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# Language, Names, and War: The Case of Angola

Inge Brinkman

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**Abstract:** This article shows the links between naming practices and war. The focus is on MPLA war names used during the Angolan struggle for independence. These names are framed in the wider context of the relations between language and war. In many African contexts, names are not singular and fixed, but may change with every personal transformation. Entering the life of a soldier constitutes just such a drastic change. The article shows that through war names, a kaleidoscope of issues may be addressed, including the relations between language, rank, and power, personal history and popular culture, spirit possession and resurrection, self-description and labeling, writing and legitimacy, and secrecy and identity.

**Résumé:** Cet article met en évidence le lien entre les pratiques nominatives liées et la guerre. Il se concentre sur les noms de guerre employés par le MPLA (Partido do Poder em Angola) pendant le conflit angolais pour l'indépendance. Ces noms sont envisagés dans le contexte plus vaste des relations entre la langue et la guerre. Dans de nombreux contextes africains, les noms ne sont pas singuliers ou définitifs, mais ils évoluent souvent avec chaque transformation personnelle. L'entrée dans la vie de soldat constitue un exemple radical de ce type de transformation. L'article montre comment, à travers les noms de guerre, un éventail de questions peuvent être adressées, y compris les relations entre la langue, la hiérarchie et le pouvoir, l'histoire individuelle et la culture populaire, les phénomènes de possession et de résurrection, l'auto description et le choix du nom, l'écriture et la légitimité et enfin, le secret et l'identité.

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IN 1996, A FORMER MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) guerrilla from southeast Angola gave the following explanation of his name changes during wartime.

We changed our names.... [Agostinho] Neto explained to us: "If in the bush you keep on using the name with which they used to call you at home, the Portuguese will kill all your relatives. They will say: 'That guy we have been looking for is in the bush.' If they find your parents, your father and your mother, they will kill them both—*tsua*. You must use other names that are not known by the Portuguese and not recorded in their books."

In the beginning I called myself Cisukuti (Boomslang). After Cisukuti, my name became Kandungu (Chili Pepper). And from Kandungu I changed to Konkili (Concrete), and I am still called thus by now.

These were pseudonyms.... [At first the name was] Cisukuti, meaning: if it bites you, you will die.... Then I was ready to go to Angola, because the Portuguese were our enemy, and we had to chase and kill the colonialists. So I changed my name [again] and it became Kandungu. If you put a chili pepper in your mouth, it burns, it is not nice. It is like that with my gun: If I hold it, the Portuguese must flee from me, because they must leave my country....

Finally my name was Konkili.... One has to mix and mix and mold soil, and stones, and cement, and water. After it has dried, [concrete] becomes very hard. Even if the storms roar and the rain pours, it will not break. Likewise the Portuguese, no matter how they arrange their guns for me, it is of no use, because we will redeem the country and the people. Then Neto wrote... down... the name Konkili.... (interview 1).<sup>1</sup>

This lengthy quotation makes clear that war names are a subject worthy of investigation. In this article I will address the issue of language and war, focusing on MPLA war names used during the Angolan struggle for independence.

The war started in 1961. In January of that year there was a revolt on the cotton plantations in Malange. In February police stations and prisons in Luanda were attacked, and in March full-scale war broke out in the north of the country. The various nationalists groups organized themselves in exile. The MPLA operated mainly from Congo-Brazzaville and Zambia; its guerrilla actions occurred mainly in Cabinda, the Dembos, and southeast Angola. The UPA, later called the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola), had its bases in Congo/Zaire and crossed the border into northern and northwestern Angola. From 1966, the UNITA (National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola) was based in an area in eastern Angola. Numerous smaller groups existed, especially in Congo/Zaire, but the three mentioned were the largest Angolan nationalist movements. In 1974 a cease-fire was agreed upon after the Portuguese army staged a coup in Lisbon, and on November 11, 1975, Angola became an independent

country. Even before independence, however, the groups had started fighting each other and a civil war ensued (see Marcum 1969, 1978).

During the author's fieldwork in Namibia among refugees from south-east Angola, some interviewees took the time to discuss extensively the linguistic codes that were used at the time of the war for liberation in Angola. People noted the various words that were used to refer to the concentrated settlements to which people were moved by the Portuguese colonial government. *Milanda* is perhaps related to the Portuguese *landa* for moor, heath, tract of wasteland; *junda* derives from the Portuguese *junta* (junction, joint); and *ndalata* is a loan based on the Afrikaans word for wire: *draad*. Others explained the terms referring to the various parties in the war. The Portuguese called the guerrillas *turras* or *banditos*, while the MPLA guerrillas denoted the Portuguese with the shortened word *tugas*. The words and signs used for greetings in the various parties were also mentioned and commented upon. Former guerrillas elaborated on the names they had used during the war. These narratives and explanations are evidence that, for those involved, the language and names used during the war form a theme that merits investigation.

War names are often mentioned in coverage of African wars by the sensationalist press. Like magical potions, bizarre dress, and weird ritual killings, these names are taken as examples of the exotic and absurd character of current warfare in Africa. Thus Keith Richburg (quoted in Ellis 1999:18) wrote about the war in Liberia as the "wackiest, and most ruthless, of Africa's uncivil wars. . . . It's a war with a general named Mosquito, a war where soldiers get high on dope and paint their fingernails bright red before heading off to battle." Richburg continues his account with noting the carnivalistic dress of the soldiers, the inanity of child-soldiering, and the use of magic in the Liberian war. Seldom do we read anything about the background of war names, their distribution, cultural references, and history.

