



THE AESTHETICS OF LEGITIMACY: MARXIST LUSOPHONE AFRICA IN TRICONTINENTAL SOLIDARITY POSTERS

IN WHAT WAYS DID THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SOLIDARITY
POSTERS CONSTRUCT THE IDEOLOGICAL LEGITIMACY OF THE
MARXIST-LEANING LUSOPHONE AFRICAN LIBERATION
MOVEMENTS WHILST EMBEDDING THEM IN THE SHARED AESTHETIC
OF TRICONTINENTALISM?



MARJORIE OSAGIE
SUPERVISOR: DR GEORGIA NASSEH
Laidlaw Project 2025



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

VISUAL CULTURAL AS REVOLUTIONARY INFRASTRUCTURE

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

LITERATURE REVIEW

SECTION ONE – LEGITIMACY BY DESIGN: REPRESENTATION AND EXCLUSION IN VISUAL CULTURE

POLITICAL FLAGS AND THE GRAPHIC LANGUAGE OF AUTHORITY

LEADERS AS ICONS: THE CULT OF REVOLUTIONARY PORTRAITURE

SECTION TWO – HYBRID AESTHETICS: THE TRICONTINENTAL STYLE AND CONSTRUCTION OF SOLIDARITY

AESTHETIC OF INCLUSION

AESTHETIC OF EXCLUSION

SECTION THREE – REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN OR REVOLUTIONARY MYTHS?: GENDERED SILENCES AND ETHICAL CONTRADICTIONS

MOTHER AFRICA AND MILITANT MOTHER

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction

VISUAL CULTURAL AS REVOLUTIONARY INFRASTRUCTURE

The idea of *legitimacy by design* underpins the focus of this project. The ideological dominance of the MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC was crafted not only through political organisation and mobilisation, but also visually and aesthetically. Legitimacy in this sense will be analysed as how these Marxist-oriented groups came to be seen as the true, authentic liberation movements of Lusophone Africa. The aesthetics in the posters that represented these movements were active components in this process of crafting legitimacy. Meanwhile, the role of posters in legitimising these political and liberation groups is not restricted to representing the movements to a global audience – the posters also defined who was worth representing and what ideas should be shared amongst the tricontinental order.

The benefit of using posters as a medium of ideological dissemination is that posters can be understood by a cross-cultural audience. Whilst OSPAAAL provided parallel translations in four languages (Arabic, English, French, and Spanish), the striking motifs and artistic choices spoke louder for the intended shared Marxist ideology that the posters were designed to communicate and legitimise. In the Tricontinental movement, the Marxist ideology translated and made into a visual culture appealed to both domestic populations – the Marxist-oriented parties in Lusophone Africa, and distant solidarity audiences. The specifically chosen motifs used in OSPAAAL posters, as Hanna posits, was not incidental.

Section One – Legitimacy by Design: Representation and Exclusion in Visual Culture establishes how visual culture, in particular posters, constructed ideological legitimacy within their representation of Marxist-oriented groups in Lusophone Africa. OSPAAAL's posters set the visual and aesthetic tone for the deliberate process of selective visual inclusion, and exclusion. Here, it will be argued that posters manufactured a political reality based on a shared and stipulatory imagined reality within the international left.

Specifically chosen visual aesthetics worked to create a shared visual language of solidarity across the tricontinental world. Lusophone African liberation movements were incorporated into, and shaped by, the aesthetics crafted by OSPAAAL posters. In Section Two – Hybrid Aesthetics: The Tricontinental Style and Construction of Solidarity, it will be argued that posters

from OSPAAAL and similar networks reflected more than just ideology. The posters circulated an aesthetic of solidarity that blended revolutionary iconography and anti-colonial symbolism to portray the interconnectedness of the tricontinental struggle for liberation. This hybrid aesthetic in turn worked to legitimise Tricontinental-approved Lusophone African liberation movements.

Lastly, Section Three – Revolutionary Women or Revolutionary Myths?: Gendered Silences and Ethical Contradictions questions the portrayal of Lusophone African women in revolutionary aesthetics. There will be a specific focus on what gendered roles were imagined for women alongside what contradictions were concealed in these depictions. Whilst OSPAAAL portrayals of women were often as symbols of liberation, they were simultaneously denied political autonomy both within poster art and in reality. This section will unpack how instead women were instrumentalised in order to perform the functions of mothers of the nation or as passive victims of colonialism. In regards to ethical contradictions, the posters obscured political violence and intra-movement repression (also involving gendered violence), in order to maintain visual unity and tricontinental ideological purity.

Historical Context

Vying for global influence, the two superpowers of the USA and the USSR orchestrated proxy wars and established opposing ideological alignments across the continents. Liberation movements occurring across the tricontinents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America were caught in between this Cold War and demonstrated that this global struggle was not solely between the two superpowers, but over the meaning of decolonisation and legitimacy of statehood.¹ The Cold War period from the 1950s to 1970s hosted an explosion of independence movements across the Third World.² The decolonisation wave that unravelled in the Third World places these movements as part of a wider political project of solidarity, with anti-imperialism and sovereignty as core ideals.³ There was also a vision of an alternative global order that did not centre nor was defined by the USA or the Soviet Union. Such nations and movements across the tricontinents recognised the strength in political and cultural cooperation and led to the growth of international conferences and the creation of a tricontinental solidarity. These newly decolonising nations, in particular those in Lusophone Africa, were not passive arenas of Cold War political struggle, but active participants that influenced global alliances.⁴

After the success of its 1959 revolution, Cuba positioned itself as a centre for revolutionary movements and ideologies. The 1966 Havana Conference built on the preceding 1955 Bandung Conference amidst a rise in non-aligned liberation movements.⁵ The Havana gathering however, leaned into a tone that was more militant, anti-imperialist, and explicitly Marxist in ideology. For the Marxist-oriented liberation groups in Lusophone Africa, this was a chance to legitimise their claim to state leadership against rival movements. Representatives from Angola's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), Mozambique's Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO), and Guinea Bissau's African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) placed Lusophone Africa's struggle for liberation within the global Marxist revolutionary discourse.⁶ Here, the Third World emerged not just as a geographic zone

¹ Westad, Odd. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. E-book, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, <https://hdl-handle-net.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/2027/heb06172.0001.001>.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Gettig, Eric. "'A Propaganda Boon for Us': The Havana Tricontinental Conference and the United States Response." *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War*. Ed. R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 216–242. Print. Cambridge Studies in US Foreign Relations.

⁶ Ibid

with shared struggles for liberation, but as an ideological construct where there disputes over what postcolonial futures should look like.

Alongside wars of national independence against Portuguese colonisation, there were also conflicts for ideological supremacy between rival groups. The Marxist-oriented Angolan political party and liberation group received strong backing from Cuba and the Soviet Union, eventually becoming the main protagonist of OSPAAAL's posters covering Lusophone Africa.⁷ Meanwhile, their rival groups National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which were backed primarily by the United States, were largely erased in visual propaganda and OSPAAAL imagery despite having a significant presence in liberation and political movements.⁸ Similarly, FRELIMO in Mozambique benefitted from OSPAAAL recognition – sidelining their counterpart Revolutionary Committee of Mozambique (COREMO), who despite had some Chinese support, remained unsupported by wider tricontinental, Marxist-oriented organisations.⁹ In Guinea-Bissau, the PAIGC effectively erased opposition groups in visual media and presented their resistance as monolithic.¹⁰ The solidification of Amílcar Cabral as a global revolutionary icon in posters and speeches highlights how PAIGC's aesthetic and ideological dominance was curated through visual culture, other groups restricted by fragmentation, limited documentation, and popular insignificance.

One of the outcomes of the Havana Conference that this project will focus on is the direct formation of the Organisation of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Functioning not only as a political body, but more effectively as a cultural and artistic producer, OSPAAAL created visual materials in the form of posters, magazines, films, and bulletins to disseminate a shared ideology across the tricontinental missions. OSPAAAL, in this project, will be viewed and analysed with an emphasis on its production as visual propaganda and a tool that was used to unify as well as control movements across geographical and cultural boundaries.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Birmingham, David. *Empire in Africa : Angola and Its Neighbors*, Ohio University Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=1743675>.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

More specifically, the posters produced by OSPAAAL became and inspired an aesthetic expression of legitimacy in which Marxist-oriented political groups in Lusophone Africa like that of MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC were made visible as the official face of Lusophone African liberation. The Conference marked the beginning of the legitimisation of Lusophone African movements through the use of aesthetics in which often excluded rival or non-Marxist groups.

Literature Review

Though earlier Third World conferences of Bandung (1955), Belgrade (1961), and Cairo (1964) had displayed solidarity amongst newly independent countries, the political and economic dealignment of its leading states like India, Egypt, Ghana, and Indonesia from Cold War blocs meant that the Global South lacked a cohesive ideological front against imperialism.¹¹ The Tricontinental Conference, which took place in Havana in 1966, forged this ideological front, focusing on pushing back against US-backed interventions. The anti-imperialist nations that met in Havana formalised this idea of a global solidarity, with the attendance of Marxist-oriented political parties crystallising a shared cultural and aesthetic dimension. This united front was represented through visual propaganda which is central to this analysis of this project. Visual propaganda in the form of posters allowed for rapid and widespread dissemination of revolutionary ideas across languages and literacy levels, and an optical embodiment of solidarity both as a moral and political imperative. The Organisation of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) was the institutional embodiment of tricontinental visual culture which worked to produce a shared, and coherent, revolutionary aesthetic of tricontinental solidarity. Extant literature on the contributions of the Tricontinental Conference have explored how the 1966 meeting led to the creation of OSPAAAL and the production of visual materials to aid the tricontinental movement alongside its impact on narrative building and the legitimisation of Marxist-oriented political groups.¹² Scholarship in this area has shown that posters function as more than solely communicative devices, but also as hybrid cultural objects of art, propaganda, and as commodities. Visual symbols aid to construct and materialise imagined communities and when used within posters the anti-imperial ideologies of Lusophone Marxist revolutionary groups enabled distant audiences to imagine themselves as part of the global revolutionary community.¹³

¹¹ Gettig, Eric. "‘A Propaganda Boon for Us’: The Havana Tricontinental Conference and the United States Response." *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War*. Ed. R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 216–242. Print. Cambridge Studies in US Foreign Relations.

