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The Strange Case of Brazilian Support to the FNLA in the Final Stage of Angolan Decolonization (1975)

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Introduction

During the escalation of the conflict in Angola throughout 1975, although Brazil evinced neutrality, and publicly displayed no preference amongst the three movements struggling for power, sent a discreet mission to join the ranks of the National Liberation Front of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola - FNLA). This paper aims to analyse the role of the elite Rio de Janeiro police units among the troops of Holden Roberto in the second semester of 1975 and gather some of the issues raised by this apparent ambiguity of Brazil. Over the course of this research project, no specific studies on this operation were identified. However, its existence may be verified by cross-referencing a series of disparate sources, to be laid out in this article.

As the third section will discuss, traces indicate that a group of police officers from Rio de Janeiro carried out a secret mission in Northern Angola in late 1975. The array of sources gathered make it possible to affirm with some certainty that these officers did not act as mercenaries – on their own initiative, completely divorced from the Brazilian government –, but rather within what may have been an extra-official operation. The

relevance of this mission to the understanding of the period is not due to its size, but to its very existence, since it contradicts the neutrality declared by Brazil. Understanding this episode may help us deepen our knowledge not only of the Cold War, but also of the internal dynamics of the Brazilian dictatorship, since the mission that supported the FNLA occurred in parallel with the political process that made Brazil the first country to recognize the independence declared by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola - MPLA), on 11 November 1975. It must be remembered that, at that time, Brazil was governed by a right-wing military regime, aligned with the Western Bloc in the Cold War, while the MPLA was identified as a Marxist group.

In recent years, a range of authors (Saraiva 1996, Pinheiro 2007, Dávila 2011) have analyzed the apparent contradiction in the Brazilian diplomatic position in relation to Angola, seeing the recognition of the MPLA as a hallmark of the doctrine of "responsible pragmatism" adopted by the administration of Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979). As it will be shown in the first two sections of this article, by recognizing the MPLA, Brasília defied not only United States policy in Angola in the middle of the Cold War, but also the most radical wings of the Brazilian army, which saw the rise of a Marxist group on the African coast as a threat to national security. The move, however, was essential to open up African markets and to avoid the risk of oil shortages. In this context, sources located thus far raise more questions than answers about Brazil's involvement with the FNLA. Some of these lingering uncertainties are laid out in the conclusion, with the hope of opening up new fronts of research.

From the struggle for liberation to the Angolan Civil War

When armed rebellion exploded in Angola in 1961, many observers believed that the dictatorial government of António de Oliveira Salazar would fall as a result, leading to the start of the decolonization process. Salazar instead refused to negotiate and marched into a long and grueling guerrilla war in Africa, which would soon spread across two more fronts: after Angola, conflict also broke out in Guinea (1963) and Mozambique (1964). As the war stretched on under Salazar successor Marcello Caetano, it paved the way for a revolution at the seat of the empire. Dissatisfied with their career advancement and worn down by years of conflict, a group of low-ranking officers in the Armed Forces began organizing to bring down the regime. On 25 April 1974, members of the military connected to the Armed Forces Movement (Movimento das Forças Armadas - MFA) took to the streets and brought the Estado Novo era to an end, facing practically no resistance (Maxwell 1999: 51-55).

Although the MFA recognized that the solution for Portugal's wars abroad would have to be political, General António de Spínola, who rose to the presidency of the National Salvation Junta, wanted to avoid an abrupt process. He envisioned a federalist model for the old empire and refused to simply transfer power, arguing in favor of a plebiscite on

self-determination, but only after the locals had been properly educated. The proposal would mean putting independence off indefinitely, frustrating both the guerrillas – who refused to disarm – and the officers in the MFA, who were anxious to resolve the situation (Rodrigues 2010: 351-377). Under pressure, the President ceded; on 27 July 1974, he signed the Decolonization Act (Rodrigues 2010: 429-436).

Unlike Guinea and Mozambique, there was no one clear heir to power in Angola, where the MPLA, the FNLA, and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola - UNITA) were jockeying for control. Since the Decolonization Act didn't set a date for independence, Spínola tried to use this margin of bargaining power to influence events in Angola. On 14 September, the General met in secret with the President of Zaire, Mobutu Sese Seko, to discuss the situation. The agreement they arrived upon stipulated the formation of a transitional government that would unite the FNLA and UNITA against the Marxist-influenced MPLA. Spínola's maneuverings, however, were cut short on 30 September, when he resigned after a failed protest by the "silent majority" which sought to bolster him in power (Rodrigues 2010: 457-469).

Spínola's exit opened up a path to Angolan decolonization. The principles for power sharing were laid out in the Alvor Agreement, signed on 15 January 1975. It recognized UNITA, the FNLA, and the MPLA as the only legitimate representatives of the people of Angola and established a transitional government comprising the three liberation movements and the Portuguese government, which was to guide the country until 11 November 1975, the date set for independence. The Alvor Agreement, however, failed to forge sufficient political stability; less than a month later, the civil war would begin with an MPLA attack on the offices of the Eastern Revolt (Revolta do Leste - RDL), a breakaway wing of the movement led by Daniel Chipenda. In a matter of months, the conflict metastasized. In July 1975, following heavy fighting, the FNLA was expelled from Luanda by the MPLA, and UNITA was soon to follow. The transitional government had collapsed. MPLA's hold on Luanda lent it the upper hand. After all, the capital was home to the country's administrative structure; control over it would be crucial for any faction seeking to take the lead in four month's time, when Angola would be declared independent. Soon enough, the other liberation movements sought to recover lost ground. Accusing Portugal of protecting the MPLA, the FNLA announced on 20 July that it would march from its northern territories toward the capital. Holden Roberto left Zaire the next day to personally command the operation. On 24 July, FNLA troops took Caxito, just north of Luanda.

