# CHAPTER TWO

# Intelligence-driven digital surveillance and public oversight success in an anocracy: Angola and the 15+2 case

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## Introduction

This work focuses on an example of successful public oversight in the anocratic political context of Angola. It assesses how public oversight of intelligence-driven digital surveillance can stop a government from abusing its capabilities and argues that in specific situations international pressure can compensate for limited opportunities for national mobilisation, with positive implications for sustaining national public oversight. It centres on a famous case, known as the 15+2 case, or the Luanda Reading Club.

The elaboration of the chapter was based in part on the personal experience of the author who at the time directly followed the events for professional reasons, on various news material published, and on 21 interviews with relevant persons (members of the 15+2 group; journalists, lawyers, former members of the security services) conducted in 2023 and 2024 with the substantial collaboration of José Luís Domingos and Tânia Canguia, from the Center for Research in Law at the Catholic University of Angola, who participated in this research, and to whom a public acknowledgement is due.

Contrary to what could be expected, we did not find any obstacles from the authorities in developing our work. The difficulty was encountered in some of the interviewees' attitudes of self-censorship.

## Angola: The context

Angola is not a democracy, but neither is it a dictatorship. Its regime is the result of a complex historical process. In 1961, the fight against Portuguese colonialism began. Angola was colonised by the Portuguese from the sixteenth century onwards. Initially, colonisation proceeded along the coast but over the centuries, and especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, it expanded into the hinterland, facing strong armed resistance from various native populations. It was only around the 1920s that the country was considered 'pacified' by the Portuguese (Oliveira Pinto, 2015). For a short time, as from the 1950s onwards, resistance movements were organised and consequently armed struggle against Portugal started afterwards. This was a divisive struggle, with liberation movements combating Portugal and fighting among themselves (Oliveira Pinto, 2015), also resulting in the establishment by the Portuguese authorities of a strong security apparatus. Mostly, three liberation movements were operational, although on a small scale, when a democratic revolution occurred in Portugal on 25 April 1974. These movements were *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), *Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) and *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA).[1] Although these movements had the same objective – the independence of Angola – their differences were quite pronounced and became more entrenched over time, with disastrous results in terms of political and social tension. The MPLA was essentially formed by intellectuals with Marxist tendencies, many of whom had undergone higher education in Portugal, such as Agostinho Neto, the future

1 Translated as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

President of the Republic, who graduated in medicine from the University of Coimbra. It quickly aligned itself with the Soviet Union and was sponsored by it and its allies. The FNLA, on the other hand, was based on the Bakongo ethnic group from northern Angola, had strong ties to Mobutu's Zaire and was supported by the US. Finally, UNITA, which began as a dissident group of the FNLA, ended up representing the largest ethnic group in Angola, the Ovimbundu. Although the ethnic aspects underlying the movements should not be overemphasised, in terms of public perception, antagonistic images were created, with the MPLA representing the city, urbanity and some miscegenation, and UNITA representing the deep country rurality and a streak of tribalism.

Afterwards, history accelerated and independence was obtained in 1975, followed by a long, sporadic civil war between 1975 and 2002. Soares de Oliveira (2015) summed up the war in an incisive way, writing, 'The conflict, which killed up to a million people, was tightly linked with international dynamics, such as the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, the Cold War and commercial appetite for petroleum and diamonds' (p. 1).

Civil war had always been a potential threat since the beginning of the Angolan armed struggle in the 1960s, as the movements opted for different strategic alliance and represented different *Weltanschauungs* and ethnicities, as seen above, beyond the existing personal animosities between the leaderships. The MPLA gradually became strongly Marxist and played a leading role in advancing Soviet ambitions in the region. It had, after the 1974 Portuguese revolution, the complicity of the new Portuguese authorities, who were themselves partly aligned with the Portuguese Communist Party and in coordination with Moscow. UNITA had already established some tactical alliances with the previous Portuguese authorities and, together with the FNLA, presented itself as aligned with the West. Thus, Angola, rich in oil, quickly became a chessboard for the great powers (Marques, 2013).

After obtaining political power in Luanda in 1975, the MPLA was never to let it go. First, it installed a Marxist regime that adopted a pro-Soviet Constitution (Bacelar Gouveia, 2014). Then, after more than 15 years of civil war, through an agreement with its rival, UNITA,

it adopted a constitutional law following a liberal democratic pattern in 1991/1992. This agreement occurred after the end of the Cold War. In fact, the MPLA was losing its main support – the Soviet Union – which dissolved itself in December 1991, and the US, for a time, abandoned interest in maintaining prolonged conflicts, since it no longer had an enemy. Thus, the Angolan movements saw their external sponsors disappear. This, and a weariness of a prolonged state of war, probably led to the attempt to reach an agreement.

The first elections in the country were held in September 1992. However, the electoral process never produced final results as the civil war was rekindled. Only with the death of Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, in 2002 was peace achieved (Soares de Oliveira, 2015). José Eduardo dos Santos of the MPLA, then president of the republic (since 1979, when he succeeded the founder, Agostinho Neto, also from MPLA), took his time to call elections, which only took place in 2008. Since that year the country has had reasonably free elections, although their fairness has always been strongly disputed (Verde, 2021). Elections took place in 2008, 2012, 2017 and 2022, with the MPLA the winner of each, although the scale of its victories declined progressively. In 2008 it obtained around 81 per cent of the votes; in 2012, 71 per cent; in 2017, 61 per cent; and in 2022, 51 per cent. Therefore, although the MPLA won convincingly, the results did not mirror those of a pure dictatorship and apparently showed a reasonable projection of popular will. This means that there will be a space for public oversight in this kind of regime.

Angola has a democratic Constitution (2010) based on the Portuguese one, although it has some traits of the Constitution of the United States of America, mostly in terms of executive power (Bacelar Gouveia, 2014). Constitutionally, the Angolan security apparatus, composed of the State Intelligence and Security Service (SINSE), the Military Intelligence and Security Service (SISM) and the External Intelligence Service (SIE), are auxiliary bodies of the President of the Republic, to whom they provide assistance in his/her executive function.

