The Persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Colonial Angola (with a digression on the inception of Tokoïsm)

Abstract: The Portuguese regime used many human resources in Angola to limit and outlaw the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This study aims to understand to what extent the Witnesses’ concept of neutrality and the way they viewed secular authorities resulted in their becoming a target for the police authorities in Angola, who did not tolerate the dissemination of ideologies which could challenge the sustainability of the colonial system.

Resumo: O regime português despendeu em Angola muitos recursos humanos para limitar e proscrever as actividades das Testemunhas de Jeová. Não se tolerava a difusão de ideologias que pussem em causa a perenidade do sistema colonial, pelo que o objectivo deste trabalho é compreender em que medida é que o conceito de neutralidade das Testemunhas de Jeová e a sua maneira de percepcionar as autoridades seculares foi determinante para as colocar na mira das autoridades policiais em Angola.

Keywords: Angola; Jehovah’s Witnesses; Watch Tower Movements; Kitawala; Tokoism; Neutrality.

Palavras-chave: Angola; Testemunhas de Jeová; Movimentos Watch Tower; Kitawala; Tokoismo; Neutralidade.

The appearance of Jehovah’s Witnesses in colonial Angola during the 1950s set various elements of the Portuguese regime’s system for vigilance and repression in motion. This article aims to understand the reasons for this reaction and its evolution until the end of colonial rule. However, it will first define the object of study, the Witnesses’ main religious beliefs and how these generated conflicts with the most diverse forms of government, from German and Soviet dictatorships to western democracies. It will then examine the movement’s implantation in sub-Saharan Africa and the unique manner in which it was disseminated in English and Belgian territories until the end of World War II. Finally, this study will detail the trajectory of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Angola, where they were confused with another religious movement – Tokoïsm – during the early years. This generated additional problems for followers of the Jehovah’s Witnesses movement, who were resolutely persecuted by the colonial regime in Angola until the country gained its independence, in 1974, as also happened to a lesser degree in other Portuguese colonial territories as well as in other lands. This study also includes a brief comparison of this phenomenon.1

Jehovah’s Witnesses, Their Beliefs and Europe under Dictatorships

Jehovah’s Witnesses have existed under that name since 26 July 1931, when those who had until then been known as “Bible Students” decided to adopt a name at a convention held in Ohio (USA), based on a passage from the Book of Isaiah. The movement first emerged during the 1870s in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, under Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), a former member of the Congregational Church, in order to re-establish original Christianity. A restorationist movement, Jehovah’s Witnesses rejected doctrines they believed had been added to original Christianity under the influence of philosophers and concessions by the Church, such as the immortality of the soul, the divinity of Jesus, the trinity, hellfire, purgatory etc. During the 1880s Russell founded the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, hereinafter referred to as the “Society”, a juridical entity overseeing the denomination’s activities.2

The main religious beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses were the doctrine of the redemption of humanity by Christ’s redeeming sacrifice and a belief in the future establishment of God’s Kingdom where Jesus would be King. This was to happen in 1914, according to their

1 The two main Portuguese colonial administrations, Angola and Mozambique, acted differently with regard to Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Mozambican case has been studied a decade ago (Pinto, Pedro, “Jehovah’s Witnesses in Colonial Mozambique”, Le Fait Missionnaire, 17 (1), 2005, pp. 61-123).
understanding of the biblical prophecy contained in Daniel 4, 10-17 about the end of the “times of the Gentiles”. Preceded by a period of chaos on Earth, which would lead to the destruction of human political institutions, Jesus would assume total universal control in 1914, followed by the resurrection of the dead and the perfecting of obedient humanity for one thousand years. Later, when these predications did not come to pass, they considered that the biblical truth about this prophetic year would not change but that the understanding of its significance had been refined: Christ had been crowned in Heaven in 1914, marking the beginning of his “presence” in charge of the Kingdom. The “sign” of this presence would correspond to the period the Scriptures called the “last days”, characterised by a global increase in wars, famines and pestilence, among other aspects, which would culminate in divine intervention at the Battle of Armageddon, where the righteous would be saved and the wicked would be destroyed, ushering in a period of one thousand years in an earthly Paradise, in which humanity would be guided down the path to perfection.3

After Russell died, in 1916, J. F. Rutherford succeeded him as president of the WTBTS. He established a more hierarchical structure for the organisation, solidified distinctive beliefs and deepened the contrast with other denominations. Rutherford’s criticism of organised religion, large-scale commerce and political interests generated opposition for the movement, including in the USA and Canada, where they were accused of communism, especially during World War II, due to what was believed to be their demoralising effect on national efforts to combat enemies of the nation.4

Emulating the evangelisation of the Early Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses are expected to share their biblical doctrines, which they believe to be of vital importance. Moreover, at their meetings adherents read and study the Bible and biblical literature produced by the Society, where they find the guidance necessary for an understanding of world events. In reality, their millenarianism is a pre-millenarianism, i.e. they do not believe they should try and intervene in society with a view to improving global conditions, leaving that to divine intervention. They opt not to be distracted from their main activity, preaching about the imminent change.5

Jehovah’s Witnesses’ understanding of the concept of neutrality is particularly relevant. Followers obey the laws of governments (or “superior authorities”, cf. Romans 13), except when they result in disregarding what they believe to be divine orders, such as evangelisation, meetings for worship or loving thy neighbour (which is the reason they refuse to do military service). They do not participate in elections, political parties or military conflicts, but keenly accompany the unfolding of global events, in the expectation of Armageddon. Their neutrality is also rooted in their vision of God as the sovereign of the universe and in God’s Kingdom as a real government, followers being God’s ambassadors on Earth. The opposition they faced from diverse regimes is viewed as a test of their faith, reinforcing their determination to tread the righteous path of fidelity to God.6

In Nazi Germany they were accused of promoting communism. Their refusal to support Hitler resulted in fierce persecution. One third of an estimated community of 30,000 members was imprisoned. Two thousand followers were sent to concentration camps, where more than half of them died, including 250 who were executed for refusing to support the war effort. In contrast, in the Soviet Union, Jehovah’s Witnesses were accused of promoting American interests, for denouncing communist ideals. Stalin endorsed the forced exile of the majority of Jehovah’s Witnesses communities to Siberia during the early 1950s and the repression and condemnation of followers was a common occurrence over the following decades, only ceasing after the fall of the communist regime. Although viewed by its followers as a neutral evaluation, the religious movement’s assessment of all human political systems resulted in Jehovah’s Witnesses being seen as anything but neutral by these very same human governments. States viewed the heralding of Armageddon and the destruction of impious human governments to be an affront to the continuation of their political domination. In Emily Baran’s words, “neutrality was inherently political”.

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3 Garbe, Detlef, Between..., pp. 31-36.
6 Baran, Dissent..., pp. 4-6, 135; Garbe, Between..., p. 6.
Sociological studies have associated the resilience of the Jehovah’s Witnesses movement with the fact that it is a “strict church”, i.e. it expects strict obedience from its members, in terms of beliefs and practices, thus ensuring a greater level of involvement than in other denominations, as well as a strong sentiment of enthusiasm and commitment shared by the community. Their understanding of religious life does not contemplate practising the faith individually, without communion with other members, or without a sense of obligation to engage in evangelisation, even though some precautions are to be taken while approaching strangers in a context of repression. This determination on the part of followers resulted in the organisation of complex clandestine operations to print or import the Society’s biblical literature and to meet secretly in smaller groups. These actions were viewed by repressive States as contravening the law.\(^8\)

**Sub-Saharan Africa: The Early Decades**

The introduction of the Bible Students’ beliefs in Central and Southern Africa gained momentum in 1906. Joseph Booth, a Protestant Australian missionary who had been a member of several religious denominations and had a history of peacefully defending the independence of Africans, convinced Charles Taze Russell to appoint him as the Society’s representative in South Africa. There were already dozens of subscribers to the Society’s publications in the region. Booth promoted the dissemination of the Society’s doctrines throughout Central and Southern Africa, above all by distributing publications to Africans. A geographical dispersion took place thanks to migrant labourers, who came to work in South African mines and returned to their homelands once their work contracts had concluded, taking the printed biblical message with them and in some cases creating small groups of followers.\(^9\)

A few years later, Booth abandoned the Society and the groups that had been created in the meanwhile continued to develop their own theologies, some being more faithful than others to the Society’s orthodoxy, blending it with Christendom’s and indigenous religious beliefs. Even though the Society sent a new representative in 1910 it was no longer possible to entirely control the diverse systems of religious ideals that had appeared in the vast colonial domains of British Central Africa, which began to generically be known as the “Watch Tower Movements”. From the 1920s onwards they were known as “Kitawala” in the area of the Belgian Congo, having only rudimentary traces of the Society’s doctrines and characterised by being exclusively African, rejecting any kind of authority, whether European or not, promoting moral regeneration, anti-fetishism and the existence of a black God. Even though they propounded passivity, some of the groups occasionally became involved in social clashes.

All these groups lacked a fixed leadership or a common theology, constantly changing according to regions, prevailing social and religious conditions and the charisma of preachers. There was widespread confusion as few locals were officially recognised by the Society as being its members. The colonial authorities in these territories found it hard to distinguish the theological differences and, sometimes, were not even interested in doing so, since the Society’s basic discourse criticising established secular and religious institutions was in any case viewed as being very disturbing and having the potential to disrupt the social order.\(^10\)

According to Karen Fields, even though much of what the authorities had feared would happen did not come to pass, their reaction was understandable in light of colonial logic. Colonial domination was in itself an archaic form of government, depending among other things on religious ideologies. For example, British colonial domination was based on two irreconcilable ideologies: the progressive Christianity taught by missionaries and the traditional beliefs which conferred authority on local chiefs within the system of Indirect Rule. On the one hand the missions served the regime’s purposes by disseminating and legitimising colonial domination by means of Christianity. However, on the other hand, they undermined the regime by combating the “paganism” that served as the basis for much of the customary authorities’ power, a key factor for the continuity of colonialism. In this context, African religious movements which denounced both the Christian missions as well as traditional religion attacked one of the fundamental pillars of the colonial ideology. The Watch Tower and Kitawala movements were essentially spiritual communities, but the political implications

\(^8\) Baran, *Dissent...*, pp. 68, 109, 115.
\(^9\) Pinto, “Jehovah’s...”, pp. 64-65.
of their existence as such were interpreted by the colonial authorities as grounds justifying their repression.11

It was only after World War II that the Society was allowed to send new official representatives to British Africa to filter and personally assess the degree of integration with the orthodox Jehovah’s Witnesses movement of several thousand people who claimed to be followers. This slow process resulted in followers being weeded out and stricter supervision of members, who were now more uniform under the orthodox umbrella of the Society. However, some groups preferred to maintain their independence, refusing to integrate into an international organisation where their identity would be diluted.12