¹² Ibid; Schmiedecke, Natália Ayo, et al. "Reframing Revolution and Solidarity: Photography and Visual Culture in Ospaaal Poster Art (1967–1990): Reencuadrando Revolución y Solidaridad: Fotografía y Cultura Visual En Los Carteles de La Ospaaal (1967–1990)." *Bandung: Journal of the Global South*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2024, pp. 102–40, doi:10.1163/21983534-11010001.

¹³ Birmingham, David. *Empire in Africa: Angola and Its Neighbors*, Ohio University Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=1743675>.

In this field, the archival work documenting the history and creation of OSPAAAL posters is already well detailed with an emphasis on the modernist artistic choices and the global circulation of the posters.¹⁴ With Cushing's documentation of OSPAAAL's production processes, utilisation of a distribution network, and the visual characteristics OSPAAAL artists used to portray the tricontinental struggle in the posters, his analysis primarily foregrounds the practical functions of the posters.¹⁵ Low-cost production costs, paired with distinctive modernist stylistic choices, made OSPAAAL posters recognisable within the tricontinental circulation network. Yet, Cushing's descriptive focus on OSPAAAL's aesthetic innovation and distribution reach leaves room for an interrogation into the ideological exclusions and contradictions portrayed through the posters such as the overly-idealised representation of gender equality and national solidarity despite sidelining simultaneous, non-Marxist aligning liberation movements.¹⁶ Similarly, whilst Molinero advances the study of aesthetics in Lusophone Africa's revolutionary movements by analysing the posters as ideological texts and cultural constructions, this exploration of aesthetics too does not fully contend with how such artistic choices functioned as mechanisms of hegemonic exclusion of non-Marxist African movements.¹⁷ Schmiedecke works to provide historical visibility to Lusophone Africa by detailing how the revolutionary movements of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau were just as integral to the global solidarity movements as the other more widely recognised movements of Vietnam, Palestine, and Cuba itself.¹⁸ Yet again, the gap on how artistic choices shaped the representation and legitimacy of political movements in Lusophone Africa remains unfilled.

This research will build on the contributions of Cushing, Molineiro, and Schmiedecke to move beyond material and stylistic descriptions of solidarity posters produced by the OSPAAAL. The ideological work performed by OSPAAAL's aesthetic choices in legitimising Marxist-oriented national liberation movements, whilst visually excluding rival political groups, is largely

¹⁴ Cushing, Lincoln. "How Poster Art of the "Long 1960s" Fueled International Solidarity." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 29, no. 2, Spring, 2023, pp. 1-18. ProQuest, <https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/how-poster-art-long-1960s-fueled-international/docview/2844849574/se-2>.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ García Molinero, Alberto. "Modelos de representación de la feminidad a través del cartel Tricontinental." *La imagen tricontinental: La Feminidad, el Che Guevara y el Imperialismo a través del arte gráfico de la OSPAAAL*, Ariadna Ediciones, 2022, pp. 149–170, doi:10.26448/ae9789566095651.50.

¹⁸ Schmiedecke, Natália Ayo, et al. "Reframing Revolution and Solidarity: Photography and Visual Culture in Ospaaal Poster Art (1967–1990): Reencuadrando Revolución y Solidaridad: Fotografía y Cultura Visual En Los Carteles de La Ospaaal (1967–1990)." *Bandung: Journal of the Global South*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2024, pp. 102–40, doi:10.1163/21983534-11010001.

unexamined. Few studies have analysed *how* aesthetic and artistic choices have performed hegemonic exclusion and the misrepresentation of gendered hierarchies through posters, and how this was connected to the larger project of revolutionary legitimacy. The primary contribution this project aims to make is the examination of the aesthetic and artistic components of Lusophone Africa-related posters as independent ideological acts. This project posits that the OSPAAAL created posters of Lusophone Africa's national liberation movements visually erased alternative political movements and reinforced hierarchies in order to legitimise Marxist-oriented movements despite claims to inclusivity.

Section One

Legitimacy by Design: Representation And Exclusion In Visual Culture

OSPAAAL posters and other related visual culture purposefully constructed the legitimacy of Marxist-oriented Lusophone African political groups and movements. Whilst most literature in this field discussing posters and visual media focuses on broader political and historical readings, this analysis will foreground artistic elements comprising colour, composition, typography, abstraction, and portraiture which function as tools of ideological portrayal. The posters chosen for this section are best read as aesthetic pieces that perform politics in that the design decisions made by the artistic body, shaped who appeared legitimate and who was excluded from the revolutionary narrative.

Flags and party symbols were used as a form of graphic language to brand legitimacy. Where the flag or party symbol of the supported FRELIMO, MPLA, or PAIGC were not used explicitly, subtle incorporations of the party's colours and symbols formed part of the poster's backdrop. The portraiture of specific leaders like Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto, and Samora Machel turned these individuals into revolutionary icons in which legitimised a specific leader in turn excluding the leaders of other rival political parties and movements. Meanwhile, to embed Lusophone African struggles into a global Marxist tricontinental aesthetic, we see the use of modernist abstraction. OSPAAAL's, and later other inspired posters, design language heavily featured global modernist aesthetics of bold flat colours, geometric forms, and visual metaphors instead of literal depictions. The modernist abstraction aesthetic here presented a unified image of the legitimate liberation struggle and implied progress and futurity as the posters projected Marxist-leaning Lusophone African liberation movements as the natural carriers of modernity into a postcolonial Africa.

POLITICAL FLAGS AND THE GRAPHIC LANGUAGE OF AUTHORITY

OSPAAAL posters and posters produced by similar organisations like that of the International Union of Students, effectuated the political flags of the MPLA, FRELIMO, and the PAIGC as modular design units to represent and convey certain tropes of legitimacy. The design play on icons like building blocks, weapons, targets and arrows, and artistic metaphors made it so that Lusophone African Marxist-leaning parties appeared as the natural and internationally recognised bearers of sovereignty and liberation. The first poster 'Le Mozambique independent batit son avenir' created and circulated by the French sect of the International Organisation of Students, *Union Internationale des Étudiants*, uses the flag of FRELIMO as a literal colour palette and architecture. By designing the FRELIMO flag as a collection of building blocks, *Union Internationale des Étudiants* metaphorically conveys that FRELIMO is the literal material of Mozambique. The flag of FRELIMO is not simply placed printed onto the foreground of the poster, but rather its geometry and colours surface at the top of the cubes, signalling that the future of Mozambique will be built from FRELIMO's ideals and prospects represented within their flag. Similarly, the isometric grid formed by the cubes demonstrates the constructivist and modernist authority Lusophone African Marxist-leaning parties aimed to portray comprising precision and future orientation.

Looking at the monochrome pictures printed on the sides of the cubes, facing the spectator, showcases an embedding of documentary within abstraction. These black and white photos inside the FRELIMO-flag-coloured cubes place proof alongside promise. The promise of advanced industry, education, healthcare clinics, and agricultural growth is visually actualised within the photographs. With this hybrid rhetoric whereby this modernist abstraction of a utopian claim is certified through the photographs, there is a blend which turns propaganda into something that feels rational and technical. In the foreground rises a red sun, the green ground below representing a renewal in land and agricultural. Together, the red circle and green square visualise post-independence futurity which works to rebrand FRELIMO from a guerilla liberation party to a party of state-building.

By templating the FRELIMO palette as an architectural system, the poster promotes the legitimacy of FRELIMO as a design inevitability in which the party's colours have already become the nation's infrastructure.

In a similar style to the work of the *Union Internationale des Étudiants*, OSPAAAL incorporates the flag design of the MPLA, and their youth group Juventude do Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (JMPLA) into the fabric of '*Day of Solidarity with Angola 4th February*' made in support of the Angolan liberation movement. The party symbol of a flambeau is turned into an ideological beam shooting out from the muzzle of a presumably AK47 – a gun symbolic of Marxist-leaning, tricontinental movements. The beam enters into a cube that takes the place of the where an eye would be placed, indicating a branding of the revolutionary subject's consciousness. The placement of the cube icon at the eye area/temple, which displays a compressed version of the MPLA flag, suggests an ideological transmission and '*conscientização*' (consciousness) of revolution as cognition, beyond surface level violence and arms. Moreso, the beam can be viewed ambiguously, is the beam being injected into the subject in the poster, or is it projected outward towards the viewer? This double duty that the beam performs highlights the ambiguous role that the posters and other similar visual media aims to perform: an internal conversion whereby the individual and personal support is encouraged, and an external broadcast to the wider tricontinental support network. Likewise, the blue concentric lines appear as radio and sound waves which supports the visualisation of propaganda as a process of emission. The poster itself becomes a media diagram of solidarity which signals a specific line of support to the viewer.

Looking closer at the subject in the poster, the phenotype of the subject demonstrates African features such as a wider, Nubian nose, and two-toned lips as shown with the colouring of the

upper lid red. Indirectly, this OSPAAAL poster's placement of a phenotypical African subject at the foreground of the poster subconsciously presents the MPLA as the party for the Angolan people and wider Lusophone Africans who are for the liberation of Africa. The legitimacy of the MPLA here is cultivated through this blend of psychographics of the African subject, the AK47, and the placement of the cube. In this way, the MPLA is shown to occupy the cognitive space of Angola meanwhile rival political parties and liberation movements by FNLA and UNTIA are made to vanish not through argument, but via visual monopolisation. By playing the MPLA flag as a cognitive implant, the poster pairs revolutionary consciousness with MPLA party identification which manufactures legitimacy.