Parts of the Constitution are feebly enforced, mostly with regard to fundamental rights, since the Constitutional Court is generally deferential to the executive branch (Verde, 2021). While demonstra-

tions are allowed by law, they are sometimes forbidden in practice, and although freedom of expression is guaranteed, some people are jailed due to defamation laws (Verde, 2021). This ambivalence between text and fact – democracy and authoritarianism – is ever present in Angola. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Angola has been living this reality of differentiation between law and fact. At the time, the contrast between the abolitionist laws on slavery and the reality on the ground were blatant, as the economy was essentially based on slavery. Its abolition by the law was not complied with in practice, which led to the coining of the term *para Inglês ver* (for the English to see). Anti-slavery laws were adapted simply to please the English but they were not applied daily, or were applied intermittently. This surreptitious legal culture probably continued, and was accentuated again when, in 1991/1992, a government and a party with an authoritarian Marxist background transformed itself, in a fortnight, into a social-democratic party and adopted the norms of a democratic constitutional system, without the respective structures having been reformed or even adapted.

Among the population percolates the idea that Angola's institutions and political parties were designed for an environment of war and confrontation, having conflict at their core, and that they are incapable of dealing with a new Angola in which the central objectives are the development and well-being of the population, as shown by last public surveys (Afrobarometer, 2024).

This means that the 'old' parties are no longer considered to correspond to the desires or interests of the population and do not offer consistent and appealing solutions. The abstention rate (54 per cent) in the last general election (2022) mirrored this situation, as growing abstention undermines the legitimacy of the election as an expression of the will of the people. The National Assembly (parliament), which has become a mere echo chamber of power, the inept justice system and the anachronistic party system define the current Angolan institutional apparatus (Cedesa, 2023).

This overall situation – a little diffuse, where contradictory signs abound – leads to Angola being described as an anocracy. What is an anocracy? Anocracy has been defined as an unstable regime that combines elements of authoritarianism and democracy. An anocracy

has incomplete mechanisms of dissent and consensualisation and is associated with permanent agitation or ungovernability, which hinders the political process (Gandhi and Vreeland, 2008). It is characterised by elections of some kind that take place, but these do not allegedly meet the high standards of competitiveness and fairness found in democratic systems (Mansfield and Snyder, 2007). Additionally, institutions in an anocratic regime that regulate the political process are relatively weak. As a result, instability and agitation tend to be the defining factors of anocratic regimes (Huntington, 1968). As Schipani (2010) pointed out:

> When discussing conflict proneness, much of the debate focuses on the democracy/autocracy dichotomy, while mixed regimes, or anocracies, are often an afterthought. This is unfortunate, given their prevalence, and more conflictual nature (relative to complete autocracies and democracies) (p. 1).

This characterises Angola today. There is a single party in power that controls the state and its main organs – namely, the judiciary, military, intelligence services and large state companies – while navigating within a formal democratic framework that is underdeveloped and underapplied. Nevertheless, the party allows a certain degree of dissent, a strong opposition and some free and critical press. However, the fact that people do not believe it is possible to remove the MPLA from power and that social and economic living conditions are worsening generates much unrest, with the country often resembling almost ungovernability. The last Afrobarometer survey about the quality of democracy in Angola assesses this aspect well, as three-quarters (75 per cent) of Angolans affirm that the country is going in the wrong direction and a majority of citizens describe their own living conditions (56 per cent) and the country's economic condition (68 per cent) as 'fairly bad' or 'very bad'. But, at the same time, they do not vote strongly for an alternative, presumably waiting for some miraculous new force to appear (Afrobarometer, 2024). It is not expected that, within the framework of a parliamentary discussion, it is possible to reach a consensus.

## The 15+2 case (2015/2016)

In 2015, amid this general anocratic situation arose the 15+2 case. At the time, Angola was at the start of a long period of crisis and disillusionment (Verde, 2021). President dos Santos, who had held his position since 1979 and won the civil war in 2002 against Savimbi's UNITA, was watching an economic boom caused by a rise in oil prices turn into a bust due to unrestrained consumption and corruption.

With the economic crisis at hand, the government began to mobilise its forces to minimise the political effects of the slump. For example, it was reported that an army colonel had begun an extraordinary process of mobilising military personnel due to the economic impact of the crisis within the army. This colonel warned the soldiers that the country was in crisis but that they should not be alarmed by measures affecting the military. There would be austerity, for which we would have to be prepared, said the colonel during a graduation ceremony. Among the measures to be imposed on the military are salary cuts. 'Austerity will last for some time,' he emphasised. When speaking to the approximately 200 officers and soldiers present at the graduation, the colonel said that his unit had not carried out promotions the previous year 'because there was a drop in oil prices and promotions would create a lot of expense for the government'. In turn, a second speaker, the officer responsible for the brigade's patriotic education, asked the officers and soldiers 'not to be sad'. He appealed to the troops to 'remain calm', observe discipline and be courageous 'because the army does not go on strike' (Marques de Morais, 2015). This is an example of the challenges the government faced in 2015.

The public began to consider aloud that the elites had been living in an atmosphere of partying and easy money but, when faced with concrete reality and defiance, they had no solutions other than closing down the country and adopting several restrictive measures, be they in economic terms or regarding political overtures. Many measures were taken, only to make the situation worse. For example, banning imports only caused the internal market to be handed over to the two or three oligarchs that dominated it, creating inflationary pressure and eliminating competition. In the name of the crisis, a

protectionist model based on patronage was legally implemented for the Angolan economy. It became patent to everyone that the easy economic model followed since 2002 was in disarray, most possibly beyond salvation. Discontentment rose (Verde, 2015b).

The context was challenging for political power. No fast solutions to the deep crisis were at hand. Enter the 15+2 case, mostly as a political distraction engendered by the Angolan Military Intelligence and Security Service (SISM). As referred to above, the SISM is the military branch of the security services, one of the three Angolan intelligence organisations. All of them worked under the direction of the President of the Republic and responded towards him.

The initial security service – Angolan Information and Security Directorate (DISA) – was created after independence. The structure and functional organisation of DISA was similar to that of the Intelligence and State Security bodies of the former socialist-bloc countries, whose principles were based on a single-party regime. DISA was an extremely powerful service and at that time could be considered one of the strongest among the Intelligence and Security Services of African countries. DISA was the only institution in Angola responsible for internal and external security, strategic information and special operations (Franco, 2013). It was later divided, but this initial genetic marker ended up defining the Angolan security service over time, despite the different names and historical and constitutional developments.