**Simão Toko and Jehovah’s Witnesses**

The Portuguese colonial administration kept a close eye on all deviations from the norm in terms of religious matters, analysing beliefs and their potential to serve political ends. This was not limited just to the Portuguese. The Belgian administration in Congo also feared that independent religious movements could unify the different tribes, inflame the people, who faced diverse economic and social problems, and introduce dangerous American or pan-African influences. The Belgian administrators were very paternalistic in relation to African organisations that were not controlled by the State or the Church. This world view is summarised in a Belgian police report dating from 1954, entitled *Rapport de Synthèse sur le Mouvement Kitawala*. Sholto Cross mentions how reports on the same subject, prepared in Southern and Northern Rhodesia, evidenced the same drama and distortion, fuelled by African informers who provided data conforming with the police preconception that a significant African rebellion was being engineered, masterminded by the WTBTS stealthily working in the background, manipulating African pawns to serve the aims of international communism and pan-Africanism.13

It is thus understandable that the first dossiers at the archives of the Portuguese political police,14 known as the PIDE (and later renamed the Directorate-General for Security, in 1969), labelled “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, both in Angola as well as Lisbon, contain innumerable reports and information related to a vast array of African religious movements, some of which had some contact with the Society’s doctrinal production, as was the case with Tokoism and Kitawala. Other movements did not have any contact with the Society, such as Kimbanguism or the “Saints”, but the authorities viewed them as being part of the same problem, namely, religious movements which had freed themselves from the control of the established Churches.15

In Angola, the first group of Jehovah’s Witnesses emerged in 1956, in the penal colony of Baía dos Tigres, the result of a schism among a Tokoist group which had been exiled there. It is known that in 1938 a European couple who were Jehovah’s Witnesses travelling through Angola had used the opportunity to disseminate the Society’s message and distributed almost ten thousand pamphlets and books in Luanda, Benguela, Sá da Bandeira (nowadays Lubango), and other cities, but there was no continuity.16 The Society’s annual report for 1945 stated that the branch in South Africa was sending publications to Angola, but


14 Apart from printed sources this study has used police sources and memoirs by some interlocutors. The police sources include confiscated correspondence, interrogations of detainees obtained by means of intimidation or violence, reports and information justifying repressive actions and anonymous complaints, with various levels of truth and reliability, which need to be assessed. It is also important to consider the tactics of those being interrogated, to protect themselves or the community, as well as the level of information to which they had access. Similarly, the memoirs written a few decades after the events occurred are subject to limitations in terms of their objectivity. The information compiled has been verified, whenever possible, by means of independent testimonies. This study has only identified individuals already mentioned in printed sources, using initials in other cases (cf. Patriarca, Fátima, “Sobre a leitura de fontes policiais”, *Andlise Socíal*, XXXII (143-144), 1997, pp. 925-935; Mateus, Daílla, *A PIDE/DGS na Guerra Colonial: 1961-1974*, Lisbon: Terramar, 2011, pp. 16-18, 68-70, 221-227).


did not provide any further details. It was only in 1951 that the annual report identified Nova Lisboa (nowadays Huambo) as one of the places where they were being sent. In 1950, there are records of a Mozambican associated with the Society being deported to the island of São Tomé and having passed through Angola on the way, where he publicised the religion. Deporting members of the Society from Mozambique to São Tomé was a common practice during the 1940s and 1950s, to work on plantations. For a few years the Society’s branch in South Africa included the group on that island in the reports encompassing its activities in Angola.

As for Tokoism, it was a prophetic-Messianic movement headed by Simão Toco. The sociological and religious aspects of the movement’s trajectory have already been analysed. Hence, this study shall only present some new historical details that are relevant for studying its connections with Jehovah’s Witnesses during the movement’s early years, which are generally overlooked, so as to better understand the attitude of the Belgian and Portuguese colonial authorities with regard to Toco and his followers.

Simão Toco was born in 1918 and was educated at the Baptist mission in Kibokolo (Makela do Zombo), where he also taught for a while after having concluded his studies in 1937, in Luanda. From 1939 to 1943 he was an instructor at the Missionary Station in Bembe. He then went to Leopoldville (Kinshasa) in Belgian Congo. During the early 1940s Toko came across Society publications on more than one occasion. He appreciated their contents, translated them into Kikongo and incorporated some of the teachings into the songs sung by the choir he oversaw in Kinshasa (consisting above all of Angolans from the Zombo community), albeit without the permission of his Baptist superiors. In 1946, he participated in the West Africa Missionary Evangelical Congress, in Kinshasa, as the Angolan representative. He expanded his horizons and exchanged views with representatives from American churches, having tried, in vain, to obtain information about the organisation which had issued the publications. After returning to Kinshasa in September 1946 he founded the Zombo Plateau Christian Association, a mutual assistance association, with a view to educating the people in Zombo and developing the region. He continued to try and obtain more of the Society’s publications and even wrote to the Portuguese Evangelical Alliance in Porto in 1947, requesting diverse religious books, including some which had only been published by the Society. However, his efforts did not yield the desired results.

In Kinshasa, Toko, who was a very charismatic individual whose followers believed him to be a prophet like Moses, instructed his friends to share these new teachings with their acquaintances in Angola and warn them of the imminent Armageddon. Toko did not openly divulge the source of the teachings, which he alone could access because he knew Portuguese. His prestige in local Angolan society increased and his meetings always witnessed large turnouts, including many followers who associated him with Simon Kimbangu, another prophet with Baptist roots who had founded a faith healing movement in the Belgian Congo in 1920s, preaching against fetishes and mediums. Toko finally managed to order a set of works from the Society, which arrived in April 1949. When he received them Toko is said to have exclaimed, “Henceforth, when we pray we shall no longer close our eyes but instead raise our faces towards Heaven”, reprimanding Christian missionaries for not having taught the truth. He was apparently referring to a passage from Luke 21, 28, according to which Christians would raise their heads when liberation was nigh. This was one of the important milestones in the movement’s progressive autonomy.

As soon as the Baptist mission in Kinshasa realised that Toko was using the Society’s publications to teach, he was chastised and when he continued to do so he was promptly expelled. The public activities of Toko’s followers became problematic for the missions and
the Belgian authorities increasingly took note of evangelisation. In July 1949, during a prayer session involving the participation of some Kimbangu followers, Toko interpreted some shaking and unintelligible expressions as being the arrival of the Holy Ghost and this event later became a founding pillar of the movement. The group’s rapid growth, chanting in the streets and enthusiastic preaching, appealing to people of any religious denomination to fill churches of all kinds, and its ties to the Society and Kimbanguism resulted in the Angolans being repatriated to Portuguese territory. The expulsion document indicated that the group was “proclaiming a new order that would put an end to the existing order”, subverting public order and had ties with the Society, no matter how tenuous the association might be, and Tokoism was no exception. During this phase, Tokoism was not distinguished from other religious movements which were rooted in contact with WTBTS publications and even years later would continue to be viewed as an ‘offshoot’ of the Society by the Belgian and Portuguese police authorities (the 1954 Rapport stated that “TOKO SIMÃO était avant tout un propagandiste inféodé aux idées Watch-Tower et qu’il fut le promoteur d’un mouvement politico-religieux”). Although little is known about other Watch Tower movements in Angola, there is evidence that at least two men were identified as belonging to the “WATCH TOWER” in Angola in 1951-1952, near the Congo border in Teixeira de Sousa (currently Luau, Moxico). Similarly, in 1958, a man identified as belonging to the “WATCH TOWER” was serving his eighth year in exile, on the governor’s orders. In both cases the available information does not make it possible to clearly identify their religious affiliation but it is likely that they belonged to independent movements, since there were no active Jehovah’s Witnesses in Angola during the early 1950s.

Toko and his followers were accepted in the Portuguese colony on 10 January 1950. A witness indicated that after crossing the border they began to sing the national anthem, probably to demonstrate that they were not as dangerous as they were made out to be. Diplomatic documents reveal that the Portuguese consul in Leopoldville, António Morais Machado, an apprentice warlock, was involved in this repatriation. He had received instructions from the governor of Angola not to act against the Tokoists. At the time, Machado suggested, in a letter dated 18 January 1950, that Toko could be used as a “decoy for other black Portuguese living here who are keenly watching the procedures the Angolan authorities use in his case”. In a report written in February, Machado stated that Toko could be a “primary element in destroying inertia” to “serve Portuguese interests” and “attract his black Portuguese followers” in Congo. The idea was not just to staunch emigration to Congo in search of better working conditions but to also get back those who had already gone there, to facilitate Portuguese efforts to repopulate the Angolan territory and meet the demand for labour. Various strategies were contemplated to this end, including manipulating Toko, who, in the consul’s opinion was more “a smart common than a religious fanatic” (considering the possible dangers of sliding into a movement akin to the Kitawala movement). The consul was also of the view that the “Angolan political milieu and vigilance by the competent authorities would attenuate and destroy his virulence”, making him “an extremely useful figure if used astutely”.

Three weeks after Toko entered Angola the plan seemed to be going well, since the Belgian authorities voiced their concern that Toko’s followers in Congo were ostentatiously

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22 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.43B, ff. 48, 271, 415-429; DelA P.Inf.10.04A/1, f. 57; The Belgian report dated 1954 also mentions two Africans originally from Angola among the members of the Kitawala movement who were detained in Congo in 1936 (Rapport... p. 104).

23 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.43B, ff. 48, 271, 415-429; DelA P.Inf.10.04A/1, f. 57; The Belgian report dated 1954 also mentions two Africans originally from Angola among the members of the Kitawala movement who were detained in Congo in 1936 (Rapport... p. 104).


26 Cit., p. 111; the Rapport de Synthèse sur le Movement Kitawala circulated in Lisbon, since there was a copy at the library of the Centre for Missionary Studies and it was cited by one of the regime’s theoreticians for religion (Santos, Movimentos... p. 567). António Custódio Gonçalves confused the influence of the Society’s doctrines in Toko with those of Kitawala, saying that this was a schism in the Society. The Kitawala movement was never part of the Society’s official structure, there being no indications of contacts between Toko and Kitawala groups in the Congo (Gonçalves, “Analyse...”, pp. 473-483). He must have been influenced by the same mistake committed by the Catholic priest Carlos Estermann (“O Tocoísmo como Fenômeno Religioso”, Garcia do Orta, 13 (3), 1965, pp. 327-331).

27 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.43B, ff. 89, 271, 415-429; DelA P.Inf.10.04A/1, f. 57; The Belgian report dated 1954 also mentions two Africans originally from Angola among the members of the Kitawala movement who were detained in Congo in 1936 (Rapport... p. 104).


