Christine MESSIANT, 1961. *L'Angola colonial, histoire et société. Les prémisses du mouvement nationaliste*, Basel, P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2006, 443 p., ISBN : 3-908193-17-6.

The publication of this *opus magnum* by the late Christine Messiant is of course long overdue. The book is an only slightly adapted version of the author's PhD thesis in Sociology at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris of 1983. In 443 pages, the author offers an analysis of colonial Angola, describing its political economy and legal structures. Initially the plan was to investigate the ideologies, discourse and practices of the Angolan nationalist movements as well as the movements' socio-cultural origins. Soon, however, the project was redirected toward a focus on Angola's colonial society: the nationalist movements themselves are hardly described. Messiant defends this shift by pointing out that the history of Angolan nationalism can only be understood through an analysis of colonial society: the 'premisses' (one would have preferred a less deterministic term) of nationalism are largely to be sought in the varied experiences during the colonial era (p. 14-18). The book is not so much historical, in the sense that it does not relate a historical narrative explaining events of the past, as much as it is socio-logical, in that the author analyses data, statistics and structures of Angola's late colonial society.

1961 starts with the broad outlines of Angola's precolonial political economy. After this the characteristics of Portuguese colonialism; its legislation, the colonial economy and population statistics as well the demographic outlines are evaluated. The final hundred pages of 1961 offer an interpretation of the three broad ethnic categories in Angola: Bakongo, Ovimbundu and Mbundu societies. Messiant is careful to point to the fractured and multifarious nature of Angolan nationalism; the 'nationalist movement' of the book's title may have been put in the plural. The precise links between the nationalist movements and the colonial legacy could have been spelled out in more detail; the book is mainly to be lauded for the insightful analysis of Angola's colonial societies. The closer the author comes to describing these links, the more interesting the book becomes. Especially the final hundred pages that describe the 'situation of the three large Angolan ethnic groups' on the eve of the nationalist wars are worth reading as they combine internal societal dynamics with the processes of marginalisation, integration and disintegration related to colonial rule.

Messiant's thesis offers an analysis of elite formation in Angola in its interaction with imperial rule. Unlike the colonial legacy, the specifics of Portuguese colonialism are spelled out in detail, and Christine Messiant considers both colonial discourse and practice in her interpretation. She emphasises the relative underdeveloped nature of Portuguese colonialism and reveals the ways in which local political structures became interlinked with the colonial economy. Messiant shows that these processes of integration were always partial and, in the final analysis, concerned a marginalisation of Angola's political economy. General impoverishment in Central Angola, large-scale land dispossession after the Second World War in the North and the slowly diminishing position of old Creole elites in Luanda led to widespread discontent in the colony. The author carefully specifies such discontent; it was fed by vary different economic, social and political processes.

As Angola's various local societies interacted with the colonial structures in different ways, the outcome was by no means an undifferentiated whole. Varying degrees of 'Portugalisation' and regional processes of social differentiation rather made for heterogeneity. Messiant discusses these issues for Angola's three major groupings, as told before.

The book is, apart from a few minor errors in the references, exemplary in its academic rigour and based on extensive reading. This enables Christine Messiant to fully engage with her colleagues' point of view: time and again she affirms or contradicts theses forwarded by other scholars and explains her arguments for the affirmation or rejection. Messiant takes her time to explain how she came to an argument. This has advantages and disadvantages: it is good that the reader can minutely follow her methods and ideas, but sometimes this makes for tedious reading: some parts should perhaps have been shortened. This also holds for the parts where the information is superfluous or even doubled: the figures on whites, *mestiços*, *assimilados* and *indígenas* in both table 4 (p. 166) and table 12 (p. 316), for example, could easily have been included in table 6 (p. 207) and are again repeated in appendix 10 (p. 416-417).

Given the fact that the study was completed in 1983, it is not very difficult to find fault with it. One could question race and ethnicity as fruitful categories for interpretation. The large debates on ethnicity only took off after the thesis was written and, although Messiant is careful enough to show the complexity of the factors leading to the Angolan conflict, ethnic groups are in the book largely presented as a given and less the imagined communities they were later shown to be. The nation and ethnicity are presented as opposites, while later studies indicated that they may not have been as different as earlier presumed. Ethnicity still figures as a kind of remnant of the precolonial past; its imagination in the colonial context is not a theme of discussion in the book. Yet, the thing is – and, as indicated, Messiant's book makes this amply clear – Angola's regional development is a crucial factor in the divisions of its nationalism. The separate missionary history, differing political and economic trends and limited interaction between the elites from the three main regions are important in explaining the three large nationalist movements and the lack of cooperation between them. Messiant's interpretation of these dynamics is sound and also rare: only few publications offer such in-depth analysis of late colonialism in Angola. That this is still the situation so many years after the thesis was written is not only a pity; it also reveals the extraordinary character of Messiant's study.

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Maria Cândida PROENÇA (ed.), *O sistema de ensino em Portugal. Séculos XIX-XX*, Lisboa, Colibri, 1998, ISBN : 9727720366.

Maria Cândida PROENÇA (ed.), *Maio de 1968. Trinta anos depois. Movimentos estudantis em Portugal*, Lisboa, Colibri, 1999, ISBN : 9727720978.

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