

# Language ideology, representation and nationalism: the discursive construction of identity in postcolonial Angola

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*Abstract:* This article explores and problematises the role of language in the construction of Angolan national identity. Drawing on cultural studies and insights from linguistic anthropology, it is argued that in the Angolan postcolonial context, the symbolic power of language has been recruited to perpetuate marginalisation, linguistic stratification and social hierarchisation through linguistic ideologies of differentiation. To collect the data the study utilised virtual ethnography, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The results of this study revealed that the circulating discourses about the nation and identity perpetuate disparate social representations, social hierarchy and marginalisation. The findings also demonstrated how social actors resist dominant discourses and ideologies about the relationship between language and identity in the Angolan postcolonial context. The findings suggest that linguistic heterogeneity creates discursive and ideological tensions that have implications for the construction of a unified national identity.

*Keywords:* identity, discourse, language ideology, representation, nationalism, Angola.

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## Introduction

Angola is a country located on the western Atlantic coast of central Africa between Namibia and the Republic of Congo. It also borders the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia to the east. Angola was a colony of Portugal for approximately five hundred years. In the context of Portuguese colonisation, language was central to cultural and identity politics. To underscore the central role of language in the process of colonisation, the Portuguese colonisers not only prohibited the use of African indigenous languages in public places and education but also used language to socially categorise Africans as *assimilados* and *indigenos* (Manuel & Johnson 2018). Such social categorisation has paved the way for the hierarchisation of languages in the construction of culture and identity in the context of postcolonial Angola.

Language has always been central to the articulation and discussion of nationhood (Haugen 1966; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 2007), and of identity and representation (Hall 1985, 1997; Howarth 2002), in both the colonial and the postcolonial contexts. It is a truism that cultural realities are always produced in specific socio-historical contexts. Consequently, it becomes vital to outline the processes that generate those contexts to better understand the socio-historical conditions that have shaped and influenced existing cultural and discursive practices. The corollary is that in postcolonial Africa (Berman 2013; Wolff 2017), and in Angola in particular, cultural and identity politics is linked to the politics of the movements of liberation against colonialism and nationalism. Although several authors have written about the liberation movements and nationalism in Angola (Guimarães 2001; Messiant 2006; Severo 2011; da Silva 2015; Martins 2016; Ball & Gastrow 2019), this article argues that the complex relationship between the movements of liberation and the politics of language and identity has not been systematically discussed in the literature.

I contend that in the Angolan postcolonial context, the symbolic power of language has been recruited to perpetuate romanticised nationalism (Gellner 1998) and linguistic ideologies of differentiation (Irvine & Gal 2000). Angola is a multilingual country with a salient discursive heterogeneity, and this implies a complex relation between language discourse, power and identity. To put it differently, language and discourse are not autonomous entities; rather, language and discourse are mutually constitutive and filled with ideological and political overtones (Bakhtin 1981). Consequently, identities are not autonomous entities because they are produced politically and discursively, inscribed into the regimes of linguistic signification and power. Nevertheless, people are not dupes who are blindly subjected to power. People may resist the discursive and non-discursive practices that interpellate them (Foucault 1972).

In Foucault (1980: 100), discourses are ‘tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations. There can be different and even contradictory discourses within

the same strategy.' Therefore, in Angola, the fact that Portuguese is the only official language operates symbolically and represents a contested space. Moreover, it is used as an instrument of national unity and a site for the construction of national identity. The relation between linguistic structure and discourse implies that power operates by producing homogeneity and stratifying languages and discourse. Consequently, this creates among other effects the hegemony of the Portuguese and other languages.

Drawing from constructionist epistemologies, cultural studies and insights from linguistic anthropology, I use a discursive perspective, specifically critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak 1997) and insights from discourse historical analysis (Wodak *et al.* 2009), to problematise and question the discourses of nation-building and the state in the Angolan postcolonial context. In addition, the article examines how the circulating discourses about the nation recruit linguistic ideologies to perpetuate power and social exclusion. For my purposes, the discursive approach refers to one in which meaning, representation and culture are constitutive (Hall 1997). Thus, I argue that identities are discursive and performative insofar as they are constructed through discursive practices that perpetuate social representations and enact disparate identities and a hierarchy of citizenship. The notion of performativity has been taken by many critical scholars to emphasise that identity construction is a dynamic process of doing rather than a static form of being, that is, identities are continuously reproduced and changing through individuals' actions (Butler 1991; Heller 2010). Methodologically, I use the discourse-historical approach (Wodak *et al.* 2009) and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (Fairclough 1992, 2013) to synchronically and diachronically make sense of the socio-historical contexts and trace the circulating texts, discourses and the processes involved in the creation of social representation and construction of identity in postcolonial Angola.

The remainder of this article is divided into three sections, the first of which is the literature review section, which discusses the key concepts such as postcolonialism; nation and nationalism; language and nationalism; language ideology and nation-building; language representation and identity; and the historical background of Angolan nationalism, specifically the roots of Angolan liberation movements against Portuguese colonialism. Next, the article presents and discusses the research methods, findings and discussion, and conclusions, respectively.

## **Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism is a contested term and has been the object of many heated debates in the social sciences and humanities. Nevertheless, according to Sandhu & Higgins (2016: 179–80), the term postcolonialism refers to 'a theoretical lens that is concerned

with the legacy of colonialism, including how the identity dimensions of class, ethnicity, language, and gender have been formed in response to the center and periphery political relations'. As a theoretical lens, postcolonial theory draws from an array of disciplines, including but not limited to sociology, critical theory and critical discourse. For [Eagleton \(2008: 204\)](#), the focus of postcolonial critique is 'the problematizing of culture itself, which is moving beyond the isolated work of art, into the areas of language, lifestyle, social value, group identity, inevitably intersects with the question of global political power'. The discourse of nation and nationalism is bounded by modern ways of thinking and talking about identities ([Calhoun 1997](#)). The term postcolonial in this article underscores the cultural legacy of colonialism and its influence particularly in language use and the construction of identity in the period after independence in Angola.