29 AHD, Orgânica 1938, R.N.P., 2.ºPAº49, Mç 35, N.º 34.212.
demanding to be expelled as well. This created some anxiety among the Belgians, who thought that Toko was going to be isolated on the island of São Tomé. Nevertheless, the Belgians did not reject the possibility of sending them to Angola as long as there was no disruption of public order. Referring to the Belgians, Machado arrogantly wrote that Portuguese colonial experience made it possible to conclude that importance should not be attributed to those who had none, being convinced that the environment in Angola was not conducive for Toko’s religious doctrines. Simultaneously, pursuing his strategy, the consul encouraged more influential Tokoists to return, but without provoking the Belgians. At the time, Machado suggested that the governor of Angola, Silva Carvalho, instruct Toko to advise his followers to peacefully leave Congo and to establish a colony for them, to settle locals in the region. Subsequently, having served his purpose as a puppet to benefit the regime, “Toko would have to quickly disappear after having played his role”. Apparently, Governor Silva Carvalho intended to protect the masses of people who would arrive and tolerate what was viewed as an “inoffensive dogmatism”. However, not everyone inside the colonial apparatus shared this view and there was interference in the implementation of the measures according to the testimony of a staff member who supported the governor’s policy. In this equation, Toko was seen to be bereft of any free will, in a paternalism that was typical of the colonial administration. However, the authorities quickly understood that his evangelising dynamism in the colony of Loge (Bembe, Uíge), where he was initially sent with his followers and from where the consul envisaged that he would obediently attract his brethren from across the border, did not quite fit within the limits defined in the plan that had been chalked out a few months ago.

Toko did not allow himself to be manipulated by the plans others had envisaged for him and his evangelisation caused reactions. The North Angola Mission alerted the head of the local colonial office, in late November 1950, about the case of a catechist who had converted to the new religion in the meanwhile and was, in their view, showing disrespect for Europeans. There were so many complaints about disruptions to public order that the administrator of the district of Bembe wrote to the provincial governor that he could no longer bear to hear Toko’s name and he had only taken up office less than two months ago, due to which he proposed Toko be deported. Toko was set to Caconda (Hula), 1,000 km to the south, at the end of 1950, and the group was divided over several places, including Luanda. The authorities had sought to weaken the movement but instead involuntarily promoted its dissemination and growth.

In April 1951 the governor of Angola was still inclined to authorise the cult. Despite the constant complaints from local colonial functionaries he did not view the movement as being subversive (an attitude that other colonial agents criticised as being lax and naive when he left the office in 1955). The local authorities sought to gather elements which would allow them to understand the phenomenon from multiple points of view, resorting to the missions. In August 1951, Rodolphe Bréchet, of the Philafricaine evangelical mission in Kalukembe, wrote two letters to the administrator of the district of Caconda, after interviewing Toko. He did not believe he had political connotations but, considering that he was obeyed “with great dedication and enthusiasm”, he felt that should he begin to preach against the authorities public order could be at risk. Similar views were voiced by a Catholic priest in September, who portrayed the preacher as promoting indiscipline.

With the passage of time the influence of Kimbangu elements became more preponderant and the Society’s publications were increasingly sidelined. In Luanda, Tokoists continued to meet but one of them, João Mankoka, did not appreciate the prevalence of mediumistic practices and two other Tokoists later supported him in his efforts to return to the initial matrix. However, Toko confirmed to the community that the mediums were the only ones who would read the Bible for the others. Ostracised, Mankoka and his supporters were denounced to the authorities by their companions, accused of creating new doctrines and disturbing the movement. This small group was thus sent to the inhospitable penal colony of Baía dos Tigres in early 1952 to serve a four year sentence, which was later extended to six years.

26 AHD, Orgânica 1938, R.N.P., 2.ºPAº49, Mc35, N.º 34.212; GNP/020/Cx.1, Doc. 109. A decade later, Silva Cunha, an influential theoretician in the field of religious associations in Angola, would criticise precisely the way in which the Vale do Loge colony was used to resettled Tokoists coming from Congo (Questões Ultramarinas e Internacionais, Vol. 1, Lisbon: Aica, 1960, p. 146). 27 Santos, Movimentos..., pp. 376-378. 28 AHD, GNP/020/Cx.1, Doc. 49, 51. 57-59 and unnumbered.
While in prison, Mankoka managed to write to the Society’s branch in Southern Rhodesia. He feared that Tokoism would lose its virtue with spiritistic tendencies, racial exclusivity and a ban on using black clothes or eating pork. The letter surprised the Southern Rhodesia branch since it affirmed that there were one thousand Jehovah’s Witnesses in Angola. The Society then sent a missionary, John Cooke, in January 1955, to verify the situation. Cooke contacted a local lawyer, Dr. Homem de Melo, and was advised that Toko’s followers were identified as being close to subversive communist movements.

With the permission of the colony’s governor-general, who was interested in knowing the movement’s true nature, Cooke visited Tockoist groups in Luanda, Benguela and Novo Redondo (nowadays Sumbe), but he got the cold shoulder and soon perceived that they had little in common with Jehovah’s Witnesses. During a second visit he took a letter of recommendation from the group at Baía dos Tigres, which he had visited in the meanwhile (making the most of the occasion to consolidate their fragile doctrinal knowledge), indicating that Cooke had come to “assume responsibility for our group”, as the representative of the religious organisation through which they had been taught biblical truths in Congo. This letter caused indignation since it seemed to the others that Mankoka was trying to elevate himself by taking a decision without consulting the entire group and that Toko would thus be deprived of his prominence.

In reality, these groups only accepted what was defined by Toko and did not contest his words. Cooke reported that those who listened to Toko “accepted everything and believed in him because Toko had the books and they believed that what he said was in the [Society’s] books or in the Bible”. Another former follower recalled that everyone “wrote [to Toko] asking for his opinion about the missionary’s visit, if they should receive him or not and if they could accept the literature Cooke gave them”. Cooke finally managed to meet Toko, in Sá da Bandeira (since Toko had successively been transferred by the authorities), always at the expense of the governor-general. Toko agreed to write a letter of introduction to the groups, satisfied at having received a visit from an envoy sent by the Society. They were photographed to prove the veracity of the event and Toko even agreed that Mankoka’s group no longer viewed Toko as their ‘leader’ and were following Cooke instead.

After conversing with Toko and, apparently, having convinced him to join the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Cooke returned to the penal colony of Baía dos Tigres, where there had been disagreements between Mankoka and David (who had been sent there by the authorities), with regard to David’s polygamy. The latter did not like this and informed Toko that Mankoka’s group no longer viewed Toko as their ‘leader’ and were following Cooke. Toko then sent a circular annulling his first letter, affirming that “Our religion is not for whites, it belongs to us Africans. If a white man comes you may receive him but if he wishes to give orders do not receive him”. Toko was more interested in an African religious organisation. If it was integrated into an organisation that had a global scale he would lose the prominence he had enjoyed until then. Silva Cunha, a colonial theoretician focusing on religions in Angola, interviewed Toko shortly afterwards. Toko explained that he did not wish to deepen his contacts with the Jehovah’s Witnesses because of their foreign ties, so that the government did not view him suspiciously. Cunha concluded that he considered Kimbanguism to be a reference, since Kimbangu had shown that it was possible “to successfully found a religion only for Africans.” It should be noted that Toko is rumoured to have said that, “Mankoka did nothing wrong by writing to the Society and taking his person with him, but he had become too prominent”; that, “My intention while requesting literature was not to join the Watch...
Tower" and that “The problem was not that Mankoka wrote, but rather that we cannot always continue as tenants of others”. I agree with Llera Blanes, who stressed that Toko “did not want to follow that missionary entity, but rather use its literature as an instrument for his project of religious utopian emancipation”. 36

The breakdown in relations between Mankoka and Toko occurred in February 1956. A schism thus took place in the Baía dos Tigres group, a minority choosing the religion propagated by Cooke, who had to leave Angola in the meanwhile after Santana Godinho, the provincial secretary of the general administration, who supported his travels, left the government.37 Initially, the Society’s South African branch thought that Toko was being pressured by the authorities but, after seeing how events unfolded, ended up officially recognising, in May, that the Baía dos Tigres group now had nothing in common with Toko.38

A New Beginning for the Society in Angola

In June 1956, Mankoka’s group wrote to the head of the local administrative post asking for a judgement differentiating them from the Tokoists. It then applied to the governor of Moçâmedes (nowadays Namibe) for permission to hold meetings, again using the argument of having broken away from the Tokoists and conversion to a new faith. From then on the two movements followed different paths, although the authorities still strove to understand and exploit the differences for their own benefit, since they monitored correspondence.39

A month later, the governor of Moçâmedes prepared a report to which Baptista de Sousa, head of the Department for Indigenous Affairs, in Luanda, replied in August. The governor did not expect the Society’s followers in Baía dos Tigres to engage in violent actions since this was repugnant to their doctrine. However, he believed that their ideals could upset the locals as they did not have a patriotic view. In keeping with the new governor-general’s oral instructions when he had visited the district, he thus proposed banning the circulation of publications and a gradual reduction in the publications that the prisoners at Baía dos Tigres were allowed to receive. As for the Tokoists, he associated them with the Kimbangu movement “of blacks against whites” and viewed their association with the Society as being merely incidental, finding ideas for the movement in Society publications. He supported encouraging a schism between the two movements and prepared false missives to be distributed among them to hasten discord.40

In Luanda, Baptista de Sousa agreed that “Toko’s xenophobic material” was more harmful than the Society’s “spiritual” aspect, but perceived the latter’s potential for expansion considering the rapid results Cooke had achieved. He did not condone the circulation of false missives but agreed with partially apprehending literature and censoring correspondence. As for the Society, Sousa considered it to be less dangerous but, “If the law allows prohibiting it, it would be best to do so.”41

In the meanwhile, in October 1956, the Society sent a missionary couple, Mervyn and Aurora Passlow, to Luanda under cover of a business deal. They discreetly evangelised, cultivating the interest some people had shown during Cooke’s sojourn. Some Tokoists pressured the handful of Africans who associated themselves with the Society, threatening to denounce them. At this time there was still some confusion in differentiating the two groups since this was repugnant to their doctrine. However, he believed that their ideals could upset the locals as they did not have a patriotic view. In keeping with the new governor-general’s oral instructions when he had visited the district, he thus proposed banning the circulation of publications and a gradual reduction in the publications that the prisoners at Baía dos Tigres were allowed to receive. As for the Tokoists, he associated them with the Kimbangu movement “of blacks against whites” and viewed their association with the Society as being merely incidental, finding ideas for the movement in Society publications. He supported encouraging a schism between the two movements and prepared false missives to be distributed among them to hasten discord.40

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In the meanwhile the Society’s global headquarters wrote to the authorities in Moçâmedes and to the governor-general of Angola, in April 1957, in favour of the Mankoka

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36 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Inf.15.45A, ff. 16-22; AATJ, Statement by D.M., [1971], ff. 3-5; Cunha, Aspectos..., vol. II, pp. 31-40; Santos, Movimentos..., pp. 387-389; cit. Llera Blanes, A prophetic..., pp. 71, 134; cit. AATJ, Statement by J. Mankoka, [1971], f. 7. Mankoka and his companions tried to solve the dispute for a few months but their efforts proved in vain (AATJ, Circular by J. Mankoka et al., 8.3.1956, ff. 1-4). In a recent biography of Toko, the author mentions oral information according to which Mankoka later returned to Tokoism. This is either a rumour or a contemporary reconstruction of the remote memory of these attempts to unite the group, as there is no documentary proof of this fact (Llera Blanes, A prophetic..., p. 100; TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Sec.781, ff. 71-73).

