

J O
R A C T L I F F E

A project for Atlántica



S O M E O N E E L S E ' S
C O U N T R Y

Mural, FAPLA base, Lobito

There are many myths about the Angolan Civil War. Fought between 1975 and 2002, it engaged a series of conflicts that merged into what became one of the most complex and protracted wars ever fought in Africa. Alongside its local *raisons d'être*, the war also unfolded as a proxy Cold War fuelled by external interference, secret partnerships, and undeclared political and economic agendas, primarily on the part of the US and South Africa, which then led to the involvement of Cuba and (somewhat reluctantly) the Soviet Union. All of this was made manifest in various deceptions, from the violation of international agreements to illegal operations, covert funding, and the provision of arms. It was a war of subterfuge, a fiction woven of half-truths and cover-ups. Even now, many of its stories remain untold.

I first read about Angola in *Another Day of Life*, Ryszard Kapuściński's book about the events leading to the country's independence and subsequent civil war. This was ten years after the book was written, at a time when South Africa was experiencing increasing mobilisation against the forces of the apartheid government, which was waging its own war in Angola against the Namibian liberation movement SWAPO. Until then, in my imagination Angola had been an abstract place. In the 1970s and early '80s it was simply "the border," a secret location where brothers and boyfriends were sent as part of their military service. And although tales about Russians and Cubans and the Cold War began to emerge — tales that conjured up a distinctly different image from the one conveyed by the South African state — it remained for me a place of myth.

In 2007 I went to Luanda and began taking the photographs that would become the series *Terreno Ocupado*. It had been five years since the war had ended and the city was wild with postwar energy and enterprise, as millions of people displaced by the war sought a new future. During my time there, a second project began to suggest itself, one that would shift my attention away from the urban manifestations of the aftermath to the space of war itself. And so, in 2009, I embarked on a two-year journey through what Portuguese colonials referred to as *as terras do fim do mundo* — the lands of the end of the world. I travelled with ex-soldiers — South African and Angolan — who were returning to the places where they had fought for the first time since the end of the war.

These works explore how past trauma manifests itself, both forensically and symbolically, in the landscape of the present, We live in a present space, but one that — as Jill Bennett notes in *A Concept of Prepossession* — "bears the marks (indelible and ephemeral, visible and invisible) of its history. And as much as we occupy places, they have the capacity to pre-occupy us."



Roadside stall on the way to Viana



The beach at Ilha



On the road to Cuito Cuanavale IV



Unmarked mass grave on the outskirts of Cuito Cuanavale



On the road to Cuito Cuanavale III



Unidentified memorial in the desert, south of Namibe I



SAM missile bunker, Cuban base, Namibe



Burning field, Dombe Grande (Dyptich)