### **Nation and nationalism**

Although the notion of Nation has been extensively discussed in the literature on nationalism ([Castells 2010](#); [Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2013](#); [Breuilly 2019](#)), Anthony D. Smith provides a useful definition to begin with. According to [Smith \(1991: 14\)](#), a nation is 'a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy, and common legal rights and duties for all members'. As a political ideology, nationalism derives its legitimacy in producing and reproducing the assumption that each state should have its nation, each nation its state ([Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008](#)). A nation is seen, then, as [Fox & Miller-Idriss \(2008: 536\)](#) forcefully note, as 'a cultural construct of collective belonging realized and legitimated through institutional and discursive practices; and a site for material and symbolic struggles over the definition of national inclusion and exclusion'.

The origin and development of nation and nationalism as products of modernism have been well documented and are beyond the scope of this article (for more details, see [Kedourie 1960](#); [Anderson 1983](#); [Smith 1986, 1991, 1998](#); [Renan 1990](#); [Eagleton 1991](#); [Fairclough 1992](#); [Hutchinson & Smith 1994](#); [Billig 1995](#); [Hall 1996](#); [Safran 1999](#); [Hobsbawm 2007](#); [Oakes & Warren 2007](#); [Wodak et al. 2009](#); [Castells 2010](#); [Coakley 2012](#); [Berman 2013](#); [Kroskrity 2015](#); [de Oliveira 2016](#); [Martins 2016](#); [Breuilly 2019](#); [Dumitrica 2019](#)). This article approaches nationalism both as ideology and discourse through the lenses of British cultural studies ([Hall 1996](#)) and linguistic anthropology ([Woolard 1998](#); [Kroskrity 2015](#)). From this perspective, this article conceptualises the nation and its corresponding ideology as cultural constructs engineered by political elites and deployed discursively to further political, economic and cultural agendas.

## **Language and nationalism**

Language as viewed by sociolinguists is a social practice and a mode of action that is socially shaped and constitutive (Fairclough 1989). In this sense, as Resta (2012: 1) aptly notes:

Language, in all cultures, fulfills a number of functions. It interprets the whole of our experiences, reducing the infinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, as well the worlds inside us, to a manageable number of classes of phenomena, types of processes, events, and actions, classes of objects, people, and institutions.

In other words, language plays a vital role in the construction of reality, creating frames of consistency. Language is the window into the world. Language is fundamentally at work in how people operate as individuals, as members of their communities and within cultures and societies. We use language to navigate expectations and engage in interpersonal interactions.

Fishman (1972: 49) maintains that ‘language is seen as the most salient collective symbol for national identity due to the fact that the unity of language is viewed as more enduring than other symbols’. Language issues have been guided by social movements, attitudes and ideologies. Language is seen as a natural division commensurate with people and their respective cultures.

Therefore, to examine the complexity of nationalism in postcolonial Angola, along with its political and cultural consequences, it is important to provide a brief sketch of the sociolinguistic situation of Angola in this period. The main feature of the Angolan sociolinguistic situation that many commentators fail to underscore is the dominance of the Portuguese language and the marginalisation of African indigenous languages. The hierarchisation of the discursive field has arisen out of the history of colonialism (Manuel & Johnson 2018). Although most language scholars agree that African languages deserve special attention, more often than not, political commentators argue that African languages should be relegated to informal social roles (Manuel 2015).

Furthermore, the practices by which Portuguese became the only linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991) gradually became consistent in the postcolonial context. The result has been that many Angolan parents are limiting the use of African indigenous languages (national languages) and teaching their children to be ashamed of them. For example, Feijó (2010) asserts that African languages, or regional languages as he calls them, have poor vocabularies and therefore are not suitable for use in scientific, technological development and innovation contexts (Manuel & Johnson 2018). It should be noted that contrary to what African languages’ detractors believe, the study and use of African languages in scientific contexts has been documented (see Carter & Makoondkwa 1987).

Surprisingly, the colonial politics of language is upheld by the ruling elites in the postcolonial context with the assumption that the existence of a common language shared by the whole population unifies a nation (Bokamba 2008). In the Angolan postcolonial context, this assumption is epitomised in article 19 of the Angolan constitution of 2010, which enshrines Portuguese as the only official language. In addition, the current Basic Law for Education no. 32/20 of 12 August upholds Portuguese as the only *de jure* medium of instruction in education. However, the assumption that a nation needs to speak a common language to develop a strong sense of nationalism raises questions about the commitment to and respect of cultural and linguistic diversity in Angola. A choice of language for nation-building is not just a matter of political integration but also a mechanism for enacting and legitimating the national culture and ideology of the political system in place in that particular nation (Safran 1994).

### Language ideology

Language ideology is an established field of research in the social sciences and humanities (Hodge & Kress 1996; Woolard 1998; Kroskrity 2012). It is noteworthy that the literature on language ideology reviewed in this article consists of selected research, namely the strands that take a cultural approach to language ideology (Silverstein 1979; Woolard 1998); the strands that emphasise language ideology and linguistic differentiation (Irvine & Gal 2000); the strand that views ideology as a discursive practice (Fairclough 2013) through which people's identities are constructed and refashioned (Featherman 2015); the strand that views language as an ideological instrument of control (Fowler *et al.* 1979; Fowler 1991); and literature that acknowledges media as a discursive space for investigating language ideological debates (Johnson & Milani 2010).

