



Liberation movement in angola and it's impact on colonial administrative structure

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Abstract

This article critically examines the rise of various liberation movements in Angola and their overall impact on the colonial administrative institutions. This paper also analyses the role of both the internal situations prevailing in Angola and the external factors associated with the Second World War. In this process, this paper has thoroughly analyzed the outbreak of the Armed Rebellion of 1961 and its far-reaching impact on the colonial administrative structure. The vital contribution of the three key liberation movements namely, the Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA), The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has also been examined in comparative perspective.

Keywords: nationalism, afroasian, bourgeoisie, new colonial, MPLA, UNITA, FNLA, UPA

Introduction

The proclamation of the Republic of Portugal in Lisbon in late 1910, followed in 1926 by the creation of the authoritarian New State (Estado Nova), marked the advent of modern Portuguese colonialism. The authorities stamped out slavery and undertook the systematic conquest of Angola. By 1920, not all but the remote southeast of the colony was firmly under Portuguese control. Kingdoms were abolished and the Portuguese worked directly through chiefs, headman and African policemen. Conversions to Christianity increased, and by 1940 there was about a million Christians in Angola, some three quarters of them Roman Catholics. Angolan "natives" were taxed and subjected to forced labour and forced cultivation. A stringent set of tests were imposed on the few non-white "assimilated persons who applied to be exempted from these impositions" [1]. Angola's economy was modernized and bound to that of Portugal by a system of protective tariffs and a start was made with import substitution industries. Portugal, ruled by a fascist dictatorship, was a poor state in European terms. Its African colonies, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Angola and Mozambique, were seen as vital prospects to the Portuguese economy [2].

The Portuguese government, therefore, was determined not to give way to the demands for independence. The Africans of the Portuguese colonies were equally determined to win their independence. Violent Portuguese suppression of African protest in all three territories soon made it clear that African liberation would only be won through prolonged guerrilla struggle [3].

As the majority of African countries were undergoing developments in full swing, eventually leading to the disintegration of the colonial empires of the major imperialist powers, the national liberation movement in Angola was just in the process of gaining momentum. This was primarily due to the fact that backward Portugal had no means of pursuing a neo-colonialist policy. Basically, it had adhered for a long time to the line of conserving the traditional forms of colonial exploitation and used on a broad scale its fascist repressive machinery to put down any manifestation of discontent among the indigenous population [4].

The Portuguese colonialists preferred to plunder Angola by the "old" methods, making wide use of other than economic coercion, which introduced no essential changes in the traditional way of life of the indigenous population. Therefore, the forces capable of leading the struggle for national liberation, matured slowly in Angola. The overwhelming proportion of the peasantry still lived in the conditions of a family tribal commune.

The broad application of a system of compulsory labour, which supplied 60 per cent of industrial manpower, hindered the formation of the working class and tended to restrict its self-awareness. The process of the economic, political and cultural consolidation of the population into a single nation was extremely slow for a long time, keeping the anti-colonial movement confined to the limits of racial religious colouring. This became manifest, for instance, in the spread of a peculiar heresy billed as "Tokoism" characterized by anti-Catholic and anti-Portuguese orientation [5].

The new stage of the national liberation struggle in Angola began in the 1950's under the impact of some radical and in certain ways, epoch-making changes, which were evident in Africa as also in the international arena. The national petty bourgeois administration led by officials, traders, intellectuals, etc. became increasingly involved in the anti-colonial movement in Angola during that period. Due to the position and status they enjoyed in the African society, their proximity to the mechanism of colonial exploitation and sources of information within

their access, the role of this class of people turned out to be a very significant factor in the struggle against colonialism.