On the afternoon of 20 June 2015, 13 human-rights defenders and activists were arrested at gunpoint by the Angolan police while they were participating in a conference session on the ideological philosophy of peaceful revolution delivered by Domingos da Cruz in the Vila Alice neighbourhood of Luanda. The conference was based on Gene Sharp's book *From Dictatorship to Democracy* and was discussing peaceful methods of protest. Shortly after the arrests, police officers and members of the National Directorate of Criminal Investigation took the activists to their respective homes and seized their cameras and personal computers before eventually detaining them in a police jail.

Two days later, two more activists were detained. Authorities also filed formal charges against two female human-rights activists,

Laurinda Gouveia and Rosa Conde, but did not detain them. Therefore, the group of activists became known as the Angola 15+2 (15 under arrest and 2 at liberty).

Among those detained were Domingos da Cruz, Luaty Beirão, Sedrick de Carvalho, Hitler Samussuku and Nuno Dala.[2] At the time, da Cruz was 31 years old and a university teacher. He had a degree in philosophy and a master's degree in legal sciences from the Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil and was the author of a book, *When War Is Urgent and Necessary*. Due to the book's title, in 2013, the Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Angola had accused him of committing the 'crime of incitement to collective disobedience', although the Luanda Provincial Court acquitted him, since the crime of which he was accused did not exist in Angolan legislation. Luaty was 33 years old and had degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Plymouth in England and economics and management from the University of Montpellier I in France. A musician and hip-hop artist, known in artistic circles as Ikonoclasta and Brigadeiro Mata-Frakuxz, he had been among those detained for an attempted demonstration on 7 March 2011, having announced it a week previously at a hip-hop show. The demonstration was inspired by the Arab Spring, which caused immense fear within the dos Santos regime. This was a first, as the demonstration demanded numbered resignation of José Eduardo dos Santos. Albeit the demonstrators numbered just 17 and nothing was happening, until some journalists came. That was when the police showed up and detained the demonstrators. They set up a large police apparatus to make an impression. The overreaction of the Angolan police to the 17 demonstrators can be explained, above all, by the fact that it was the time of the 'Arab Spring'. From December 2010 onwards, a wave of revolutionary demonstrations and protests took place in

2 The full 15+2 group was composed of Domingos da Cruz, Sedrick de Carvalho, Luaty Beirão, José Gomes Hata, Nito Alves, Afonso Matias 'Mbanza Hamza', Hitler Samussuku, Inocêncio Brito 'Drux', Albano Bingo, Fernando Tomás 'Nicola', Nelson Dibango, Arante Kivuvu, Nuno Álvaro Dala, Benedito Jeremias and Osvaldo Caholo, who were detained in June 2015, plus Rosa Conde and Laurinda Gouveia, who were not detained.

the Middle East and North Africa. There were revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and a civil war in Libya and Syria; there were also large protests in Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Oman and Yemen and smaller protests in Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Western Sahara. The protests shared civil-resistance techniques in sustained campaigns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies, as well as the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to organise, communicate and raise awareness among the population and the international community in the face of attempts at repression and internet censorship by states. All of this could be replicated in Angola, the authorities apparently feared.

De Carvalho, aged 26, was a journalist in his fourth year of a law degree. He had started at the weekly *Folha 8* as a page editor in 2011 and later became a journalist. In 2013, he moved to *Novo Jornal*, covering society and economics, and in January 2015, he returned to *Folha 8*, again dealing with these areas. Samussuku, who was 25 years old and born in Moxico, was a fourth-year university student working on a political science degree. He was also a hip-hop artist belonging to the group Third Division, together with Cheik Hata. According to family members, Samussuku's father was a joker, which was why he chose the name Hitler, after the leader of Nazi Germany, for his firstborn, and Mussolini, after the Italian Fascist leader, for his youngest. Dala, aged 31, was a university teacher and researcher at the Technical University of Angola, as well as a teacher at the Centre for Care and Integration of Special Children. He had a degree in Portuguese from Universidade Agostinho Neto. In his text, entitled *Incitement to War or the Destruction of the Dictatorship?* Dala argued that the only path to structural change in Angola was through a non-violent process of popular revolution (Santos, 2015). Unlike the independence fighters, this group does not appear to follow any particular ideology, standing out for its proposals of non-violence, anti-dictatorship and the establishment of democracy. They are a reaction to a situation – the long prevalence of José Eduardo dos Santos and the MPLA – and did not represent anything more utopian or defined.

The Criminal Investigation Service of the Ministry of the Interior

of Angola published a press release on the day of the arrests, announcing that 'various steps were taken that culminated in the arrest *in flagrante delicto* of 13 national citizens, who were preparing to carry out acts aimed at altering the country's public order and security' and that 'during the operation a series of pieces of evidence were seized' (Frontline defenders, s/d).

However, the detainees were not granted an arrest warrant, information about the reasons for their arrest or the possibility of contacting a lawyer or family (Carvalho, 2021). Only on 28 September 2015 were they notified of the content of the investigations conducted by the Attorney General of the Republic of Angola, which had been concluded, and that charges were being prepared. Meanwhile, Luaty Beirão had initiated a hunger strike on 21 September to protest against the arbitrary preventive detentions. The Angolan Constitution of 2010 does not contain any direct reference to the possibilities of pretrial detention; however, there has always been legislation permitting such detention, whose constitutionality has never been challenged. At the time, the pretrial detention regime was regulated by a statute of 1992, Law No. 18-A/92, of 17 July, and the truth was that the general rule of thumb allowed the usual application of this measure with no time limits being respected, despite there being a maximum period of 90 days under the terms of Article 25 of the aforementioned statute (Costa, 2015). In fact, this hunger strike was an important aspect that drew national and international public attention.

On 8 October 2015, the 15 defendants were finally formally charged with organising a coup d'état against President José Eduardo dos Santos and the government of Angola, as well as preparatory acts of rebellion. The two others who had not been detained, Conde and Gouveia, were also charged, having also participated in several meetings with the current inmates to discuss the principles of non-violent protest and political change in Angola.

The combination of Luaty Beirão's hunger strike and the absurd charges of conspiracy and rebellion led to an intense public reaction with national and international importance. It was clear to everyone that this group of young teachers, journalists and artists, without any weaponry, was not able to organise such a coup. How a group

of 15 people without any weapons or relevant connections, whether with the police, armed forces or any armed group, could provoke a coup d'état or a rebellion that would threaten the current constitutional order, was never understood. There was a huge inconsistency between the accusations and the real factual possibilities. The idea sounded ridiculous.

