

**Control, ideology and identity in civil war:
The Angolan Central Highlands 1965-2002**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics
University of Oxford
February 2011

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between political movements and people during the civil war between Angola's MPLA government and the UNITA rebels in the Central Highlands region. It shows how conflicting ideas about political legitimacy originating in anticolonial struggle informed leaders' decisions and formed the basis of their efforts to politicise people.

Much existing literature sees civil conflict in terms of rebellion against a state, motivated by grievance or by the desire for loot. I argue against such an approach in the Angolan case, since the MPLA and UNITA originated from different strands of nationalism, and neither achieved complete control over Angola's territory and people. Instead, I draw on constructivist approaches to statehood in analysing the war as a contest in which both sides invoked ideas of the state in asserting their legitimacy.

The MPLA state controlled the cities while UNITA established rural bases and a bush capital, Jamba. Violence, often involving the capture of people, occurred at the margins of the areas of influence. Within each zone, each movement controlled public discourse to make its control hegemonic. Each presented itself as the authentic representative of the Angolan nation and condemned the other movement as the agent of foreign interests. These nationalist claims were given substance by processes of state building, more fully realised by the MPLA than by UNITA. Each movement's claim to statehood served to legitimise its own violence while criminalising the violence of the other side.

Public dissent was prohibited in either zone, but people's responses to politicisation ranged from genuine support, to co-operating only as necessary to avoid punishment, depending largely on their degree of involvement in the state building process. War itself was central to constituting perceptions of common interest, and political actors' capacity to manipulate perceptions depended largely on military control.

Acknowledgements

Any research project of this kind relies hugely on the goodwill of others, and nowhere more so than in a place that is as costly and as logistically challenging as Angola. A full scholarship from the Southern African Students' Fund at Oxford allowed me to enrol for and to complete the MSc in African Studies, which led ultimately to this doctoral project. The ORISHA fund paid my tuition fees and most of my living costs for the first three years of the DPhil. An award from the Warden's Bursary Fund at St Antony's College helped with my expenses in the final term of my work on the DPhil. My field research was made possible by grants from St Antony's College and from the Department of Politics and International Relations at Oxford, part of it through the Norman Chester fund.

No less valuable than any amount of funding was the support I received from people in Angola during my field research. Here my first thanks are to Father Daniel Nogueira and the Benedictine Community of Huambo for providing me with a home in every sense of the word over many months during my field research. Without their help, this project would never even have started; it could not have continued without the help of many others. I gratefully acknowledge the accommodation and help offered to me by the Trappist Community of Soke; Father Alberto Sambundo; Father David Sandambongo; Father Nito Tchatalika; and Father Nicolau Costa. The Archbishop of Huambo, Dom José de Queirós Alves, was also tremendously helpful. Also in Huambo, I enjoyed valuable assistance from the staff of Development Workshop and ADRA-Angola.

None of my contacts in the Central Highlands could have been made without the help of Rafael Marques. I am deeply indebted to him not only for his assistance with this project, but for his generosity and advice that go right back to my first encounter with Angola almost ten years ago. Fern Teodoro also deserves special thanks for her hospitality in Luanda, and I am very grateful for the help offered by her colleagues at World Learning. Thanks too to Tia Sara for the meals, and Okidi for entertainment.

This thesis would, of course, not have been possible without the co-operation of the many people I interviewed, some of whom overcame misgivings in order to speak to me, while others were generous with sharing their memories and reflections from the start. My special gratitude goes to them all. I would particularly like to thank General Peregrino Chindondo Wambu, Marcolino Moco and Penina Paulino for the amount of time that they were prepared to spend talking to me, and for helping me meet others.

Dr Mary Daly shared insights born of long experience in Angola, and introduced me to other interviewees whose thoughts and recollections formed a great contribution to my research. Paula Roque, too, provided valuable contacts and has been a valued sharer of ideas over the years that we have both studied Angola. Colin Murphy found the document that showed the thinking behind the counter-insurgency strategy that led to the defeat of UNITA. Ingrid Samset offered useful comments on an earlier draft.

I was fortunate to have two dedicated, patient and intellectually rigorous supervisors whose areas of expertise complemented each other perfectly. I benefited from Professor Jocelyn Alexander's wide experience of research in societies riven by

conflict (she also curbed, but never broke, my semicolon habit), and from Dr Ricardo Soares de Oliveira's extensive knowledge of Angolan history and society. Apart from my supervisors, Professor William Beinart and Professor David Anderson brought me to Oxford in the first place and continued to offer intellectual and practical support during the MSc in African Studies, in the application process for the doctoral programme in politics, and through the years of study for the DPhil itself. I am also grateful to Professor Margaret MacMillan, the warden of St Antony's College, for her advice and encouragement.

Among the many friends and relations who have offered moral and practical support, I will mention in particular those whose hospitality and patience allowed me to live the peripatetic life of a DPhil student when really I should have been old enough to know better: In Johannesburg, Anthony Philbrick (the only person I know who willingly drives to the airport) and Lesley, Lucas, Dusty and Dorrie Cowling for their warm hospitality; Ros Taylor and David Turnbull, Stephen Garratt and Ryan Meyer in London; Pauline and Malcolm Pearce, Johan Hugo, and Professor Pierre de Vos in Cape Town – and Kelly Rosenthal and a man with a big guitar for reminding me how to laugh in the middle of fieldwork. In Oxford, the community at 11 Norham Gardens provided a fixed point to which I could return home between stints of field research. I thank in particular Sister Lorraine Pratt and Ana Santos for making this possible. Vaughan Dutton introduced me to the physical and mental benefits of running on Port Meadow. The St Antony's administrative team, Gillian Crook, Margaret Couling and Rachael Connolly, and Wanja Knighton at the African Studies Centre in Oxford, were patient and effective in dealing with requests for help that often came over a faltering internet connection in Huambo when I was not present to deal with paperwork myself.

A number of institutions gave me the opportunity to present aspects of my research: WISER at the University of the Witwatersrand in August 2008; the Workshop on Field Research and Ethics in Post-Conflict Environments at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) in December 2008; the workshop "Autour de l'Angola et des travaux de Christine Messiant" at the Centre de études et de recherches internationales (CERI) in Paris in January 2009; the African History and Politics Seminar at Oxford in March 2009; the two seminars organised in Lisbon in 2009 and 2010 by the London School of Economics Cold War Studies Centre and the Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais; Chatham House in London in April 2010; and the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom Conference in Oxford in September 2010. I am particularly grateful to the conference organisers at CUNY and CERI for paying my travel and accommodation expenses for their events, and to the Santander Student Travel Fund, which supported one of my trips to Lisbon.

I write this at a time when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in the United Kingdom has set about dismantling a higher education system built up over centuries, and the state has responded with violence against those who would protest against such moves. I feel privileged to have benefited from this system, and outraged that someone attempting a project like mine a few years hence might not find the means to realise it.

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February 2011

Note on sources

The question of interviewee consent is particularly difficult in a situation where interviewees cannot have any notion of the nature of the finished research project and of how it is to be disseminated. Consent is meaningless unless it is informed consent, and a person in a rural village in Angola will not know the implications of being quoted in a thesis in a university library, or in an article on the internet. In any case, the majority of my interviewees, whether or not they were acquainted with the academic world and with global information technologies, expressed caution about being quoted: an indication of the political contentions that still surround the recent history of Angola. Rather than make decisions about what can and cannot be attributed, I have made interviewees anonymous except when they are public figures who agreed to be quoted. In other cases, interviewees are identified in the footnotes by a number and in the body of the text by a brief indication of their occupation, gender and other relevant information. In cases where the same anonymous interviewee is quoted several times in the thesis, I have arbitrarily assigned the person a gender-appropriate pseudonym so as to indicate that the same person is being quoted at different moments, while still allowing the text to flow: calling someone “José” is simply less cumbersome than “interviewee 134”.

I conducted interviews in Portuguese where possible. When interviewees could not speak Portuguese, I employed translators who translated from Umbundu. The quotations from interviews are my own translations from my notes taken in Portuguese from my interviewees or from the translator. Where there is an ambiguity or subtlety of meaning in Portuguese that cannot be rendered in English, I have opted for the nearest possible translation and indicated the original Portuguese word or phrase in brackets or a footnote.

Where I cite published sources in Portuguese, French or Afrikaans, the translations are my own.

The map of Angola on the following page is copyright by the United Nations. I took the maps in chapters four and five from Google Maps and edited the details as best I could with the limited software available.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Studies of civil war in post-colonial Africa have until now paid little attention to Angola, and to the war between the *Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA): a conflict that began before independence in 1975 and continued until 2002. While case studies of Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe have fuelled academic debate about the internal, local dynamics of civil war, what little writing exists on Angola in the first decades of independence has concentrated on external factors: foreign backing for the Angolan adversaries before 1990, and the role of international trade and diplomatic links in sustaining the conflict after 1990.

Difficulties of access by researchers have ensured that the existing literature is almost entirely silent on internal political processes during the war. With the end of the civil war having made access easier, this thesis will address the question of the relationship between the political movements that were the protagonists in the Angolan civil war, and the people in the areas affected by the conflict.

Angola is diverse in terms of geography, demographics and historical experience. For practical reasons, particularly bearing in mind the need to take a historical approach, this thesis limits itself geographically. It focuses on the Central Highlands (*Planalto Central*): a region centred on Huambo province, and including the northern part of Huila, the western half of Bié, and the inland parts of Kwanza Sul. It was there that UNITA made its strongest identity-based claims and concentrated its efforts of mobilisation as independence approached. Huambo, the principal city of the Central

Highlands, was the most significant urban centre ever to fall under UNITA control, for three months in 1975-76 and again for more than a year between 1993 and 1994. At the same time, the Central Highlands constituted one of the most developed parts of the colonial state, and as such was of symbolic and economic importance to the MPLA as well as to UNITA. The region therefore offers a case study that may illuminate the political strategies of the two movements in urban and in rural areas, and the ways in which people responded to them. Events in the Central Highlands cannot, however, be seen in isolation from the rest of Angola. Chapter two therefore deals briefly with events in Luanda that had consequences for the whole country, and chapter four considers Jamba, the bush capital in south-eastern Angola which is essential to any understanding of UNITA's politics.

Any study of the Angolan war faces a problem of knowing where to begin, as Christopher Cramer has noted.¹ Violence of a political nature can first be seen in the form of attacks on state facilities and settlers in 1961. Guerrilla warfare began later that decade with the opening of the MPLA's Eastern Front in 1965. The withdrawal of the Portuguese state in 1975 by definition turned an anti-colonial conflict into a civil conflict. The war after 1992 was different in character from what had preceded it. Yet my research suggests that it would be misleading to ignore the continuities between the different stages of the conflict. My main interest was in examining the period after independence, when the conflict could properly be called a "civil war", when the protagonists on all sides were Angolans and when the purpose of the war was no longer anti-colonial liberation. The early stages of research revealed, however, that it was impossible to understand people's political affiliations after independence

¹ Cramer 2006:139.

without understanding the differing responses to the political mobilisation that began shortly after the Portuguese coup d'état of April 1974. These in turn could not be understood without reference to the experiences of the late 1960s, when the possibility of independence began to be discussed secretively among educated citizens in the Central Highlands. There were practical reasons for not attempting a detailed study of the years before about 1965: this project is largely dependent on interviews as sources, and while it was not difficult to find people who had been at least in their late teens at the end of the 1960s, people with adult memories of the 1950s and early 1960s were harder to find, or less willing or less able to reminisce.

The roots of the Angolan civil war are documented in historical literature that deals with social schisms that can be traced back to the early colonial period and which gave rise to different strands of nationalism.² Yet while the existing historiography of Angola locates the origins of the civil war within internal divisions, it tends to explain the progress of the war itself in terms of external factors, be they foreign intervention during the Cold War, or the government's and UNITA's international trade links after 1992.³ It is undeniable that without Cuban and Soviet support for the MPLA, and American and South African support for UNITA, the Angolan civil war could not have sustained itself for as long as it did. But, as John Marcum notes in the conclusion to his study of the transition to independence in Angola:

[E]xternal powers that continue to deny or defy the discrete, informal realities of political conflict [...] will continue to pay the price of miscalculation. Only an understanding of Angola's own particular history, social structure, and material circumstances [...] can provide the external policy maker with a basis for a reasonable, constructive relationship.⁴

² Heimer 1979, Guimarães 1998, Birmingham 2002, Messiant 2006, Malaquias 2007.

³ Wolfers and Bergerol 1983, Minter 1994, Cilliers 2000, Gleijeses 2002.

⁴ Marcum 1978:280.

Fernando Guimarães observes:

The fact is, the cold war did not bring conflict to Angola in 1975. [...] During the preceding decade, a dogged struggle for supremacy had developed between the main anti-colonial movements.⁵

Similarly, while it would be wrong to disregard UNITA's use of diamond revenues to fund its war after 1990, and the Angolan government's use of oil revenues to pay for the military action that eventually defeated UNITA, emphasising these factors does nothing to elucidate the local politics of the civil war, nor whatever changes may have taken place within a war setting to the contending discourses of identity and of national liberation that have been identified as underlying the formation of separate nationalist movements.⁶ Assis Malaquias, in a study mostly concerned with the economic underpinnings of the war, broaches the topic of Angola's fractured national identity in the context of the obstacles to building "positive peace" after 2002, but says little about the content of the rival discourses of politics and identity that shaped and were shaped by the conflict.⁷ As William Minter has noted, the silence of the available literature on these questions has much to do with previous practical difficulties in research.⁸ The only documents that make any attempt to address the relationship between combatants and society are human rights-focussed accounts that by their nature concentrate on those moments when the conflict was most violent and which do not address those periods when UNITA and the MPLA interacted with

⁵ Guimarães 1998:xv.

⁶ Cramer 2006 deals in detail with the analytical problems that arise from focussing only on resource availability as a determinant of conflict.

⁷ Malaquias 2007.

⁸ Minter 1994:217.

people in those times and places where one or other movement enjoyed uncontested control, and established a peaceful relationship with the population it controlled.⁹

Later in this chapter I review literature that traces the development of how conflict in post-colonial Africa has been understood, and consider to what extent the perspectives offered might help us to understand events and processes in Angola. Much of this writing concentrates on the relationship between non-state (guerrilla) movements and the people under their control, taking for granted the relationship between the state and society in the areas under consideration. Such an approach would be misguided in the case of Angola as it would imply that UNITA – as a guerrilla movement – sought to win territory and people from the control of the MPLA state. The reality was more complicated. Although both movements had some limited success in taking control of pockets of territory in the 1960s, in most of the country the MPLA and UNITA fought simultaneously to assume control as Portugal withdrew in 1975. Both parties enjoyed unchallenged control in parts of the country for long periods, and some contested territory passed from one side's control to the other more than once during the course of the war. I suggest it is more useful to look at the MPLA and UNITA as equivalent forces, differing only in the degree to which they were able to use appeals to statehood in their attempts to legitimise themselves. I will therefore examine critically the MPLA's relationship with those people under its control just as I will examine UNITA's relationship with people. Moreover, considering that UNITA, as I shall make clear later, bore some state-like characteristics in its relationship with the people under its control, it will also be useful to examine UNITA through a perspective of state formation as much as through the perspective of guerrilla mobilisation.

⁹ Richardson 2001; Vines 1999; International Research Network on Children and Armed Conflict 2005.

Literature on state formation will therefore be of no lesser relevance to this thesis than the literature on guerrilla movements. Of especial importance is that literature that deals with weak states in situations of contested power, and literature that deals with the way in which notions of statehood are evoked in the discourse of political movements both inside and outside of the state.

This chapter will, therefore, begin by looking at texts on state formation in situations of contested sovereignty and will consider what perspectives they may offer on Angola. The emphasis here will be on the question of the control of people in a situation of contested territorial domination, and the importance of the idea of statehood as a tool of political legitimation. The following section will go on to examine literature on civil war that can offer an insight into the case of Angola. It considers different perspectives on the relationship between armed movements and society, suggesting that it is misleading to see the relationship either as one of willing co-operation, or as a case of purely violent predation. The section questions the assumptions underlying the perspectives on civil war that emerged in the 1990s, namely the “new war” and related theses, as well as comparative quantitative studies. It emphasises instead the need to examine closely the local discourses associated with political conflict. The final section of the chapter considers arguments about the links between political control, ideology and identity that are applicable not only to war situations. This allows an understanding of the Angolan case that moves beyond normative distinctions between the state and the rebel movement, and between wartime and peacetime.

Chapter two outlines the political context of nationalist mobilisation from the 1960s onwards, and of independence. It shows how the intransigence of Portuguese colonial policy before 1974 and the repressive character of the state restricted the possibilities of anti-colonial mobilisation, and how this in turn determined the weak and class-differentiated penetration of the anti-colonial movements into Central Highlands society. I consider how hasty decolonisation, combined with an absence of consensus among the three anti-colonial movements, provoked a conflict over territory and state resources that led to the division of much of Angola between the three movements several months before independence. Politics came to be understood in terms of the control of territory and of people, a logic that persisted for the duration of the war.

Chapters three and four deal with the period from independence in 1975 until the peace initiatives of the late 1980s. Chapter three concentrates on the urban areas of the Central Highlands, particularly Huambo, which were dominated briefly by UNITA in the months following independence, and thereafter by the MPLA. The chapter first examines UNITA's attempts at instituting government in the cities that it controlled, and how these efforts were received by people who lived there. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with the MPLA's state-building initiatives in the towns of the Central Highlands. It analyses the kind of relationship between state, party and people that was established under MPLA control: people were drawn into party structures through mass organisations that provided an opportunity for the shaping of political consciousness, linked to a particular version of Angolan history. At the same time, the party and the state were conceptually indistinct, with the MPLA presenting itself as the provider of welfare and security. This contributed to an idea of citizenship that was inseparable from the party. The divided territorial control of the

country meant that town and countryside took on political meanings, the town becoming associated with the MPLA and the countryside with UNITA. The MPLA regarded people under its control as “government people”, and those outside of its own zones of control as “UNITA people”. Some people began to identify themselves in this way, though to different extents and with differing degrees of sincerity. One consequence of this association between territorial control and political identity was the government’s policy of bringing people out of UNITA-controlled areas and resettling them in government-controlled areas wherever possible.

These themes concerning the interrelationship between control and identity, politicisation and the obligatory movement of people are continued in chapter four, which is concerned with UNITA’s efforts to dominate the rural parts of the Central Highlands and the impact of this on the formation of national and political consciousness in the region. The chapter begins by examining UNITA’s attempts to establish a political and economic relationship with peasant communities in the Central Highlands. The latter part of the chapter deals with Jamba, the centre of operations that UNITA established with South African support in south-eastern Angola during the 1980s. While the practical importance of Jamba was self-evident, more relevant in terms of my arguments is Jamba’s symbolic and political importance: its role as an emblem of UNITA’s aspirations to statehood. The general conclusion of chapters three and four is that while there were, through force of circumstance, evident differences in the ways in which UNITA and the MPLA governed the areas and the populations that were under their control, the discourses of political legitimisation on either side had much in common.

Chapter five considers the period of war that followed the 1992 elections. This chapter concentrates on the consequences, particularly for UNITA, of the changed political and military situation: UNITA, after rapid military success in the months immediately following the election, found itself on the defensive in a war of attrition that lasted for the greater part of a decade. The chapter will show the effects of these changing circumstances on UNITA's ability to retain support. It argues that UNITA could no longer depend for legitimation upon a discourse that had emphasised the role of a political movement as a state-like defender and provider: indeed, precisely this understanding worked to the advantage of the MPLA as soon as the government gained the military advantage.

The state

Any understanding of state power in Angola needs to recognise that at no time prior to 2002 did the recognised government exercise even notional control over the whole of the national territory. Even in those areas where it exercised notional control, state institutions functioned at best sporadically. As Chabal notes: "From [1976] on, the government's writ effectively stopped running outside the main urban centres."¹⁰ A persistent civil war made a mockery of the notion of the state being defined by its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in a territory. Before 1990, some significant international actors (the United States and South Africa) openly supported UNITA against the Angolan government. Even after 1990, the MPLA government was unable to control the borders of its territory, and UNITA continued to benefit

¹⁰ Chabal 2002:101.

from international trade. The Weberian ideal is nevertheless usefully borne in mind not only as a point of negative definition, but also because, as an ideal, it remains implicit in discourses of power and legitimacy. As Donald Donham suggests:

While Weber's ideal type of the modern state has become hegemonic in the global system – when political elites speak, virtually everyone appears to assume, particularly after the end of the cold war, that Weber's kind of state is what the state should be – we have to realize that this ideal type describes political reality nowhere, not even in the developed “West”.¹¹

Charles Tilly introduces a crucial qualification to the notion of the state being defined by the monopoly on violence: “governments organize and, *wherever possible*, monopolize violence”.¹² Tilly points out the circularity involved in defining the state in terms of its monopoly on legitimate violence, when it is the state that defines whether violence is legitimate or not. For this reason, he sees the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate violence as “elastic”.¹³

This points to other debates over where the analytical boundaries of the state lie. Among the difficulties that Akhil Gupta identifies in the study of the contemporary state in developing countries is the “reification inherent in unitary descriptions of ‘the state’”, which instead needs to be “conceptualized in terms far more decentralized and disaggregated than has been the case so far”.¹⁴ Accordingly, I will look at the specifics of how the MPLA state functioned during the civil war: to what extent it was able to exercise the prerogatives of statehood, including the monopolisation of violence, the building of institutions and the provision of social services. Furthermore, UNITA bore some characteristics of statehood to a varying degree during the course

¹¹ Donham 2006:20-21.

¹² Tilly 1985:171, my emphasis.

¹³ Tilly 1985:173.

¹⁴ Gupta 1995:376.

of the war: the control of borders, the control of the movement of people within the national borders, international trade and a degree of international recognition. By focussing on the question of statehood as it is constituted in practices and discourses of power, we may keep open the possibility that these practices and discourses may be appropriated by actors other than the state.

Gupta emphasises “the role of public culture in the discursive construction of the state” and suggests that “[f]oregrounding the question of representation shows us the modalities by which the state comes to be imagined”. Hansen and Stepputat use the notion of “stateness”, arguing that “[m]odern forms of state are in a continuous process of construction, and this construction takes place through invocation of a bundle of widespread and globalized registers of governance and authority, or, as we prefer to call it, ‘languages of stateness’.”¹⁵ The idea of a state “in a process of construction” is one of particular relevance to the unfinished state-making project that we can see in pre-2002 Angola. Hansen and Stepputat’s use of “globalized” deserves to be treated with caution, suggesting as it does that discourses of authority may be universal. That these discourses of statehood are “widespread” is less contentious, as post-colonial states have inherited practices and discourses of statehood that originated in Europe. John Iliffe observes that in Africa, “[n]ationalism aimed to imitate the most modern nation states: not the minimal governments of agricultural societies but the development plans and bureaucratic controls of the industrial (especially socialist) world”.¹⁶ As noted by Donham, notions of the state based on the Weberian ideal are invoked by states that objectively have little in common with that idea – or indeed by movements like UNITA that are not states in any legal sense.

¹⁵ Hansen and Stepputat 2001:5.

¹⁶ Iliffe 1995:252.

Nevertheless, if we treat the state primarily as a construct within political discourse, this is not to disregard it as a real political force. Philip Abrams approaches the debate on the merits of studying statehood by proposing “that we should abandon the state as a material object of study [...] while continuing to take the *idea* of the state very seriously”. The state, for Abrams, “is first and foremost an exercise in legitimation”.¹⁷ Timothy Mitchell takes Abrams’s argument a step further, agreeing that “we should distinguish between two objects of analysis, the state-system and the state-idea” but identifying political functionality in the very act of defining the boundary between the state and the non-state: “producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power”.¹⁸ Other literature looks at how the material manifestations of statehood are used politically by incumbent governments to create what Mitchell calls the “state effect” and what Simon Turner calls “state spectacles”.¹⁹

Appeals to discourses of statehood as an exercise in legitimation – as Abrams would have it – are not the sole prerogative of recognised states. Das and Poole note that the state may be invoked as a way of seeking legitimacy for practices by actors outside the state: the “mimicry of the state”, as they call it.²⁰ David Nugent, in assessing the relative success of the Peruvian dissident movement APRA against the relative failure of the state explicitly uses Weberian notions as his reference points: the rebels

¹⁷ Abrams 1988:75-76.

¹⁸ Mitchell 1999:83.

¹⁹ Turner 2005:317.

²⁰ Das 2004:23.

succeeded in “the identification of key areas of knowledge” and the establishment of a “security apparatus”.²¹

But while Weberian notions of statehood, as noted, may still provide a normative basis for claims to legitimacy by governments and rebels alike, it is also important to consider the non-Weberian norms that are the reality in many post-colonial situations: these too, as we shall see, form part of the basis for the creation of “the state effect”. E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo identifies in the legitimating discourses of the modern Kenyan state an “ideology of order” that bestows on the state the prerogative of silencing the “discordant political noises” of opposing class interests and alternative visions of the independent state.²² Citing Achille Mbembe, Hansen and Stepputat note that sovereign power in certain colonial situations was not aimed at constructing a “public interest” but merely “absolute submission” and that this tendency continues in independent states.²³ The model of “gatekeeper” statehood used by Frederick Cooper and others to understand the state in post-colonial Africa again sees continuity with colonial practice; Cooper sees “gatekeeping” as the legacy of colonial states that were limited in their administrative capacity and oriented towards controlling the movement of people and goods both internally and across international boundaries.²⁴

The “gatekeeper” mode of power – lacking well-established institutions and exercised through the control of movement – is one that is mimicked and adopted by rebel movements with relative ease. This is implicit in the work of William Reno, whose notion of the “shadow state” is in effect a model of the state that operates in a manner

²¹ Nugent 2004:202.

²² Atieno-Odhiambo 1987:190.

²³ Hansen and Stepputat 2005:24. See also Ferme 2004.

²⁴ Cooper 2002:70.

comparable to those rebel movements which, like UNITA was in the 1990s, are funded by the control of natural resources. Reno asks: “How does one distinguish a ruler of a very weak state from a warlord? Obviously, this calls for a judgment as to where to draw a line along a continuum of informal versus bureaucratic and collective versus private.”²⁵

The “gatekeeper” model of statehood points to a way of addressing another key problem area identified by Gupta, namely “the translocality of state institutions [...] any analysis of the state requires us to conceptualize a space that is constituted by the intersection of local, regional, national and transnational phenomena”.²⁶ The transnational element in the constituting of the Angolan state has been dealt with by Imogen Parsons, who draws upon the notion of extraversion as propounded by Bayart and others to argue that the Angolan state endures thanks to its position within international systems of trade and diplomacy rather than because of its relationship with Angolan citizens.²⁷ My concern, however, is with the inconsistent presence of the state over Angola’s national territory. The notion of bounded territorial control on which the international state system is predicated is, after all, a historically specific phenomenon that came late to Africa and has never been fully realised in all parts of the continent, a fact that some writers have linked to the abundance of land and relative scarcity of population in pre-colonial and colonial times. David McDermott Hughes contrasts the situation on the two sides of the Mozambique-Zimbabwe border:

[In Mozambique’s Sitatonga region] a Gaza Nguni kingdom [was] oriented toward the accumulation and circulation of subordinate people – toward

²⁵ Reno 1998:2. Compare Tilly’s argument that was noted earlier, about the arbitrariness of the line between legitimate and illegitimate violence.

²⁶ Gupta 1995.

²⁷ Parsons 2006.

ambulatory enslavement. Those fundamentals did not change when the Portuguese took control of the area in 1895. Administrators and private companies taxed the human resources of the Sitatonga region, and they used exactly the same collectors that the Gaza Nguni had [...] Since whites had neither alienated nor transformed the landscape, politics began and ended with *corvées* and forced labor, never quite outlawed in the colonial period.²⁸

Hughes contrasts this with the Zimbabwe side of the border where white settlement and displacement of the indigenous population ensured that resistance took the form of “cadastral politics”. In this sense, Angola, where land enclosure never took place on the scale of Zimbabwe, is closer to Hughes’s Mozambique example than to Zimbabwe.

Hansen and Stepputat also note that people were a “scarce resource” in relation to the colonial state since they could move away from centres of government.²⁹ Their concern is with the implications of this for the legitimacy of post-colonial states: they describe the task of independence movements as follows:

If the colonial state was built on the assertion of sovereignty without a referent, anticolonial movements strove to produce *national people* that could fill the void, and become the referent that made the power of the state legitimate.³⁰

Central to this argument is a notion that legitimacy depends on the control of people. This echoes Herbst’s argument that the main challenge faced by African states is how to “project” their power within territories that had been delineated and bequeathed to them by their colonial predecessors. The under-population and abundance of land in many parts of Africa before the twentieth century meant that in colonial times, people could migrate away from the reach of the state if they so wished, and the “modest”

²⁸ Hughes 2006:14.

²⁹ Hansen and Stepputat 2005.

³⁰ Hansen and Stepputat 2005.

ambitions of the colonial rulers meant that there was no particular need to pursue these people. Herbst suggests that such control becomes more difficult the further one moves from the urban centres of state power.³¹

Notions of diminishing control from centre to periphery, and of the supposed differences in the kind of relationship that urban and rural areas have to central authority, are important to this thesis for two distinct reasons. First, they form a pervasive theme in the literature on state building in post-colonial Africa, and for this reason alone they deserve to be weighed against my observations about how both the MPLA state and UNITA sought to extend their influence away from their respective core areas of control. Second, the notion that urban people's relationships with political formations are qualitatively different from rural people's relationships with political formations are not confined to academic literature: they are central to how people in Angola made sense of the social cleavages and of the political possibilities associated with the Angolan conflict. Ideas of the urban and the rural are embedded in Angolan political ideologies, and these ideas need to be deconstructed and analysed if we are to understand the political dynamics of the civil war. I will now briefly review some of the literature on the relationship between rural people and states in Africa.

Ralph Austen notes that for African nationalists "peasants were assumed to be a conservative force, concerned with defending their [...] agricultural base and identified with local rather than territorial/national political units".³² Austen notes, nevertheless, that late colonial economic intervention made peasants better disposed towards nationalist movements in the years before independence. Yet after

³¹ Herbst 2000.

³² Austen 1987:232.

independence, governments continued to use the state marketing boards inherited from the colonial regimes to depress producer prices for agricultural goods.³³ Some writing on independent Africa contends that peasants continued to be sceptical of state intervention. Gavin Williams suggests that while peasants “have responded to new opportunities and have organised production in ways to improve their conditions of life”, they “regard with suspicion the plans of outsiders to transform or improve” their way of life.³⁴

In the late colonial era and the first decades of independence in Africa, the idea of modernisation came to be associated with centrally planned development. This association has given rise to a critical literature that sees modernisation as producing norms, discourses and hierarchies that came to define the relationship between ruler and ruled: more specifically, between an urban bureaucratic elite and peasant farmers. Cooper sees modernisation as driven by officials who “themselves had the essential knowledge to build the stage and write the script” and conceived of development as a “series of co-varying changes” that although inevitable, also required state-led intervention to make it a reality.³⁵ Implicit in this modernist developmental ideology was a hierarchy, or even a dichotomy, of those who were responsible for effecting development, and those who needed to be “improved”. The late colonial conception of the role of the state, of the state’s position in relation to society and of the differentiated categories of people that this relationship produced, influenced the practices and discourses of the independent states that followed. Some have described developmental ideology as having a moral dimension, which was about changing

³³ Cooper 2002:97.

³⁴ Williams 1981:29.

³⁵ Cooper 1997:81.

personal habits and mentalities as much as about increasing production. Michael Jennings observes that in Tanzania “the post-colonial state had inherited the understanding of community development as a means to change people into new, modern individuals, into an identity shaped by development planners and policy makers”, and officials considered resistance to modernisation as “the residual influence of atavistic, irrational traditions”.³⁶ We must note, however, that modernising practices varied from one country to another, and so did reactions to them. In the case of Mozambique, peasant farmers’ dissatisfaction with the coercive measures implemented by FRELIMO in the name of modernisation – including forced removal and the reconfiguring of social structures – has been identified as one of the factors that allowed the RENAMO rebels to gain popular support in some parts of the country.³⁷ This was, however, an extreme case. The experience of Mozambique, or of the more frequently cited case of Ujamaa in Tanzania, should not be interpreted as meaning that peasants will always resist state authority.

In later chapters I will show how a modernist developmental ideology similar to that which has been noted elsewhere in Africa helped frame the outlook of the MPLA and of UNITA towards the people over whom they ruled. This discourse produced and perpetuated categorical distinctions between on the one hand political leaders, soldiers and cadres, and farmers on the other hand. My research, however, presents no evidence to suggest that peasants shunned modernisation as a practice. In reality, few of those I interviewed had had any experience of the modernising ambitions that were evident in the discourse of political leaders. This discourse was not echoed, but nor was it explicitly rejected, in the way that peasants themselves spoke of their encounter

³⁶ Jennings 2009:106.

³⁷ Geffray 1990.

with political authority. The towns present a contrasting picture: urban people actively endorsed the ideas of developmental modernity that were part of the legitimating discourses of the MPLA as it established its authority over the towns.

What my interviews do suggest is that those people who were the least dependent on an urban-based economy were on the whole the most sceptical towards any of the political movements that existed in Angola during the war. These people were aware that their livelihoods were not dependent on the presence of a particular political movement exercising a monopoly of violence in the area where they were. Their first concern was to live in a secure environment in which they could produce food and obtain basic manufactured items. They saw political movements as useful as long as the movements appeared to be a guarantor of such conditions, but as hostile if their presence was a threat to peace and stability. The fact that political elites understood their relationship with peasants in terms of ideologies of modernity does not mean that peasants' scepticism towards organised politics should be read as a rejection of modernity.

Any consideration of the relationship between the control of territory, the control of population and state building in Angola needs to take into account the country's exceptional circumstances: first, because of the belated and inchoate nature of colonial state building, and second and crucially, because of the fact of civil war, which prevented the state's access to significant proportions of the national territory and population.³⁸ My interviews with peasant farmers indicate that movements of population frequently involved migration from the control of one movement to the

³⁸ On colonial state building, see Bender 2004, particularly chapters 5 and 6.

control of another, or from a contested or ungoverned area into a controlled area: it was seldom a case of people moving easily from a controlled area to an uncontrolled area. Rather, people often found themselves between two political-military forces. Farmers were confronted in the first instance not with modernising bureaucrats nor with economic incentives, but with guns. The MPLA and UNITA used force to remove people from contested areas or from enemy-controlled areas and took steps to ensure that people did not leave, but in wartime neither movement could do this consistently since they only ever enjoyed partial and variable control over the national territory. In the Angolan war, the movement of people needs to be understood in terms of frequent changes in political control, and the repressive capabilities of both sides. Theoretical debates about whether or not peasants are amenable to incorporation into a state or to mobilisation by rebels are of little use in such situations. People's decisions were often based on the need for survival at least as much as upon economic or political concerns.