37 Silva Carvalho’s administration came to an end and in relation to local religious issues he had always voiced an interest in properly understanding all the aspects involved before taking more drastic decisions, as can be seen with the process surrounding Toko’s entry into the colony in 1950.

38 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Inf.15.45A, f. 32; Santos, Movimentos..., pp. 389-391; Cunha, Aspectos..., vol. II, pp. 38-39.

39 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Inf.15.45A, ff. 31-35; Santos, Movimentos..., pp. 390-391; Cunha, Aspectos..., vol. II, pp. 40-41.

40 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Inf.15.45A, ff. 37-45.

41 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Inf.15.45A, ff. 46-47.

42 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA Inf.15.45A, ff. 310-312; DelA P.Inf.15.45B, f. 330; DelA P.Inf.15.46A, f. 192; Cunha, Aspectos..., vol. II, p. 72.
group, as his sentence had been extended by two years, allegedly because they were now part of the Society. In June, the missionary couple was detected and expelled from the colony. They said that the local police commissioner associated them with the ‘Watch Tower Movements’ in Central Africa. Later, the commissioner stated that Passlow had indicated that officially allowing the Society’s missionaries to enter, as the British colonial authorities had allowed relatively successfully after 1945, would prevent groups such as the Tokoists from emerging, thus assuming that, in their view, Tokoismo had the characteristics of a ‘Watch Tower Movement’.\(^{43}\)

A European citizen, Manuel Gonçalves Vieira, then took over coordinating the fragile and reduced group of followers. In October the summary of their activities in Angola was limited to about 30 individuals, scattered over Luanda, Novo Redondo, Ambiz, Lobito, Benguela and Moçamedes. In March 1958, the Society asked the governor-general for permission to establish a mission in the colony to avoid the injustices that followers and sympathisers suffered, but did not get a reply.\(^{44}\)

A characteristic of the Luanda group that concerned the PIDE, especially after the group was reinforced by Mankoka and other ex-Tokoists, freed in April 1958, was the fact that Europeans and Africans mingled together at their meetings. Informers at the heart of the group kept the PIDE abreast of the group’s strategy. This enabled the PIDE to prevent a foreign superintendent sent by the Society, Harry Arnott, from being able to contact the group, as he was detained at the airport. After this event, the PIDE director, Aníbal de São José Lopes, summoned Gonçalves, in February 1959, to make a statement after raiding his house, since he wanted to know about links with the Society’s followers who had been deported from Mozambique to the island of Sáo Tomé. The director also informed Vieira that he was waiting for an opinion from the governor-general regarding a report about the Society’s publications before implementing further repressive measures. Lopes told Gonçalves that the group should not hold mixed meetings, which was later implemented with some exceptions. This policy of segregation sought to limit spaces for multiracial interaction and was in stark contrast to the propaganda of integration and multiracial relations the Portuguese promoted in the tropical colonies.\(^{45}\)

### The Society’s Theoretical Framework in the Colonial World View

The secret police was sent to the colonies in 1954 although it was only officially installed with the functions of a political police in 1957. In Angola it gathered information compiled by local police and military authorities, which, in the case of the Society, included cases, articles, reports and proposals for actions with regard to a large variety of movements, from Tokoismo to Kitawala, including Kimbanguism and the “Saints”, supplemented by data provided by the Belgian police services (who in their turn resorted in 1956 to the British administration in Rhodesia and Nyasaland to obtain information about the eventual benefits of using WTBTS missionaries to contain the expansion of the Watch Tower Movements), by means of trans-colonial cooperation. Portuguese colonial agents saw connections to the Society in many heterodox religious phenomena, emulating a 1954 report by the Belgian Sûreté about the Kitawala movement. In Luanda, the Society’s publications were read, studied and underlined by the authorities from the mid-1950s onward, particularly the sections of the annual reports concerning African territories, evangelisation experiences and statistical data, in order to study their *modus operandi*. When the Passlows were expelled from Luanda, the local police translated all the correspondence in English seized from the missionaries, not just regarding religious matters but also commercial and personal documents. All the information about the Society’s activities were then compiled and organised thematically and chronologically.\(^{46}\)

The accumulation of information, much of it provided by informers and the colonial apparatus, which saw subversion everywhere, did not necessarily signify a better capacity for systematisation and analysis. There was a lot of information of dubious value, such as the
report that Kitawala had been brought from Brazil, or that John Cooke, who had been born in Bombay, along with a Tokoist who had served in the military in Goa, could be part of an initiative by the Indian Union to take Portuguese India away from the Empire, etc. 47

The regime’s need to further its knowledge about religious movements in a more solid manner resulted in the creation, in 1957, of a Mission to Study Associative Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa (Missão de Estudos dos Movimentos Associativos na África Negra). The person responsible for this initiative in Mozambique was Afonso Ferraz Freitas. 48 In Angola, it was Silva Cunha, who was a professor at the Institute for Overseas Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos), in Lisbon, responsible for training colonial administrative staff and, later, Minister for Overseas Affairs between 1965 and 1973. Silva Cunha conducted two missions in Angola (one in 1956, even before the initiative was officialised, and another in 1957) and a mission in Guinea, in 1958. In Angola, Silva Cunha had access to colonial, administrative, military and police archives, and interviewed diverse people at various levels of the colonial administration, missionaries, etc. 49

In his reports, Silva Cunha quoted social scientists, such as George Balandier, to prove that African religious innovations were a direct precursor to modern nationalism, in his anxiety to confer scientific respectability on his conclusions. This “colonial science” was later used to suppress its objects of study, being widely cited by the police, military and judicial authorities to justify their actions. 50

When Silva Cunha interviewed Captain Pestana de Vasconcelos, one of the authors of reports describing the communist infiltration of religious movements, at the military headquarters in Angola in July 1957, Vasconcelos informed him that the Ministry of Defence in Lisbon believed that “Tokoism and Watch Tower” were the same thing. Vasconcelos did not share this view. However, he felt that the territories in Africa with the largest concentration of Jehovah’s Witnesses were now independent or well on the way to achieving independence, clearly alluding to how dangerous it would be to let them stay in Angola. Another of the individuals Silva Cunha interviewed had a different opinion: the police commander of Luanda, who had been involved in the expulsion of the Passlows, felt that Tokoism was “directly derived from the Watch Tower Movement”. 51

However, confusion reigned even among the Catholic spectrum. A symptom of this was the brochure entitled Who are they? Jehovah’s Witnesses’ (Followers of Simão Toko, so to speak), published by the Catholic Mission in Carmona, Sanza Pombo and Quimbele, in July 1956, with a print run of more than 3,000 copies. The police confiscated the publication to prevent any resulting curiosity from further disseminating these ideas. 52

At the end of the 1950s, the police and military authorities and theoreticians examining religious movements in the Portuguese colonies had already arrived at their conclusions, which endured until the regime ended, in 1974. While Toko preached discipline and zeal in relation to work, learning capacities which could be useful in a future ushered in by an African redeemer, and passivity and submission to colonial authorities (although rejecting some fiscal and labour stipulations), Silva Cunha interpreted everything as an effort to win over the authorities and conceal veiled objectives of promoting a revolt. Religious self-sufficiency, a religious semi-revolt and the development of an independent organisation at a national level which was not just limited to its original ethnicity, albeit still being racially exclusive, enabled the Tokoists to escape the shackles of tight colonial control over associations. 53 Other pro-regime authors shared Cunha’s opinion: a Catholic priest even
viewed Tokoism as a set of “Messianic and prophetic tendencies, with revolutionary reactions”. 54

As for the Society’s followers in Angola who, it should be recalled, had a fragile structure of theological instruction owing to the limitations imposed by the authorities with regard to the entry of authorised representatives, Silva Cunha recognised, in 1959, that the “rudimentary Angolan congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses has remained within the Brooklyn canons” (alluding to the movement’s headquarters). However, its expansion could constitute a threat since their “doctrine of rebelling against the established order” was “easily accepted among the locals”. Cunha assumed that the expansion of “religious reaction movements typical of the Africans” would be limited to their ethnic group. He was instead more worried about the universalist aspirations of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, as he believed they made it possible “to unify all the aspirations of revolt that the reactionary movements manifested”, giving rise to a “unified front of extremely dangerous anti-Portuguese action”. If an “Africanisation of the movement” took place among the Baio da Tigras group, Cunha was of the view that a situation similar to what had occurred in the Belgian Congo with the Kitawala movement could occur, i.e. a hybrid movement could be created, with the potential to be used for political purposes, when viewed through the prism of the colonisers. 55

Irrespective of hypothetical doctrinal deviations, Cunha had affirmed as early as 1955, that in itself, from the “social and political point of view, the [Jehovah’s Witnesses] doctrine is dangerous, since it results in permanent rebellion against all constituted authority, by virtue of considering them to be solely a product of the forces of evil”. 56 As mentioned in the introduction, this interpretation by Cunha was derived from the concept of neutrality defended by the Witnesses with regard to secular authorities. Their refusal to obey laws which they believed conflicted with a linear reading of Biblical principles and their aloofness concerning human governments, which they believed to be rooted in the spirit of independence promoted by Satan, caused the mentors of colonial ideology to fear that if a governmental law was disobeyed, others would also soon be disregarded in short order. Apart from this, their refusal to support the Portuguese colonising and civilising project in Africa and their proclamation of the advent of a heavenly government that would end social injustices made them personas non gratae and voices to be suppressed so as not to diminish the morale of the regime’s active forces. Cunha suggested that the policy which should be followed to counter such movements should include repression and eliminating factors promoting them, such as the disintegration of traditional societies due to the diffusion of European culture. In order to facilitate the integration of the Africans and, thus discipline them, it was essential for the Catholic faith to be assimilated, this being the responsibility of the State and missions. In this rationale, there was no justification for reflections on or self-criticism of colonialism, only an intention to implement it more effectively. 57

There was no room in dictatorial Portugal for new religious movements which could snatch away members of churches which had been established over centuries, especially the Catholic church. In this context religious dissidence was similar to political activism. If an African Protestant was traditionally viewed as an agent of denationalisation, the minorities examined in this study worried the colonial authorities even more, as they were suspicious of...

54 Estermann, “O Tocoísmo...”, p. 334. There are other coeval articles by Catholic missionaries with an adverse judgement of what they call “sects” with camouflaged communist motives (Pintassilgo, António Rodrigues, “Seitas Secretas no Congo”, Portugal em África, X (60), 1953, pp. 368-369; Oliveira, Herculano de, “Religiões Acatólicas em Angola”, Portugal em África, XIII (73), 1956, pp. 39-47). Ernesto Domingues was particularly incisive. At a conference in 1960, he criticised the ‘importation’ of Tokoism in 1950 which had penetrated Angola in a “sinister manner”, and alluded to “A stock of excommunicated people, who are the anarchists of the Watch Tower” [i.e., the WTBTS], referring to Cooke’s visit to the colony in 1955 (“A conjuntura religiosa em África”, in Colóquios de Política Internacional, Lisbon: JIU, 1960, pp. 206-208). He later wrote fiercely against the permissiveness of the authorities who allowed Tokoists and Witnesses to continue to be active (“Introdução ao estudo das seitas políticas de Angola”, Missões, 16 (3), 1963, pp. 5-21). He also compiled diverse articles on Tokoism, which he published in his periodical Missões, as well as other classified reports he was able to access, and sent them to the Angola Information Centralisation and Coordination Services (SCCIA), proposing harsh measures to thwart their progress, denouncing the leniency shown by the authorities. His role in the renewed repression of Tokoism which ensued has yet to be assessed (TT, SCCIA, 262, ff. 60-107).