At the national level, a Catholic mass was organised to express solidarity with the human-rights defenders detained in June and the deteriorating health of one of them, Luaty Beirão, who had been on hunger strike for 23 days. In addition, several interventions were made by activist websites, such as Rafael Marques' Maka Angola. Social media was the main point of dissemination of the incredulity and anger at the situation.

At the international level, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human-rights defenders, Michel Forst, intervened, asking the government of Angola to release the activists. Frost mentioned that the 'deprivation of liberty on the sole ground of having promoted good governance and exercised the rights to free expression and peaceful assembly may be considered arbitrary', adding that 'such criticism is not only fully legitimate according to Angola's obligations under human rights law; it is also essential to the free and public debate necessary for a healthy civil society in the country' (UNHR, 2015, paras 2–3). Meanwhile, an association of lawyers from countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) announced their intention to monitor the trial. 'We are undoubtedly concerned about the case,' Makanatsa Makonese, executive director of the SADC Lawyers Association, told the Portuguese news agency Lusa, adding that two members of the organisation would monitor the trial of the Angolan activists in Luanda (Marques de Morais, 2015). In addition, the American Bar Association sent the famous lawyer Kimberley Motley to survey the case.

The trial itself was bizarre. It featured the judge exalting the virtues of President dos Santos and the prosecutor, ashamed of her role in the trial, hiding her face with long, false hair. The military intelligence service cantoned in a nearby room switched off the electricity in the courtroom when exchanges between the defendants' lawyers

and the prosecution and judges became heated. One of the defendants, de Carvalho, referred to it as 'the clown court' (Carvalho, 2021, p. 115).

At the end of December 2015, it was crystal-clear that the trial would mark the beginning of the end of the regime's ability to control and detain without restraint. This trial brought to light a beleaguered and lost regime. The behaviour of the judge and the public prosecution were an example of the lack of independence of the judiciary, which clearly seemed to be simply following superior instructions. Faced with the legal ineptitude of dos Santos's officials, the trial went on absurdly, with interruptions and pauses oscillating between the arbitrary and the bizarre. One day, the activists' mothers say they will turn to the witch doctors to help them change the judge's evil spirit, who seemed bothered by such statements. The next day, the court's lights fail at a time when the exchange of words between the lawyers and the judge is intense. And in the end, the evidence about the so-called revolutionary conspiracy did not appear.

It was clear to the public that it had become impossible to defend the accusatory position, as no evidence of wrongdoing, beyond some speeches and readings, hardly considered indicators of a subversive movement, emerged.

The bulk of the evidence presented was the result of digital surveillance of the members of the 15+2 group. The regime made a point of showing the evidence obtained – without any known judicial mandate – both in court and on the TV and radio stations it controlled. The group's discussions were recorded using a ballpoint camera by two secret-service agents. The members of the group and their families were all subject to digital surveillance, before, during and after the trial. The location and capture of Domingos da Cruz was apparently carried out using mobile-phone tracking technology.

The evidence pointed to recording devices used being digital and included a video camcorder pen and a car-key fob device. Their small size allowed for surreptitious recording when compared to old-style analogue recording devices (for example, VHS cameras), which are too large for surreptitious recording.

In March 2016, the Luanda Provincial Court sentenced the 15+2 defendants to prison sentences ranging from two years and three months to eight years and six months for the alleged crimes of preparatory acts of rebellion and association with criminals, after the charges of organising a coup d'état against President dos Santos had been withdrawn by the prosecution. Based on the technicalities of criminal law, despite the fact that they were not considered to have attempted, much less committed, the crime, the court convicted them of mere preparation.

No one was convinced by the evidence presented or the farcical tone in which the trial took place, as the then general published opinion demonstrated (Verde, 2021). Furthermore, the evidence, which included videos digitally obtained illegally, had no legal force, as there was no warrant (Carvalho, 2021).

The case was seen as a diversionary strategy by the SISM, led by General Zé Maria, who was close to dos Santos, working with him since early days, occupying the function of Deputy Army Chief of Staff in 1991, and directing the military secret service since 2009. Zé Maria had ineptly tried to build a case that would divert attention from the declining economic situation and the president's leadership. This strategy was not successful, and the public reaction was vocal domestically and robust internationally. Susan de Oliveira wrote that it will always be clear that the trial was a grotesque farce from beginning to end. Amidst the masks and bad actors, the brave activists brought laughter and intelligent criticism from those who inevitably mark social transformations (Oliveira, 2016). Amnesty International considered the young people 'prisoners of conscience' and Human Rights Watch referred to the decision as ridiculous (Novo Jornal, 2016).

At the time, social networks and internet sites were already replacing the traditional press. Mastery of the public space was no longer possible, therefore the public outcry, regarding the trial, was everywhere and government did not have the means to control the digital world.

The image of progress and growing democracy that the government had been trying to present over the years was collapsing, exemplified, for example, by the approach with CNN International

since 2012 where the government provided the news agency with funding to promote a positive image of Angola around the world (Maka Angola, 2012). Therefore, the government raced to fix the blunder.

The decision of the court of first instance was always subject to appeal to the Supreme Court. And so it was done. At the end of June 2016, the Supreme Court, in a terse decision against the trial judge, ordered the release of the defendants. Sedrick de Carvalho argued that this was the first step of 'cleaning up the government' by criticising the trial judge. By then, all the errors and wrongdoings of the process had become his fault. The Supreme Court ordered the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against the trial judge by the Judicial Council (Carvalho, 2021, pp. 185–6). Today, we know that this was cosmetic, as in 2019, the judge was promoted to the Court of Appeal.

However, the matter did not end there. On 20 July 2016, an amnesty law was approved that ended the proceedings against all the defendants. Albeit, released by a Supreme Court decision, such court order referred to the provisional detention or 'pre-trial detention'. The group had to serve a prison sentence in the future. With the amnesty law everything was gone. The process was erased.

It is curious that the same law also exempted most of the economic crimes that could be attributed to the regime's top leaders in the future.

What remains of this case are aspects that are relevant to the analysis we intend to carry out on the role of security and intelligence services, the use of digital surveillance and the possible role of public opinion and mobilisation.