Yet the fact remains that state building is possible only insofar as the state has the capacity to limit the flight of population, either by persuading people that it is acting in their best interests, or by using coercive means to keep people under its control. The same applies to a movement like UNITA, with aspirations to statehood. Such an approach is implicit in the idea of a "war for people" put forward by Basil Davidson and later taken up by Inge Brinkman as a way of understanding the anti-colonial war in Angola.³⁹ Brinkman, like Hansen and Stepputat, contends that the parties to the conflict saw an intrinsic political worth ("wealth in people") in the capture of populations, but she also sees the control of people as functional insofar as it provided

³⁹ Davidson 1972; Brinkman 2005.

an opportunity for political education. Brinkman's point about political education is indisputable, and I shall discuss it further in a later section of this chapter. My research does not contradict the idea of "wealth in people" (Brinkman) or "national people" (Hansen and Stepputat), although my interviews suggest such symbolic value attached to the control of people may be less significant than the instrumental value.

In summary, the theoretical perspectives that have so far been cited so far in this section suggest parallels in the functioning of states and non-state movements. First, state-like functions may be exercised by non-state actors – these functions may be coercive, ideological, or ritually bureaucratic. Second, state power asserts and sustains itself through bureaucratic rituals and violence. Third, non-state actors may have recourse to the signifiers of power – bureaucratic rituals and violence – that are employed by the state. Fourth, state-like power may be exercised inconsistently over a state's national territory, and extending power to rural peripheries is a concern for those who wield power from the centre. Fifth, in situations where neither adversary can exercise full control over a bounded territory, the exercise of power may instead be directed towards keeping people inside a controlled territory.

All of these blur the analytical distinction between the state and non-state actors. This supports the contention that in a case like Angola, where a well-established rebel movement was competing with a weak state, it is more useful to ask the same kinds of questions about the state and the rebel movement, in respect to their relationship with the people they controlled rather than treating them as analytically separate. To what extent did the Angolan government and UNITA draw upon the discursive and coercive practices associated with statehood for the purposes of legitimation? What

kind of state was invoked? How and to what extent was the movements' capacity to make claims to statehood dependent on foreign support and on their control of people and territory within Angola – all of which changed over the course of the war? These questions are derived from debates on the nature and the construction of statehood, which, as I have argued, are also of relevance in considering non-state movements' relationship with society. A separate body of literature, dealing specifically with case studies of rebel movements, is considered in the next section.

Rebel movements

This section reviews conceptual frameworks that have been used for understanding guerrilla war, particularly in post-colonial Africa. I group these different frameworks into two broad categories. First I consider writings from the 1990s that although varied in their assumptions and approaches, are linked by a common preoccupation with the causes of civil conflict. These writings also tend to take a broadly comparative approach, seeking general conclusions about the nature of war. This contrasts with the second broad category of literature that I consider: writings based on the close study of specific conflicts, which collectively take forward debates about the nature of the relationship between armed movements and the civilian population.

The thinking about civil war that gained prominence in Europe and the United States in the 1990s seeks, above all, to understand conflict after the end of the Cold War had demolished old certainties. Its emphasis was on what “caused” civil conflict. Debates about the relationship between guerrillas and civilians, and the relative roles of

coercion and conviction in this relationship, were of little relevance to this preoccupation. One strand of thought held that the wars of the 1990s were objectively and qualitatively different from earlier wars; the term “new war”, proposed by Mary Kaldor and others, gained adherence as writers sought to locate the phenomenon in the context of changes in the international system that accompanied the end of the Cold War.⁴⁰ Two much-cited articles by Samuel Huntington and Robert D Kaplan do not speak explicitly of “new war”, but I include them since their assumptions overlap to a certain extent with the “new war” characterisations.⁴¹ None of these approaches will be central to the theoretical framework of this thesis, but they will be considered here briefly, because of their undeniable influence and because they are important for the understanding of a further wave of thinking that emerged from the end of the 1990s: Cramer, Duffield, and Richards, among others, frame their views on war explicitly in opposition to the “new war” approach.⁴²

The term “new war” is associated with characteristics that include the waging of war by non-state groups, using light arms and seeking to control populations rather than territory; armed groups’ exploitation of natural resources as a direct source of funding for conflict; the absence of ideological motivations for the conflict; and the evocation of identity-based (often ethnically-based) claims by the protagonists as a way of mobilising support. Van Creveld, who deploys the idea of “new war” predictively, and Kaldor, whose thinking is based on a case-study of Bosnia, both posit a shift in the nature of warfare away from the Clausewitzian notion of war as the business of

⁴⁰ Van Creveld 1991; Kaldor, 1999.

⁴¹ Huntington 1993; Kaplan 1994.

⁴² Cramer 2006; Duffield 2001; Richards, 1998. Duffield uses the term “new war”, but seems to refer simply to “recent war”, without implying any qualitative difference from previous wars.

states, “the continuation of politics by other means”: a shift that is inseparable from a change in the state system upon which Clausewitz’s thinking was predicated, and the “erosion” of the state’s monopoly of organised violence. For Kaldor, this monopoly has been

eroded from above by the transnationalization of military forces which began during the two world wars and was institutionalized by the bloc system during the Cold War [and] from below by privatization. Indeed, it could be argued that new wars are part of a process which is more or less a reversal of the processes through which modern states evolved.⁴³

One consequence is the breakdown of the old categorical distinctions such as combatant versus non-combatant, or soldier or policeman versus criminal. A more emotional extrapolation of these ideas can be seen in Kaplan’s vision based on his observations in West Africa. In other words, characterisations of “new war” depend on the distinction from an “old”, Clausewitzian mode of war that was inseparable from a certain kind of international state system. But, as Van Creveld recognises, the state system was a historically recent and geographically bounded phenomenon, and so was the mode of war associated with it.⁴⁴ The “new war” characterisation appears to rest on an assumption that something had to fill the gap left by the disappearance of Clausewitzian warfare, and that this something must by definition be “new”. Van Creveld’s predictions on the future of warfare appear as nothing other than a description of a long-established mode of guerrilla warfare. As FitzGerald et al note:

These ‘low intensity conflicts’ may seem like a new phenomenon to aid agencies and academics whose point of reference is the Second World War. But they were well known as ‘small wars’ by colonial administrators [...] before 1939, and as ‘counter-insurgency’ during the cold war. Moreover in developing countries (as in developed countries in the past) everyday life is

⁴³ Kaldor 1999:4-5; Van Creveld 1991:49.

⁴⁴ Van Creveld 1991:153.

intrinsically violent, and the borderline between ‘peace’ and ‘conflict’ is thin and hazy.⁴⁵

Kaldor acknowledges that “new war” has much in common with the guerrilla war that pre-dates the modern state system, but distinguishes it as follows:

whereas guerrilla warfare, at least in theory as articulated by Mao Tse-tung or Che Guevara, aimed to capture ‘hearts and minds’, the new warfare borrows from counterinsurgency techniques of destabilization aimed at sowing ‘fear and hatred’.⁴⁶

However, the subsequent chapters will show that the “hearts and minds” approach cannot be separated from the “fear and hatred” approach as readily as Kaldor suggests. Neither coercion nor persuasion would, alone, have allowed UNITA to wage war for as long as it did.

Kaldor further characterises “new wars” in terms of the emergence of identity politics that she relates to the weakening or disintegration of states. Her argument is based primarily on her Balkan case study, but she extends it to post-colonial Africa and Asia amid the “disillusion of independence hopes”.⁴⁷ For Huntington, identity politics are central: in contrast to a past in which wars “were primarily conflicts within Western civilization”, Huntington predicts that “most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating [...] civilizations from one another”. For Kaplan, the battle lines are between “our civilization” and “criminal anarchy [which] emerges as the real ‘strategic’ danger”.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ FitzGerald et al 2006:9; Nhema 2008:15 makes a similar argument.

⁴⁶ Kaldor 1999:7-8.

⁴⁷ Kaldor 1999:81.

⁴⁸ Kaplan 1994:2.

A further approach to the study of conflict that emerged after the Cold War is the comparative quantitative approach to the study of war of which the best known examples are the studies conducted by Paul Collier and others for the World Bank's Post Conflict Unit, beginning in 1998.⁴⁹ The most influential conclusion of these studies was the emphasis placed on the relative importance of "greed" (economic incentive) in causing conflict while playing down the consequences of "grievance" (political motivation). Unlike the "new war" arguments, Collier's ahistorical approach makes no propositions concerning the changing nature of warfare. What it has in common with the "new war" thinking is a preoccupation with causality; indeed, Marchal and Messiant suggest that the work of Kaldor, Kaplan and Collier, as different as it may appear, is driven by a common set of normative assumptions that reduce any armed conflict to criminal behaviour.⁵⁰

Collier's conclusions about the centrality of "greed" also echo Kaldor's characterisation of "new wars" as driven by resource predation. A recurring criticism of Collier's approach is that its economic determinism elides the difference between the cause of war and the economic circumstances that sustain it. As Cilliers remarks in the introduction to a volume that deals with the economic basis of the post-1990 phase of the Angolan war:

Two lines of thinking underpin [Collier's] analysis on the relationship between war and economics: that easily exploitable natural resources are used to finance civil wars and that the perpetuation of war in certain African countries

⁴⁹ Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2000, 2004.

⁵⁰ Marchal and Messiant 2006:6. The same criticism could be extended to Malaquias's argument that UNITA was transformed after 1990 into a "criminal enterprise" Malaquias 2007:20. See also Duffield's argument (2001:10-13) about how understandings of conflict have been determined by normative ideas of "liberal peace" that are linked to an increasingly interventionist international development agenda.

serves as an alternative way of gaining income. Although not exclusively so, this approach has been collated into that of ‘resource war’, sometimes put forward as reflecting an additional or ‘new’ type of war.⁵¹

Cilliers warns that “any analysis that seeks to reduce the study of extensive social conflict to a single determinant should be treated with care”.⁵² More recently, the economic determinism of Collier’s work has attracted more fundamental critical scrutiny, from writers who simultaneously maintain a sceptical view towards the role of ideology and questions of identity, and who are equally critical of the “new war” thesis. These approaches acknowledge that although a conflict has to be paid for, natural resource endowment does not in itself cause conflict; they recognise that while questions both of ideology and of identity may be evoked as a justification of conflict, these factors cannot on their own be seen as causing conflict. These approaches argue for the need to historicise civil war and to recognise that a complex conjuncture of factors must be taken into account in explaining the genesis and sustenance of each instance of war. For FitzGerald, Stewart and Venugopal, the motivations of “self-determination movements” (SDMs) “cannot simply be reduced to the ‘criminal greed’ of rival local elites or to age-old ‘ethnic rivalries’. [...] SDMs have an essentially political dimension that involves both the contestation of state power and the construction of legitimacy, both of which have internal dimensions.” FitzGerald et al “reject the simplistic view that all political violence is irrational (or criminal and simply motivated by personal gain) but we have tried to avoid the opposite danger of seeing it in merely instrumental terms as a Clausewitzian extension of politics by another means.”⁵³ In the case of Angola, an influential analysis by Christine Messiant

⁵¹ Cilliers 2000.

⁵² Cilliers 2000:2

⁵³ FitzGerald et al 2006:1; see also Mkandawire 2002 and Zeleza 2008.

demonstrates how the experience of conflict and territorial division was constitutive of (ethnic) identity difference, rather than the other way round.⁵⁴

Cramer uses Angola as a case study in a critique of the various perspectives on civil war that were current in the 1990s. Taking issue with Collier's work, Cramer points out the methodological problems in using quantifiable proxies for non-quantifiable variables (such as "grievance")⁵⁵ and the failure to deal with the collective action question and the importance of "historical experience, powerful norms and ideas" – that is to say, the ideological dimensions of conflict;⁵⁶ he notes that "greed versus grievance" is a false dichotomy. For Cramer, the "calculative rationality and choice" that Collier's models assume as a determinant of participation in conflict disregard the fact that most participants in warfare do so only because they are forced.⁵⁷ Turning to essentialist explanations of war, Cramer plays down the importance of ethnicity as a determinant of conflict,⁵⁸ a conclusion that the research presented in this thesis largely confirms.

I turn now to the second of the two broad categories of literature on civil conflict, namely those that apply historical or anthropological analysis, and sometimes a combination of the two, to particular cases. Here I will consider literature on civil conflict in post-independence Africa from the 1980s and after. An important debate that emerges in this literature concerns the nature of the interaction between guerrillas and civilians: this takes in questions of people's willing co-operation with armed

⁵⁴ Messiant 1994.

⁵⁵ Cramer 2006:129.

⁵⁶ Cramer 2006:133.

⁵⁷ Cramer 2006:151.

⁵⁸ Cramer 2006: 161.

movements as opposed to their being coerced into participating, the nature and content of political education conducted by the armed movements among their own soldiers and among civilians, and the nature and purpose of violence seen during the course of conflicts.

Terence Ranger's work on the Zimbabwean war challenged earlier assumptions about guerrilla conflict, thanks in part to a methodology that put a high value on interviews with the protagonists. Ranger emphasises the importance of the specific historical experience of a particular class in a particular situation: this emphasis is linked to scepticism towards the official ideologies and models of struggle propounded by nationalist leaders.⁵⁹ At the same time, Ranger notes the importance of the shared historical experience of groups that might, at first glance, appear to have divergent interests.⁶⁰ Ranger's conclusion is that Shona peasants co-operated with guerrillas because the peasants had clear grievances against the Rhodesian state, and saw support for the independence struggle as a way of achieving redress. Shona peasants, Ranger argues, had a "long tradition of understanding what had been done to them", specifically the theft of their land by colonial settlers and fought "for the recovery of their lost lands" as well as for "a transformed state [...] that would back black farming against white".⁶¹ Thus, while political education remained part of guerrilla mobilisation, this was grounded in a consciousness that predated the arrival of the nationalist movements, and "did not seek to transform peasant consciousness".

⁵⁹ Ranger 1985:10.

⁶⁰ Ranger 1985:223 ff.

⁶¹ Ranger 1985:177.

Ranger's work challenges a body of literature in which, to quote Theda Skocpol, the peasantry "was spurned as the repository conservatism and tradition, of all that needed to be overcome by a revolutionary bourgeoisie or proletariat, or by a modernizing elite"⁶². In other words, this literature portrays peasants not only as resistant to the modernising efforts of state builders, but also as suspicious of efforts at revolutionary mobilisation. Ranger makes no universal claims about peasants being amenable or resistant to state formation: situating his work in the context of land dispossession in Zimbabwe he suggests, rather, that Shona peasants were amenable to mobilisation because of a specific historical grievance.

Ranger's conclusions about the mobilisation of Shona peasants are in turn challenged by Norma Kriger, who questions the idea of a "peasant consciousness" that caused all strata within peasant society to support the guerrilla struggle. Rather than treating peasants as a class with common interests, Kriger emphasises the initiative of different sections of peasant society (split, for example, along generational and gender lines) in using the presence of guerrillas to pursue their own group interests.⁶³ An approach based on gender and generation, rather than class, also dominates the literature on the civil wars in West Africa since 1990, which portrays conflict as driven by the blocked aspirations of young men, urban or rural, who have been politically or economically marginalised.⁶⁴

⁶² Skocpol 1994:213.

⁶³ Kriger 1992:168. See also Maxwell's (1993) discussion of the literature that preceded his work on Zimbabwe.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Richards 1998.

Kruger further suggests that Ranger underplays the reality of the violence that was a necessary part of the guerrillas' operations. She distances herself from the "voluntarist" accounts of revolutionary warfare that hold that people are the main driver of events, just as she rejects structuralist accounts that deny agency to the mass of people: the fact that peasants might not be in command of their own destiny is not a reason to ignore their narratives about belief and participation.

Questions of violence versus willing participation in guerrilla war and the disposition of peasant farmers towards guerrillas are developed further in the literature on Mozambique, which includes debate about the extent and the nature of violence attributed to RENAMO: the most important lesson being, perhaps, a warning not to assume that an armed movement's methods and priorities were uniform at all times and in all places.⁶⁵ Jessica Schaffer observes that the post-1990 literature on Mozambique "discerned a variety of patterns of both FRELIMO and RENAMO soldiers' interaction with civilians, falling at all points on the continuum from collusion to coercion".⁶⁶ Margaret Hall emphasises the instrumental nature of RENAMO violence, seeing fear – even terror – as central to the guerrillas' strategy.⁶⁷ She explicitly questions the "fish in water" view of guerrilla struggle, arguing violence was aimed at the isolation of people and the destruction of infrastructure so as to "disarticulate" the state. Violence was also instrumental to RENAMO's survival; in the absence of rear bases, Hall argues, guerrillas must have lived off the local

⁶⁵ Gersony 1988; Geffray 1990; Hall 1990; Minter 1994; McGregor 1998; Schafer 1999.

⁶⁶ Schafer 1999: 45.

⁶⁷ Hall 1990; See also Vines 1991:1.

population, and one purpose of violence was simply to extort food and other supplies from peasants who, she suggests, were not sympathetic to RENAMO's aims.

Both Hall and Alex Vines note, nevertheless, that RENAMO violence was not uniform throughout Mozambique. Vines finds that RENAMO was best able to establish a relationship with the rural population in those areas where FRELIMO's rural development policies, particularly villagisation, created discontent among the farming population.⁶⁸ This conclusion resonates with ideas discussed earlier about peasant resistance to modernist development, and more specifically with Geffray's finding that forced villagisation and the suppression by the state of local beliefs and practices allowed RENAMO to gain adherence in some parts of Mozambique. Hall observes that violence was least severe where RENAMO was well established: a point that supports the idea that violence was used instrumentally. Hall's argument in this sense echoes the typology applied to Mozambique by Gersony, who views RENAMO's zones of influence as being divided into zones of "taxation" (where RENAMO's dominance was unchallenged), "control" (where political control was dependent on the use of force), and "destruction" (where RENAMO had no hope of taking control).⁶⁹ Minter's study of Mozambique and Angola in the 1980s considers all of these arguments on Mozambique, and acknowledges that a lack of primary research on UNITA-controlled areas during the period in question makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the Angolan case. Despite seeing South Africa as the main driver of the Angolan conflict, Minter suggests that UNITA used both force and persuasion to mobilise civilians, and its followers included a core of willing

⁶⁸ Vines 1991:114-115.

⁶⁹ Gersony 1988.

supporters and others who had been forced to join the movement.⁷⁰ I suggest, however, that Minter's argument rests too heavily on a categorical distinction between the MPLA as state, and UNITA as rebel movement: while Minter interrogates the motivations of UNITA's adherents, he does not ask similar questions about adherents of the MPLA government, and sees UNITA as a "counter-revolutionary" force aimed at overthrowing the "revolutionary" order established by the MPLA. The analysis presented in the following chapters of this thesis will show that Minter's argument depends on a misleading assumption about the degree to which the MPLA had established state structures in Angola. The difference in circumstances between the origins of the Angolan and the Mozambican civil wars should warn us against being too quick to see analogies between the two cases, since the majority of peasants who came into contact with UNITA did so without ever having experienced MPLA rule, unlike the Mozambicans who in Geffray's account welcomed RENAMO as a direct reaction to their experience of state practices. Again, if our approach is one that emphasises the similarities rather than the differences between the operations of states and those of rebel movements, and if we accept that peasants are likely to resist the advance of a predatory and authoritarian state, this does not necessarily mean that they will be any better disposed towards whatever demands a non-state movement might make on them.

The central issue in the study of the relationship between guerrilla movements and the societies in which they operate is summed up as follows by Christopher Clapham:

To what extent is this a relationship of common interest, in which the population supports the insurgency and the insurgents represent the aspirations of the population? To what extent, conversely, is it and one in which the

⁷⁰ Minter 1994:217.

insurgents control and even exploit that population, in pursuit of interests which local people do not share?⁷¹

Stathis Kalyvas, in a wide-ranging comparative study of qualitative work on civil war, offers a theoretical perspective that moves beyond a dichotomy between violent control and willing support, by conceptualising these as part of the same process. Rather than seeing *a priori* support for political movements as a cause of conflict, Kalyvas suggests support is shaped, even determined, by political and military control. He seeks

a theory of irregular war, which is defined by the twin processes of segmentation and fragmentation of sovereignty: territory is divided into zones monopolistically controlled by rival actors (segmentation) and zones where these actors' sovereignty overlaps (fragmentation). The type of sovereignty or control that prevails in a given region affects the type of strategies followed by political actors. Political actors try to shape popular support (or collaboration) and deter collaboration with their rival (or defection).⁷²

I will return to Kalyvas later, since his perspective appears especially pertinent in a case like the Angolan Central Highlands, where, as I shall argue in chapter two, there was limited popular interest in either of the main political movements before they began to take control of territory and of people during 1975. Comparable to Kalyvas's emphasis on control is the perspective adopted in another comparative study by Oberschall and Seidmann: they introduce the issue of food supply in contested areas and suggest that this, rather than violent control, is the main factor that constrains the choices made by civilians.⁷³

⁷¹ Clapham 1998:14.

⁷² Kalyvas 2006:12.

⁷³ Oberschall and Seidmann 2005.

Thandika Mkandawire also steps aside from the debate about coercion versus persuasion, suggesting that rural people were not particularly important for guerrilla movements – they were merely caught in the crossfire of a war that was really about the capture of urban-based resources and power.⁷⁴ Mkandawire’s thesis is problematic in a case like Angola, where conflict was the norm rather than the exception for much of the country over a period of decades. Mkandawire’s analysis renders irrelevant the complex processes of interaction between armed political movements and rural people, and effectively denies rural people a role either as supporters of guerrilla movements (Ranger), or as people who were ambivalent towards guerrilla movements but may have turned their presence to their own advantage (Kriger). Mkandawire’s perspective is nevertheless useful in pointing out that conflicts that are played out in a rural environment do not necessarily have their roots in the countryside. After 1994, the MPLA’s control of the Angolan state was never in question, despite its failure to bring the whole of the country’s territory and population under its control.⁷⁵ In examining political relationships in the latter part of the Angolan civil war, we need to ask questions about whether the political importance of controlling the rural population was the same at all times, or, if not, when and how it changed. I will argue that an understanding of the Angolan civil war requires that we look closely not only at a rural-based guerrilla war, but also at the discourses of power deployed by a state that was urban centred, as well as considering the role of the city and of urban-based power in UNITA’s political imaginary.

⁷⁴ Mkandawire 2002.

⁷⁵ See also Parsons 2006, and Kaarsholm’s observation (2006:4) that “the African state never had to really fight for its life” as a result of which states “have been allowed to continue to malfunction with impunity” or even “to disintegrate in their capacity to uphold any pretence of social order.”

One theme that has emerged in anthropological studies of conflict since the 1990s is the focus on specific practices of violence; another possibility involves the study of political ideologies, at local as well as elite level, in an attempt to understand the logic whereby people perceived political legitimacy to have been constructed. In this thesis I have tended towards the latter approach. There are practical reasons for this that I discuss further in the section on methodology later in this chapter. Furthermore, I am mindful of the concern expressed by Kalyvas of the need to distinguish violence within war from war itself: he suggests that previous literature has made the mistake of conflating these two distinct concepts:

Although political scientists and historians tend to subsume violence under violent conflict, many anthropologists, NGO activists, and journalists tend to perceive violence as an outcome rather than as a process, often effectively “black-boxing” it [...] The focus is on instances of violence rather than the complex, and often invisible, nonviolent actions and mechanisms that precede and follow them.⁷⁶

Such caution is particularly pertinent for this study of Angola: the “war” under consideration in this thesis refers to a period of some 35 years, during which violent acts were neither continuous nor uniform. In this sense, it is more useful to see war not so much as a series of violent incidents as a situation of contested control of territory and people, a contestation that is manifested in violence at certain points.

Understanding the construction of political legitimacy necessitates considering the ideational elements in civil war, while rejecting the essentialism of “new barbarism” and similar theses. Preben Kaarsholm, like Gupta, emphasises the concept of “public culture” in understanding the political relationships associated with war:

⁷⁶ Kalyvas 2006:21.

This will involve an appreciation of the fora and the discourses through which political understandings and endeavours are constituted; how these fora and discourses relate to the state and to each other in different ways and how they change and develop over time. [...] This will include institutions whose articulations do not necessarily concern themselves with politics at the level of the national state. Their concern may be rather with the micropolitics of ‘local’ society [...] In this way,⁷⁷ the concept of what constitutes ‘politics’ is opened up for reconsideration.

I will look at the discursive construction of political norms and meanings both “at the level of the national state” – that is, how the manifest business of politics is done – and in “the micropolitics of ‘local’ society”. The approach outlined by Kaarsholm has the potential to take the analysis of civil war beyond the question of the mechanics of the relationship between guerrillas and society, and allows us to apply the same approach – as proposed in the introductory section of this chapter – to understanding political relationships on both sides of the conflict. In addition, it allows us to move beyond the focus on causality that dominated the literature of the 1990s, of which I have noted the critiques. I draw therefore upon thinking from political anthropology, not all of which is derived from the study of war situations, and of which a large part deals as much with the interaction between people and states as between people and rebel movements. In this way it offers an approach that allows us to move beyond the categorical distinction between state and rebel movement, a distinction which, as noted earlier, is more misleading than useful in the Angolan context, and to study the MPLA and UNITA as contenders in their attempts to control and to forge a political relationship with the people of the Central Highlands. This will be taken up in the next section of this chapter.

⁷⁷ Kaarsholm 2006:13-14.

Beyond state and non-state

Studying “the micropolitics of ‘local’ society” will on the one hand involve examining local understandings of those concepts that are uncontroversially political: for example, Kaarsholm himself identifies a significant change in many African countries around 1990, marked by the entry of the idea of democracy into local discourse, while Frederic Schaffer analyses the way in which the French and Wolof equivalents of the word “democracy” are deployed in Senegal, concluding that understandings of democracy and political accountability are situation-bound.⁷⁸ Equally important is to study the interpenetration of the overtly political with everyday social norms and discourses. One useful approach is that offered by Liisa Malkki’s study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, which examines the effects of physical dislocation upon the formation of ideas and identities. Malkki emphasises the “making of worlds” in the discourse of the refugees through the articulation of “mythico-historical themes” in their accounts of their own life histories and those of their forbears. These accounts represented

a subversive recasting and reinterpretation of [the past] in fundamentally moral terms. In this sense, it cannot be accurately described as either history or myth. It was what can be called a mythico-history.

[...]

But what made the refugees’ narrative mythical, in the anthropological sense, was not its truth or falsity, but the fact that it was concerned [...] with the ordering and reordering of social and political categories, with the defining of self in distinction to other, with good and evil.⁷⁹

Michael Schatzberg reaches comparable conclusions through a different methodology: he analyses records of political discourse from eight African countries

⁷⁸ Kaarsholm 2006:9; Schaffer 1998.

⁷⁹ Malkki 1995: 54-55.

in search of a “moral matrix” that underlies political legitimation and defines that which is “thinkable” in terms of political possibilities.⁸⁰

Concepts such as “worlds” and “mythico-history” (Malkki), “public cultures” (Kaarsholm) or “moral matrix” (Schatzberg) all address the arrangement of ideas within the public discourse of a particular social group, which shape a particular set of understandings common to that group. I shall, for the sake of convenience, use the term “public culture” to cover all of these interrelated concepts. The idea of public culture allows us to move beyond the either-or of coercion versus willing participation. It also, incidentally, undermines the idea of individual rational choice, which is a theoretical cornerstone of Collier’s and similar arguments. Far from being objective, such interests are constructed in discourse and thus subject to change over time and according to changing circumstances.

The writers quoted so far who have adopted these constructivist perspectives on local politics tend, nevertheless, to regard public culture only in the present tense, and pay little attention to how it might develop over time, and, crucially, to be subject to political influence. Following Kalyvas, a central question of this thesis will be to examine the process that links control to adherence: the process whereby “[p]olitical actors try to shape popular support (or collaboration) and deter collaboration with their rival (or defection)”.⁸¹ Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is useful here: “[t]he ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group”. For Gramsci, intellectuals of the dominant group formulate the ideas that shape hegemony, but

⁸⁰ Schatzberg, 2001:31.

⁸¹ Kalyvas 2006:12

Gramsci's conception allows for resistance against the dominant class, as intellectuals of the subordinate class develop counter-hegemonic thinking. Gramsci also offers an understanding of the complementary roles of consent and violent force in maintaining domination: "The apparatus of state coercive power [...] legally enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively" and is typically deployed "when spontaneous consent has failed."⁸² Self-evidently, wartime Angola had neither the secure state structures nor the differentiated classes that characterised the Europe of which Gramsci wrote. Rather than hegemony being backed up by the threat of force, in the more fluid situation of civil war, force is always real and present, and an individual's first experience of a particular movement is likely to be one of violence. Nevertheless, Gramsci's concepts provide an entry point to understanding the complementary use of force, consent and the instrumental construction of consent that can be observed, on each side of the Angolan conflict, between an armed political movement (the MPLA or UNITA) and the people who lived in the territory it controlled.

Even if the concept of hegemony has normally been associated with states, there is no lack of literature to demonstrate how non-state armed groups seek to shape public discourse, and thereby mould group and individual identities, in order to secure legitimacy. Clapham argues that "[a]ny insurgency, dependent on mobilizing local-level support, almost necessarily must articulate concepts of identity which bind together its supporters and distinguish it from its adversaries".⁸³ David Pool examines how the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, through its programmes of political

⁸² Gramsci 1971:12.

⁸³ Clapham 1998:13.

education, “reshaped” the past in its efforts to unify a heterogeneous nation.⁸⁴ In the limited research conducted on UNITA and the MPLA, some suggestions have emerged about the importance of political education to the two movements. The available literature on UNITA suggests that the movement indeed made a conscious effort at political education. Linda Heywood attributes Savimbi’s success to his invocation of “pre-colonial Ovimbundu ideologies”.⁸⁵ Anecdotal accounts by authors who spent time with Savimbi in the 1970s testify to his persuasive skills as an orator at rallies.⁸⁶ Likewise, the MPLA attached a high importance to the ideological content of education as it sought to take control of the state apparatus after independence.⁸⁷ Parsons argues that at UNITA’s headquarters at Jamba, “the concentration of population also enabled the cultivation of loyalty, or at least of indoctrination, compounded by the perception of an external threat and encouraged by any previous experience of violence by the ‘other side’”.⁸⁸

The interviews and documents that I cite in the following chapters demonstrate that both UNITA and the MPLA made assiduous efforts to shape understandings of current events and of history in such a way as to assign a positive value to themselves in the public culture of the communities that fell under their control. This was done through formal and informal political education, of which the dominant message was to present the party concerned as the defender of communal (often defined as national) interests and security. However, a party was able to do this only for as long as it maintained physical control over the population in question. As people moved

⁸⁴ Pool 1998.

⁸⁵ Heywood 1998.

⁸⁶ Bridgland 1986; Stockwell 1978.

⁸⁷ Wolfers and Bergerol 1983:115.

⁸⁸ Parsons 2006:197-198.

from the control of one movement to another, as a result of conquest, capture or defection, they were adept at adopting the discourse of the party that was newly in control. My interviews also make clear that most of the people who participated, willingly or unwillingly, in the civil war in 1975 had had no contact with and only minimal knowledge of the Angolan political movements prior to the Portuguese coup d'état in April 1974. The exception was a small and educated group on each side of the conflict. For everyone else, the movements were experienced as exogenous, even if UNITA was given some credibility by its leaders' local origins in the Central Highlands. Voluntary political participation was possible for less than a year, before the MPLA, UNITA and the *Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) assumed exclusive control in particular parts of Angola, and people had no choice but to accept their authority. Interviewees recalled how they were obliged to speak and act in a way that was consistent with the public discourse of whichever party was controlling them at a particular moment.

Given that this research relies on memories that would have been altered by changing circumstances over the years, it would be unrealistic to try to establish precisely to what extent people had identified with the discourse of a controlling political movement, and to what extent they had adopted a particular discourse in order to survive. It is nevertheless clear that at least some people believed in the doctrine of one movement even though they may have spent years under the control of the opposing movement, while others changed their loyalties depending on who was in control at the time. Political domination, supported by force of arms, enabled near-complete control over what was said publicly, if not always what was believed in private.

Having discussed the relationship between political control and political education, I turn now to the question of content of the ideologies that were used to mobilise support. In addressing this question we need to examine both the explicitly political content of ideologies (even if Jonas Savimbi's expedient switching between the political discourses of Maoism, Africanism and pro-Western market capitalism give us cause for scepticism) and appeals made on the basis of different identities – Angolan (national), black, peasant, Ovimbundu, regional – and be aware of interaction and slippage of meaning between these. The creation and mediation of identities within political discourses must also be investigated.

Explanations of the Angolan conflict as an “ethnic conflict”, in which *a priori* ethnic categories determine social rifts that in turn lead to war, are discredited. As Guimarães suggests:

Angolan ethnicity may have been exploited by movements and personalities in their political conflicts but the latter do not emerge solely from the differences between the ethnic groups.⁸⁹

People who were interviewed for this thesis rarely evoked ethnic categories when they spoke of their understandings of Angolan history and society. Many of them spoke of social rifts along regional lines; some would attribute specific characteristics and motivations to “southerners” and “northerners”.⁹⁰ But people acknowledged that such regional loyalties changed over time and were only one among several factors that

⁸⁹ Guimarães 1998:34. See also Messiant 1994; Minter 1994; Pereira, 1994; Brinkman, 2005.

⁹⁰ In the terms of such a dichotomy, the “south” was understood to mean the Central Highlands, while the “north” referred more commonly to Luanda and its hinterland than to the Bakongo far north.

contributed to people's political adherence. Some of those who remembered UNITA's political education or political rallies recalled how Savimbi or other UNITA officials would use ideas of local southern identity, blackness, indigeneity and Ovimbundu identity in their efforts to legitimate UNITA. A useful approach is to examine how ethnicity and other categories of identity are used in political discourse in such a way as to locate political enmity within the subjectivity of the individual. Vigdis Broch-Due notes that

the processes through which ethnic identity is produced and reproduced by social, economic and political forces mobilise deeply rooted issues of being, belief and desire to belong. Individuals and groups call on cultural and historical narratives, arguments and ideologies, to challenge established parameters and reinforce their claims to legitimacy. [...] However, with a shift in circumstances, everything can change and a frontier that once seemed so solid can start to fade.⁹¹

Nationalist appeals are equally slippery. Benedict Anderson envisaged nations as "imagined communities". He allowed the possibility of imagined communities other than the nation, though his argument seems to grant a privileged status to the nation among the various other possible imaginings: the nation is imagined as "sovereign". Nevertheless, Anderson sets this "sovereignty" of the nation in a specific historical context.

