

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?

This project examined how legitimacy for Marxist-Oriented liberation movements in Lusophone Africa led by the political parties of MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC was crafted visually through solidarity posters. Focusing primarily on solidarity posters produced by the Cuban international non-governmental organisation OSPAAAL, it is artistically analysed how solidarity posters functioned as active instruments of ideological legitimisation as they defined who was represented as authentic revolutionaries.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The wave of decolonisation in the 1950s-70s saw a confrontation with colonial powers and a struggle over the meaning of independence and legitimacy. Cuba's 1959 revolution placed its capital Havana as the centre of revolutionary solidarity. The 1966 Tricontinental Conference brought together global anti-imperialist movements, many of which aligned with Marxist thought. Subsequently OSPAAAL (Organisation of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) was founded, disseminating visual media and ideological thought.

For Lusophone Africa, this was a critical moment as the MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, gained visibility as the authentic and legitimate voices of liberation. Meanwhile, their rival groups such as FNLA, UNITA, and COREMO were excluded from the tricontinental global stage and erased from OSPAAAL's and related solidarity posters' visual culture.

The solidarity posters circulated by groups like OSPAAAL functioned as tools of ideological selection by visually canonising certain, Marxist-leaning movements which then shaped perceptions of who embodied the struggle for freedom.

FINDINGS

This project finds that legitimacy in Lusophone African liberation movements was not solely achieved through military or political means but was artistically constructed through design. Solidarity posters selectively framed MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC as the authentic and legitimate representatives of liberation meanwhile rival groups were visually excluded. The study concludes that the posters were actively created using subtle aesthetics and artistic abstraction to shape perception and construct legitimacy.

THE PROJECT DEVELOPS IN THREE STAGES:

- 1) Legitimacy by Design** – how selective representation and exclusion in poster art framed Lusophone Marxist movements as authentic liberation struggles.
- 2) Hybrid Aesthetics** – how posters combined modernist abstraction, revolutionary symbolism, and anti-colonial imagery to create a shared tricontinental style that reinforced solidarity and legitimised approved movements.
- 3) Revolutionary Women or Revolutionary Myths?** – how women were depicted as symbols of progress, sacrifice, or “Mother Africa,” yet denied political autonomy, exposing gendered silences and ethical contradictions in the aesthetics of solidarity.

ANALYSIS

This project centred the visual form of the solidarity posters, with their political functions being secondary. The main question being how certain aesthetic choices shaped the perception of legitimacy:

Party Flags and Symbols: Party flags and revolutionary emblems were subtly integrated into the solidarity poster compositions, which fused national identity with revolutionary symbols creating a sense of inevitability around these parties as the legitimate liberation movements.

Leaders as Icons: Figures like Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto, and Samora Machel were portrayed in stylised portraits, their imagery turned into iconography. Abstracting their faces into symbols of resilience, legitimising their movements as universal.

Guns and Guerilla Imagery: Rifles appeared often, turning the guerilla struggle into a heroic aesthetic. The guns functioned less as weapons and more as artistic motifs of authenticity, subtly signalling that Marxist, armed resistance as the only legitimate path to liberation.

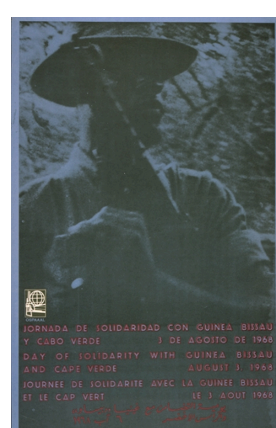
The Aesthetic of Inclusion and Exclusion: Rival groups like FNLA, UNITA, and COREMO were visually erased through the omission of their flags and leaders. The solidarity posters constructed a monocular political narrative whereby Marxist-leaning parties were shown as the representatives of a liberated Lusophone Africa.

Gendered Silences: Women in the solidarity posters were shown as either mothers, allegories of Africa, or anonymous fighters but denied the portrayal as decision-makers. Their presence was used to affirm revolutionary inclusivity, whilst their visual silence reinforced the gendered hierarchies.

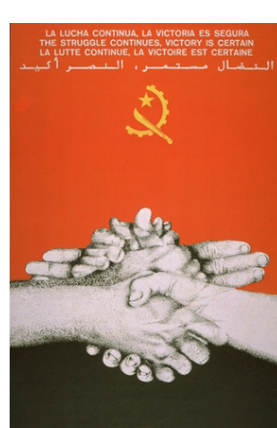
THE POSTERS



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.



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.



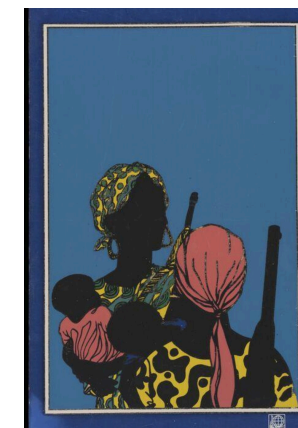
Poster by Faustino Pérez depicting 'The Struggle Continues / Victory is Certain', 1977, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Cuba.



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



Poster, La Mozambique Independant Battit Son Avenir / Independent Mozambique Builds Its Future, published by L'Union Internationale des Etudiants, Prague, 1985.



Poster by Lazaro Abreu and Emory Douglas published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Cuba, 1968.



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



Poster by Lucio Martínez, 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.



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



Poster by Enrique Martínez depicting Abel Djassi (Amílcar Cabral), Third anniversary of his assassination, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Cuba, 1976.



Poster by Olivio 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.



Poster by Rafael Enriquez, With Angola in Defense and Production, published by the Organisation in Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Cuba, 1982.