First, it has now been proven, by the constant presence of its members during the trial and the digital vigilance material presented in court, that the operation was planned by the SISM and its head at the time, General Zé Maria, to alleviate the pressure on the government due to the economic decline (Verde, 2021).

Second, SISM had at its disposal all the police and judicial resources in the country, controlled the trial by being conspicuously present and were also responsible for several videos of 15+2 meetings shown as essential evidence. Regarding the illegal surveillance,

Samussuku noted that the security services managed to infiltrate the meetings with at least two young people and used surveillance cameras throughout the debate sessions in which the 15+2 participated in Vila Alice (Interview, Hitler Samassuku, 2023). In fact, there is no judicial record of the way and means by which these videos were obtained and no reference to any court order as legislation obliged or otherwise. Nevertheless, they were not declared null or void by the judge in the case.

Third, the response from the public was decisive, with lawyers from the American Bar Association, for example, international organisations (UN, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and press and social media (Público, DW, Maka Angola)) paramount in creating an awkward environment for the government. As Domingos da Cruz, a defendant in the case, related to this book, civil society's response had two phases. Initially, there was shock and fear. The case paralysed people, and many citizens believed the narrative of a group organised to carry out a coup d'état constructed by the regime, based on videos captured through surveillance and shown by the media constantly. In the second phase disbelief was born, and the public began to question the veracity of the videos and the legality of the actions that captured them, thanks to the efforts of lawyers to educate the public about the law and the significant contributions of the free press inside and outside the country, made through social networks (Interview, Domingos da Cruz, 2023). Samussuku said that this was a timely, necessary and urgent response, arguing that after a few days friends of the defendants started sharing the defendants' profiles on social media, which led to a wave of solidarity in the social media and public conversations in meeting places such as coffee shops, bars and so on. If it were not for this, the defendants might have been killed, with the security services presenting a manufactured version of their deaths to the public, as had happened in the past. When the public learnt that they were artists, students and young people who were civic leaders in their communities, they decided to raise their voices with the slogan 'freedom now' (Interview Samussuku, 2023).

## Public reaction as a watershed in the 15+2 case

As seen, the 15+2 case brought about defeat for the Angolan government of dos Santos, leading to a retreat that ultimately resulted in a new amnesty law that sought to definitively put an end to the issue. Nevertheless, in the end this defeat contributed to the delegitimisation of the dos Santos regime and, most probably, in part, to his decision to withdraw from the presidential election in 2017. Teixeira Cândido, the leader of the only journalists' union existing in Angola, said that the government had backed down owing to public pressure, both national and international. It was an active reaction that exposed the arbitrariness of the government and judicial bodies (Interview, Teixeira Cândido, 2023). Rafael Marques, a well-known human-rights activist, described the case as blatant incompetence. The arrest of the 15+2 never made any sense, and everything else was a race to the abyss (Interview, Rafael Marques, 2023). Media coverage and internal and international pressure exposed too many errors, which made a retreat possible, suggested the lawyer Margarida Nangacovie, meaning that given the errors exposed, there was no other option but withdrawal (Interview, Margarida Nangacovie, 2024). In fact, it quickly became clear that the evidence had not been collected in accordance with criminal rules, and even that which was presented in court did not reveal any dangerous conspiracy, only meetings to discuss theoretical non-violent ways of changing the regime. There were no plans to occupy palaces, recruit security forces, arm them; nothing.

Clarice Vieira, a law teacher, believed that the government backed down due to international pressure because it needed to show the international community that democracy existed in Angola and because civil society had made so much noise (Interview, Clarice Vieira, 2023). The same was said by the journalist Eliseu Ngola (Interview, Eliseu Ngola, 2023). Filomena Azevedo, a businesswoman with public influence, emphasised that the government had relented because there was much anger about this case (Interview, Filomena Azevedo, 2024).

The causes of the resolution of the 15+2 process are unanimously accepted. It was a successful case of public pressure that limited

the effects of political persecution based, among other things, on illegal digital surveillance, with the pressure applied both nationally and internationally.

However, no one has highlighted which specific sources of pressure were useful and which were not. There was a feeling transversal to the government authorities and civil society of global pressure, but what had this translated into? It is a fact that there were no street demonstrations, general strikes, or non-violent combat by the population (even less, violent combat). Added to this was the fact that the press, TV and radio were essentially controlled by the government. What we might call the classic media – television, radio, printed newspapers – whether state-owned or privately owned – were aligned with the government, with one or two irrelevant exceptions. Therefore, it was not from the street or from classical media outlets that this public outrage was translated.

We can point out three axes of embarrassment that departed from the classic forms as street protest and use of traditional media. The first resulted from the widespread media coverage of Luaty Beirão's 36-day hunger strike. Probably because he was Portuguese-Angolan and the son of one of the symbols of the dos Santos regime, José Beirão, who was general director of the José Eduardo dos Santos Foundation until his death in 2006, Luaty Beirão received widespread interest from the Portuguese press. From there, the interest spread out to the world. Apparently, the Portuguese media projected Luaty Beirão and his hunger strike. He confessed:

> I was completely astonished by the almost pornographic level that this thing [hunger strike] took. All that was left was for the Vatican to speak out. It reached the United Nations, the Department of State of the Obama Government. It reached a point such that there was nothing left to do, except for the [Angolan] Government to give in (Lusa, 2016).

It is interesting to note that the closer he was to death, the more the issue gained international importance, almost demonstrating that the existence of martyrs is necessary for the international community to take human-rights issues seriously. Beirão admitted

that on the 19th day of the hunger strike, he had begun to fear for his life but that the Angolan government had started to take the protest more seriously (Lusa, 2016). The adverse publicity from the Portuguese press was one of the reasons for the Angolan government to take the case seriously. That suggests a very colonial mindset, still predominant in Angolan elites, who developed most of their educational, recreational and business activities in Portugal.

A second axis was the use of social media, mostly news portals and Facebook posts. The Angolan government was used to controlling the media, with direct or indirect ownership of television and radio stations and newspapers. Any dissent generally ended with the million-dollar purchase of the medium in question for later closure, as happened, for example, with Semanário Angolense of Graça Campos.

Although social media already existed, it was not yet widespread or, at least, the intelligence services were not fully qualified to deal with it. Therefore, all the discontent was channelled through websites and Facebook. It was on these platforms that the main fight took place – in terms of legal arguments against the case (Maka Angola) and, humorously, the prosecutor's hair (Facebook). It was a time of digital effervescence that caught the old generals off guard.