In 1950-1954, attempts were made to set up small group consisting of members of the middle classes, who took a stand against the colonial policy of "Portugalisation" of the local population. Many members of these groups had been educated in the metropolitan country, where they had got in touch with the democratic forces of the Portuguese people. As far back as 1948, students from Angola, including the future president of the MPLA Antonio Agostinho Neto, took an active part in setting up the Centre of African Studies in Lisbon to do research into the socio-economic and cultural problems of the peoples of Portuguese colonies ^[6]

Angola on The Path of Nationalism

Portugal's ability to maintain the colonial status quo, however, weakened its proportion to the growth of African political consciousness and exacerbated the unrest over the abuse of the conscript labour system. Government officials needed only to increase local head taxes to produce more labourers through fiscal liability. In addition, to rural resentment against conscript labour, the economic modernization, urbanization and education that came along with European settlement introduced social ferment within a growing segment of African society ^[7].

On the surface, Angola remained calm so that in 1956, a sensitive observer like Thomas Hodgkin wrote of the "Apparent non-existence of nationalism in Portuguese African" ^[8] Yet Angola's poets, prophets, peasants, students and émigrés had created a wide assortment of pro-nationalist movements. During the 1950's, Angolan nationalism developed into an important challenge to continued Portuguese rule.

Portugal tried desperately restraining the political and social changes sweeping the African continent. Premier Salazar was unwilling to make concessions to the increasingly impatient demands for political reforms. Had Portuguese observers been informed about the extent and intensity of the African sentiments in Angola at the end of 1960, they might easily have predicted that 1961 would be a year of rebellion ^[9] By the time it assumed the form of a rebellion in true sense, the situation had become irremediable on all counts. It has been clearly expressed by the Marxist Variato da Cruz in these words:

These were the result of the irreversible blow dealt to traditional African structures by the market economy, introduced under the Portuguese colonial Administration ^[10].

The disintegration of traditional society coupled with the injustices heaped by the colonial government, led to widespread disorientation, despair, repression paving way for the preparation for violent protest. In the decade prior to 1961, the contradictions inherent in Angola's social formation gave rise to a variety of "local regional organizations ranging from legal and semi-legal interest groups to underground movements of political oppositions." ^[11] The decolonization process that started all over Africa further "stimulated much initiatives and led by to the creation of several nationalist groupings or organizations working and fighting for the political independence of Angola". ^[12]

Armed Rebellion of 1961

In February 1961, merely six months after the independence of the Congo, serious rioting occurred in Luanda, the capital of Angola, when armed members of the Movements Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA) tried to free political prisoners from the city's prison. The following month, a much more serious revolt broke out in northern Angola, by apertures of the Uniao Populasaos de Angola (UPA), which had been formed in 1958 by Holder Roberto. The UPA operated from base in the Congo, where Roberto was much influenced by Patrice Lumumba. Bakongo people, who lived n both sides of the frontier, largely supported the party. In 1962, the UPA merged with another party to form the Frente Nacional de Libertasao de Angola (FNLA).

The revolt in Northern Angola was an extremely grave event. More than 6000 loyal Africans were killed by the nationalist guerrilla forces, besides some 2000 whites, the largest number of European civilians killed in any single African territory during the anti-colonial struggles. The Portuguese were totally unprepared for the outbreak of hostilities on this scale and had to face the wrath of 50,000 troops dispatched from Portugal. These were largely successful in suppressing the uprising by the end of 1961, but soon afterwards, about 50,000 Africans were killed in savage fighting ^[13]. This was, however, only the first stage of the Angolan war of Liberation. In 1962 and 1964, similar nationalist insurrections broke out in Portuguese Guinea and Mozambique, respectively.

Armed revolt began in Angola in 1961, spread to Guinea in 1963 and to Mozambique in 1964. Portugal responded by recruiting an army, which accounted for 28.7 per cent of government expenditure in 1962, rising to 44.4 per cent in 1970 (9 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product). ^[14]Portugal received substantial support for these activities from Western industrial countries that had a major interest in the economic exploitation of the colonies and hence, in supporting Portuguese efforts to maintain it, and also from the Republic of South Africa, whose very existence depends on having a strong white block in Southern Africa.