The language used in war is a subject that hitherto has received only limited attention. Some lists and indexes of war idioms exist, but usually these provide little analysis (an exception is Fussell 1990, 2000), and they do not normally contain any references to naming practices in wartime. In more general onomastic studies, the specific uses of names in wartime are not a focal point of study. One of the reasons for this lack of interest may be due to the often static and fixed conception of names: many onomastic studies do not allow for name changes. Historians often collect personal names and place names as part of their data, but they rarely consider this material as a historical subject in itself. Naming practices in Africa have at times been included in anthropological monographs, but in most cases the interpretation goes no further than an ethnographic description. There has been some discussion of authors' pseudonyms and on the anthropological practice of giving pseudonyms for informants (Van der Geest 2003; Finnegan 2003). On the whole, however, the literature on naming practices in Africa is limited.

## Language and War

The importance of linguistic categories in wartime can hardly be overestimated. The wide range of possible relations shows that it is a subject that goes beyond the purely linguistic field. In wartime, a sharp distinction is made between “us” and “them,” whereby the former is imbued with morally good qualities and the latter constitutes the evil, even inhuman, “enemy.” Language is often used as a marker for who is an enemy and who is not. Many linguistic theories are based on the assumption that language is a system of communication. That people from Birkhamsted stoned a dachshund during the First World War indicates that language is much more than that (Fussell 2000:176).

In many conflicts, “the enemy” is identified not through his or her spoken language but rather on the basis of what he or she does *not* speak. Etymologies of words like *barbarian* and *Hottentot*, both stemming from words meaning “stammerer,” indicate that a denial of other people’s linguistic abilities often forms part of a process of dehumanization. In the Angolan context as well, such a link between enemy-construction and “wrong language” was established. In Luanda in 1993, on what later came to be known as Bloody Friday, people looking like they came from Zaire were stopped and ordered to say “arroz,” the Portuguese word for rice. The attackers believed that all those who could not say this in proper Portuguese could be classified as an “enemy” (Mabeko-Tali 1995:71). The issue of loyalty and betrayal is sharply connected with language: not only because traitors “tell on” people, but also because people who come to belong to a fighting party are incorporated through language. Thus people taken prisoner by UNITA after Angola’s independence had to learn Umbundu. Two former prisoners were adamant that this was not only for practical reasons (interviews 2 & 3); using the wrong language or the wrong wording in the wrong context could have lethal consequences. Thus the war cry “Commando!” answered with “Brave! Strong! Intelligent!” sounded in Monrovia (Liberia) after one of President Doe’s men had spoken of rival Johnson’s men as “rebels” (Ellis 1999:7).

A second aspect of the relationship between language and war is the fact that language often changes in wartime. Just as landscape elements may lose the function they have in peaceful times and become “fighting things” (*Kriegsdinge*) (Lewin 1917), the names used for people, places, and things may change as violence radically alters their characteristics. As Paul Fussell (2000:169–87; 1990:251–67) explains, a war jargon may develop that sets war language apart from ordinary language. Both during the First and the Second World Wars, local place names were altered, ordinary items received new labels, and new words were created to mark the new context in which people lived. Such war idiom is often specific to the war and has no meaning outside its context.

Language change may be a general feature of wartime, yet the way in

which words are altered differs from war to war. Thus Fussell describes how euphemism and implication characterized the language used in the World War I, whereas in World War II a new sort of language “forced itself up from below” to described horror in ironic, obscene ways (2000:174). Secrecy, instead of communication, is a further aspect of linguistic change during war: code language may be developed to prevent the enemy from knowing about war strategies and plans. In the Angolan war against colonialism, various forms of such code language existed (IANTT, PIDE, Del.A., P.Inf. 110.00.30, 19:222,242-244; IANTT, PIDE, Del.A., SS Fundo, NT 9084, Serpa Pinto:19).

The relationship between war and language is not restricted to war proper. Language and naming practices remain important in the memories of the war as well. It is no coincidence that upon independence many African countries changed their name as well as many of the place names within their territory. For example, after the independence of Congo/Zaire, the place name Kibentele, which was based on the name of the BMS missionary Bentley, was changed to Nlemvo, the name of one of Bentley’s first African converts (Stanley 1992:345). Also in Angola, despite the choice of Portuguese as the official language and the fact that a growing number of Angolans do not know any African language, many place names were altered after independence from those of Portuguese heroes of discovery into local names. The social memory of the war is also shown in the names of schools, institutes, streets, and other public places. In the Angolan context, there have been complaints about the preponderance of MPLA names in this respect (Mukonda 2002).

Place names are not the only way to remember war heroes; many parents choose to name their children after them. Just who is regarded as a hero of course depends on one’s perspective. Thus some people living in African countries under British rule called their children Hitler because he fought the British, and in present-day Nigeria many children are called Osama.

These varying aspects reveal the importance of language, words, and names before, during, and after a war. They may become the subject of intense debate. They may become part of the internal logic of fighting and develop into a constitutive element of warfare. As already indicated, this has been the case in Angola: thus signs, names, and words used during the war were given ample attention during fieldwork.

