

"Letters from Angola": Soviet Print Media and the Liberation of Angola, and Mozambique, 1961–1975

Natalia Telepneva

University of Warwick

University of Strathclyde

International publicity was crucial to the liberation of Southern Africa. As Matthew Connelly shows in *Diplomatic Revolution*, the innovators in this regard were the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), who used international fora effectively to achieve recognition for their cause in the context of the Cold War.¹ The print media were crucial for the construction of modern nationalism, or "imagined communities", the title of Benedict Anderson's seminal work.² The post-war era ushered in a new age of global media that African revolutionaries were able to use to capture international audiences.³ International solidarity networks were fundamental for this global outreach. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Portuguese dictatorship started handing out an increasing number of scholarships for young men and women from Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde to study in universities across Portugal. The students were supposed to learn the 'merits' of Portuguese civilisation and return to occupy administrative posts across the Empire. Instead, many started to agitate for the 'rediscovery' of African culture and to campaign for independence.

As persecution of nationalist activism in Portugal and the colonies intensified, many student activists went into exile. In the 1950s, one group of activists from the Portuguese colonies—Mário Pinto de Andrade and Viriato da Cruz from Angola, Marcelino dos Santos from Mozambique, and Amílcar Cabral from Cape Verde—gathered in Paris, from where they launched a campaign against Portuguese colonialism. They also started building a network of

supporters among European left-wing circles and from socialist countries. With Portugal's prime minister, António de Oliveira Salazar, refusing to cede control of the colonies, in 1960, De Andrade, Da Cruz and Cabral were among those who moved to Conakry, Guinea, from where they started campaigns to harness support for the armed struggle against the Portuguese regime. Cabral did so on behalf of The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). De Andrade and Da Cruz on behalf of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

In February-March 1961, a large-scale popular uprising shook Angola, Portugal's largest colony. The uprising and Portugal's brutal retaliation hastened the need for African nationalists to launch armed struggle – or face competition from local rivals. In April of that year, representatives from the MPLA, PAIGC, and the lesser-known the National Democratic Union of Mozambique (UDENAMO), amongst others, met in Casablanca, Morocco.⁴ The participants established a new umbrella organization, the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP) with headquarters in Rabat, Morocco, which was to serve as a publicity centre and a clearing house for inter-movement communication.⁵ CONCP intended to attract international attention to the problem of Portuguese colonialism in the aftermath of events in Angola and to strengthen its members through a transnational alliance.⁶ In 1962, Marcelino dos Santos played an important role in founding FRELIMO, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique. Once the MPLA (1961), FRELIMO (1964) and PAIGC (1963) launched armed struggle in the early 1960s, they used a variety of media – print, radio, and television – to advertise their cause. They also started inviting foreign journalists to visit the so-called liberated areas. These efforts were crucial to attracting international attention to the cause and countering the official Portuguese narrative that the nationalist movements were little more than a bunch of “armed bandits”, controlled by Moscow.

The Soviets turned their attention to the Third World after Nikita Khrushchev replaced Joseph Stalin as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereafter CC CPSU) in 1953. A pragmatic party apparatchik, Khrushchev understood that the rapid pace of decolonization offered Moscow opportunities to gain new international allies. At the same time, Khrushchev had come of age during the interwar period—the peak of the Comintern’s support for black liberation around the world. He was vested in the language of anti-racism and believed that the Soviets had a duty to help anti-colonial movements in the Third World. He hoped to revive socialism along so-called "Leninist " lines after he denounced Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956.⁷ The Soviets did not pay much attention to the Portuguese colonies until after the Angolan uprising. In 1961 that the Soviets offered the first assistance package to the MPLA, and by the mid-1960s, the Soviet Union and their allies in Eastern Europe were providing cash, arms, and military training to the MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC.

As Soviet official support for the anti-colonial movements picked up in the mid-1960s, the media followed suit. The 1960s saw an exposition of publications on the anti-colonial struggle – in print, on radio, and on television. Soviet journalists and party cadres used the print media to condemn the Portuguese colonialism. They also championed the anti-colonial cause by reporting on armed struggles in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Soviet journalists also served as informal go-betweens, reporting on what they saw and briefing the party cadres on the situation on the ground. While print media were a fundamental feature of Soviet support for liberation movements, we know very little about the content – or the people behind them.⁸ Characteristically, Artur Domoslawski’s biography of Ryszard Kapuscinski, a prominent Polish journalist and the author of such acclaimed books as *The Emperor*, *Shah of Shahs*, and *Another Day of Life*, produced much controversy when it was revealed that the former practiced a “literary journalism” and had a close relationship with the party bosses in Poland.⁹ By

demystifying the role of international journalists, we can better understand the nature of Soviet support for anti-colonial movements and uncover the transnational networks that sustained them.

This chapter investigates the functions of Soviet publications on the anti-colonial movements and the people behind them. It investigates the content of publications, written by a small team of Soviet officials who staffed the Africa desk of the CC CPSU International Department. It then looks at the Soviet international journalists reporting from the so-called liberated areas of Angola and Mozambique for *Pravda*, an official daily newspaper of the CPSU. Furthermore, this chapter uncovers the informal functions of Soviet journalists as sources of intelligences and informal liaisons between African and Soviet leaders. The varied functions of Soviet journalists are illustrated through an investigation into the career of Oleg Konstantinovich Ignat'ev, a Soviet international journalist (*zhurnalist-mezhdunarodnik*) and one of the most prolific commentators on the Portuguese colonies. By focusing on the content of Soviet print media and the people behind it, this chapter seeks to expand our understanding of the transnational networks that sustained the liberational struggles in Southern Africa.