Figure 1 Poster, *La Mozambique Indépendant Batit Son Avenir / Independent Mozambique Builds Its Future*, published by L'Union Internationale des Étudiants. Prague, 1985.



Figure 2 Party Flag of *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO)*

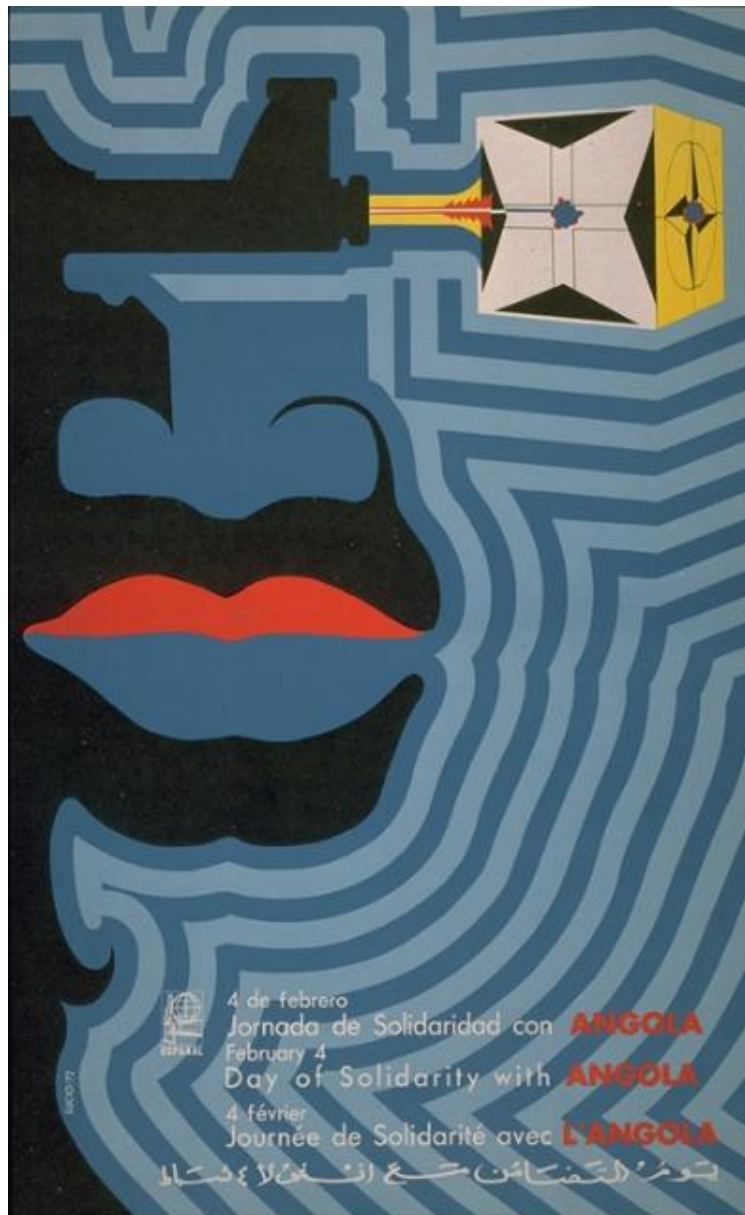


Figure 3 Poster by Lucio Martinez, Day of Solidarity with Angola 4th February, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1972.



Figure 4 Party Flag of A Juventude do Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (JMPLA)



Figure 5 Party Flag of O Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA)

LEADERS AS ICONS: THE CULT OF REVOLUTIONARY PORTRAITURE

Beyond using symbolism and artistic references to legitimise the ideas of Lusophone African Marxist-leaning political parties, OSPAAAL posters circulated ideas to further cement this call to legitimacy. Circulating particular faces as icons of the liberation movement presents a designated group of legitimate representatives of a liberated Lusophone Africa, simultaneously erasing rival leaders. The artistic styles in the selected posters, when analysed as form of visual mythmaking, are easily seen to amplify certain leaders into global icons. The use of repeated personalised imagery allows for the portraits of Samora Machel, Amílcar Cabral, and Agostinho Neto to become visual proxies for the struggle for liberation across Lusophone Africa.

The posing of OSPAAAL's portraits of these Lusophone African leaders were not simply neutral likeness, but stylised constructions. Each icon posed to communicate what kind of legitimacy each leader was to embody and their affiliated political party also. While Cabral is rendered with stark, woodcut simplicity representing an intellection and timeless icon, Machel is portrayed more naturalistically and in motion. His outstretched hand, photograph taken mid-speech, smiling and open stance, exudes human warmth and charismatic futurity. Cabral is given shadows and bold scaling. The intellectual markers of the glasses and stern facial expressions reflect a philosopher/poet turned into a leader of a legitimate liberation movement.

In both OSPAAAL portrait posters of Cabral he is adorned with a Kufi Cap – a short, rounded cap worn by usually older men across Africa. The cap carries layered meanings from religious affiliation, to age and status. Here, OSPAAAL utilises the Kufi to invoke wisdom and a connection to the ancestors who had worn it prior. Using this as a marker of solidarity with

wider African traditions, the Kufi highlights Cabral as a rooted in a shared African identity. In combination with the Kufi, the frown lines added onto Cabral's face with the use of shadows and shading signifies an elder status and a patriarchal authority. He is transformed visually into a repository of ancestral wisdom and more than a military leader, rather as a visionary who will guide the liberation of Angola. This presentation of a wise leader is reinforced by the earthy tones in both the background of Cabral's portraiture, but also used to colour and shade his face. The browns and greens, and warm and subtle reds and oranges, reinforce the MPLA as a party and liberation movement that is level-headed and yet assertive. The brown and beige lines in the foreground of Cabral's portraiture appear like the texture of wood grain, further sublimating maturity and grounding.

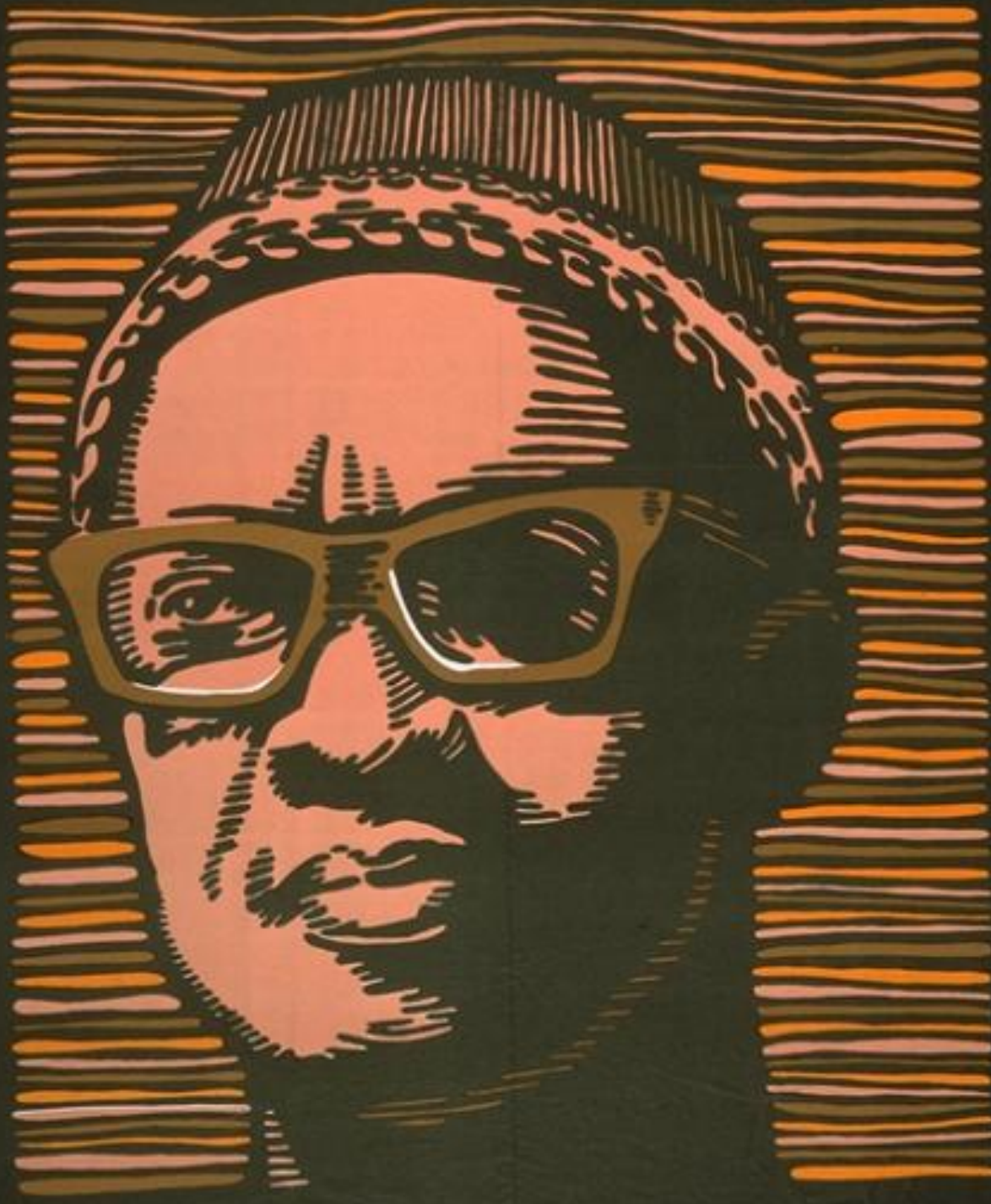
In a similar style, OSPAAAL's portrait commemorating the assassination of Cabral also uses high-contrast lines with a background that is bold with flat colours. The orange flat background is fitting for the feelings of mourning and sacrifice, yet its brightness and noticeability conveys feelings of hope. The minimal text shows an emphasis on Cabral's figure as an icon, the layout isolating his head by enlarging it to fill up the foreground. Doing so, removes Cabral from a specific time or region, turning him into a icon of resistance that can be transcended to the wider tricontinental network. A shadowed silhouette of a rifle is placed in the background, behind Cabral's head signifying OSPAAAL's commemoration of his assassination. The use of a silhouette instead of a solid icon of a gun conveys that Cabral's ideologies are to live on beyond his death.