However, the Portuguese troops were not able to prevent the liberation movements from gaining extended liberated areas. In the remote areas, where the population was exposed to the despotism of the colonial administration and did not know either school or hospital, a revolution takes place. Through the path of creative destruction, the rural populations in particular, under the leaders of the political bodies of their organizations, made the experience of independence. ^[15] Economically, socially and politically, the colonial structures were being attacked.

This armed struggle has brought something new to Black Africa. It is not only the colonialists who are being fought, but also every kind of oppression, of exploitation of man by man. This prevents the danger of replacing colonialists by an autocratic bourgeoisie, and a continuation of oppression as had happened elsewhere under various forms of neo-colonialism.

Portugal was constantly forced to try to counteract the liberation movements by reforms that were in fact purely tactical measures. Their stated purpose—the advancement of the African population—would inevitably jeopardize the Portuguese dominance, a fact that was evident to people in the liberated areas in which the nationalist movements exercised de facto sovereignty.

Post-1961 Administrative Reforms

After the outbreak of the revolt in Angola, the government rushed through reforming legislation by which the status of the indigenous was formally abolished and all the inhabitants of the colonies became Portuguese citizens.

There is no doubt that the major reforms were delayed, however a limited programme of administrative change, which the government had already begun before the uprising, was continued and expanded. It called for improving labour conditions, prohibiting forced cultivation, creating elective councils in communities of 5000 or more inhabitants and broadening social of health services.

While Dr. Salazar still attacked the USA for serving the cause of communist subversion by supporting terrorism in Angola, he admitted that his government might have "erred on the side of excessive caution"^[16] in the past and promised a speed up in the process of modernization and assimilation. A sharply expanded programme of education was undertaken. Unfortunately, Portuguese reforms failed to introduce freedom of the Press, speech or ballot and made no concession to the rising sentiment of African nationalism.

As 1961 progressed and fighting in northern Angola continued, a struggle for revolutionary leadership developed as the centrepiece of Angolan nationalist politics. It became a competition between the movement associated with the Luanda Mbundu area and the one in the north Bakongo region.

At the same time, the MPLA began efforts to assure itself a place in the revolutionary picture. Through its leader, Mario the Andrade, it began mustering external support. Thus, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev responded to a message from Andrade and expressed his sympathy and confidence in the "Ultimate Victory of the Angolan people". Soviet representative consistently supported the nationalist cause at the U.N. Still, the MPLA was unable to make similar headway in those of USA, and this left Holden Roberto and the UPA as the only spokesman of Angolan nationalism in the US, counterbalancing MPLA's advantage in Europe. The MPLA was always suspicious of US policies towards colonial countries. It believed that America's much-praised votes against Portugal at the UN were "reluctant" votes, made under pressure from the Afro-Asian Countries.

In late December 1961, the UPA released a statement, first made by Roberto in New York that a rebel government would soon be set up inside Angola. It was followed by an army communiqué that called for the creation of a provisional government, under the banner of the UPA. Within three months, the government was established, a product of a limited two-party coalition with headquarters not inside Angola but in Leopoldville.

The failure of Angolan nationalist forces to secure large, fixed areas inside Angola, as had been hoped, and the inability or unwillingness of UPA leaders to travel to the remote, dangerous areas under nationalist control, meant that the original plans to establish a provisional government within Angola were to be deferred and then, abandoned. On 27th March 1962, Roberto and Savimbi (Now leading the UPA) joined to form the Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola (FNLA). On 5th April, the FNLA announced that it, in turn, had formed a Government of the Angola Republic in exile (GRAE). To counter MPLA activity, it was decided to form this Government in exile and not wait till it was possible to locate such a government on Angolan soil.

The MPLA swiftly denounced the Frente as unrepresentative. For over two years, it had been promoting various projects for a common front only to find itself excluded from the one that was finally created. Radio Lisbon also carried out anti-MPLA tirades, urging other fronts to desist from association with it.