The liberation struggle in Southern Africa through the lens of the CC CPSU International Department

The men and women who carried out Khrushchev's new policy in the Third World were mostly members of the Soviet bureaucratic elite—party cadres, diplomats, spies, journalists, and academics. However, perhaps the most important department to deal with liberation movements in Southern Africa was the International Department of the CC CPSU. In response to Soviet interest in sub-Saharan Africa, in the early 1960s, the International Department expanded its Africa desk, which would come to fulfil crucial functions in daily engagement with the liberation movements. The small staff at the Africa desk collected and processed information

about the situation in particular areas and made policy recommendations to the head of the International Department, Boris Ponomarev. They also “met and greeted” African revolutionaries on their visits to Moscow and processed their requests for assistance.¹⁰

In 1961, the International Department recruited Petr Nikitovich Yevsyukov as a desk officer responsible for Portuguese colonies. Fluent in Portuguese, Yevsyukov soon enough became one of the most informed figures on matters related to the Portuguese colonies as he received and processed all information from Soviet embassies abroad, press agencies, and intelligence sources. As such, he became a man with considerable influence on policy matters related to the Portuguese colonies.¹¹ While we know now quite a bit about the role of Yevsyukov and other middle-ranking officials as important liaisons, we know very little about them as producers of print content, as informers and shapers of public opinion through specialized print media. In fact, officials like Yevsyukov were actively involved in producing content for the media, including for specialized journals on topics of their specialisation.

One such journal was *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* (*Africa and Asia Today*). Established as a joint publication of the Moscow-based Institute of African Studies and the Oriental Institute, *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* became a forum for Soviet academics, international journalists, writers, and politicians to inform and educate the Soviet public. In general, the journal mainly targeted a domestic audience. Similar to other journals in the era of Khrushchev’s thaw, *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* allowed for a measure of engagement with the readers. The journal ran a special rubric titled “Answers to Readers” in which the editors provided an answer to a particular question raised by a particular member of the public. It is not clear how many such letters were received by *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya*, but it is instructive that the editors tried to connect with the readers – in line with the spirit of Khrushchev’s thaw that offered greater freedom for journalists and editors.¹² The cadres of the CC CPSU International Department and its Africa desk were regular contributors to the journal.

Yevsyukov started to contribute to *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* soon after joining the Africa desk at the CC CPSU International Department. One of his first articles for *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* in August 1962 focused on the PAIGC and the anti-colonial struggle in Guinea-Bissau. In “Vosstaniye Razgoraetsya” [The Uprising Flares Up], Yevsyukov presented the PAIGC as the only organization that represented the nationalist movement in Guinea-Bissau. He emphasised that the PAIGC had failed to achieve independence for Guinea-Bissau by peaceful means and had thus launched sabotage action against the Portuguese. Yevsyukov also highlighted PAIGC’s connections with “progressive nationalist organizations such as the MPLA” that were bound together in the CONCP. He praised the PAIGC leader Amílcar Cabral as “an energetic and capable political leader”, who was elected “deputy Secretary General of the CONCP”.¹³ Yevsyukov’s positive evaluation of Cabral on the pages of *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* is not surprising. He had first met Cabral earlier that year, in 1962. He was immediately taken by Cabral’s charm and became an important chain in Cabral’s transnational support network, which included supporters in Ghana, Algeria, Morocco, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and the Nordic countries, to name a few. Cabral and Yevsyukov would regularly meet in Moscow and Conakry, Guinea, where the PAIGC was based.¹⁴

Yevsyukov continued to emphasize transnational connections between the anti-colonial movements. In his article dedicated to the launch of armed struggle in Mozambique in 1964, he again emphasized that FRELIMO was part of CONCP and wanted to unite forces with other liberation movements to coordinate actions against Salazar’s regime. However, this time, Yevsyukov spared the reader laudatory epithets regarding FRELIMO’s leadership. The reason for this was a complicated relationship between the Soviets and FRELIMO’s first president Eduardo Mondlane, who was treated with suspicion in Moscow because of his background (he was educated and married in the US) and his contacts with the administration of US President John F. Kennedy.¹⁵

Besides shaping dominant narratives about the anti-colonial struggles, Yevsyukov used *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* to inform readers about the struggles for continued white minority rule in Southern Africa. In a detailed commentary about Portugal's colonial wars in 1965, Yevsyukov shared the dynamics of struggle for white rule in Southern Africa. Portugal was not alone in the region, he argued, for it received support from South Africa's Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd and Roy Welensky, the prime minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Salazar, Verwoerd, and Welensky, argued Yevsyukov, had entered into a "secret union" to sustain white power. Yevsyukov's allegations were not without foundation. That South Africa, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and Portugal consulted and coordinated their actions was known. While there was probably no official "secret agreement" in the early 1960s, there indeed existed diplomatic, intelligence, and military exchanges between South Africa, Portugal, and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. By the early 1970s, these developed into a more formal military alliance, known as Exercise ALCORA.¹⁶ Yevsyukov also lashed out at the United States for playing a "double game" by supporting Salazar's regime and at the same time giving money to "pro-American Angolan nationalists."¹⁷

