

“A COMMUNITY WITHOUT EDUCATION IS AN INVISIBLE COMMUNITY”: INTERVIEW WITH DAGO NÍVEL INTELECTO

Tom Stennett

Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Exeter University, Exeter, United Kingdom

Francisco Mapanda (b. 1989), better known as Dago Nível Intelecto, is a student, social activist, and organic intellectual¹ in the Gramscian sense (1971) from Luanda, Angola, where he was born and raised. Inspired by the Arab Spring (2010–2012), which he followed from afar, he and other young activists began to challenge the regime of President José Eduardo dos Santos (1979–2017). During this initial phase of his activism (2010–2020), Dago reached an audience through the critical texts he published on his Facebook page. His activism, however, earned him a summary prison sentence of eight months in 2015, due to his involvement in the arrest of the activist reading group 15 mais 2. The imprisonment of Dago and other social activists attracted international attention (<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-angola-15>; <https://www.dw.com/en/meet-dago-nivel-an-angolan-who-took-on-the-system/video-60060627>; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr12/5205/2016/es/>).

Following his release, Dago became involved in various social movements, such as the Movimento contra o Desemprego (Movement against Unemployment) and the Associação Mudar Viana (Mudar Viana Association; <https://www.facebook.com/mudarviana>). In 2020, in the context of the pandemic, he co-founded with Arante Kivuvu (b. 1993) the community project *Biblioteca 10padronizada* [10padronizada Library (a pun on “dez padronizada”, which translates as “unstandardised”)], located in one of Luanda’s peripheral neighbourhoods, near the Robaldina bus stop. Photographs posted on *10padronizada*’s Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/10padronizada>) demonstrate the impressive transformation of the space. Previously a narrow, muddy passage, it now houses a collection of 4,300 books — almost entirely donations — within a shipping container, as well as a stage, benches, chairs, and a swing for children, all adorned with beautiful artworks and plants. During a visit in 2024, Dago contrasted *10padronizada* with the nearby public school. Before and after classes, as well as at lunchtime, students visit *10padronizada* to utilise the books and the swing, which are lacking at the school. Dago explains that his team receives, on average, seventy visitors per day in this “island” of relative calm, situated between a railway line and one of the capital’s main thoroughfares.

Dago emphasises that *10padronizada* is not merely a library: chess and literacy classes are offered, theatrical performances are staged, and literary and cultural events are organised. The project has inspired several replicas within and beyond Luanda. The team

¹ The concept of the organic intellectual was theorised by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). It refers to an individual from a social class that typically does not produce traditional intellectuals, who assumes the role of an intellectual without distancing themselves from their class of origin, instead articulating the desires and interests of that class (Gramsci, 1971/1992).

has welcomed numerous visitors, including national and international parliamentarians, businesspeople, artists, and academics, and has even received a Diploma of Merit from the provincial government of Luanda in 2023. According to Dago, *10padronizada* represents community, culture, education, and resistance. It is a project that, he explains, "has broken the social, cultural, political, and educational paradigm in Luanda" (Dago Nível Intelecto, personal interview, 14 May 2025).

The team is small. During my two visits to the library in June 2024, I met the coordinators: Dago (overall coordinator and cultural manager), Arante (financial manager), and Nena Coimbra (executive secretary and head of marketing). I discussed the social and political role of literature in Angola with the historian and friend of the project, Lúcio Katukuluka², during one of the "flash events" spontaneously organised at the library. Despite the challenging material and political conditions in which the project operates, Dago and his colleagues have "resisted" (his word) all obstacles, without steady funding and relying on book donations, as well as the goodwill of their team and the community. Before the interview, Dago told me that they are accustomed to setbacks: "fall and get up, fall and get up — this has almost become our mantra" (Dago Nível Intelecto, personal interview, 14 May 2025).

In the following interview, conducted online on 14 May 2025 in Portuguese, Dago discusses the educational and cultural landscape in Luanda, social inequalities, his cultural and political references (including Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Jonas Savimbi, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Mário Pinto de Andrade, and Viriato da Cruz), the challenges faced by *10padronizada*, and the relationship between culture, education, community, and resistance. His perspective is explicitly socialist and peripheral, offering reflections rooted in political, social, and cultural praxis with tangible results. In editing the interview, we have chosen to maintain the conversational style of the discussion.