OSPAAAL's poster of Machel, created one year into his presidential term as leader of FRELIMO exudes a warmth and optimistic sentiment. Machel's open and expansive gesture shows how hope has been turned into an aesthetic strategy. The golden and yellow dominated palette produces a specific effect of optimism and futurity in the background. Machel's portraiture is a contrasting black and white image. When the positioning of his body is read as architecture it is clear that his arms suggest an arch and gateway from the threshold from colony to and independent, liberated nation. In this way, Machel's half-body portrait acts as an infrastructure in that it is both a symbol of a leadership, and a site in which national projects such as developments in schools, public infrastructure, and employment will take place. Likewise, the negative background space with minimal text, though not uncommon in OSPAAAL posters, amplifies Machel's presence. The minimal verbal load lightens the load of the portrait, allowing for both domestic and international viewers to interpret the gesture and colour as universal cues of modernity and legitimate leadership.



Figure 6 Poster by Olivio Martínez 'Day of World Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands', depicting Amílcar Cabral, 1973, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba.

ENERO 20, 1976. TERCER ANIVERSARIO DE SU ASESINATO
JANUARI 20, 1976. THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF HIS ASSASSINATION
JANVIER 20, 1976. TROISIEME ANNIVERSAIRE DE SON ASSESSINAT
20 كانون الثاني 1976 - الذكرى الثالثة لاختفائه



published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1976.

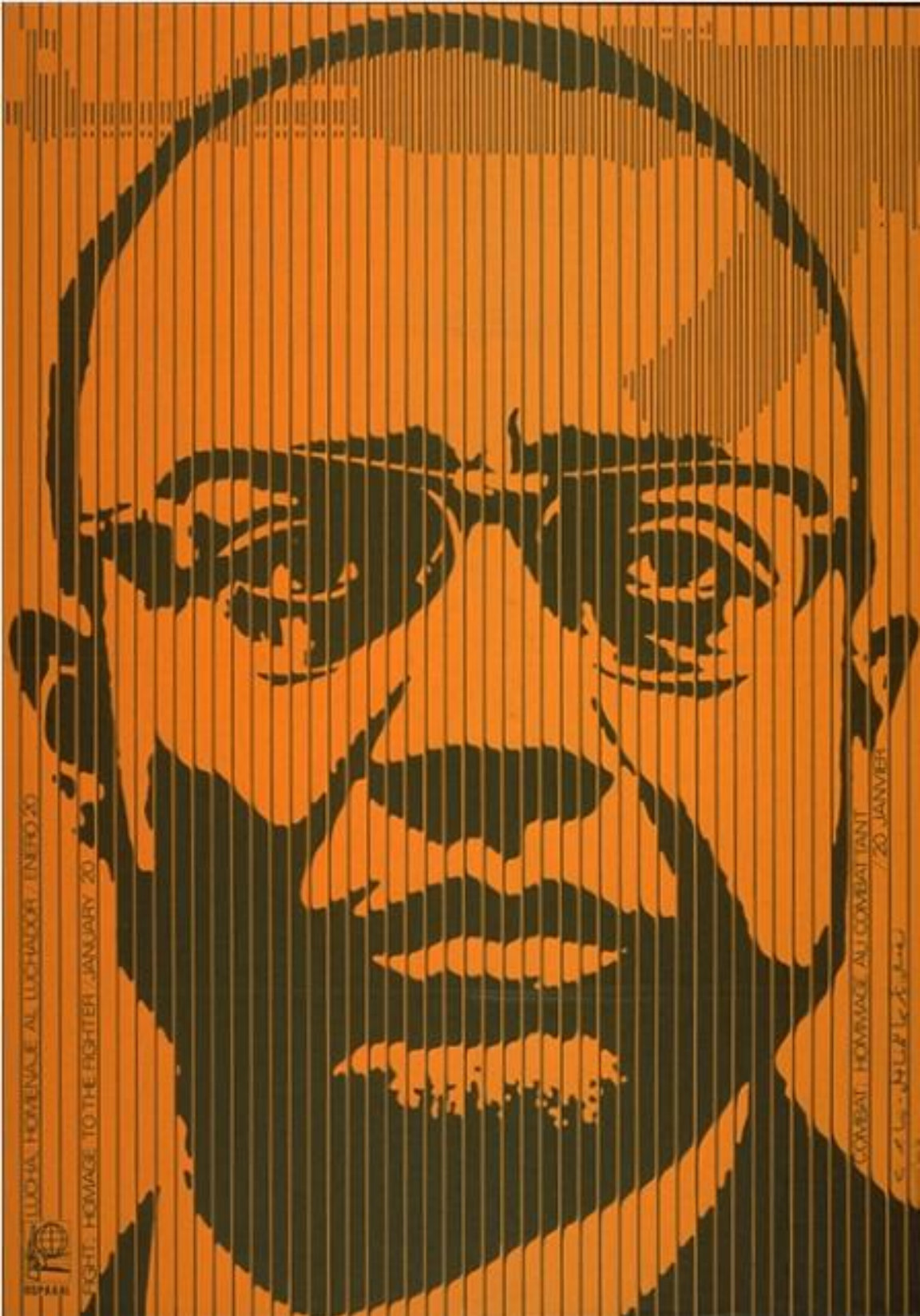


Figure 8 Poster by Olivio Martínez depicting Amílcar Cabral 'Fight: homage to the fighter', 1974, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba.

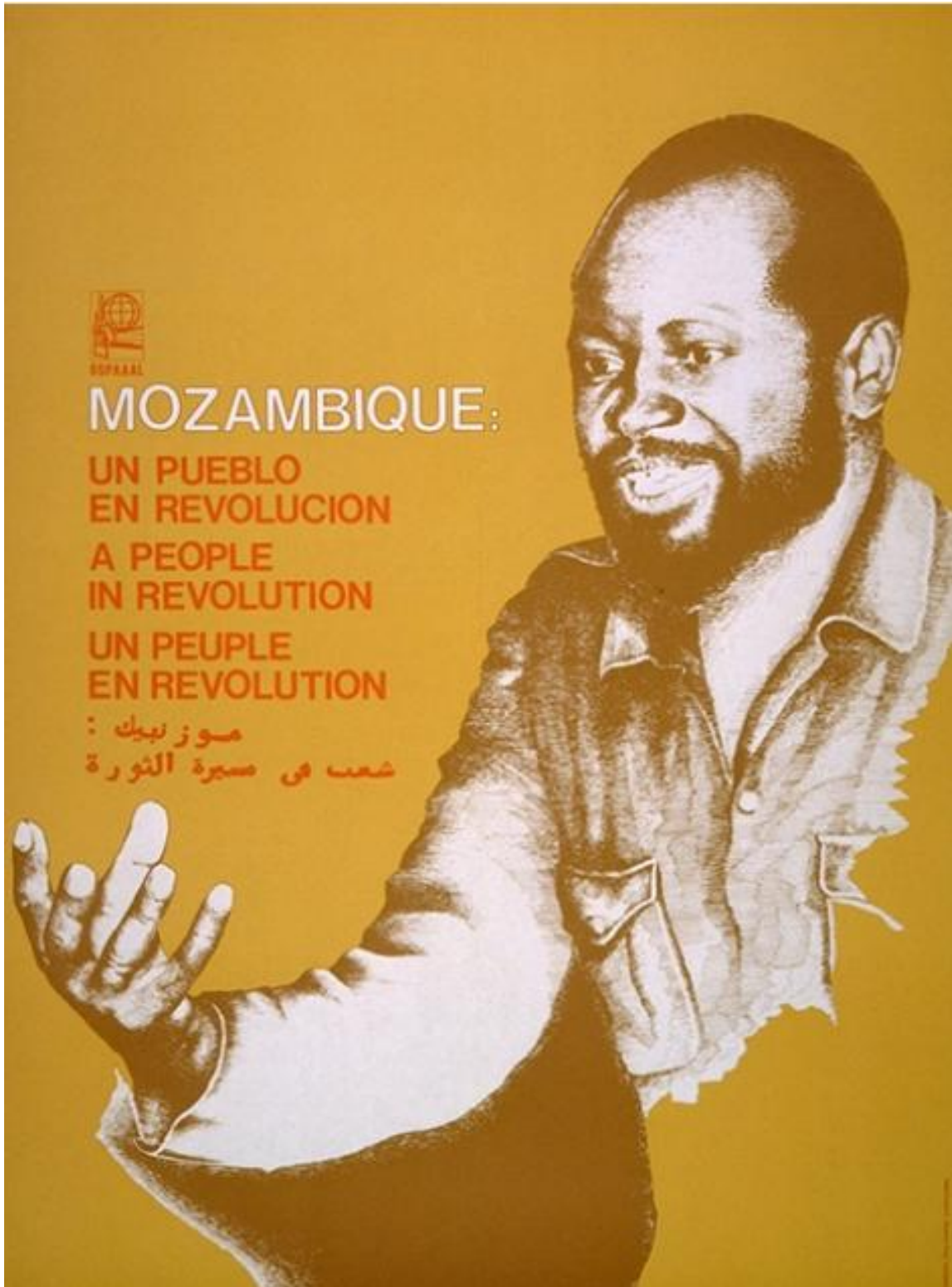


Figure 9 Poster by Rolando Córdoba depicting Samora Machel 'Mozambique: a People in Revolution', 1978, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba.