Concerning ideology, Silverstein (1979: 193) defined linguistic ideologies as 'any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as rationalization or justification of perceived language structure or use'. Silverstein's contribution paved the way for language ideology as a field of inquiry in the field of linguistic anthropology. This research has flourished rapidly and pursues the following research questions: (1) What is the structure of language ideology? (2) What are the consequences of such ideologies? (3) How do linguistic ideologies shape linguistic identities? (4) What is the agency of speakers in an ideologically constrained social structure (Woolard 1998; Rodríguez-Ordoñez 2019)?

Irvine & Gal (2000) used Peircean semiotics to investigate language ideologies in South Africa, West Africa and Europe. They note that ideologies are produced through semiotic processes of iconisation, erasure and recursiveness. Iconisation refers to the process through which linguistic processes (linguistic features) are assumed to

represent the essential characteristics of a particular social group. Said differently, language ideology links the specific qualities or linguistic features of language varieties to the qualities of the people or group that speak those varieties. Social actors construct boundaries that regulate social interactions by reinforcing social norms and discursive practices. Erasure, as Gal & Irvine (1995: 974), put it, refers to the ‘process in which ideology in simplifying the field of linguistic practices, renders some persons or activities or sociolinguistic phenomenon invisible’. Recursiveness is when a distinction at one level of signifying practice is projected onto another level in a recurring manner. In so doing, the distinction tends to be used recursively across various social categories (De Costa 2016).

Moreover, social media as a space where ordinary people interact and discuss various social issues represents a discursive space and a potential site for the discursive construction of identity. Investigating language ideology in social media represents a new window that can cast light on the contemporary processes of social change and identity construction (Heller 2010). Finally, language ideologies are indexical because they create boundaries and assign individuals positions based on the differentiation of linguistic resources, accents and non-standard language (Irvine & Gal 2000; Blommaert 2009). In the context of the production and reproduction of ideologies, it is worth noting that language and social practices do not merely reflect social norms but also perpetuate and shape them. According to Fuller (2013), despite the naturalisation of ideas, it is possible to find evidence of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies in discussions and comments in public forums such as blogs, chatrooms, social networking sites and others.

Conceptualising the discursive construction of identity as an ideological and contested space implies, as Blommaert (2009: 204) notes, rejecting the monocentric view of the nation-state as ‘the main actor and delineator of language norms, to polycentric multilingual environments that may or may not include national units’. Consequently, multiplicity emphasises the view that the discursive construction of identity may involve divergent ideological perspectives on language use and discourse that are contested and sometimes disjunctive (Kroskrity 2015). Of particular interest to this article is how political and historical processes have shaped language form and function, and how they have created multiple and shifting ideological relationships between language, representation, power and identity (Freeland & Patrick 2004) in the postcolonial context. The literature on linguistic ideology is extensive and it is not possible to review it here (for more details, see, e.g., Blommaert 1999; Lippi-Green 2012; Verschueren 2012; Ajšić & McGroarty 2015; Kamwangamalu 2016; Wright, 2016; Douifi 2018; Rodríguez-Ordoñez 2019). Suffice it to say that this article combines the insights on the ideology of linguistic differentiation formulated by Irvine & Gal (2000) and Gal & Irvine (1995) with critical discourse analysis (Wodak *et al.* 2009)



to make sense of the discursive construction of identities in the Angolan postcolonial context.

### **Language, representation and identity**

The relationship between language, discourse and identity has been a focus of inquiry within the field of sociolinguistics. In recent years the field has witnessed new developments as a result of a theorising of identity that challenges traditional views of identity (ethnonational identities) which assume them to be stable (De Fina *et al.* 2006). A perennial issue for discourse analysts has always been the challenge to examine the role of language in the construction of identities and how language practices index such identities (De Fina 2006). How is group identity represented, refashioned and circulated through discourse?

The analysis of relationships in identity construction can potentially illuminate the nature of group–self representations. Discourse analysis based on participants' accounts of social interaction can cast light on identity construction. De Fina (2006: 352) concurs that participants' accounts of social interactions can reveal how 'socially shared group representations are managed and deployed by members of particular groups and what kinds of conflicts and acts of resistance are associated with them'. The social constructionist approach to social and discursive phenomena propounds that identities are constructed and negotiated through discourse and rejects the traditional view that identity is stable and characterised by objective qualities of individuals or social groups (De Fina 2006).

In summary, the construction of identity also relies on subjective factors such as attitudes, perceptions and sentiments of nationhood. These attitudes, stereotypes and perceptions have been shaped and influenced by discursively constructed political and cultural ideologies in the context of struggles against colonisation and nationalism. In the context of postcolonial Angola, the stereotypes and attitudes result from the struggles for power and hegemony among the political elites who fought for independence and the construction of the 'Angolan nation' (Martins & Cardina 2019). Research on the discursive construction of identity and representation is vast and it is not possible to discuss it here (for further reading, see Lakoff 1987; Hall 1997, 2000; Baker & Galasiński 2001; Moore 2001; Fauconnier & Turner 2002).

### **The background of Angolan nationalism and the language question**

Angola is a country located in south-west Africa. Angola was a Portuguese colony from the 16th to the beginning of the 20th century and it acquired its independence from Portugal in 1975. It is commonly accepted that understanding the Angolan



postcolonial context requires an understanding of the process of decolonisation, which involves the three important nationalist movements, namely the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA); the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), a revolutionary movement with Marxist ideological leanings; and the Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), a movement with Maoist ideological leanings. Although the nationalist wars in Lusophone Africa had a political character (Chabal 2002; Arenas 2011), it is important to stress that in Angola nationalist wars were not only political but also ideological and cultural in nature.