Tom Stennett (TS): Dago, could you tell us about the origins of the *10padronizada Library* during the pandemic?

Dago Nível Intelecto (DNI): The coronavirus situation was squeezing us on all levels — psychologically, physically, and everything else. Life was getting harder and harder for people, and since no one could go out, the lack of food and money to get by... all of that started hitting everyone, including us. That's when Arante and I decided to start selling whisky and cigarettes under the bridge. In the middle of the pandemic, it was a bit of a rebellion against the rules at the time — you weren't supposed to be on the streets, you couldn't really move around. But since we were hungry and going mad from being stuck at home for so long, we decided that, no, we couldn't go on like that. Whatever happened to us, we were going to try something. Because we have the habit of reading, from all our experiences of activism, we have accumulated books along the way. We would always bring one or two books to read under the bridge. This caught the attention of other users of the

² Lúcio Katukuluka (b. 1997) graduated in History Education from the Higher Institute of Educational Sciences of Luanda. His research interests include intellectual history, anti-colonial resistance, and the often-overlooked dilemmas involved in the construction of Angolan identity at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

space: those who came to buy cigarettes or whisky, those who were just waiting for a taxi, those seeking shade. They showed interest in our books. It was from this interest that the idea arose to share our books with others.

That's how we decided to share our privileges with people. In the community where we live, having books at home is a privilege. Owning more than 50 books, as we did, was a very significant privilege. Within our activism, we had always considered establishing street libraries. Instead of acting as gurus, explaining to people what we were reading, why not give them the books, so they could read freely, for free, and draw their own conclusions? It was from that idea — the decision to share our privileges — that the *10padronizada Library* was born, in the context of a pandemic. In a reality where there are basically no spaces to access art, culture, and — above all — literature in any meaningful way. There are no school libraries. The municipal offices don't have libraries either. So, basically, everything just fell into place — sharing our privileges and adding value to existing relationships between people. Me, in my sociological thinking, looking at the social relationships between the metal structures — Luanda's bridges — and the people, I thought specifically about that bridge. If people stop there to get out of the sun, to wait for taxis, to smoke a cigarette or have a drink, to chat — they have a relationship with that space, with that structure. We decided to improve the relationship between the people and the bridge by adding value in the form of books (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *10padronizada* in 2024

Credits. Dago Nivel Intelecto

TS: Could you tell us a bit about how the library is organised? Who are the staff? What is the profile of the users?

DNI: Well, our library is run by three main administrative coordinators. There's me, as overall coordinator and cultural manager; Arante Kivuvu, who currently serves as financial manager — he's also one of the mentors and founders of the *10padronizada Library*; and Nena Coimbra, who is the executive secretary and responsible for marketing, communications, branding, and managing the social media accounts. Then we have a few volunteers: our receptionist, Bernardo Berna Dji; the person in charge of cleaning and

maintenance, Xicamaru; and the librarian, Paulo Evangelista. These three are volunteers, and keeping them has been quite challenging, because people need to meet their own basic needs even while volunteering, which makes it difficult. Still, their commitment and understanding of the importance of the space have kept them with us to this day, despite the challenges we've faced with funding and projects.



Figure 2. Artwork by the boys and girls enrolled in the visual arts classes in the Arte Salva project, funded by BIC SA bank, under the guidance and supervision of the visual artist and teacher Ely Inglês, better known as Bwe.

Credits. Dago Nivel Intelecto

Our audience is very diverse, because besides being a library, we're also an artistic and cultural space. We host events, debates, shows, training sessions, and workshops. We work very intensively with art and culture (Figure 2).

On average, about seventy people pass through our library each day. Mostly young people, teenagers, and children. The children come at specific times of the day because we have two public schools nearby and several private schools. The library and its activities help fill the gaps left by public education in our community. These kids stop by the library in the morning before going to school, do a quick read, and then head to school. At break time, they return, then go back to school, and after school, they stop by again. The older teenagers and young adults tend to stay with us all day. We also have adults, including older people, who visit the space from time to time. Everyone I've mentioned comes from our community — Robaldina and the surrounding areas, like Estalagem, Vila de Viana, and Cazenga. People from these areas come every day, just to read.