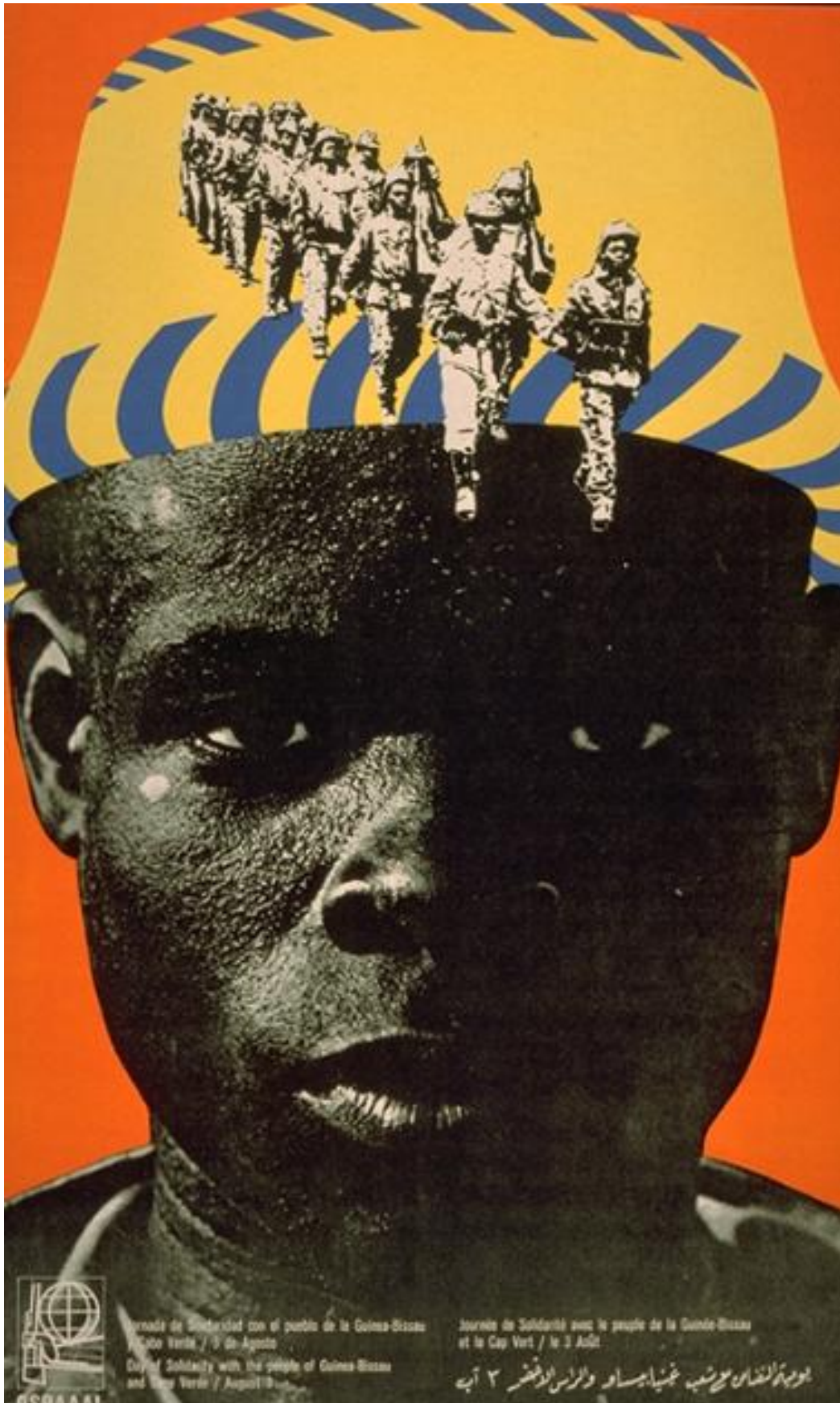


Figure 10 Poster by Heriberto Echevarria advertising 'August 3rd as a day of solidarity with the people of Guinea Bissau', published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1974.

Section Two

Hybrid Aesthetics: The Tricontinental Style and Construction of Solidarity

The Tricontinental Style within OSPAAAL posters and related networks can be characterised by a shared visual vocabulary which widely featured bold, flat colour blocks of mainly reds, greens, blacks, and yellows as the backdrop. The art style is clearly derived from a geometric abstraction with a play on repeated icons such as fists, maps, and rifles. For posters supporting the Lusophone African liberation struggle, these tricontinental, Marxist symbols icons are fused with local cultural motifs deepening a sense of solidarity within the political region.

As opposed to verbal material like speeches and bulletins, posters as a form of visual media needed to circulate across an array of languages and cultures that make up the Marxist-tricontinent. This shared style adopted by OSPAAAL and other connected posters created an imagined communities of revolutionaries whereby the fight for liberation in Lusophone Africa could be seen as inseparable from Cuba, Palestine, or Vietnam. However, it is this visual and artistic construction of solidarity that also brought exclusions. OSPAAAL posters featured a stylistic flattening to erase rival factions and political complexities, therefore presenting a monolithic revolutionary identity that aligned closely with Marxist ideology.

AESTHETIC OF INCLUSION

In OSPAAAL's use of a hybrid visual grammar, the posters here shifts the portrayal of a gun as an instrument of violence to a modular sign that is stylised and abstracted to become a transnational emblem of an armed struggle for liberation. The seriousness of the gun and the contexts in which it has been used, visually legitimised Marxist-oriented Lusophone movements for global solidarity audiences. The poster '*Solidarity with Mozambique*' features mainly negative, dark-coloured space with the word "MOZAMBIQUE" boldly written in the top. The only pictorial element depicted here is a stylised magazine of the AK-47 gun rendered in yellow and orange rectangles. By reducing the gun to its magazine, the gun is transformed from a tool of conflict, in this context conflict in guerilla warfare, into a clean and emblematic motif. The orange and yellow rectangular panes that make up the magazine can be read as parts that make up a whole. In the context of Mozambique's struggle for liberation, these panes represent the consecutive damages and violence that Mozambique has experienced from Portuguese colonialism. Akin to decolonial ideas, these damages and violence has now resulted in uprising and a violent struggle for freedom in which the AK-47 represents.

Returning to the empty space below the gun, the negative background produces a potentiality for a reading of the gun. As the weapon floats above and settles at the top of the poster, there is a suggestion that the gun represents a vector into future construction. The gun and the violent guerilla uprising that it plays a key role in, will clear a new path for FRELIMO to build an independent nation. As such, this aesthetic emptiness invites the international, tricontinental

view to project their own script of support, through donations, material aid and even diplomatic recognition, into this space.

OSPAAAL's other two posters '*Jesús Day of solidarity with the people of Mozambique*' and '*Day of solidarity with Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde*' depict and include the African Guerilla as an icon of legitimate struggle. Both posters explicitly mark their subjects as African, each in different registers. In '*Day of solidarity with Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde*' the inclusion and recognition of the Lusophone African liberation fighter is performed through the use of an image in which the subject wears a wide-brimmed hat, a modest soldiers outfit, and stood within a forest. This photographic realism used by OSPAAAL foregrounds the subject as a "peasant-in-arms" who identity can be transmitted across the different cultures in the tricontinent– from the peasant fighters of the Viet Cong and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Doing so, this inclusion further cements the liberation movement of PAIGC, portraying PAIGC as a party of the worker and the peasant-farmer. A shared struggle that resonates globally and is rooted in Marxist-ideology.

In poster '*Jesús Day of solidarity with the people of Mozambique*' the figure depicted takes on a least realistic form, moreso a stylisation to amplify African heritage and culture into a heroic archetype. The artistic, statuesque figure becomes a monumentalised symbol of Africa's contribution to tricontinental struggle. This struggle, as shown by the gun placed behind, to the left of the figure, has been led by Marxist-oriented liberation groups. In both posters, the rifle appears casually and as an extension and silhouette of both rural subjectivity and as a cultural marker. Both rifles are fused into the subject's identity creating a visual shorthand of the need for a revolution to be armed. This works to legitimise both FRELIMO and the PAIGC through arms. The guns is not used as an artistic spectacle but as credential to mark authenticity and a political right to claim statehood.