Finally, there was international pressure. The US State Department, the United Nations and the American Bar Association have already been mentioned. Even an attorney from the Portuguese Public Prosecutor's Office and member of the national board of the Prosecutors' Union of Portugal wrote a column in a Portuguese newspaper stating that the most basic procedural guarantees of defence of the accused had been grossly trampled on in Angola (Sousa, 2016).

As will be seen later, it was a moment of singularity with a set of circumstances almost unrepeatable in an anocratic regime – or at least not predictable. It could happen at any time, or it could happen never again. In the end, it was difficult to create from this case a broad and general applicable rule regarding public oversight.

## Legal framework: From text to factuality

Formally, the Constitution of the Republic of Angola is clear regarding the protection of the right to privacy, prohibiting digital surveillance unless there is a judicial warrant. Article 34 clearly and eloquently establishes that '. . . the confidentiality of correspondence and communications, regardless of the means used, cannot be subject to surveillance of any kind. If necessary, surveillance can only occur with judicial authorization' (Constitution of the republic of Angola, 2010).

Angolan legislation addresses communications and social information services in the country, regulating these and the provision of digital content. It is worth mentioning that, although the Constitution protects against digital surveillance, requiring judicial authorisation, other laws may present contradictions or ambiguities in relation to this topic. In Angola, specific laws related to digital surveillance are deemed fundamental to protecting citizens' rights in the digital environment. Although the Constitution of the Republic of Angola establishes general principles, other specific legislation also addresses privacy and surveillance issues. Listed below are some of them:

Personal Data Protection Law: Law No. 22/11 of 17 June regulates the processing of personal data in Angola. It establishes the rights of data subjects and the obligations of those responsible for processing that data. This law aims to protect citizens' privacy and restrict the misuse of personal information.

Electronic Communications Law: Law No. 23/11 of May 20 deals with electronic communications, including the surveillance of telecommunication networks. It establishes rules for the interception of communications, ensuring that surveillance occurs only with legal authorisation.

The above statutory laws were in force when the 15+2 case occurred, although they, as well as Article 34 of the Constitution, were not even considered in the case. Therefore, the surveillance occurred outside the framework of these laws.

The fact is that until 2011 Angola did not have a personal data protection law; therefore, a culture of non-legality was pervasive. That year, Law No. 22/11 of 17 June was approved and with it a data

protection agency was created. Under Article 44, this agency was composed of seven citizens, three of whom were designated by the president of the republic, three by the National Assembly and one was elected by the Superior Council of the Judiciary. The supervision of digital surveillance and data intelligence was, therefore, carried out by a data protection agency that, under the terms of the law, belonged to the interdependent State Administration and maintained a cooperative relationship with the Executive – in this case, the president of the republic – under the terms of Articles 69 and 120, in fine, of the Constitution.

Related to the intelligence services, the law in force at the time was enacted in 2002 (National Security Act). This Act required the intervention of a Supreme Court judge to authorise any interception of communications.

Therefore, from a positive point of view, the law in Angola is sufficiently robust and comprehensive. Since 2011, the country has built a methodical legal framework regarding digital surveillance out of almost nothing.

However, reality is very different from the law. João Pinto, an unexpected source, as he is a former Member of Parliament for the MPLA, a Deputy Whip of the parliamentary party and now Inspector General of the state, asserted that the degree of independence of the above-mentioned Data Protection Agency is fragile, as there is broad discretion in the appointment of its members by the three state powers. Therefore, the nominees of the Data Protection Agency are conditioned for reasons of lack of patrimonial, administrative and functional autonomy. The principles of nonremovability and stability of its members do not have practical application since the presidential decree that approved the Statute of the Data Protection Agency allowed for the discretionary appointment and dismissal of members appointed by the president of the republic (Interview, João Pinto, 2023). Samussuku, a defendant in the 15+2 case, went further, emphasising that the fact that Angola was an excessively centralised state, where political power was in its entirety confined to the MPLA, should be considered. Consequently, it was not possible to ascribe any independence to the so-called independent entities, because the leaders previously responsible for

these bodies were politically active in the party, which was confused with the state. From this logic, defending the party was understood as defending the state. If the MPLA wanted any surveillance information about someone, these bodies were not able to reject it (Interview, Hitler Samussuku, 2023). The same evaluation was made by Eliseu Gonçalves, a former aide to President dos Santos, who reflected that it was important to highlight that the ruling party, the MPLA, had almost complete control over regulatory bodies. For example, the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information Technologies and Social Communication was responsible for supervising the technology sector, while Angolan Institute for Communications (INACOM) served as the sector's regulatory body. INACOM determined the sector's regulations and policies, set prices for telecommunication services and issued licences (Interview, Eliseu Gonçalves, 2023). This mean that any intelligence oversight from public/state powers is always conditional and submitted to political constraints.

It can be concluded that the legal text in Angola is less important than practice. Rosianne Pávla, a lawyer, explained that there was a legal framework that was robust but also ineffective due to the political interference in the institutions that dealt with the matter (Interview, Rosianne Pávla, 2024).

This reality is the result of the existence of a party, the MPLA, whose own history is intertwined with the Angolan state, as it has always been in power, both in dictatorship and democracy. Thus, there is no prospect of democratic alternation, which leads all decision makers, independent or not, to adopt behaviours compatible with the MPLA's permanence in power. This reminds us of the model advanced by Ramseyer (1994):

> Players who expect to play [any player considered in the game theory] indefinitely may sometimes defect and sometimes cooperate. So too with whether rational politicians keep courts independent. Fundamentally, whether they keep them independent (whether they adopt the cooperative strategy) depends on two things: (a) whether they expect elections to continue indefinitely and (b) if elections will continue, whether

> they expect to continue to win them indefinitely. Only where they rate (i) the likelihood of continued electoral government high, and (ii) the likelihood of their continued victory low might they provide independent courts (p. 722).

This fits Angola perfectly. Although it is expected that elected government will prevail, it is also anticipated that MPLA will win every time; therefore, there does not exist any incentive to create de facto independent courts or supervisory organs. The absence of a viable political alternative is a factor too. It seems like disaffection is translating into declining voter participation rather than support for an electoral alternative, which is to the advantage of MPLA. This is a global trend – this means, disengagement from formal politics especially among the youth, which makes it more necessary that public oversight is encouraged as the formal institutions tied to electoral politics are representing fewer and fewer people. That is an important trend across the board.