55 Cunha, Aspectos..., Vol. II, p. 73. This notion is also evident in a report by the Higher Inspectorate of the Overseas Administration related to Angola in 1944, sent by Inspector Nunes de Oliveira to the Minister for the Colonies, Marcello Caetano (future head of the Portuguese government, between 1968 and 1974). A section is dedicated to a revolt that occurred in 1944, in Elisabethville in Belgian Congo, the inspector having concluded that, “A sect of fanatic natives known as the Kitwala [sic] played a predominant role” (AHU, MU/ISUA, A2.01.002.012.000007, p. 227).


57 Cunha, Movimentos..., pp. 49-51.
the subversive potential of a direct interpretation of the Scriptures without suitable supervision. That is why, in December 1956, the governor-general’s office advised all the colonial authorities to seize a magazine published by the Society, because it believed that an article in it attacked Catholicism as well as the Portuguese regime, by describing the latter as “dictatorial” in a report on the presence of Portuguese Jehovah’s Witnesses at a Convention in Paris, in 1955.58

A close relationship was thus established between “terror and colonial knowledge”, insofar as much of what was produced in the field of anthropological studies sought to, “ascertain responsibilities in the context of rebellions and the use of the indígenato policy, as well as that of the civil and military authorities; finding patterns to explain revolts; and, through the latter, enable a range of political options for the State”, which would be precipitated in 1961.59

1961: Repression in Luanda

1961 was a year of crisis for the Portuguese dictatorship. In January, labourers in the cotton plantations of northern Angola revolted against the compulsory working conditions to which they were subjected. In the same month, opponents of the regime hijacked a packet boat belonging to the Colonial Shipping Company, exposing the regime’s nature internationally. In February, the São Paulo jail in Luanda was attacked and, in March, an armed uprising by locals caused chaos in the colony’s northern regions. This was followed by an unsuccessful attempt at a coup d’état in April, headed by the Minister of Defence. The year ended with the loss of Goa to the Indian Union, after a military invasion in December. Not only did Portugal not receive the support it expected from its traditional allies but it also saw the USA vote against it at the United Nations that year and suggest a process of self-determination for overseas territories in the medium term. The Portuguese government opted for an attitude of resolutely defending its colonies against everything and everyone.60

The events that occurred in Angola in 1961 assumed a singular dimension. Rebels operating under the aegis of the UPA (Union of the People of Angola) against the Portuguese colonial system slaughtered entire families of colonists and Africans who worked with them in the northern plantations, resorting to methods that traumatised public opinion. The victims, who ran into several hundred, were frequently subjected to cruel treatment: quartered with machetes, burnt and sawn into pieces while alive, creating a climate of profound insecurity and fuelling the colonists’ suspicions of Africans. In Luanda, far removed from the clashes, the news of the atrocities and the testimonies of the survivors who began to stream into the city caused widespread panic, after the recent events of the previous months when the prison had been attacked. Every local was now a potential terrorist and many injustices were perpetrated by colonist militias.61

Some sections of the Angolan press and books accused non-Catholic religions of being actively involved in the massacres62, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses, “a socially pernicious anti-Christian sect”.63 Using truncated quotes taken out of context from Society publications, the Society was accused of inciting and justifying the massacres, of being anti-European and creating “political sects” as a religious disguise for communist movements such as the Kitawala movement and Tokoism and having close ties with African nationalist movements.64

The main source for these assertions was the acritical reproduction of Silva Cunha’s pseudo-scientific studies on associative religious movements, which, after gaining acceptance in colonial police circles, also began to be used in journalistic reports and academic works and studies supporting the regime, not only until the regime collapsed in 1974 but even beyond its demise, reappearing decades later in retrospective studies of former political leaders, members of the political police, the army and the colonial apparatus, often plagiarising Silva Cunha without credit, and occasionally wrapped in the respectability of articles published in university journals.

The Luanda congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses was split into four groups so as not to be conspicuous, especially after the conflict began. Correspondence with the South African branch stopped in late 1959, the clandestine branch in Lisbon being chosen instead, owing to the systematic violation of correspondence in the postal system. Evangelisation was limited to suburbs and known individuals, in an informal environment, among families and at work, instead of going from house to house. Believers held weekly meetings in private homes, inviting their guests as part of their evangelising activities. Some people discovered these meetings hearing the chants that were sung and entered. It seems that one of the attractions was the unusual possibility of those who were present being able to ask questions after the meetings. In the Catholic Church, learning was characterised by a passive attitude of receiving teachings. The liturgy was presented in Latin and only some chants were in Portuguese, with even fewer being in vernacular languages.

In a climate of heightened suspicion and tension after the conflict broke out in such tragic circumstances for the colonists, it is easy to understand why groups of Africans who met to consider religious themes were very inconvenient for the regime. On 25 June 1961, one of the groups was detained by the Military Police under the PID’s supervision during a meeting in the Sambizanga musseque. About 30 men, including a few who had nothing to do with the meeting but had simply been in the area, were detained and brutally beaten. The women and children were released. The subject being contemplated at that meeting had been “A demonstration of unity in a divided world”, which had been studied for weeks in Portuguese, Kimbailundu and Kimbundu, since, as Mankoka stated during the interrogations to which he was subjected, “It was a lesson teaching love among Christians without racial discrimination or any political objectives”.

The detainees were later taken to the São Paulo jail, where they were held for five months and subjected to frequent interrogations. New arrests were made after further investigations. Many of the answers in the interrogations seemed at first sight to be replicating each other, but reading between the lines of police brevity, interested in highlighting their own interpretation of events, sometimes in an abusive manner, it is possible to discern some nuances, among a group of individuals which were in different stages of the
learning and maturing of their beliefs. Almost all of them were unmarried and the majority worked in traditional professions and trades, some as apprentices or assistants (typographers, masons, locksmiths, carpenters, cobblers, painters, lottery ticket sellers, etc.). Only two were students. Most of them were youths, with an average age of 25 years. The overwhelming majority (17) of those who really were Jehovah’s Witnesses came from Ambriz and Ambrizete (nowadays Nzeto), four were from Luanda, two from North Kwanza and one from Makela do Zombo (the leader João Mankoka). Almost all the followers were recent converts, going by their statements, with a few months to less than two years of indoctrination. Four of the detainees were freed after their interrogation because they proved that they were only in the vicinity at the time of the raid and because the PIDE did not believe them to be actively involved in the religion as they had been arrested after the investigations.

They were accused of, “Belonging to a clandestine organisation aiming to achieve independence for Angola”. Mankoka defended himself, affirming that he did not allow politics, i.e. communism, to be discussed during the meetings. A month later he explained that he had never been involved in politics and that was precisely why he had split from Toko, “As he had wanted to give his religion a political slant, to such an extent that he only admitted Negroes into his religion”. Although the PIDE confessed that it had not found any indications of criminal behaviour the neutrality of the Jehovah’s Witnesses was considered to be pernicious, since it “would enable many individuals to escape their military duties, betraying their country” as they refused to fight. It was feared they could be subverted from the outside, especially because Mankoka confirmed that unknown individuals occasionally frequented the meetings and nothing was known about their intentions. At the meetings some individuals asked questions about the national flag and military service, but Mankoka emphasised that his clarifications did not have any political connotations. The Witnesses’ concept of neutrality is clearly evident. Mankoka thought that the fact that he sought to keep the meetings focused on the Bible, even in the context of thorny issues, was equivalent to being considered apolitical, however, at this point, simply being neutral was deemed to be political. The authorities did not conceive of such a position of neutrality, not just because they sought support from all sections of society, including the colonised, to pursue the Portuguese civilising mission in Angola, but above all because during a period of war such questions themselves were equivalent to an attack on national sovereignty: to allow “locals without the necessary intellectual preparation to meet to take care of matters that were of no interest for the common good” threatened the territory’s sovereignty. What was required of them was an obedient colonised people, grateful for the Portuguese mission. Furthermore, for the PIDE, merely questioning Catholic principles and sacraments was equivalent to sowing the seeds for forming political communities.

The governor of Angola, General Venâncio Deslandes, ratified the sentencing of Jehovah’s Witnesses to penalties of two to three years of fixed residence, which in some cases were extended sine die, one of them even reaching eight years. In practice, they were destined for forced labour and physical mistreatment.

1961: The PIDE’s vision from Lisbon

In May 1961, a report prepared by the PIDE’s Overseas Office in Lisbon voiced the notion that the Comintern was agitating the masses in Africa in association with the American Committee on Africa (ACA) and the “WATCH TOWER”. When the governor of Angola sent information to the PIDE in Lisbon six months later suggesting that the Soviet Union was permitting Baptist churches because of their subversive activities in Africa, similarly linking the American Baptists to the ACA, the PIDE director, Colonel Homero de Matos, prepared a dispatch establishing a link between the Jehovah’s Witnesses and a global anti-Portuguese conspiracy. In this dispatch he identified the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church as being

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* TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 439/61.
* TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 439/61, ff. 23v, 94.
* TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 439/61, ff. 36, 94v.
* TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 439/61, ff. 106-109; Yearbook…1983, pp. 177-179. It is important to note what happened with a former Tokoiist, Carlos Cadi, who was part of the Society in 1956. He worked as a nurse in Quibaxe when he saw the farm where he lived being invaded by UPA rebels in 1961 and fled with other locals until he encountered Portuguese troops. Although it was proved that he had helped save some Bailundu children amidst the chaos, he was arrested for more than a year owing to his religious background and as he had a drawing of the infirmary in Baía dos Tigres with him (TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 223/62).
a senior KGB official, affirming that Orthodox Christians were friends of the Baptists and that these churches were connected with Jehovah’s Witnesses in the USA (an unlikely link since the Society criticised all other organised religions). However, Matos believed that the ACA was controlling everything and that the majority of the members of those organisations were unaware of the pro-communist intentions of their leaders. It seems that for Matos all non-Catholic religious organisations were, or could be, part of a global plot funded by the Soviet communists to eliminate the Portuguese regime, followed by all of western civilisation.74

In light of this conviction and all the information compiled by the information services, when the first conscientious objector who was a Jehovah’s Witness appeared in Portugal, in early 1962 the PIDE deported the three foreign missionary couples who were in Portugal and the Society’s publications were banned throughout the Empire. Subsequent protests by the Portuguese leaders of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Lisbon, as well as by various foreign branches of the Society, against what had happened in Luanda in 1961 and in Lisbon in 1962 did not have any effect. The international dimension of the Society’s protest caused the authorities to be even more convinced of the danger they posed.75