## **Names, Change, and Party Traditions**

Naming is tightly connected with a person’s history and identity. In many Angolan cultures one’s name is regarded as an integral part of one’s personality (Van Wing 1938:15; White 1948:154). However, this does not necessarily mean that a name is singular and unchanging. As David Coplan

(1994:45–47) indicates for Lesotho, “every level of personal development has a name-giving ritual, in which the new name symbolizes the achievement of a new state of social being.” Such levels might include birth, Christian baptism, initiation, and marriage. Names thus form an idiom that “sets the parameters of biography.” In many Angolan cultures this was also true. In the southeast, people would change their name after every significant turn in life. Thus after initiation boys and girls would change their name to mark their passage to adulthood. Parenthood marked another such change (White 1948:154; Pearson 1977:63), and life events could also form a reason to change one’s name. Thus Monard (1930:78) notes that people might adopt a new name when joining a trading caravan. In many cultures going to war has also been regarded as such a transformation, as is evidenced by the phrase “baptism by fire” (which exists in Portuguese, French, German, and Dutch). The experience of war constitutes a break with the past and a new life in a radically new context. As Ernest Parker (quoted in Fussell 2000:114–15) wrote about the first time he went to the front line in the First World War: “What effect this experience would have on our lives we could not imagine, but at least it was unlikely that we should survive without some sort of inner change. Towards this transmutation of our personalities we now marched.” To many soldiers, a new name seems an apt expression of this new identity.

In all wars, soldiers take on war names. The extent to which this happens varies, however, and in some contexts the cultural and historical references may be richer than in others. During the war in Angola, some soldiers of the colonial army adopted a nickname. Thus we hear of Rat-Killer, Minister of Hygiene, and Knives; of Jew, Cricket, and Man of Arabia (Cardoso 2000:235,243; Laidley 1964:43; IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., P.Inf. 12.23.A:15–16). Africans in the colonial army sometimes also received nicknames: thus three “Bailundo” came to be known collectively as “os 3 mosqueteiros” (The Three Musketeers) (Ventura 1981:vii).

The soldiers in the colonial army did not discard their official names, however; their war names were used in addition to their registered names. In contrast to guerrillas who seek to avoid state detection, regular soldiers have no need to hide their registered names. In general, the tendency to adopt war names is a stronger feature of guerrilla movements than it is of regular armies. Apart from the aspect of secrecy, war names for guerrillas may be regarded as part of the action to undermine the government. To stop using the state-registered names can be interpreted as one way in which guerrillas build a society outside state control.

During the struggle for independence in Angola, many guerrillas used a new name, although the phenomenon was not equally widespread in all movements. Thus in FNLA circles the adoption of aliases was strictly controlled and attempts were made to standardize and regulate naming practices: “The youngsters must give their complete identification, never changing their names or first names. Nicknames are permitted for all, by means

of prior authorisation from the President" (IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., P.Inf. 11.12.D:3). In UNITA, the practice of adopting war names was also limited initially. Only after Angola's independence, when UNITA became a guerrilla movement fighting the MPLA government, did many members adopt pseudonyms.

In the MPLA, war names were extremely widespread. Several reasons can be cited for the relative importance of war names in the MPLA. A first reason may be the clandestine origins of the group. While the UPA was founded in Léopoldville in Congo and UNITA later split off from the FNLA, the MPLA was formed as one among many splinter groups in Luanda in the 1950s. For the UPA the newly independent Congo provided a safe basis from which to operate. For the groups in Luanda, on the contrary, secrecy was of paramount importance. The Portuguese secret police had informers in nearly all Luandan movements, and the risks of arrest and disappearance were very real.

Another reason may have been the strong literary background of the MPLA. Many of the early MPLA leaders had been active in the literary movement that emerged after 1948 and published poetry expressing nationalist sentiments in *Mensagem* (Message), a literary review founded in 1950. The literary tradition of using pseudonyms may have further contributed to the development of war names in the MPLA. In addition, of the three groups, the MPLA was the party most concerned about radical change. The MPLA did not only envisage a revolution that confronted the colonial state and imperialism with the socialist ideal; it also wanted an internal change toward what it called the "New Man." The revolution, in other words, was to constitute a force as creative and radical as Christian conversion. As Bettina Decke (1981:372 n.10) suggests, "One could think about a connection between the Christian demand of radical conversion and renewal in Jesus Christ (the turning away from the 'old Adam') and the concept of the 'New Man.'" In the case of the MPLA, this comparison may in fact have been more than figurative; the importance of Christianity (in the case of the MPLA, largely Methodist and Roman Catholic), with its stress on baptism, may have further contributed to the practice of adopting new names under the new conditions of warfare.

## Leaders and Soldiers

Apart from the differences between the various armies involved in fighting the anticolonial war in Angola, there were also variations in the employment of war names within the movements. The majority of those using a war name were men; there were only a few female guerrillas and not all of them used a pseudonym. The only example I encountered was that of a woman named Christine Chipema, who was called Marsha (Barnett & Harvey 1972:130). There were also differences between leaders and rank and



file. While for many ordinary soldiers war names became a device for protection, the most prominent leaders of the movements hardly ever used a war name. Only during the very first years of Angolan nationalism did some of the leadership use a pseudonym. Thus in 1958 Holden Roberto had at least five names, most of them derived from Baptist missionary circles. Even after independence, there were rumors that Holden Roberto was not his official name. Roberto was clear about the reasons for his secretiveness: "PIDE was after me" (quoted in Drummond & Barber 1999:28; see also Marcum 1969:67,68).