Days before Roberto's declaration, a meeting had been held which would influence the next stage of the struggle in Angola. On 16 July, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sat down with Nathaniel Davis of the Division of African Affairs. Davis informed the Secretary that the MPLA had achieved a dominant position after the clashes that month in Luanda. In turn, Kissinger announced that he had decided to recommend to President

Gerald Ford that the United States secretly aid the non-communist forces involved in the conflict. The American intervention would support UNITA and the FNLA, looking to ward off a MPLA victory. On 18 July Ford approved the clandestine program for Angola, which would be baptized 'Operation IA Feature'. Negotiations between the United States and President Mobutu of Zaire produced a plan comprising $32 million in support for the FNLA and UNITA, a total of $16 million in military equipment, and the recruitment of mercenaries to advise both movements (Moreira de Sá 2011: 205-215). There was a long-standing connection between Zaire and the CIA, which had acted in 1965 to facilitate Mobutu's rise to power. Zaire and the FNLA were likewise long acquainted. The personal relationship between Holden Roberto and the Zairean President was the backbone of a bond dating to the early 1960s. Zaire provided logistical support and arms to the FNLA, and, in 1975, Zairean troops joined the ranks of the movement in the struggle against the MPLA. Zaire was eager to see a friendly government installed nearby to ensure the stability of Mobutu's regime and its regional influence (Guimarães 2001: 114-121).

Before American help materialized, the FNLA had already incorporated a group of Portuguese led by Colonel Gilberto Santos e Castro,[1] a commander in the Portuguese Liberation Army (Exército de Libertação de Portugal - ELP), an armed group set up in Angola by a conservative white minority. Members of the ELP, which was connected to the Spínola-founded Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal (Movimento Democrático de Libertação de Portugal - MDLP), included ex-military and former agents of the Portuguese secret police, or PIDE/DGS (Calvão 1976: 162-163; Pimenta 2008: 416). In exchange for support in the Angolan conflict, Spínola expected FNLA aid for his plan to regain power in Portugal.[2] At the time, the General was in exile in Brazil, where he also negotiated support for his counter-coup attempt, but his talks with Brazilian intelligence sectors were overruled by President Ernesto Geisel (Rodrigues 2014: 75-76; Gaspari 2014: 117-123).

With CIA support, the FNLA's ranks swelled between late July and early August, thanks to recruiting efforts in Rhodesia. The *Flechas* ('Arrows'), a special operations force connected to the recently abolished PIDE/DGS, had retreated there from Mozambique following the events of 25 April, where they stuck together in Salisbury and planned to attack the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique – FRELIMO). The group, headed by Major Álvaro Alves Cardoso, attracted Portuguese officials deserting in Mozambique. Alves Cardoso's command was mobilized to reinforce Roberto's troops, and his first men left Salisbury for Johannesburg on 29 July 1975, proceeding on to Kinshasa. Having made initial contacts in the Zairean capital, they moved into Angola and established themselves in Ambriz, the 'military capital' of the FNLA (Marangoni 1998; Silva *et al.* 1978: 29-30).

The FNLA also received some backing from South Africa. Strategists there saw opposition to the MPLA as essential to ensuring the stability of apartheid and continued South

African control over Namibia. South Africa's involvement in Angola, while initially discreet, would be shored up in the summer of 1975. Spurred on by the United States, it came to a decisive head in October of that year with the start of Operation Savannah and the mobilization of regular troops to combat the MPLA (Guimarães 2001: 121-135; Moreira de Sá 2011: 230-236). In parallel with the escalation of South African involvement, Cuba moved to bolster its support to the MPLA, which was already making use of arms and training supplied by the Soviet Union. Havana began its Angolan intervention in late July 1975 after an appeal from MPLA leader Agostinho Neto. The Cuban presence in Angola would only swell over the second half of 1975, but Fidel Castro's regular troops only arrived on the eve of independence.[3] Operation Carlota, as it was called, allowed the MPLA to maintain its control over Luanda, fending off both the FNLA, advancing from the North with Zairean support, and the South Africans, moving up from the South with UNITA.

According to Gleijeses, the United States and South Africa had different goals when they got involved in Angolan Civil War: "Pretoria wanted to shore up apartheid at home and eliminate any threat to its illegal rule over Namibia, sandwiched between South Africa and Angola. South African officials were well aware of the MPLA's hostility to apartheid and of its commitment to assist the liberation movements of Southern Africa (by contrast, UNITA and FNLA had aligned themselves with South Africa). Although U.S. officials likely knew that an MPLA victory would not threaten U.S. strategic or economic interests, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believed that success in Angola could provide a low-cost boost to the prestige of the United States (and to his own prestige), which had been pummeled by the fall of South Vietnam. He cast the struggle in stark Cold War terms: the freedom-loving FNLA and UNITA would crush the Soviet-backed MPLA" (Gleijeses 2006: 5). On the other hand, according to Gleijeses, the Cuban involvement cannot be explained by realpolitik. The dispatch of Cuban troops to Angola not only challenged the initial Soviet hesitation but also jeopardized relations with the West at a moment when these relations were improving. For this author, Castro's main commitment was with racial justice: "As he saw it, the victory of the U.S.-South African axis would have meant the victory of apartheid and the reinforcement of white domination over the black majority in Southern Africa" (Gleijeses 2006: 8).