The MPLA was described as a "communist" organization and Andrade personally, as a "suitably trained, indoctrinated communist, who had carried out necessary trips to Moscow, Peking and Prague." It was alleged that the MPLA enjoyed the backing and financial resources" of international communism along with communist instructors, arms and technicians of sabotage, propaganda and subversive war. Lisbon maintained." The most important thing is that the MPLA is controlled by European brains and is not a purely African organization".^[17]

Ten days after this broadcast, Pravda carried an article that praised the MPLA's "militant Programme" and charged that Roberto's refusal to co-operate with MPLA was weakening the force of the Angolan nationalist movements and "playing into the hands of the Portuguese and other colonialist. Pravda went on to say that "Progressive forces within the UPA" were striving to unite the efforts of both parties, and concluded:

They rightly regard the unity of the nationalist forces as the inevitable pre-requisite for the victory of the Angolan people over the Portuguese colonialists^[18].

In spite of this verbal support from the erstwhile Soviet Union, Andrade stressed his party's determination to avoid entanglement in the east-west cold war and rejected exclusive ties with either the east or the west, "during the current phase of the struggle". He said that his party would sincerely work to "counteract any moves to international intrigue"^[19] in the Angola of tomorrow.

Angolan Political Movements and The Colonial Administration

As a matter of fact, both the internal situation in Angola as well as the external factors contributed significantly to the rise of political movement in different regions of Angola. More importantly, the ruthless economic exploitation, excessive suppression of Civil and political rights and moreover, the social degradation of the black Angolan were bound to organize themselves collectively and launch a strong protest against the exploitative Portuguese colonial rule in Angola. The powers of decolonization all over the world after the second world war was the major external factor which accelerated the rise of nationalism in Angola.

After independence of the Belgian Congo (Now the Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1960, a major revolt rocked northern Angola in 1961; it was followed by a long guerrilla war. Land alienation and forced labour sparked off the rebellion in the coffee zone, while in the Kwango valley the peasant's role against forced cotton cultivation. In Luanda, an attack on the prison was led by frustrated Creoles ^[20]

To contain the revolt, the Portuguese deployed large number of troops, set up strategic hamlets (forced settlement of rural Angolans), and by encouraging Portuguese peasants to immigrate to Angola, raised the white population to about 330,000 by 1974. At the same time, they tried to "win hearts and minds" by abolishing forced cultivation, forced labour, and the stringent tests to gain "assimilated" status. They also stepped up the provisions of education, health and social welfare services and protected peasants from land alienation. The economy entered into a period of sustained boom, marked by rapid industrialization and the growth of oil production, and urban workers and many rural producers enjoyed rising standards of living ^[21].

Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA)

The armed struggle continued, but the anti-colonial guerrillas were seriously weakened by dissension. The Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola) was founded in 1956 with the help of the clandestine Portuguese Communist Party: Agostinho Neto led it from 1962. It was popular in Luanda as well as in some rural areas, and it got foreign support from the Soviet Union. Initially based in Brazzaville, the MPLA moved to Zambia in 1965 ^[22].

It originated as a movement of Angolan most exposed Portuguese education and culture. Its core was made up of Lisbon-educated Angolan in the Civil service in Luanda and other big cities. Portuguese culture heritage proved a common bond, but the MPLA was opposed to Portuguese colonization. It was sympathetic to the Portuguese leftists, opposed to the authoritarian system of Salazar and Marcello Caetano. As such, close ties developed between the MPLA and the Portuguese socialist and communist movements.

Ideologically Neto seemed to stand for a relatively undogmatic socialism, while chipenda's eastern revolt expressed itself in terms of a diffused populist nationalism. The internal split caused most of the MPLA's external allies to cut back their political and material support. This also caused Overseas Angolans to contemplate forming a new guerrilla activity of their own. Thus, when the Portuguese coup d'etat in April 1974 finally opened the door to decolonization, the MPLA was solving its internal problems.

The MPLA had certain advantages over the other two parties; "It had a well-educated leadership, cohesive ideology and an appeal across racial and tribal lines". It had extensive ties with other African movements, European leftist and within the OAU. But factionalism weakened it by 1974.

National front for the liberation of Angola (FNLA)

The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola) founded in 1957 support from the Bakongo and some rural Mbundu based in Zaire. The FNLA obtained aid from United States and China ^[23].