Soon, however, PIDE came to know the names of the leadership, so there was little point in using a pseudonym. Furthermore, it was important for the highest echelons to garner international recognition: their names had to become widely known, if possible on a global scale. The element of personality cult among the Angolan followers also played a role: the leaders' names had to spread through narratives, songs, and speeches. In the various parties, choirs sang about their leaders to praise and honor them. Spreading the name was employed as a strategy to increase the fame of a movement's president, and by connection, of the movement itself. To some extent, the names of the groups and their leaders became equivalent. Thus in some interviews people would refer to the leader Agostinho Neto to indicate the MPLA itself. Neto sometimes added "Doctor" to his name, not only to impress local people but also to show the Portuguese that he was on equal footing with them.

Despite the honorary titles and the diffusion of leaders' names, there was sometimes widespread criticism of the movements' leaders. MPLA's rank and file often protested against the hardships and terror they experienced in the bush, contrasting this with the luxury in which the leadership lived in exile. Among themselves, these followers would call the leadership by their nicknames, which were much less flattering than the official titles. Thus Neto was called "Cinjanga in the East" because of his protruding teeth (interviews 4 & 5). At times these names burst out into the open. Jean-Michel Mabeko-Tali (2001:136) describes how in December 1969 a group of dissenters staged a march on MPLA's headquarters in Lusaka shouting: "Neto tchinjanga!" Interestingly, Mabeko-Tali translated this as "Down with Neto!" suggesting the strong connections between nicknames and protest.

## The Choice of a Name

Names given by others may form part of a "hidden transcript" in which dominated people seek to criticize the powerful. The humorous and carnivalesque aspects of such "weapons of the weak" have not gone unnoticed (Scott 1990; Toulabor 1981). Many colonial officials, settlers, and missionaries received nicknames describing their bad characteristics or comment-

ing on their physical appearance. One Portuguese official who was deemed very harsh was called *Lilundumuna*, “referring to a trap in which heavy tree trunks fell on the captured prey.” Another, like the former MPLA guerrilla quoted at the beginning, received the name *Kandungu* (Chili Pepper) because of his short temper (Pearson 1977:63; cf. Finnegan 1970:470-471).

Of course, not all nicknames are intended to comment negatively on people. Also in the colonial context, many Europeans received names that merely recorded one of their characteristics or described them in a positive manner. Thus some missionaries were remembered well and received a complimentary name. The famous missionary *Héli Chatelain*, for example, was called “*Kamba dia Angola*” (Friend of Angola) and “*Long Leg-Short Leg*,” as he limped very badly (Chatelain & Roch 1918; Disila 1991:275). Another example concerns a settler woman in the southeast given the name *Niamavaya* “because she reminded the people of a chieftainess of that name who had been a very active and energetic person” (Pearson 1977:64).

In wartime, heroic and martial qualities of the fighters can be stressed through praise names. These praise names may be given by others, but they may also be a form of positive self-description. During Angola’s war for independence, a Portuguese pilot was called “*Mãos-de-Seda*” (Hands of Silk) for his ability to steer aircraft (Cardoso 2000:168). *Américo Boavida*, the well-known MPLA doctor, was called *Ngola Kimbanda* (Chief Healer), a title showing respect for his medical abilities but also clearly referring to indigenous religious healing practices (Decke 1981:235; cf. Finnegan 1970:112, 212, 474–77).

While praise names express boast of prowess already achieved, a war name may also refer to a wish or a model: many young soldiers chose the names of popular heroes or film stars who were widely known and part of their cultural repertoire. While young men now prefer the names of American movie heroes like *Rambo* and *James Bond* (Ferme 2001:209; Behrend 1999:7; Sommers 2001:131–32), young men during the guerrilla war in Angola chose the names of heroes of their own youth culture. Thus one young man was called *Zorro*; *Floribert Monimambu* was also known as *Spartacus*; and another guerrilla simply called himself *Cowboy* (Rossi 1969:233; Davidson 1981:180; Marcum 1978:452). The relationship between war names and wishes was also clear in names like *Angola Livre* (for *Manuel Muti*) or *Vyakulutwe Vyetu* (“all things in the future will belong to us”) (Marcum 1978:452; Barnett & Harvey 1972:232; Van Wing 1938:232).

A namesake was not always chosen for his heroic and martial qualities; perceived parallels in personal histories could also form a reason. Thus, when asked “Why ‘*Paganini*’?” a local MPLA commander answered, “Because I had sorrowing childhood, and so did he” (Davidson 1972:20). Sometimes the names were based in details of people’s lives: one UPA soldier was called *Sept-Sept* because his registration number was seventy-seven (Rossi 1969:175). Personal history could also be applied in another way.

Thus an MPLA member who took his training in Bulgaria was given the Bulgarian name Petrov, explaining, “they gave me that name in Bulgaria because they couldn’t pronounce my real name” (Davidson 1972:22). A name may also refer to the wider historical context: César Augusto called himself Kiluanje, and also in present-day Angola a name like Ekuikui (for José Alfredo) ties present and past (Marcum 1978:432).