Hatzky also links the Cuba-Angola relationship with the invention of the 'Latin-African' nation by Castro. This idea is based on the blood tie between the two continents created through the slave trade: "This invented tradition implied a return of the former slaves under reversed circumstances (humanism, solidarity, internationalism) to fight together with the Angolan 'brothers and sisters' against colonialism, imperialism, apartheid and racism. The issue of race was a central pillar of Cuba's international policy" (Hatzky 2008: 54). The partnership generated mutual benefits. It began with the objective of militarily strengthening the MPLA, but later it was also extended to the civil cooperation plan, supplying the African country with technical staff. In doing so,

Cuba could guarantee a certain political independence from the Soviet Bloc, expanding the influence of Fidel Castro internally and externally (Hatzky 2008: 55).
At the stroke of midnight on 11 November 1975, as had been established in the since-suspended Alvor Agreement, Portugal left Angola. The formal handoff was executed by High Commissioner Leonel Cardoso, who transferred power to "the Angolan people" on board a Portuguese warship. With Luanda under its control, the MPLA declared independence that very day. UNITA and the FNLA also issued a parallel proclamation of independence from Huambo, but the international recognition of the MPLA and faltering Western support would ultimately consolidate power in the hands of the movement led by Agostinho Neto (Pimenta 2008: 418-419).

The path to Brazilian recognition of Angolan independence

Up through Angolan independence, as Pinheiro has aptly summarized it, Brazil wavered between three positions in the international debates over decolonization: condemning the economic exploitation of the colonies and its competitive consequences for developing countries; making general declarations in favor of self-determination; and supporting colonial powers out of a need to combat the spread of Communism and keep up good relations with Portugal (Pinheiro 2007: 85-86). Brazil's endorsement of colonialism prevailed through the early 1960s, having emerged from a diplomatic strategy adopted in the wake of World War II. The nation entered the post-war period as a strong ally of the West in its anti-red crusade, believing that warm relationships with the great powers would open doors to industrialization and growth. This loyalty, however, bore little fruit in terms of developmental help, and voices supporting Third-World solidarity and pragmatic diplomacy soon gained strength (Saraiva 1996: 21-58). The transition from one strategy to another – from alignment with the developed North to building up South-South relationships – marked the history of Brazilian international relations in the XX century. It reflected not only changes in the global context, as Third World perspectives began questioning the bipolarity imposed by the Cold War,[4] but also the balance of power between different sectors of Brazilian society. The strengthening of those who supported pragmatic diplomacy and detaching from the East-West dogfight came under Jânio Quadros and João Goulart, in the early 1960s, and was accompanied by a growing interest in forging closer ties between Brazil and Africa.[5] During this period, for the first time a push for decolonization began to carve out space in the Brazilian agenda, overcoming such internal obstacles as vigorous defenses of friendship with Portugal that stemmed from Gilberto Freyre's vision of Lusotropicalism.[6] The development of an independent foreign policy, however, was cut short by the 1964 coup and the arrival of the military to power. With Humberto Castello Branco as President (1964-1967), the adoption of the 'national security doctrine' formalized the foreign policy guidelines conceived and recommended by theorists at the Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG) since the 1950s. In Brazil, the leading theorist of the ESG's line

of thought was Golbery do Couto e Silva. The thrust of his doctrine was to transform Brazil into a great world power, aligned with the defense of Western values. The quest for development wasn't cast aside, but it was subordinate to collective security. As Couto e Silva saw it, Brazil was not completely immune to the clashes of the Cold War, given the fragility of its internal structures; for that reason, he argued, the country ought to seek out the support of the United States. Brazilians' concern over the Cold War might seem excessive at first glance, as the world was witness to the opening of a dialogue between the two superpowers after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The problem, however, lay in the shifting of conflict to the Third World. On the Latin American stage, the main fear was that Cuba might become a hub of instability. Another point of interest for Brazilian strategists was the Atlantic, which led to a revision of the country's African policy. Following Couta e Silva's logic, Brazil's Northeast was particularly vulnerable. Just 1,600 miles lay between Dakar, in Senegal, and the city of Natal, once an American base in World War II. An occupation of Africa's Atlantic coast by hostile forces – communist forces, that is – would pose a threat to Brazilian security. It was in this context that the Castello Branco's administration moved closer to Salazar, driven mainly by an interest in ensuring that Cape Verde and Angola stayed in the Western bloc (Saraiva 1996: 102-105; Gonçalves, Miyamoto 1993: 213-220).

This swerve in Brazilian diplomacy would be temporary; the military dictatorship itself would return to the pragmatic approach that had been interrupted by the 1964 coup. This resumption started under Artur da Costa e Silva (1967-1969), and the search for a more autonomous stance, one less dependent on the United States, would be intensified under the administration of Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974). Brazil entered this new phase with renewed confidence, thanks to the vigorous growth of the so-called 'economic miracle' (Moniz Bandeira 1997: 97-108; Saraiva 1996: 126-129; Gonçalves, Miyamoto 1993: 221-226).

Around this time, Brazil came to see Africa as a region where it might come to wield greater influence, in addition to considering African countries' weight in multilateral organizations. But the key motives behind Brazilian outreach were commercial. Expanding Brazil's presence in the world was an imperative handed down by the 'economic miracle', which forged an export-focused economy and demanded a broader range of partners so as to dodge the protectionism of developed countries (Saraiva 1996: 135-160).

Between October and November 1972, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mário Gibson Barboza headed a commercial mission that visited nine African countries. Barboza returned with the conviction that closer relations with Africa bore great commercial promise. During his trip, however, it became equally clear that Brazil's interests in Africa would be hurt by continued connections to Portugal (Dávila 2011: 173-206). A change in position faced stiff resistance from army hardliners, who saw it as unacceptable for Brazil to

make any gesture of solidarity with Marxist movements such as those coming out of Lusophone Africa (Saraiva 1996: 135-73).