For artistic and cultural activities, we also have an audience that follows our work on social media. They come from Quilama, from the city centre, and even from other provinces to attend our events. So, our audience is vast and highly diverse.

TS: How is the *10padronizada Library* funded?

DNI: From 2020 until 2024, we've always worked on our own initiative and with our own funds. In fact, people respect us here because we've made things happen without any funding up until 2024. Initially, various individuals made donations, and some

institutions also contributed, which is how we revitalised the library. After revitalising the library, we managed to keep it running for two or three years without any funding. Of course, we've always had occasional support from cultural institutions, such as the Goethe-Institut in Angola³, for specific activities. But we've never had annual funding for the full range of activities or the schedule we plan for the library. Still, we kept making things happen, and I think that's one of the reasons people show solidarity and support us, either directly or indirectly.

For example, to run an activity, we borrow a speaker from a neighbour who has one and a microphone from another neighbour. That's how we offer free activities to the community. And that's thanks to the goodwill and respect of the people. So, our biggest challenge has been securing funding to maintain our plans and activities, while also keeping our volunteers satisfied and maintaining balance within the administrative team.

As a space born in and for the community, we've long faced a lot of bureaucracy. That's why we've been developing the idea of staying increasingly autonomous. We're thinking about creating community funds, which we'll publicise when the time comes.

Last year, we received some funding and worked on developing the *Arte Salva* (Art Saves) project, which included literacy, chess, and visual arts classes for boys and girls in our community. We ran it throughout the year with funding that covered administrative costs and other project expenses.

TS: In a conversation we had last year in Luanda, you mentioned a wave of community-oriented cultural institutions and libraries that emerged during the pandemic. Could you tell us a bit about this phenomenon?

DNI: It's an honour to say that the *10padronizada Library* is not just a library. When it emerged, it became a landmark for youth participation and community involvement, and it sparked a sort of literary movement. The *10padronizada Library* is the first genuinely public reading space. From there, everyone else who had ideas or projects they couldn't realise — stalled because of the pliers⁴ to youth participation at every level — started to think: if the *10padronizada Library* can emerge there, why can't I open something here in this abandoned square, which instead of serving the community has been used for other negative things? Why not do it ourselves? So from the *10padronizada Library*, replicas began to appear, and a movement started, especially in the peripheries. For example: the Biblioteca Contr'Ignorância (<https://www.facebook.com/p/Biblioteca-Contr'Ignor%C3%A2ncia-100064307341230>) in the Rangel municipality, which now works mainly with children; the Biblioteca da Kassemba Terra Preta (<https://www.facebook.com/Kassembaterrapreta41>), which existed before as a

³ The Goethe-Institut Angola was inaugurated on 15 June 2009. The institute is involved in various cultural activities, mainly in Luanda (<https://www.goethe.de/ins/ao/pt/index.html>).

⁴ Dago Nível Intelecto explains that the term "pliers" ("alicates", in Portuguese) can be understood as a metaphor for containment, control, or the blocking of young people's action and expression. The image of pliers, associated with something that grips, tightens, or restricts movement, when applied to youth participation, evokes processes of co-optation, silencing, obstacles, violence, or suffocating bureaucracy (Dago Nível Intelecto, personal interview, 14 May 2025)..

cultural centre but didn't have the library dynamic; Mbanjedo Livro in Namibe (<https://www.facebook.com/Mbanjedolivro/>); the Biblioteca Njila in Kwanza Sul (<https://www.facebook.com/people/Associa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-Njila/100081592748384>); and on Luanda Island, the Biblioteca de Rua (https://www.facebook.com/p/Biblioteca-de-Rua-na-Ilha-de-Luanda-100064795179120/?locale=pt_BR).

The crucial point is that all these spaces emerged to fill a void. They were places with no libraries, no cultural spaces, no sports facilities — nothing — because the periphery is the main victim of the lack of public policy. So, those affected by this absence of public policy became active because our initiative went viral. People would ask us, "why don't you open more spaces?", and we'd say: no, we don't need to open more spaces when people can take our example and create, in their own communities, spaces that fit their own circumstances.