Many names had an obvious relation to the context of war and soldiering: Vitória (Victory), Pistola (Pistol), Abri-Fogo (Open Fire), Venceremos (“we will win”), and so on (IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., SS Fundo, NT 9084, Serpa Pinto:13). Appearance was often a criterion for choosing a name; one Portuguese soldier was called Fidel Castro because of his beard (Laidley 1964:43). A name could also be chosen on the basis of the function a person had. For example, João César Correia, who formed the UPA link between Luanda and Léopoldville, was called Kuiza Kuenda (“come and go”) (Drumond & Barber 1999:166). The PIDE agents were aware of these guerrilla customs: “The new terrorists receive armament, a pseudonym and prepare for a determined duty, always at the side of leaders. The pseudonyms are always fitting the functions: Chibolobolo (*surucucu* snake), Uemo Uemo (lightning), Licubi (bird of prey), etc.” (IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., SS Fundo, NT 9084 Cuito Cuanavale:415). Of course, some names may have had no particular meaning, or the reason for choosing a name can be forgotten. A name may be based in a slip of the tongue, a trifle experience, or a casual action. The naming practice as such renders the action less casual, less trifle, but later people may forget the history of the name.

Honor could be bestowed on people through praise names, but also by naming a place after a person. Mozambican, Cuban, and Vietnamese revolutionaries were chosen as names for MPLA bases: Cienfuegos (Mabeko-Tali, 2001:109), Sigauke (Conchiglia 1969), Viet-Angola, Nguyen van Troy, and Ho Chi Minh (Barnett & Harvey 1972:28). In this manner the struggle was placed in an international context of revolution and solidarity. Local heroes of the past or present may also be honored with localities named after them. Thus there was the Agostinho Neto Trail, the Mandume base, the Sequeira camp (named after a guerrilla who had been killed in action) (Davidson 1972:254; Barnett & Harvey 1972:218). Linking people, language, history, and geography, name-giving practices form a network of references that relate local and international contexts as well as the past and the present. As Marianne Ferme (2001:177) puts it: “Knowledge of names provides an entry not only into the intimate history of individuals but also into an encompassing social and political history.”

## Rule or Resistance

The extensive explanations and interpretations of the war language in Angola as presented by the informants during the fieldwork stand in

marked contrast with the language used in documents of the military and the secret police of the Portuguese. Oral war language expands linguistic forms: new words and concepts are created, and this new vocabulary may be explained by lengthy discussion of the meanings and origins of the various terms. In writing, on the other hand, codes used during the war constitute a linguistic reduction: words already known are abbreviated. Thus, for example, *IN* stands for *inimigo* (enemy) and *NT* for *nossas tropas* (our troops). The documents in writing are filled with technical terms, abbreviations, and numbers, while the words and names used in speech display creative imagination and through their etymology refer to a wide history and culture.

This discrepancy between writing and orality is not coincidental. As Scott, Tehrenian, and Mathias (2002) have pointed out, state-making involves a process of fixing and reducing local naming practices. While local, largely oral, naming practices depend on perspective and relations, state intervention to register names erases this frame of reference and results in only singular, standardized names. Scott, Tehrenian, and Mathias focus on these repressive aspects of name-giving. A similar focus can be discerned in the work of Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:219), who argue that Christian renaming in South Africa can be compared with other forms of colonial imposition, calling it “an evangelical refraction of the general tendency of imperialisms of all stripes to impose themselves by redesignating people and places.” Similar arguments about colonial imposition were used by African authors who dropped their Christian names and used their African names only. A well-known example is James Ngũgĩ, who later became Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. Within the Angolan context, Simeão Chimbinda (2003) describes how colonial rule upset the local naming system in the Ovimbundu cultures, as it privileged patrilineal over matrilineal naming systems.

Patrick Harries (1994:59,60,208), on the other hand, holds that European-derived names were not merely a function of colonial repression and ridicule. In the South African mines, workers adopted names such as Jim, Captain, Sixpence, and Go to Hell! when they registered with the police. While Harries does not entirely dismiss the interpretation of these names as “the practices of racist whites seeking to infantilize blacks and legitimate their exploitation,” he stresses the workers’ initiative and pride in adopting these new names. Their new names marked their confidence in coping with the new context in the mines and the migrants’ extended knowledge and experience upon their return home. While for whites the names may have been a source of amusement, for many workers the names “served as badges of self-worth and achievement.” Harries’s notion of appropriation suggests that it is not necessarily the language that determines whether or not a name is an instrument of repression, but rather the interpretation of those choosing the name.

## Naming Others and Naming Oneself

The importance of this process of appropriation also shows itself in the practice of many Africans to name their children, or even their families, after missionaries who established themselves in their area. Thus in Northern Angola, surnames appeared such as Coxi, Peterson, and Pinnock: all names from missionaries who had worked in the region (Mbelolo ya Mpiku 1972:144; Grenfell 1995:12,185). Rather than a sign of European imperialism and colonization, these names were given to mark people's ability to adapt to the new context and their pride in having an open attitude toward novelty and change.

During the Angolan war for independence, many guerrillas from the east similarly adopted Portuguese names. This cannot be interpreted as a sign of their colonized consciousness, but rather as an indication of the flexibility of linguistic categories, the irony of appropriation, and the importance of exoticism in youth war culture. A war name had to be at once familiar and strange; it had to fit within a frame of reference of popular heroes and contemporary terms, yet it had to be novel enough not to be hackneyed or threadbare. To mark the new context and personal change, many soldiers wore exotic dress, chose new hairstyles, and adopted foreign names.