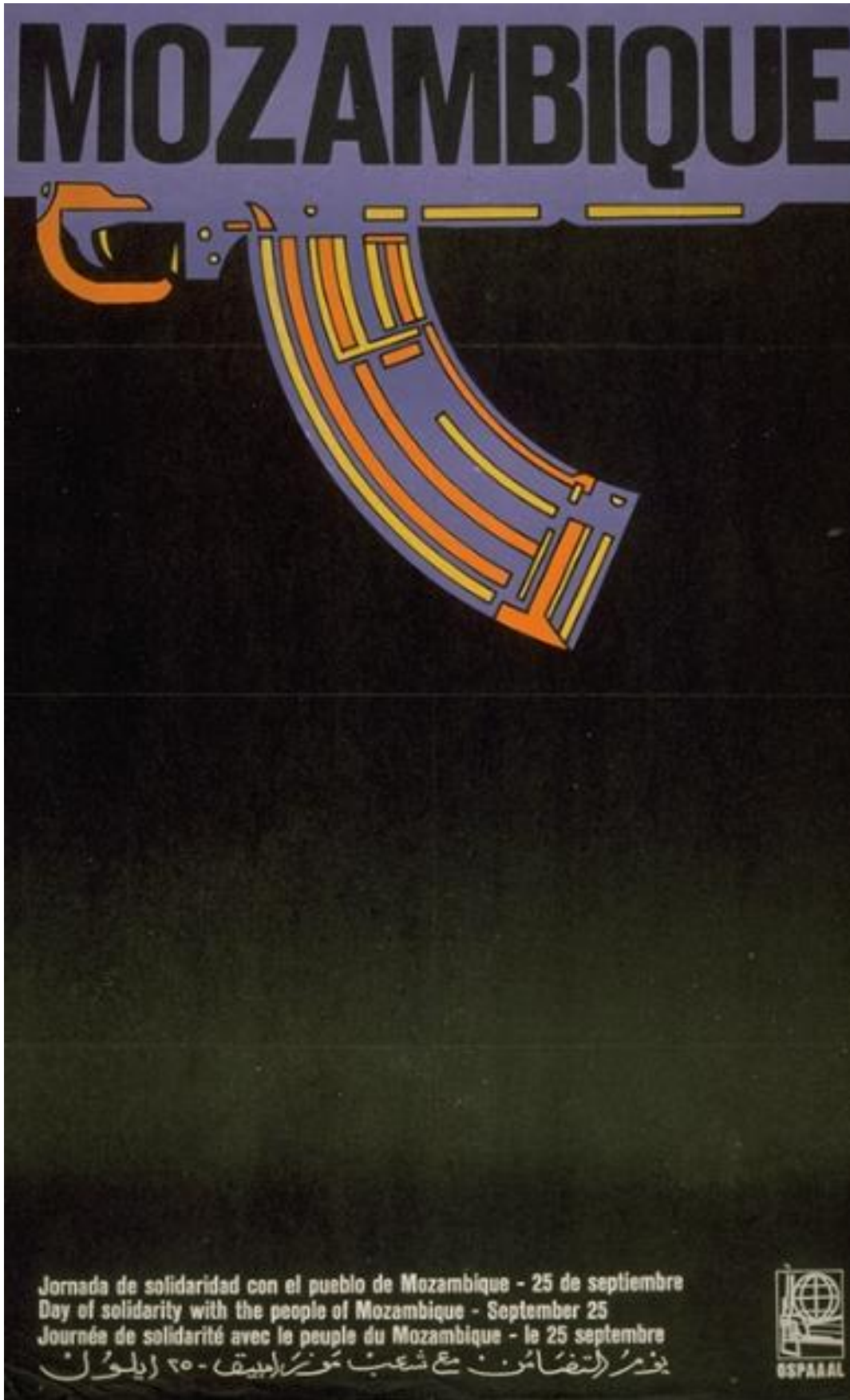


Figure 11 Poster by Enrique Martinez, 'Solidarity with Mozambique', published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1960s.

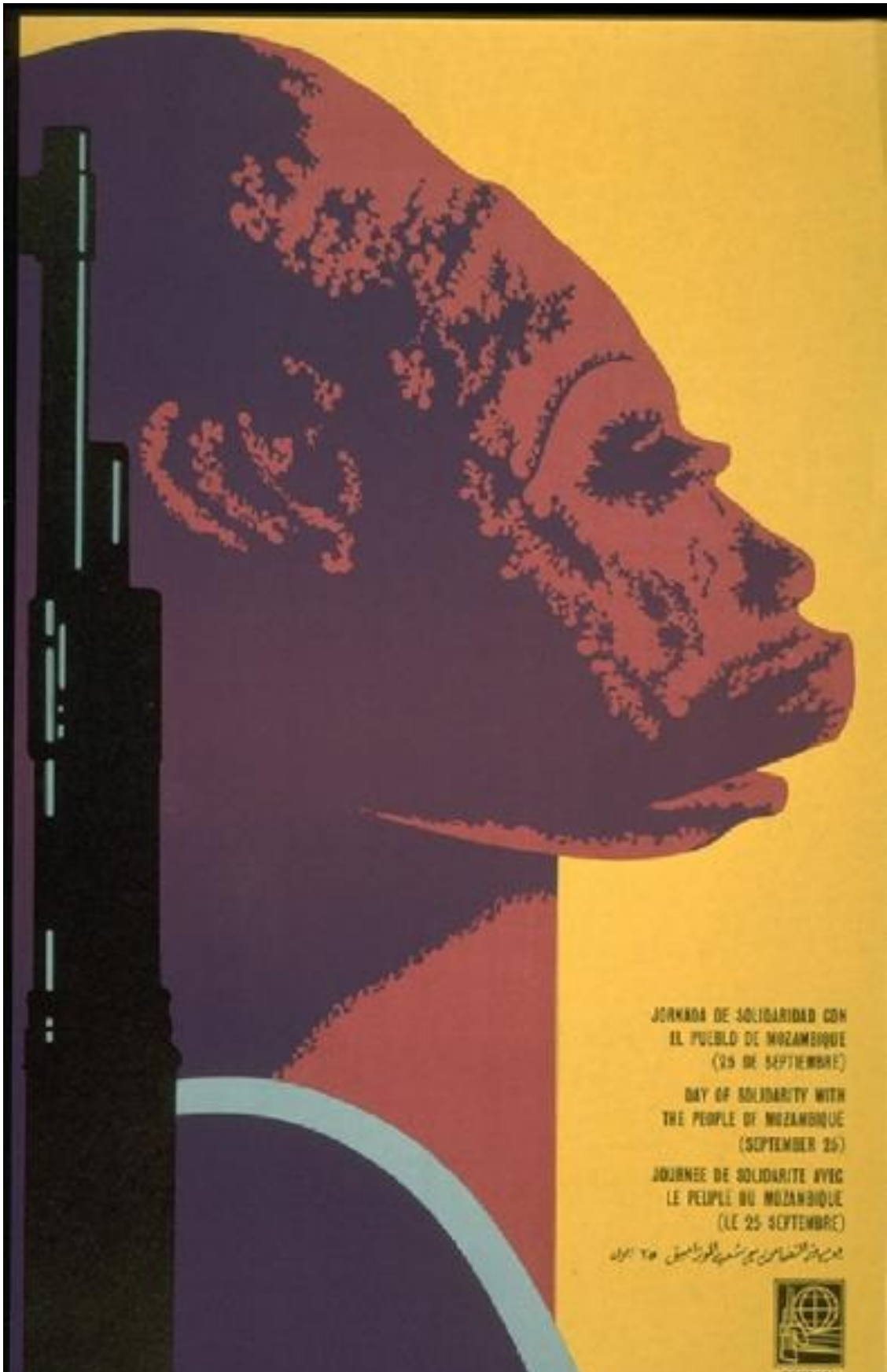


Figure 12 Poster by Olvio Martínez depicting 'Day of World Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands', 1973, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba.

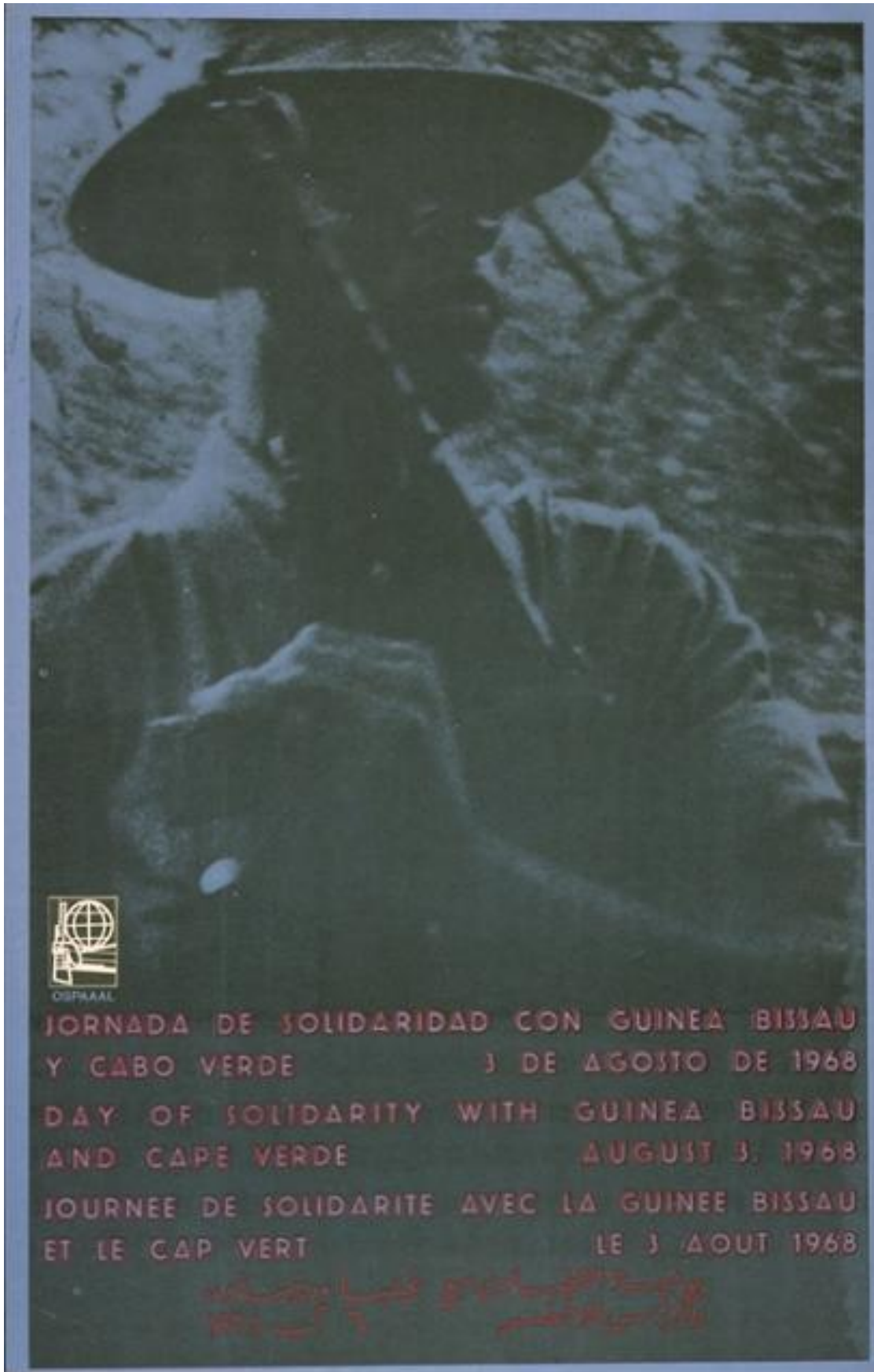


Figure 13 Poster by Lazaro Abreu advertising 'Day of solidarity with Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde', published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1968