(The nation) is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm [...] nations dream of being free [...] The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.⁹²

Nationalist claims also have a particular power in the "mythico-history" identified by Malkki among the refugees she interviewed:

⁹¹ Broch-Due 2005:10-11.

⁹² Anderson 2006:7.

[F]rom the point of view of the Hutu refugees, at least, what is being asserted is national, not tribal identity. [...] [T]he legitimation of the categorical claims of the actors necessitates laying claim to a history. And this is not just any kind of history. It is a totalizing, collective historical charter which defines its dominant subject, and the “rights” and “destiny” of that subject.⁹³

With respect to the nationalist claims in the discourse of the MPLA and UNITA it must be remembered that both started out as nationalist movements opposing Portuguese rule, and the nationalist element in their discourses survived even though the content of their nationalisms was different.⁹⁴ Where Ranger, for example, was able to identify objective grievances against white rule as motivating Zimbabwean peasants, it is more difficult to argue that UNITA’s southern Angolan peasant constituency might have had real grievances against the MPLA since the MPLA was barely present in rural Angola during the period in question. I do, however, investigate how both UNITA and the MPLA drew on narratives of anti-colonial grievance to construct their legitimacy, and sought to delegitimize the other side by casting it as the agent of Cuban invaders (as UNITA characterised the MPLA) or the tool of western imperialism and apartheid aggression (as the MPLA described UNITA). Much of the literature on independence movements in the post-colonial world sees these movements as being led by privileged, educated, urban sectors of society.⁹⁵ As noted earlier in this section, nationalism in Angola emerged out of three regionally-based elites, and its proponents nurtured their ideas in exile or clandestinely before returning to their home regions in 1974 to mobilise support among the people whom they considered their constituency. Peasant farmers whom I

⁹³ Malkki 1995:250.

⁹⁴ Analysing the reasons for the resumption of war after the 1992 elections, Anthony Pereira writes: “At the heart of the continuing conflict in Angola is the difference between the nationalisms of the two opposing sides” (1994:17).

⁹⁵ Chatterjee 1993 chapter 8; Freund 1998:181 ff; Austen 1997:226 ff.

interviewed, although they did not explicitly challenge nationalist discourse, spoke of this discourse as something that had been brought to them by the political movements rather than as something that had emerged spontaneously from among themselves.⁹⁶

Discussion of nationalism brings us back to the question of the state and its position within political discourse. Benedict Anderson's assertion that "the gage and emblem of this [nationalist] freedom is the sovereign state" has a particular resonance in the study of post-independence Africa: Firstly because African nation building was defined in terms of colonial territorial boundaries, and secondly because nationalist struggles were, ultimately, struggles for control of the state and the resources, both political and material, that it commands.⁹⁷ In this way, nationalism as an ideology is linked if not to actual statehood then to the aspiration to statehood. The literature examined earlier in this chapter emphasises the importance of what Mitchell calls "the state effect". Similarly, various case studies illustrate how the creation of an *illusion* of bureaucratic nation-statehood, linked to discourses of national liberation, can provide a basis for the imagining of a particular identity. Pool emphasises that during the struggle for Eritrean independence, the EPLF in some areas took on governmental characteristics to the point that "the Ethiopian state played hardly any role at all in the provision of services", and attached importance to matters such as social infrastructure, logistics and discipline that are more typically prerogatives of a state. Yael Navaro-Yashin, in a study of the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, argues that this mimicry of state-like behaviour becomes constitutive of identities, creating "mental and psychic worlds [...] even in subjects of the regime

⁹⁶ Austen's observations (1997:231) about the possibilities of nationalist mobilisation among the peasantry because of grievances are less applicable in Angola: this will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Iliffe 1995: 246 ff; Freund 1998:209 ff.

who would critique the experience of confinement that ensued”.⁹⁸ Das and Poole make a similar argument with respect to bureaucratic practice, linking such practice to subjectivity: “it is through these documentary practices that the state makes the population legible to itself, creating what has been referred to as a visibility effect”.⁹⁹ In the case of Angola, Anthony Pereira acknowledges that “the M.P.L.A.’s strong cross-ethnic appeal [based on the 1992 election results] may have much to do with its control over the state apparatus, and its ability to manipulate national symbols and associate them with itself”.¹⁰⁰ Bridgland’s and other accounts from the 1980s suggest that UNITA also made assiduous efforts to create the visible trappings of state-like authority.¹⁰¹ Among people I interviewed, those who recognised the legitimacy of UNITA’s territorial control during the war expressed this in terms of UNITA’s ability to fulfil roles conventionally associated with statehood.

Methodology

Of necessity, this project has largely been based on oral testimony. Few written records exist that are of relevance to the period, the region and the focus of my study, the main exceptions being the accounts of the late colonial period. At the same time, an interview-based methodology seemed appropriate for a thesis that is focussed on political legitimisation and the relationship between political movements and people. The central concerns of this thesis are questions that are constituted in discourse, and talking to people about how their relationship to politics had been shaped seemed therefore an appropriate way in which to approach these concerns. Much of the

⁹⁸ Navaro-Yashin 2005:118.

⁹⁹ Das and Poole 2005:15-16.

¹⁰⁰ Pereira 1994:23.

¹⁰¹ Bridgland 1986: 322.

qualitative research on civil war in postcolonial Africa has used a similar methodology, although a large part of this literature has drawn additionally on written sources to a greater extent than was possible in this thesis.¹⁰²

In setting out to conduct research in Angola using a similar approach, I was encouraged by the interviews that I had conducted as a journalist in Angola in late 2001 and throughout 2002, with people who had until recently been under the control of UNITA. I interviewed them either in displaced people's camps run by international NGOs, or in the quartering areas that were managed by UNITA commanders, with limited oversight from the Angolan Armed Forces. Although by 2002 the MPLA was beginning to hold rallies in some displaced people's camps, there was no indication that the ruling party had managed to influence public discourse among communities that had spent long periods under UNITA control. Consequently, people were willing to talk frankly about the time they had spent in areas controlled by UNITA.

Much had changed by the time I did the research for this thesis, over a period of six months in 2008 and two months the following year. One of the themes of the thesis is the intimate relationship between political control, the control of public discourse among a certain population, and the construction of the political loyalty of that population. My research tried to establish how this relationship functioned during a period in the recent past when Angola was under divided territorial control, yet this research was being conducted at a time when Angola was under the control of a single entity, the MPLA-controlled state. Political relationships were no longer what they once were, and this had an impact on any attempt to record the political discourses of

¹⁰² For example: Ranger 1985; Kriger 1992; Alexander, McGregor and Ranger 2000; Behrend 1999; Brinkman 2005; Malkki 1995.

an earlier period. Kalyvas notes the difficulties in “work relying on retrospective reconstructions” of civil war, and suggests that we shift focus from examining attitudes to examining behaviour, but he also acknowledges that observing behaviour presents its own problems.¹⁰³ Kriger observes that researchers’ access to rural populations in a post-conflict situation “is invariably contingent on demonstrable political allegiance to the incumbent regime or to the revolutionary organization”.¹⁰⁴ The situation in Angola in 2008 and 2009 was not as restrictive as that which Kriger describes, but there were limits on my access to rural people, and on their ability to speak freely to me.

Initially I relied on contacts in the churches and in non-governmental organisations with a long presence in Angola to introduce me to people whose life histories might provide them with a perspective on the questions that are considered in this thesis. Interviewing urban people, and particularly better-educated urban people – teachers, clergy, and civil servants – was seldom difficult. Some of these people had roots and continuing family links in the rural areas, and they were able to talk about political relationships in the countryside insofar as they could recall those earlier years. The difficulties arose when I tried to interview people currently living in villages, whose testimony, given the centrality of peasant farmers to UNITA’s military strategy, was to be a crucial part of this thesis. By 2008, the people who had come from UNITA-controlled areas at the start of the decade had dispersed; according to the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the government and UNITA at the end of the war, people formerly with UNITA were expected to return to their villages of origin. This implied that there must be villages in the Central Highlands where former

¹⁰³ Kalyvas 2006:100.

¹⁰⁴ Kriger 1992:7.

UNITA adherents were living alongside people who had spent most of their lives under government control. Yet such communities were difficult to find and to identify, apparently because people who had been associated with UNITA were not at liberty to talk about this fact.

In June 2008 I conducted interviews in one village close to the city of Huambo, which had always been under government control apart from during the periods when the city itself had also been occupied by UNITA. I had previously visited there in 2003, at which point it was home to a few people who had recently arrived from the UNITA quartering areas and settled in this largely MPLA-supporting community. When I returned to the village in 2008, people told me there were no former UNITA adherents living in the village. It was impossible to know whether they had moved elsewhere, or whether they (and their neighbours) had chosen to deny their UNITA history.

Finding out more about people's relationship with UNITA during the war was made difficult by the social norms that prevailed in most of the villages that I visited. People were reluctant to talk to me anywhere other than in a public place, and MPLA party activists took advantage of this fact. If I attempted to talk to individuals other than chiefs, elders or party activists, my interlocutor would often defer to these people in any case, or else the authority figures would eventually intrude on the conversation uninvited. One incident that revealed a lot about the control on discourse in villages was when I went to visit a farmer who, I had been told, had spent much of his adult life in UNITA areas and been actively involved in UNITA's local political structures. He seemed reluctant to speak to me, and insisted that I speak instead to the village

chief and “co-ordinator” – the latter being an MPLA appointee. At the end of my visit, however, he took my telephone number and phoned me when he visited Huambo. Away from the restrictive atmosphere of the village, he was able to talk freely about the time he had spent with UNITA.

By this time, the MPLA’s campaign for the 2008 parliamentary election was under way, and observing the campaign strategies gave an indication of how the party was controlling public discourse in the villages. MPLA activists took every opportunity to remind villagers of the deprivations they had suffered under UNITA control, and spoke in a way that portrayed UNITA as a movement that had waged war against the Angolan people. At the same time, gifts from the party to village chiefs, and the appointment of “co-ordinators” to act as the party’s eyes and ears in villages helped to ensure that parties other than the MPLA were not welcome. The demonisation of UNITA in the official discourse, and the close control over what was said in the villages, ensured that the testimony that I heard presented the MPLA as the only defender of the Angolan people against a violent and predatory UNITA. It is true that some interviewees were nevertheless frank about the predatory behaviour of the MPLA soldiers, as well as UNITA, in the early stages of independence. But no one would admit to having co-operated with UNITA, even in areas where Angolan NGO workers and priests had told me that the local villagers had co-operated with both parties at different times.

Of course, such interviews were enlightening insofar as they revealed the dominant discourse associated with the MPLA and the mythico-history, to use Malkki’s term, of

communities that identified with the MPLA.¹⁰⁵ But it became apparent that I would have to make a particular effort to meet villagers who had lived under the control of UNITA and who were prepared to talk openly about UNITA's strategies. Ideally, I would have sought out people who did not currently hold a strong affiliation to either party, but it became apparent that I would have to seek the help of local UNITA branches in order to locate people who were not afraid to talk about their past in UNITA-controlled areas. This yielded a series of interviews that revealed a strong political bias and which were therefore not to be trusted as records of fact, but which nevertheless helped to assemble not only an image of UNITA as it was perceived by its loyal adherents, but also of the mythico-history that was current among people who had willingly lived for long periods with UNITA. These interviews spoke of narratives about Angolan history and about UNITA's methods and priorities, which had sustained people's belief in UNITA through the war years, and which were invoked today to justify adherents' continuing loyalty to the party. It seemed reasonable to infer that these narratives were indicative of the version of history that UNITA had propagated in its own political education programmes. These narratives had, however, been internalised to the extent that people saw an inherent moral superiority in the values of hard work and self-sufficiency that they believed to be associated with UNITA. Later in the research, when I was again trying to find people who had lived under UNITA control, an Angolan NGO agreed to help me contact people who had lived in UNITA-controlled areas. I had hoped that using the NGO as a facilitator would bring forward people who were not decisively in favour of UNITA. Yet the people who came forward tended to identify with UNITA and to express favourable views of the movement. It appeared that those people who had spent time in UNITA-

¹⁰⁵ Malkki 1995.

controlled areas and who were willing to talk about it, were those who retained sympathies for UNITA.

The causality of this relationship might be working in either or both directions: people who had spent a substantial part of their lives under UNITA control, particularly those who had lived with UNITA during a time of peace, were more likely to continue to identify with UNITA over the years; but at the same time, continued identification with UNITA would make people more willing to talk about the period of coexistence. Whatever the causality, it was clear there was a relationship between history and present political affiliation, and through interviews it became possible to identify themes that linked the experience of political control, understandings of history, and political affiliation. It proved impossible to identify anyone who had lived in UNITA-controlled areas and who could offer a neutral assessment of the movement's methods and priorities. (With hindsight, such a goal seems unrealistic.) What was possible, however, was to identify people with differing levels of proximity to UNITA – for example, differentiating at the very least between those people who had held office in UNITA, and those who had worked as farmers in the areas that UNITA controlled – and to observe how these differences were related to the accounts given in interviews. Where interviews are quoted in this thesis, the nature of the interviewee's relationship to UNITA is noted as accurately as possible. Where it appeared that the circumstances of the interview – particularly the presence of government or UNITA authority figures – were restricting the speaker from offering a frank account of events, this is noted.

At this point, it seems appropriate to reflect on my own position as a researcher, and how I was liable to be perceived by those who met me. Given the history of South

Africa's earlier involvement in the Angolan conflict, I avoided mentioning my South African nationality to people allied with the MPLA, although I would answer truthfully if asked: instead, I said in the first instance that I was associated with a university in England. With UNITA loyalists, I generally did mention my nationality early in our interaction, and in some cases my interviewees invoked this as a point of solidarity between us, however uncomfortable I found this given that UNITA's engagement with South Africa had been through the apartheid government. Less-educated interviewees appeared unaware of South Africa's previous role in Angola, so that my nationality was not an issue. Although there was a certain advantage in the fact that my accent and my appearance are manifestly not Portuguese, the fact that I am obviously white may have encouraged older interviewees to compare colonial Angola favourably with the present day, as discussed in the following chapter. At all times, I took care to emphasise my lack of affiliation with any political grouping. This was helped by the fact that I relied on church networks and non-partisan NGOs to facilitate my contacts with interviewees.

From the initial base in the city of Huambo, the research was extended to other locations within the wider Central Highlands region. This was motivated by a desire to speak to people whose differing experience of the war would permit them to speak about a range of different aspects of political control: for example, not only did I need to speak to people who could recall both government and UNITA control, but also to people who could recall living under UNITA at different stages of the war. Given the mobility of people over the course of the war, the experiences recounted in interviews were not confined to the immediate areas in which I was interviewing. Jamba in particular, hundreds of kilometres away in south-eastern Angola, was prominent in

the histories recounted by people who had spent time there. Even though my main geographical focus is the Central Highlands, any attempt to understand the political consciousness of UNITA adherents without reference to Jamba would be misguided.

The principal research locations were as follows.

Huambo

Huambo, formerly Nova Lisboa, is significant as the second city of colonial Angola, and therefore a crucial prize in the battle for the control of the post-colonial state. Huambo was where Savimbi declared independence in 1975, and where UNITA attempted to establish itself in the administration before being driven out by the MPLA after only three months. UNITA once again took control of the city in early 1993. Huambo is therefore important as offering an indication of UNITA's relationship with urban people, and of the significance of urban politics to UNITA.

Villages on the periphery of the Huambo urban area were regularly used as resettlement areas for people who had left UNITA-controlled areas, voluntarily or involuntarily. About 20 kilometres from Huambo is a further group of villages where I conducted research. These villages were subject to predation by both the government and UNITA armies until the late 1980s. After that, those villagers who had not left with UNITA were resettled by the government in a location close to a main road. The experiences of forced displacement to be found here made an important contribution to understanding the political and military strategies of both sides.

Bailundo

The town of Bailundo, formerly Teixeira da Silva, is about 100 kilometres north of Huambo city, and is the administrative centre for an area that comprises the northernmost part of Huambo province. Until 1902 Bailundo was the capital of one of the five Ovimbundu kingdoms of the Central Highlands, and is remembered as the last of the kingdoms to surrender to colonial rule; as such, it is of particular symbolic significance in the anti-colonial discourses of southern Angola. Bailundo was one of the last towns of the Central Highlands to remain under UNITA control, only being captured by the government in 1999. Consequently, interviews in Bailundo had the potential to provide recent memories of UNITA control. For reasons of access, my research in the Bailundo *município* was not primarily in the town itself, but in rural areas further north. This is further detailed in chapter five.

Kuito

Kuito, the capital of Bié province and formerly known as Silva Porto, was important as the second largest urban centre of the Central Highlands, and more particularly because of its unique experience following the 1992 elections. At a time when UNITA had gained control of the other towns of the Central Highlands, a government army garrison and part of the civilian population engaged in street-to-street fighting, and prevented UNITA from taking control of Kuito, which it had surrounded and blockaded. Since then, Kuito has assumed a central role in the government memorialisation of the war, being presented as evidence that UNITA had turned

against the Ovimbundu, who responded with heroic resistance. For this reason it was important to examine the accounts of people who were in Kuito during the war, and to put these accounts in the historical context of political mobilisation in the Central Highlands.

As mentioned at the beginning, this thesis attempts to trace the development and use of political discourses and how these discourses defined the relationship between political movements and people, rather than to give a close account of events. This fact needs to be emphasised, because the approach that I have adopted risks creating false impressions if read as a definitive and encompassing statement on events that took place. The most obvious omission concerns the matter of violence, about which none of my interviewees was prepared to speak at any useful level of detail. There are two apparent reasons for this. First, the political pressures that stood in the way of obtaining testimony of any kind were intensified when it came to a subject as morally and as emotionally burdened as violence. Second, the field of enquiry covered a period of several decades, during which memories had faded. People who had once been in the middle ranks of UNITA's army often denied that UNITA had perpetrated any sort of violence: clearly an implausible assertion. The educated people at the top of UNITA's command sought not to deny violence, but to minimise it and to justify it in terms of political necessity: often by claiming state-like prerogatives of violence for UNITA. Long-time sympathisers of the MPLA, if they spoke of violence, similarly justified it as the prerogative of a state faced with an external enemy. People who had experienced violence and predation from both sides would speak about this, but only in the most general terms. Such testimony was insufficient to support any credible conclusions either about specific practices of violence or about the frequency of

violent incidents. My intention here is not to underestimate the levels of violence that occurred in the course of the war, and certainly not to exonerate the perpetrators.

Violence has been documented in a number of human rights-focussed reports, and in literature published by the MPLA and its supporters abroad.¹⁰⁶

The testimony gathered for this thesis is, however, useful insofar as it demonstrates how discourses on violence – what people say and in what they omit – are related to political legitimisation or delegitimisation. As discussed earlier, my approach is to see war not so much as a series of violent incidents as a situation of contested control of territory and populations, a contestation that is occasionally manifested violently. The experience of war was not one of unremitting violence. Indeed, when interviewees accounted for their support for one or other political movement, they laid the greater emphasis not on violence but on those periods of coexistence between political movements and populations when they accounted for their support for one or other political movement.

Those written records that I have cited in this thesis are supplementary to the material gathered in interviews. They enrich the arguments of the thesis, particularly concerning the “official” ideologies: the discourse of political elites on both sides. In some cases they provide a firmer factual basis to interviews, as interviewees were often uncertain about chronology. The archived documents of humanitarian organisations can offer some information on the scale and timing of population movements, though they seldom reveal the causes of these movements. State records, where they existed, proved impossible to access. I spoke to one former civil servant

¹⁰⁶ People’s Republic of Angola undated; Human Rights Watch 1999; Richardson 2001; International Research Network on Children and Armed Conflict 2004.

who told me that the social services authorities had kept records during the 1980s, but I met no one who could tell me where these records were now kept. My enquiries to the relevant government department brought forth only records from the late 1990s.

Recent memoirs by UNITA officials are useful for the insight they offer into UNITA's internal practices and discourses, though for obvious reasons they need to be read with a particularly critical eye. The accounts of journalists who spent time either in UNITA-controlled or government-controlled areas are useful for similar reasons, though also subject to the proviso that the only journalists admitted to Angola at that time were those who were demonstrably sympathetic towards whichever side hosted them, and that their movements and access to information were strictly controlled. Reports from Luanda newspapers during the last months of colonialism helped to confirm and give some substance to my interviewees' recollections of that period.

Conclusion

This thesis sets out to explore the nature of the political relationship between, on the one hand, the conflicting parties in the Angolan civil war (the MPLA government and UNITA) and, on the other, the people living in urban and rural areas of the Central Highlands. The literature considered in this introduction has suggested a number of subsidiary questions that need to be asked in the course of addressing the main question. To what extent can we talk about political support for the movements, and to what extent was the relationship one of control – or is this in fact a false dichotomy? How did the experience of control by one movement or the other shape

people's perceived self-interests – in other words, to what extent did people subjectively identify with the movement that controlled them? What was the content of the ideological discourses used by the warring parties in creating the perception of shared interests and antagonisms? To what extent were nationalist, regionalist, ethnic and other identity-based appeals important on both sides? How important were notions of statehood – real or imagined – in securing nationalist appeals? How did these perceptions change with changing political control – during the course of the conflict, and more especially with the government victory in 2002?

The chapter structure outlined at the beginning of this introduction was chosen so as to allow the exploration of these questions against the background of key moments in Angolan history, which will in turn permit the examination of the evolution of ideas about politics, and of how and to what extent these ideas gained adherence among different sections of society at different times. Interviewees' narratives of their personal history and of the history of their region and country, as well as their accounts of the nature and the content of the political discourses with which they came into contact at different times, will be examined critically in the context of the speaker's life experience and compared with other available oral and written accounts in such a way as to ensure that political and other pressures on how memories are made become in themselves an object of enquiry, rather than an obstacle.

I will not view the conflicts of the Central Highlands as driven solely by popular aspirations, but at the same time I do not take the position that people were simply subject to political forces over which they had no control. I follow Kriger in rejecting both what she characterises as structuralist and voluntarist accounts of political

participation.¹⁰⁷ Rather, I will argue for a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between, on the one hand, political and military control, and on the other, the political allegiances that people express and upon which they act. Crucial to examining this relationship will be understanding the discourses about history, authority and social responsibility that political movements used in order to secure their legitimacy among the populations that they controlled at different times, paying particular attention to how ideas of stateness are articulated within these discourses; the extent to which these discourses were adopted by the people themselves and to what extent there was a possibility of resistance; and public cultures, in the sense of shared knowledge and shared understandings about authority, legitimacy and identity, and the demands that these made on people's behaviour.

¹⁰⁷ Kriger 1992.

Chapter 2: Anti-colonial mobilisation 1965-1975

The purpose of this chapter is to account for the balance of political forces in Angola, and more particularly in the Central Highlands, on the eve of independence. The chapter will trace the development of interaction between the nationalist movements and the people of the Central Highlands from the mid-1960s – the time when some people in the region became aware of nationalist ideas – through the years of underground mobilisation before the Portuguese coup d'état in April 1974, the legalisation of the movements and the rivalry between them that intensified until independence in November 1975. The chapter aims to examine the different progress of the various movements, the differing strategies that they used in their attempts to seek legitimacy among the people of the region, and to account for the different levels of awareness of and identification with the political movements among different strata of society in the Central Highlands.

The chapter will begin by tracing the main historical factors that determined the nature of the nationalist movements' interaction with the population of the Central Highlands. The first of these has to do with the region's inaccessibility to guerrillas before 1974, and the second concerns the political reforms of 1961, which had defused some of the anti-colonial grievances of earlier generations. After this, I will consider the consequences of the coup d'état in Portugal, an event whose historical impact proved to be more enduring than any initiatives previously undertaken by the nationalist movements. The chapter will trace the escalation of violence that began in Luanda and spread to the Central Highlands, suggesting that violence and the

movements of population that followed it served to deepen the association in public discourse between the movements and particular regions of the country, and the people from those regions. Each of the three movements ignored the power-sharing provisions of the Alvor Accord, which they and the Portuguese government had signed with the aim of ensuring an orderly transition. Instead, the movements sought outright control in their areas of influence, sometimes assuming state-like prerogatives as the Portuguese state retreated in the months before independence.

Nationalist mobilisation came late to the Central Highlands, thanks to its distance from any international frontier. MPLA and UNITA guerrillas entered Moxico from Zambia, and were competing for territorial control by 1970: this became known as the Eastern Front.¹⁰⁸ MPLA guerrillas also reached Cabinda from Congo-Brazzaville, and during 1965, a column crossed secretly through the hostile territory of Zaire and got as far south the Dembos region in today's Bengo province; the members of this column had all retreated or been killed by 1968.¹⁰⁹ The FNLA, from its political base in nearby Kinshasa, controlled a strip of Angolan territory along the Zaire border. This penetration was made possible by the relative proximity of international borders with countries that were sympathetic to the movements' aims.¹¹⁰ The distant location of the Central Highlands from the frontiers ensured that guerrillas never got as far as the region, with the exception of incursions into the eastern part of Bié.

The politics of the Eastern Front are beyond the scope of this thesis, and little research

¹⁰⁸ Davidson 1972; Marcum 1978:9-61, 179-240; Chiwale 2008.

¹⁰⁹ Pélissier 1971:210ff; Gleijeses 2002:174-182.

¹¹⁰ Clarence-Smith suggests that "the liberated zones were much smaller than what was claimed by the guerrillas" and warns against attaching too much significance to them 1985:218.

exists on the subject. The available accounts do however suggest that the tactics of political legitimisation through service provision, social organisation and the creation of rudimentary state-like structures, which became so important after independence, had their genesis in the pre-independence period. Linda Heywood notes that mission-educated Ovimbundu cadres who had gone to join UNITA in the east “helped to create villages in the liberated zones that were similar to those of the Protestant [mission] organisation in the highlands [...] it was this village structure that Savimbi adopted as a framework for his proto-state which was taking shape in [his headquarters at] Lungue-Bungu”.¹¹¹ Basil Davidson describes villages that were politically organised and offered food to itinerant MPLA guerrillas. A roving MPLA doctor would offer treatment at each village he visited.¹¹²

As discussed in the previous chapter, a central question in the study of civil war has concerned the extent to which armed movements have been able to use existing grievances to mobilise support for their cause. Since this chapter deals with the period of the earliest contact between the organised Angolan nationalist movements and the people of the Central Highlands, who until then had known only colonial rule, a brief consideration of the nature of colonial government and society during the period in question will be necessary to provide an understanding of the context of the attempts – inchoate as they were – at anti-colonial mobilisation.

Violent resistance to colonial rule in Angola was first seen in 1961, beginning with riots in the cotton-growing areas of Malange province in January and a prison break in Luanda on 4 February. The MPLA has long claimed the latter incident as the start of

¹¹¹ Heywood 1989:54.

¹¹² Davidson 1972:25-27.

its armed struggle, but it is still disputed whether the prison break was the work of any organisation, or simply of individuals.¹¹³ In March, the *União de Populações de Angola* (UPA: the forerunner of the FNLA) launched an insurrection in the Bakongo regions of northern Angola, which specifically targeted Portuguese settlers and their property.¹¹⁴ Later the same year, the colonial state responded to the beginning of anti-colonial mobilisation with a legal reform package that included the abolition of forced labour and forced cultivation and the repeal of the 1954 *Estatuto dos Indígenas* (Native Statute), which had codified a two-tier system of citizenship that conceded rights to a tiny number of *assimilado* (assimilated) blacks while excluding the *indígena* (native) majority. The state also made efforts to train primary school teachers with a view to expanding the provision of education: a task that previously had been largely left to the Catholic Church.¹¹⁵

The existing literature suggests that the reform plans were inconsistent both in conception and implementation. Clarence-Smith observes that the repeal of the Native Statute did not end the two-tier model of citizenship, but merely introduced an element of choice.¹¹⁶ Marcum notes that those former *indígenas* who opted for citizenship saw their taxes doubled from five to ten dollars per head.¹¹⁷ The government acknowledged the existence of white racism, and the impact that this had on employment opportunities for blacks, yet efforts to change attitudes among whites

¹¹³ Marcum 1969:125-140; Andrade and Ollivier 1975:119; Birmingham 1992:36; Guimarães 1998:44-45.

¹¹⁴ Pélissier 1971:177ff.

¹¹⁵ Marcum 1969:191-192; Pélissier 1971:196-199; Clarence-Smith 1985:217; Bender 2004:158.

¹¹⁶ Clarence-Smith 1985:215.

¹¹⁷ Marcum 1969:191.

were partial and ineffectual.¹¹⁸ In the cities, “[e]ducation, health and transport facilities were improved, but again not on a sufficient scale”.¹¹⁹

In the rural areas, Clarence-Smith notes there were improvements in education and health facilities as well as mechanisms planned to foster the emergence of a “kulak” class:

Rural markets, African settlement schemes, co-operatives and rural extension services all fostered the emergence of the kind of cash-cropping peasantry which was proving so politically conservative all over independent Africa. However, the Portuguese seem to have miscalculated in thinking that such peasants would necessarily support them.¹²⁰

Moreover, from the late 1960s the reform strategy was in certain areas accompanied by programmes to move peasant farmers into “strategic hamlets”, supposedly for security reasons, and about a million Angolans were affected.¹²¹ Land left vacant by “resettlement” could be granted to individuals or companies without compensation to the original owners.¹²² While the northern coffee-growing regions were most affected, Bender suggests also that in Bié province, “the guerrillas were able to capitalize greatly on the dissatisfaction engendered by the programme”.¹²³

Whatever the defects of the reform plans of the 1960s, they had a positive impact on popular memory of the period, at least in the rural areas of Huambo province. Almost all the people interviewed for this thesis had been born after 1950, and therefore had no adult memories of life before 1961. Their recollections of the late colonial period

¹¹⁸ Clarence-Smith 1985:216.

¹¹⁹ Clarence-Smith 1985:217.

¹²⁰ Clarence-Smith 1985:217.

¹²¹ Clarence-Smith 1985:218.

¹²² Clarence-Smith 1985:216.

¹²³ Bender 2004:180-188; quote 186. See also Clarence-Smith 1985:218.

sometimes indicated an awareness that the system under which they had grown up was less oppressive than what their parents had endured: “Our parents paid taxes, built roads by hand, carried rocks, endured much suffering. They were whipped.”¹²⁴

Others would compare the late colonial period favourably with the period after 1975, from which their abiding memories were the violence and disruption of the war. The one specific grievance with colonial rule that a substantial number of interviewees mentioned was that of taxation. None of them referred to land dispossession, an omission that seems peculiar given the centrality of land questions in anti-colonial struggles elsewhere in southern Africa, but might be explained in terms of the fact that the areas where my interviews were conducted were not affected by the dispossession that went with counter-insurgency in the 1960s.

It is also possible that memories of the period were influenced by subsequent processes of politicisation. Throughout my interviews in rural areas, the discourse of less educated interviewees bore traces of the official discourses of the nationalist movements: these usually coincided with the discourse of the movement under whose control the interviewee had mostly lived, and the movement for which the interviewee expressed support at the time of the interviews in 2008 and 2009. For example, a UNITA party activist declared that UNITA’s task in the 1970s had been “fighting for total independence of Angola”¹²⁵ – a reference to UNITA’s full name, while a *soba* (chief) who was integrated into the MPLA state system recalled that “on 8 February 1976 [when the MPLA entered Huambo] the people turned around and began to live well,” and the party’s task was “To fight the colonialist and to build our country –

¹²⁴ Interviewee 29, Huambo, May 2008.

¹²⁵ Interviewee 71, Huambo, July 2008.

MPLA, the Workers' Party.”¹²⁶ With this in mind, it seems plausible that the lack of reference to grievances such as land dispossession may be related to the fact that the nationalist movements paid little attention to politicising these issues. Interviews with the elites of both parties and other records of official ideologies also have little to say on issues such as land, preferring to dwell on more abstract questions of freedom and national identity.¹²⁷ Similarly, among the rural people who were interviewed, those who spoke of a desire for independence expressed it in more abstract terms as freedom, or a desire for self-determination.

In colonial times people lived well. The traders did good business, and gave credit to people. Many people studied.

[Did people have pro-independence feelings?]

We talked about that, yes. We wanted to govern what was ours, we didn't want to be dependent.

[Did you know anything about the independence movements?]

We didn't know. Just that there was a time in 1961, when a lot of people died.

[When did you first hear about the movements?]

It was in 1974, only in a general way.¹²⁸

Some recollections suggest that the experience of war after 1975 caused people to remember the 1961-1974 period in an unrealistically positive light, and to disregard some of the injustices of the colonial system that remained. An elderly farmer from near Huambo was among several interviewees who contrasted abstract notions of freedom with the realities of life since independence: “We are free because the Portuguese are no longer here. But there has been no change.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Interviewee 16, Huambo, May 2008.

¹²⁷ There is an interesting contrast to be drawn here with Ranger's characterisation of guerrilla-peasant relations in Zimbabwe, in which political education was “grounded in a consciousness that predated the arrival of the nationalist movements” (1985:177). This demonstrates the validity of Ranger's insistence that we examine the specific historical experiences of peasant populations in different times and places rather than assuming a uniformity of experience.

¹²⁸ Interviewee 27, Londwimbali, May 2008.

¹²⁹ Interviewee 51, near Huambo, June 2008.

Those who went so far as to say that life in colonial times was better than the present were usually those who still had institutional links to UNITA at the time when the interviews were conducted, and who sought vindication for UNITA's armed struggle by portraying life under the MPLA as worse than in colonial times.

Colonialism was better than the current government. The population had everything, they had benefits. The exploitation was only psychological – of man by man. It was not like the current government. [...] Today Angolans have neither liberty nor democracy. They do not have freedom of expression. [...] The Portuguese colonists prioritised agriculture. Now, the economy has collapsed. There used to be silos. They no longer exist.¹³⁰

These examples illustrate that memories of the colonial period were coloured by subsequent events and by experiences of politicisation by different parties. Colonial rule in the 1960s, while less oppressive than what had preceded it, was still far from just, yet there is little suggestion that the injustices as experienced by peasants had become politically charged. This is consistent with the fact that political movements were barely present in the region until the colonial government had already announced its intention to hand over power, and in particular, the failure of any political movement to reach the rural Central Highlands before independence. Linda Heywood's writing on UNITA, while it emphasises the movement's appeals on the basis of Ovimbundu ethnicity, makes clear that UNITA's origins were in a mission-centred elite and that its first success in popular mobilisation was among Ovimbundu migrant workers rather than peasants.¹³¹

In the absence of organised opposition in the Central Highlands before 1974, the most

¹³⁰ Interviewee 63, Caála, June 2008.