Here, Yevsyukov hinted at the MPLA's main rival—the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) led by Holden Roberto. Originally established in 1958, the FNLA was rooted in the Bakongo community who had traditionally traversed northern Angola and southwestern Congo.¹⁸ In contrast to the leftist leadership of the MPLA, Holden Roberto was explicitly anti-communist and looked up to the USA as a model for the future of Angola. He made a few trips to the USA to look for assistance, and established a covert relationship with the CIA. In the early 1960s, the Soviets supported the idea of a common front between the MPLA and the FNLA, and it is thus not surprising that Yevsyukov avoided directly "naming and shaming" Holden Roberto. As the Soviets abandoned the goal by the end of 1964, they openly named Roberto as a CIA creation, reinforcing the MPLA's narrative.¹⁹

Another regular commentator on Southern Africa for *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* was Petr Manchkha, the head of the Afrika desk at the CC CPSU International Department. Like Yevsyukov, Manchkha was not an expert on the Portuguese colonies. He was first brought into the CC CPSU International Department to maintain relationships with left-wing groups in Albania and Greece. After Soviet relations with Albania deteriorated in the early 1960s, he was moved to head the new Africa desk at the International Department.²⁰ In early 1967, Manchkha took part in an intra-governmental delegation of Soviet officials who went to investigate the progress of armed struggle in Portuguese colonies ‘on the ground’. The delegation never crossed the border into the Portuguese colonies, but held a number of talks with leaders of the liberation movements, based in Tanzania, Zambia and Congo-Brazzaville. One of their interlocutors was Agostinho Neto, the MPLA’s president since 1962. The delegation came back convinced there was some progress and increased support for the MPLA.²¹

Upon his return, Manchkha wrote a long article on his experiences for *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya*. His main goal was to convince readers that the MPLA was the “main and leading force” in the liberation struggle, in contrast to the FNLA led by Holden Roberto. While the MPLA was “the most influential and authoritative organisation in the country”, the FNLA was constructed on a “narrow, tribal basis” and, he said, flirted with anti-white racism. The MPLA tried to establish a common front with the FNLA, but Holden Roberto countered any such attempts, thus dividing the nationalist movement. Behind the FNLA’s divisive tactics, argued Manchkha, was the United States, which supported Holden Roberto to lay the groundwork for influence in case Angola became independent. As such, Manchkha reinforced the MPLA’s narrative of being the only organisation that represented the people of Angola and of Holden Roberto as a puppet of the United States.²² Manchkha also highlighted the key role of the Soviet Union in supporting the liberation movements: “Active and regular support that the Soviet Union provides for Angolan, Mozambican and Guinean patriots and their sacred struggle for

freedom and national independence proof of the truly internationalist attitudes of the Soviet people towards national-liberation movement of oppressed peoples.”²³

As such, *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* served to inform and educate Soviet citizens. Articles by Yevsyukov and Manchkha sought to construct narratives of the MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC as the only viable representatives of their own people and to bash their internal rivals. They also sought to condemn the United States and the West for supporting white minority rule in Southern Africa, while highlighting Soviet support for anti-colonial struggles. This was to highlight Soviet internationalism in the service of anti-colonialism, as opposed to Western hypocrisy and moral duplicity. These publications in *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* thus also served as an important “moral weapon” in the struggle for “hearts and minds” for domestic and international audiences in the context of the Cold War. The journal also provided a platform for Africans themselves to communicate with the Soviet readership. Among regular contributors were Amílcar Cabral and Agostinho Neto, who regularly published updates on the progress of armed struggle.²⁴ Meant to educate and inform, the articles published by party cadres such as Yevsyukov and Manchkha were generally quite similar in the language used and the messages conveyed. These contrasted sharply with the lively style of so-called “reports from liberated areas” that became a common feature of Soviet print media, starting from the mid-1960s.

Soviet Journalist and Reports from the Liberated Areas

In the socialist countries, foreign journalists were a privileged caste. Soviet international journalists could travel and work abroad, a marker of privilege bestowed upon a narrow elite. The route to such a privileged career often started with passing difficult entrance exams to enrol at the Moscow State University or the Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO), which offered training in area studies and foreign languages. The vast majority of Soviet internationalist journalists were men, mainly of Russian ethnic origin, since entry

requirements restricted access to women and men of Jewish ethnic background.²⁵ Soviet international journalists were highly educated men who spoke foreign languages. Many had fought in the Second World War. These Soviet journalists were part of a confident post-war generation who were proud of their country and its achievements, and were dedicated to the party. Many were ‘true believers’ in Soviet socialism and welcomed Khrushchev’s speech at the Twentieth Congress. When Khrushchev turned to the Third World, Soviet journalists were also to act as informal ambassadors to the Third World, to enhance the positive image of the Soviet Union – in print and in person. As to the Soviet elite in general, the anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles excited journalists, who saw the Third World as the new frontier, where revolution could be reborn. It is not surprising that Soviet journalists jumped on the bandwagon to report on anti-colonial struggles. Starting from the mid-1960s, Soviet journalists would commonly report about their travels to areas where the anti-colonial movements were heavily present, the so-called liberated areas.²⁶

The emergence of Soviet reporting from the liberated areas also coincided with the intensification of armed struggle in Portuguese colonies. In 1964, MPLA reorganized its operations from a new base in Congo-Brazzaville. Armed with Soviet weapons and backed by a contingent of Cuban advisers, the organisation started operations in Cabinda – an Angolan enclave in neighbouring Congo-Brazzaville. As the MPLA launched its first forays into Cabinda in 1965, Soviet journalists began touring areas of Angola under control of the MPLA, known as “liberated areas”. Mikhail Domogatskikh was the first Soviet journalist to travel to Cabinda, accompanied by the MPLA guerrillas. He came back with field notes that were published in a series of articles in *Pravda* under the title “Plamya nad Angoloy” [Flame over Angola] between May and June 1965.