So, with the *10padronizada Library*, a literary movement was born. Many young people started writing, many began singing, many started performing poetry. Many spaces created by these young people to perform, write, discuss, and debate began to appear, especially in the peripheries. And this also introduces a new paradigm, as it provides alternatives to the cultural hegemony of the city. Before, everything happened in the city, everything was for the city — if you wanted to hear good music or see a theatre performance. However, with these spaces emerging in various peripheral areas, including the *10padronizada Library*, we now see people from the city, from all over the country, going out to these new peripheral spaces. Essentially, the dynamic and the desire to do something for our communities unleashed our imagination and creativity. And yes, we mark our spaces and become visible, even after all the public policies of invisibility.

TS: During my visit to Luanda in 2024, you mentioned that your team had already faced some operational challenges related to sanitation and other issues. I have also been following the recent issues you have experienced with the railway company's construction work, which has led to the library's closure on two occasions. Could you discuss how the community has been addressing these challenges?

DNI: Exactly, and the people who rely heavily on our work end up being affected. But what stands out is the resilience — resisting all the obstacles that arise at political, structural, social, and other levels. That, I think, is what keeps us strong and also gives us credibility and respect from others.

TS: These disruptions must be very frustrating.

DNI: They cause us distress both psychologically and emotionally, and also in relation to our audience, our users. From one day to the next, when the library is damaged, a kind of uncertainty arises about whether we will be able to keep the space, whether there is political will for it to grow, or rather, a political will to oppose it. Because it is inconceivable that a public space like ours could be invaded in this way without prior discussion, without warning, without formal institutional communication, upon their arrival, the ground had already been disturbed by the machinery.

But, as I said, this would not be an issue if all these spaces were properly respected. Yes, yes, they came and hired — I don't know if it was the provincial government or the Railway Company — a Portuguese construction company with branches in several countries, including Angola, and they are responsible for this work. So, there is also a discussion about who should have notified us, specifically, who should have informed us that work would be ongoing from day X to day X, so that we could prepare ourselves and take the necessary precautions.

Whether it was the provincial government, the Railways, or Afavias⁵, we have occasionally had face-to-face contact with the person in charge at Afavias, the chief engineer. So we have been holding them accountable for whatever happened there. In fact, the first time they damaged things, they destroyed a wall to build another; they ended up damaging the library, and we charged them for the gravel. But that only happened because of the pressure we applied by tagging the Railways, Afavias, and the provincial government on Instagram and Facebook. And they felt obliged to compensate for the damage caused during the works. So, that has been the communication with Afavias, and the engineer promises that once the job is completed, everything will return to normal. And we hope so, because the damage this time is greater, since they had to tear down our fences and remove the ones that were already there.

TS: The community's resistance is starting to have some positive results.

DNI: Yes. The first time, they wanted to reduce the size of the library — in other words, shrink the library's space to a small alley under the pedestrian bridge. That prompted us to publish the whole arbitrariness and the pressure on both Facebook and Instagram, which ultimately led them to back down on the same day. They filled in the initial excavations and then conducted further digs at the boundary where the old wall had stood.

TS: And what's your take on the situation?

DNI: First of all, there is a lack of respect for our work and our space, which serves a public function that is vital for the community. On the other hand, we also believe there is some political interference. The government knows that we are a space with public utility, even though we are not formally a public space. We are a community space with a public utility that reaches beyond our immediate community (Figure 3).

It is a proven space — no one can take that away from us. In fact, we have the Merit Diploma from the Provincial Government of Luanda, which was awarded to us in an official ceremony, broadcast on television, and everything.

For us, [those actions] reflect more or less a lack of political will to cause us problems — that's what drives this kind of politics, because politics is also based on respect between institutions.

⁵ Afavias is a Portuguese engineering and construction company. Angola is its primary African market.

TS: Moving on to another topic, who are your political and cultural references?

DNI: Yesterday [13 May, the day José Mujica died], I remembered that I have always been a massive fan of Pepe Mujica⁶. As a child, I admired Pepe Mujica for his humility. Also, Jonas Malheiro Savimbi⁷, because of his rebelliousness, despite the criticisms that others, and I myself, have of him. I consider myself a very rebellious person. This idea of him being the protagonist on the other side, because we had the official version but not the version from the other side —it's like the devil. You know, we hear a lot about God from the Bible; we know it is God speaking, but we don't hear the devil. We're not sure what trouble the devil is up to.