Nevertheless, the struggle for political power was probably the critical factor that led to armed conflict among the nationalist movements. One of the most daunting challenges of Angolan nationalism was the ideological divide among the three liberation movements, which consequently divided the country along ethnic lines. The ethnic associations led to the assumption that the FNLA was a liberation movement that had regional support among Bakongo, MPLA with members from Mbundu group, and UNITA with members from the Ovimbundu group. This situation, as Guimarães (2001) puts it, resulted in a dogged struggle for supremacy between the three main anticolonial movements.

After the fall of the authoritarian regime in Portugal in 1974, the drive to be the leading anticolonial movement intensified into an outright bid for power in a soon-to-be-independent Angola.

It is significant, however, to note that despite its divisive policy, colonialism paved the way for the rise of nationalist consciousness among intellectuals, which consequently led to the process of defining a collective idea of wider Angolan national identity through the erasure of ethnic identities (Guimarães 2001). The history of Angolan nationalism and the armed conflict among the nationalist movements have been well documented (Guimarães 2001; Chabal 2002; Brinkman 2003; Messiant 2006; Severo 2011; de Oliveira 2016; Martins 2016) and are beyond the scope of this article.

Returning to the language question, especially the relationship between language, power and identity politics (McColl-Millar 2005; Craith 2007; Mooney & Evans 2015), it is significant to note that although many studies have discussed the roots of Angolan nationalism, the question of how language has been used in the production and reproduction of nationalist discourse and national identity in the postcolonial period has been neglected. To underscore the place of language in the nationalist project is to emphasise that the Angolan nation is part of a wider ideological consciousness; as Billig (1995: 10) notes, 'national languages also have to be imagined, and this lies at the root of today's common-sense belief that discrete languages naturally exist', and the Portuguese language is the unmistakable symbol of national unity and nationhood. It is critical to note that Angola is a multilingual and multiethnic nation with more than 29 languages and dialects (Ethnologue 2022).

Ethnologue considers six African languages to benefit from corpus planning in Angola: Chokwe, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Oshwambo, Ngangela and Umbundu. In 2014, the Angolan government organised its first population census and found that 71 per cent of the population spoke Portuguese at home, with only 22.96 per cent speaking Umbundu, 8.24 per cent speaking Kikongo, 7.82 per cent speaking Kimbundu, 3.11 per cent speaking Ngangela and 6.54 per cent speaking Chokwe. In urban areas, 85 per cent of the population reported speaking Portuguese at home in the 2014 census, against 49 per cent in rural areas ([Angola 2014](#)). In terms of domains of use, Portuguese is the only official language, but more than 29 other languages are spoken in the country, mostly Bantu languages. African languages have little coverage on national television and radio and they are mostly confined to informal roles such as traditional ceremonies, family encounters and markets. Thus, the trend over the past 20 years appears to be a marked linguistic shift towards Portuguese and away from African languages.

It has been argued that elites play an important role in the development of nationalist ideologies and the construction of national identity ([Gellner 1983](#); [Myers-Scotton 1993](#)). In their quest to control political and cultural power, Angolan political elites have used language strategically as an instrument for the expression of collective consciousness. Despite resistance on the part of ethnic intellectuals, the elites also use language to demarcate themselves from the population in order to perpetuate the status quo and maintain control over the economic and cultural capital ([Bourdieu & Passeron 1977](#)) necessary to participate in the democratic processes of society.

Angolan nationalism can be characterised both as a nationalist ideological movement and as a symbolic language nationalism which, according to [Smith \(1991: 73\)](#), ‘connects ideology with mass sentiments with the wider group of the population using slogans, ideas, symbols, and ceremonies’. In my view, while Angolan nationalism is rhetorically built on the premise of the supra-ethnic political culture, its modus operandi reflects the use of cultural distinctiveness of the elites and intelligentsia, or what [Smith \(1991\)](#) refers to as intelligentsia nationalism, to forge the political and cultural identity of the nation. Consequently, as national identity has been defined based on the cultural and political identity of the elites, the population from different ‘ethnic’ groups has been marginalised and excluded based on linguistic differentiation.

In other words, although the role of language in the construction of national identity and citizenship remains marginal in discussions of Angolan nationalism, especially in the postcolonial context, this article argues that language has been at the heart of the discourse on national identity in Angola. To maintain their grip on political, cultural and economic power, nationalists qua political elites have oversimplified the complexities of the multiethnic and plurilinguistic population through the nationalist ideology of ‘one people and one nation’ declared by Agostinho

Neto, the first president of Angola (Neto 1977). Consequently, this implies the confirmation of the hegemony of Portuguese as the sole official language and therefore the language of national unity. This hegemony operates through the ideology of linguistic differentiation. Cultural narratives of national identity, as Martins (2016) argues, have been used to perpetuate linguistic prejudice, stereotyping, marginalisation, discrimination, language hierarchisation and legitimisation of political actions, with profound social, educational, cultural and economic consequences in the lives of the population.

To summarise, although much has been written about Angolan nationalism and its consequences in the aftermath of independence, much of what is written has failed to question and problematise the role of language in nation-building and its profound impact on the construction of the Angolan national identity and citizenship in the postcolonial context.