The key turning-point in deciding for Africa over Portugal was the oil crisis begun in 1973. Brazil, which imported around 80% of its oil, found itself extremely vulnerable (Pinheiro 2007: 91-92). Its major oil providers, Arab and African countries, were increasingly coordinated. The Yom Kippur War in 1973 and the emergence of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) only strengthened those bonds. African member nations supported their Arab colleagues after their territories were occupied by Israel, and were aided in turn in the fight against colonialism and apartheid. On November 1973, 17 African countries decided to include Brazil in the group of those sanctioned for their positions on Africa (Saraiva 1996: 159-160). The risk of an oil shortage was a strong argument in favor of revising the country's relationship to Lisbon and strengthened the hand of those calling for pragmatism over ideology.

It was later in the Médici administration that Brazil decided to distance itself from Portugal, but the official change only came under Ernesto Geisel, who took office in March of 1974. His foreign policy doctrine became known as 'ecumenical and responsible pragmatism'. Until 25 April, however, Brazil did little more than pressure Portugal or offer to mediate the conflict (Saraiva 1996: 173). This delay in taking a stance meant that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was caught flat-footed by the revolution; it no longer meant much to abandon a defense of Lisbon when the Portuguese themselves were beginning to deconstruct their colonial empire.

After 25 April began a period of mistrust in relations between Brazil and the new Portuguese government, which intensified as the Portuguese revolution began to turn further to the left after the fall of Spínola (Carvalho 2010: 30). Brazil tried, without success, to present itself as a possible intermediary of the dialogues between Lisbon and the African movements. Portuguese diplomacy, however, denied this possibility, leading the Itamaraty (the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to seek an autonomous way to play a prominent role in the decolonization of Lusophone Africa (Carvalho 2010: 45-47). The price that Brazil paid for its ambivalence and inaction prior to 25 April was distrust on the part of African countries. To win them over, Brazilian diplomats needed to show signs that their change in attitude wasn't one of convenience, but rather a sincere gesture. This opportunity came with the lack of definition around the Angolan situation. Brazil's official diplomatic strategy at the tail end of Angolan decolonization consisted in establishing special representation in Luanda and triangulating between the MPLA, the FNLA, and UNITA. As the MPLA came to prevail, Brazil immediately recognized its declaration of independence on 11 November 1975. This gesture set Brazil against not only the United States, but also the anti-Communism of the most radical flanks of the dictatorship.

Vestiges of Brazilian participation in the troops of the FNLA

The elements that inspired the present study are to be found in the account of former

CIA agent John Stockwell. His book *In Search of Enemies*, published in 1978, is an exposé of the American activities in Angola, which he led. In it, we find the following description of an alleged encounter with Holden Roberto in Ambriz, in mid-1975: "Roberto drove in from the airstrip and shook my hand distractedly. He had on slacks, a light jacket, and a beige golf cap. I barely had time to get a glass of water before he ushered me into one of the new Volkswagen minibuses and we drove away. With us were three whites: a tall, broad Portuguese named Chevier; a heavy-set man dressed in the uniform complete with major's insignia, parachute wings, and a red beret; and Falstaff. [...] According to Falstaff, the one in utilities was a Brazilian army major, apparently there as an observer. And what were Falstaff and the Brazilian major doing in Ambriz? Falstaff ducked this question, changing the subject. But the answer was obvious. Brazil was not uninterested in the Angolan outcome" (Stockwell 1978: 126).

In the passage above, Stockwell mentions an encounter with two Brazilians: the "heavy-set man" in uniform, and Falstaff, introduced a few pages earlier as a journalist whom Holden Roberto had hired as a press agent for the FNLA. In addition to this account, Stockwell's book includes a photograph in which he appears alongside Holden Roberto, FNLA commanders, and a squatting officer described as a "Brazilian army observer" (Stockwell 1978: 131).

Though Stockwell took care to use the codename Falstaff, the Brazilian journalist who supported the FNLA in 1975 wasn't wedded to his anonymity. Fernando Luís da Câmara Cascudo later narrated his experience in the book *Angola: a Guerra dos Traídos*. Fernando Cascudo was born into a conservative, anti-communist family. Fernando's father was the renowned folklorist Luís da Câmara Cascudo, who leaned monarchist in the 1920s and 1930s, then flirted with the Brazilian Integralist movement (founded in 1932), and was on friendly terms with the military dictatorship which came to power in 1964 (Silva 2003: XIII-XIV). Fernando Cascudo described himself as anti-communist and used the term "revolution" to refer to the 1964 coup (Cascudo 1979: 33). His house had always been frequented by military officers, long-time family friends.[7]

Cascudo arrived in Luanda in early 1975. The Head of Brazil's Special Representation in Angola, Ovídio de Andrade Melo, mentioned the journalist's presence in the country in his memoirs. This is how he describes a phone call from Cascudo in March 1975: "He was interested in feeling me out. He refused to believe that Brazil could have come to Angola to be impartial, balanced, or neutral. He insisted that, deep down, Brazil must have some preference, since "the MPLA was communist", and 'UNITA was an insignificant movement created by the Portuguese themselves to fight the MPLA'. By process of elimination, he had come to the conclusion which he then proffered: that "Brazil could only be supporting Holden Roberto and the FNLA, even if I refused to reveal that preference" (Melo 2009: 116-117). In another passage, Melo refers to Cascudo as a possible threat to Brazil's pretensions of impartiality towards the three liberation movements: "[...] I was concerned by the role that he, a Brazilian journalist, would

take on with the FNLA. He ought to limit himself to providing technical specialized guidance to his employer, without ever engaging in partisan activity. It would be even less appropriate if his acts were at any point taken for those of the employees there on official missions, as this would set the Special Representation against other Angolan parties and foil Brazil's policy" (Melo 2009: 117).