Figure 3. Collection at *10padronizada*

Credits. Dago Nivel Intelecto

Another figure who really caught my attention was Mfulupinga Nlando Victor⁸, an Angolan intellectual and member of parliament, who I heard was one of Angola's greatest mathematicians. His interventions in parliament were unique. I've always admired politicians who have an identity, something of their own. Another figure who fascinated me for a long time — I'm not sure if it's politically correct, but I have to say it — was Cheikh Anta Diop⁹, because he deconstructed myths about black people.

Culturally, I've always admired artists like Teta Lando¹⁰, who was also a major figure in my childhood, and I would even say he empowered me because of his music. For

⁶ José Mujica (1935–2025) was President of Uruguay from 2010 to 2015.

⁷ Jonas Malheiro Savimbi (1934–2002) was an Angolan politician and military commander. He was the leader of the nationalist movement União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, UNITA), which he founded in 1966. In the post-independence period, he fought against the governments of Agostinho Neto (1975–1979) and José Eduardo dos Santos (1979–2017) in the so-called “civil” war — a label contested due to the significant involvement of regional and international actors, namely the United States, South Africa, Cuba, and the Soviet Union — which lasted until Savimbi's assassination in 2002.

⁸ Mfulupinga Nlando Victor (1944–2004) was an Angolan MP and founder of the Partido Democrático para o Progresso – Aliança Nacional Angolana (Democratic Party for Progress – Angolan National Alliance). He was assassinated in 2004 by unknown actors.

⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986) was a Senegalese anthropologist and politician, known for his theories on the origins of humanity and as a precursor of Afrocentricity.

¹⁰ Teta Lando (1948–2008) was an Angolan musician.

example, one of my favourite songs is "Assobio Meu" (My Whistle) by Teta Lando, which basically talks about the bitterness of life. "Assobio Meu" was like a balm for a wounded soul, soothing all the pain caused by the war and the context in which we lived.

I also really liked David Zé¹¹, who was an activist and an activist musician associated with the Movimento de Libertação de Angola (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA)¹², because he also used music as a tool of struggle.

One of the greatest, if not the greatest, references in national literature is Uanhenga Xitu¹³, who deeply marked my childhood. Even within the MPLA, his interventions and his political and moral stance have always been a reference for me. Another political figure is Raul Danda¹⁴.

TS: Thinking about your name, Dago Nível Intelecto, I wonder if you're a fan of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

DNI: [Laughs] Yes, yes! I really like Gramsci.

TS: And what strikes you in Gramsci's texts?

DNI: How he approaches the role of culture. Because Gramsci is very provocative. He gives us the view that culture is more than an isolated element. It's a tool for struggle, an element of consciousness-raising, of awareness. He also has this connection with the ideals of the masses. Even as an intellectual, his worldview never failed to highlight structural inequalities.

TS: I also wonder if you admire Paulo Freire¹⁵.

DNI: [Laughs] Yes, yes, yes, yes! Look, I'm a young person with a socialist political orientation. That's very clear. Paulo Freire — remembering that I like rebels, those who break paradigms — came up with the concept of liberatory education. There's no way I could not admire Paulo Freire. No way, really no way. A person who revolutionised education the way he did. He's one of the intellectuals I admire most in the world.

TS: Can you give us your perspective on the relationship between education and community?

¹¹ David Zé (1944–1977) was an Angolan musician associated with the MPLA. He was killed during the purge that followed on 27 May. There is no published account of his death (Moorman, 2008, p. 174).

¹² The MPLA is a political party that has governed Angola since the country's independence in 1975. Before independence, it operated as an armed nationalist movement fighting against Portuguese colonialism. In 1977, during its First Congress, it was transformed into a Marxist-Leninist party.

¹³ Agostinho André Mendes de Carvalho (1924–2014), better known by his literary pseudonym Uanhenga Xitu, was an Angolan politician and writer. His most notable works are *Mestre Tamoda* (1974) and *O Ministro* (1989).

¹⁴ Raul Danda (1957–2021) was an Angolan politician and leader of the Total Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

¹⁵ Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was an educator and philosopher, recognised for his proposals of "critical pedagogy" and the "pedagogy of the oppressed." He authored several works, including *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1968).