¹³¹ Heywood 1998:53-55.

important vehicle for the dissemination of anti-colonial ideas was the radio station operated by the MPLA, Rádio Angola Combatente, which broadcast from Brazzaville. When interviewees recalled having had any knowledge of the nationalist movements or nationalist ideas before 25 April 1975, they almost invariably attributed this knowledge to the existence of the radio station. Such knowledge was dependent on a certain level of privilege: those who had access to a radio either lived in the towns or, if they were farmers, were connected in some way with the missions. Since only the MPLA was broadcasting, it meant that the MPLA was known in the Central Highlands almost a decade before UNITA was able to disseminate its message in the region. Bernardo, a former senior civil servant, recalled:

Rádio Combatente spoke of mobilising the will of Angolans so that they would liberate themselves from the colonial regime [...] to be conscious of the fact that Angola under Portuguese rule was not just. Angolans had to struggle to become independent. [...] Aside from the armed struggle there was an ideological struggle, translated, for example, into literature. Agostinho Neto wrote a lot about defending Angola's independence: the message of liberation for the Angolan people, the message of oppression that people suffered throughout the world, not only in the Portuguese world.¹³²

The radio station was almost solely responsible for giving the MPLA a political foothold in the towns of the Central Highlands, something that it never achieved in the countryside. Roberto, a lawyer in Huambo who had been a young man at the time of independence, made explicit the distinction between “intellectuals” and everybody else.

The [nationalist] movements, and the war [for independence] weren't really felt here in Huambo because they were very far away. [...] We intellectuals listened to the radio – but the part of the country that was more affected was the east and the north. [...] All intellectuals wanted to be independent, because there were situations of punishment, contract labour, difficulties in studying – there were no opportunities. Black people who lived in the city

¹³² Interview, Huambo, May 2008.

were few – the city was occupied by whites, and we were in the villages. If we were here, it was as students [at the seminary].¹³³

When people in rural villages were asked about anti-colonial political mobilisation, a typical answer was: “In this region we knew nothing. We first heard of independence in 1975”¹³⁴ – that is, after the change of government in Portugal allowed the liberation movements to begin mobilising in the Central Highlands. In the account of a *soba* (traditional chief) near Huambo:

As a youth I went to school, looked after my father’s cattle, went to fetch water. No one was talking about independence. In 1974 Caetano, the coloniser, delivered the country into the hands of the government. [...] Our first contact with the movements was in 1975: the MPLA and UNITA. There were also other movements, other governments: Holden Roberto and Daniel Chipenda, but later they left, and only the MPLA and UNITA were left here fighting, until this day.¹³⁵

This man’s characterisation of political movements as different “governments”, incidentally, goes to the heart of how politics was understood by many Angolans. The movements were not so much political alternatives as mutually exclusive possibilities.

Listening to the radio was, however, a dangerous pursuit, and so was discussing nationalist ideas with anybody except trusted friends and family members. People spoke of an atmosphere of fear created by the knowledge that PIDE (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*: the security police) had informers in the towns. René Pélissier describes “only insignificant clandestine activity” in Huambo at the time when he was writing, and attributes this to the presence of PIDE and the fears

¹³³ Interviewee 3, Huambo, May 2008.

¹³⁴ Interviewee 42, near Huambo, June 2008.

¹³⁵ Interviewee 38, Huambo, June 2008. Several other interviewees spoke of Daniel Chipenda, an MPLA faction leader who later joined the FNLA, as the leader of a fourth liberation movement.

engendered by the stories of imprisonment from 1960 or 1961.¹³⁶ Amid this tightly controlled political environment, religious institutions provided a space where new ideas could be received and discussed. According to Horácio Junjuvili, later a senior figure in UNITA:

The Central Highlands were the most evangelised part of Angola before 1974 [...] this allowed the greater contact with missionaries and Angolans. The missionaries already had a very liberal, pro-independence discourse. Everyone who passed through the missions felt like this. This was used by UNITA to serve as a trampoline for its mobilisation in the Central Highlands. Much is spoken of tribalism, but there was no tribal discourse. There was an affective bond between the people who frequented the missions, and the guerrillas.

Pélissier emphasises the importance of the missions in the origins of nationalism in the Central Highlands,¹³⁷ and later writers have paid particular attention to the missions set up in the region by North American and central European Protestants. Heywood sees in the villages that grew up around the Protestant missions in the early twentieth century “an alternate society, under [Ovimbundu] control”.¹³⁸ Didier Péclard has argued that the social ethos of the Protestant missions created a milieu that was well disposed to politicisation, and helped shape the particular character of UNITA.¹³⁹ Catholic missions and seminaries also provided a space in which ideas could be shared, albeit with discretion.¹⁴⁰ Marcolino Moco, later a provincial governor and, for a while in the 1990s, Angolan prime minister, first encountered nationalist ideas while at the seminary.

In those years, the 1950s and 1960s, [...] the picture we got was the following: God made [...] the white man to dominate the world, and the black

¹³⁶ Pélissier 1971:229.

¹³⁷ Pélissier 1971:167.

¹³⁸ Heywood 1989:51.

¹³⁹ Péclard 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Heywood (1989:54) notes that “nationalist activity ... involved Catholics and non-converted Angolans as well”.

man to be subjected. [...] But later, particularly when I went to the seminary – in 1967 I began to hear that there were independent African states in which blacks controlled their territory, and that Angola also had independence movements, whose leaders were persecuted by the colonists, and which were for the liberation of the country. I heard of the 4 February [1961] when Angolans liberated prisoners. There was also more recent news of people here in Huambo who were prisoners. Including from my father's wife, who had lost a nephew in Bailundo – the Portuguese police caught him and he never appeared again. I heard all this news, but I interpreted it as a reproachable act of rebellion by certain blacks against an order that was natural. But in the seminary – even though our priests and teachers were completely incorporated into PIDE – ideas were circulating there, particularly among those of our colleagues who came from the north, from Luanda. [...] Political consciousness came from other students, not from our teachers, who were priests. But we also came to know teachers with more advanced ideas – for example the Basque priests, Spaniards who had been sent here. Perhaps they had had problems with the Franco regime.

Moco said that a few people listened secretly to the MPLA broadcasts in the seminary before 25 April 1974; after this date more students tuned in.

It was because of Rádio Combatente that I was expelled from the seminary. When it was time for prayers, I was the one who mobilised other students to go and listen to the radio.¹⁴¹

Bernardo also felt the Catholic Church had brought him, as the son of a rural family, into contact with new ideas:

My father was simply a farmer. But because he grew up in the missions with foreign priests, and these priests spoke a lot about Angola, which was then under colonial rule – they told my father to study well, because in a little while Angola would be independent and the people would govern itself. That was the message my father gave me. I also have my uncle, who had been in the colonial troops in the 1960s. In the 70s he had left the troops and gone back to being a stonemason – he also said “you must study, you who are going to be the future leaders of Angola”. Even in the Portuguese Army, he had the idea that the country had to become independent.

Bernardo's account introduces another manner in which men became politicised,

¹⁴¹ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

namely through service in the colonial army.¹⁴² Other men who had served in the army said they had become aware of the nationalist movements because the war made them aware of the existence of armed opposition to the colonial regime, and through talking to fellow soldiers who had come from different parts of Angola. Repressive measures by the colonial authorities served to arouse curiosity about the enemy that the Portuguese were trying to eliminate. According to Junjuvili:

There were the prisons, and the persecution by PIDE from 1967. If you heard that someone had been captured and taken to PIDE and interrogated about being in contact with the bush, one would ask, “who is in the bush?” “It’s Jonas Savimbi who’s fighting to drive out the Portuguese.” The word was passed around, not through UNITA’s own initiative but because people were curious to hear. There were also many people from the Central Highlands in the colonial army – Valdemar Chindondo and others – who explained to people that there was a third force closer to them [i.e. UNITA] that was fighting for independence. So this created a support for mobilisation – there wasn’t a very efficient structure, but word got around. There were cases when the PIDE prisons helped a lot in projecting UNITA’s message. I remember, for example, in 1968 or 69 they captured the mother of a friend of mine. [...] From that moment on, we knew there was something going on.

Nevertheless, whether political awareness came through the radio, through the missions, through military service or through family members, it remained the preserve of a limited number of people. By no means all of these people could have been described as a political elite at the time, and what privilege they had was only relative. But access to information was much easier for them than it was for the farmers who remained in their villages. The differentiated knowledge of formal politics reinforced prejudices among the more educated stratum that political engagement was their exclusive prerogative – as well as the tendency to equate “politics” with the actions of the government or the liberation movements. In the

¹⁴² According to Clarence-Smith (1985:217), some two-thirds of Portugal’s fighting force in the colonies were black, and “an increasing amount of combat duty was left to commando groups of Africans under white officers”. Ovimbundu soldiers “played a prominent role” among the Portuguese forces in Angola.

words of a Catholic priest: “At a time when people could choose, the people didn’t know who would govern well or badly [...] Politics was a bit elevated. The people didn’t understand anything.”¹⁴³

This assessment by the priest reflects the views of an educated stratum. But the lack of interest in politics was acknowledged even by people who later became involved in political movements, such as Estêvão, a farmer who was a UNITA village organiser:

The most educated men discussed things: that Africans must liberate themselves, that the black man must become independent. Blacks who had studied abroad discovered these things – or those who had friends who came from other countries. But the Angolan people themselves didn’t know. People were surprised when liberation movements appeared, movements that had been in other countries. People didn’t organise themselves here.¹⁴⁴

Interviewees in the villages stated frequently that “the movements arrived” in 1974 or 1975. This was said not only in answer to questions specifically about the nationalist movements, but also in response to more general questions about politics: for example, “when did people first start talking about independence?” The very idea of politics had become synonymous with political organisations.

Mobilisation after 25 April 1974

The coup d’état in Portugal on 25 April 1974 was the decisive event in changing the way in which politics was conducted in Angola.¹⁴⁵ The government that took power in

¹⁴³ Interviewee 57, Huambo, June 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Interviewee 60, Huambo, June 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Pélisser (1971:200) suggests that at the time he was writing, there was a military

Lisbon lifted the ban on the nationalist movements in the then colonies, allowing the movements to campaign openly throughout Angola, and for the first time in the towns. This section of the chapter will consider the kinds of relationships that the political movements sought to establish with the people of the Central Highlands, and how people reacted to them.

The previous section showed how members of a self-identified intellectual elite believed – with some justification – that they had had access to anti-colonial ideas that were inaccessible to other levels of society. In a similar way, better educated people explained their political adherence after 25 April 1974 as the result of conscious and informed choice, while believing that the less educated had no choice but to support whichever movement was more powerful in the area where they lived. Bernardo distinguishes between the decision-making process of the “enlightened” and others.

The MPLA always declared itself as a party for socialism. At that stage, socialism was an alternative to put an end to exploitation. [...] For the more enlightened ones I think this was [their reason for choosing the MPLA]. For the less enlightened I think not, because up until then, alternation of power had been unknown in the country. [...] With few intellectuals, few people are able to see the country's future and to make choices. I think the more lucid people were along these lines. For the less enlightened [...] it was a case simply of choosing for the sake of choosing, because the country was emerging from colonialism and obscurantism.¹⁴⁶

The ideological basis of political choice is also apparent in the recollection of Paulina, another former civil servant of the same generation. Her family had been divided by the conflict, with several of her siblings going to the bush with UNITA.

stalemate between Portugal and the Angolan guerrilla armies, and the latter had failed to paralyse the country's economic development. Change, in other words, was not a direct response to the challenge posed by the independence movements, though in a less direct way, the evident futility of the colonial wars was one of the factors that prompted the coup against the Caetano regime.

¹⁴⁶ Interviewee 31, Huambo, May 2008.

Of the three of my siblings who stayed with the MPLA, one died on 27 May 1977, accused of factionalism. He was accused of collaborating with UNITA and captured. They killed him in jail – we never knew the story. I was active in the MPLA from 1974, when I was 25 years old. I translated documents from Portuguese into Umbundu for the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA, but I identified with the MPLA. I sympathised more with the MPLA because it helped me to shape my ideas. I felt there was more progress, more development, in the MPLA's vision – a more progressive vision, not that emphasis on culture [that UNITA displayed].¹⁴⁷

Members of UNITA's rank and file also sometimes spoke in a way that suggested there had been an ideological element to UNITA's recruitment in 1974. A man who later reached the rank of lieutenant recalled:

I came to know the movements in 1974 – I was a student at the time. I joined UNITA [aged 16] – it was the movement that would free the Angolan people – I joined as a soldier. We wanted to free the people from the claws of Portuguese colonialism. There were three parties, each with its ideology. There was war because one party did not want elections.¹⁴⁸

Yet this account seems to have been revised according to what the man perceived to be an official UNITA version of events: the assertion that the MPLA had rejected the multi-party elections agreed in the Alvor Accord was one that was agreed by most former UNITA adherents. By contrast, those people who identified less strongly with either party were more sceptical about the existence of clear ideological differences between them. In the words of a schoolteacher who had experienced the control of both parties:

I think UNITA had its way of convincing people, and the MPLA too. Each had its way of explaining what its ideology was and each person considered this and according to his understanding, went to whichever was better for him. [What were the main differences in terms of ideology?]

¹⁴⁷ Interviewee 150, Caála, July 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Interviewee 72, Huambo, July 2008.

Perhaps I might say, each [party] said that if it were to govern the country, it would do better for the people.¹⁴⁹

It is also significant that Abel Chivukuvuku, currently a senior figure in UNITA, explains adherence to the movement in the 1974-75 period less in terms of ideology than as the result of UNITA's local origins.

UNITA didn't even need to mobilise as such. People just felt, "this is our organisation". I think it happened the same way in Luanda [with the MPLA], or in Uige, Mbanza Congo [with the FNLA] – people just felt, "this is our organisation". And for the fact that the elites of the area just joined, everybody joined.¹⁵⁰

In summary, the interviews suggest that people who identified with the MPLA during 1974-75 perceived themselves to have a clearer ideological commitment to the party – often having been introduced to the MPLA by the broadcasts on Rádio Angola Combatente – and that this kept them attached to the MPLA even when UNITA came to be the dominant movement. By contrast, UNITA adherents were motivated by a desire for national liberation, but their choice of UNITA was more likely to be determined by the movement's rootedness in a certain stratum of Planalto society rather than by any particular programme of action promised by UNITA.

Most of the people quoted so far in this section had either been in towns or at mission schools in the years preceding independence. Accounts of nationalist activity in the villages were too fragmented to be conclusive. This was due in part to confusion over dates and the sequence of events: people would speak of the movements arriving around the time of independence, but were unsure of whether this happened before or

¹⁴⁹ Interviewee 26, Londwimbali, May 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Chivukuvuku, Luanda July 2009.

after 11 November 1975. The only conclusions that we can draw about mobilisation in the villages at this time are relative to the situation in the towns. In contrast to the town dwellers, none of the villagers spoke of a period in which the movements made assiduous efforts to recruit people, and contested peacefully for public support. One *soba*, although loyal to UNITA, echoed the attitude of many village dwellers when he remarked: “In 1975 UNITA was here – but troops only occupied where the whites lived” – that is, in the towns.¹⁵¹

In the months that followed, the different parties became identified with different neighbourhoods within the cities, and used force or threats within the areas they controlled.

[After 25 April] each one could choose the party he wished – each could choose, “I’m MPLA, I’m UNITA”.¹⁵² Then people distributed themselves according to areas. Then this problem started occurring. If you were with [the wrong side], you suffered.¹⁵³

The legal framework for the transition to independence was laid down in the Alvor Accord, which the FNLA, MPLA, UNITA and the Portuguese government signed on 15 January 1975 with a view to establishing a transitional government and joint armed forces. The government was established on 31 January 1975. It included equal representation from the three movements, and a High Commissioner appointed by Portugal was to “arbitrate differences within the coalition”. A National Defence Commission, with representatives from the three movements and Portugal, was “to oversee the integration of 8,000 soldiers from each of the liberation movements and

¹⁵¹ Interviewee 40, Huambo, June 2008.

¹⁵² *Sou do MPLA, sou da UNITA*.

¹⁵³ Interviewee 22, Huambo, May 2008.

24,000 Portuguese troops into a mixed military force. When this was achieved, the Portuguese troops would be gradually withdrawn between 1 October 1975 and 29 February 1976.”¹⁵⁴ As it happened, the government lasted barely six months, the army was never established, and Portugal withdrew its troops ahead of schedule.

Marcum’s account of the twelve months following the coup suggests that the FNLA’s determination to arm itself, and the MPLA’s reaction to this by arming civilians in the programme known as *Poder Popular* (people’s power), were the main factors that started a cycle of violence that culminated in the collapse of the Alvor agreement and the de facto fragmentation of the territory. Consequently, it was Luanda that first became the theatre for political violence. Marcum suggests that as the other two movements battled for control of the north, UNITA remained above the fray:

“Aspiring to the role of reasonable conciliator-aggregator, Savimbi had succeeded in attracting heterogeneous support from among whites and Africans alike.”¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, Chivukuvuku remembers that soon after the Alvor Accord, UNITA was also trying to build up an army.

What was obvious was that the movements were recruiting seriously, troops, individuals – to go and train. In the Central Plateau it was trains and trains of people going east, to where UNITA’s army was based, in Moxico. Some of them came back after three or four months not as soldiers but as commissars, political activists, others came back as military people.

Indeed, according to the South African Defence Force’s official account of its intervention in Angola, Savimbi began receiving weapons from South Africa as early as October 1974, three months before the Alvor Accord. According to this account,

¹⁵⁴ Hodges 1976:47.

¹⁵⁵ Marcum 1978:260.

the South African military first made indirect contact with Savimbi in July 1974 through Fernando Falcão, leader of the settler nationalist movement, *Frente de Unidade Angolana* (FUA).

In answer to questions that were put to [Savimbi], it was clear that he had paid relatively little attention to the South Africans as a possible factor in Angolan politics. Yet after this, through intermediaries, he requested certain weapons from South Africa.¹⁵⁶

Although large-scale military aid to UNITA would have required the authorisation of the State Security Council,

[t]o keep UNITA's goodwill, the Minister of Defence gave permission for a small quantity of weapons to be handed over to this movement. This happened on 9 October 1974 at Rundu, where envoys of Savimbi took possession of the weapons. There were ten 9mm hand machine carbines, fifty 9mm pistols and 6000 rounds of ammunition. For purposes of maintaining contact with UNITA leadership elements, Col IR Gleeson visited Luanda in the first weeks of December 1974 and then ordered that with a view to welfare, clandestine aid in the form of food and clothes must be given to UNITA.¹⁵⁷

According to General Nunda, UNITA never intended to go to war against the other nationalist movements, but the Alvor Accord's requirement that each movement deliver a certain quota of soldiers to the single army prompted a rush for recruitment.¹⁵⁸ The fact remained that for UNITA as for the other movements, politicisation happened as part of a process that also involved militarisation. This established an association between politics and the military life that persisted until the end of the civil war.

¹⁵⁶ Spies 1989:61.

¹⁵⁷ Spies 1989:61.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Nunda, Luanda, September 2009.

Amid international concern about the internal tensions in Angola, Neto, Roberto, and Savimbi met in Nakuru in Kenya under President Kenyatta's chairmanship from 16 to 21 June, and the result was a respite from fighting in the first week of July.

The transitional government came forth with a draft constitution, and the first company of an Angolan national army was formed in Cabinda. But on July 9, heavy fighting broke out and spread swiftly throughout the country. Within a week, the MPLA had forced the FNLA out of Luanda. The FNLA [...] eliminated all remaining MPLA presence in the northern towns of the Uige and Zaire districts.¹⁵⁹

Later in July, the FNLA declared its intention to take Luanda, while the MPLA consolidated its exclusive control over the Luanda hinterland as far east as Saurimo, as well as over Cabinda.

The threats and violence notwithstanding, the fact that all three movements were competing in a notionally free political environment in 1974 and 1975 has left us with a newspaper record of the period: the only time in Angolan history when all political parties enjoyed something close to equal access to the media. The daily *Província de Angola* had previously presented only the concerns of Portuguese settler society. The newspaper was bought by the FNLA early in 1975 with funds supplied by the United States and Zaire,¹⁶⁰ yet it never became a vehicle only for FNLA propaganda. The political news reports betrayed a slight bias in favour of UNITA and the FNLA, but most of the newspaper's political coverage simply reproduced, verbatim, statements by the nationalist movements and their leaders' speeches – including, notably, a statement by the MPLA on 18 July 1975 that accused *Província de Angola* itself of being a “fascist newspaper”.

¹⁵⁹ Marcum 1978:260.

¹⁶⁰ Hodges 1976:50.

The newspaper's reports make clear the regional concentrations of political activity. While some UNITA activity is reported in Luanda until July 1975, most of the reports on its activity are from the Central Highlands. On 29 June we read, for example, that Savimbi was greeted at the airport in Nova Lisboa by "a throng calculated at many dozens of thousands of people who applauded him deliriously".¹⁶¹ Although the newspaper's coverage of political violence is fragmentary, it provides a useful written record of when the most serious incidents occurred. Reports describe increasing political tension and factional violence in Luanda beginning in the first half of July 1975. *Província de Angola* reported on 12 July that clashes between MPLA and FNLA supporters had taken place in Luanda *bairros* three days earlier. On 17 July, the MPLA called for the formation of vigilante groups in all *bairros*.

At the time, the newspaper was more concerned with the problems of Portuguese citizens trying to leave Angola, but on two occasions during July 1975 it noted the movement of refugees from Luanda and its hinterland to the south.

Countless refugees have begun streaming into the capital of Huambo. The majority of these refugees are from Dalatando [sic] or other parts of Cuanza Norte. They arrive in buses or cars, in lorries or pick-ups. Some come with the intention of staying in Huambo only until such a time as the confrontations finish. [...] Others are not thinking of going back to the north. [...] Many have come to Huambo because they have relatives here, or were born here.¹⁶²

Three days later, the paper reported that "Lobito has already received about 5200 evictees but about 1000 have continued to the interior," the result of "serious incidents

¹⁶¹ *Província de Angola* 29 June 1975.

¹⁶² *Província de Angola* 24 July 1975. These movements of people occurred about a year after the expulsions from the Bakongo zone to Huambo.

[...] in the country's capital, especially on the 8th to the 17th of this month".

The shooting, the grenades, the mortars, tribalism, banditry etc forced many people to leave Luanda in the direction of the lands of the interior, such as Uíge, Bié, Huambo, and Lobito.¹⁶³

On 29 July, the newspaper carried a statement from the MPLA that declared that "the people of Luanda observed the expulsion of ELNA [*Exército da Libertação Nacional de Angola*: the FNLA army] forces with joy", though Hodges reports a further "major battle" between MPLA and FNLA forces in Luanda on 8 August, "which prompted the Portuguese to accede to MPLA demands that FNLA's ministers be evacuated from the capital".¹⁶⁴

The UNITA members of the transitional government left Luanda on the same day.

According to Jaka Jamba, then a member of the government and now a UNITA parliamentarian:

Then there was a day when our Portuguese friends said it appears the people – the so-called people's power – want to hold a demonstration to put Agostinho Neto in power. They told us, "you have to leave because your life is in danger – leave Luanda, and take nothing with you." For us to go to Huambo they put a small military aircraft at our disposal. We left early in the morning – the others woke up and realised that the UNITA government members were no longer here [in Luanda].¹⁶⁵

About the same time, UNITA supporters, and indeed some Ovimbundu who previously had had no strong political affiliation, started to leave Luanda and to head for the areas where UNITA was dominant. Jaka Jamba says these people felt

¹⁶³ *Província de Angola* 27 July 1975:3.

¹⁶⁴ Hodges 1976:53.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Jamba, Luanda, September 2009.

“unprotected and threatened” following the departure of the UNITA leadership. It cannot be confirmed to what extent the leaders’ departure had an impact on Ovimbundu in Luanda, but the accounts of elites, ordinary citizens and journalists suggest that the southerners in the capital had a reason to be fearful. People heading from Luanda towards the Central Highlands via the inland route were attacked by MPLA supporters at Dondo as they reached the Kwanza River, the conventional dividing line between northern and southern Angola.

General Nunda recalls:

The first conflicts were an event in which some boys from UNITA who were in a house were killed on the spot. Many from UNITA were taken prisoner, including those who were in the Joint Forces. My brother-in-law [...] was part of the Unified Army. He had to flee from here [Luanda] with a group of individuals who were in the armed forces that were being created, and was caught in the area of Dondo. They were caught on the [Kwanza River] bridge and were killed there. At that time, whoever had the opportunity of killing those from the other side, did so. The logic of war emerged. From then on, the lines were divided.

Nunda also confirms the account of many residents of Huambo that the MPLA was chased out of the Central Highlands during August 1975: “There were confrontations, and in these confrontations the MPLA didn’t have much strength. It was UNITA that had more strength in Huambo. [...] It wasn’t a decision – it was a confrontation that could not be resisted.” Nunda attributes this to UNITA’s organised support base in Huambo as much as to its concentration of forces in that region: “The area where UNITA did its strongest political activity was Huambo. UNITA had been expelled [from Luanda] at the beginning of August.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Nunda, Luanda, September 2009.

Marcolino Moco, relatively unusual as an Ovimbundu from Huambo province who had joined the MPLA, concurs with Nunda and Jamba at least on the point that the attacks on Ovimbundu by MPLA supporters in Luanda started a cycle of violence:

Between July and August 1975 the MPLA was expelled [from Huambo]. The majority of MPLA militants in Huambo were mixed-race or from the north, though there were also Ovimbundu. Everyone had to leave – my wish was to flee to Luanda but [...] there was no transport and I had to stay. I went to jail for a while but later got out as I was a well-known person. In an area where few people had education, I was the only one, and also the son of a chief. ...

Moco attributes UNITA's advantage in this situation both to Savimbi's skills at popular mobilisation and to its superior firepower.

MPLA militants were seized, they were killed. [...] This was practically pay-back for what happened when the UNITA militants who had been in Luanda, when Savimbi ordered them to come, to leave there – that was one of the stupid things Savimbi did, giving orders to all the Ovimbundus to leave there and come here [to Huambo]. The MPLA soldiers killed many people, caught many people, even killed leaders. That was what happened first. UNITA then did this. The big problem with UNITA – they were very much the incarnation of their leader. Exaggerated motivations, they didn't work with their brains enough. Too much emotion. [UNITA] people were killed at Dondo – and here, anyone who was MPLA was killed, whether they were Ovimbundu or whatever.¹⁶⁷

Early in August, UNITA also expelled MPLA forces from Silva Porto (Kuito), after accusing the MPLA of shooting at Savimbi's aircraft on 3 August.¹⁶⁸ Around the same time, FNLA and UNITA forces drove the MPLA out of Serpa Pinto (Menongue).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Hodges 1976:53.

¹⁶⁹ Spies 1989:71.

On 9 August, *Província de Angola* carried a statement by FAPLA¹⁷⁰ that for the first time brought specific accusations against UNITA: previously, the MPLA had appeared concerned only about the actions of FNLA activists. The statement accused UNITA and the FNLA of “intimidating and terrorising our militants [...] and stopping the advance of our people in the struggle against imperialism [...] [these are] manifestations of tribalism, racism and armed actions”. It alleged at least fifteen attacks on MPLA activists in Bié and Huambo since 20 July, including an assault by a UNITA lieutenant against a member of the *Pioneiros* (MPLA youth) in Longonjo and an attack on the MPLA delegation in Munhango.¹⁷¹ Just over a week later, an MPLA statement alleged that the FNLA’s army had attacked “our delegation in Huambo” after which FAPLA had “moved on to a counter-attack and destroyed the FNLA installations in Huambo”. The statement claimed that “throughout the city of Huambo there was a real hunt for all militants and sympathisers of the MPLA”.¹⁷²

If UNITA was a latecomer to a pre-independence conflict in which the protagonists were initially the MPLA and FNLA, this needs to be seen in the context of its military resources, in comparison to those of the other two movements. According to Marcum’s account, the FNLA received military instruction and weapons from China and Zaire as early as June 1974, and by late September had established an occupied zone in the north of Angola, extending from the Zaire border almost as far south as the city of Carmona (Uíge). In the process, some 60 000 Ovimbundu workers were expelled from the north to refugee settlements near Huambo.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ *Forças Armadas Populares da Libertação de Angola*: The MPLA’s army.

¹⁷¹ *Província de Angola* 9 August 1975.

¹⁷² *Província de Angola* 17 August 1975:3.

¹⁷³ Marcum 1978:246.

As we have seen, UNITA received a small quantity of arms from South Africa in October 1974, but Spies's official South African account mentions no further assistance for almost a year after that. On the MPLA side, Gleijeses has noted the lack of clear information regarding arms shipments to the movement in the first half of 1975. He casts doubt on the findings by Hodges and by Marcum that the MPLA was receiving large quantities of Soviet weaponry by April 1975, and cites sources that indicate that the MPLA's most significant source of arms in early 1975 was either Yugoslavia or Algeria.¹⁷⁴ The MPLA began to receive support from the Cuban military mission in late August 1975.

Spies's account suggests that the South Africans and Savimbi had by September 1975 become concerned about the amount of territory held exclusively by the MPLA, and a meeting between UNITA and South African officials in Silva Porto agreed on a plan for UNITA to take control of the entire south-west of the country by the time of independence. South African trainers arrived in Silva Porto on 29 September, and began a hasty basic training course at the Capolo base, 60 kilometres from the city, where 700 UNITA soldiers were stationed. Problems included UNITA's "assortment of weapons, some unfamiliar to the trainers"; the "shortage of light arms because those they had had been issued to soldiers in the field"; food and language problems, and the recruits' lack of prior military experience.¹⁷⁵

All this suggests that in contrast to the FNLA, neither the MPLA nor UNITA was well armed before mid-1975. The fact that UNITA had evicted the MPLA from the Central Highlands by August 1975 was due to popular mobilisation rather than

¹⁷⁴ Gleijeses 2002:247-349.

¹⁷⁵ Spies 1988:69-70.

military strength, and the same is true for the MPLA's control of Luanda. As Marcum puts it, "[b]y September, Angola's liberation movements were dug into their respective ethnic bastions".¹⁷⁶ Press reports from August onwards reveal that the country was being divided into "zones of influence", with one of the three nationalist movements exercising exclusive control in each zone.

People's Defence Committees [CDP] have been created [by the MPLA in Luanda]: a paramilitary organism made up of workers guarantees the conditions for the existence and defence of the institutions of People's Power.

...

All armed individuals that do not belong either to the FAPLA or to the CDP are considered illegal armed bandits.¹⁷⁷

This suggests that MPLA had begun to assume for itself a monopoly on legitimate violence in those areas that it controlled. The other movements were assuming similar powers. Early in September, *Província de Angola* reported that planes belonging to TAAG, the state passenger airline, had been detained by the FNLA in Carmona (present-day Uige) and by UNITA in Nova Lisboa (Huambo).

[UNITA] is going to use the aircraft in internal services in its zone of influence. [...] TAAG [...] has decided [...] to suspend all services to areas of FNLA or UNITA influence (before it is left with no more planes). [...] It has been decided to maintain air services to zones under the influence and control of the MPLA.¹⁷⁸

This meant the suspension of services to many of the main provincial cities in the southern UNITA zone and in the FNLA-controlled north. On the same day, a

¹⁷⁶ Marcum 1988:263. I follow Marcum here on the matter of territoriality, while advising caution on his characterisation of regions as "ethnic". Marcum (1988:246) notes that consolidated territorial control happened much earlier in the Bakongo north, where the FNLA had expelled the other movements from all except a few towns as early as July 1974.

¹⁷⁷ *Província de Angola* 20 August 1975:3.

¹⁷⁸ *Província de Angola* 5 September 1975:2.

statement by the *Comissão Nacional de Descolonização* (National Decolonisation Commission) noted

the introduction by the liberation movements of large quantities of armaments since 25 April [...] a lack of political tolerance that is manifesting itself in violence [...] the existence of so-called zones of influence and of supposed military superiority [...] the arming of the civilian population.¹⁷⁹

UNITA and the MPLA simultaneously denied the “balkanisation” of Angola while blaming each other for it. Agostinho Neto mooted the possibility of an eventual unilateral declaration of independence by the MPLA, and accused UNITA and FNLA ministers of abandoning the government.¹⁸⁰ An MPLA statement issued on the same day rejected the concept of zones of influence and the “balkanisation of the country”.¹⁸¹ Savimbi denied that the movements had divided the country into zones of influence.¹⁸² His second in command, Miguel Nzau Puna, during a rally in Huambo, accused the MPLA of balkanising the country by taking over institutions in Luanda: “The official broadcaster, clearly, is today only talking of the MPLA. So, who is seeking the balkanisation of Angola? The MPLA or our liberation movement?”¹⁸³

Nzau Puna’s claim that the MPLA was monopolising the airwaves is given some credibility by the fact that the party also seized control of *Província de Angola* about the same time. The 21 August edition reported on its front page a meeting between Interior Ministry officials and the management of the newspaper, which announced “a structure that will be put in place at the [publishing] company, to serve [...] the

¹⁷⁹ *Província de Angola* 5 September 1975:7.

¹⁸⁰ *Província de Angola* 14 August 1975:8.

¹⁸¹ *Província de Angola* 14 August 1975:7.

¹⁸² *Província de Angola* 15 August 1975:9.

¹⁸³ *Província de Angola* 21 August 1975:9.

people, and not to serve reactionary forces.” From that point on, the daily military situation report, which previously had come from the office of the High Commissioner, also began to include a statement from FAPLA, and the editorial line suddenly began to favour the MPLA.¹⁸⁴

Portugal acknowledged the breakdown of the power-sharing agreement on 28 August, when it announced the suspension of the Alvor Accord.¹⁸⁵ MPLA and UNITA officials were at this point engaged in talks aimed at finding a political solution; both sides announced progress in these talks, but they reached no lasting agreement and accused each other of intransigence.¹⁸⁶ On 9 September the newspaper announced that the MPLA had reconstituted the government, with new (MPLA) incumbents in the positions formerly occupied by UNITA and FNLA appointees.¹⁸⁷

Reports on UNITA meetings disappeared from *Província de Angola* soon after the MPLA took over the newspaper. News from the Central Highlands also vanished until one week later, when the paper reported that “the city of Huambo remains almost isolated from the rest of the world” with telephone and telex lines down, and no fuel to operate the VHF radio station.¹⁸⁸ The paper quoted people who had come from Huambo as saying “there is no longer beer, nor sugar, nor any kind of the most essential foods that we were accustomed to seeing every day,” that cars “were almost being given away” as their Portuguese owners left town, and there was no petrol.

¹⁸⁴ *Província de Angola* 21 August 1975:1.

¹⁸⁵ *Província de Angola* 29 August 1975:1.

¹⁸⁶ Gleijeses 2002:266.