In November 1962, the Home Ministry issued a circular for the civil governments based on a report which deemed the Witnesses to be responsible for a series of brutal murders in Congo and accused them of denationalising Angolan refugees in Congo and helping freedom movements. This information even reached the ears of Salazar himself. The authorities were now armed with solid arguments: Jehovah’s Witnesses supported “terrorists” in Angola, rejected nationalist values as they repudiated Catholicism and defended non-belligerence when the nation was at war. The ministry encouraged energetic actions to prevent the diffusion of their beliefs in Portugal, even though a year later the PIDE had ascertained that the news of the murders was not true.76

1963: Officially Banned

In light of the significant impact of the detention of the Sambizanga group in 1961, there was a decline in the activities of the Witnesses during the subsequent period. Only a few dozen members met sporadically in Luanda, many of them only in a family environment, whether among Europeans or among Africans, with few publications and a rudimentary familiarity with the Society’s methodologies for conducting meetings and carrying out evangelical activities.77

Silvino Silvério Marques, governor of Angola since 1962, suspected the subversive potential of religious meetings. Given that the Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to evangelise and meet for religious worship, he issued a dispatch on 22.10.1963 officially banning them in Angola, along with the Bahá’í religion, as they “opposed the concept of nationality and constitute a threat for the State’s security, insofar as the dissemination of the doctrine could create a widespread desire for anarchy”. Henceforth, the norm would be to repatriate Portuguese leaders to Portugal and to send Africans to forced labour camps, from where they could ideally emerge only if they had changed their convictions.78

This radical attitude was precipitated due to two unconnected events. The first involved five Africans who, in Alto Catumbela (Lobito), abandoned the Philafricaine evangelical mission in Ebanga after one of them came into contact with the Society’s doctrine by reading anti-Jehovah’s Witnesses articles and an exchange of correspondence published in a Protestant journal, in 1960. They subsequently contacted the Society in Lisbon and began to receive their publications. They affirmed themselves to be Jehovah’s Witnesses and met almost every day, albeit without ever having been indoctrinated by a Witness. Their contact in Lisbon encouraged them to preach what they learnt from the publications to others and they were even counted as members of the confession, which was an unusual procedure. In 1963, Samuel Stauffer, superior of the Ebanga mission, complained to the colonial authorities in the district of Ganda that the lack of interest on the part of some of his flock was due to the Tokoists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, which, coupled with a letter penned by Rodolphe Bréchet,

75 Pinto, “As Testemunhas…”, pp. 164-165.
76 Pinto, “As Testemunhas…”, p. 165.
77 AATJ, Statement by D.M. [1971], f. 7.
78 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.45B, ff. 32, 48-51, 57; DelA P.Inf.15.45D, f. 108; DelA P.Inf.13.29A/14, ff. 69-70.
from the same mission, about the political and social danger posed by the Witnesses, alerted the local authorities.79

When they became aware of the complaint, all the five individuals presented themselves of their own accord to the authorities in the district of Ganda to defend the “inoffensive nature of the doctrine” they professed, stating that they were only meeting to study the Bible and that they would like to have permission to do so, just like the Tokoists had. They were unaware of the Society’s hubs in Baia dos Tigres and in Moçâmbedes. The administrator listened to them and sent them home, to gain time, telling them that he would present the request to the governor. When Silvério Marques was informed of this new group which had emerged spontaneously he issued orders stating that, “It would be opportune to eliminate this sect immediately”. All the biblical literature they had was then seized and they were banned from meeting. They were subsequently detained. It is not surprising that their answers during the interrogations showed little knowledge of basic doctrines, since they had not been subjected to personalised indoctrination. However, they knew the regime’s sensitive points and hence sought to mislead the authorities when they affirmed that they were unaware of the doctrine’s position on the national flag and military service, giving answers which they thought would satisfy their interrogators. Under the pressure of successive interrogations by the PIDE, who were suspicious of such an unusual group of Witnesses who hailed the flag, the prisoners ended up by acknowledging that they thought they would thus be released from prison sooner. Despite their bizarre unofficial status, the authorities acted with the same determination and banished them, in April 1964, “for a period liable to make them forget the doctrine”, i.e. for one to two years.80

The second event also took place in 1963, on 14 October. A Portuguese couple who had been sent from Lisbon to Luanda to reorganise activities was detained after a complaint of door to door preaching. Two other Europeans were also held, including Vieira, who had coordinated the European group since 1957. The PIDE considered them to be members of a political-religious organisation, thus discrediting their alleged neutrality. The Jehovah’s Witnesses had a well organised structure behind the dissemination of their doctrines and always sought to standardise the religious practices of their communities in any part of the world. In Luanda preaching was not systematically carried out among the Europeans in the city. There was only an extremely rudimentary knowledge of the movement’s organisational procedures. Instead of the habitual three weekly meetings only one meeting was held regularly. The new leader established a training programme for all facets of evangelisation and meetings began to be held according to a regular schedule. In Luanda, about 100 individuals began to attend the meetings, up from an initial number of 18 members. The PIDE viewed this as an attempt to reactivate the movement and took action. Eight days later the governor issued the aforesaid Secret Dispatch No. 76, banning the Witnesses and providing the legal context for the PIDE to act effectively against the Society’s followers.81

For the first time the PIDE had direct contact with the way in which the Witnesses were organised: blocks divided into charts to systematically cover the territory, indicating what had already been covered; meetings to train disciples with personalised attention; reports concerning evangelisation activities; the use of numeric codes to refer to members; diverse forms to be filled, etc. In his proposal to the governor to extend the period of preventive detention Inspector Varatojo confessed that he was dealing with a “complex organisation” carrying out “exceptionally dangerous” activities. Thus, by virtue of the governmental dispatch he recommended that European prevaricators be expelled, thus once again decimating the movement’s local leadership. The governor approved this proposal on 21.1.1964.82

Reactions to the Repression

During the 1960s the Society suggested to its followers around the world that they write letters to authorities, institutions and individuals in countries where their brethren in the faith were being persecuted. The international exposure of persecution in its weekly

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80 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 208/63, Vol.2, ff. 55-71; DelA P.Inf.15.45B, f. 57. It was around this time, in July 1963, that Toko was extradited from Angola to an island in the Azores, within the scope of the governor’s repression of everything that was considered to be subversive (Llera Blanes, A Prophetic..., pp. 84-86).
81 Pinto, “As Testemunhas…”, p. 159; AATJ, Statement by M.S., 30.12.70, f. 1; Statement by D.M., [1971], f. 7.
82 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 343/63, Vol.1, ff. 74-90; Vol.4, ff. 87, 97-100.
publications sought to alleviate pressure on their coreligionists, obliging international
chancelleries to have to deal with questions from the media and the interminable
correspondence addressed to them.

For example, in late 1963, the PIDE in Luanda found, among the belongings of the
aforesaid Portuguese couple detained in October, a draft of a letter addressed to the Spanish
dictator, General Franco. When questioned in this regard, the prisoner predicted that the
same thing would happen in Portugal. In May 1964, the Society launched its first international
campaign on the persecution in Portugal and Angola. The thousands of letters which arrived
at Portuguese diplomatic missions around the world caused increased repression in Portugal
and resulted in an official ban in October that year. A new campaign took place in 1966, at a
time when a congregation of Witnesses was being judged in Portugal at a special tribunal
dedicated to the regime’s political enemies. From November 1966 to January 1967 a large
number of letters were sent to Angola from the USA, Canada, Germany, Brazil and England,
among other nations, especially to commercial companies, containing a pamphlet that
exposed the alleged injustices committed during the trial in Lisbon. A new campaign later
emerged, this time spearheaded by Amnesty International, which in 1970 began to pressure
the Portuguese authorities by sending hundreds of signatures urging that Jehovah’s Witnesses
incarcerated in forced labour camps in Mozambique and Angola be freed. This initiative was
dismissed by the regime, which felt that Amnesty International was close to communism, a
common reaction by the regime when faced by any criticism of its acts.83

On the ground, during the 1960s and 1970s, the Witnesses began to be careful with
invitations to people to attend their meetings held in private houses, since any unauthorised
meeting was viewed suspiciously by the authorities. The location of meetings was often
changed and they began to have watchmen ready to alert followers of any imminent threat.
Nevertheless, it was difficult to balance the need to disseminate the doctrine to others with the
precautions that were necessary to avoid situations that could lead to complaints. For
example, in 1966, there are records of how plainclothes policemen read a Society publication
in public to encourage contact by less astute Jehovah’s Witnesses.84

**Everyday Life in Prisons and Forced Labour Camps**

At the end of 1963, 37 Witnesses were serving sentences banishing them to the
district of Moçâmedes, at a time when the number of followers in the colony ranged between
35 and 58, which meant that the organisation was virtually inactive outside a prison
environment.85

According to some testimonies compiled during the 1970s, those who were
euphemistically sentenced in administrative terms to “measures to establish residence”, an
illegal practice under prevailing legislation, were actually being sentenced to forced labour
within the colonial system in camps where torture, violence and indiscriminate deaths were
common occurrences.86 One follower recalled how he was deported to Moçâmedes in the
cargo hold of a ship and worked to load and unload minerals at that port while awaiting a
definitive destination, having later been assigned to build roads for three months. He was
then sent to a jail in Moçâmedes, from where he was transported, along with other followers,
in cargo wagons on trains bound for the Missombo Labour Camp, some 700 km away. There
they chopped down trees, dug irrigation channels, built houses etc. When the camp was
disbanded in 1966, fearing that guerrilla fighters could attack the vicinity, the prisoners were
transferred to the São Nicolau Labour Camp. The camps sought to rehabilitate prisoners
ideologically and hence, despite their good behaviour, their religious obstinacy prevented
their release. In some cases, they were detained for years beyond the initial sentence.87

Even while in prison, Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to preach, most of them with
renewed zeal as they deemed persecution to be the hallmark of true Christianity (although
there are also records of followers who gave up the religion). Some speeches were held when
the group which had been arrested in 1961 was at the São Paulo jail in Luanda and some
prisoners converted.88

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83 Pinto, “As Testemunhas...”, pp. 167-173; TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.16.42E, f. 25; DelA P.Inf.16.42F, f. 29; SC CI(2)
1078.
84 AATJ, Statement by D.M. [1971], f. 10; Yearbook...2001, p. 82; Yearbook...1967, p. 252.
85 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.16.42E, f. 25; DelA P.Inf.16.42F, f. 29; Yearbook...1964.
86 Mateus, A PIDE/DGS..., pp. 120-151.
The prisoners managed to access the Society’s publications with a greater or lesser degree of difficulty in the prisons and camps. In the São Paulo jail in Luanda, the paper family members used to wrap the food they sent prisoners actually consisted of pages from the Society’s publications. The authorities were obliged to occasionally carry out raids within the camps and isolate the more evangelical followers, resorting to intimidation or using Catholic and Protestant priests to convince Jehovah’s Witnesses to abjure. They also provided works written by the Society’s opponents and even offered to release some followers if they signed a statement renouncing the faith, akin to practices followed in Nazi camps. Some prisoners agreed but the authorities often did not carry out their part of the bargain, suspecting the sincerity of those who signed such statements. The authorities continued to be paranoid and fearful of conspiracies. For example, in March 1964, the PIDE in Luanda feared that an alliance was being formed at the Missombo camp among Tokoists, Kimbanguists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, along with “individuals who had been imprisoned for subversive activities against State security, to constitute one or more organisations aimed at carrying out those activities, in association with one or more external movements, which everything indicates is the MPLA”.