DNI: We first need to define what education is. Because people get the idea that education is school. But in our understanding, education is much more than that. It is also all the knowledge you can absorb from your relationship with the world.

Life experience is part of a person's knowledge, education, morality, and ethics, including culture and everything else. So, there is a very close relationship between education, understood in a broad sense, and the community. Because when these elements, including the educational and teaching structure, are not present, we create a huge gap in how people understand themselves as individuals, first and foremost, and then how they understand the world. An uneducated person, someone who hasn't received the necessary inputs to observe the world beyond the obvious, is limited in every sphere. Education is, above all, crucial in communities because it raises and empowers civic participation. A citizen with an artistic or cultural space in their community has numerous opportunities to discover creative or artistic elements and talent. A citizen with access to a quality school in their community can broaden their critical perspective and, in doing so, improve the world around them. Education is the foundation that enables people to overcome inequalities and fight for justice, especially in peripheral communities. Because no one fights if they don't have the basic tools to understand that inequality, injustice, discrimination, and disrespect exist.

In short, education is the foundation for community empowerment, for social advancement, and even for visibility. A community without education is an invisible community.

TS: One word you've mentioned several times is resistance. Is education a form of resistance? And if it is, resistance to what?

DNI: Yes, for me it is. I'm speaking from the perspective of someone living on the periphery and aware that they live on the periphery. It's from that standpoint that I produce knowledge and share it. In our view, education is a resistance against the hardships caused by social injustices and inequalities. An educated person understands that they also need to resist. Education is also resistance in the periphery because it asserts visibility and affirms our existence. Why do I say this? Because the moment someone is instructed, educated, and has access to education, they are a person who questions authoritarian power. They are someone who questions inequality and, more than questioning, also proposes solutions. And they propose, above all, what is missing in their community, in their reality. So, education is also resistance against what we lack.

TS: Do you think culture can play the same role in critique and resistance?

DNI: Yes, definitely, because culture is produced; it is the material developed by a civilisation. Here I'm citing Professor Isaac Paxé¹⁶. If it's a civilisational production, it's a tool we have in our hands, and a tool that can help us resist, for example, against the alienation and Westernisation [of Angolan cultures].

¹⁶ Isaac Paxé (1972–) is an Angolan educator and intellectual. He is a researcher at the Higher Institute of Educational Sciences in Luanda.

Culture is one of the greatest instruments of struggle and resistance we can have, especially when all the other shields that help us resist these asymmetries and existing inequalities start to disappear. So, it becomes the last stronghold of defence, the last bastion of resistance (Figure 4).

Because once they take away our culture, after taking away education and our culture, we are nothing. Who are we if we don't have culture? What are the people, what are the individuals without culture? And remembering, as Isaac Paxe says, culture is production — it's the material and immaterial heritage. These elements — education, community, culture, and resistance — ultimately prove to be key to our existence, to our visibility.



Figure 4. Event at 10Padronizada

Credits. Dago Nivel Intelecto

TS: Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral are two names that came to mind while you were talking about the relationship between culture and the people.

DNI: [Laughs] Yeah, exactly. They were organic intellectuals who clearly understood the importance of the relationship between education, culture, and the people. Amílcar Cabral¹⁷ — we already know what he challenged, what he did, and where he ended up because of it. Fanon¹⁸ and Cabral are intellectuals and political figures whom I also consider references. Especially Fanon — he brought new perspectives on *Pele Negra, Máscaras Brancas* (Black people in Black Skin, White Masks; 1952).

TS: How do you now view emblematic figures of the anti-colonial struggle from the same generation as Cabral, including individuals from the MPLA, considering the country's and the MPLA's post-independence trajectory?

¹⁷ Amílcar Cabral (1924–1973) was a politician, agronomist, and nationalist leader of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. He founded the Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde; PAIGC) in 1956. He led the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau, which began in 1963 and resulted in the international recognition of the PAIGC as the sole legitimate representative of the Guinean people in 1972. He was assassinated in Conakry in 1973.