¹⁸⁷ *Província de Angola* 9 September 1975:1.

¹⁸⁸ *Província de Angola* 28 August 1975:8.

UNITA by this time had taken control of the airport and was supervising the departure of planeloads of Portuguese citizens, according to General Nunda.

The civil war had already begun, so at that time [September to November 1975] I stayed in Huambo, in charge of the UNITA personnel who were at the airport in Huambo to effect the repatriation of the Portuguese. [...] UNITA was the only [military] force there, though at least some FNLA political officials had been admitted. The MPLA had left.¹⁸⁹

This assumption of state-like prerogatives by the movements in the areas in which they were dominant, of which UNITA's control of Huambo airport was just one example, must be seen in the context of the withdrawal of the Portuguese state. Portugal's announcement, as it reneged on the Alvor Accord, to withdraw all troops by 11 November meant that for practical reasons the majority of soldiers would have to leave Angola before that date. But even before Portugal had formally acknowledged the collapse of the accord, Gleijeses suggests that the Portuguese army was content to hand over control of territory to the liberation movements and lacked either the means or the political will to exercise its state prerogatives.¹⁹⁰ Spies, writing from the point of view of the South African military, which was jointly responsible with the Portuguese for the dams that spanned the South West Africa-Angola border at the Cunene River, notes that:

By August 1975 the steady dismantling of the Portuguese administration was unmistakable. [...] Twenty or so MPLA soldiers came to pay a visit from Roçades and eight of them were left behind at Calueque. On 8 August 1975 UNITA forces violently took control of Beacon 1 (at Ruacana) and Beacon 5½, and the Portuguese detail at the posts went to seek safety with the South African Police in Ovamboland.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Nunda, Luanda, September 2009.

¹⁹⁰ Gleijeses 2002:258.

¹⁹¹ Spies 1989:46.

This prompted the SADF to assume military positions in Angola for the first time, on 12 August 1975, to safeguard the dams against “terrorists” from UNITA, SWAPO and the MPLA.

On 11 September, *Província de Angola* reprinted an article from the Lisbon *Diário Popular*, whose correspondent had apparently visited Huambo. Its first concern was with Portuguese citizens – “25 000 people in Nova Lisboa were waiting in dramatic conditions for transport to Portugal” – and the inflated prices of cigarettes and petrol. But it also reported:

[Savimbi], leader of the movement that still controls militarily the provinces of Huambo and Bié, aimed a message to the peoples, after exhorting the Portuguese troops to abandon Nova Lisboa and in fact Angola, according to the revelations of the *Diário Popular* correspondent. Savimbi also said he did not recognise the new Portuguese High Commissioner and that his movement had ceased all contact with the Portuguese government.¹⁹²

From then until November it is difficult to find any detailed record of events in Huambo.

What we do know about the period between September and November 1975 is the change in the military situation that was effected by the increase in military assistance both to the MPLA and to UNITA. The foreign intervention on both sides has had profound consequences for the historiography of the Angolan war, which has concentrated on the motivations and strategies of foreign powers to the near-exclusion of the internal dynamics of the conflict. Although this thesis is not primarily concerned with foreign intervention, a brief consideration of the main South African

¹⁹² *Província de Angola* 11 September 1975:3.

and Cuban movements is necessary to set this work in the context of the existing historiography and to emphasise that the foreign presence from October onwards began to set limits upon the decisions that were made by the Angolan actors.

As we have seen, the Angolan movements established zones of control during August 1975. By the end of this process the MPLA was in control of the entire coast from Luanda southwards to the Namibian border, as well as a broad swath of territory parallel to the Luanda-Malange rail corridor, extending as far east as the border with Zaire at Luau. The FNLA held the northern part of the coast and the adjacent interior, while UNITA occupied the southern interior. The FNLA-MPLA conflict is beyond the scope of this thesis, but what is important to us is that the delimitation of territory between the MPLA and UNITA before August was established without organised military confrontations, either between the two movements and the Portuguese or between the MPLA and UNITA. Instead, the dominant movement in each region gradually assumed state functions from an ever-diminishing Portuguese military and administrative presence. Violence took the form of skirmishes between the soldiers of the different movements, or attacks on civilians who, correctly or incorrectly, were assumed on the basis of their regional origins to be associated with an opposing movement. The account of events that I have presented so far indicates that the de facto division of Angolan territory that had occurred by the end of August 1975 was the result of local political mobilisation and decisions taken autonomously by the leadership of each movement. As already noted, the MPLA and UNITA both began receiving the services of military instructors, respectively Cubans and South Africans, from August or September 1975. South Africa, as already noted, had also moved troops north of the Cunene River in the name of safeguarding the dams: an action that

was taken unilaterally. At this stage of the conflict, the Angolan movements retained the military and political initiative. This was, however, soon to change with the large-scale South African incursion into Angola.

Following the de facto division of Angolan territory between the movements in August, the first major military initiative in south-central Angola was the MPLA's advance from the coast of Benguela province into the interior towards Huambo in September.¹⁹³ This advance was halted early in October by a UNITA unit led by a South African major and with 19 South African advisors.¹⁹⁴ The character of the conflict changed markedly with the entry of the SADF Taskforce Zulu into Angola on 14 October. The force advanced quickly northwards as far as Novo Redondo (Sumbe), expelling the MPLA from the coastal strip that it had previously occupied. This completely changed the balance of forces and reversed the MPLA's gains of the previous month. In Gleijeses's account, "[s]outh of Luanda there were only weak FAPLA units, badly armed and poorly trained. They were strong enough to defeat UNITA, but were no match for the South Africans."¹⁹⁵

The first Cuban troops (as opposed to military advisers) arrived on 9 November. According to Gleijeses, "[t]he second and third companies of the battalion of Special Forces, which arrived in Luanda from November 11 to 16, went straight to the Queue. They had to hold the line, they were told, 'whatever the cost'".¹⁹⁶

The Cubans checked the South African advance by blowing up the bridges on the

¹⁹³ Gleijeses 2002:269; Spies 1988:76.

¹⁹⁴ Spies 1988:82.

¹⁹⁵ Gleijeses 2002:298-300, quote from 300.

¹⁹⁶ Gleijeses 2002:314.

Queve. The South African column turned inland in search of an alternative route to Luanda, before a decisive confrontation with the Cuban forces at Ebo on 23 November halted the South African advance and “gave the Cubans time to build up their forces”.¹⁹⁷ In this way the military initiative passed to the MPLA, leading to the SADF’s retreat and eventual withdrawal from Angola, and to UNITA’s flight from Huambo on 8 February 1976.

Conclusion

This chapter has made a number of observations about Angola (and particularly about the Central Highlands) in the late colonial period that are important for an understanding of developments in the years that followed. First, a relatively privileged group of people had access to anti-colonial ideas at least ten years earlier than the majority of the region’s population. This came from their links with the church or with people who had travelled to other parts of Angola, or through listening to radio broadcasts. People in this category, based in towns or at the missions, believed they possessed a political consciousness that was unavailable to mere peasants. Later chapters will make clear that political officials on both sides treated politics as an urban and elite business, in which farmers were the objects within strategic decisions made by others.

Second, geography determined that there was only minimal direct contact between the nationalist movements and the people of the Central Highlands before 25 April 1974.

¹⁹⁷ Gleijeses 2002:317

Mobilisation came late and concentrated on building a following for each party in towns and cities. Before independence there was no significant interaction between guerrillas and farmers in this part of Angola. Although the MPLA was the first nationalist movement to be known, in name at least, in the Central Highlands, UNITA was later more successful at mobilising people in the Central Highlands on the grounds that most of its leaders were from the region.

The third point has to do with the ideological basis of nationalist mobilisation in the Central Highlands. We have seen that this drew upon generalised anti-colonial narratives. But the grievances of the earlier colonial period, particularly forced labour, had to some extent been alleviated by the reforms of 1961. This deprived the movements of an ideological point of entry into rural communities. This point is, however, in itself less significant than the movements' late arrival in the region and their failure, once they had arrived, to establish structures outside of the main towns. Even if they had had an attractive political message to present to farmers, this would have been useless given the fact that the movements did not conduct any large-scale programme of mobilisation in rural areas before independence.

Fourth, even with independence in sight, each party further developed the armed forces that it had founded during the anti-colonial struggle. These forces were deployed against supporters or perceived supporters of other parties, including civilians. This served to entrench a pattern of territorial control and to deepen mutual fear and suspicion. Violence that was spoken about in terms of politics, but in which people were targeted on the basis of where they came from, had in the months preceding November 1975 provoked migration and deepened the (discursive)

association between people and political movements, and assigned to the political movements a role as the guarantor of the safety of the people in their area of control against an external enemy.

The final point is about the establishment of political exclusivity in various parts of Angola. The MPLA moved to take sole control of the government and other state institutions in Luanda. In the Central Highlands, UNITA's adoption of the formal instruments of power was less consistent, but it remained the dominant military force in the region. On the eve of independence the MPLA, UNITA and the FNLA each enjoyed exclusive control in a particular region of Angola. This control was secured through a monopoly of violence, but each side asserted its legitimacy by acting to a greater or lesser degree in a state-like manner. Each movement claimed legitimacy throughout Angolan territory and spoke of its rivals as illegitimate and alien to Angola.

These developments during 1974 and 1975 served to establish two important themes in the discourses that surrounded the Angolan civil conflict: first, an association between political movements and territory, and second, the assignation of identity to people on the basis of the movement that controlled the territory where they lived.

The following chapters will demonstrate how these themes evolved in the years after independence and continued to define how politics was understood on both sides of the conflict in the Central Highlands.

Chapter 3: Independence and war 1975-1992: the cities

This chapter considers the relationship between people and political formations in the urban areas of central Angola from the date of independence, 11 November 1975, until the elections in 1992. UNITA retained exclusive military and political control of Huambo and other cities for barely three months following independence day. In February 1976, the MPLA's armed forces, supported by Cuban soldiers, took control of the city. The MPLA remained in control until after the 1992 elections, although UNITA was once again active in the countryside from 1981. The chapter is concerned with the means by which the two movements, UNITA and MPLA, sought to establish a relationship with the people of the cities during their respective periods of control. The chapter will consider UNITA's attempts at governance in cities for the short period of its occupation. It will then look at the nature of the state established in urban areas by the MPLA during the period in question, and UNITA's urban underground operations during the years of the MPLA government.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the circumstances of Angolan independence, in which the rival nationalist movements made mutually exclusive claims to statehood and neither succeeded in its goal of establishing state control of the entire Angolan population, suggest that it would be inappropriate to make normative distinctions between "state" and "rebel movement" in the case of UNITA. The approach will instead be one that concentrates on the "idea of the state" or "stateness",¹⁹⁸ and the ways in which these concepts are used in the discourses associated with either

¹⁹⁸ Mitchell 1999; Hansen and Stepputat 2001.

political movement in such a way as to legitimise the power of that movement. The chapter will also consider the practices employed by each movement in turn, in support of its discourses of statehood: in other words, simply talking about statehood would in itself not be enough to secure legitimacy without some attempt to act like a state, or to create institutions that indicate the presence of a functioning state. The chapter will also consider what kind of state was imagined, or created, by either political movement. In particular I will discuss to what extent colonial conceptions of the state informed the aspirations of the nationalist movements, or to what extent the movements believed themselves to be introducing a new kind of relationship between power and people. Since this chapter is concerned with cities, it will also consider to what extent the imagining of the state for UNITA and for the MPLA was specifically urban. This chapter draws on interviews with people who remember Huambo and Kuito during the period in question. Some of these were affiliated to one of the main parties, while others had no strong political affiliation. By comparing the accounts given by people representing a range of political perspectives, the chapter seeks to identify the official discourses propagated by each party, and the extent to which and the manner in which these discourses were accepted outside the immediate circle of the party.

UNITA in the cities: November 1975 to February 1976

As discussed in the previous chapter, UNITA had succeeded in gathering a significant level of political support in the Central Highlands, through Savimbi's mobilisation of identity claims on the basis of region, race, ethnicity, and indigeneity. However, the

MPLA had become the dominant force in the south by September 1975 – only South African intervention in the last months before independence allowed UNITA to gain the military upper hand.

South Africa first sent in advisers to counsel UNITA on ways of outwitting the MPLA, then supplied combat troops, and finally drove in a squadron of armoured cars. With such powerful backing UNITA was able to make the highland city of Huambo, once known as Nova Lisboa, into a capital city and a focus for a rival declaration of independence to the one being prepared for November 1975 in Luanda.¹⁹⁹

The symbolism of the independence ceremony and Savimbi's address to mark the occasion of independence exemplify the discourse associated with UNITA. General Peregrino Chindondo Wambu, who was 15 years old at the time and whose two older brothers were already in UNITA's army, was part of a musical group whose other members included Abel Chivukuvuku, who today is a UNITA member of parliament. Wambu recalls:

We played at a party organised by UNITA: one of the public parties to celebrate independence, and which went on until the 12th. There was a big rally on the 11th, well organised. UNITA was a great political force at that time. There were difficulties but the message that UNITA transmitted was that there would soon be an agreement between the estranged brothers [i.e. the rival parties]. But this was only reached years later.²⁰⁰

Bridgland, who was covering events as a journalist, describes a "desultory" ceremony at midnight on 10/11 November at Huambo's football stadium, during which the Portuguese flag was lowered without a single Portuguese person present, and a UNITA military police officer took the salute as the UNITA flag was raised. Gunfire had broken out several hours earlier as UNITA soldiers celebrated, and continued

¹⁹⁹ Birmingham 2002:146.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Wambu, Luanda, September 2009.

throughout the night.²⁰¹ It was only the next day that Savimbi publicly declared the independence of the Democratic People's Republic of Angola at the same stadium, in a precarious alliance with Holden Roberto and the FNLA, who declared independence simultaneously at Ambriz on the northern coast. Savimbi began by berating the undisciplined behaviour of his soldiers the previous night: "Listen well,' he said. 'If tonight, or at any other time from now onwards any UNITA soldier fires a shot without an order, it will be his last shot [...] if we catch you firing your gun, you will not move again from that very spot.'"²⁰²

Two themes emerge here that will recur in the interviews quoted later in this thesis, and which are invoked by political leaders and followers alike as a measure of a political movement's legitimacy. The first of these is a preoccupation with maintaining order. The second is an assertion of the legitimacy of violence carried out in the name of the political movement (hence Savimbi's threat of capital punishment), as opposed to the illegitimate violence perpetrated by soldiers without orders.

The remainder of Savimbi's speech, in Bridgland's account, included attacks both on the former Portuguese colonists and the MPLA. He sought to cast doubt on the MPLA's authenticity as Angolan by stating that "Portugal wished to decolonise by

²⁰¹ Bridgland 1986:132-133. According to Spies (1989:149), Savimbi was otherwise occupied on 10 November 1975. Having requested a meeting with South African Prime Minister JB Vorster, he was flown via the Caprivi Strip to Pretoria in the morning, and after meeting Vorster and other senior government officials he returned to Angola the same day having secured Vorster's commitment "not to withdraw the South Africans from Angola immediately provided that Russia and Cuba's help to the MPLA did not grow to the point that South Africa could not deal with the onslaught without the help of a foreign power". Marcum (1977:277) quotes a newspaper source also mentioning the 10 November visit.

²⁰² Bridgland 1986:134 – ellipsis in original.

leaving us here with its godchild named Antonio Agostinho Neto”.²⁰³ He nevertheless expressed willingness to contest elections with the MPLA as soon as it “decides to consider other liberation movements as patriots”. He also emphasised the MPLA’s Soviet links as evidence of the movement’s non-Angolan nature: ‘While the MPLA goes on thinking that only through Russian arms can they offer an ideology, we will say “no” and we will continue to fight.’

The speech also set out an ambitious and idealistic conception of the role of the state in relation to the people:

Savimbi spelled out his ideas about ‘people oriented socialism’ by saying leaders had to ask what people wanted, rather than dictate what they should have. ‘What they want is to live well. They want jobs, schools, sanitation. We depend on the people. From the institutions here they deserve respect, kindness and consideration. The people must be cherished.’²⁰⁴

Savimbi’s claims that UNITA intended to construct a state that based its legitimacy upon service provision bore no relation to the reality that UNITA inherited. First, it continued at war with the MPLA. Second, 90 percent of the white public service personnel had left Angola. As Birmingham notes:

Whereas most other colonial heirs [...] inherited an entrenched legal framework, a functioning civil service, an internationally recognised currency and an integrated army, in Angola the departure of most of Portugal’s soldiers, bankers, administrators and lawyers left few functioning institutions that could be adapted to the new political circumstances.²⁰⁵

The independence movements that assumed control inherited physical infrastructure but little else. Moreover, Savimbi’s supposed alliance with Holden Roberto in

²⁰³ Bridgland 1986:134-135.

²⁰⁴ Bridgland 1986:135.

²⁰⁵ Birmingham 2002:150.

declaring the Democratic People's Republic of Angola never became a reality: the DPRA instead, according to Marcum, "reflected continuing communal and organizational cleavage, dramatized by the inability of the DPRA partners, even in extremis, to create a functioning alternative to the Luanda government".²⁰⁶

Eventually, a "Christmas Eve shootout in Huambo escalated into an FNLA-UNITA war within a war that led to the defeat and disintegration of Chipenda's army by early January."²⁰⁷

Few interviewees had clear memories of the very short period of UNITA rule in the city, and the accounts of the period appear to have been more strongly influenced by the political prejudices of the interviewees than was the case in memories of the later period of MPLA control. It is nevertheless possible to discern a broad picture of UNITA's attempts at governance in Huambo during the months in question. The following extract is from a group discussion with people still active in a local UNITA branch in the city, who had started their activity in the party shortly before independence. My questions were about what changes had come to Huambo with independence, and how UNITA had administered the region during its months of control following independence.

- Nothing changed with independence. The Portuguese left then the war began.
- UNITA defended the people's goods. The administration functioned. In 1975 we had functionaries in all the areas.
- Even in the businesses – there were shops
- Shops, tailor's shops – everything in the service of the party.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Marcum 1988:276.

²⁰⁷ Marcum 1988:276. Daniel Chipenda was the former MPLA faction leader who later led the FNLA forces in the south.

²⁰⁸ Interviewees 82 and 83, Huambo, June 2008.

This characterisation, emphasising a functioning bureaucracy, is notable for its similarity to the MPLA's concept of the urban-based state (discussed later in this chapter) and its difference from the kind of rural state that UNITA officials idealised at other times (discussed in the following chapter). As long as it still had a presence in the cities, UNITA appeared to concentrate on asserting its control over the relics of the colonial state. It kept the Benguela Railway operating, continuing to employ a Portuguese train driver, even if the railway was pressed into the service of the party rather than being left as a public transport amenity.²⁰⁹ In Kuito, UNITA had taken control of the local branch of Banco de Angola, and cash continued to circulate in the town.²¹⁰ Estêvão, a long-time UNITA loyalist, suggested that “the MPLA called in the Cubans [to take Huambo from UNITA in 1976] because it knew that who controls Huambo, controls the south of Angola”.²¹¹

Herbst's ideas on state formation in Africa offer a perspective on UNITA's priorities here. Herbst emphasises the inability of colonial rulers throughout sub-Saharan Africa to “project power” beyond the main areas of colonial settlements, resulting in “a power gradient, whereby formal control was exercised in the cities while authority was highly variable in the rural areas”,²¹² this mode of rule was crystallised after independence by a system of international relations that equated sovereignty with control over the capital city, even when rulers lost effective control of parts of their territories.²¹³ Consequently, “states had to control their political cores but often had

²⁰⁹ Bridgland 1986:164.

²¹⁰ Spies 1989:75.

²¹¹ Interviewee 60, Caála, June 2008.

²¹² Herbst 2000:94.

²¹³ Herbst 2000:110.

highly differentiated control over the outlying areas.”²¹⁴ UNITA had neither the local support in northern Angola nor the military capacity to occupy Luanda, but the movement knew that capturing the main regional city – and a city which had, incidentally, been mooted as an alternative capital during colonial times – was its best way of asserting its claims as a contender for power on an equivalent footing to the MPLA. The symbolism of UNITA’s independence ceremony echoed similar ceremonies that had accompanied the birth of new sovereign states throughout the continent in the previous two decades: it was part of the vocabulary of stateness.

The principles of governance set out by Savimbi at the stadium were, however, no less important in UNITA’s attempts at legitimising itself, even if they were never implemented. One *soba* who had been loyal to UNITA since before independence expressed UNITA’s efforts more in terms of the principles that the movement espoused rather than in terms of concrete progress:

In 1975 it started out well. But it broke down when the MPLA brought the Cubans, because only [the MPLA] wanted to rule. They didn’t accept that the southerners would take power. [While in power Savimbi did] many things. Savimbi fought for Angolans to have no limits on their education, that the colonist limited. Savimbi wanted everyone to study to whatever level, without paying money. In the days of Savimbi we understood for the first time that one could get medical treatment without paying.²¹⁵

General Wambu recalls that schooling continued, despite difficulties, during the period of UNITA control:

I remained a student until the day I left my city. [Classes] continued, with some difficulties, because we had lost some teachers who had gone to

²¹⁴ Herbst 2000:134.

²¹⁵ Interviewee 86, Huambo, July 2008.

Portugal. But new teachers came. [...] There were many shortages – books, notebooks – because at that time the academic year began in October, so we were in the first term.²¹⁶

These generally positive assessments need to be contrasted with the accounts of people with a more sceptical attitude towards UNITA in order to gain an idea of the extent to which UNITA succeeded. Bernardo, the former civil servant quoted in the previous chapter, suggested that Savimbi's declaration of statehood was nothing more than empty rhetoric:

Even if it's known that Savimbi proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Angola, I know nothing of this because UNITA governed in a climate of war. UNITA didn't have a flag of the republic, only the movement's flag. If UNITA installed the Democratic Republic of the South I didn't know of this, because having a republic means having a flag, constitution, government recognised not only at the local level but also internationally. This didn't happen. I think that we're dealing with a kind of speculation here. In terms of the organisation of the state – things didn't go in that way.

[Nevertheless] there were efforts, there were certain tasks done by them in the midst of conditions of war, this never stopped: safeguarding certain health services, certain education services. These functioned, but not to the extent that people would have wished them to be in peacetime – they were services in a climate of war.²¹⁷

Two points are notable here. The first concerns Bernardo's definition of the criteria whereby a movement may become a state: these include the visible symbols of statehood, but also international recognition. Second, he acknowledges that UNITA's failure in this respect was at least in part due to the context of war in which it operated. This fact alone, however, does not make him any more sympathetic to UNITA. His assessment of the 1975-1976 UNITA occupation seems to have been coloured by his own long association with the MPLA state; his much more positive

²¹⁶ Interview with Wambu, Luanda, September 2009.

²¹⁷ Interviewee 31, Huambo, May 2008.

assessment of the MPLA's subsequent efforts at state building will be discussed later in this chapter. Crucially, he evokes peace itself as one of the criteria for the creation of state-like legitimacy. The idea of peace endowing a government with legitimacy is one that emerged in many interviews, with barely-educated rural people as well as with members of the urban intelligentsia: as chapter five will make clear, this became central to many people's rejection of UNITA in the final years of the war.

Other interviewees suggested that a shortage of expertise prevented UNITA from fulfilling whatever intentions it may have had. This is evident in the following two accounts. Additionally, both these accounts allude to the maintenance of the colonial legacy as a minimum criterion for state building: UNITA's success as a state is explicitly judged against the colonial state, and found wanting. (As we shall see later, memories of colonialism were also evoked as a yardstick by which the MPLA was judged, and frequently found wanting.)

According to a Protestant preacher, Pastor David:

[UNITA] tried to put in place all the structures that were needed. [...] They had their government, they had their administrators around the country. The question of electricity – except that later they cut it off. The question of water – then they cut it off. But in principle they tried to organise, to put in order everything that the Portuguese government left. But they didn't have the technicians to maintain it. During the war there was still food that the Portuguese government left behind. In 1975 there was no problem.²¹⁸

This kind of interpretation can also be discerned in the words of a schoolteacher who was 30 years old at the time of independence. His attitude to party politics was ambivalent: he regarded UNITA's identity claims among southern Angolans as valid,

²¹⁸ Interviewee 19, Huambo, May 2008.

but also felt an affinity with the MPLA since he and his wife had lived in government-controlled areas since 1976 and had spent their careers in government service.

[Life during the UNITA occupation in 1975-1976] was difficult. Even though they were occupying coastal provinces like Benguela, we didn't have petrol, nor salt nor soap. UNITA tried to establish a government. But it was a government that didn't work properly for people to live well. [Schools and hospitals established in colonial times] continued to function. But there were few medicines in the hospital and few doctors, only nurses. The schools operated, but without proper wages for the teachers.

UNITA punished MPLA sympathisers. Some had to flee – rather than stay in the city they fled to the villages. [How did UNITA punish people?] They beat or killed them.²¹⁹

A man in Kuito, who had worked for a transport company in colonial times and came to be a state employee when the company was nationalised under the MPLA, had a similar view:

[UNITA's presence] was more like an occupation. There was nobody, and no structures, to govern. There was trade, schools, health – the system didn't stop. Hospitals and education continued functioning, but they didn't offer salaries.²²⁰

The fact that the UNITA officials and some of the FNLA officials in the Transitional Government had settled in Huambo after leaving Luanda provided for a certain degree of continuity, at least as far as incumbency in office was concerned. General Wambu cited this as the reason why UNITA had managed to keep an administration functioning:

There were two political forces, FNLA and UNITA. Professionals who had served in the colonial administration remained in their positions, with the

²¹⁹ Interviewee 48, near Huambo, June 2008. In reality, UNITA's occupation of Benguela was very brief.

²²⁰ Interviewee 194, Kuito, August 2009.

exception of some who had left because of their own physical insecurity. In November and December there was a transition between the peace that was envisaged – UNITA was still trying to stabilise the situation – and war. We all knew that political dialogue had not been going well and probably the only way out was war, as indeed happened.

Paulina, who already had strong pro-MPLA views at the time of independence, also suggested that whatever governmental structures existed under UNITA were simply the remnants of what had existed before.

There was a government with two parties, with portfolios divided between UNITA and the FNLA. I worked with the Agriculture Ministry, which went to the FNLA. I felt the minister didn't feel good [about working with UNITA], but being from the FNLA he had more trust in me. [In terms of governance] UNITA did nothing. I preferred to stay at home.²²¹

The divergent views expressed about UNITA's attempts at governance appear largely to coincide with the present-day political affiliations of the interviewees. Beneath the differences of interpretation, there is a consensus on certain facts: UNITA (and some FNLA) officials took seats in government offices, but the administration had neither the human nor the material resources to function effectively.²²² The best that the administration could hope for would be to keep the functions inherited from the colonial government operating at a minimal level. Where this happened, it appears to be thanks to teachers and other public servants who remained in their posts, rather than to any original initiative by UNITA. (Subsequent chapters will show that this was not the last time that political movements sought credit for people's efforts at self-reliance.)

²²¹ Interviewee 150, Caála, August 2008.

²²² A visiting journalist described Huambo in January 1976 as a town where economic activity and public services had all but ceased. "The War in Angola: View From 2 Sides". *New York Times*, 23 January 1976.

Dedicated UNITA sympathisers saw an essential value in the movement's ability to occupy government structures. Among sceptics, as well as among MPLA supporters, UNITA's lack of capacity – or lack of ability – to be an effective government was taken as reason not to support it. What is remarkable is that none of the interviewees saw this as evidence of any inherent lack of worth in UNITA: rather, those who expressed dissatisfaction with UNITA's efforts stated frankly that this was the result of circumstance.

The MPLA and state building

UNITA's first occupation of Huambo and other Central Highlands cities lasted only three months. The MPLA met no immediate resistance upon entering the cities.²²³ However, it never consolidated its control over the countryside, and its dominance was challenged by UNITA's return to war in 1981. In considering the MPLA's efforts at state building it is therefore necessary to consider the context of war in which they took place. The MPLA leadership had ideologically driven ideas about the role of the political party and the state and its relationship to the people: ideas that defined the prerogatives and responsibilities of the party or state towards the people, and the rights and duties of the people with respect to the state. At the same time, ideas of the state and party were inseparable from the MPLA's military identity. This section

²²³ Most interviewees concur on this point. See also Bridgland 1986:174: "In the early hours of 9 February 1976 Cuban tanks started rolling into Huambo. They met no resistance. Some 5,000 UNITA troops had left the city and pulled back to the small town of Vila Nova, about 50 kilometres to the east, and to heights a few kilometres to the south."

seeks to examine the ways in which the MPLA went about trying to construct a state and to secure legitimacy among the population: a task that was possible only with the support of Cubans whose skills filled some of the gaps left by the departing Portuguese. I will contrast the ways in which different interviewees spoke about the work done by the party-state, attempting to show how these efforts were understood and received, and how they shaped people's relationship with the party and state.

Between about August 1975 and February 1976, the MPLA had no visible political presence in the cities of the Central Highlands, even though a substantial number of MPLA supporters lived there. According to Messiant:

The MPLA did not arrive in power thanks only to Cuban troops and Soviet aid. It had important popular support: in the countryside (as in the case of the other two movements on a largely ethnic basis, but also from positive relationships forged during the guerrilla struggle); and especially in the towns of the whole territory and among all ethnic groups, as much in the colonial and administrative apparatus as in wider society [*dans les secteurs populaires*].²²⁴

Nevertheless, from the point of view of those people in the city who had not been active supporters of the MPLA, the MPLA entered as a military movement that only later acquired a political character. In the words of Pastor David:

The MPLA [...] came with tanks, with the Cubans, so UNITA didn't resist, it left. The MPLA came, and started looking around to see if there were still any UNITA people there, and established, more than anything else, its military bases: it occupied strategic areas of the city, and later civilian structures started to appear, but first the military structures.

[Was there vengeance against people suspected of having collaborated with UNITA?] There was, but not as soon as they [MPLA] entered. Only later were

²²⁴ Messiant 1994:50. Note that the rural support for the MPLA that Messiant mentions here was concentrated in the Luanda hinterland, but urban support was also present in Huambo and other towns of the Central Highlands.

some people denounced. Some died because of this.

In 1976 when the government came, and supported [by Cubans], they established all the structures for the functioning of governance. [...] For example, the water started to function, the electricity started to function, the shops started opening – then the communications, the postal service began to work and then they put buses on those roads they had managed to open – they went to other cities like Benguela, Huambo and Bié. Life started functioning normally.²²⁵

Those who were sympathetic to the MPLA's aims put a stronger emphasis on its civilian developmental role. According to Bernardo:

The MPLA had barely arrived before it started concerning itself with taking over the state administration. The MPLA entered in February 1976, and reorganised structures similar to the rest of the nation [...] Schools, hospitals began to work and the whole administration started to gain its previous force. They paid civil servants' salaries and tuition became free: everybody studying, everybody working and everyone on the move. Something that people now miss [in 2008] is that we studied for free. Children went to school and received books for free. There were the Pioneers [MPLA children's brigade] who received clothes for free. Everything free. This was always the philosophy of the MPLA: keep struggling for the people to have a better life.²²⁶

In the months that followed the MPLA forces' arrival in Huambo, the government tried to assume responsibility for the provision of food, and implemented a system of state shops that sold basic manufactured foodstuffs at a low price, and which were accessibly only to people who held ration cards: those who had cards were state employees. While there was an ideological justification for this, there was a practical consideration too: the necessity of army escorts for transport between Huambo and the coast implicated the state in the delivery of these items. Certain other goods, such as soap, toothpaste and soft drinks, were delivered to public functionaries when available, in quantities commensurate with the recipient's professional rank. During

²²⁵ Interviewee 19, Huambo, May 2008.

²²⁶ Interviewee 31, Huambo, May 2008.

the 1980s, special shops were established where higher-ranking civilian and military officials could obtain wider variety of goods. The fertility of the land around Huambo, the reliable rainfall for eight months of the year, and the presence of agricultural plots within the city limits, ensured that vegetables and grain were produced inside the city and bartered on the informal market: this was technically illegal, since all goods were supposed to be sold to the state, but there was little that farmers could buy with the cash paid by the state buyers. This system implemented by the MPLA is remembered both as an example of the party's efficacy in creating structures that served the public interest, and as an example of inefficiency and discrimination in the interests of the party elite.

Trade worked – they created co-operatives and shops. There was a ministry of internal trade that supported the shops.²²⁷

People's shops – you had to buy what they had: usually rice, sugar and cooking oil. On the black market you could buy quality goods, to which the Cubans and FAPLA officers had access. The people's markets [the informal market] were intended for vegetables sold by farmers, but these became the shops for most of us.²²⁸

This ambivalence is evident in the description by Paulina, who was deeply loyal to the MPLA's principles:

For basic, necessary goods you needed a card. The shops were only for state functionaries. At the People's Shop, you still needed a card. Later the special shops started, for skilled and mid-level workers, and the bosses. It was terrible discrimination. Everything was cheap because it was subsidised. Things like sugar or rice you could get in the people's shops. The special shops had butter, milk, imported beer. You only had the right to spend two thousand kwanzas.²²⁹

²²⁷ Interviewee 21, Huambo, May 2008.

²²⁸ Interviewee 105, Huambo, September 2008.

²²⁹ Interviewee 150, Caála, July 2009: She thought these special shops were founded about 1981, though another interviewee, who seemed more certain, gave the date as

Paulina explained the philosophy behind the MPLA's food provision strategies as follows: "Whoever had a job was ours, and had the right to goods."²³⁰ She contrasted the availability of foodstuffs in government shops with the situation in UNITA-held areas: "In a UNITA area you'd be in trouble if you were caught with salt or cooking oil." A doctor who worked in the state system recalled that in the early 1980s, "the government still took responsibility for the people" – an attitude that the doctor thought had disappeared after 1990.²³¹

Appreciation of the MPLA's state-building role was also linked to the ways in which people spoke about violence: those who accepted the legitimacy of the MPLA's presence also portrayed as legitimate any acts of violence committed in the name of the MPLA, or played them down completely. The normative distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence made here assert the MPLA's claims to statehood in much the same way that Savimbi, as noted earlier in this chapter, claimed the exclusive prerogative of violence for UNITA. According to Maria de Conceição Neto:

"Reactionary violence" was met with "revolutionary violence". The various participants saw violence to be not just necessary but legitimate; they claimed that it served "the interests of the Angolan people", whom everybody claimed to represent.²³²

When asked whether any fighting accompanied the MPLA's arrival, a schoolteacher

1987. The appearance of the special shops may be seen in the context of the increasingly elitist nature of MPLA politics through the 1980s, as noted by Vidal (2008:128-130).

²³⁰ "Ours" here means "of the MPLA". This idea of political belonging will be taken up later in this chapter.

²³¹ Interviewee 146, Luanda, July 2009.