The language of a war name also reflected this tendency to balance between the familiar and the exotic. Many guerrillas from the southeast chose European names. For example, Lucas Malasa Luis adopted the name *Economia do Pais* (Economy of the Country); Makai Katamo called himself *Boa-Vida* (Good Life); Fernando Mayando became *Mão Direita* (Right Hand); and João Visesa used the war name *Novavida* (New Life). One UPA guerrilla chose Frank Jean de Swarte as his new name (Barnett & Harvey 1972:66; IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., SS Fundo, NT 9084, Serpa Pinto: 13; *Ibidem* P. Inf. 11.12.B: 26). In the southeast Angolan context, the complex linguistic situation included European languages other than Portuguese. As the example of Konkili (interview 1) shows, war names could also be based on loans from the English, or, for that matter, from the Afrikaans.

In contrast to those who chose European names, many *mestiços* born in Luanda or other urban areas chose African names as a political gesture. As Lucio Lara, the son of an African mother and a Portuguese father, answered when asked to explain his pseudonym, Chiweka:

"It is very simple. It is the name of a village, a settlement in the municipality of Mungo in Bailundo, which is the birthplace of my mother. I chose this name precisely because it is the birthplace of my mother. Later, during the struggle, I encountered by chance another meaning among the Mbunda, Luvale people. It is the supernatural being who is responsible for fire, a sort of divinity for fire. But my name has nothing to do with this. By chance, . . . when I was in the bush, the people with whom I went . . . chose

this interpretation and liked it a lot. But this was simply a coincidence, as I said. The settlement still exists: Chiweka, of Bailundo.... I have the strongest ties with my mother, because my mother, being African, and I being in a struggle for the well-being of the African people and the African continent, it was natural for me to go there in search of historical sources. That is, by the way, a problem not given much attention, but one that today has a transcendental importance in our country and in Africa—the problem of History, that I think is very important” (Drumond & Barber 1999:36).

In his explanation, Lucio Lara describes a mental connection between family, location, and history. Furthermore, he places his personal history and the history of the African continent in a continuum. This chain of connections is selective: his choice of the name Chiweka excludes the Portuguese ties between family, location, and history. It is obvious that choice is important in the process of name-giving practices during a war: a *nom de guerre* draws on particular aspects of memory while excluding, deliberately or not, other aspects.

Not all guerrillas were allowed to chose their own name; some were given a name by their compatriots. In *Mayombe*, the Angolan novelist Pepetela (1994:69–70) suggests that in most cases new guerrillas received a name from their unit: “The baptism of a guerrilla was always a subject for lengthy discussions.” Amidst laughter and jokes, the guerrillas would suggest names like Onhoka (Umbundu for *cobra*), Avança (Advance), or VeWê (Volkswagen, or Tortoise). The borderline between the “power to name others” (Worby 1994) and the power to name oneself can be very subtle. Thus in the quotation with which this article opened, the guerrilla chose his name himself, yet he strongly emphasized that his war name was written down. In this manner his choice was authorized. Whereas Scott, Tehrenian, and Mathias (2002) consider writing in terms of its negative, repressive qualities, this informant stressed the positive aspects of the power of writing and his pride in having his name sanctioned by the MPLA leadership. For this man, the MPLA registration of his war name was part of the struggle for independence; it made him belong to a new order that went against the colonial state. Formal registration of one’s name was by many regarded as a crucial moment of lending legitimacy to a person to act as a member of a movement (Barnett & Harvey 1972:173).

These remarks show the complexity of the relationship between orality and writing in war name traditions. As we saw, written war documents often form a reduction through their use of technical terms, abbreviations, and numbers. In contrast, words, names, and signs from oral culture often form an extension, in the sense that they creatively draw in aspects of history and culture. Written recording of these oral forms was, however, often appreciated by those involved. It was regarded as a form of acknowledgment and authorization that increased the status of orally produced forms. In African wars for independence, the aim of establishing a new state was

not only projected onto the postcolonial era; often attempts were made to start constructing a counterstate even during the fighting. Registration for administrative purposes, stamps, official titles, typewriters, and passes formed at once an inversion and an appropriation of colonial bureaucracy (see Smith 1998).

The process of naming others often included collective names for the fighting groups. Such group attribution could form part of the construction of the enemy and in these cases expressed negative feelings. Thus the Portuguese were called *tugas* (pejoratively, from Portuguese), while the Portuguese called the guerrillas *bandidos* (bandits) or *turas*. In these “onomastic politics” (Gengenbach 2000) of wartime, praise and ridicule could thus be issued at a personal as well as a group level.

### Secrecy and Fear

As Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:227) note, “to know the names of persons or beings [is] to have some control over them, to be able to summon them for good or ill.” While in modern Western cultures names are meant to identify, this conception of the name is by no means universal. In many African cultures names are not meant to reveal identities; rather they form part of what Mariane Ferme (2001:202–6) has called the “logic of secrecy.” In a village nearly all children may bear the same name, or one person may use several names, depending on the context. Heidi Gengenbach (2000) describes how women will switch from one personal name to another, use kinship terms instead of their proper names, or invent nicknames for others. Such name play seems bewildering to a stranger, but for the participants it is an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of local social relations, history, and geography. In this light, it is not surprising that the word *lizina* (Ngangela for “name”) is derived from the verb “to know” (Pearson 1977:63).