¹⁸ Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist, revolutionary, and political theorist from Martinique. He supported the Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front) during Algeria's war of independence. He authored several influential works, most notably *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

DNI: I'm reading *Combater Duas Vezes: Mulheres na Luta Armada em Angola* by Margarida Paredes¹⁹ (Fighting Twice: Women in the Armed Struggle in Angola; 2015), which talks about women's participation in the armed struggle, and in that book, the author references some members of that vanguard, like Matias Miguéis²⁰ and Viriato da Cruz²¹. I think the MPLA had politicians like Viriato da Cruz and Mário Pinto de Andrade²², whose inspirations were betrayed by their comrades after they took power. We see this in Manuel Rui's²³ *Quem me Dera ser Onda* (Wish I Were a Wave; 1982), and his critique of the independence process, and how it pushed politicians who had fought the coloniser to adopt the coloniser's ways of being, living, and acting. Matias Miguéis, Viriato da Cruz, and Mário Pinto de Andrade understood that the MPLA was beginning to betray its own cause, becoming distorted as we started to experience interference from imperialist forces.

These vanguard intellectuals had a vision of liberatory education, in the words of Paulo Freire. For an intellectual, the greatest inspiration is to see people's minds liberated. We are experiencing a kind of regression nowadays, which is accompanied by the detachment of these vanguard MPLA politicians: Mário Pinto de Andrade left, then Viriato da Cruz went to China, and later, there were other incidents, culminating in the events of 27 May²⁴ — all because the theory and practice of the MPLA, along with many of its elites, came into conflict.

That is why today these figures — Viriato da Cruz, Mário Pinto de Andrade, and Matias Miguéis — even though they were part of the MPLA, are widely respected among people who understand that, despite belonging to the MPLA, they took a steadfast stand that separated them from the main body of the organisation. Because the Angola they planned, envisioned, and fought for was already beginning to crumble at its foundations, first in education, in the reproduction of the education we were given, because everything became a new form of colonialism. And so, today we have the country we have, the education we have, the idea of culture we have, and a whole range of problems. Power corrupts, power distorts initial ideas if we don't have the foundations in the masses, in the people, if the people are not the object of our struggle, the object of contestation, the object of our dedication.

¹⁹ Margarida Paredes (1953) is a Portuguese writer and researcher, who participated in the Angolan liberation struggle. She stayed in Angola after independence, until 1981.

²⁰ Matias Miguéis (1927–1965) was an Angolan politician. He was elected vice-president of the MPLA in 1962 but left the movement amid internal disputes. He was assassinated in 1965.

²¹ Viriato da Cruz (1928–1973) was an Angolan politician and writer. He was a founding member of the MPLA and its first secretary-general until 1962, when he resigned. In 1963, he was expelled from the movement due to internal struggles with the new president, Agostinho Neto. In 1966, he relocated to China, where he remained until his passing.

²² Mário Pinto de Andrade (1928–1990) was an Angolan politician, theorist, and writer. He was a founding member of the MPLA and the movement's first president. Following internal struggles after Agostinho Neto's rise, he was removed from the movement. In 1974, he participated in the Revolta Ativa (Active Revolt) against the MPLA presidential faction. Post-independence, he lived in exile in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Mozambique, and France.

²³ Manuel Rui (1941–) is an Angolan writer, jurist, and politician. He is the author of numerous literary works, including *Sim, Camarada!* (Yes, Comrade!; 1977).

²⁴ The 27th of May refers to an alleged attempted coup d'état led by followers of Nito Alves and José Van-Duném, both MPLA leaders. Following the assassination of a group of Agostinho Neto's allies in the Sambizanga neighbourhood on 27 May 1977, an unknown number of alleged "fractionalists" (supporters of Nito Alves) were killed. The 27th of May remains something of a taboo in Angolan society.

TS: Your observations remind me of Amílcar Cabral's concept of class suicide²⁵.

DNI: Yes, class suicide and the homicide of the other classes. The elite begins to commit suicide with all its contradictions, and those contradictions end up killing the masses, all at the grassroots level.

TS: What role do young people play in political and cultural processes in Angola?

DNI: We have a society where the young do not speak in the presence of elders, and this has its roots in some of the various cultures existing in Angola. Where there is an elder, the young must remain silent. This behaviour has been carried over into politics as well. Today, there is a trend towards greater participation; however, historically, young people have always been made invisible, silenced, blinded, and excluded from political participation. The elders' perception is that young people lack experience in political movements, democratisation, citizenship, and justice.