Fernando Cascudo denied in his book that he ever became politically involved in the Angolan conflict (Cascudo 1979: 32). However, Eduardo Cascudo now refers to the role that his father played in Angola as heading up the FNLA's "psychological war" effort.[8]

The journalist's memoirs give no clues as to the identity of the other Brazilian described by John Stockwell on his trip to Ambriz. Nor does *Comandos Especiais contra Cubanos* (Silva *et al*. 1978), a hard-line work that also describes the situation behind the scenes at the FNLA in the months preceding independence, exalting the role of the Portuguese commandos led by Colonel Gilberto Santos e Castro. The authors identify themselves as Portuguese military officers, but one of them – the aviator Pedro Silva – was a Brazilian mercenary, according to the records of Itamaraty.[9]

Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva[10] was among the first group of men recruited in Rhodesia by Portuguese army major Álvaro Alves Cardoso to join the ranks of the FNLA. His path to combat in Angola diverged from that of his Portuguese colleagues. Itamaraty records indicate that Pedro Silva attended the Air Force Academy in Brazil, dropping out partway through, in 1972. In December 1974, the Brazilian delegation in Mozambique reported that he had entered the country on 24 May 1973 and worked on Catholic missions – first near Nampula, and later in Niassa. In conversations with the Brazilian consul in what was then called Lourenço Marques, Pedro Silva was said to have confided that he planned to go on to Rhodesia, with the idea of connecting up with groups opposed to the guerrilla movements.[11] In his memoirs (Marangoni 1998) and in the interviews he granted as part of this study, Pedro Silva declares that, between dropping out of the Brazilian Air Force and his work in the missions, he went to France and served in the Foreign Legion. By his account, this change was motivated by a desire for a real combat experience, something that seemed unlikely were he to pursue a military career in Brazil. He states that his anti-communist convictions drove him to enlist in Brazil and eventually led him to the front lines in Africa; his stint in the Foreign Legion, meanwhile, was aimed at providing infantry experience, since he had been trained as a pilot and paratrooper.[12]

Silva recounts that after the 25 April 1974, he joined the militias acting in Niassa and remained there until September of that year, when he went to the capital to join the uprisings that followed the signing of the Lusaka Accord. From there he went straight to Rhodesia, where he made contact with the group run by Major Alves Cardoso and was subsequently shuttled on to Angola (Marangoni 1998). He rejects the label 'mercenary' when applied to his activity in Africa, saying that his motivations were ideological, not profit-oriented.[13] In his first interview, Pedro Silva confirmed that he had met other

Brazilians in Ambriz. Evoking a "pact of silence", however, he only identified the man who appears in Stockwell's (1978) book by a codename: "Major André".[14] Silva denied that Major André was from the Brazilian army, as the CIA agent had believed, but said that he would not provide any information that was not already public; at most, he would confirm or deny what was presented to him. Mentions of a 'Major André' appear in both Pedro Silva's and Fernando Cascudo's books, albeit with no reference to his origin. In the journalist's memoirs, for example, one finds: "On September 2nd, Holden Roberto received a message at his bureau in Kinshasa, according to which 'a large-scale MPLA military operation was to take place in the coming days in the Caxito region'. [...] All troops were put on alert, especially in the Caxito region, around Tentativa and Mabubas, where the attack was expected. Major André's group had been reinforced with five members, explosives experts, who immediately went into action, mining the more dangerous paths [...]" (Cascudo 1979: 91-92).

The journalist writes that Holden Roberto "admired and respected" this "Major André", described as a man that "comes from afar [but] completely integrated into the struggle, with great knowledge of urban and rural guerrilla warfare", and as "a military man who endured all of the most brutal combat, leaving a swath of dauntlessness in his wake at every turn" (Cascudo 1979: 118). After his first interview, Pedro Silva found a reference online connecting Major André's real name to his activities in Angola. Since the information could be considered public, he abandoned the 'pact of silence' in all subsequent testimony. The reference led to an interview with former political prisoner José Carlos Tórtima, in which he describes his torturers: "The most ideological of all was Boneschi, a fervent anti-communist. Ironically, he wound up dying for it. He went as a mercenary to Angola to fight against the MPLA [...], where he came down with a severe kidney disease that killed him".[15]

The torturer mentioned by Tórtima is Detective-Inspector José Paulo Boneschi of the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police, who joined the Department of Political and Social Order (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social, DOPS) in 1955.[16] Prior to his career as a police officer, Boneschi had attended the Agulhas Negras Military Academy, but never completed the army officer-training course.[17] Ideologically speaking, Boneschi is described by Pedro Silva as "genetically anti-communist", "serious", and "disciplined".[18] On 4 July 1969, Boneschi headed up the formation of the Special Operations Group (Grupo de Operações Especiais, GOESP) in Rio de Janeiro. In its first incarnation, the group comprised just 12 men. In 1971, the GOESP was renamed the Special Resources Service (Serviço de Recursos Especiais, SERESP) and swelled to 38 agents. The group is considered the first unit of the Brazilian police to have trained elite snipers.[19] It had a direct link to the public security department (Secretaria de Segurança Pública, SSP) of the former State of Guanabara and was created at a time when urban guerrilla action was on the rise in Brazil. Group members, unlike ordinary police officers, were trained to handle heavy weapons and explosives. Paulo César Amendola, a colonel in Rio's military

police, joined the unit in 1975. He recalled its founding as follows: "Boneschi, as the leader of this elite group, started recruiting volunteers at various security agencies: the civil police, military police, and the military firefighters' corps. The best were selected and then sent on to the Paratroopers' Brigade to undertake an intensive two-month training course in special operations. Those who passed were immediately incorporated into the GOESP. The first class graduated in 1969, then came another in 1970 and the last in 1972. All of the members were idealistic, patriotic, and extremely dedicated to specialized training and to the proper execution of operations outside normal police work – special operations, that is, which called for a different sort of agent, one with exceptional physical, technical, tactical, and psychological preparation".[20]