The essential conclusion that comes from a legal analysis is the opposite of a legal analysis; rather, it is a factual or political analysis. The common perception is that there are no independent adjudicators in Angola, whether they be courts or autonomous administrative entities. The consequence is that it becomes difficult in such an environment to apply the law. The problem is not with the law but with the environment and with enforcement. It is important to note that there is a school of thinking in law, critical legal scholarship, which considers the law to be inherently political and looks at how law is designed to look good but be unimplementable in reality and restrained by social and political structures. Positivist legal theory would look at the legal instruments only and not at the conditions in which they are developed and implemented, which does not explain the situation in Angola (Kairys, 1998).

## Colonial roots: A surveillance culture that prevails

The entrepreneur Filomena Azevedo was adamant in saying that, in Angola, colonialism affected everything: 'Almost everything we do

here is similar to the Portuguese' (Interview, Filomena Azevedo, 2023). This evaluation of the culture of surveillance that exists in Angola is almost unanimous. The roots of a paramount culture of unhindered surveillance are found in colonial practices. Rafael Marques, a well-known human rights activist, went somewhat further, adding the impact of Marxism-Leninism and a melting pot of intelligence and surveillance practices that the old regime collected from various parts of the world.

Until recently, the Angolan penal code was that of Imperial Portugal from 1886, which did not contain relevant safeguards concerning surveillance and none regarding digital surveillance. Therefore, the colonial impact on the creation and application of laws was clear (Interview, Rafael Marques, 2023). The same approach was purposed by Samussuku, who stated that the MPLA followed, to the millimetre, the colonists' codes of domination and surveillance against the people they said they had freed from the colonial yoke. The MPLA inherited the practices of the Portuguese political police and then combined them with the Cuban experience of surveillance against everything and everyone, including some of its militants who presented positions that were at times not in line with the president (Interview, Samussuku, 2023). MPLA, despite being a liberation movement, or because of that, never adopted a vision for the democratic development of the country. Perhaps the civil war hindered any efforts as the support of the Soviet Union implied some kind of communist regime. That meant that MPLA had no emancipatory vision for intelligence and transformation programme post independence.

The reality is that there is a convergence of two authoritarian forces in the definition of the Angolan security services' attitudes and behaviours.

The first force, which could be designated as structural-cultural, is derived precisely from colonial practices. The Angolan PIDE (Secret Portuguese Police) delegation was formally established in Angolan territory in 1954, but its presence was residual. From 1961 onwards, with the outbreak of armed conflict in the territory, control measures increased with the multiplication of delegations, subdelegations and posts in various districts of the territory, and with the

creation of the Angolan Centralization and Coordination of Information Services (SCCIA), which complemented the PIDE's 'empirical research' with the centralisation and processing of information, studies, statistics and reports, forwarded from lower levels. This institutional multiplication, responding to the emerging conflict situation, implied a substantial expansion of the information production network (namely through the network of informants), as well as the creation of paramilitary forces (*Os Flechas*). A strong apparatus covering border control, infiltration into independence groups, counterespionage, social observation and military support, was created (Blanes, 2013). The objective was to persecute nationalists and, to this end, the force had a vast system of prisons and work camps, which were nothing more than concentration camps, such as São Nicolau in Angola, where nationalist guerrillas were taken, mixed with populations displaced by the conflict. In these camps there were prisons, work zones and even satellite villages. The conditions were inhumane, with cells measuring 20 metres by 40 metres containing 200 people, and cases of rape and various types of torture, such as the burial of people alive, crucifixions and shootings. The police were the result of a regime of totalitarian influence, albeit with a great paternalistic nature, that served as an example for other countries, including Brazil, with the Estado Novo under the control of Vargas. The PIDE was used to repress any act that meant a change in the political, social, economic, cultural or religious status quo in the Portuguese colonial empire (Mendonça, 2018). It was a body strongly operationalised in the culture of surveillance and control. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that it influenced how the Angolan state operationalises today, reacts to issues of (in) security and, in relation to these, considers its protagonists, according to Margarida Nangacovie (Interview, Margarida Nangacovie, 2024).

However, it is necessary to broaden the approach and mention that colonial influence is not seen only in terms of the powers and functions of the political police because it has structural characteristics. Simply looking at the legislative history that leads us to the present, the various constitutional moments that followed after independence broadly corresponded to a legal structure influenced by colonialist practices, where authoritarianism and centralisation were

predominant, and did not coincide with what was known from pre-colonial history but rather with the functional aspects of colonial power. What happened after independence was that such a structure was dressed according to different ideologies – that is, Marxist until the 1990s and then liberal democratic. However, it maintained the substance of the powers and mechanisms of the colonising state. Simply put, the colonial Portuguese structure of centralised and unsupervised power, just dependent on the President of the Council of Ministers, Oliveira Salazar, without any real oversight became the basic latent matrix of Angolan constitutionalism (Verde, 2025).

Obviously, the Soviet-Cuban influence should also be considered, as it reinforces the colonial one, as Marques and Samussuku highlighted. Nevertheless, this influence can be characterised as operational rather than structural. Agostinho (2018) described a first phase regarding the establishment of security services in post-independence Angola (1975–91), in which it was feasible to build a state with a Marxist matrix that was non-democratic and with a single-party system, where there was a monopoly and the predominance of state power over society, privileging defence and security structures over other ones, due to the revolutionary period and regional upheavals occurring in the historical moment, as well as the post-independence civil war. In this context, an intelligence service with a Soviet matrix was built.

The construction of this intelligence system took place in 1975, as mentioned above, with the approval of Law No. 3/75 of 29 November, 1977 which created the DISA. The DISA emerged because of the period of unrest subsequent to the declaration of independence in 1975, so the structuring process, as well as its attributions, was influenced by the non-democratic political regime in force at the time in Angola. The DISA had procedural powers; that is, it conducted investigations, instructed proceedings and finally referred cases to the courts or police bodies, depending on the case. In practice, the DISA acted as the Public Prosecutor's Office. That was not enough, and the DISA's powers were increased by Law No. 4/77 of 25 February 1977 on the Prevention and Repression of the Crime of Mercenaryism and by Law 7/78 of 26 May 1978 on Crimes Against State Security, which not only densified procedural powers but also

strengthened the non-democratic regime with repressive bodies and a partisan police force. The security-service structure had areas that carried out secret operational investigation activities, criminal and operational investigations, procedural instruction, trials and criminal re-education. These activities were identical to those of an overall police body fundamentally directed against actions opposing the non-democratic regime (Agostinho, 2018).