Many of these elders studied abroad and implemented a poor-quality education system here in Angola. So, if we have a formal education system that is of poor quality, we also have limited youth capacity for political participation.

However, alongside this, we have a very engaged and socially active youth. In fact, I consider the Angolan youth to be the hardest working in the world. So, while we have a driving force — youth — that is functionally powerful, we also see shortcomings in public policies regarding the inclusion and participation of young people.

Why is it [like that]? Because politics here, regarding youth, women, and marginalised groups, is centred on parliamentary representation. That's why, in youth organisations, you often find people aged 45 or 50 as president, coordinator, or head, while a wide range of capable and willing young people are excluded simply because they are young. Then, there has been a shift, especially with the social media. Firstly, youth participation has taken place in public opinion. Many young people have come to see social media as a space for political participation because it gives them a voice and a chance to be seen [and heard]. In recent years, we have even seen young people founding political parties. But for me, another concern arises here, because we have a politicised, party-driven society — that's the proper term — a party-dominated society. So, if you are a young person interested in participating in public life, politically or not, you must be affiliated with a union, an association, or a political party. If your intention is, for example, to become a community administrator, you must belong to a political party — the MPLA or the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola — and only then might you achieve it someday. And by the time you do, you are no longer young. We also have a political system — and I could briefly talk about laws, norms, regulations, and public policies — that even closes civic spaces

²⁵ "Class suicide" is a voluntarist concept theorised by Amílcar Cabral in two interventions in the mid-1960s: an analysis of the social structure of Guinea-Bissau (1964) and his speech at the Tricontinental Congress in Havana (1966). According to this theory, the success of the African revolution depended on the will of the African petite bourgeoisie — after having played a leading role in the liberation struggles against colonialism — to "commit suicide as a class"; that is, to transfer the protagonism of the revolution to the people (Cabral, 1976/2013, pp. 121–123; pp. 253–255).

for citizen participation. Young people often struggle to come together. Even associations created by young people tend to be controlled by elders. Many associations appear non-partisan but always carry a political imprint. They are, as we say here, partners of the State, which is basically the MPLA. Participation is controlled by the political regime. If you do not participate in political parties to achieve a position, to have a voice, and to participate politically, you are also prevented from effective and free participation in associations and non-governmental organisations created by young people themselves.

Some young people serve as examples of youth participation, while others cannot gain access. We only need to look at employment requirements. When a young person applies for a job, the minimum requirement is five years of experience. "I am just leaving university, and you ask me for five years of experience in the field I studied? How is that possible, when I spent those five years studying?" We do not even have public policies for youth integration into the labour market, civic participation, or [a] youth-targeted policy. We see a narrowing, a futile attempt to sweep things under the rug, to push young people aside, and then turn around and speak against them. [They say] "young people don't like to work, Angolan youth don't like to read, Angolan youth don't like to participate." And these same narratives are repeated concerning women and other marginalised groups. That is a stark contrast.

Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the generosity and availability of Dago Nível Intelecto and the entire *10padronizada* team, who welcomed me in June 2024. Many thanks to the Leverhulme Trust, which funded the trip to Luanda, where I first met Dago Nível Intelecto. I also wish to thank the editorial team and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and comments.

REFERENCES

- Cabral, A. (2013). *Unidade e luta: A arma da teoria: Textos coordenados por Mário de Andrade* (Vol. I). Fundação Amílcar Cabral. (Original work published in 1976)
- Gramsci, A. (1992). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Trans.). Lawrence and Wishart. (Original work published in 1971)
- Moorman, M. (2008). *Intonations: A social history of music and nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to recent times*. Ohio University Press.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Tom Stennett is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Exeter (United Kingdom). His project, *Author-politicians in Angola and Mozambique*, examines the

interconnection between party politics and literature in Angola and Mozambique during the national liberation struggles and the socialist post-independence governments. He is the author of *Dissident Authorship in Mozambique: The Case of António Quadros* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9421-4592>

Email: tomstennett2@gmail.com

Address: Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Department of Spanish and Portuguese – The Queen's Building – Exeter University, Exeter, EX4 4QH, United Kingdom

Submitted: 16/05/2025 | Accepted: 02/07/2025



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.