Boneschi's identification made it possible to locate a document in the Public Archives of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, APERJ) which mentions his presence in Angola.[21] In it, the 1st Army requests that the SSP provide information about the time spent by six agents in Angola, where they allegedly fought alongside the FNLA. Word of the mission was reportedly provided by an informant in the Paratroopers' Brigade, who had obtained it in conversation with a GOESP member named Athayde Histemberg Martins. According to the 1st Army, "a FNLA member, name unknown, came to Brazil to make the necessary contacts directly with Investigator Boneschi".[22] The men who joined the FNLA were all connected to GOESP, but the document indicates that they were not in Angola on official business. "Each member requested leave from his division and presented himself to the FNLA as a volunteer".[23]

Of the six agents who spent time in Angola in the latter half of 1975, the document mentions four others beside Boneschi: Theobaldo Lisboa, Adalberto Ricardo Contani, Euclério Sant'anna de Souza, and José Lopes. The first was a clerk for the Superior Court of Justice of the State of Rio de Janeiro, in the service of the SSP since the early 1970s. The second was a military policeman, and the latter two were civil policemen. According to Amendola, the sixth member of the GOESP who went to Angola was civil police officer Waterloo Vilela da Silva.[24] Of the six, Boneschi and Lisboa are best known for their work under the dictatorship. Both are identified as direct agents of repression at the service of the Rio DOPS. Their names are on the list of torturers drawn up by *Projeto Brasil: Nunca Mais*.[25] The report indicates that, in addition to working for DOPS, Boneschi also participated in torture sessions at the naval intelligence center (Centro de Informações da Marinha, CENIMAR) and the Rio de Janeiro Military Police Battalion. The 1st Army's information request states that Boneschi was recruited directly by a FNLA agent sent to Brazil. Paulo Amendola corroborates this in his testimony: "It seems that the FNLA President sent an emissary to Brazil/RJ to recruit explosives specialists with experience in combat operations. Members were trained to work with explosives and defuse bombs. It also seems that the FNLA needed specialists in that area [...]. These operations were focused on demolishing bridges and other aims; mine installation and/or deactivation, etc.".[26] The 1st Army's document also declares that Boneschi went alone

to Angola and that the rest of the mission members joined him around a month later. While it was not possible to identify the precise date when Boneschi arrived in Ambriz, the cross-referencing of sources gathered during this investigation indicates that the most likely possibility is July 1975. The secrecy around the GOESP's mission in Angola, as evoked by Pedro Silva in his first interview, is also mentioned by Colonel Amendola: "The mission in Angola began and unfolded in total secrecy, and the possibility of its coming to pass was only debated outside this group, which is why I only have very summary information about it. The little concrete information I received came from Boneschi himself, shortly before the start of the journey to Africa".[27]

Other sources suggest that the diplomat in charge of Brazil's Special Representation in Luanda was not aware of the Brazilians in the FNLA. In his memoirs, when he mentions that members of the Brazilian military were seen circulating with Roberto's group, Melo limits himself to citing John Stockwell's book (Melo 2009: 144-145). When Melo was the head of Brazilian diplomacy in Angola, MPLA propaganda's mentions to 'Brazilian mercenaries' didn't seem to convince the diplomat. While he did not completely discount these reports, his correspondence to Brasília evidences a search for alternative explanations. This passage from a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Relations is symptomatic: "FAPLA [Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola] communiqué today [...] says that 'Zairean units and mercenaries from Portugal, Brazil, South Africa, and elsewhere' were forced to retreat. References to Brazilian mercenaries are recurring, and may not be entirely unfounded. It may be due to the presence of Câmara Cascudo and his accomplices in this adventure alongside Holden's men, or to the presence of Portuguese passing themselves off as 'Brazilians'".[28]

In his book, John Stockwell writes that the CIA recruited mercenaries not only in Portugal, but also in the United Kingdom, France, and Brazil. Brazilian recruitment was said to fall to CIA Deputy Director Vernon Walters, who had served as a military attaché in Brasília in the 1960s (Stockwell 1978: 184). The CIA went so far as to send an emissary to Brasília in an attempt to recruit "negro sergeants" who could speak Portuguese, a request turned down by Geisel.[29] Though it is not currently possible to reject the idea that United States may have sent Brazilian mercenaries to war in Angola, Stockwell's bewilderment as he describes Boneschi's presence in Ambriz suggests that at least he was not a CIA recruit. Pedro Silva, for his part, denies that Brazilian police officers joined the FNLA as mercenaries: "They weren't mercenaries because they executed a mission handed down by a superior. If they had gone there as mercenaries, they wouldn't have received radio orders to return to Brazil at the time of independence – an order that they followed immediately, albeit grudgingly".[30] Amendola also refutes this hypothesis, preferring the term "extra-official" to define the nature of the journey undertaken by the GOESP agents: "The team went on an 'extra-official' mission, shrouded in secrecy at the time. I can say that the Secretary-General of the Department of Public Security was aware of it then, as was the Director-General of the intelligence service".[31]