It is not within the scope of this work to carry out a comparative intelligence and security exercise. What is important to mention is that a totalitarian perspective of surveillance and general control promoted by both colonial and Marxist practices decisively influenced the ethos of the security services in Angola and their relationship with the population and vice versa.

It is evident that since the 1970s and 1980s, there have been several changes in the Angolan intelligence services as well as new operational influences, such as Mossad, which contributed with training and advanced technology and an adaptation to the democratic constitutionalism of 1991/1992 and then in 2010 (the present Constitution). Today, there are three services, one for external intelligence, another for internal security and a third for military information, in a model similar to that adopted by democratic Portugal, as well as a separation between police and prosecutorial services.

However, what can be seen from various interviews is that the idea of an all-powerful secret service persists exactly as in the past. For example, Teixeira Cândido had no doubts that the state had been investing heavily in surveillance, using Chinese, Israeli, Russian and American technologies. People had no way of opposing the state's means. Journalists took courses to prevent this, but the resources invested were disproportionate (Interview, Teixeira Cândido, 2023).

## Changes after the 15+2 case: Just an illusion

Logic would lead us to think that the 15+2 case had a significant impact on Angola, especially with regard to human rights and freedom of expression. The case attracted national and international attention to the situation of the political activists in Angola. Many people

showed solidarity with the detained activists, demanding justice and freedom for them. The arrest of the 15+2 activists demonstrated the Angolan Government's repression of freedom of expression and dissent. This created an environment of fear and inhibited the free expression of critical opinions. International human-rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, closely followed the case. International pressure contributed to the release of the activists from prison and their transfer to house arrest. The 15+2 case led to discussions about the need for legal and political reforms in Angola.

In summary, the 15+2 case highlighted the vulnerabilities faced by political activists in Angola and encouraged debates about freedom of expression and justice in the country. The 15+2 case seemed like a watershed moment, although it was not. The strength of public opinion, both nationally and internationally, forced an authoritarian government to retreat completely. It was expected that, from then on, the courts would be more careful, the intelligence services would follow the law more proficiently and, in general, there would be more intervention by the public.

In fact, as seen, the advent of João Lourenço as President of the Republic (2017) inaugurated a legislative effort aimed at regulating a series of practices that were not foreseen in the law as well as creating a new penal and criminal procedure code.

However, the perceptions gained in the field study carried out for this work in 2023/2024 do not support this logic. It appears that the 15+2 case was an exception that confirmed the rule of the non-accountability of electronic surveillance and the actions of the intelligence services.

Domingos da Cruz, one of the 15+2 and presently a researcher at a Spanish university, was adamant, saying that, as far as he knew, no change had taken place, either legally or in practice. As for civil society, there had been no systematic, high-quality or consistent actions, just mere fragments of actions. Angolan civil society was poor, resulting from the general low-level development of the country and fragility enhanced by all the obstacles imposed on it by the regime, with active collaboration from the international community to keep the country as it is and under the control of the MPLA (Interview, Domingos da Cruz, 2023). The same assessment was made by Samussuku, another

of the 15+2, who stated that the regime was the same, did the same things and continually made the same mistakes (Interview, Hitler Samussuku, 2023). Clarice Vieira, a lawyer, did not disagree. She stated that there had been no changes in supervision practices in light of controversies concerning digital surveillance or opportunities for responses and proactivity from civil society or journalists. Abuses and arbitrariness were still committed within the scope of digital surveillance, including towards the exercise of freedom of expression and of the press, which were repressed in different ways, and all information was controlled and delimited. In short, everything was controlled, and there was a very special democracy in Angola with its own characteristics (Interview, Clarice Vieira, 2023). Filomena Azevedo, a businesswoman with strong intervention in the public space, did not disagree and asserted that there had been no change. Journalists were increasingly taking a stand, but they still feared the 'system', which was why they did not do it any more. Civil society would arrive with much strength and then end up giving up (Interview, Filomena Azevedo, 2023). In addition, Teixeira Cândido revealed that there had been no changes in surveillance practices; rather, there was more sophistication in surveillance methods (Interview, Teixeira Cândido, 2023). In fact, the promised advances have not materialised.

## The perils of an anocratic regime

An anocratic regime is defined by oscillation and uncertainty (Regan and Bell, 2010). It is neither a democracy nor a dictatorship, but has elements of both. It allows dissent, but the limits are not known. It has mechanisms of freedom, but the borders are not known. The state is powerful and does not act under the rule of law, but sometimes it does.

Indefiniteness and uncertainty characterise this regime, which becomes prone to unrest. Due to these characteristics, it does not allow for a consistent model of the supervision of digital surveillance by public opinion.

In fact, it sounds as if international pressure, culminating in the embarrassing spotlight put on the hunger strike by the Portuguese

press, tilted the case towards the defendants. Internally there was limited follow-through by the state and even by activists as the groundswell was not sufficiently locally rooted. The international campaign work did not seem to build local capacity. Perhaps, international actors should have maintained constant pressure and tried to work in conjunction with local groups.

What the 15+2 case demonstrates is that, in certain circumstances, translated into obvious injustice, the physical and moral courage of activists, widespread outrage on social media and strong international institutional pressure and, public opinion can reverse the arbitrary positions of an anocratic regime. However, this does not create a permanent trend or structure; it is case by case. In this specific case, it seems that the emergence of a possible 'martyr', intense external pressure and the work of social networks were sufficient elements. However, this conclusion leaves the question: does it take a 'martyr', deaths or near deaths for public pressure to be effective in curbing the abuses of digital surveillance?

In the end, the 15+2 group disbanded. Some continued their activism (Luaty Beirão), others joined UNITA, the main opposition party (Hitler Samussuku and Nuno Álvaro Dala, the latter of whom is now a Member of Parliament). Sedrick de Carvalho is a book publisher and Domingos da Cruz has furthered his academic career. Others have disappeared from the public sphere. The truth is that they no longer function as a group.

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