²³² Neto 2001:43.

from Huambo replied:

Of course, this [violence] happens. At that time, UNITA considered this [territory] its own property that it wanted to defend. But in order to defend territorial integrity, the government had to come and conquer all the spaces that UNITA had occupied, and this had to be done in battle. Each one defends, and withdraws when it sees the other side is advancing.²³³

One farmer interviewed in a peri-urban *bairro* of Huambo had not witnessed serious violence, and mentioned this among his reasons for accepting the presence of the MPLA.²³⁴ “The MPLA, when it entered here, in 1976 as well as 1994, used the same policy, which was not to appear with the policy of killing. This is a very positive signal.”²³⁵

An earlier section of this chapter discussed the tendency for post-colonial state building in sub-Saharan Africa to concentrate on urban areas, something that was true even for a movement like UNITA that staked a large part of its legitimacy on peasant support. The MPLA state, particularly in the Central Highlands, took on an even more strongly urban character, for a number of reasons.

First, a large part of the MPLA’s support was concentrated in the towns. UNITA’s greater success in mobilising in the southern countryside ensured that in southern Angola the MPLA was entirely an urban movement. Messiant points out the presence

²³³ Interviewee 19, Huambo, May 2008.

²³⁴ *Bairro* means “neighbourhood” in Portuguese. In Angola it usually refers to a poor outlying neighbourhood that was not part of the colonial city. The term covers the kind of settlement that would be known as a township in South Africa, but can also be used for semi-rural settlements on the edge of a provincial town.

²³⁵ Interviewee 32, Huambo, June 2008.

of MPLA cadres in the “colonial and administrative apparatus”²³⁶, which brings us to the second point: the presence of its members within the administration meant that MPLA was better placed than UNITA or the FNLA to take over the functioning of a largely urban colonial state once the Portuguese left.²³⁷ Heimer observes that necessity prompted the MPLA to take control of the economy as well as the state bureaucracy, quite aside from the party’s ideological commitment to centralised control:

The exodus of about 90% of the Angolan Portuguese had created something approaching a vacuum in important sections of the spheres traditionally occupied by the white petty bourgeoisie and the *classes económicas*. The correlate of this process was a massive influx of non-whites into these spheres – with “low level” and “middle level” petty bourgeoisie as well as proletariat “moving upwards”, and with people marginalized by the colonial system [...] taking their place in Angolan society. At the same time – although until the end of the “conventional” civil war the MPLA had more urgent concerns than launching overall societal transformations – the Luanda government was obliged to establish state control over an increasing number of abandoned enterprises in order to maintain vital economic activities.²³⁸

Former prime minister Marcolino Moco, who was a provincial official in the years following independence, also viewed the state’s involvement in the economy as the consequence both of ideology and of necessity.

On the one hand, the war itself: with the departure of the Portuguese who were the shop owners, the factory owners – everything collapsed. There was a period of nationalisation. But afterwards, this persisted, and broadened.²³⁹

Third and most importantly, however, it was the war itself that set the geographical limits on the MPLA’s ability to construct the apparatus of statehood. Towns were

²³⁶ Messiant 1994.

²³⁷ Pélissier’s (1971:232) description of the road building programme of the 1960s presents a picture of a colonial state in which “each white settlement was an island in an African sea”, linked only by air until the roads were built.

²³⁸ Heimer 1979:83.

²³⁹ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

defensible, while any state presence outside of the city limits was liable to attack after UNITA resumed its military role in 1981. Moco suggested that while the war provided an incentive for state intervention in the economy, it also imposed limits on the intervention: “As the war closed in more and more, it made it difficult for the state to broaden its role as a distributor. The factors worked against each other. But hunger finds a way of eating.”²⁴⁰

Roberto, a lawyer who had been a young man in Huambo in the early years of independence, recalled:

Here in the centre [of Angola] – because UNITA still wasn’t very far away – the MPLA made many efforts to maintain the *municípios* and the city itself. It didn’t have many hypotheses of building, of creating – it was just maintaining what had existed in colonial times, because the action of the guerrilla war didn’t permit more than that. It required a great effort to maintain Bailundo and Mungo, these *municípios*, because they were completely surrounded by UNITA’s forces. [Development meant] maintaining an administrative presence, the schools, the hospital, the infrastructure that the colonist had left. The reconstruction is only being done now [in 2008]. It was never done [in the past] because it was not possible.²⁴¹

The consequently fragmented geographical nature of the state affected how the state was perceived in those areas that it controlled.

It managed to establish a state, but it was as though the state was an island. The government would be in a *comuna* but could not go more than 20 or 30 kilometres from it. In those other areas they lived more from the people’s agriculture. So, although the government was spread throughout the country, they couldn’t go very far.²⁴²

Travel between the “islands” was possible only as part of a military convoy. Even in

²⁴⁰ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

²⁴¹ Interviewee 3, Huambo, May 2008. *Município* here refers to the main town of each municipal district.

²⁴² Interviewee 19, Huambo, May 2008.

those rural areas that were close enough to the towns to fall under the MPLA's military control, the efforts of state building through service provision that were noted by urban dwellers were barely present. Maria da Conceição Neto concludes that even during these years of peace, the MPLA's rural development efforts were inadequate:

UNITA had little military power during the first years of the war. However, the MPLA lacked the capacity to provide a development project that was sufficiently attractive to the rural population [...] It also did not understand the cultural, social and political reality of Huambo [province], and so failed to see that economic and social advancement was much more enticing for that population than the uncertainty of war.²⁴³

A woman farmer who had spent her whole life on the outskirts of Huambo – part of the area that fell under government control as soon as the MPLA entered the city in February 1976 – described the post-independence period as follows:

Life was like this – each depended on his or her own efforts. Peasants had to cultivate land to get something to eat. Many who had children, many fathers didn't have the possibility for their children to study – the facilities didn't exist because of the war. As time went by, the NGOs brought materials for schools and hospitals and the government managed to do more for the schools. With time the country managed to send children to schools. Then development began.²⁴⁴

The following recollection, by a man who in 1975 was aged 14, living in a village with his farmer parents and studying at a mission school close to Huambo city, suggests that for those people whose livelihood was agriculture, it made little difference which party was in power, as long as they were not being preyed upon by soldiers.

After the clashes [before independence] the FNLA left and then the MPLA.

²⁴³ Neto 2001:65-66.

²⁴⁴ Interviewee 30, Huambo, May 2008. This woman lived in a village where a development NGO had implemented adult education programmes for more than a decade: this explains her use of the word “development” and its link to education.

UNITA stayed. At the provincial level UNITA was governing. It wasn't bad. We went back to our classes after a while. Then there were more clashes and classes stopped once more [when the MPLA returned to Huambo] but then later resumed.²⁴⁵

UNITA governing “at the provincial level” seems to mean simply that UNITA was occupying the provincial capital rather than implementing any kind of governance throughout the province. Asked if the arrival of the MPLA government had brought about any changes where he lived, the man replied that “the village was outside the city – we stayed in the *kimbu* [village]”. When he tried to think of changes that occurred, the first that came to mind was: “the change in the money – from escudos to kwanzas”.

Rural people perceived state building to be something that happened elsewhere, and happened to other people. It is true that the majority of the rural population was beyond the reach of the Angolan state for much of the war. However, even in the limited rural zones that were under the safe military control of the MPLA, the state was barely present, and people in those areas continued to see the state as something essentially urban and which had nothing to offer rural dwellers.

Cuban support

The MPLA's arrival in the Central Highlands in February 1975 was made possible by military support from Cuba, while the South African troops who had been providing

²⁴⁵ Interviewee 44, near Huambo, June 2008.

backup to UNITA withdrew to the extreme south of Angola.²⁴⁶ Cuban military assistance to the MPLA was followed by the arrival of Cuban professionals, chiefly medical staff and teachers.²⁴⁷

Their presence was crucial to the MPLA's efforts to build state institutions following the collapse of the colonial state and the departure of the Portuguese who had staffed its bureaucracy and fought in its army, as well as the departure of some Angolan professionals with UNITA.²⁴⁸ Only a year after independence, a British-based pro-MPLA newsletter reported:

Many Cuban experts are now employed as advisers in almost all the important branches of government [...]. They are also involved in the rapid political indoctrination and mobilisation of the masses. [...] [B]oth countries have been encouraging immigration from Cuba to Angola. This highly politicised and militant immigrant population will not only be useful for national reconstruction, but would also, in a way, be a guarantor of the Angolan revolution, if need be.²⁴⁹

Marcolino Moco saw the importance of the Cubans as both military and political:

In military terms the FAA²⁵⁰ didn't exist at the time of independence – they were bush guerrillas, and the colonial army had been practically dismantled. [The Cubans addressed] the question of training outside of Angola: they trained generals. [...] Clearly, there was a great degree of connection between

²⁴⁶ Gleijeses 2002:342.

²⁴⁷ Gleijeses's (2002) otherwise comprehensive history of Cuba's Cold War era involvement in Africa makes no mention of Cuba's humanitarian and developmental role in Angola, though he does describe similar initiatives in Algeria and Congo.

²⁴⁸ Birmingham 2002:150. A UN policy document noted that "colonial policies in the past had limited participation of the indigenous population to minor roles in the running of the country. Thus, after the mass exodus of expatriates following independence, there were few trained personnel to implement the new government's policy. Ten years after independence, this remains a major weakness affecting all sectors of national life." (UN Economic and Social Council 1987:5).

²⁴⁹ *Africa Currents* 7, Autumn 1976,

²⁵⁰ *Forças Armadas Angolanas*: The national armed force that was created as a result of the Bicesse agreement of 1991.

the Cubans and the armed forces [FAPLA], and also between the Cuban commanders who came here as assessors to the Angolan commander. There was a practically a Cuban assessor at the side of every Angolan leader. This was intended primarily as a way of consolidating socialism – Cuba was the ideal socialist country – and on the other hand, during that period of transition, of state construction, for Africans who had never taken part in the construction of a state, they were a great help.²⁵¹

This section considers the ways in which the Cuban presence was represented by interviewees, taking into account both the political convictions of the interviewee, and the circumstances in which the interviewee encountered the Cubans. These two factors, of course, could not be separated one from the other: experience of the Cubans moulded people's political views, while political convictions also coloured how interviewees interpreted the experience of the Cubans. The section seeks to show how the Cuban presence contributed to (and occasionally detracted from) the MPLA's efforts to gain legitimacy in the areas of the Central Highlands that it controlled in the years following independence.

Among the most politically committed interviewees, attitudes to the Cubans seemed to be concurrent with party loyalties. Such interviews, parroting the party line of one side or the other, serve as a useful reference point by which to understand the more nuanced, or more ambivalent, views that emerged in other interviews. One interviewee was a *soba* in a peri-urban *bairro* of Huambo (Bairro 1). This *bairro* had absorbed people who had migrated or been removed from UNITA to government areas in the early 1980s; as a result, pro-MPLA politicisation appeared to have been particularly strong here. The *soba* spoke of having been “captured” to serve in the MPLA's armed forces while he was a contract labourer in northern Angola in the 1960s. Although he described his experience as one of “capture”, it had nevertheless

²⁵¹ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

apparently cemented his identification with the MPLA, and he habitually dressed in red, black and yellow, the party colours.

The MPLA called the Cubans to join our armed struggle. We were friends, great friends. No one spoke ill of the Cubans. To this day, the Cubans are great friends.²⁵²

The fact that memories of the Cubans were still a politically loaded topic in that *bairro* became evident during an interview with another man there. This former soldier, who had been conscripted to fight for the MPLA in the late 1970s, complained that the Cubans “just stole things from the people, ate our food. In battle they stayed behind and the Angolans were pushed to the front”.²⁵³ This version of events provoked a reaction from people who had been eavesdropping on the interview, who intruded and contradicted the interviewee, insisting that “the Cubans were our brothers”.

More educated interviewees offered an ideological account of the Cuban involvement.

Bernardo expressed it as follows:

The Cubans at that time were taking part in the proletarian struggle, to win against colonialism and especially capitalism. They were always people well disposed to helping those who were in difficult situations. We felt this: in war, at school, in the hospitals they were with us.²⁵⁴

Such explanations were, however, exceptional and confined to an elite associated with the MPLA. People associated with UNITA tended to remember the Cuban presence as wholly negative.²⁵⁵ One interviewee had been a young woman in Huambo at the

²⁵² Interviewee 16, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁵³ Interviewee 29, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁵⁴ Interviewee 31, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁵⁵ The ways in which the Cuban presence was evoked in official UNITA discourses

time of independence, and spent the rest of the war either working underground for UNITA in the city, or in the bush with UNITA's army, married to a senior army officer and working in UNITA's health services. She recalled running away from Huambo as the Cubans advanced in February 1976:

When the MPLA entered Huambo with the Cuban forces we thought they were coming to persecute the UNITA people. Many were killed. We went back [to the city] when it was returning to normal.²⁵⁶

“Normal”, as so often in Angola, proved to be relative.

The Cubans would take people's animals. The people lived with oppression. This is why many people preferred UNITA and made the revolution underground. The Cubans and Angolans [MPLA] co-operated in oppression. The Cubans raped women – anyone who said no to them would be punished.

The examples quoted so far illustrate the two poles of opinion about the Cuban presence in Angola. The speakers were people who had been strongly influenced by MPLA or UNITA, and their positions seem to offer illustrations of the preferred discourse of one or the other party. However, for many of the interviewees their perception of the Cubans and of the role they played was shaped not chiefly by politicisation, but rather by the circumstances in which they encountered the foreigners. The Cuban presence was far from being uniform throughout Angola. Even within the “island” state formed by the MPLA, the Cubans appear to have clustered only in the urban centres of each island. It was in places like Huambo city that they made the most impact. Roberto, who had been a student at the time of independence, suggested that Cubans had played an important part in helping the MPLA to gain the allegiance of the urban population of Huambo through the provision of services:

will be considered in the next chapter.

²⁵⁶ Interviewee 69, Caála, July 2008.

When the MPLA appeared in 1976 it appeared with the Cubans – with a different type of organisation, a more supported organisation, to distinguish it from UNITA, which had a more backward society, of a lower level. Whereas the MPLA, in areas where it was, came with many partners, the doctors who started to operate – the schools opened with the Cubans. This brought a bit more stability, which as time went on convinced people that things were moving in a positive direction.²⁵⁷

Roberto was better educated than most of the interviewees and was hence able to state eloquently what was implicit in others' accounts: that the MPLA built its legitimacy on its ability to construct a state and that the Cubans were central to this project of state building. Although not a party office-bearer, Roberto had been a functionary in a state system that was politicised and associated with the party. It is not surprising his ideological frame of reference corresponds to the official one, even though he expresses it in a more nuanced manner than was the case with those villagers who were marginal to the state and to the party, but whose long sojourn in government-controlled areas meant that they had no choice but to become MPLA loyalists.

One such person was a woman in her late forties, a farmer with little education, who had lived in Huambo as a teenager in the 1970s and as a young woman in the 1980s. When she was asked about the Cuban presence, she spoke first of the Cubans' military role: "They were the army. Their programme was to fight against the enemy, which was UNITA. They went around the bush in their vehicles looking for the enemy – we remained in our *bairros*."²⁵⁸ Only when asked whether there were also Cubans in civilian life did she reply: "They also worked. They helped in the hospital, curing the sick. In all the departments they helped a lot. Some were soldiers, others civil servants. They did their work of development here in the civil service."

²⁵⁷ Interviewee 3, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁵⁸ Interviewee 30, Huambo, May 2008.

Patrícia, also in her early teens at the time of independence, declared herself neutral as far as party politics was concerned, and came from a family that had UNITA sympathies. Despite her lack of connections with the MPLA, she was well disposed towards the Cubans.

The Cubans lived together well with the people. They left sons and daughters. Everyone knew they were foreigners, but there were no limits to how we could live together. They had a different status. They had their own separate shops, but you could also see Cubans shopping in the market.²⁵⁹

A man of similar age, and whose politics appeared to incline to neither party, made a similar point:

The Cuban presence took two forms. They were in the army, and they were involved in civil co-operation: education and health. They had a training camp near Boas Águas [east of Huambo] where they sold food. Angolans who lived near the Cuban bases could do well out of this.²⁶⁰

The fact that these three people took a positive view of the Cubans has less to do with MPLA politicisation than with the fact of their being urban people, from modest backgrounds but with some education, who benefited from the social organisation brought by the MPLA – even if they did not explicitly attribute a political agenda either to the Cubans or to the MPLA.

This forms a contrast with the views of people in more marginal peri-urban or rural areas, whose lives were untouched by the MPLA state-building project. Here I refer to a group discussion conducted in a settlement on the outskirts of the city of Huambo (Bairro 2). This settlement was almost entirely rural in character, the people there

²⁵⁹ Interviewee 108, Luanda, September 2008.

²⁶⁰ Interviewee 104, Luanda, October 2008.

growing most of their own food, and trading a small surplus only for the most basic manufactured items such as salt and clothing. The village and the people had always remained under the control of the government, but this had more to do with its location close to a military base than to any effort to include the place and the population in the process of state making. In contrast to Bairro 1 where frequent movements of people appeared to have led to a high degree of conscious politicisation, Bairro 2 seemed to have been ignored. The result was apathy and cynicism towards politics.

- Everything that the Cubans found they killed or took by force.
- Everyone took cattle: the government and UNITA.
- War is like that.²⁶¹

According to these interviewees, the Cubans had difficulty with the fact that all Angolans were the same colour, hence it was difficult for them to spot the enemy – and the result was that the Cubans were uniformly suspicious towards all Angolans, particularly those whose language – Umbundu – marked them as being from the same ethnic group as Jonas Savimbi.

- Whoever spoke Umbundu was seen as being UNITA.
- I was in the army. Whenever a Cuban was killed and not an Angolan, everyone was accused of being with UNITA.
- They came to comply with an internationalist mission. [In other words, Angolans were not their first priority.]
- It was an international war. The MPLA with the Cubans, UNITA with the South Africans. But it was mostly Angolans who died. Only a few Cubans died. They pushed us to the front. They'd say 'you are the master of this land'.
- They had rights that Angolans didn't have. When Angolans weren't sleeping on mattresses [the Cubans] had beds.

I asked this group what social assistance they had received during the years of the war. They were adamant in their response: “Nothing – neither in education, nor

²⁶¹ Group discussion 107, Huambo, September 2008.

farming, nor health. Rural culture stopped.”

These were people who had never been directly exposed to UNITA’s politicisation. Yet although they were in the MPLA’s zone of control, the fact that they saw little benefit from the MPLA’s state building project gave them no reason to view the Cubans with anything other than suspicion. In the absence of political mobilisation, adherence to the church became particularly strong here – and the association of the Cubans with Marxism-Leninism and hence atheism served to deepen people’s suspicions.

People’s attitudes towards the Cubans were determined by the circumstances in which they encountered them. But the contradictory statements about the Cubans that emerged in the interviews sometimes appear to have been a matter of interpretation rather than a matter of fact. They mixed well with the Angolans despite living in separate quarters – or their sheltered, privileged existence only bred alienation and resentment from Angolans. Angolan women bearing the children of Cuban soldiers were interpreted as a sign of the Cubans’ integration into Angolan society, or of their tendency to rape indiscriminately. The fact that they spoke Spanish, which has much in common with Portuguese, helped them to integrate – or the fact that they spoke neither Portuguese nor Umbundu kept them apart.

There is a complex relationship between how people experienced the Cubans, and how they interpreted their experiences. People who lived in the cities, and who were not strongly attached to any of the churches, were more likely to have experienced the benefits that the Cubans brought in terms of welfare and development. Yet city people

who had strong pro-UNITA convictions dating from before independence were more likely to regard the MPLA's developmental efforts with suspicion, and see the Cubans as proof of the foreign nature of the MPLA, rather than viewing their expertise as contributing to an indigenously Angolan initiative. People strongly aligned with either the MPLA or with UNITA tend to take the preferred view of either party, and their interpretation of the Cubans' role seems to have been conditioned by political convictions, rather than allowing their political beliefs to be swayed by the presence of the Cubans.

Mass organisations and MPLA political education

Within the "islands" of MPLA control, the creation of functioning schools, hospitals and shops was accompanied by a programme of political education aimed at promoting the single party as the unique and legitimate representative of the Angolan nation. Marcum argues that during 1976, while UNITA fell apart politically as a result of being on the defensive militarily, the MPLA "drew strength from its longstanding commitment to ideologically grounded political education and mobilization",²⁶² something made possible by the MPLA's control of the towns. Civil structures linked to the party such as OMA (*Organização da Mulher Angolana* – Angolan Women's Organisation), OPA (*Organização dos Pioneiros Angolanos* – Angolan Pioneers' Organisation, for children) and JMPLA (*Juventude do MPLA* – MPLA Youth) sought to create opportunities for participation in party activities. The following account by Maria da Conceição Neto, a historian who was a student in Huambo in the mid-1970s,

²⁶² Marcum 1978:278.

illustrates how these organisations brought activities identified with the party into civic and social life, and into state functions such as the provision of education and health care.

“Mass organisations” had the role of “conveyor belts” for directives from the top of the party. [...] The youth organisation (JMPLA) changed from a “mass organisation” to a “nursery for cadres”, a kind of antechamber leading into the party; in the process any less orthodox or controlled initiative for youth was stifled or marginalised. In spite of everything, the activities of the mass organisations were for many people important experiences of community action. Through them were carried out campaigns of literacy, sanitation and vaccination. They involved all sections of the population in socially useful activities, and through them were awakened ideas of citizenship.²⁶³

Moco described the role of the mass organisations as “fundamental”: “A child who went to school was automatically with OPA. It was a system of total integration.”²⁶⁴

Other interviews suggest that although participation was not compulsory, there were positive incentives to do so. These incentives were made possible by the close identification between party and state, and the fact that the state controlled most opportunities for employment. The following extracts are all from interviews with people who were teenagers or students in the late 1970s:

After UNITA left it was all MPLA propaganda. People were persuaded to participate in government organisations, though not obliged to. There were privileges attached to participating, like uniforms or activities. There were OMA meetings in the schools that were sometimes obligatory. If you didn't go, it counted against you. At rallies (*comícios*) each school and each business kept a note of who was there – teachers, pupils, workers. If you didn't go you would lose a day's salary. But some went voluntarily if they were party members.²⁶⁵

[Recruitment to the party] was obligatory. At that time [the late 1970s] there was a social structure linked to the JMPLA – it was called the AEEM

²⁶³ Neto 2001:45.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

²⁶⁵ Interviewee 108, Luanda, October 2008.

(Association of High School Students / *Associação de Estudantes de Ensino Médio*) and this association was an appendage of the JMPLA. In such a way that even if you weren't incorporated as an activist you still would be involved in activities that were those of the JMPLA. In such a way that all of us [young people] were part of the JMPLA, whether directly or indirectly.²⁶⁶

People couldn't choose. The movement that was there controlled everything. It was the same when UNITA came: everyone joined the UNITA structures. [...] OPA promoted patriotic education. People couldn't go to church, because they planned events on a Sunday. Going to church was not prohibited, but party activities took place at the same time. They gave us [in OPA] uniforms. Those who excelled were sent to Cuba to study. This was organised by party activists. [At school] history changed. They even changed the exercise books, taking away the multiplication tables [formerly printed inside the cover] and replacing them with the national anthem. In the workplace, if you didn't belong to the party you couldn't be promoted. If you criticised the system openly you were seen as being UNITA.²⁶⁷

Participation in party activities should not, however, be confused with formal party membership. As Nuno Vidal has noted, party membership dropped dramatically after the leadership tightened membership criteria in response to the challenge by Nito Alves in 1977, and by the early 1980s grassroots party adherents enjoyed no special privileges.²⁶⁸ The mass organisations and the blurring of party, state and people that they embodied nevertheless continued even after formal party membership became more exclusive.

What, then, was the content of the political education that the party presented? In attempting to answer this question I will consider official discourses about state and party and the relationship of both with people; interpretations of the historical role of the MPLA; the reasons that were presented for the war; and how the fact of the war shaped the discourses presented by the MPLA.

²⁶⁶ Interviewee 9, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁶⁷ Interviewee 105, Huambo, September 2008.

²⁶⁸ Vidal 2008:129-132.

The following account by a party loyalist gives an idea of the MPLA's own preferred version of its function in society.

[The role of the party in daily life] was to mobilise people for work, because at that time it was called the MPLA-PT (Workers' Party). It was known that without work the party would not go forward. Mobilise the country for work and to study, because studying was a revolutionary duty, and mobilising the country for the defence of the country because at that time we didn't only have the problem of UNITA, but also the problem of external enemies. You know we had the problems with South Africa, with Zaire, which attacked us. It was necessary to mobilise the people in such a way that they would be aware of the political-military situation that the country was experiencing. Aside from education, work, health it was necessary to mobilise the people to guarantee the security of our territorial integrity. Mobilise the youth to join the armed forces to guarantee territorial integrity. That was the great role of the party.²⁶⁹

Anselmo, a younger man, had spent the first years of his life in an area that was contested between UNITA and the government, before moving to the city with his parents in order for him to go to school, and for his parents to resume the teaching careers that they had begun in colonial times. He recalled the late 1970s as follows:

It was a time of great investment in ideology, particularly in education. I was a member of the Pioneers, then the students' association, and then the JMPLA. I helped organise rallies. The education system functioned – but in terms of transmitting the ideas of the dominant power. We were most affected by the war after 1983, when there were attacks [by UNITA] on Huambo city. [...] There was an internal reaction against counter-revolutionaries, people suspected of working for UNITA. There was a lot of talk of South Africa, of Ronald Reagan and the Clark Amendment.²⁷⁰

In the youth organisations, a figure called Ngangula featured in political education: a young boy who had supposedly been captured by the Portuguese and been killed when he refused to reveal where the guerrillas were hiding. According to a priest who had been a child in the 1980s:

²⁶⁹ Interviewee 31, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁷⁰ Interviewee 104, Huambo, September 2008. The 1976 Clark Amendment to the United States Arms Export Control Act, banning US assistance to non-state armed groups in other countries, was repealed under the Reagan administration.

Now that I know, I'd say he was a fictional character, just so that children would have a model, a fictional character, so that we couldn't do anything without reference to him. They had to create this image – this reference for childhood patriotism.²⁷¹

MPLA propaganda after independence presented the party's role in the anti-colonial struggle and emphasised the external nature of the current enemy that the MPLA was confronting. By casting UNITA as the agent of South African and other foreign forces, the MPLA discourse fixed the party's own role as the defender of the nation and served to conflate the interests of people, nation, state and party. Moco sees UNITA's foreign links and collaboration with the colonial army during the independence war as one of the most important elements in the MPLA's discourses of legitimation.

It was, let's say, the great pretext to battle UNITA without respite: UNITA having allied itself with South Africa, and also there were precedents of UNITA having collaborated with colonialism. The story that the MPLA told, and with considerable evidence [...] was that Savimbi lived inside Angola under the cover of the Portuguese colonialists who helped him create a movement to impede the advance of the other movements, particularly the MPLA.²⁷² [...] When UNITA allied itself with South Africa, which at that time was hated for its policy of apartheid, it was a mobilising factor to say that UNITA was not worthy of being a liberation movement, but was a movement that, first, helped to prolong colonialism, and second, tried to help apartheid, racism, and tried to destroy Angola to help foreign interests.²⁷³

War itself was an essential element in the MPLA's strategies of legitimation: this is most clearly evident in Anselmo's recollection that an increase in UNITA attacks provided an opportunity for the government to brand its opponents as being connected to UNITA and to its foreign backers. This reached its most extreme expression in the words of an Angolan government official – a man who had been imprisoned and

²⁷¹ Interviewee 193, Kuito, August 2009.

²⁷² On Savimbi's co-operation with Portugal see Minter 1988.

²⁷³ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2009.

tortured during UNITA's occupation of Huambo in 1992, who denied that there had ever been a civil war in Angola: in his reading, the MPLA had simply been doing battle against an external enemy from 1975 until the end of the war.

Supporters of the MPLA spoke of the party as having a defensive role, in a way that seemed to conflate the functions of party and military: "In 1980, when UNITA intensified the guerrilla war, it was the task of the party to defend the city: to create a system to protect its leaders."²⁷⁴

This view was echoed so consistently in the reminiscences of less-educated people, who spoke about the MPLA's role as being to "defend the people", that it appears to have been a theme in the party's political education. This association between the MPLA and the FAPLA also appeared frequently in the accounts of men who had served in the FAPLA, as will be discussed in the following section.

Conscription

As noted, the phenomenon of "the state like an island" and the danger of travelling outside of the urban centres was one aspect in which the ongoing war had an impact of the lives of citizens. But it was military service that brought the reality of war into every Angolan family. Although men officially became eligible for military service at age 18, there are frequent accounts of boys being conscripted before this age. This section will consider the recollections of Angolan men who were conscripted into

²⁷⁴ Interviewee 150, Caála, August 2009.

FAPLA during the 1980s. From this I seek to examine the role of conscription in the official discourses of the MPLA state, and how conscripts' reaction to the experience of conscription affected their perceptions of the legitimacy of the conscription system.

According to Rui, a lawyer:

I joined the military life very early.²⁷⁵ At 18 years old I was already a soldier in FAPLA, which was the army of the single party. [...] At 19 I was already an officer. And no officer was outside of the party structure. That could not be imagined. If one happened to be at the battlefield, as a matter of principle one had to be a member of the party. I went to a military unit whose commando was more inside the city because it was part of the justice system: the military court. I was part of the MPLA youth and part of the party itself.
[How did the military recruitment system function?]
There were structures for military recruitment.
[Was recruitment aimed only at young men over 18?]
Many were taken despite being minors, on the basis of their appearance.
[When a young man entered, how many years did he stay in the military life?]
The law established certain terms, I don't remember, they were different for soldiers, sergeants, and officers.²⁷⁶

This legalistic explanation of the system echoes the professional background of the speaker rather than reflecting the reality of conscription as experienced by many young men, particularly the less educated. Former conscripts almost invariably used the words “*raptar*” (seize) or “*apanhar*” (catch) when they spoke of being drafted, a choice of words that suggests the process was arbitrary and violent. One man who considered himself lucky to have escaped described the process as follows:

My name never came up. I wasn't caught in the street as was normal. They would catch a young man and take him to the army by force, but it never happened to me. No one wanted to go to the troops. So, if you didn't want to go freely, and few people wanted to go freely, because people knew that this war was no good, so people didn't want to go and the government just caught them, they had to go. They didn't look at one's age, they looked at one's

²⁷⁵ “The military life” is a direct translation of “*a vida militar*”, an expression commonly used in Angola to denote time spent in the army

²⁷⁶ Interviewee 9, Huambo, May 2008.

height. Even at 15, if you were a good height, you'd go.²⁷⁷

Ordinary soldiers had a still keener sense of the arbitrariness of the system of conscription. According to a rifleman who had served 14 years in the FAPLA: "This law didn't mean very much. If you knew someone who could arrange something you might get out." A captain who had served 11 years in the military added: "Service ended when you were killed or lost an arm or a leg."²⁷⁸ Notwithstanding their comments, both of these men had themselves avoided death or amputation, and were demobilised in terms of the peace agreement in 1989.

Other former soldiers spoke of having received political education while in the army, which in some cases allowed them to regard their time in the military as being for the greater good. Albano, a farmer from the outskirts of Huambo insisted that "I joined the army so that we could remain independent", an interpretation that was apparently linked to his belief that "if it wasn't for the MPLA we wouldn't have become independent. The MPLA has brought us to this time of peace." He recalled that "we received education. Very good education. Everything that we learnt in the troops remains in our minds. We learnt to work together with others, live well with others, remain respectful towards others, work so that our country could remain free and just."²⁷⁹

This positive assessment of the military experience must be put in the context in which it was related. Albano was interviewed in what I have previously referred to as Bairro 1: a resettlement zone where the MPLA had made particularly assiduous

²⁷⁷ Interviewee 19, Huambo, May 2008.

²⁷⁸ Group discussion 125, Chicomba, November 2008.

²⁷⁹ Interviewee 29, Huambo, May 2008.

efforts at politicising the local population. People whose experience since demobilisation was different looked back more sceptically on their time in the armed forces. Lucas, who had served in the FAPLA in the mid-1980s, explained:

I joined the troops because of the war, and I had reached a certain age.
[How old?] I was 15.
[Did you receive any education while in the army?]
There were political chiefs in each battalion so as to have good political and military education. We were taught to live among the people. We were taught: “we are soldiers, we are FAPLA, our mission is to defend our population, to respect the elderly – we are friends. The soldier is the defender of his people.”²⁸⁰

But even if Lucas had been exposed to the same military education as Albano, he took a sceptical view of the MPLA, speaking of “elections that went astray” in 1992, something that must be blamed on “those who counted the votes”. Unlike Albano, who had lived since the end of the war in an intensely politicised community, Lucas had spent his civilian life working as a catechist. As noted in many interviews, people strongly affiliated with one of the churches were best placed to maintain a critical distance from both the rival political movements.

Educated people could sometimes avoid conscription if they were working in key professions. This account by a former schoolteacher illustrates the primacy of the military in the discourses of statehood: teaching is framed as important because it is a “frontline” activity, and teachers lost their exemption as soon as there was a shortage of soldiers.

I joined the troops in 1984 [at age 26]. In 1978 when I left the seminary I joined the education profession. At that time, if you were a teacher you were considered a frontline combatant, and benefited from postponement [of military service]. So in 1978 I became a teacher and at the same time my name

²⁸⁰ Interviewee 121, Chicomba, November 2008.

came up to join the troops, but I didn't enter because I was a teacher. There was an actual decree that governed this, that whoever was a teacher could get a year-on-year postponement, until the age of 35 [after which one was no longer eligible for the military]. I received postponements until 1983, when I was incorporated because [the army] could not get the number of people they wanted. They started sending people with seventh, eighth, ninth grade to the front.²⁸¹

Conscription provided additional opportunities for political education in a society where the penetration of the party into civic life meant such opportunities were already plentiful. Political education within the military seems not always to have been effective on its own; those who gave a purely positive account of their years in the army were those who lived in places where the MPLA continued to control public discourse after the end of the war. Those who were most critical were those whose identification with the church gave them an alternative reference point. Most men had little choice but to resign themselves to the fact of spending years in the ranks of the military. Political education might convince them of the justice of the war the FAPLA were waging, but it could not stop them from recognising the arbitrariness and injustice of the way in which conscription operated.

Movement of people

As already noted, the area within the Central Highlands that was controlled by the MPLA state in the 1970s and 1980s was confined to pockets of territory centred on the towns. The boundaries were never strictly delineated: there were some areas that were notionally under government control but where UNITA soldiers could pass freely at night. In the early 1980s, the South African Defence Force returned to

²⁸¹ Interviewee 22, Huambo, May 2008.