Other indicators also exclude the possibility that Boneschi traveled to Angola completely independently. One lies in the information request sent by the 1st Army to the SSP, which states that Inspector Boneschi was drawing up "a report on the mission in Angola, to send to the SNI [Serviço Nacional de Informações, the Brazilian intelligence service]".[32] Another factor is the scale of the GOESP. As indicated above, the unit had fewer than 40 members in the 1970s. How could it grant so many simultaneous leaves to multiple agents without this handicapping its activities or raising suspicions? These factors make it possible to affirm with some certainty that these agents' mission with the FNLA was known to at least some of their superiors. At the same time, the version that made it to the 1st Army and the 'pact of silence' mentioned by Pedro Silva suggest that there was some attempt to camouflage the group's activity. When they left for Angola, then, it was not on an official mission, but rather 'semi-official' or 'extra-official' activity.

Final considerations

As examined in the first half of this article, the 1964 coup aligned Brazilian foreign policy with the context of the Cold War and the struggle against communism, of which Angola became one hot spot in 1975. However, prevailing political and economic conditions led Brazil to opt for a pragmatic approach to diplomacy, over the misgivings of those in the military who feared the rise of a Marxist movement just across the Atlantic. Brazil's official stance in the last stages of Angolan decolonization was to maintain an equal distance from each of the three factions jockeying for power, culminating in the recognition of the independence declared by the MPLA when it came to prevail over its rivals. However, as demonstrated here, despite Brasília's position of neutrality, there are strong indications that a group of agents tied to the Brazilian dictatorship came to reinforce FNLA troops in the second half of 1975.

While this study did not initially discount the possibility that the police officers went to Angola as mercenaries, the information collected during this investigation points to a different conclusion. Among them are a) the number of agents sent to Angola in relation to the size of the group to which they belonged, a proportion that could hardly have gone unnoticed by superiors; b) a document indicating that the mission's leader was preparing a report on it for the national intelligence service; c) witnesses who point to collusion between the mission and higher-ups; and d) the secrecy under which the mission was conceived and executed. Nevertheless, the sources located thus far are insufficient to properly contextualize this mission. While they suggest that the operation was not completely autonomous, and that there was an effort to hide it, they do not trace the full extent of the chain of command. This lacuna makes it impossible, for example, to question the sincerity of Brazil's stance of neutrality; one cannot discount the possibility that the mission to the FNLA was carried out without the knowledge of the high echelons responsible for decision-making on Angola. In this

case, one must weigh the hypothesis that the most radical sectors of the Brazilian dictatorship had autonomy sufficient to develop their own, parallel diplomatic efforts. Given the political context of the time, we are led to believe that the latter option is the most likely. 1975 is marked by the reinforcement of military anarchy in the Brazilian political scene, due to the unfavorable results obtained by the ruling party in the elections of 1974. The confrontation between the military sectors and the President's authority wouldn't end until 1977, when Geisel imposed himself and fired his Army Minister, the hard-line General Sylvio Frota (Gaspari 2014: 14).

The indiscipline of the troops came from their own forces of repression (Gaspari 2003: 478). Gaspari nicknamed these forces *porão* ('basement') and their agents, *tigrada* ('tigers'). In the author's analysis, the strength of the repression sectors is directly linked to the denial of torture and to the protection of the torturers that marked the Brazilian Military Regime: "The denial of torture by the rhetoric of the regime catapulted the *tigrada* from the condition of infringing to that of untouchable. When it's been shown they can do something the government denies and condemns, it is no longer possible to know where the line separating what is allowed from what is forbidden lies"(Gaspari 2002: 22-23). In the period after the 1974 political defeat, dissatisfied with Geisel's plan to promote the distension of the regime, the bases of repression directly challenged presidential authority. When the steelworker Manoel Fiel Filho died in a violent interrogation in early 1976, the intelligence services deliberately did not report the case to Geisel (Gaspari 2014: 212-213). As mentioned earlier, in June 1975, the SNI insisted on holding talks with General Spínola about a possible Brazilian support for his attempt to invade Portugal, ignoring a President's determination (Gaspari 2014: 117-123).

Like in the episode involving Spínola, the police support for the FNLA may mean that the autonomy of the *porão* was not restricted to the violence against the internal political enemy, but also ventured internationally. In addition to matching the anti-communism of the most radical sectors of the dictatorship, the mission in Africa could also serve the purpose of challenging Geisel's authority. Another challenge will be to better understand the military networks that spread across the South Atlantic on the margins of the Western bloc in the Cold War, since the sources examined here suggest that Brazilian agents were recruited directly by the FNLA, and not through the United States.

During the Medici government, Brazil had rehearsed an approach with Kinshasa. In 1972, Zaire was among the African countries visited by Brazilian Foreign Minister Mário Gibson Barboza (Gonçalves, Miyamoto 1993: 227). In the same year, Brazil opened its embassy in the country, a gesture that had reciprocity in 1974.[33] However, in deciding to recognize the independence declared by the MPLA, the Itamaraty countered Mobutu's policy for Angola, and the two countries only re-approached in the 1980s.

Based on what is now known, it is most likely that the connection between Brazilians

and FNLA has occurred not through Zaire or the United States, but via Portugal. It is necessary to remember that in 1975 Spínola commanded the MDLP from his exile in Rio de Janeiro. There, as already mentioned in this paper, he made contacts with SNI agents, and the MDLP was involved in the Angolan conflict in support of FNLA. It is natural to assume, therefore, that Spínola's presence in Brazil may have connected the Brazilians with Holden Roberto's group. In this sense combating the 'communist threat' alongside the FNLA, rather than UNITA, could be attributed more to the connection of Brazilians with the Portuguese exiles than by a specific preference for the policy of Holden Roberto.