Conscientious Objections to Military Service

Conscientious objection to military service was a logical consequence of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ ideals of neutrality and was the aspect that the colonial authorities feared the most, especially after the Angolan conflict broke out in 1961. The police were well aware of the resolute attitude of the Society’s followers during World War II in Nazi Germany. At the time when one of the Luanda groups was arrested in 1961 the police discovered that some of the individuals who attended the meetings raised questions about military service, which was understandable in light of the conflict that had been declared in the northern area of the province and indicated an inevitable use of indigenous troops. Mankoka claimed to have answered one of them saying that “Whether or not any brother is to render military service to defend the homeland depends on the degree of faith acquired previously [...] as well as each individual’s criteria to take up arms or not”. The PIDE voiced its fears in writing towards the end of the report: it would be a risk to give weapons to the locals as they could become traitors, refusing to confront the enemy or even handing their weapons over to them.

The 1963 case against three European Witnesses included a 24 year old youth who had come into contact with the Society’s doctrines while a recruit in Portugal. He then adopted a position of strict neutrality and was successively subjected to military discipline after he was sent by the military to Angola. This was the regime’s greatest fear, the dissemination of non-belligerent ideals in barracks. The police became even more worried after finding a list of subscribers to the Society’s publications with this young Witness, which included many of his former comrades. The youth acknowledged that he shared his new life principles with his colleagues, but denied that he had imposed them as a norm to be followed, limiting himself to citing the Bible and saying that each individual should adopt their own criterion. The fact that he had repeatedly acted in this manner in the various places through which he travelled in the colony’s northern areas made it abundantly clear to the investigators that it was time to end this situation. Even though the prisoner reaffirmed his love for the nation and his appreciation for all things Portuguese, the PIDE felt that the Witnesses did not “esteem or inculcate patriotism as a natural sentiment in all people”, contributing towards “disrupting the National Unity that is so necessary in the current scenario”. The PIDE’s irritation is evident in the unusual formulation of some questions. They asked M.S. “If he had already disseminated or tried to disseminate his doctrines among the terrorists who still plague some regions to the north of this province or if on the contrary he disseminated them more comfortably among white Portuguese in this city of Luanda”. When he refused to provide the names of other believers, the PIDE told him that his answer was “very similar to the answers militants of the so-called “Portuguese Communist Party” habitually gave when questioned about their organisation and intended purposes”.

There are few known cases of Angolan Witnesses who presented themselves officially as conscientious objectors. On the one hand the Society always had a relatively small number

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82 TT, PIDE/DGS, DeLA PC 439/61, ff. 36, 102.
of followers and there were even fewer youths at a military age. On the other hand widespread conscription had not been introduced. During the early stages of the conflict it was feared that African troops could go over to the enemy, but the armed forces inevitably became increasingly African, not just to serve as propaganda for a racially diverse colonial society united against a common enemy but also for practical reasons. The State budget dedicated 40%-50% of its funds to the war effort and it was understood that the colonies should be self-sufficient. It was also cheaper to train local troops rather than to send them from Portugal, where, over the course of time, human resources became increasingly scarce (many emigrated to escape conscription). In 1974, about half the troops were constituted by Africans.93

The first known case of a Jehovah’s Witness being a conscientious objector in Angola dates from 1969. There were only a handful of such cases up to 1974, but they were treated harshly. They were joined by some of their spiritual brethren from Portugal, who were sent by plane to Guinea and Angola to serve as military recruits by force. Some were taken to the jungle, to battle fronts without weapons and placed before troops. Others were beaten, tortured and sent to forced labour camps.94

1964-1974: The Final Years of Portuguese Rule

In late 1963, despite the shortage of literature there were two groups in the musseques of Luanda, totalling about 40 followers, and a total of about 60 followers in the entire colony.95 Despite the repression and forced internment of many of the most experienced believers the Society’s activities expanded progressively during subsequent years, although the numbers were always negligible when compared to other religions. From 1964 to 1968, the PIDE was more effective in its repression. The authorities feared that the former exiles would again prevaricate when they returned but the intimidation had an effect as many curtailed their evangelical activities, limiting preaching to family circles and acting more discreetly. This intimidation was clearly visible in the way the authorities acted. For example, in 1967, a group in Luanda was taken by surprise by the local police in an ostentatious operation. The agents brandished machine guns and followers were taken to the police station where they were warned that if they did not abjure they would be handed over to the PIDE the next time.96

After the Society’s unsuccessful attempt to reorganise activities in Angola in 1963, new efforts were made in 1968. A special envoy organised two African congregations and a European congregation in Luanda, at a time when the average number of active members in the colony was about 120-130 people.97

In 1969, the Luanda group was again detained and the most influential members were held in prison for three months. The authorities pressured followers to sign a commitment to limit their practices to family circles. Many signed, apparently as part of an expedient strategy until they again returned to a clandestine existence. As in the case of the Soviet persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the replies during interrogations reveal both resistance as well as compromising by believers, as well as opportunities for evangelisation. The strategies of detainees included taking responsibility in order to protect members who were essential for the local structure, or identifying names of people who had already been detained or were known to the police. However, the psychological and physical pressure by the political police, which was particularly fierce in the colonies, especially with regard to locals, resulted in the inevitable confession of names, addresses and facts leading to new arrests. Under pressure, some of those who were associated with Jehovah’s Witnesses formally abjured or stated they would no longer associate with them. Among them a few were arrested again later, in the same circumstances, and were hence subjected to more serious penalties. Abjura as a strategy was condemned internally by the religious organisation, while only the compromise to limit activities to family circles was accepted, according to instructions provided by an

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94 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PC 207/70; Yearbook... 2001, pp. 85-87; Pinto, “As Testemunhas…”, p. 161; Statement by M.A.S., f. 3-4.
95 AATJ, Statement by D.M. [1971], f. 8; Yearbook...1964.
96 Yearbook...1966, p. 229; Yearbook...1983, pp. 204, 210; TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.45E, f. 37.
97 Yearbook...1969; AATJ, Statement by D.M. [1971], f. 10.
overseer who came from Lisbon to inform followers that the results of a petition submitted to the government were expected at any moment.98

João Mankoka was finally released from prison in August 1970, being obliged to appear before the authorities every fortnight, and he revitalised the African congregation in Luanda. In a report prepared that year the SCCIA estimated that there were 100 European families who were followers of the Society and many more African families (the Society’s annual report indicated a peak of 355 active individuals in 1970). The fact that they had been banned since 1963 made it difficult for the police to monitor them, and, according to the SCCIA, the proposals that Silva Cunha had propounded in 1958-59 regarding the threat the Society represented were still valid and pertinent.99

At this time a new religious freedom law being discussed in Portugal echoed in the colonies and a police report dating from September 1970 indicated that “presently, the city of Luanda is witnessing a new wave of activities by the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” political-religious sect”. The Luanda press also described this fact and pressured the authorities. For the DGS (the new name for the political police), the Witnesses interpreted the purpose of the new law incorrectly, and, on 27.4.1971, the opinion voiced by the Corporation Chamber in Lisbon regarding the government’s diploma proved it. This document referred to the Witnesses in overseas domains, indicating they were outside the scope of the new legislation, owing to their objection to military service and, in their view, based on Silva Cunha, they were not a strictly religious organisation.100

When a youth refused to join the colonial army in February 1971, it gave the DGS an opportunity to again investigate the Society’s members, hunting for those who were responsible for such anti-patriotic behaviour. The police began to arrest members who had already been identified and interrogations persuaded the detainees to provide new names. Two months later about 40 Europeans and Africans, men, women and children, had been arrested and periodically interrogated to supply the answers the police sought, i.e. those who were instructing such youths to arrive at such decisions, since the authorities did not believe that they would have done so based on conscientious reflections as per biblical principles. The process also allowed the DGS to perfectly understand the hierarchical structure of the Society’s congregations and groups in Luanda, having identified 231 people in the course of their investigations. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Portugal intervened and used an apparent trump card, a former Angolan guerrilla fighter who had converted. However, the authorities viewed such conversions as a farce, since they believed it was clear that “terrorists” were infiltrating the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The DGS contemplated taking the group that had been detained to court, but “considered a scenario in which this could have been exploited by terrorist organisations”, given the negative experience with the case that had been judged at the Plenary Court in Lisbon in 1966. Instead it chose to dismantle the organisation, repatriating three of the Europeans who it believed were crucial for the Society in Angola back to Portugal. They sent the Africans who refused to change their ways to the forced labour camp in São Nicolau. As for the others they obtained a written statement from them agreeing to limit their worship to their family environment, on pain of banishment.101

In late 1973, when African believers, who included the experienced João Mankoka, were released, everything returned to the way it had been in the past. The family meetings soon began to include more people and, in January 1974, the police reacted once again. The supervisors of the three congregations in Luanda were detained. Considering the governor’s 1963 ban, the 1966 judicial verdict in Portugal against the movement and the fact that the Witnesses continued to, “Clash with the established social order and constitutional norms”, and that warnings and detentions had proved to be ineffective, the DGS director was of the view that, “It seems there is no room for tolerance, it being deemed necessary to continue these procedures and send the cases to court”. This opinion was sent to the General Secretariat of the Government of Angola in early March to be processed. The next phase of the clash would have been the court in Luanda. However, in the meanwhile, the Carnation Revolution occurred in Portugal in April 1974 and put an end to persecution, resulting in

98 Baran, Dissent..., pp. 52-56; Yearbook...1971; TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA PI19138, ff. 47-49; DelA PC 196/69, ff. 95-98; DelA SR 26859, f. 17.
99 TT, SCCIA, 180.
100 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.45D, f. 162; cited in PIDE/DGS, DelA SR 26859, f. 18; Pinto, “As Testemunhas...”, pp. 174-176; A Provincia de Angola, 12.12.1970.
101 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.45D, ff. 102, 139; DelA PC 61/71.
freedom of worship for Jehovah’s Witnesses, including for those who were being held in forced labour camps and were subsequently released.102