Angola and took control of the extreme south of the country. This renewed South African support enabled UNITA to reorganise its forces, and it began more systematically to attack government-held towns and installations.²⁸² During this time, large numbers of people arrived in government-held centres. According to UN figures, the number of people displaced by the war had reached 500 000 by 1985.²⁸³ Some of this movement was voluntary but the government also employed a strategy of evacuating people from villages that fell on the margins of government influence to locations that were more securely under the control of the government.²⁸⁴ It is not certain exactly when this strategy began to be implemented. Interviews suggested some efforts to move people into government-held territory in the late 1970s, though these efforts appear to have become more systematic after 1980, in response to UNITA's increasing military strength at the time. The government's priorities appeared to be determined by Angola's hierarchical administrative structure of province, *município*, *comuna*: if the government was driven out of a *comuna*, its agents would retreat to the administrative centre of the *município*, and from the *município* to the provincial capital.

Moco, who was part of the provincial MPLA leadership from 1978, plays down the role of the government in moving people during this period:

I wouldn't say there was a very conscious strategy, as there was in the colonial period. [...] The concentration (of people) was spontaneous because people were persecuted to the point of death, and concentrated themselves at points close to cities and towns.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Malaquias 2007:40-41.

²⁸³ UN Economic and Social Council 1987:4.

²⁸⁴ Neto 2001:68.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Moco. The colonial era strategy he mentions is described by Brinkman 2005.

However, the stories quoted in the rest of this chapter indicate that while some people went voluntarily to the cities as Moco suggests, others were brought to the towns by the FAPLA. Some of these people had lived in areas that had been firmly under UNITA control since 1975, while others had been in areas that were contested between the two sides. (At this stage of the war, people would distinguish between the conflict zone and UNITA-held areas in their accounts of the conflict; this changed after 1990, and the UNITA zone became synonymous with the conflict zone, as chapter five will make clear.) The interviews also indicate that class factors affected the way in which people were regarded by the opposing movements, and the way in which they responded to military pressure from the two sides.

Those who spoke of having gone voluntarily did so because going to the town seemed better than life in a conflict zone: this is evident in my interview with Anselmo, who despite having been educated in the MPLA system in the 1970s and 1980s maintained a neutral view of the two main parties. He had made his career in rural development, an experience that apparently shaped his analysis of his own family history, the facts of which – given that he was a child in the 1970s – he must have learnt from his relatives.

At the time of independence my family left the village and we lived in the *mata* under the control of the guerrilla movement, until we left the guerrilla movement in 1979.²⁸⁶ It was a rural economy, so at that time there was not much difficulty in feeding ourselves – not like later. But UNITA didn't have much capacity to control the population. The government troops put a lot of pressure on us. The result was the destruction of the rural zone, and the population became divided: some went to Jamba and others to the cities.

²⁸⁶ “Guerrilla movement” sounds awkward, but is the closest translation of “*guerrilla*” in Portuguese, which refers to a campaign or a movement, as opposed to the English meaning of “guerrilla” as an individual combatant.

[Where one went] was the result of circumstances – through being closer to one side or the other. But at the beginning of the 1980s when the government began to fail in its rural development policies, the guerrillas found it easier to attract people.

...

The zone that was under the influence of the city was the zone of instability. We had to leave secretly, so as not to be intercepted. In 1979 we came to Vila Nova.²⁸⁷ My parents were teachers. They presented themselves to the authorities, said they had abandoned the guerrilla movement, and were integrated into the civil service.²⁸⁸

He attributed this treatment to the fact that his parents, as teachers, had been part of “the rural elite from colonial times”. As Vila Nova came under military pressure, the family moved to Boas Águas, closer to Huambo, and as the war intensified further, they moved to Huambo in 1984.

João, a schoolteacher in Kuito, told a similar story, though suggesting that his status as a state employee made him more vulnerable to capture by UNITA. João had been posted to a school in a *comuna* after independence.

In 1985, we functionaries had to abandon the area and go to where there was protection. But the people stayed there. You know, the people [*povo*] weren't controlled. It doesn't matter whether UNITA appeared or the government. But functionaries, if you stayed you were captured.²⁸⁹

As state employees became concentrated in the provincial capitals, there was no difficulty in finding employment in the new location: “Teachers from *comunas* could be absorbed into the city because teachers were in short supply,” João said. State resources were scarce, and one effect of the war was further to concentrate the presence of the state in urban areas.

²⁸⁷ Present-day Chicala Cholohanga, in Huambo province, 60 kilometres east of the provincial capital.

²⁸⁸ Interviewee 104, Huambo, September 2008.

²⁸⁹ Interviewee 191, Kuito, August 2009.

João's claim that peasants were left alone by the warring parties might have been true in some cases, but is contradicted by numerous accounts from farmers who were instructed to move by the government. But while teachers and other professionals found themselves welcomed and incorporated into state structures, the same was not true for farmers, who in most cases were resettled either on the outskirts of towns – sometimes within established *bairros* – or next to main roads. One of the areas in which I conducted research was a valley some 20 kilometres from the city of Huambo. On the far side of this valley were mountains where UNITA established bases. In the years immediately following independence, this area was under the firm control of neither the MPLA nor UNITA. A chief from the area, who had been a child in the mid-1970s, described the experience of living between two armed forces before the population of his village was moved to a roadside location:

Often when I was a child FAPLA would come to attack, then UNITA would come to attack, killing people, taking away crops, chickens, cattle. FAPLA said “if you stay here there will be contact with UNITA”. FAPLA would say “you are UNITA” and UNITA would say “you are FAPLA”.²⁹⁰

Another man from a nearby village added:

All [the soldiers] robbed, raped, killed – they're soldiers. In 1977 the government withdrew [*recuou*] the people to the road so as to guard the people. [The government] asked for help from the Red Cross: schooling, soap, clothes. The Red Cross was invited by the MPLA. [After the evacuation] the war was out there [*lá fora*], not in the village. The MPLA was in the city, UNITA was in the bush.²⁹¹

Two main points are evident in this last extract. First, the fact that the government

²⁹⁰ Interviewee 39, near Huambo, June 2008.

²⁹¹ Interviewee 38, near Huambo, June 2008.

presented humanitarian aid in such a way that it was associated with the MPLA. In this way people who previously had no political relationship with either side were drawn into a political relationship with the government/MPLA, even if they remained marginal to a state-building process that was concentrated in cities.

The second point concerns the way in which government and popular discourse attributed political meanings to town and countryside: this is a theme that occurs repeatedly in interviews with people from all levels of society and from urban and rural areas. The last sentence recalls the way in which Brinkman, writing about the war between the MPLA and the Portuguese colonial army in eastern Angola in the 1960s, examines the way in which urban and non-urban spaces acquired political meanings, due initially to the urban-centred nature of the colonial state. These meanings acquired new connotations as a result of the MPLA's guerrilla campaign in the countryside, and the colonial government's counter-insurgency strategy that involved concentrating people in protected villages.

The Portuguese used the word *mata* or *mato*, 'bush' in relative terms. Within the context of Angola as a whole, the entire South-East was classified as 'bush', while officials in the region's towns would use the word 'bush' for everything outside the urban sphere. Seen from the village, every place connected with the colonial system was called 'town'.²⁹²

As noted, during the late colonial period that forms the object of Brinkman's study, there was no guerrilla activity in the Central Highlands, and the colonial authorities never used villagisation strategies there. After independence, however, the MPLA state in the Central Highlands came to occupy a position analogous to that of the colonial state, concentrated in the cities, and sought to move farmers to areas where

²⁹² Brinkman 2005:97.

they were unable to supply food to the rural-based guerrilla army: in this case UNITA. In the interview with the villager quoted above, the MPLA is associated with city and UNITA with the bush. The original location of the village, before the removal to the city, was conceived of as an intermediate position between city and bush. As Brinkman's study suggests, these meanings were fluid and relative, depending on the point of view of the speaker. According to a man who had spent most of his life in a village outside Huambo city:

(After 1976) UNITA never entered the village because we weren't very far from the city. There were some attempts to attack – my village suffered an attack once, in 1980 or 1981. Some houses were destroyed, and they took away possessions, but not people.²⁹³

In other words, the speaker here perceived his village as being safely under government control on the basis that it was close to the city. This contrasts with the account of Anselmo quoted earlier: having spent part of his childhood in a UNITA-controlled area, Anselmo believed that the instability he had experienced was the result of being close to the city: "The zone influenced by the city was the zone of instability".²⁹⁴ To both men, the dangerous places were those on the margins of the control of either side.

The political meanings attached to space also became associated with the people living in a particular area. Soldiers in FAPLA had orders to bring to the cities anyone who was found in the bush in the course of their operations.

We'd collect them – it wasn't their fault they had been captured [by UNITA].

²⁹³ Interviewee 44, near Huambo, June 2008.

²⁹⁴ Interviewee 104, Huambo, September 2008.

We'd take them to the base and inform the authorities. Then a vehicle would come to take them to the *município* [the district administrative centre] where the government would give them food and other assistance.²⁹⁵

Another former soldier, asked how soldiers were supposed to identify the enemy in the bush, replied:

Those who are with the MPLA are in the environs of the city – beyond that is the bush, 30 kilometres away – anyone there is the enemy. Even if he doesn't have a gun, he's one of the enemy people. The commander would send these people to the *município*. But if he had a gun he couldn't stay with the people (in the *município*), he might run away. So he would be sent to the province (i.e. the provincial capital). [Those who were left in the *município*] – some of them stayed 30 or only 20 days and then they went back to the bush.²⁹⁶

Armed or unarmed, any person who did not go along with the FAPLA soldiers risked being suspected of active collaboration with UNITA. Another former conscript into FAPLA recalled:

We knew that there were [UNITA] troops among the people. People paid dearly for this. In confrontations no distinction was made. Both UNITA and MPLA troops killed many people. UNITA had bases, but there were moments when it hid itself among the people.

[When FAPLA came to remove people,] whoever stayed behind, wasn't people any more.²⁹⁷ This policy continued until 2002 in the east. If you hid and didn't go, you weren't people any more, you were [one of the] troops.²⁹⁸

Someone who was “*povo*” was liable to capture by either side: war booty rather than a belligerent. Someone who was “*tropa*” was perceived as being more closely integrated into UNITA, even if – as will be discussed in the next chapter – participation in UNITA's army was never voluntary. This categorical distinction

²⁹⁵ Group discussion 125, Chicomba, November 2008.

²⁹⁶ Interviewee 126, Chicomba, November 2008.

²⁹⁷ *Quem ficou, já não era povo.*

²⁹⁸ Interviewee 141, Chicomba, November 2008.

made by the FAPLA soldiers echoes a distinction that was made within UNITA itself, and which will be discussed in the next chapter: the distinction between those individuals who had defined military or civilian roles within UNITA, and the “*povo da UNITA*” who tilled fields in areas under UNITA control and who supplied food to the military bases.

Even if the FAPLA was the main organ of government involved in bringing people into government-controlled areas, its operations in doing so did not always involve violence. This is seen in the recollections of Adriana, who in 1976, aged twelve, had left Kuito with her family as UNITA fled the city ahead of the advancing MPLA and Cuban forces. Her story concerns events in 1979, when she was taken by the FAPLA to a government-controlled *comuna*. Unlike the stories quoted so far, from farmers who were caught between the two armies, her account suggests that she was living in an area where UNITA had established hegemonic control over the population, to the extent that the people living there were fearful of the MPLA. Adriana recalled:

One night, while we were in the *matas*, the elders found out that in that area there were FAPLA troops, MPLA troops. The men said: “generally when the troops find people, the men are killed – so you women stay here”. We went to sleep in front – our fathers and brothers went to another area while we remained. In the morning there was an attack on the base, and the people went fleeing. My mother said: “look, as we’re in this situation let’s not delay, but we must prepare food for the people to take on the journey”. We had cassava, and we started stamping it on the rocks to make flour. I met others who said we mustn’t stay, because the FAPLA were already here in the bush. I grabbed my things and went to look for my mother. But I didn’t get to where I had left my mother. I met troops – the FAPLA. They caught me and took me along. On the way from the village where they caught me to the *comuna* that they had come from, we suffered many attacks. The UNITA troops chased us – all along the way we were attacked. I was well treated [by FAPLA] – they did nothing to me, I did very well. [...] In the *comuna*, I didn’t know anyone there, so I stayed with a family I didn’t know for about six months, until my mother came to fetch me.

[How did you meet this family?]

When I was captured, I was in a group with some other people that included a girl my own age. So when we arrived I stayed with her family. [Some people] knew that the FAPLA soldiers who had captured me had come from that *comuna*. So, when my parents were captured [later, by FAPLA], my mother came looking for me and found me.²⁹⁹

Adriana, who later became a government official and expressed firm loyalty to the MPLA, was nevertheless conscious of the situational nature of political identity during the war. Asked whether her parents had been followers of either party, she replied:

In the conditions in which we were taken, of necessity one had to identify oneself as an adherent of UNITA. [*Laughs*] If you identified yourself the other way you would be dead. As long as we stayed with UNITA, we were UNITA. But when we came back here with the MPLA, we became MPLA.

This theme will be elaborated further in the next section of this chapter.

Control and identity

The remarks by former soldiers quoted above indicate how, in the terms of government discourse, anyone living outside of a government-controlled area became an “enemy person” or a “UNITA person”, and the remarks by Adriana who was “captured” by the FAPLA suggest that people had to express an identification with the political movement in whose territory they were living. Examining how people recollect the years of war in Angola, we may discern a number of different but overlapping discourses on the relationship between territorial control and political identity. The government, particularly the military, labelled people on the basis of

²⁹⁹ Interviewee 180, Kuito, August 2009.

their location in a way that silenced the possibility of political choice by the person in question. According to Moco:

During that period of almost 30 years, people lost the notion of being independent persons. They would say, “I’m UNITA” or “I’m MPLA”. This has been disappearing since 2002, but there was a time when it was like that. I, Marcolino Moco, was either MPLA or UNITA – there was no middle way. People became possessions. During the time of the single party, people were all with the government.³⁰⁰

When asked what it meant to be “with the government” (*do governo*) Moco explained:

To obey all the government’s instructions, collaborate with the government – though it wasn’t really the government, it was the MPLA. The MPLA was the government, it was the same thing, a fusion.

Moco’s definition captures one of the contradictions in how political identity was constituted: in one sense it was assigned on the basis of where one was; in another sense, it had to be demonstrated by obeying and “collaborating”. Space became associated with political identity, since within any one political space there was no possibility of expressing any political choice. According to a farmer on the outskirts of Huambo, who had been a teenage girl at the time of independence:

In those areas [away from the city] UNITA controlled its people. Here in the government area, the government also controlled its people. Each party in the area where it was, controlled its people.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Interview with Moco, Huambo, August 2008.

³⁰¹ Interviewee 30, Huambo, May 2008. I have translated “*controlar*” in Portuguese as “control” for the sake of convenience, but the two words do not have identical meanings. If the primary meaning of “control” in English is concerned with commanding or managing something, in Portuguese “*controlar*” more often has to do with watching over someone or something.

Yet people also spoke of having chosen to identify with one or the other party, even if they acknowledged their lack of choice, and that political identity could change. A man who was a student at a seminary near Huambo during the independence years, when asked about which party he supported at that time, replied:

This matter has to be personal – but for me [...] there weren't yet very clear (policy) programmes. If I had been more mature, I would have depended on ideology. As seminarians, we were not allowed to choose parties. No one bothered us. But from 1976 we identified ourselves with the MPLA, because in the city there was only the MPLA. I was of the age for military service but I only went to the army in 1984 because I had been at the seminary. I spent eleven years in the army and all this time I identified with the MPLA party.³⁰²

People who passed from one zone of control to the other, like Adriana quoted in the previous section, had a keener sense of how political control required that they assume one or another political identity. This appears in the narrative of a man who as a child travelled by train from Luena to Huambo with his mother and siblings, during the first months of MPLA control in Huambo:

We lived constantly in a situation of war that is very hard to understand. For instance, when we left Luena for Huambo my mother had to identify with two movements – because from Luena to Kachiungo the train came under the control of UNITA, and from Kachiungo to here (Huambo) the train came under the control of the MPLA. [...] People were obliged to say they were with one or the other to preserve their lives. [...] We were three children and [my mother] had to protect us. Honestly, in those days it was very complicated to say 'I'm from one side or the other'.³⁰³

Another man, who was working as a driver in Kuito at the time of independence, said he had no particular political affiliation but emphasised how one's affiliation was assumed on the basis of having or not having a UNITA membership card:

³⁰² Interviewee 21, Huambo, May 2008.

³⁰³ Interviewee 9, Huambo, May 2008.

Whichever (party) was here you needed to have their card to save your life. When the MPLA came in, whoever was caught with a UNITA card was in trouble – they would be considered a sympathiser. Like trees bending in the wind – the people had to lean whichever way.³⁰⁴

In a situation of close political control, how one presented oneself was not a matter of choice. Yet some were able to exercise political choices, as long as this was kept secret: this fact is made most clearly evident by the existence of people who worked actively but secretly for UNITA within communities that were under the control of the government, including Huambo. In August 1980, the Huambo provincial court sentenced nine people to death and a further seven to prison terms ranging from two to twenty years for having belonged to “clandestine networks of bombers linked to UNITA puppet groups” who attempted to plant bombs on at least three occasions during 1979.³⁰⁵ According to the state newspaper, *Jornal de Angola*, most of them had first joined UNITA in Huambo in 1974; some had left with Savimbi in 1976 and later returned to the city. Colino Ricardo began in 1978 “to make trips to the city of Huambo where he managed to contact former UNITA sympathisers and people with families or friends in the bush, to recruit them to the bombers’ network”. Francisco Chitombi had also left Huambo with UNITA in 1976, but later returned and joined an urban guerrilla cell. Francisco Chiungo had been in UNITA from 1974, but remained in Huambo in 1976 and even joined the ODP. Having been “captured” by UNITA in 1978, he returned to the city to recruit secretly for the underground movement. Chitombi and Chiungo were caught when a detonator that they were carrying

³⁰⁴ Interviewee 194, Kuito, August 2009. It is significant that the UNITA card, not an MPLA card, is the determinant of identity here. The MPLA’s policy on mass membership changed over the years (see Vidal 2008:128-131), but association with the MPLA was not necessarily judged on the basis of having a card, rather with attendance at party events.

³⁰⁵ *Jornal de Angola*, 17 August 1980:1.

exploded as they made their way to plant a bomb at the railway station in Huambo.³⁰⁶ Others used their own or their employers' vehicles to take necessities to the guerrillas. One man was said to have used the petrol station where he worked "as a transit centre for goods sent to the *matas*". UNITA's delegation in Lisbon issued a statement in which it accepted responsibility for the bombings.³⁰⁷

People who were involved in the UNITA underground justify their reasons for doing so in the same terms in which UNITA sought to mobilise people in the region (described in the previous and following chapters). According to a chief in an urban *bairro* of Huambo, aged over 70 at the time of the interview:

As a *soba*, despite being a UNITA adherent, I decided to stay here [in the city] with UNITA in my heart to encourage the people. I worked secretly, enlightening the people that they must wait for UNITA. We took pencils, educational material and books [to people in the bush] – a long way, sometimes as far as Bailundo [100 km away].³⁰⁸

The following interviewee was in her sixties when interviewed, and active in LIMA, UNITA's structure for women:

When UNITA withdrew to the bush I stayed in the city. In 1976 I was in Benguela, and when I returned to Huambo I no longer found UNITA there. I had chosen UNITA out of my own preference, because of UNITA's policies. Savimbi struggled for the Angolan people. We always stayed with UNITA.³⁰⁹ UNITA leaders would appear secretly and give us courage. We sent flour, cooking oil, salt, schoolbooks to the bush. This was prohibited, and [the government] security caught a lot of people. In 1978 we saw people being shot for this, at the *palácio* [the government building in Huambo].

³⁰⁶ *Jornal de Angola*, 23 August 1980:4.

³⁰⁷ *The Times* (London), 30 July 1980. Excerpted in *Facts and Reports* 10 (O-P), 8 August 1980. Holland Committee on Southern Africa.

³⁰⁸ Interviewee 86, Huambo, July 2008.

³⁰⁹ She seems to mean "with UNITA" in the political sense, not physically with UNITA.

Pamphlets used to come from Jamba. When Savimbi had a rally in the bush people went, recorded it and brought the cassettes home. Everything that he did in the bush, we knew about.³¹⁰

The secrecy was such that UNITA involvement was sometimes unknown even by close family members. Patrícia, a schoolteacher, recalled:

Some UNITA people [in the bush] had families in the city and would hide with them. People knew they were defending a cause [...] My brother was working secretly for UNITA – we didn't know [...] When UNITA came out of the bush in 1992 my mother put on her old t-shirt and *pano* (wrap) from LIMA [which she had last worn in 1975].³¹¹

What these accounts illustrate is that political identity was not entirely a function of political control. Some people could make choices about the party they supported, even if they could not show their support publicly.³¹² During my interviews I routinely asked what it meant to be “a government person” or “a UNITA person”.³¹³ The responses broke down into two main groups, with people either saying that this depended on the party that one supported, or on the party under whose control one lived. But a few interviewees pointed to the essential ambiguity in how party identity was determined. According to Bento, a catechist who had grown up during the war:

There were two ways. One would have to speak well of the party and receive them. But some people don't change, for many motives. Also, because of [professional] function – not being MPLA could be very difficult. [But] in the war, on the basis of where one lived, one was considered to be MPLA or UNITA. This ended in 1992, when people could choose – but then UNITA

³¹⁰ Interviewee 82, Huambo, July 2008.

³¹¹ Interviewee 108, Luanda, October 2008.

³¹² All of the accounts that I heard of such dissidence were from the towns. It is possible that the social environment of the village ruled out the possibility of working for the party that was not in control: see the comments in the methodology section of the introductory chapter about the restrictions on public discourse in rural Angola.

³¹³ *Pessoa do governo / pessoa da UNITA.*

destroyed it.³¹⁴

Bento's own life was an illustration of the disjuncture between political identity as assigned and political identity as lived. He appeared to have pro-UNITA sympathies, linked to the importance that he attached to his southern identity and his Christian faith. However, he had lived exclusively in government-controlled areas during the war, and had served in the FAA.³¹⁵ In his description of processes of political identification, "speaking well" and "receiving" suggest the necessity of demonstrating, like the woman on her train journey in 1975, that one was associated with the party that happened to be in power.

The actual nature of the association between person and party, and how those in power required it to be demonstrated, are not obvious. At the very least, we need to disaggregate the ideas of adherence and support and to understand them in the context of wartime Angola. "Support" in a non-democratic situation does not have its liberal connotations of free choice and moral identification: it becomes as much a matter of performance as of belief.³¹⁶ Kalyvas warns against "[c]onceptualizing support in attitudinal terms", a practice that ignores the fact that the preferences expressed by people at a particular moment may be conditioned by the need to survive under threat from the movement that is dominant at the time and wrongly implies instead "that people actually 'choose' what faction to support based on its political and social profile or ideology – as if they were voting in elections". As will be discussed in the

³¹⁴ Interviewee 141, Luanda, July 2009.

³¹⁵ At the time of the interview he was living in Luanda, active as a catechist of the Catholic Church, and mixing in predominantly Catholic and Ovimbundu social networks.

³¹⁶ Kalyvas 2006:92-94.

next chapter, loyalty to UNITA in the rural areas that it controlled was judged in terms of how people delivered the food and labour that UNITA needed, yet to deliver these goods was obligatory: “support” was understood not to be a sentiment, but a behaviour that did not necessarily coincide with subjective belief. In government-controlled areas, similarly, people’s political identity was judged on behaviours such as working for the civil service, or attending MPLA events that were all but obligatory: “obeying” and “collaborating” as Moco expressed it. When interviewees were asked specifically about their “support” for one or other movement, it was in these terms that they understood the question and offered answers.

However, when interviewees spoke generally about their and others’ relationships with political movements (without being prompted by a question about “support”), the words they usually chose were *aderir* (“adhere”, or more colloquially, “join”) and *aderência* (“adherence”). These suggest a relationship with a movement not necessarily defined either by agreement with its aims, or by active participation; and a relationship that was not necessarily voluntary. In its broadest definition, “adherence” meant nothing more than accepting the authority of the movement that was in charge.

Bento’s assertion that “some people don’t change” speaks of the possibility of retaining political beliefs contrary to the party that was dominant in an area: most notably, this applied to the members of the UNITA underground networks in Huambo. The official discourse in government-held areas nevertheless categorised people primarily on the basis of where they were: “government people” or “UNITA people”. People’s actual beliefs, if they were not pro-MPLA, could not be expressed and therefore could not be quantified, although people could fall under suspicion of

belonging to UNITA if they did not take part in MPLA activities.

At the same time, as we have seen, the government discourse allowed for the possibility of bringing people (*povo*) who had formerly been with UNITA into government controlled areas, on the assumption that they had been with UNITA involuntarily, and that simply the change of location could transform them into “*povo do governo*” within the terms of the government’s discourse. Ambivalence towards these people remained, however: anyone who chose to remain in a rural area that was notionally under UNITA control was suspected of being actively part of UNITA, and government officers attached particular suspicion to young men.

Concerning the strategy of moving people into government-controlled areas, several possible motives suggest themselves. As discussed in the introduction, some writers have suggested that the possession of people has an intrinsic symbolic worth.³¹⁷ The research for this thesis, while not contradicting these writers’ analysis, suggests that the state’s primary reason for moving people was crudely instrumental: to cut off support for the guerrillas by emptying the countryside. Beyond this, though, the movement of people was also the first condition for efforts to forge a political relationship between the MPLA party-state and people who previously had been beyond the reach of the state. The first part of this consisted in the provision of humanitarian assistance to people who arrived in the towns, even if much of the aid in fact came from foreign donors working under the auspices of the MPLA state. As later chapters will discuss, this theme of provision recurred throughout the war and after. The second part of this political relationship was defined in terms of security: in

³¹⁷ Brinkman 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2005.

the capacity of a political movement to protect the people of a particular area against an enemy. This, however, needed more than guns: it also required the creation of a perception of fear, which in turn required the construction of an enemy in the eyes of people who, left alone, would have maintained an equal and sceptical distance from both movements. This chapter has discussed the importance of UNITA as an alien enemy in the MPLA's discourses of legitimation: the following chapter will show how the converse was equally true.

Conclusion

The discourses that defined the relationship between political control and political identity in Angola persisted and developed throughout the war and after. This will be discussed further in subsequent chapters of this thesis. As will become evident in the next chapter, the discourses on control and identity in areas under the control of UNITA were similar to those in government-controlled areas. Those in power labelled people as belonging to the MPLA or to UNITA largely on the basis of their physical location. Many people in government-controlled areas came to see themselves as belonging to the government or the MPLA, whether or not they were actively involved in the party and its associated organisations. How this belonging was expressed varied according to the social class of the person concerned. Educated urban people usually spoke in terms of the party having earned the people's allegiance through its developmental efforts, though some members of this group were also able to declare themselves autonomous of either movement. People in peasant farming communities, many of whom had had the experience of having moved or of having

been moved from one area of control to another, spoke almost exclusively of “belonging” to a political movement in the sense of possession. Neither the city dwellers nor the peasant communities, as long as they were under MPLA control, had the option of expressing support for any political movement other than the MPLA.

Both UNITA and the MPLA recognised the political importance of gaining control of urban centres. In a situation where the resources of the state inherited from colonial rule were thinly spread over most of the national territory and concentrated in the towns, taking control of these towns was the only effective way for a movement to assert its legitimacy as a viable successor to the colonial government. Cities had a symbolic as well as a strategic importance. The regional patterns of political mobilisation after April 1974, and the military situation at the time of independence, meant that UNITA rather than the MPLA initially took control of the Central Highlands. UNITA presented itself as a nationalist movement that made claims to statehood, and attempted to reinforce these claims through the perpetuation of certain state functions left behind by the colonial government. However, UNITA’s attempts at state building in the cities were minimal, due largely to the fact that its presence in urban areas lasted barely three months after independence, at a time of continuing military upheaval throughout the country. In the end, it was not able to survive the loss of South African military support.

UNITA’s efforts at state building were enough to impress some people of its capacity to rule, although, as will be discussed in the following chapter, it was UNITA’s powers of social organisation at Jamba that made the most enduring impression on people who spent time there. In the cities, it was the MPLA that better convinced

people of its capability as a state builder. This was due to a number of different factors, including the secure military control of the city that the MPLA enjoyed between 1976 and 1992, and the fact that a large part of the MPLA's support within Huambo came from people who worked in the administration or in trade. At the same time, the departure of the Portuguese officials from these same sectors meant that the MPLA had little choice but to exercise state control in order to keep basic services running; this helped to promote the intermingling of party and state affairs in a way that complemented the MPLA's ideological commitment to single-party rule and state-led development. The MPLA's own priorities, as well as its historical origins as an urban-based movement and the subsequent circumstances of war following UNITA's return to arms in 1981 served to fix the urban character of the state that the MPLA created.

The overlapping of the functions of party and state was complemented by an official party-state discourse that presented the MPLA as the unique representative of the Angolan people. This discourse was promulgated through the involvement of the party's mass organisations in many areas of civic life, as well as through the military conscription of young men, even if the arbitrariness of the conscription system also bred scepticism towards the government's legitimacy. Although war had constrained the MPLA's efforts at maintaining the physical apparatus of statehood, the war provided further opportunity for the MPLA to present itself as the representative and defender of the nation, against an enemy that was portrayed as a foreign aggressor.

The urban character of the MPLA state, together with the party's own efforts to identify itself with the state and the nation, led to an association in popular discourse

between the party, the state and urban spaces. At the same time, government discourse (and, as I shall consider in the next chapter, official UNITA discourse as well) developed a clearly delineated sense of people belonging to one or the other movement, becoming “our people” or “enemy people” largely on the basis of where they were located. These identities came to be expressed by people themselves, though this had as much to do with survival as with political conviction. Within the cities, people regarded by the authorities as “government people” could work secretly for UNITA, while in the countryside – as the next chapter will make clear – peasant farmers would accept the authority of either movement while regarding both with scepticism.

These notions of the interrelationship between ideas and practices of statehood, and between political control, spatial control and political identity, constitute themes that will be traced in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. The next chapter will consider UNITA’s efforts to legitimate itself through the discourse and practices of state building in the rural areas that it dominated between 1976 and 1992, and at Jamba.

Chapter 4: UNITA's retreat, guerrilla war and Jamba: 1976-1991

This chapter is concerned with UNITA and the people under its control, beginning with UNITA's departure from the city of Huambo and other Central Highlands towns in February 1976, and covering the period until the Bicesse accords of 1991. The chapter will examine UNITA's way of operating both as a guerrilla movement in the bush of the Central Highlands and at Jamba in south-eastern Angola, the place that served as the movement's stable base for more than a decade. The focus will be on the relationship between three broad categories of people: the UNITA leadership, those people who had accompanied UNITA's columns that left the towns, and the peasant farmers who lived in the zones over which UNITA established or attempted to establish its control. It will relate the accounts of UNITA's practices and political discourses to the formation of identities based around the movement, looking in particular at the way in which it deployed discourses of statehood and the kind of state that these discourses evoked. The previous chapter showed how MPLA government discourse created a dichotomy of "government people" versus "UNITA people". This chapter will disaggregate the idea of "UNITA people", showing how UNITA discourses created different categories of identity within the areas it controlled, people being classified in terms of their relationship to the movement.

The chapter is arranged partly thematically and partly chronologically. It starts with UNITA's immediate response to being expelled from the cities of the Central Highlands, and the months that followed during which UNITA had no fixed base, and Savimbi and his closest followers remained on the move. The second section deals with UNITA's relationship with farming communities in the Central Highlands, and

the third with life at Jamba. Military conscription, and UNITA's relationship with its foreign allies form short sections before the conclusion.

Departure from Huambo and the “long march”

By January 1976, Savimbi had already decided that retreat from the towns that UNITA had occupied was inevitable. He called a conference in Bié province where he informed UNITA officials that they were “rowing against the tide” in trying to resist the MPLA. UNITA was also aware of the proposed Clark Amendment to the United States Arms Export Control Act, which became law later that year and which banned US assistance to non-state armed groups operating in other countries.³¹⁸ South Africa, meanwhile, had ordered the withdrawal of its troops on 14 January, and they retreated to within 50 miles of the border with Namibia. The last troops would later leave Angola on 27 March.³¹⁹ A man who had been part of Savimbi's proto-government in Huambo recalled Savimbi saying:

We have lost the war – we will go to the guerrilla war. We don't know how to choose our friends. The United States is not our friend. If we'd chosen the

³¹⁸ Chiwale 2008:215-216. BJ Vorster's conditional promise made to Savimbi on 10 November 1975 (Spies 1989:149), that South African forces would remain in Angola as long as it was equal to the task of keeping the Cuban forces at bay, had been apparently eclipsed by the military progress made by the MPLA and its Cuban allies. The strength of UNITA's own forces at this point is indicated by Spies's account of the UNITA troops trained by South African instructors at Capolo, near Kuito, between September and November: “By the time the South Africans evacuated the base on 8 November 1975, the following UNITA force had been trained: three infantry battalions each comprising three companies, three 81mm mortar platoons, three 60mm mortar platoons, three 4.5 inch mortar platoons, three 50 inch Browning machine gun platoons and crew for eleven 106mm canons. Also, 60 UNITA soldiers had been trained as a leading group and another 60 as instructors. [...] They took over training after 8 November 1975.”

³¹⁹ Gleijeses 2002:341-343.

Russians we'd be in Luanda by now.³²⁰

According to Samuel Chiwale, who was later to become UNITA's military commander in chief:

We started to abandon the cities in the middle of January [1976], not simultaneously, but according to the enemy's progress. Nevertheless, after the fall of the cities of Bié (12 February) and Huambo (8 February), the abandonment was total: we had lost "our" capital.³²¹

As noted in the previous chapter, some 5,000 UNITA troops left Huambo as the MPLA and Cuban forces approached early on 9 February 1976, and retreated east to Vila Nova. According to Bridgland:

On 10 February Savimbi and eight other UNITA leaders signed an order for the movement's followers to leave the towns to return to the bush and begin a new guerrilla war – this time not against the Portuguese, but against Cuba and the Soviet Union.³²²

As I shall discuss later, UNITA did not maintain a clear categorical distinction between people serving in civilian and military roles, but interviews make clear that the majority of those who withdrew from the cities with UNITA were not armed. This exodus was confirmed by interviewees who stayed behind in Huambo, as well as those who left with UNITA. According to an interviewee whose political sympathies were pro-MPLA:

³²⁰ Interviewee 149, Lisbon, May 2009.