The FNLA was less intellectual than the MPLA, but ranker conscious and tribally traditionalist. It had its headquarters in Kinshasa (Zaire) and had military training facilities in Zaire. It enjoyed the support of successive Zairian government but suffered a setback during Moise Tshombe's premiership in 1964-65. Its land access to northern Angola prevented the MPLA from crossing its zone of influence.

The FNLA's flagging strength in the late 60s received fresh energy after Mobutu Sese Seko seized power in Zaire from 1972 onwards: Mobilizing Chinese help, Mobutu, linked by Kinship ties with the FNLA's President Holder Roberto lent the movement sufficient political and material support to restore some of its international credibility and to make it a virtual instrument of intervention in the event of decolonization in Angola. He did not, however, allow it to trouble his "peaceful co-existence" with Portugal, or to attain a strength that would enable it to be source of threat to him.

By 1974, the FNLA had 10,000 troops of which only 300 had active guerrilla experience. Its problem was to widen its base horizontally in terms of ethnic support.

National union for the total independence of Angola (Unita)

In 1966, Jonas Savimbi set up a third movement, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Uniao Nacional para a independencia total de Angola, UNITA) with a predominantly Ovimbundu leadership and with some support from the Chokwe and Ovambo. UNITA enjoyed little foreign backing (although China provided some aid) and lacked a secure foreign base, since Zambia leaned toward the MPLA. Internal conflict among the three national movements also considerably prolonged the prospects of decolonization ^[24]

While UNITA lacked an educated cadre, it had the largest ethnic base (The 31% of the population) and was united under the Charismatic Jonap Savimbi It was founded in 1966 after failing to find common ground with

the FNLA. Zambia was its real base and its operations were seriously hampered when in 1967 it was expelled from there.

UNITA's support came from the rural areas and it had fewer arms or foreign contacts than the other two movements. It thus stressed self-sufficiency and guerrilla warfare. After the Portuguese revolution, it tried to capitalize on its potential electrical strength and to minimize its military weakness. It called for a political solution to Angola's problem was the most pragmatic and resilient of all 36 political parties [25]

Conclusion

The comprehensive study and critical analysis of the evolution of Angolan nationalism, especially in the aftermath of the second world war, unambiguously established that all the three key political formations namely MPLA, FNLA and the UNITA, were developed and articulated itself almost abroad. In fact, all these three political parties were organized, financed and staffed, and had to conduct all their affairs, in friendly neighboring states, and this situation persisted practically until the movement of independence. As a result, the greatest difficulty faced by nationalist movements, which were forced to operate from outside their own countries, was that of maintaining cohesion between the different exiled groups, especially when they derived support from different outside patrons.

The year 1961 was really a watershed in the history of colonial liberation movement in Angola in the sense that the Angolan revolt against Portugal began in 1961. Indeed, 1961 was a year of reckoning for Angola, the pivot of country's recent history. The rebellion broke out to shake the Portuguese out of their lethargy and dreams and to awaken unfulfilled hopes in the Africans in general and Angola in particular.

The decisive impact of the 1961 rebellion in Angola was clearly reflected in the form of fundamental reforms by Portugal in Angola thereafter. These reforms were introduced to modify social, economic, political and administrative relationship between the Angolans and the white community. There was also an increase of local political autonomy in the form of greater decision-making power on the part of the more elected representatives in the provincial organs of the legislative council and the social and economic council.

However, the major decisions were still made in Lisbon or by the Governor General the chief Portuguese representative in Angola. More important than political change was the general economic expansion during 1961-70. In the social field, the labour code of 1928, which gave arbitrary power to the European employed, was replaced by the new labour code of 1962, which abolished completely one of the sources of humiliation of Africans.

Despite these limited reforms in the political, administrative, economic and social fields, the Angolan blacks were not satisfied because they were convinced that if there was to be any impetus towards independence, it would hardly come from Portugal or the outside world. Instead, it would have to come from the Angolan people themselves.

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