

It was from his grandfather that Jonas inherited his dislike of the Portuguese. Jonas once said, "My grandfather told me that although he had a big soul, it was in great pain because of the humiliation imposed upon him by the Portuguese."⁸ His grandfather at one time had fought the Portuguese. It was also from his grandfather that Savimbi inherited and learned the use of the Ovimbundu language which stood him in good stead in the years ahead when he led the Ovimbundu in wars against the Portuguese and then the Luanda government and its Cuban allies.

Savimbi received his secondary education at a missionary school. Later he studied at a government fee school and earned his keep by working in the headmaster's kitchen and watching his dog. In 1958, he graduated at the top of his class from a senior secondary class in southwest Angola. To embark upon a medical career, he took a boat to Portugal for advanced studies. A sailor gave him books on Marxism and on Marcus Garvey, the early American black consciousness leader. Savimbi said: "...After I read them I was really burning to join a freedom movement. On the ship I already knew that my studies would be a secondary matter for me."⁹

In the years that followed, Savimbi mixed plotting against the Portuguese with his studies. Savimbi travelled to Spain, France, and Switzerland. After his tour of Europe, he returned to Africa to attend an international student gathering in Kampala, Uganda. There were two small Angolan liberation movements operating in exile outside of that country: the MPLA, with its roots among the slum dwellers, intellectuals, and the Kimbundu people of the capital's hinterland; and the Union of the Angolan People (UPA), the forerunner of the FALPA, whose roots were among the northern Kikongu. Savimbi decided to join the UPA.

In February 1961, there was an UPA uprising in Luanda. Africans armed with clubs and knives attacked the capital's jails in an attempt to release political