarship, all of which have brought us to the point where we can think about liberation movements in “Lusophone Africa” as reflecting and contributing to globalising trends of the latter twentieth century. The value for international historians is abundantly clear.

Leslie James

Queen Mary University of London

School of History, Arts Two Building

Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, United Kingdom

leslie.james@qmul.ac.uk