**Angola, Mozambique and Malawi: Similarities and Differences**

When one compares the persecution in Angola to what occurred in Mozambique it can be seen that the Angolan authorities were less flexible when dealing with religious differences. In Mozambique, during the 1930s and 1940s, considering the relatively low numbers of Witnesses, the norm was repression by means of deportation to other parts of the territory or to the island of São Tomé. Other views emerged during the 1950s: occasionally the heads of administrative posts in the lower echelons of the colonial structure deemed them to be inoffensive, while at one of the highest levels of the hierarchy, the administrator of the district of Lourenço Marques, who was later the director of the Mozambique Information Centralisation and Coordination Services, the aforesaid Ferraz Freitas, dedicated himself to studying such associations, with a view to compiling data about their members, beliefs and geographical diffusion. In his opinion, repression made sense but should not be applied in a disorganised manner, since it would hinder an understanding of the true dimension of the movements to be eradicated. This policy was implemented even though the police authorities did not always support it, given that the movement grew. The policy exasperated the Minister for Overseas Affairs, Silva Cunha, the theoretician par excellence of the regime with regard to religious associations, who, in 1967, reprimanded the police authorities in Mozambique for not being as effective as their counterparts in Angola. Raids became frequent after 1968, especially in the cities, as did demands that heads of families limit their worship to family circles, as was the case in Angola at the time. The political police reacted to repeated incidents by condemning several elders to administrative security measures, a euphemism for prison terms, without trial, for a more or less indeterminate period of time, according to the prevaricator’s future social readjustment.103

There is only one recent study about the experience of Jehovah’s Witnesses outside Portuguese colonial territory during the third quarter of the 20th century, namely the violent persecution meted out by the regime of Kamuzu Banda in Malawi. However, broader studies for sub-Saharan Africa make it possible to arrive at some conclusions. The early 1960s marked the progressive independence of the colonies, with the emergence of States dominated by charismatic figures based on hegemonic parties which aimed to dominate all spheres of society. According to Sholto Cross, the independent African state was often “jealous of its authority and fearful of any undermining of its monopoly over the means of persuasion and coercion, and the function of prescribing national policy. These attempts to consolidate power are often legitimized in terms of development – a commitment towards economic and social goals”. The states were thus built on fragile foundations: tribalism, a lack of unity, a widespread absence of a civic conscience and traditionally decentralised centres of authority as compared to central governments. These factors induced these new states to select new national symbols, such as flags and national anthems, as well as active participation to support increasingly dominant single parties, crucial to foment the stability and social and economic development promised before independence. When the Witnesses distanced themselves from political participation to the extent of not enrolling in single political parties, refusing to sing the national anthem or hail the national flag, withdrawing their children from schools where these acts were compulsory, or seeing their children expelled from such schools, maintaining the same principles of neutrality which they had upheld during colonial times, the new states viewed such abstention and refusal to participate in the construction of a new society as being particularly grievous, often classifying the Witnesses as enemies of society and occasionally as the ideal scapegoats for the government’s own failures to produce the social changes promised in countries where normally there was no political opposition at all. Finally, the new regimes did not tolerate what they viewed as competition at the level of public mobilisation, *viz.* the Witnesses’ evangelisation: only the party had the exclusive right to contact the masses and mobilise them with their message. The Witnesses thus became an anathema and began to be persecuted with varying degrees of intensity.104

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102 TT, PIDE/DGS, DelA P.Inf.15.45E, f. 15; DelA P.Inf.15.45D, ff. 15, 102, 139; DelA PC 18/74.
104 Fiedler, Klaus, “Power at the Receiving End: The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Experience in One Party Malawi”, in Kenneth R. Ross (ed.), *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective*, Zomba,
Many of the new African states banned their activities, such as preaching and meetings, and expelled their foreign missionaries, forcing followers to hide their religious practices. Some of them were subjected to harsh treatment, their property was destroyed, their children were expelled from school and occasionally some followers were killed in popular uprisings. Situations like these occurred with a greater or lesser level of intensity and frequency from the 1960s and 1970s onwards in practically all of independent sub-Saharan Africa. In comparison, Jehovah’s Witnesses missionaries were also expelled from Angola in 1957 and the cult progressively became a clandestine movement. Some Portuguese members were also repatriated during the 1960s and 1970s, but their properties were not confiscated nor are there recorded incidents of children being expelled from school for refusing to sing the national anthem, although this does not mean that it might not have happened as there are records of such cases in colonial Mozambique. The Portuguese authorities perpetrated their harsh treatment within the hidden confines of the prisons and forced labour camps, out of the public gaze, as the regime always sought to portray an image of legality, the absence of racism and respect for human rights.

There was a common thread that bound colonial and independent Africa, as also happened during other historical moments on other continents: when regimes sought to mobilise all their citizens towards a common nationalist objective, whether it was the creation of a new Nazi or communist society, or facing the nation’s enemies during times of war, a distancing from or refusal to support such efforts were often persecuted by the regimes, with a greater rigour and level of violence in the case of dictatorial and totalitarian regimes. In Angola, the Portuguese dictatorship went far beyond any of its other overseas territories, both in scale as well as the intensity of the repression, but it pales in comparison with the persecution the Witnesses faced in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and Malawi under Kamuzu Banda. As Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to acquire a Malawi Congress Party card they were banned and lost all civil rights. The peak of the repression occurred in 1967 and 1972, and Witnesses were expelled from the country, preceded by the theft of their crops and properties, with their houses being set on fire (even with the residents still inside), mistreatment, physical torture, rapes, quartering and murders, without any consequences for the perpetrators of such crimes, often carried out in public by henchmen of Banda’s party. Given the porosity of land borders, tens of thousands of Witnesses fled at this time to Zambia and northern Mozambique. Especially after 1972, the Portuguese authorities confined them to buffer zones, where, under the aegis of the United Nations, veritable “cities” of refugees sprang up. The Portuguese regime took advantage of this situation politically to affirm, in a delicate balance, its moral superiority as a nation accused of practising aggressive colonialism while it was taking care of refugees coming from an independent African nation.

Conclusion

In short, in the case of Angola, until 1974, repression was the norm and not the exception, with successive waves of detentions, especially of men who were the leaders of local congregations, who were sent to prisons and forced labour camps. In the final years of Portuguese rule only a few followers were allowed to practice their faith in a limited manner at home with their family, without the right to organise or attend meetings or to preach publicly. Although it is possible to discern various voices within the colonial regime in Angola, from 1950 onward in the highest echelons of the administration there was a strong conviction that the suppression of the Witnesses and religious movements which fell outside the traditional spectrum was the right path to follow, to avoid the disintegration of colonial domains.

On the one hand the presence of religious movements with an international dimension was not deemed to be desirable without it being supervised by national citizens supporting the regime. On the other hand, the authorities associated the national identity with Catholicism (even though in the regime’s final years some elements of the hierarchy


*The photos and films compiled by the Portuguese were not flaunted because Malawi was a country with which the Portuguese regime traditionally maintained good relations in an Africa that was overwhelmingly hostile to the Portuguese. When Mozambique became independent the new FRELIMO government demanded that Malawian refugees unequivocally support the political project for national reform and they consequently returned back home. At the same time it was now the Mozambican Witnesses who suffered a far fiercer persecution than they had faced with the Portuguese regime. Witnesses were rounded up in Gaza and Maputo and sent to rehabilitation camps in Zambezia (Fiedler, “Power”, pp. 149-176; Hodges, Tony, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Africa, Oxford, Minority Rights Group, 1976; Jubber, Ken, “The Persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Southern Africa”, Social Compass, XXIV (1), 1977, pp. 121-134; Cross, “Independent”, pp. 304-315).
began to distance themselves from the way the colonial project was being conducted), to the
detriment of other forms of religiosity. The Christian ideals of the Jehovah’s Witnesses for a
“new world” of racial brotherhood without oppression contrasted with the colonial reality and
were perceived, above all by colonial religious theoreticians, as an affront to national
sovereignty. This brought them closer to communism, anarchism and opposing forces, as was
believed to have happened with the Watch Tower or Kitawala Movements in Central Africa.

Conscientious objection to military service was another reason why the Witnesses
were persecuted, especially when the armed conflict broke out in 1961. Accepting this stance
promoted by the Witnesses meant transmitting a negative message with regard to the
conflict’s outcome and would be a blow to morale.

The Witnesses’ message about the imminent destruction of global political
governments at the hands of God also had a direct impact on the regime, shaking it to its core.
Advocating a Government of God was equivalent to rejecting all other forms of human
government. For a dictatorial regime such as the Portuguese state this meant accepting that
its colonial subjects contemplated and yearned for an end to its control.

Although people did not join the Jehovah’s Witnesses to resist the State their religious
practices prevented them from being integrated into the colonial system. The Portuguese
dictatorship sought to avoid the disintegration of the colonial regime and required absolute
obedience to norms in effect. This did not dovetail with the Witnesses’ doctrine, according to
which they were first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God and only then were they
Portuguese citizens, following national laws as long as they did not contradict divine laws
stipulating that people should love their fellowmen, preach the Gospel and meet with their
brothers. Their persistent determination meant that the regime deemed them to be equivalent
to political and clandestine organisations and, consequently, described them as a “political-
religious sect”.

The figures are eloquent, since the relatively low numbers of the Society’s followers
mobilised a disproportionate amount of resources within the state’s repressive mechanisms
over the course of decades. It can be said that the colonial authorities were relatively
successful in their attempts to suppress Jehovah’s Witnesses during the 1950s and 1960s,
managing to ensure that a relevant number of followers abandoned the movement or limited
their activities. In ten years, from 1956, the date when the Society’s group was formed in Baía
dos Tigres, until 1968, the Witnesses grew from a few dozen members to just over one
hundred, many of whom were constantly confined to prisons and forced labour camps. However,
their resilience and perseverance, along with their evangelisation, ended up by
yielding fruit, as the number of followers rose to almost 2000 members in 1974.

Only the April 1974 revolution would change the panorama for the Jehovah’s
Witnesses, both in Portugal as well as in the colonies, when the ban was lifted and the
followers who were in forced labour camps were released. However, shortly thereafter, the
members of this religious confession faced challenges similar to those they had faced during
the colonial dictatorship when dealing with the new regimes in the diverse territories.

\[\text{Cf. Baran, } \text{Dissent...}, \text{pp. 4-8, 38, 49.}\]
\[\text{The idea that Armageddon would occur in 1975 began to circulate informally among the Society’s members and
contributed towards an unusual growth. This belief was based on an interpretation that 1975 marked the end of 6000
years of the existence of mankind and was disseminated in the Society’s publications from 1966 onward. Although
peremptory affirmations were not made, some statements emphasised this probability (Pinto, “Jehovah’s...”, pp. 114-
116).}\]
\[\text{In Luanda, independence meant that they could hold an assembly, where 7,713 Europeans and Africans met in
mid-1975. The transitional government legally recognised the Witnesses on 5.9.1975 (Yearbook...2001, pp. 87-127).}\]
\[\text{In Angola, the civil war which began in 1975 forced the majority of European followers to return to Portugal and
placed those who remained behind in a delicate position given their neutrality and non-participation in the
construction of a communist utopia (as happened with their brethren in Mozambique with FRELIMO). The hostility
began in 1976 and was formalised on 8.3.1978 with an official ban. The ensuing repression was far more intense than
it had been under the Portuguese regime, entire congregations being interned in camps, while there are reports
mentioning that an individual who refused to serve as soldier was shot. Conditions only changed with the end of the
first civil war, in 1991, which enabled the Society to again be legally recognised, on 10.4.1992 (Yearbook...2001, pp.
87-127). With regard to FRELIMO, cf. Pinto, “Jehovah’s...”, p. 113.}\]