Such reports were made for domestic and international consumption. They would be first published in *Pravda*, then adapted for broadcast in foreign languages for international

audiences. Finally, they would be recorded and scrutinized by PIDE, Portugal's secret police. In one of the first reports in "Flame over Angola", Domogatskikh described his arduous journey, crossing the border, and finally meeting the MPLA guerrillas, "valiant fighters for the freedom of Angola". Upon arrival, he discovered a sense of comradeship and a genuine interest in Soviet experience of struggle against fascism during the Second World War.²⁷ In subsequent articles for *Pravda*, Domogatskikh goes on to depict the portraits of specific guerrilla commanders: their backgrounds, the reasons for joining the struggle, and hopes for the future. Domogatskikh also relays the words of an MPLA guerrilla commander about difficulties in their struggle and about those who, like Holden Roberto, have betrayed the revolution. His articles are filled with emotion, he wants to convince the reader about the sincerity of their fighters and their sacrifice.²⁸ He finishes the series of articles with a celebration of the Soviet solidarity with the MPLA, with highlighting ties that bind:

I started talking about how much our people are paying attention to the national liberation struggle, how much they are following the wars in Angola, Mozambique, and 'Portuguese' Guinea: 'The Soviet Union has always been and will remain with you, dear comrades.' Everybody jumped from seats. Hands clutching machine guns went up: 'Vive Union Soviétique! Vive Moscou!'²⁹

Tomas Kolesnichenko followed Domogatskikh to Angola shortly afterwards. Kolesnichenko was one of *Pravda's* main foreign correspondents, known for his lively writing style and flair for adventure. In early 1966, Kolesnichenko published a full account of his travels in Angola for *Pravda* in a series of articles titled "Pis'ma iz Angoly" [Letters from Angola]. In his first 'letter' for *Pravda*, Kolesnichenko constructed a portrait of the MPLA's President Agostinho Neto as a hero of the liberation struggle. Kolesnichenko showed himself dining with Agostinho Neto before crossing the border. Then, their conversation was interrupted by somebody switching on the radio. He writes: "Somebody switches on the radio. One can hear

loud speech. The partisans listen for some time, then they start laughing. ‘This is Portuguese radio’, says Agostinho Neto’. Now they are saying that they had completely crushed the bandits, while only few ‘agents from Moscow’ remain. Meanwhile, the existence of Angolan partisans is a myth, made up by the agitators”.³⁰ Kolesnichenko’s goal was to counter Portuguese propaganda, to show that the MPLA was "real" and that it indeed controlled areas under its occupation. Kolesnichenko relays a conversation with Hoji Ya Henda, a popular MPLA guerrilla commander. The Portuguese propaganda was a lie, according to Hoji Ya Henda. The MPLA’s forces were regularly engaged in fighting the Portuguese, who rarely ventured out of their posts for fear of ambushes.³¹

Once Kolesnichenko crossed the border into Angola, his gaze turned towards the MPLA guerrillas and the nature of the struggle. In the midst of the jungle, he sees the portrait of I. V. Lenin. The Angolan partisans “know Lenin”. Kolesnichenko describes MPLA guerrillas as “internationalists, convinced their task was inexorably linked with the struggle against imperialism and colonialism.”³² The role of Holden Roberto and FNLA also comes up in Kolesnichenko’s account. He highlights FNLA’s duplicitous nature through a story of Veneno (nom de guerre), another MPLA commander. Veneno was the son of a poor plantation worker who had been abused by his boss.³³ Since childhood, Veneno hated colonial rule and thus he did not hesitate to join the uprising in 1961. Veneno first joined the FNLA, but he was soon disappointed when he realised that Holden Roberto did not fight against the colonizers, but only enriched himself. After many travails, he managed to escape and finally joined MPLA.³⁴ In another article for *Pravda*, Kolesnichenko goes further to portray MPLA as a beacon of hope for Africa. He underlines that Bourgeoisie propaganda” was wrong to celebrate the destruction of the “progressive forces”. In fact, MPLA’s struggle showed that forces existed in Africa that would develop revolution. That, he continued, depended on support from the Soviet Union and the socialist countries: “The struggle of the Angolan partisans proves that the liberation

movement against colonialism and imperialism can't exist in isolation from the international workers' movement, from the international socialist system.”³⁵

In reports from the liberated areas, journalists like Domogatskikh and Kolesnichenko constructed a dominant narrative for MPLA and its struggle. The MPLA enjoyed widespread control and a large degree of control in rural areas. They were the only representative of the liberation struggle in Angola, juxtaposed with Holden Roberto's FNLA who were ineffective and unwilling to fight. Another aim was to reaffirm Soviet leadership of the international communist movement. In fact, as the journalists tried to show, MPLA's struggle could not exist in isolation, without Soviet support. MPLA's struggle proved that revolution was alive and the Soviet Union was crucial to its success. Over time, Soviet journalists reporting from liberated areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau became fairly commonplace. They often went with small crews of cameramen to shoot films about the armed struggle. They also came back with reports of the "real situation on the ground" for official use. Nobody exemplified the many functions Soviet journalists played in the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa than Oleg Ignat'ev.