Such links between naming and secrecy existed in many Angolan contexts. A name might have been given in order to conceal, rather than reveal, a person’s identity. Relatives often did not utter each other’s names as a form of respect. Also in southeast Angola, in-laws would address each other with kinship terms instead. Names were also used to hide a person. Thus parents might call a child “Changoco” (Worthless Thing) so as not to draw the attention of any evil spirit (Pearson 1977:63; see also Schottman 2000:89). As Gengenbach (2000) points out, such “names of misery” may not necessarily be related to averting evil, but may also serve to remember actual suffering. A “name of misery” may hence at once serve as a mask and as a way to “arm [an infant] with history to help ward off suffering in the future.”

In some contexts the issue of secrecy is more pertinent than in others. Thus, for fear of witchcraft, some people would not utter a personal name

in the presence of strangers, young refugee men in a foreign city would try to remain anonymous, and in a family with high child mortality, parents might choose a slave name for their child and symbolically sell the so-named child (White 1948:153–54; Sommers 2001:131–32; Schottman 2000:88–89). War was another such context of heightened risk. As the explanation at the beginning of this article indicates, an entire family might suffer if the enemy came to know a guerrilla's real name. Therefore, at some MPLA bases the use of proper names and references to kinship were forbidden and people were allowed to address each other only as "Comrade." This was deemed an extraordinary measure in the eyes of civilians living under guerrilla control. As one woman recalled: "When the MPLA entered [the country], be it your brother, your uncle or your father: you knew: 'This is my uncle, this one is my brother,' but to all you would say: 'Good morning comrade, good morning.' 'Good afternoon, comrade.' That was it. You could not say: 'Hey brother.' No. It wasn't like that. No." (interview 6). The fear of incest as a consequence of such dangerous anonymity was frequently expressed during the interviews (especially interview 7).

The adoption of war names was thus born out of necessity and in this sense was imposed by the presence of the Portuguese colonial forces. At the same time, however, such necessity could be turned into creative force. The man who called himself a variety of names and eventually settled on Konkili (interview 1) stressed protection as his prime motive for adopting a pseudonym. Yet in his choice he also emphasized his fighting skills, his strength, and his power to defeat the Portuguese. He transformed a "name of misery," adopted for fear of death, into a praise name expressing his qualities as a fighter. As we saw, praise names often express prowess, power, and bravery. Such boasting is self-laudatory, but it may at the same time be meant to instill fear. In wartime, spreading rumors can be a crucial fighting strategy. The fame of a party does not depend only on what actually happened, but also on a carefully built-up reputation. There are many ways in which one can boost the morale of one's own soldiers and dishearten the enemy. The employment of terrible names constitutes one such tactic. A name like *Hoji ya Henda* (Lion of Love, for José Mendes de Carvalho) was relatively benign. But *Dangereux* (Dangerous, for Paulo Silva Mungungu), *Monstro Imortal* (Immortal Monster, for Jacob Caetano João) sounded somewhat more intimidating (Barnett & Harvey 1972:228; Marcum 1978:252,432). The name of Barreiros Freitas, who called himself *Katuwa Mitwe* (Cut the Heads) was outright threatening. *Corta Cabeça* was also the name of an UPA guerrilla group in 1970 (Mabeko-Tali 2001:135; IANTT, PIDE, SC-CI (2), 2126, SR 59, 3: 686v).

Another example is the man called Satan or Salingimbu. This soldier was said to have been active in the MPLA, UNITA, SADF, and the Portuguese army. He would not only torture and kill civilians from the opponent's party but also act as the henchman in cases of treason or witchcraft within his own party ranks. The names Satan and Salingimbu (meaning



“the father of the ax”) were clearly not meant to create secrecy; many people knew his personal name. They served to fill people with fear and awe (Brinkman 2000). Thus war names are multifaceted and heterogeneous: they may combine aspects of secrecy, fear, boasting, praise, and terror.

## Death and Resurrection

A name inserts a person into history. Thus namesakes often link grandchildren to grandparents and in turn to former generations of the family. In southeast Angola, the practice of calling a parent after his or her first-born child (father-of-name, mother-of-name) further create ties between the generations.

Names may shift from one person to another in war as well. At the end of Ngūgī wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari*, the young protagonist, Muriuki, whose name means “the resurrected,” does not just take the place of the revolutionary guerrilla Matigari; he *becomes* Matigari. The question “‘Who was Matigari ma Njiruungi? Was he dead, or was he alive?’ is rhetorical: Matigari, his name meaning ‘the patriots who survived the bullets’ is everywhere” (Ngūgī 1990:174). Throughout Angola’s history, examples exist of people adopting the name of a dead person, mainly to deceive the enemy. Thus one informant told how in the beginning of the colonial era the Portuguese were intent on arresting Chief Cinkanda. The chief, however, hid in the reed, his head covered with water lilies, and his nephew presented himself as the great chief. The nephew was killed in prison in his stead (interview 8). Also during the war for independence such confusion of identities occurred at times. Thus some people believed that Chief Kapilu was killed by the Portuguese, yet others believed his nephew was killed instead and that Kapilu died much later of old age (interviews 9,10,11). Similarly Manuel Barros Nekaka at times tried to hide his identity by using the name of his nephew Holden Roberto, who was far less well-known in Angola (IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., P. Inf. 11.12.A:454).