## Methods

### Participants

The study utilised the purposive sampling method to select the participants who were interviewed. The researcher selected a total sample of 18 participants. Ten participants were aged 24 to 45 and eight participants were aged between 30 and 65. To select the participants, individual factors such as education, occupation, as well as social, regional and ethnic membership (as defined by the participants themselves) were used as selection criteria. The participants selected were linguists, teachers, politicians and workers such as merchants. In terms of education, linguists and teachers had at least earned a bachelor's degree. Other participants had concluded secondary school and technical vocational education. In terms of language, most participants spoke at least two languages, that is, Portuguese and other languages (French, English, African languages). The participants were originally from different ethnolinguistic groups (Bakongo, Mbundu, Ovimbundu, etc.). The goal was to select participants from different social groups to get a broad cross section of society. For online data, the study utilised distributed document data collections (Rahm-Skågeby 2011); specifically, several blogs were searched for relevant discussions. These were general discussions on different issues, and the threads of the discussions relevant to the research question were saved and labelled through screenshots (Boellstroff *et al.* 2012).

### Critical discourse analysis

The development of critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be traced from critical linguistics, an approach to language and society put forward by a group of linguistics dissatisfied with the analysis of language and discourse in mainstream linguistics (Fowler *et al.* 1979).

CDA is an interdisciplinary method that combines micro and macro levels of analysis to explore the ideological workings of language. CDA is an explicitly political approach which, according to Benwell & Stokoe (2006: 9), is ‘dedicated to uncovering and exposing societal power asymmetries, hierarchies and the oppression of particular groups’. Discourses play a central role in the genesis and construction of social conditions. According to Chouliaraki (1998), discourse is a system of options from which language users make choices. From this perspective, identity construction is performative. Performativity depends on how people frame and evaluate discourse (Da Silva 2015).

Methodologically, this article combines the discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Wodak *et al.* 2009) and Fairclough three-dimensional framework (Fairclough 1992, 2013) to synchronically and diachronically make sense of the socio-historical contexts and trace the circulating texts, discourses and the processes involved in the creation of social representation and construction of identity in postcolonial Angola. DHA explores the historical and social to locate the embedded meaning of social events and phenomena in a specific moment (Wodak & Meyer 2009). Fairclough’s CDA framework attends to three interrelated levels of discourse analysis, namely the object of analysis (text, verbal or visual); the level of production and reception, which attends to the processes by which the object of analysis is produced (e.g., writing, speaking); and the socio-cultural level, which provides the social analysis (including the historical conditions).

Following Wodak *et al.* (2009), this investigation uses triangulation by collecting data using topic-oriented semi-structured interviews to see how participants discuss and discursively articulate the issue of language and national identity. Using an interview protocol, semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, and interviews were conducted in a private closed room at the Faculty of Humanities. The interviews were tape-recorded using a previously tested digital recorder with the consent of the participants. Although the researcher conducted 18 interviews, after 15 interviews many of the themes became recurrent, and little or no new information was obtained from the final three interviews, suggesting that all categories had been exhausted and a point of saturation was reached (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015). Following the guidelines from Saldaña (2013), data from interviews was immediately coded into themes, concepts and categories after the audio recordings had been

transcribed (Rubin & Rubin 2012). In the descriptive process, multiple and overlapping codes emerged. Codes suggesting similar thematic links were collapsed, while codes that were not relevant to answer my research question were put aside.

In Wodak *et al.* (2009), triangulation means that the analysis of discourses uses methodological and theoretical perspectives from various disciplines. Additionally, the article uses data collected from online social networks, particularly threads that configure discussions and ideological debates (Blommaert 1999) on important social issues related but not limited to health, language, politics and identity. Virtual ethnography, introduced by Hine (2000), has become a useful tool for investigating language ideologies. It is a variant of traditional ethnomethodological techniques, utilising a spectrum of observational and other qualitative methods to examine how meaning is constructed in online interactions (Kelly-Holmes 2015).

Cyberspace or social media is a suitable source of data for the study of language, representation and identity because it is one of many sites of ideological reproduction (Hine 2000). According to Hine (2000), a discourse analysis approach to ethnography might be appropriate for examining discourse and identity (Benwell & Stokoe 2006) through online social networks. As Blommaert *et al.* (2009: 204) note, in mediated environments 'it is not just language that is policed but also registers, genres, and styles, lexis and pronunciation when it comes to the production of messages, meanings, and identities'. Data from online social networks was collected from Instagram debates during the Covid-19 quarantine period between March and September 2020.

Thus, the main objective of this article is to identify and describe how self-representation (Moscovici 1984) and national identity are constructed discursively among the participants in social interaction. According to De Fina (2006), linguistic resources are often used to index individuals' positioning concerning social categorisation. Therefore, textual and intertextual analysis (Fairclough 1992; Manuel & Johnson 2018) was used to reveal how socially shared group representations are produced, reproduced and negotiated in social interactions. To trace the interrelations between texts and discourses, or what Fairclough (1995) refers to as intertextuality, the article examines different discursive practices to see how individual argumentation patterns on the same topic are interconnected and recontextualised in other discursive contexts (Wodak *et al.* 2009). Specifically, the study looks at how the issue of language and national identity is framed in different texts, especially in the Angolan language policy (The Constitution, Article 19 line 1 and 2), the interview texts and the discourses from online social networking threads. The main goal is to trace the intertextual and interdiscursive links among the various texts and discourses and see how these have influenced social and discursive practices in Angola.

## **Data presentation, analysis and discussion**

This article investigates the discursive construction of national identity and how the ideology of linguistic differentiation is used to perpetuate stereotypical social categorisations of particular groups in the postcolonial context in Angola. In other words, the main question of this investigation was to explore people's experiences with language use and national identity in Angola. The findings from the excerpt of the Angolan Constitution regarding language use, online ethnography (social networks) and semi-structured interviews with the participants are presented below.