The Myth-Maker? Oleg Ignat'ev and the Struggle against Portuguese Colonial Rule

Ignat'ev's career reflects the multiplicity of roles that were accessible to highly sought-after area studies specialists with the knowledge of foreign languages. Born in 1924, Ignat'ev served in the Black Sea fleet during the Second World War as a deep-water diver who laid mines. After the war, he enrolled in the prestigious Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO). After graduating in 1949, he first worked for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* before going on a three-year foreign assignment to Argentina where he worked as the second secretary and press attaché at the Soviet Embassy. Back in Moscow, he moved to a post at the State Committee for Cultural Links with Foreign Countries, specialising in Latin America. In 1959, he returned to

Komsomolskaya Pravda. In 1964, Ignat'ev started working for *Pravda*.³⁶ It was shortly after he started to work for *Pravda* that he met Amílcar Cabral. He remembered that their first meeting took place on 10 November 1965 in Moscow at the initiative of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. "A mulatto of medium height entered the mention at Kropotkinskaya Street. He had regular features and his brown eyes looked calmly and attentively from behind large, horn-rimmed glasses. His temples had begun to grey. On his head was a knitted cap work by Czech skiers. 'Amílcar Cabral', he introduced himself and held out his hand". It was at that meeting that Cabral first suggested that Soviet journalists should venture to the "liberated areas" of Guinea-Bissau. Apparently, Ignat'ev immediately supported Cabral's idea and suggested that *Pravda* should dispatch him to report on the situation there.³⁷

In 1966, Ignat'ev became the first Soviet journalist to travel to Guinea-Bissau. On his first trip, he went to the south of Guinea-Bissau – the heartland of support for PAIGC. On first examination, Ignat'ev's reports on liberated areas in Guinea-Bissau differ little from those of Tom Kolesnichenko or Mikhail Domogatskikh. He wrote about the cruelty of Portuguese colonialism and PAIGC's brave struggle, all against the backdrop of his own trek across the Guinea/Guinea-Bissau border into the liberated areas, night-time bombardments, and conversations about freedom with the guerrillas. However, Ignat'ev went further.³⁸ In his reports, he showed PAIGC acting as an "embryo state" in the liberated areas by building schools for children and offering primary healthcare services for the people. Ignat'ev also zoomed in on Soviet solidarity with the struggle, mainly through reporting on meetings with those who had studied in the Soviet Union. During his first trip to Guinea-Bissau, Ignat'ev talks about meeting a young woman who had just returned from the USSR, where she had studied to become a nurse. In his last report from Guinea-Bissau, Ignat'ev reports, he finally met Amílcar Cabral, who asked him to speak about what he saw in front of the UN's Decolonisation Committee. Ignat'ev could not go testify, but stressed his reports bore witness to the fact that the people of "Portuguese Guinea" had freed almost half of the territory under the

leadership of PAIGC; that there was no colonial administration in the liberated areas; and that the struggle for liberation was led by regular military units of the PAIGC's armed forces.³⁹ Overall, Ignat'ev's reports meant to reinforce the dominant narrative of PAIGC as an "embryo state" in the liberated areas for domestic and international audiences.

After his first trip in 1966, Ignat'ev became a regular visitor to Guinea-Bissau. In 1968, he went to Guinea-Bissau again, this time with a crew of Soviet cameramen to shoot a film about PAIGC. In 1970, he covered the armed struggle in the East of Guinea-Bissau. Ignat'ev's interest in Guinea-Bissau was shaped by a close personal relationship that he developed with Amílcar Cabral. In the early 1970s, Cabral's daughter, Iva, stayed at Ignat'ev's home as a first-year student at the History Department of the Moscow State University. Cabral thus commonly met Ignat'ev in his home, discussing forthcoming trips. The two became friends. In 1973, Ignat'ev went to Guinea-Bissau again. This time, he wanted to cross the whole country from north to south. On 21 January 1973, Ignat'ev was in Mores in the north of Guinea-Bissau when he heard news of Cabral's assassination in Conakry.⁴⁰ Cabral was murdered as part of a failed plot, concocted by the Portuguese and executed by a group of PAIGC members, unhappy with the progress of armed struggle and with what they believed was the dominant position of Cape Verdeans in the PAIGC. The Soviets were very worried about PAIGC's prospects in the aftermath of Cabral's death. With Cabral gone, the Soviet military felt the PAIGC was under threat of being subsumed by either the Guineans, the Cubans, or both, so they dramatically expanded military assistance.⁴¹ Since Ignat'ev happened to be inside Guinea-Bissau when Cabral's murder took place, he had the privileged position to structure the narrative.