To the obvious explanation of concealment may be added other interpretations that stress the religious aspects of such shifting names. As one PIDE document stated: “If a terrorist of the base dies, the pseudonym that he uses is given to the one that will replace him. In this manner, they continue to pronounce the name. The dead person ‘protects’ his ‘representative’ in all his bad moments” (IANTT, PIDE, Del. A., P. Inf. 110.00.30, 14:3; *Ibidem*, 16:340). Not only the name, but also the dead soldier’s spirit, continues to live on. Through this form of spirit possession the guerrilla “borrows” the power and protection of the spirit and a generational cycle is created, not through family ties, but in a new line of guerrilla descent (Behrend 1999:133,139).

Shifting names could even lead people to appropriate names of the enemy; name-giving practices thus became one of the strategies to over-

come the irony of war. A name like Ungrateful Tuga for an MPLA guerrilla shows how irony can be deployed in wartime to ward off fear, the deadliest enemy of all (Pepetela 1996:11; Fussell 2000:7–8). Just as initiation is often compared to death and resurrection, entering battle can be compared with the same process. “We were received as Lazarus was,” Edmund Blunden stated after having returned from a dangerous action during the World War I (Fussell 2000:115). The transformation through battle renders a person resurrected and yet new. As we saw, this multiplication of identities goes hand in hand with the multiplication of names. Just as the ambivalence of old and new multiplies a person’s identities, a war name does not entirely erase a soldier’s former names. Rather, the war names are added to the person’s name, his former nicknames, and kinship terms. This history of names consists both of names by which a person is called and of the memory of names no longer in use.

## Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to relate naming practices in wartime to wider issues of personhood, religion, and knowledge. In many African contexts, names are not singular and fixed, but may change after every dramatic turn in life. Entering a soldier’s life constitutes such a drastic change. For guerrillas, the necessity of secrecy and anonymity forms a further reason to use a pseudonym instead of the name registered by the state. Often naming practices in wartime take on an ambivalent and slippery character, as they are at once aimed at secrecy, self-praise, and instilling fear. In many cases there is a balance between inconspicuousness and boasting. The choice of a war name may involve a wide frame of reference in history, geography, language, and culture, but it may also be based in details of personal history or figures of speech. War names cannot be reduced to one category. They may serve to praise, mock, or criticize. Difficult to classify, war names at once form part of and refer to popular culture. Furthermore, name-giving practices may vary from one party to another and differ within one party between leaders and rank and file.

Even in the West the notion of one fixed, unchanging name is a rather recent development and is connected to state power and bureaucracy. But in cultures in which names can change, the difference between titles and proper names is not always so clear (Miller 1972:561), and the idea of a pseudonym or nickname is foreign, since such a notion presupposes a “real” name that is permanent. The idea that a name is meant only to reveal identity is also not universal: often names form part of a “logic of secrecy” (Ferme 2001:202) and serve to confuse and conceal as much as reveal and identify. Apart from these aspects of concealment and revelation, the multifaceted and heterogeneous history of a person’s name draws on his or her social relations, individual history, the wider political and his-

torical context, geography, and personal transformations. For many people, the question: "What is your name?" can only be answered with "It depends" (Scott et al. 2002).

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### **Abbreviations**

Del. A.—Delegação de Angola

DGS—Direcção Geral de Segurança

FNLA—Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola

IANTT—Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo

JUPA—Juventude da União das Populações de Angola

MPLA—Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola

PIDE—Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (stands for PIDE/DGS in the references)

P. Inf.—Processo de Informação

UNITA—União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola

UPA—União das Populações de Angola

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Interview 2, a 28-year-old man born in Cuito Cuanavale; Kehemu, August 3, 1996.

Interview 3, a 29-year old woman born in Cuito Cuanavale; Kehemu, September 5, 1996.

Interview 4, an elderly woman born by the Namomo; Kehemu, June 21, 1996.

Interview 5, a 32-year-old woman born in Mavinga; Kehemu, July 29, 1996.

Interview 6, a 54-year-old woman born between Zambia and Angola; Kaisosi, September 5, 1996.

Interview 7, a 67-year-old man born in Mwiva; Kehemu, August 29, 1996.

Interview 8, a 33-year-old man born in Cuito Cuanavale; Kehemu, June 23, 1997.

Interview 9, a 49-year-old woman born in Mavinga; Kaisosi, June 28, 1999.

Interview 10, an elderly woman born by the Namomo river; Kehemu, June 25, 1999.

Interview 11, a 70-year-old man born near the Lomba salt pan; Kehemu, June 28, 1999.

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## Note

1. Fieldwork was carried out in Kehemu and Kaisosi, two locations near Rundu in the Namibian Kavango Region in 1996, 1997, and 1999. In these settlements many Ngangela-speaking migrants from southeast Angola are resident. Visits to Lisbon, Luanda, and Mbanza Kongo provided further information. Documents of the Portuguese secret police (PIDE, later DGS) and the Portuguese intelligence services were consulted in the Torre do Tombo archives in Lisbon, Portugal (IANTT). Individuals interviewed are identified by number throughout the article; general identifying information is provided in the "References" section.