### **Language provision in the Angolan Constitution**

Concerning the use of language, the Angolan Constitution of 2010 Article 19, specifically states that:

[Extract 1] The official language of the Republic of Angola is Portuguese ... The state shall value and promote the study, teaching, and use of other Angolan languages, in addition to the main international languages of communication. (Angolan Constitution, 2010)

Although the official status of the Portuguese language may seem unproblematic given its role as a language of wider communication, the second clause of Article 19 of the Constitution is both problematic and revealing. The article has important ramifications as far as the language question is concerned. The Constitution enshrines Portuguese as the only official language in Angola. Although the Constitution upholds the use of African languages, it categorises them as 'other' languages. In treating the African languages as 'the other languages', the Constitution creates a situation whereby Portuguese is accorded high status while African languages are simply treated as 'other languages'.

Furthermore, the rhetorical language of the Constitution can be viewed as a declaration of intentions or of what is desirable, but not what is de facto to be promoted. The language provision in the Constitution also demonstrates how the creation of a linguistic hierarchy involves not only the ranking of languages, but also their categorisation so that some languages are associated with prestige, privilege and economic power. Within the context of language use, the hierarchisation of languages results in the legitimisation and imposition of certain ways of knowing and speaking.

Furthermore, the imposition of linguistic hierarchy can also be seen as integrally tied to socio-economic boundaries, which may reinforce the political and socio-economic power of those who have a good command of the dominant language and the marginalisation of those who do not. The Constitution enshrines the hegemonic position of Portuguese while rhetorically upholding the use of African languages,

albeit with a marginalising tone. As will become apparent, ideological conflicts and contradictions at the centre of the language and identity politics in Angola are captured by the positioning of the interviewed participants and the findings from social network ideological debates in this study, to which I now turn.

### **Social networks**

As discussed earlier, cyberspace or social media is a suitable source of data for the study of language, representation and identity because it is one of many sites of ideological reproduction (Hine 2000). As noted earlier, according to Hine (2000), a discourse analysis approach to ethnography might be appropriate for examining discourse and identity through online social networks. The findings from social network interaction in this section represent threads collected from Instagram debates on health care (1,236 comments).

This social network feed contained Instagram debates on a video posted by a patient with a typical Portuguese accent who claimed that he was being unfairly quarantined at the Covid-19 facility in Luanda because he did not have Covid-19. The extracts below present people's reactions to the video.

Concerning the video, one of the participants in the discussion commented:

[Extract 2] This Zairian or Langa does not know how to speak Portuguese. These Bakongo are like that.

Reacting to this participant's comments, another participant in the debate said:

[Extract 3] This is very complicated because I see many people in this debate focus not on the message that the man is trying to deliver, but instead call him Langa or a foreigner. Brothers, the disease does not know nationality, race, religion, or even political ideology. These behaviors separate the African people.

Another participant in the feed made the following observations:

[Extract 4] This Langa does not know how to speak Portuguese. Instead of saying Ambulancia. He said Ambulencia.

To the above comments, one of the participants reacted as follows:

[Extract 5] First, the tribalist comments simply demonstrate that these people have little brains and are ignorant. We should be supporting our Angolan brother. He is Angolan like us. But ignorant people don't see that.

Another participant disagreed with the above and noted:

[Extract 6] what! A person, who is Angolan does not speak that way. This is Langa; Bakongo are like that.



Later another participant in the debate on the video bemoaned:

[Extract 7] It is sad. Discrimination against my people. The people of my heart.

In a similar vein, another commentator to the video noted:

[Extract 8] Even though we are discussing health issues, it is inadmissible to treat a person like that, regardless of ethnicity or nationality.

One of the participants in the discussion agreed, saying:

[Extract 9] Many are not reacting to the video and the issue it addresses. People are making tribalist comments. My god what kind of country is this. Many people think an Angolan is the one who speaks Portuguese well.

Finally, another participant in the debate commented:

[Extract 10] People, let us not underestimate this citizen's message. We should pay attention to the message, not to his Portuguese with an awful accent.

The extracts above reveal how the circulating discourses on language use and identity are intricately intertwined with the existing discursive practices in postcolonial Angola. [Extracts 2, 4 and 6](#) demonstrate how language is used to set boundaries for who is considered Angolan based on linguistic differentiation. As can be seen above, the participants in [extracts 2, 4 and 6](#) did not attempt to understand the message in the video, in which the patient in quarantine claimed that he was being unjustly taken to the Covid-19 facility without any evidence that he was infected with Covid-19. Rather, these three participants in the debate concentrated on using the linguistic performance of the patient to categorise and stereotype him as 'Langa' and 'Zairian' or 'Bakongo'. Interestingly, the three extracts cited above stereotypically use the terms Zairese or Langa and conflate them with one of the major ethnolinguistic groups of Angola called Bakongo.

In the postcolonial context, it is not surprising that these participants use stereotypes and categorisations to represent particular ethnolinguistic groups, in this case the Bakongo. It is important to note that stereotyping and categorising individuals who speak Portuguese with a French accent or Angolans who have returned from the former Zaire (today's DRC) as Zairians or Langas has its origins in the struggles for political interests and power among the Angolan nationalist movements. The categorisation and stereotyping of particular ethnolinguistic groups has often been used strategically and ideologically, both before and after independence, to control the masses and maintain the grip on power among the nationalist movements, as discussed concerning the background of Angolan nationalism.

Language ideologies are involved in how we define what counts as a legitimate language or language variety and a legitimate accent in social interactions. Investigating

language use as a discursive phenomenon in the context of nation-building through the examination of language in social media ideological debates is useful because it can cast light on the complex formation of national identity in the postcolonial context. Moreover, as [Blommaert \(1999: 1\)](#) has noted, ‘debates are not ideologically neutral, but constitute the very moments in which views and beliefs about languages and their speakers (i.e. language ideologies) are crystallised, enforced, and/or challenged’.