One of his aims was to underscore that Cabral's murder did not change the situation inside the country, that PAIGC still had the support of the local population. The main reason why common people in the liberated areas supported PAIGC, argued Ignat'ev in characteristic fashion, was the transformative nature of the struggle for people's lives. In one of his articles for *Pravda*, he

recounted a conversation with Fode Ture, “an elder of about seventy years old, dressed in typical Muslim dress”. According to Ture, people did not know anything beyond their own village. Now, Ture’s elder son was fighting for PAIGC in the south, while one of his granddaughters was studying abroad to become a teacher. PAIGC built schools and dispatched doctors to care for children. The Portuguese may have killed Cabral, but the people would never live in the same way as before.⁴²

Another of Ignat’ev’s aims was to dispel the notion that the coup in Conakry and Cabral’s murder had anything to do with disagreements within the party. Returning to Conakry from his tour of Guinea-Bissau in February 1973, Ignat’ev was the first international journalist to interview Cabral’s wife Anna Maria, the only eye-witness to the assassination. The short version of her account was printed in *Pravda* on 6 March 1973. In an emotional account, Ignat’ev relayed Anna Maria’s account of the murder: Cabral’s bravery in dealing with his assassins, reinforcing his image as a slain revolutionary hero. In his own commentary, Ignat’ev emphasised that Cabral’s assassins were mere criminals who worked for the Portuguese.⁴³ As such, Ignat’ev’s reports were supposed to reassure about PAIGC’s success and provide credence to the organization in crisis. He developed the narrative in a book-length study of Cabral’s murder, published in 1975 and 1976, in Portuguese and Russian. Written in a lively journalistic style, the book is based on minutes of interrogations with those who were involved in the plot to murder Cabral and aimed to show PIDE as the main villains.⁴⁴

In the following years, Ignat’ev continued to write to establish the “myth of Amílcar Cabral”. In 1975, he published the first biography of Cabral, titled *Amílcar Cabral: The Son of Africa* both in Russian and Portuguese.⁴⁵ The book does not have any references, but does contain verbatim dialogues with Cabral and others around him to paint an idealistic picture of a man fully dedicated to the struggle from a young age. Ignat’ev’s Cabral is an ideal type, a hero of a liberation struggle. Allegedly based on Ignat’ev’s conversations with Cabral during his many tours of the liberated areas, Ignat’ev carefully constructed *The Son of Africa* to showcase Cabral as the only

uncompromising leader and fighter for independence of his nation. However, the book remained the only biography of Cabral until the publication of Patrick Chabal's *Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War*.⁴⁶ As Chabal is right to note, the biography was "tendentious journalistic of arbitrary chosen events in Cabral's life".⁴⁷ Ignat'ev's biography of Cabral was never meant to be an academic study. Written in a vivid and racy style, it was supposed to enchant the reader, to construct his image as a revolutionary hero akin to Che Guevara. "Ignat'ev's work is truly worthy of a film script", writes Mustafa Dhada.⁴⁸ While Ignat'ev spent a lot of time and energy writing on PAIGC, by the early 1970s, he had become the main journalist reporting on struggles in southern Africa—in Angola and Mozambique.

Upon the request of MPLA's Agostinho Neto, in July 1970, Ignat'ev headed a four-men Soviet crew on a trip to Angola. Their goal was to shoot a film about life in MPLA-controlled liberated areas. Ignat'ev's reports from Angola were very similar to those from Guinea-Bissau, characterized by similar romanticism and dominant narratives of suffering and struggle against Portuguese colonialism. As in his reports from Guinea-Bissau, Ignat'ev pays a lot of attention to MPLA's attempt to establish an "embryo state" in Angola: "The women work in the fields, the men go hunting and fishing, they engage in cattle grazing and extract honey. Seemingly, this is the quiet, patriarchal life, which has been in place for centuries. You will immediately notice the changes in people's lives that occurred due to selfless work of the MPLA". Ignat'ev elaborates: the MPLA had opened schools and healthcare services. The local medic, Bazadio, studied medicine in the USSR. Attached to the article were photographs of the partisans, but also of small children sitting behind desks.⁴⁹ He also notes the evolution of MPLA's armed struggle: the organization was waging the war in all areas of Angola; the headquarters had been moved inside of the country. There were many more trained cadres who had undergone military training in "North Africa and the socialist countries, including in the USSR".⁵⁰ A year later, in July-August 1971, Ignat'ev went to southern Africa again. This time, he was covering FRELIMO's armed struggle in Mozambique.

Ignat'ev's trip to Mozambique in 1971 coincided with a difficult period of anti-colonial struggle in the Portuguese colonies. In 1970, the Portuguese undertook a massive counter-offensive in Angola and Mozambique. In Angola, it was led by an experienced general, Francisco da Costa Gomes. In Mozambique, General Kaúlza de Arriaga launched *Operação Nó Górdio* (Operation Gordian Knot), a massive military offensive against FRELIMO. While Gordian Knot was originally successful, by 1971, it had become clear that FRELIMO had shifted the focus of its operations from the northern Cabo Delgado to Tete Province.⁵¹ At the same time, the Soviets were reviewing their support for FRELIMO. In 1967–69, FRELIMO had undergone an internal crisis, which led to the rise of Samora Machel as the new president after Eduardo Mondlane's assassination. Machel was suspicious of the Soviets, but he was nonetheless eager to obtain increased assistance to counter the Portuguese offensive and expand operations. Machel first came to Moscow 1971. The occasion was the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the CPSU, but Machel's main goal was to negotiate with the Soviet Military for the delivery of new weapons.⁵² The Soviets remained cautious about FRELIMO and eager to investigate their political alignment, especially with the Chinese.⁵³