AESTHETIC OF EXCLUSION

While OSPAAAL posters were purposefully designed to include liberation struggles within a shared tricontinental solidarity, the posters artistically shaped what was excluded. This exclusion was not often explicit, but rather implicit through aesthetic strategies such as through visual metaphor with icons, and abstraction. With this abstraction, the posters functioned as curated acts of visual editing as they deliberately presented a harmonious image of Lusophone Africa liberation struggles and avoiding a depiction of the messy, political realities. Issues such as rivalry between nationalist parties, contradictions within the gendered experience, and violence alongside famine and internal repression naturally did not appear in the posters.

The poster '*With Angola in defense and production*' features a still-life composition of a pile of ripe mangos with bullets scattered amongst them. The mangoes glow with a faint hue against a dark, marron background drawing the viewers attentions solely to the fruits. Whilst the poster suggests the harmony of defence and production, it also conceals the real violence of the Angolan civil war which led to famine and displacement. In a way, this aesthetic attempts to sanitise an armed struggle as a metaphor for a necessity of violence for agricultural stability. The use of an abundance of mangoes presented in a still-life aesthetic carries associations of fertility and domestic prosperity meanwhile the presence of bullets creates a jarring dissonance and thus an implication that such fertility and prosperity will be achieved by the incumbent and supported government – MPLA. Doing so implicitly aligns with MPLA's claims to legitimacy. Rivals like UNITA who have different visions of agriculture and foreign alliances are therefore visually excluded allowing no space for contestation only a single metaphor of incumbent legitimacy.

Utilising the artistic style of bold modernist minimalism, OSPAAAL's *'The struggle continues / victory is certain'* displays four, tightly bound, overlapping hands against the backdrop of a flat red and black plane. The addition of a yellow hammer and sickle turning the background into an Angolan flag. Simultaneously, the background appears as both the communist flag as well as the flag of Angola, further deepening the appearance of tricontinental solidarity and backing. Whilst the Marxist abstraction makes it universally legible, there is an erasure of cultural specificity whereby there are Lusophone African identifiers as the generic hands have no specific representation. This universality smooths over intra-African rivalries and presents an aesthetic of a false fraternity concealing deep-rooted fractures within tricontinental politics such as the Sino-Soviet split and internal Angolan divisions.¹⁹ As such, by portraying bound hands devoid of differentiation, the poster suppresses a contested solidarity in favour of one that was automatic. Through this, OSPAAAL legitimised Lusophone African Marxist-leaning groups by erasing what did not fit the visual narrative.

¹⁹ Schmiedecke, Natália Ayo, et al. "Reframing Revolution and Solidarity: Photography and Visual Culture in Ospaaal Poster Art (1967–1990): Reencuadrando Revolución y Solidaridad: Fotografía y Cultura Visual En Los Carteles de La Ospaaal (1967–1990)." *Bandung: Journal of the Global South*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2024, pp. 102–40, doi:10.1163/219835i34-11010001.

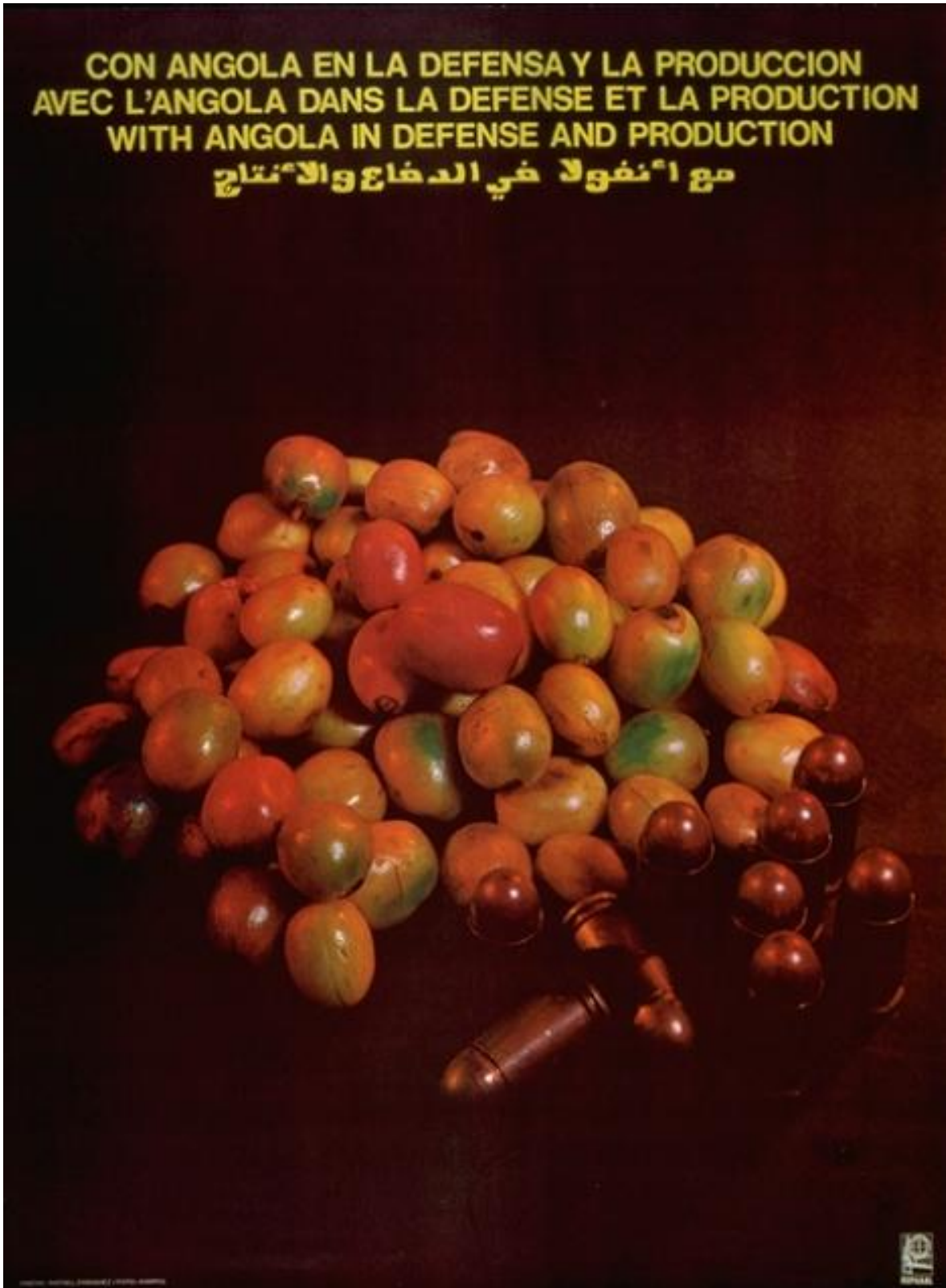


Figure 14 Poster by Rafael Enríquez, *With Angola in defense and production*, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1982.