The extracts above reveal how linguistic features such as accents have come to be conventionally understood as pointing to particular social categories and identities ([Jaffe 2014](#)). Moreover, [extracts 2, 4 and 6](#) demonstrate how language features and linguistic performance have been used to perpetuate what [Irvine & Gal \(2000\)](#) refer to as iconisation. The participants in the three extracts use the language features produced by the patient to categorise him as a member of a particular social group, that is, Bakongo, Zairian or Langa. Unfortunately, in the postcolonial context of Angola, these stereotypes and categories have made their way into the existing public discourse and may have been used to perpetuate social exclusion and the linguistic hierarchy, which has implications for the consolidation of national identity ([de Oliveira 2016](#)).

Furthermore, it is important to note that although indexicality is a context-dependent phenomenon ([Jaffe 2014](#)), the use of stereotypes and categories such as Langa, Zairian or Bailundu to index individuals who speak with a particular accent or pronunciation cannot be understood in isolation because historically these have been strategically used within the context of nationalist movements. Furthermore, the use of languages in Angola continues to reflect the colonial legacy. During the colonial period, acquisition of the Portuguese language was a prerequisite for Angolans to become full citizens ([Halme 2006](#)).

Consequently, in the postcolonial context this legacy has continued to perpetuate monolingual bias and the ideology of linguistic differentiation. While recognising that in social interactions contexts are multilayered, from the findings above it can be inferred that the context of the interaction in the debate is shaped by collective and historical processes (nationalism) and circulating discourses that the participants do not have control over. The history of colonialism provides the backbone and has paved the way for the anticolonial movements, which are the instruments through which nationalist sentiment and discourses are produced, circulated and reproduced in the postcolonial context ([Martins 2016](#)).

In other words, in Angola language continues to provide the best fit not only for self-categorisation but also for the construction of national identity. The construction of identity relies on objective characteristics such as language and territory. The dominant ideology, that is, the ideology of linguistic differentiation, values monolingualism, and national identity is distributed based on linguistic performance that devalues other languages and varieties and marginalises individuals who speak with an accent

other than the standard Portuguese. Particularly striking is the fact that a debate about health care (Covid-19) turned into a discussion on the patient's Portuguese linguistic competence.

Nevertheless, a critical look at [extracts 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10](#) demonstrates that people are not always subservient to dominant ideologies. These extracts clearly show how social actors negotiate meaning in response to the lack of unity caused by the institutional, socio-economic and cultural conditions of late modernity. The extracts also show how, in the context of late modernity, people are repositioning themselves against the one state, one language and one culture discourse akin to modernist nationalism ([Anderson 1983](#); [Billig 1995](#)). The extracts demonstrate that there has been an ideological shift away from the view of language as bounded entity indexing, particularly in an ethnolinguistic community, towards a new understanding and emphasis on multilingualism ([Pérez-Millans 2016](#)). [Extracts 9 and 10](#) demonstrate that participants are aware of the fact that people might have different proficiency levels in terms of languages. For example, in [extract 9](#), one of the participants said that 'many people think an Angolan is the one who speaks Portuguese well'. In this extract, the participant shows some awareness that language proficiency does not necessarily index ethnolinguistic identity or nationality.

This shift can be attributed to the increasingly fragmented nature of competing identities in the postcolonial context. People are more and more aware that the relationship between language and identity is unstable and dynamic. Although it is often assumed that ordinary people repeat nationalist discourse unreflexively (banal nationalism, in Billig's terms), from the extracts above it can be seen that people speak reflexively about nationhood, bringing to the fore their agency.

In short, rather than working from presuppositions about a top-down mechanism originating from a fixed political power that shapes and influences discursive practices and social action, a critical look at the participants' discourse concerning language and identity reveals how actors in social interactions negotiate meanings and positioning to capture the changes of conditions in the context of late modernity ([Appadurai 1996](#)). It should, however, be stressed that from the analysis it is also clear that ideological debates are not only about languages but also involve evaluation of others in ways that ratify and endorse unequal social relations ([Pickering 2016](#)). Although there has been an ideological shift in how people assess the relationship between language and identity, the findings above suggest that in the Angolan postcolonial context, people use stereotyping and categorisation to strategically create disparate conceptions and representations of ethnic groups in public forums and social networks. The findings also suggest that stereotypes create symbolic boundaries between ethnolinguistic groups based on linguistic differentiation. Stereotypes are used as an instrument of social categorisation and discrimination. Nevertheless, the findings also show

the existing discursive and ideological tensions regarding language use (Portuguese) and its role in the construction of national identity. Yet it is clear that Portuguese is the language with the highest value and it remains the language of wider communication and identity construction in Angola. The hegemonic position of Portuguese downplays the complex sociolinguistic configuration of the country, marginalises the speakers of African languages and ignores contemporary changes spurred by the conditions of late modernity.

### **Discussion: intertextuality and interdiscursivity**

In this section, I take a closer look at the intertextual and interdiscursive connections across the findings from the different contexts, that is, the findings from the online social network interactions, the interview responses and the excerpt on language provision from Article 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola (2010). The salient themes in the interview responses include the hegemony of Portuguese and the marginalisation of some social groups through stereotyping and categorisation. While the political rhetoric pays lip service to the promotion of African languages, official discourse consistently upholds the hegemony of the Portuguese language. As discussed earlier, the language use provision in Article 19 of the Constitution unequivocally supports the sole use of Portuguese and treats African languages as ‘other’ languages. In turn, the way the interview respondents and the participants in the social media discussion network defended Portuguese as the symbol of national identity show connections between the official discourse and the discursive practices. The intertextual and interdiscursive links regarding the role of Portuguese in the construction of national identity is illustrated in [extracts 2, 4 and 6](#), respectively.