The purpose of the trip to Mozambique was thus two-fold. As before, Soviet journalists were to establish the dominant narratives of FRELIMO's liberation struggle. In his reports for *Pravda*, Ignat'ev covered familiar themes: the brutality of Portuguese colonial wars, the bravery of the guerrilla fighters, and FRELIMO's modernisation attempts in rural areas. While the deliveries of Soviet arms were always an open secret, it was not until 1970 that Moscow decided to openly admit they were providing arms to the anti-colonial movements.⁵⁴ Now, Ignat'ev openly wrote about Soviet military assistance to the anti-colonial movements.⁵⁵ However, Ignat'ev and his crew were also to produce a secret report about the situation on the ground to ascertain the progress of armed struggle and the moods of FRELIMO's leadership. The journalists' secret report to the CC CPSU from 7 August 1971 on the situation inside FRELIMO was quite positive. They wrote favourably about FRELIMO's leader Samora Machel, arguing he was a "authoritative, energetic,

and wilful leader” who was quite impressed by the conversations he had had in Moscow during the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the CPSU. Machel was still in the process of "political formation", they continued, but his background, having come from a “very poor peasant family”, set him on a path to become a "true people’s leader”.⁵⁶ While one could still see China’s influence among FRELIMO, they argued, the organisation had turned in the direction of the USSR. To enhance the trend, Moscow should step up assistance and widen contacts with the leadership. Another way of countering Chinese influence would be through the "political education" of FRELIMO cadres coming to study in the USSR.⁵⁷ It is not clear how much these kinds of recommendations affected Soviet attitudes and policies towards FRELIMO. However, they prove that journalists like Ignat’ev fulfilled multiple functions, especially when truthful information was pretty scarce.

On 25 April 1975, a group of junior military officers known as the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) seized power in Portugal. The coup led to a process of democratization, known as the Carnation Revolution. Censorship was lifted, political parties legalized, and the secret police disbanded. Among those who were allowed to return to Portugal in the aftermath of the coup were Álvaro Cunhal and Mário Soares, the General Secretaries of the Portuguese Communist Party and the Socialist Party, respectively. Both were invited to join the first provisional government, with Soares taking an important portfolio as the foreign minister. Soares proceeded to negotiate for transfers of power to PAIGC and FRELIMO in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Angola was a much more complicated case. The coup in Lisbon took the Soviets by surprise. In Angola, the nationalist movement was divided between three rival organisations: MPLA, FNLA, and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Savimbi. In a series of meetings at Alvor, Portugal, in January 1975, the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA signed an agreement, which obligated all three to share power in a transitional government and to hold constituent assembly elections in October. The date of independence was set for 11 November 1975. However,

the Alvor Accord did not hold. By June 1975, the country was engulfed by a civil war, with MPLA pitted against FNLA and UNITA.

The Soviets also had very little information about developments on the ground. In fact, they had very little impact upon the process of negotiations for transfer of power to PAIGC and FRELIMO, which were ongoing for most of the summer of 1974. The Soviets needed to understand the balance of forces on the ground. In September 1974, Oleg Ignat'ev became the first Soviet journalist to make a long trip to Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola. He returned with a series of economic and political recommendations for the CC CPSU. His evaluation of the situation in Guinea-Bissau was particularly positive. In his report to the CC CPSU, he argued Guinea-Bissau might well soon turn into an "example for many Third World countries" since PAIGC had many experienced, talented leaders, many of whom had been educated in the USSR. He also observed the development of a bitter rivalry between liberation movements in Angola and advised that the Soviets should step up support for MPLA. In a handwritten comment, the head of the CC CPSU Africa desk Petr Manchkha stated that the Soviet Solidarity Committee and other Soviet "public organizations" would consider his report.⁵⁸

Ignat'ev was not the only Soviet journalist to provide "first-hand" information on developments in Angola. In December, Mikhail Zenovich, a journalist with *Pravda*, followed Ignat'ev to evaluate the situation in Luanda. In his report to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Zenovich noted the intensification of rivalries between key political parties in the capital. The future power in Angola depended on whether MPLA or its main rival, FNLA, backed by Zaire, could accumulate sufficient military force.⁵⁹ These observations together with information coming from other MPLA leadership seemed to confirm to the Soviets the need to resume military support for MPLA by the end of 1974.⁶⁰ However, Ignat'ev still remained the key Soviet journalist reporting on Angola. In the months preceding the declaration of independence on 11 November, Ignat'ev was back in Luanda, this time working with Igor Uvarov, an officer of the Soviet Military Intelligence (GRU)

who had first arrived in Angola in early 1975, working undercover as a TASS correspondent. Another journalist who often travelled with Ignat'ev and Uvarov was Ryszard Kapuscinski, the Polish journalist and author of *Another Day of Life*. In the months preceding the declaration of independence, Ignat'ev and Uvarov served as key liaisons between Moscow and MPLA leadership, relaying messages from the Soviet government. When Oleg Nazhestkin, a KGB officer who had known Agostinho Neto since the early 1960s, arrived in besieged Luanda in early November, he recalled meeting Ignat'ev and Uvarov in the famous Tivoli Hotel. Late at night, all three men drove to Neto's residence to pass on a note of support from the Soviet government.⁶¹