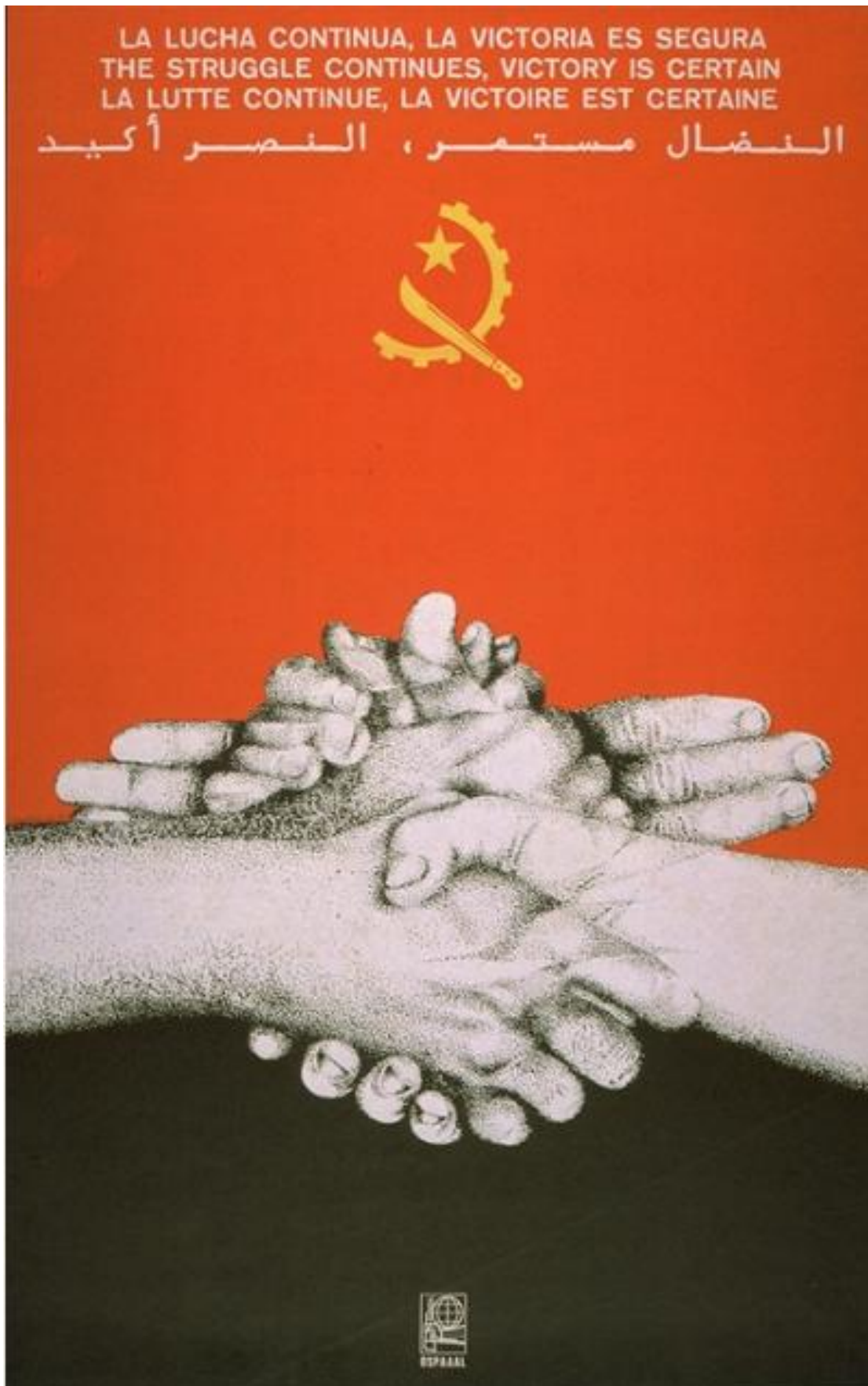


Figure 15 Poster by Faustino Pérez depicting *The Struggle Continues / Victory is Certain*, 1977, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba.

Section Three

Revolutionary Women or Revolutionary Myths?: Gendered Silences and Ethical Contradictions

Whilst women were made highly visible in OSPAAAL's Lusophone African posters, this visibility rarely translated into true political agency. The aesthetics in OSPAAAL posters featuring women's inclusion was performative, designed to legitimise the Marxist-leaning political parties and liberation movements as social progressive and modern. Lusophone African women's representation within solidarity posters largely operated within archetypes of the militant, the mother, at times combining the two to perform an allegory of the movement. Though these maternal and militant feminine figures signalled inclusivity, they simultaneously hint at gender hierarchies.

Molinero outlines how the appearance of women in solidarity posters took on only the role of a feature whereby their representation was symbolic or secondary to their gendered position in society.²⁰ Their appearance was an aspect of the tricontinental, Marxist revolutionary imaginary that OSPAAAL and similarly solidarity posters alike aimed to construct. This signalled that Marxist-leaning, Lusophone African liberation movements were a struggle of the whole people including women, as well as Marxist movements globally being a movement of social progress that included gender equality. Therefore, as argued by Molinero, such solidarity posters legitimised supported liberation movements and political parties but through an artistic aesthetic that used performative inclusion.²¹ The posters visually affirmed gender inclusivity in order to project an presentation of a socially progressive movement.

²⁰ García Molinero, Alberto. "Modelos de representación de la feminidad a través del cartel Tricontinental." *La imagen tricontinental: La Feminidad, el Che Guevara y el Imperialismo a través del arte gráfico de la OSPAAAL*, Ariadna Ediciones, 2022, pp. 149–170, doi:10.26448/ae9789566095651.50.

²¹ Ibid

MOTHER AFRICA AND MILITANT MOTHER

Lazaro Abreu's 1968 OSPAAAL untitled poster uses a faceless silhouette and soft outlines to portray maternal gestures which works to bind women to their symbolic roles rather than depict them as autonomous revolutionary leaders. The two silhouetted women, devoid of a face and therefore identity, stand carrying their children on their sides. Their heads wrapped in patterned cloths as they wear similarly patterned clothing – an African inspired print. On the opposing shoulder, a rifle in slung, a simple black silhouette depicting the guns. Meanwhile, the background is a stark, flat, deeper-hued blue, devoid of landscape and text only a simple frame of an even darker blue. This background isolates the female figures, suspending them in a timeless and untitled void. In comparison to the solidarity posters of the leaders of Machel, Cabral, and Neto who had their portraits grounded in slogans and history, these faceless women exist in an abstracted space which is universalised and therefore disconnected from a specific Lusophone African lived political reality.

Though the two central female figures dominate the composition, they are faceless and deliberately stripped of individuality turning them into a universal trope. Looking at the mirrored placement of both of the women and children on their flanks, this arrangement suggests a stabilised formation whereby the visual symmetry reinforced the ideas of family as a core element of revolution. Doing so places the reduces the political individuality and importance of women, condensing their role as one that is best analysed relationally as mother and caretakers instead of autonomously. Moreover, this combination of facelessness, colourful fabric, and a maternal formation moves their figures into a metaphor for the Marxist-supported future of Lusophone Africa. The figures are a representation of the trope "Mother Africa" who is

nurturing and fertile. By carrying the children, the women of Lusophone Africa and the Marxist-leaning political parties are an embodiment of continuity of the next generation, a promise to nurture and defend their future. Yet, though inspiring, this is a reduction of the Marxist Lusophone African woman to her biological and symbolic function in which her role is to be an aesthetic vessel, as opposed to a political voice.

With the rifles and children presents the most striking visual tension. If this poster were to be analysed for its inclusivity, the rifles would appear to break the stereotypes of passive female roles – the women recognised as armed combatants active in the guerrilla struggle. However, the telling lack absence of text and a title pushes for the rifles to be analysed as symbols of exclusion and not instruments of agency. The women’s militancy is aestheticised instead of contextualised as it is done in other solidarity posters featuring men. The African women are not posed as icons in motion of what could be an “armed motherhood”. They are instead used as props to the rifles to reinforce the allegorical register of an armed liberation struggle.



Figure 16 Poster by Lazaro Abreu advertising 'Day of solidarity with Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde', published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL). Cuba, 1968.

Conclusion

OSPAAAL and related solidarity posters demonstrate how legitimacy in Lusophone African liberation movements and political parties were cultivated through visual culture. The posters crafted were not solely passive reflections and displays of support for these liberation struggles, but instead participated as active agents in shaping international and domestic perceptions of what counted as a legitimate revolutionary movement. This project has foregrounded aesthetic analysis within the historical context Lusophone African liberation movements and political parties occurred, whilst performing this exploration of crafting legitimacy through intentional and subconscious artistic choices.

Within each section, this project has uncovered different ways the legitimisation of Marxist-leaning liberation movements and political parties was performed through solidarity posters. Section One's focus on how legitimacy was constructed by design resulted in an exploration of the subtle artistic tools used within solidarity posters to elevate the Lusophone African liberation movements led by MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC as voices of their respective nations. The inclusion of party flags and portraits of leaders fed into a visual monopoly in which rival visual aesthetics of FNLA, UNITA, and COREMO were erased. Here, a key finding was how artistic choices made by OSPAAAL and related solidarity posters functioned as a selective curation of the revolutionary reality. It was no one based solely on who was visible, but how this chosen visibility was stylised as heroic, modern, and authentic.

The blending and execution of the "tricontinental style" with African visuals as seen in the use of African phenotypes, weapons, and rural and guerrilla motifs with global revolutionary symbols of the red star, hammer and sickle, and fists in the solidarity posters analysed in Section Two concluded with how this hybrid aesthetic contributed to a shared language of solidarity. By implementing the global tricontinental Marxist aesthetic into solidarity posters that support a specific political party and liberation movement, the legitimacy of MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC is cemented into a global network, encouraging related organisations to give their support. Though, this section also ascertained how this inclusivity was paradoxical as whilst the solidarity posters appeared to connect Lusophone African struggles to a global

liberation movement, the hybrid aesthetic also flattened differences and therefore reduced local contexts and contentions into a single revolutionary imagery.

Finally, Section Three zoned in on a singular OSPAAAL solidarity poster. Lazaro Abreu's untitled poster highlighted the gendered contradictions that related solidarity posters aimed to refute. Whilst women in Lusophone African solidarity posters were made highly visible, more so than in Asian or Latin American solidarity posters, their visibility was still constrained. The three main archetypes prevalent in the poster of a militant, maternal figure, and/or the abstract allegory of "Mother Africa" legitimised women's presence in Marxist movements as progressive.

Regardless, Section Three centres the ideological silence of Lusophone African women, which appears in the solidarity poster through the lack of text and facial identity. The findings from this artistic analysis foregrounds how the inclusion of women in solidarity posters in an attempt to legitimise Lusophone African Marxist-leaning liberation movements and political parties was more so performative than substantive as in reality these women lacked agency in comparison to their male counterparts.

Essentially, the scholarship of Cushing, Schmiedecke, and Molinero has helped to emphasise distribution networks and the ideological functions of solidarity posters. This project has built on this in an alternative direction - moving beyond the treatment of solidarity posters as solely historical and political artefacts. It has been learned that through artistically analysing the solidarity posters of OSPAAAL made in support of Lusophone African Marxist-leaning liberation movements and parties, the conversation shifts from the solidarity posters being primarily forms of propaganda, to posters which form part of visual infrastructures of legitimacy.

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