Furthermore, the findings from the respondents and social network interactions highlight the role played by the political elite in perpetuating the dominance of the Portuguese language in the Angolan postcolonial context. As documented by [Myers-Scotton \(1993\)](#), in Africa (and Angola is no exception), political elites perpetuate cultural and identity closure by strategically exploiting official language policies to enforce monocultural and monolingual language practices. The dominance of Portuguese reinforces the ideology of linguistic differentiation used to perpetuate marginalisation, stereotyping and categorisation of some social groups in society.

Moreover, the ideology of linguistic differentiation has been strategically used to question the identity of those who do not have a good command of Portuguese or who speak the language with an accent that demarcates them from the elites (elite meaning those who use the dominant or expected variety of Portuguese), linguistic repertoires that are seen in [extracts 2, 3 and 6](#). A closer analysis of the respondents’ positioning and the social network discourses reveals strong links in the relation and

association between language and identity. In both contexts, the respondents and the participants articulate strong ethnolinguistic ideologies (extracts 2, 3 and 6). The findings also suggest some interesting patterns in the ways participants constructed the relationship between language and identity. Participants sometimes constructed language and identity as overlapping or indexing one another (extracts, 2, 4 and 6); these constructions tend to suggest implicit ethnolinguistic ideology.

As seen in extracts 4 and 6, in their discursive patterns the participants in social interaction highlighted this indexing and engaged in justifying why a person with an accent or a weak command of Portuguese is not qualified to be Angolan. Therefore, the explicit nature of these discursive patterns suggests that the respondents and the participants in the social network interactions were operating in the context of a deep-rooted ethnolinguistic ideology. These taken-for-granted assumptions of the relationship between language features and ethnic or cultural identity are akin to what Riley (2011) refers to as ethnolinguistic ideologies. It is important to note that in the project of imagining the postcolonial nation, ethnicity was always seen as at odds with or even in opposition to the goals of the homogeneous and indivisible Angolan nation. Nationalist ideology was epitomised in the motto ‘um só Povo, Uma só Nação’ (one people and one nation) (Messiant 2006). However, the findings illustrate how ethnicity is strategically recruited in the postcolonial project for the construction of national identity.

Moreover, the stigma and marginalisation attached to African languages and the speakers of these languages is a result of the prestige and the market value of Portuguese (extract 3). Within the market place, language carries value because it is the means by which speakers establish who has the right to speak and what knowledge is valued. From the linguistic market perspective, language has a market value that speakers use to reproduce and establish power relations. Therefore, the findings suggest that African languages and their speakers lack the linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991) necessary to access the cultural, economic, and political resources necessary for their individual development.

From the findings, it is also evident that the official discourse on the use of language as sanctioned by Article 19 of the Constitution links interdiscursively to the responses of the participants and the views of the participants from the debate in the social networks regarding the hegemony of Portuguese as a mechanism strategically used by the elite to maintain their grip on power and enforce the status quo (extract 9). The findings suggest that the issue of identity and citizenship in Angola has political roots, sustained by a colonial legacy that latently established cultural, regional and ethnic divisions (Martins 2016), which were used as instruments of power contestation among the three liberation movements that were fighting for independence, that is, FNLA, MPLA and UNITA.

Nevertheless, as illustrated by [Martins \(2016\)](#), the findings also demonstrate how the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are extremely complex. In particular, the findings demonstrate that while identity is ideologically produced and reproduced through institutionalised contexts, this does not mean that identity is blindly accepted and followed by individuals. The findings reveal that people are not dupes who are blindly subjected to power ([extracts, 8, 9 and 10](#)). People may resist the discursive and non-discursive practices that interpellate them ([Foucault 1977](#)). This is an important finding because it illuminates how the construction of identity is a process fraught with ideological tensions and contradictions. Although these findings cannot be generalised to all Angolans, they nevertheless illuminate how and why the issue of language and identity in Angola is problematic and controversial.

## **Conclusion**

This article analysed the discursive construction of national identity in the Angolan postcolonial context. It examined the circulating discourses on the construction of national identity from different contexts, particularly the official discourse, Article 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola, interview responses and the stances of the participants from the social network interaction. The article also examined official texts, discourses and language ideologies concerning the relationship between language and identity within the context of nation-building in postcolonial Angola. The article looked at how official discourse on language use gets appropriated, recontextualised and eventually resisted by a diverse range of participants in different contexts. The results provide the opportunity to see how dominant ideologies shape participants' assumptions about the relationship between language and identity as well as how participants push back against such ideologies and construct alternative assumptions about this relationship. The findings show how identities are discursively constructed, contested and open to negotiation in different contexts. The findings suggest that Portuguese is unquestionably the dominant language and the language of national identity. Language differences are used to marginalise and discriminate against some social groups. The findings also demonstrate how linguistic heterogeneity creates discursive and cultural tensions that lead to social hierarchisation and marginalisation. These tensions are the result of the centrifugal and centripetal forces which stratify the languages and discourses, albeit within unequal relations of power. The emerging tensions are not autonomous but rather need to be understood within the socio-historical, cultural and political contexts. Changing these practices will require a battle, especially since language ideologies supporting the hegemony of the Portuguese remain entrenched. The findings also put the political motto 'um Povo

e uma Nação' (one people, one nation) under public scrutiny. It remains to be seen whether future policies will be able to effectively address the odds stacked against the claimed unified Angolan national identity.

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