Alongside Uvarov, Ignat'ev became a key source of information about developments on the ground, while simultaneously writing many short reports for *Pravda*. Later, he published a book based on his notes and memories from his time in Angola titled *Operatziya Kobra-75 (Operation Cobra-75)*.⁶² While Ignat'ev's and Kapuscinski were in Luanda at the same time, the two books are very different. Kapuscinski's *Another Day of Life* is an evocation of Luanda as a wooden city floating away, as he witnesses the Portuguese evacuation amid the civil war. In *Another Day of Life*, Kapuscinski is firmly on the side of the MPLA and even picks up a gun in real life in the midst of the fighting.⁶³ Both Kapuscinski and Ignat'ev portray the MPLA in heroic terms. However, if Kapuscinski is interested in the spirit of the times, the *Zeitgeist*, Ignat'ev wants to prove events in Angola as a product of international conspiracy, concocted by the USA, China, and South Africa. He describes in grimy details the brutality of the FNLA and UNITA, but accords either organisation little agency, arguing there was no secret that the "mobs of Savimbi and Roberto" played a secondary role in the intervention.⁶⁴ Published in 1978, in the midst of the Soviet-Cuban operation in Angola, Ignat'ev also openly speaks about Cuban advisors, but does not mention about the role of the Cuban Special Forces in the defence of Luanda in the days preceding 11 November.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The print media were crucial to Soviet engagement with the anti-colonial struggles in southern Africa. Writings on the anti-colonial movements, however similar in their message, writing style, and means, were fundamental to expressing Soviet solidarity with anti-colonial movements. They were meant to educate and inform domestic and international audiences and help the chosen anti-colonial movements—MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC—construct heroic metanarratives of anti-colonial struggle. As this chapter shows, not only professional journalists, but also party cadres like Yevsyukov and Manckha, were involved in the process of constructing the dominant narrative of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. The journalists' accounts "from the liberated areas" were, however, quite different since they were intended to evoke emotions of solidarity in the readers and affinity with the guerrilla fighters. Besides establishing the dominant narrative of anti-colonial struggles, the key goal of these reports from liberated areas was to validate the socialist experiment and increase the prestige of the Soviet Union. Through these romanticised descriptions of the anti-colonial struggles in southern Africa, Soviet journalists tried to build an "imagined community", bound together by common vision of the future.

Oleg Ignat'ev embodied the many functions of a Soviet internationalist journalist. Through his reports, he established a particular language and narratives to talk about liberation in Southern Africa. He emphasised personal bravery and sacrifice of the African guerrillas, as well as the cruelty of Portuguese colonialism, backed by the US and other Western allies. Besides, Ignat'ev consistently underscored the liberation movements as sources of modernisation in the liberated areas. Like other journalists, Ignat'ev also served as an informal go-between for the leadership of the liberation movements and Soviet officials, providing first-hand information about developments on the ground. Soviet journalists like Ignat'ev were key to establishing the heroic narratives of anti-colonial struggle, which revolved around Africa's "big men" like Cabral, Neto and Samora Machel. Soviet journalists were crucial actors in

sustaining metaphysical and real contacts between anti-colonial movements and the Soviet Union.

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² B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

³ J. Brennan, "Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of Africa, 1953–1964", in: C. Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Movement and Its Political Afterlives*, Athens: Ohio U.P., 2010.

⁴ This meeting also included: The Committee for the Liberation of Sao Tome and Principe (CLSTP); the Union of Angola's Workers (UNTA); the Goan National Congress; Goa Liberation Council; Goan People's Party; and the Goan League. See: José Manuel Duarte de Jesus, *Casablanca: o Início do Isolamento Português*, Lisboa: Gradiva, 2006, pp. 59-69.

5. J. Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: The Anatomy of an Explosion, 1950–1962*, 2 vols., Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969, pp. 10–11.

6. M. Laban, *Mário Pinto de Andrade: Uma Entrevista dada a Michel Laban* [Mário Pinto De Andrade: An Interview Given to Michel Laban], M. A. Daskalos (trans.), Lisboa: Edições João Sá da Costa, 1997, p. 167.

⁷ S. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Creation of a Superpower*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 436; M. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928–1937*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2012, pp. 1–2; S. Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

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¹² S. Huxtable, “The Life and Death of Brezhnev’s Thaw: Changing Values in Soviet Journalism after Khrushchev, 1964–1968”, in: D. Fainberg and A. Kalinovsky (eds.), *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 21–43.

¹³ P. Yevsyukov, “Vosstaniye Razgoraetsya”, *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya*, 2 (1962) 8, pp. 18–19.

¹⁴ P. Yevsyukov, “Natsionalno-osvoboditelnaya Borba v Gvinee-Bissau”, in: A. Vasil’ev (ed.), *Afrika v Vospominaniyakh Veteranov Diplomaticheskoy Sluzhby*, Moscow: Institut Afriki RAN, 2004, p. 140.

¹⁵ P. Yevsyukov, “Front Osvobozhdeniya Mozambika”, *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya*, 8 (1965) 3, pp. 8–9; On Soviet relations with FRELIMO, see: Telepneva, “Mediators of Liberation”, pp. 67–81.

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¹⁷ P. Yevsyukov, “Sorvat’ Sgovor Kolonizatorov!”, *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya*, 3 (1963) 1, pp. 12–14.

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- ³² T. Kolesnichenko, “Otryad Tovarishcha Vystrel”, 11 March 1966, p. 5.
- ³³ T. Kolesnichenko, *Granitsu Perekhodyat v Polnoch*, p. 24
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- ⁵⁴ The provision of arms was first officially acknowledged by the director of the Institute of African Studies, Vasiliy Solodovnikov, in his address to the delegates of the International Conference of Solidarity with the Peoples of the Portuguese Colonies, held in Rome, in 1970. See: V. Solodovnikov, *Tvorcheskii put' v Afrikanistiku i Diplomatiiu*, Moscow: Institut Afriki RAN, 2000, p. 91.
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