These issues point to the need for new studies in order to clarify Brazilian support for the FNLA in 1975. Such an understanding would not only shed more light on Brazil's role in Angolan independence, but also deepen our knowledge of the internal dynamics of the Brazilian dictatorship and of the Cold War itself.

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NOTES:

1 - The brother of a former Governor-General of Angola, Fernando Santos e Castro, Gilberto Santos e Castro was one of the founders and the first leader of the 'Commandos', a special counter-guerrilla force in the Portuguese army during the Colonial War (Oliveira 2012: 17-18).

2 - *Entrevista com Alpoim Calvão*, "Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril", n.d.: http://www1.ci.uc.pt/cd25a/wikka.php?wakka=eacalvao.

3 - There is no consensus on the start date for Cuban aid. See Gleijeses (2002: 254) and Moreira de Sá (2011: 221). The literature also diverges somewhat as to the start of the effective participation of regular Cuban troops, with studies indicating dates that range from late October to early November. See Westad (2007: 231-234), Gleijeses (2002: 305), and Moreira de Sá (2011: 223-224).

4 - 1961 saw the First Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, dating back to the 1955 Bandung Conference. For more on this, see Hobsbawn (1998: 337-362).

5 - This period corresponds to the adoption of the Independent Foreign Policy *(Política Externa Independente*, PEI). On this, see Vizentini (1994).

6 - The 1933 publication of *The Masters and the Slaves* sparked historical revisionism in Brazil, casting the role played by the Portuguese in a sunnier light. This new reading led to a range of gestures of rapprochement which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Consultation in 1953. The document formally aligned Brazil's foreign-policy stances to those of its former colonizer. On Lusotropicalism, see Gonçalves (2003: 90-98) and Castelo (1998).

7 - Eduardo Luís da Câmara Cascudo, Skype interview, 19 February 2015.

8 - Eduardo Luís da Câmara Cascudo, Skype interview, 19 February 2015.

9 - Arquivo Nacional (NA), Divisão de Segurança e Informações do Ministério das Relações Exteriores (DSI-MRE), BR DFANBSB Z4 DPN PES 0353, *Repercussão na imprensa portuense sobre fuzilamento de cidadão português em Moçambique*, 9 April 1979.

10 - This is the name recorded in Brazilian archives. The man in question currently tends to identify himself as Pedro Alberto Marangoni, which is the name on his memoirs. When asked about this, Pedro says that

'Marangoni' was left off of his two first passports and only incorporated later, 'in peacetime'. Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, e-mail interview, 28 January 2015.

11 - AN, DSI-MRE, BR DFANBSB Z4 DPN PES 0353, *Repercussão na imprensa portuense sobre fuzilamento de cidadão português em Moçambique*, 9 April 1979.

12 - Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, personal interview, Espírito Santo do Pinhal (SP-Brazil), 22 January 2015.

13 - Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, personal interview, Espírito Santo do Pinhal (SP-Brazil), 22 January 2015.

14 - Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, personal interview, Espírito Santo do Pinhal (SP-Brazil), 22 January 2015.

15 - *'Nada foi pior que o período no DOI-Codi', diz ex-preso político*, «O Estado de São Paulo», 16 August 2013. The present study was unable to confirm the Inspector's cause of death.

16 - Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (APERJ), Delegacia de Ordem Política e Social (DOPS), prontuário 37.175, *José Paulo Boneschi.*

17 - Paulo César Amendola, e-mail interview, 4 February 2015.

18 - Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, e-mail interview, 29 January 2015.

19 - Despite the official change, the term "GOESP" never fell out of usage, and appears in both documents cited here and interviews with former SERESP agents. The history of these elite squads may be consulted in Reznik (2008: 207-211).

20 - Paulo César Amendola, e-mail interview, 4 February 2015.

21 - APERJ, DOPS, n5 85-87, *Assessoramento à FNLA por policiais brasileiros*, 6 January 1976.

22 - APERJ, DOPS, n5 85-87, *Assessoramento à FNLA por policiais brasileiros*, 6 January 1976.

23 - APERJ, DOPS, n5 85-87, *Assessoramento à FNLA por policiais brasileiros*, 6 January 1976.

24 - Paulo César Amendola, e-mail interview, 4 February 2015.

25 - Arquidiocese de São Paulo, *Projeto "Brasil: Nunca Mais" Tomo II Volume 3*, "Relatório Projeto Brasil Nunca Mais", 1985: http://bnmdigital.mpf.mp.br/docreader/REL_BRASIL/967.

26 - Paulo César Amendola, e-mail interview, 4 February 2015.

27 - Paulo César Amendola, e-mail interview, 4 February 2015.

28 - Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty (AHI), 2084, *Telegrama confidencial 563*, Luanda, 9 December 1975.

29 - *O espião desiludido*, «Jornal do Brasil», 20 August 1978 in Gaspari (2014: 142).

30 - Pedro Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, e-mail interview, 30 January 2015.

31 - Paulo César Amendola, e-mail interview, 21 February 2015.

32 - APERJ, DOPS, n5 85-87, *Assessoramento à FNLA por policiais brasileiros*, 6 January 1976.

33 - *República Democrática do Congo*, «Ministério das Relações Exteriores», n.d.: http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4956&Itemid=478&cod_pais=COD&tipo=ficha_pais&lang=pt-BR.

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