³²¹ Chiwale 2008:217. I quote extensively from Chiwale's book in this chapter, but am aware of the need to read his account sceptically. I accept his accounts of dates, the movement of people, and the logic of UNITA strategy as generally reliable. In cases where Bridgland – who quotes other UNITA officials – and Chiwale write about the same events, they concur on the broad facts. On matters such as the principles that UNITA supposedly upheld or the details of its interaction with the farming population, I regard Chiwale's account – just as I regard interviews with UNITA officials on such matters – as an indication of how UNITA liked to see itself rather than a record of how it was.

³²² Bridgland 1986:174.

This is normally the strategy when troops leave: they have to take the public with them for defence. We saw when the government was coming, UNITA said “come with us because they are from the other side, they are the enemy” – this is always a strategy.

[Did some people go voluntarily?]

Yes, there were some among the population. And others who went even though they tried to resist going. Some could leave more easily than others – it depended where they were in relation to the advancing [MPLA and Cuban] army. It can be overwhelming, a military clash – so without knowing UNITA’s programme, one might find oneself on one side or the other.³²³

This recollection of a “clash”, however, is inconsistent with most accounts, which indicate that UNITA’s forces had left the city before the Cubans and the MPLA arrived. Pastor David, when asked whether the Cubans’ entry into Huambo had been accompanied by much violence, replied:

In the city, no, because they didn’t find many people. The large majority fled. But those whom they [the MPLA and the Cubans] found on the road died, those who were trying to flee died. But here in the city, no. Only a few people stayed behind – including myself.

[Why did you stay?] I wasn’t involved in any movement – I had no reason to leave. I was free to stay here. Those who fled with UNITA, went voluntarily, because they were very frightened – they always fled because of fear. But those who were linked to [UNITA] as militants, they were obliged to go with them.³²⁴

Simão, a former UNITA lieutenant, presented what appears to have been the account of events that was current among the UNITA soldiers in the bush during the years following the departure from Huambo. This version of events emphasises the Cuban role in such a way as to construe UNITA’s adversary as foreign, but it does not speak of UNITA being expelled from Huambo violently.

There were no confrontations but there was a lack of understanding between presidents [Neto and Savimbi]. Agostinho Neto went to get the Cubans – the

³²³ Interviewee 22, Huambo, May 2008.

³²⁴ Interviewee 19, Huambo, May 2008.

Alvor accord never happened. In 1976 the Cubans were the greater force and we had to leave for the bush. Savimbi said each officer must spread out through the territory.³²⁵

Certain interviewees' recollection of a "clash" therefore seems to derive from the presence of soldiers and the fear of military action rather than from an actual event.

An MPLA sympathiser interviewed in Huambo emphasised how UNITA used coercion in keeping people under its control, but also acknowledged a degree of political support for UNITA and emphasised the dilemma of people who might not have had strong political sympathies with either party caught between the armed forces of the two sides. He also testifies to the tendency of the MPLA authorities to identify anyone outside the city limits as being attached to UNITA, as noted in the previous chapter:

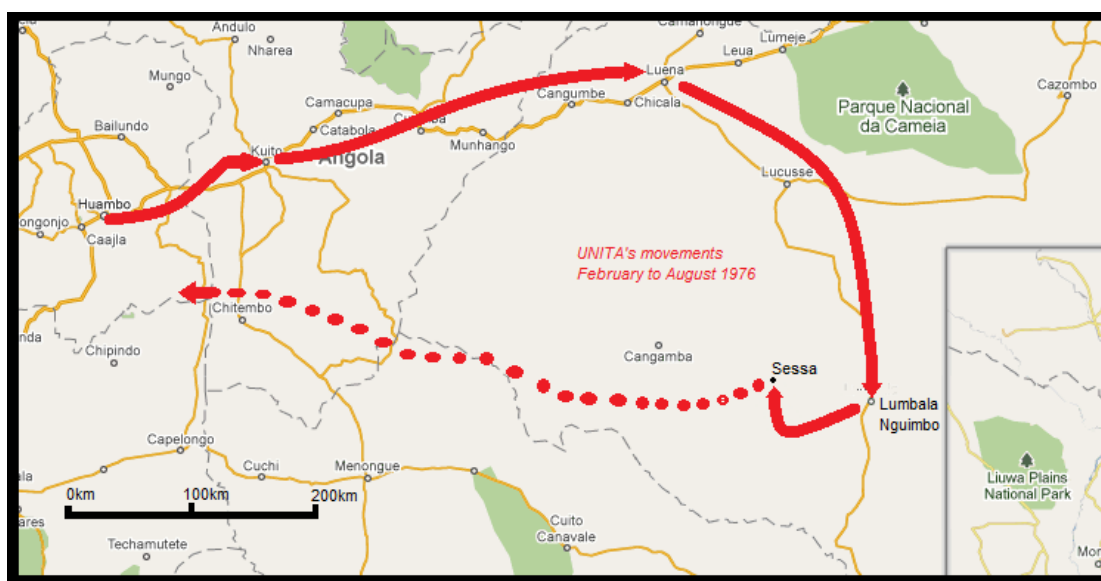
When the MPLA caught UNITA here, UNITA withdrew, and many intellectuals went with UNITA. Those who stayed were those like me who were in the seminary. And then the war started, because [...] UNITA took, invited everyone to leave the cities and go to the bush, to the villages. [...] They said there would be a fierce war here in the city. So these people went to the villages and UNITA stayed between the villages and the city, so the people couldn't go back to the city – so they started to withdraw [further into the countryside]. [To go back] would be difficult because it was as though the city was sealed. The [UNITA] security forces got to work – everyone they took, they considered a soldier as they couldn't go back. If they went back they would be considered UNITA and could be killed.³²⁶

For UNITA's leadership, the question was where to go, a question that had to be considered both in terms of the military situation and of the organisation's vision of its future. With the MPLA and the Cubans advancing from the west and north-west, the options seemed to be the east (Moxico province) and the south-east (Cuando

³²⁵ Interviewee 72, Caála, July 2008.

³²⁶ Interviewee 3, Huambo, May 2008.

Cubango). Savimbi and Miguel Nzau Puna respectively took charge of these two regions.³²⁷ Savimbi, still in Bié following his departure from Huambo, “ordered his soldiers to disperse to their old forest bases and advised UNITA’s civilian followers to return to their relations in villages. As far as possible, the enemy must be left with empty towns to conquer.”³²⁸



Chiwale accompanied Savimbi as he fled to Luena, the capital of Moxico province and the major town of eastern Angola. However, they had barely arrived before the town came under attack by the MPLA and Cuban forces, and the group made for Lumbala Nguimbo. They remained there for one month, during which time the UNITA officers rallied soldiers in the area who had joined UNITA during the anti-colonial war. While based temporarily in Lumbala Nguimbo, Savimbi fled to Kinshasa and to Lusaka to inform President Mobutu Sese Seko and President Kenneth Kaunda of his intention to continue fighting. A Cuban air attack on Lumbala Nguimbo on 13 March prompted a rapid evacuation. A column of 4 000 soldiers and

³²⁷ Chiwale 2008:217. Marcum 1978:195-6 suggests that UNITA had by 1970 already had some success at building political structures among peasant communities in the east, though only in the relatively small areas that it had secured.

³²⁸ Bridgland 1986:195. Bridgland’s account of this period of UNITA’s history is attributed to interviews that he conducted with Savimbi and with Nzau Puna.

civilians left at dawn the following day, 14 March 1976, reaching Sessa, a former colonial forestry settlement, that evening.³²⁹ From here, Savimbi despatched troops to establish bases in various locations further west.

He told them to try and paralyse the roads with ambushes. But, above all, they had to show the population that UNITA was capable of launching guerrilla warfare again.³³⁰

By 24 March, Savimbi was ready to move on, having assembled a column of about 1 000 to accompany him. “Some 600 were guerrillas and the rest civilians, including women, children, several African Protestant pastors and three black Catholic priests.”³³¹ Thus began a five-month journey that Savimbi used to demonstrate his commitment to ideas about guerrilla warfare derived from Mao Tse Tung. Chiwale’s memoir contributes to the mythologising of that period:

The tough journey to flee from the tentacles of our executioners came to be known in the history of our party as the Long March, because of the similarity to that of Mao Tse Tung and his companions.³³²

A former member of Savimbi’s government took a more cynical view of this label, suggesting that the “march” was the result of Savimbi’s determination to pursue a particular kind of struggle:

UNITA called it “the great march”, but that was more a question of marketing. Savimbi had no need to do that. He could have gone to Namibia. But then he wouldn’t have been able to go back to the guerrilla war.³³³

The purpose of the march seems to have been to allow Savimbi to remain inside

³²⁹ Bridgland 1986:196-198; Chiwale 2008:217-219. Bridgland refers to Luena and Lumbala Nguimbo by their colonial names, respectively Luso and Gago Coutinho.

³³⁰ Bridgland 1986:200.

³³¹ Bridgland 1986:201.

³³² Chiwale 2008:221.

³³³ Interviewee 149, Lisbon, May 2009.

Angola, but without the MPLA and Cubans knowing his whereabouts at any moment. Chiwale, moreover, even if he honoured the memory of the “Long March”, nevertheless contrasts this with the fact that many of the people with him – including Chiwale himself – were urban people with urban expectations and priorities.

Sessa [...] made us aware in a very dramatic way that once again we had to embrace the sacrifices of guerrilla warfare. One of the events that contributed to this was the burning of vehicles.

At the parade early in the morning, Dr Savimbi ordered that all the vehicles be burnt; the order dropped on us like a bomb: those present looked at one another, incredulous; someone might have thought we were not in command of our mental faculties. Honestly, it cost me immensely to throw my BMW and a Citroen, both almost new, onto the fire.

The people, still perplexed, commented on what happened, which led Dr Savimbi to say: “As from now we are going to exchange conventional war for guerrilla war, otherwise we will be wiped out by the machine of those who are pursuing us. If anyone thinks we are going to need these cars, this is completely mistaken; a guerrilla’s car is his feet.”³³⁴

According to Bridgland:

Though Savimbi had urged people to abandon most of their possessions, many clung to their best town clothes, platform-heeled shoes so beloved by Africans at that time, and items like pillows. The first few days of the march over apparently endless forested hills were exhausting. Soon, some of the marchers wanted to abandon everything and Savimbi lectured them on the need to choose essentials and retain them.³³⁵

Chiwale recalls:

Truly, there were difficult moments, particularly for the young people from the cities and the high school students; it had never entered their heads that one day they would be in a guerrilla war. I heard some of them commenting: “This is what happens when you follow these old men! Now what will become of our lives? How are we going to do this by going on foot, then without planes to bring us food and things for first aid and personal hygiene, how will

³³⁴ Chiwale 2008:221.

³³⁵ Bridgland 1986:201.

we survive?”³³⁶

These observations speak not only of the unfitness of the urban recruits for guerrilla war, but also of a profound difference in class background and outlook between the peasants who were necessary to Savimbi’s vision of struggle, and the urban people who were recruited to wage this struggle. As I shall discuss later in this chapter, the presence of mission-educated professionals was as much a part of the practicalities of Savimbi’s plan as the presence of peasant farmers, and UNITA’s politics during the civil war are best understood in terms of UNITA’s efforts to forge a perception of common interest between these two groups.

UNITA’s strategies for setting up new political structures that defined its relationship with rural communities will be discussed later in this chapter. During those first few months of the “long march”, however, UNITA benefited from the structures that had been set up during the war against the Portuguese: Chiwale calls it “a matter of returning to the bases of the past, created in the anti-colonial war.”³³⁷ Another former UNITA official recalled life at the bases:

It wasn’t difficult to survive. We had a line of “zero bases” which had been set up during the armed struggle against the Portuguese army. Every day, each person worked three hours in agriculture, including the officials like me. Not Savimbi and Chiwale³³⁸ – but everyone else. Another source was the Cuban columns – we ambushed them for food. But still, it was tough. When I went to the guerrilla war I weighed 80 kilograms – when I left, I weighed 50 kilos.³³⁹

This man added that the bases remained in place while Savimbi was being pursued, and were sufficiently well concealed to avoid attack until 1979 when SWAPO

³³⁶ Chiwale 2008:222.

³³⁷ Chiwale 2008:218.

³³⁸ In other words, all but the most senior officials.

³³⁹ Interviewee 149, Lisbon, May 2009.

guerrillas revealed the location of the bases to the Cuban forces. However, the meandering route taken by Savimbi's column during the five months of the march meant that weeks could go by without the marching party having contact with a base. Chiwale and Bridgland both write of the group surviving by gathering seeds of limited nutritional value, and mushrooms which sometimes proved to be poisonous, in addition to occasional hunting.³⁴⁰ At a time when the party was weak from hunger and from a difficult crossing of the Cuito River in cold weather, both accounts concur that they were able to recover at villages where the population was sympathetic to UNITA. Bridgland, whose account of the journey is based on interviews with Savimbi and his former aide, Tito Chingungi, writes that "[t]he villagers did not have big stocks of food, but they gave maize, cassava and antelope meat."³⁴¹ Chiwale recalls that in one location, the villagers "had neither enough maize nor cassava for themselves, let alone for us, who were around 300 people. We had no alternative but to buy cassava husks."³⁴² Chiwale reports more generosity at another village:

[The chief] was one of our allies, living almost in the beard of the enemy: a few metres from the chief's seat there was an encampment of Cubans and FAPLA, which was protecting the road. [...] "I cannot convey my happiness and satisfaction to have you here," he said, smiling. "So I invite you to spend the night with us; have no fear, for these people are trustworthy. No one will go and report you." [...]

They served us plates of cassava porridge and sweet potato with goat and pork. [...] What at first appeared to be simply an opportunity to satisfy our hunger turned into a feast.³⁴³

Chiwale never speaks of having to use threats or coercion to obtain food, and Bridgland's informants seem to have been similarly silent on this matter. These accounts must be read sceptically as a record of events, but are important as an

³⁴⁰ Bridgland 1986:213; Chiwale 2008:230.

³⁴¹ Bridgland 1986:214.

³⁴² Chiwale 2008:231.

³⁴³ Chiwale 2008:232.

indication of UNITA officials' own discourse on the nature of their movement: they wanted to see themselves as being able to depend on the voluntary support of villagers. What is clear, however, is that at least some rural chiefs were prepared to offer shelter to UNITA at considerable risk to themselves and to their communities. Remarks made by Chingungi in his interviews with Bridgland give an indication of how UNITA perceived its relationship with the peasants at the time, and of Savimbi's role in mobilising support:

Tito Chingungi recalled it this way: "The President lectured that UNITA had no prospect of success unless the people were with the movement. They [the villagers] would ask awkward questions and there was no way those questions could be avoided. They would ask, for example, whether the war would finish soon or whether it would be long. "The President said it would be long. There would be no quick victory. He told the chief that one day the enemy would discover that his village was helping UNITA and it would be attacked. The village should start building up food stocks in the bush for the day came that they needed to flee."³⁴⁴

As the later sections of this chapter will show, UNITA's encouragement of war preparedness and its efforts to present itself role as a defender against an external threat remained an important element in its interaction with the rural population throughout the war.

After enemy attacks and fear of discovery had necessitated repeated changes of plan during the course of the march, Savimbi decided to head for Cuelei, a UNITA base 150 kilometres south-east of Huambo that had been established during the anti-colonial war, and which was still under the command of UNITA officers. He arrived there on 28 August 1976 after a circuitous journey from Luena. Only 79 of his original column remained with him, the rest having died or been diverted into other

³⁴⁴ Bridgland 1986:216.

columns or ordered to remain in villages because of illness along the way.³⁴⁵ Cuelel became Savimbi's base for the ensuing months, and it was there that he outlined the strategies that would determine UNITA's programme for the years that followed.

These strategies would have to accommodate both the need to operate in an environment conducive for recruitment – what Savimbi called “the theory of big numbers” – and the need for a central political base that was safe from attack by the MPLA government. There was no one place that met both these requirements: the former could best be found in central Angola, while the latter could be created only in the under-populated lands of the south-east, as far as possible from Luanda. Savimbi explained the “theory of big numbers” to Chiwale as follows:

The struggle against Russian-Cuban expansion will be long; it will take time and many of these young people who are here will die, or in the best hypothesis, become disabled. Thus, we have to choose a region capable of renewing regularly our hatchery [*viveiro*] of guerrillas so that we never run short of them. At the moment there are no better zones than Bié, Huambo, Benguela, Huíla and Cuanza Sul.³⁴⁶

In contrast to the requirements of “big numbers”, the political base needed to be in as remote as possible a location.

At first, we did not have an exact idea of the place, given the size of the country, but we could outline its profile: first of all it had to be in an under-populated region with few ways of communication, full of mountains and marshes to make the enemy operations difficult. [...] We all agreed that it would have to be in the Cuvango region, which adjoins the Zambian border and reaches the Benguela Railway in the north.³⁴⁷

According to General Nunda – a UNITA captain at the time – UNITA initially

³⁴⁵ Bridgland 1986:218.

³⁴⁶ Chiwale 2008:243-244.

³⁴⁷ Chiwale 2008:253.

believed it could maintain a secure base in the Central Highlands, founded on a consensual relationship with the local population.

As the Central Highlands were the most populated part of the country, and almost self-sufficient in food, until 1977 life was almost normal in the parts of the Central Highlands controlled by UNITA. Schools continued functioning, health posts continued functioning, with the secret system to buy medicines in the towns. It only changed in 1977, when the MPLA launched an operation to occupy areas controlled by UNITA in the Central Highlands. In the Huambo region this began on 7 July 77. Burn the bases, burn the villages – it was an operation to destabilise the areas controlled by UNITA. UNITA [...] needed support bases further from Huambo. It was decided to put them in Cuando Cubango. At that point there were already links with the South Africans. Also, the government's actions in the bush almost uprooted the capacity to mobilise. Those professionals who had left the cities and the missions to go to the UNITA-controlled areas followed the leadership to where they were – in Cuando Cubango, and each time further south in Cuando Cubango.³⁴⁸

Also during this period at Cuevei during 1977, UNITA took steps to bring more professional people into its ranks. Chiwale writes that after outlining the theory of big numbers, Savimbi told him:

“[W]e will need a structure capable of looking after people's education and health. Unfortunately, we lack religious entities and experienced and capable teachers.”

Later, one afternoon, Dr Savimbi called me and said: “We must have here the best teachers from [the missions], as well as the priests and pastors of those missions, otherwise we're not going to go anywhere. Only they will manage to transmit, with wisdom, the knowledge that the youth need for their intellectual, cultural and military training.”

“I agree completely with you, sir,” I replied, “but we don't have these people here”.

“If we don't have them, then we must go to fetch them wherever they may be and place them in the bush to work for our revolution.”

It was not difficult to put this plan into practice. It was ordered that Captain Geraldo Sachipengo Nunda would go to these locations to inform [*sensibilizar*] the elites linked to education, to health and to the church, and convince them to join us.

The plan produced results: a while later we received, with open arms, the most noted pastors from Central Angola with their families [...] and some

³⁴⁸ Interview with Nunda, Luanda, September 2009. Nunda later became a senior UNITA general, before joining the government forces after the Bicesse accord. He is currently deputy commander-in-chief of the FAA.

[Catholic] priests. There was the same success with teachers [...] and in the area of health we had the same good fortune.³⁴⁹

If Chiwale describes this process as voluntary, Nunda himself – speaking in 2009, two decades after he broke from Savimbi – makes clear that the teachers were tricked.

We knew that Agostinho Neto had invited the religious leaders who were at Dôndi – the leaders of the Evangelical Church were there, at Dôndi. The director of schools was there too. The Dôndi hospital continued to function, and the seminary and the church structures. Dr Savimbi knew that this posed a danger because, through these religious leaders, the MPLA would manage to mobilise the church elites at Dôndi, and also the political elite of that area. The party-political positions [between UNITA and MPLA] were still not very far apart. People who were mobilised by UNITA would be UNITA, those mobilised by the MPLA would be MPLA. [Savimbi] sent me to Dôndi to find a way of fetching the leaders. He didn't say to me "you will fetch the leaders for them never to return". I went to tell the leaders that Dr Savimbi was in an area not far away, just so you can go and meet him, three days away on foot. But go and talk to him, and afterwards I will bring you back. When we arrived there [where Savimbi was] he told me, "go and fetch their wives – you will find a way of bringing their families here". Eventually I understood that I hadn't fetched the pastors for them to return afterwards. [*Laughs.*] They stayed there, and I went to the mission to fetch the families and bring them to the position where the UNITA leadership was. [...] [Savimbi] told the old men to write letters to the families. We took the letters and delivered them to the mamas.³⁵⁰

Nunda explained the need for professionals in UNITA's ranks in terms of his own understanding of Mao, and the need to provide services as a way of cementing support: "The Chinese revolution taught that a guerrilla movement that wants to take power has to create support bases." This contrasted with the role of the peasantry, which "was more the population where soldiers were recruited, the population that organised food for the troops, and also carried weapons for the troops." Again, we see here the importance to UNITA of having an intellectual elite under its control. The same thinking underlay the capture and abduction of professional people to Jamba in the early 1980s, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

³⁴⁹ Chiwale 2008:244.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Nunda, Luanda, September 2009.

The MPLA's push against UNITA's rural bases was still four months away when UNITA held its Fourth Congress in March 1977 in Benda, in Huambo province. In terms of organisation, the congress appears to have endorsed the plan that Savimbi had earlier explained to Chiwale: "As it was a given that the war would be long, organisational structures were conceived that would be able to sustain it through an efficient system of health, so that children, and not only children, would have access to basic literacy and to health." War here is presented as the rationale for establishing social service structures. As was the case with the MPLA state, the fact of war was one of the factors that determined the nature of the state that UNITA imagined and attempted to make a reality. On the ideological level the congress affirmed UNITA's commitment to opposing "Soviet penetration" in Angola and in southern Africa more widely.³⁵¹ Also during 1977, Savimbi and other officials travelled to various locations in Huambo and Bié provinces holding rallies whose purpose was, in Chiwale's words, "to mobilise the masses and their elites,"³⁵² a phrasing which, again, encapsulates the duality of UNITA's strategy between popular and elite mobilisation. During 1978 Savimbi and Chiwale travelled to South Africa to ask for "further weapons and the possibility of instructors for the guerrillas", and met the then foreign minister, Pik Botha, and head of the South African Defence Force, Magnus Malan.³⁵³

The next two sections of this chapter deal, respectively, with UNITA's efforts to establish political relationships with rural communities in the Central Highlands, and with the society that UNITA created and governed at Jamba. These involved two

³⁵¹ Chiwale 2008:246.

³⁵² Chiwale 2008:246.

³⁵³ Chiwale 2008: 251.

different sets of political strategies, because, as outlined earlier in this chapter, each of these environments formed a necessary part of UNITA's wider strategy for the country. They are dealt with in that order because UNITA operated in rural areas for at least five years before Jamba was established, but the sections of the chapter must not be seen as chronological, since UNITA continued to operate in the Central Highlands – and indeed among peasant communities elsewhere in Angola – at the same time as in Jamba.³⁵⁴

Before proceeding, it is worth considering some of the terminology associated with UNITA and the spaces it occupied. This terminology is often layered with overlapping and sometimes contradictory meanings, and the slippages between these meanings are themselves revealing. Jamba itself was the main concentration of population within an area that was sometimes referred to as the “consolidated lands”: the part of Angola where UNITA's military presence was unchallenged. The term “Jamba” was sometimes used more broadly to refer to the consolidated lands. “Consolidated” was, however, a relative term, and people would sometimes talk of pockets of land in the Central Highlands as being “consolidated”, meaning that they were relatively safe from FAPLA incursions. The word “*mata*” (bush) also takes on layers of political meaning in connection with UNITA and Jamba. The association of the bush with UNITA, which as discussed in the previous chapter was evident in government discourse, appeared also in UNITA's own discourse. “*Mata*” became synonymous with the area in which UNITA operated more or less freely. A person

³⁵⁴ The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in the Central Highlands, and the conclusions drawn from it cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the whole of Angola. The information on Jamba is drawn partly from my own interviews with people who spent time there, and partly from published work, particularly Bridgland 1986 and Chiwale 2008.

who emphasised Jamba's sophistication and urbanness could nevertheless say: "I was born in the *mata* – at Jamba".³⁵⁵

At the same time, people would talk about "the interior" when referring to those parts of the country where UNITA's control was not consolidated, but where it had bases.³⁵⁶

This opposition between Jamba and "interior", as well as the extension of the term "*mata*" to include Jamba, served to construct the idea of Jamba as a provisional capital, and a peripheral location in a country where UNITA could not gain a hold of the heartland. The ways in which people speak about Jamba reflect the tensions between its status as a capital and as an outpost in a region that remained foreign to the great majority of people who inhabited it. A man who had migrated to UNITA-controlled territory with his family as a young child, and who had grown up in Jamba, nevertheless expressed the feeling that he would one day return to his birthplace: "Jamba was seen as a temporary land. We kept the dream that the enemy that had occupied our lands would withdraw."³⁵⁷

Bush war in the Central Highlands

This section will consider the ways in which UNITA sought to establish a political relationship with the people of the Central Highlands between 1976 and the 1992 elections. The section draws on interviews with people who occupied different places

³⁵⁵ Interviewee 65, Caála, July 2008.

³⁵⁶ Interviewees 62, 74 and 75, Caála, June and July 2008.

³⁵⁷ Interviewee 166, Chicomba, August 2009.

in the UNITA hierarchy, from the leadership to peasant farmers who lived under UNITA control. The purpose of examining accounts by people from across the hierarchy is to explain both the ideological and strategic approach adopted by the UNITA leadership, and how the ideas and practices associated with UNITA were accepted and understood by the population at large. As noted in the previous chapter, some communities experienced UNITA only as a violent and predatory force. The purpose of the present chapter is not to cast doubt upon these accounts, but rather to examine UNITA's ways of operating in those areas where the military situation was sufficiently stable to enable it to try to engage in a peaceful manner with the local population.

All of the accounts indicate that the core element of UNITA's presence in a rural district comprised bases that had a military character but which also were central to UNITA's attempts to provide services, particularly health and education, to villages within the area of influence of the base. The interviews sometimes pointed to contradictory interpretations of the role of military and civilian members of UNITA, and of the villagers who lived under in areas controlled by UNITA. These apparent contradictions, as I will discuss later, are significant as an indicator of ways in which the categories of "military" and "civilian" were understood, as well as the ways in which UNITA viewed its relationship with the people it controlled, and how they came to see themselves in relation to UNITA.

Estêvão, a farmer, declared himself to have been "captured" by UNITA initially, but soon became integrated into UNITA's political and economic structures and was appointed as a "director" of a village, continuing to live in the village but serving as

the point of contact between his fellow villagers and the UNITA officials from the nearby base. When interviewed in 2008 he continued privately to express strong loyalty to UNITA, though he believed that it would not be safe to make his continued support for UNITA publicly known.

From 1975 to 1979 I was with the government. From 1979 to 1991 I was placed in a village after they [UNITA] captured me and made me go to the bush. I was director of a village. UNITA chose men who had vision. There were between one and three directors controlling each village. The leaders lived in bases and the population lived in the villages. When they [the leadership] came from the bases to the villages, they would contact the director [of the village]. They would ask, for example, “were there MPLA troops here?” And they would make a report. Only soldiers lived at the base – but that included the wives of soldiers. It was rare for a soldier to have a woman in the village. If a woman stayed outside the base, she could talk [to the enemy].³⁵⁸

Estêvão added that there were no UNITA structures in the village apart from the directors, like himself. The directors liaised with the traditional authorities, but “the orders came from the party”. The essential point here is that villagers were militarily useful, in this instance as sources of information, but they were separate from UNITA, which was conceived of essentially as a military structure.

Costa had joined UNITA’s army “from my own convictions” in 1975, aged 20. He remained with UNITA until the end of the war in 2002, when he went to one of the quartering areas established in terms of the Luena peace accord. When interviewed in 2008 he was spending much of his time at the local UNITA office in a town in Huambo province and considered himself a party activist. Costa explained the composition and functions of the UNITA bases as follows:

³⁵⁸ Interviewee 60, Huambo, June 2008. In this extract I have translated “*mulher*” variously as “wife” and as “woman” as seemed appropriate in English, though the same word was used in Portuguese.

At the base there were no civilians – the party secretariat, all of them were soldiers. They were there to organise the masses, to explain the cause – why we were here to defend Angolans. There were between 800 and 1 000 people at each base. As well as the base there was [military] protection to allow the people to be able to work in peace. There were military patrols – there were fronts where between five and ten people were stationed.

There was a consolidated area and non-consolidated areas, with the front line in between them. There were various bases in a consolidated area. A consolidated base and others on the periphery. A consolidated base didn't stay in a single place. It moved around – but not very much, since the area was consolidated: only when there was a government offensive. The base had to move three or four times a year. The people [the peasant farmers] didn't move much: there were attempts to capture people but our troops defended them.³⁵⁹

Costa gives an idea of the mobile nature of the bush bases, although other interviewees suggest that the degree of mobility varied greatly from one region of Angola to another. This mobility was in contrast to the more permanent settlements at Jamba that will be discussed later in this chapter. Also important is his reference to the merging of political and military functions within the base: the political functionaries were also soldiers. Given Costa's ongoing unequivocal support for UNITA at the time of the interview, it is likely that his account contains elements of UNITA's official discourses. Two elements are most apparent. First, as discussed in the previous chapter, UNITA portrayed its role as defending the people and defending the peace. Second, the interview suggests that UNITA knew that political education was necessary if people were to be convinced of the justice of UNITA's cause. The content of this education will be discussed later in this chapter.

³⁵⁹ Interviewee 63, Caála, June 2008. As discussed above, “consolidated” is relative. In this case it refers not to the Jamba area but to a part of the Central Highlands that was relatively safe for UNITA.

Services

We have seen how Savimbi and other leaders believed that providing services – or, at least, causing UNITA to be associated with the provision of services – was essential in establishing a political relationship with people. Interviewees who had lived under UNITA control before 1990 mostly recalled that UNITA either provided or attempted to provide basic social services, principally health and education, to people in villages as a central element of its vision of the political relationship that it sought with the people. Estêvão, the former village “director”, described the relationship between a base and the surrounding villages as follows:

Teachers and nurses [...] lived at the bases and left the bases to help the people [*populações*] in the villages. Medicine was free and pupils didn't have to pay for classes. There was one teacher in a normal village, four in a bigger village. Some had been trained in the bush, others in colonial times. This is why teaching in the bush was different from in the city. UNITA had more teachers from colonial times. When the Portuguese left UNITA already had teachers, who were obliged to go to the bush. There were no salaries, just exchange – there was no money. They would receive food or salt.³⁶⁰

Also interesting here is the suggestion that UNITA's employment of teachers trained in colonial times was testimony to its effectiveness. Even in the bush, appeals to legitimacy could be made in terms of UNITA's ability to mimic the colonial state. Little distinction was made between military and social service functions within UNITA. The more important distinction appears to have been between the people who lived at the base and who had arrived there from the towns along with UNITA's columns, and the villagers who were originally from the area.

UNITA's discourse distinguished between two categories of people, distinguished by

³⁶⁰ Interviewee 60, Huambo, June 2008.

where they lived and by the nature of their relationship to UNITA: the people of the villages, and the people at the base. This was noted earlier in Nunda's distinction between the roles of professionals and those of the peasantry within UNITA. One woman who had left Huambo in 1976 and spent the following years on the move with UNITA drew a distinction between the term "militarised people" [*povo militarizado*], meaning those, including herself, who were associated with the base, and "*povo da UNITA*" who were "the found people" [*povo encontrado*], that is, the people living in the area before the arrival of UNITA.³⁶¹ This second category became "UNITA people" simply through being in an area controlled by UNITA, the same basis of categorisation that appeared in government discourses, as noted in the previous chapter. The population of the base was dominated by people who had left Huambo or other towns of the Central Highlands in 1976. People from the villages would go to live at the base only if they had been recruited into the army, or, more unusually, if they had acquired the skills necessary to join the ranks of UNITA professionals.

In addition to the fields worked by peasant farmers surrounding the base, some bases also had collective fields, which were cultivated by people who lived at the base. The practice described above by the official who had been in the bush in the early days of the war whereby UNITA soldiers and functionaries themselves grew food, continued even in those areas where the main source of food was local peasant farmers. Amélia, who spent three weeks as a captive at a UNITA base near Bailundo in 1984, said the farmers outside the base cultivated the collective fields, and these fields were then abandoned when the population of the base moved on to another location.

Everyone had the right to receive food from [the collective fields]. Everyone

³⁶¹ Interviewee 69, Caála, July 2008.

received the same quantity. A commander or official from UNITA would call the people to receive. A pregnant woman would get an extra ration. What interrupted the system of food supply was the war. If you were concerned with having breakfast, lunch and dinner sometimes that wasn't possible.³⁶²

But even if the people of the base produced some of their own food, the organisation of food for the base was nevertheless the main material basis of the distinction between the two categories of people: the people outside the base produced and donated food, while the people inside the base produced some food but also consumed food produced by others. Extracting food from the farmers was both a practical task and a political one for UNITA, since UNITA officials had to convince people that it was in their own interests to give up part of their harvest.

Former UNITA central committee member Horácio Junjuvili, when asked how UNITA persuaded people to give produce to the soldiers, explicitly evoked UNITA's structure that linked security, administration and politics.

In the *mata* UNITA had a tripartite structure: Army, administration, and party. The army made war, protected the population. The administration dealt with agriculture, stock-rearing, health and education. Other professionals were in the party to mobilise, encourage, recruit personnel. That was the structure in the interior. South of Menongue you would find another structure, because there everything depended on Jamba. I was north of Menongue, and didn't depend much on Jamba. I only received medicines, seeds, arms and uniforms. But there were others [still further from Jamba] who had to survive on their own initiative. The survival would be easier with a better relationship with the people. If you mistreat the people, the people go away. And also, UNITA's discipline was very strict. One had to respect the people and their goods. [...] A village might have a field of cassava or whatever – if you destroy this field and the people flee, you eat cassava one day and then the animals destroy the rest. Better that you maintain relations with the people because they will look after what they have. When you arrive ask, and they give. It's true that when UNITA began to grow it no longer had enough professionals to be allocated everywhere. And in this case there was violence. But between UNITA and the MPLA it was the MPLA that destroyed more villages.³⁶³

³⁶² Interviewee 88, Luanda, July 2008.

³⁶³ Interview with Junjuvili, Luanda, July 2009.

The logistics of extracting food was one of the tasks of people at the base, in co-operation with designated individuals in the village. According to a woman, born about 1950, who was with UNITA throughout the civil war:

I was responsible for organising food, in the fields, with people who cultivated. I arranged food for the troops. The responsibility of each farmer was to deliver x kilograms [the x varied from time to time and place to place]. I lived in a military base. My husband was the secretary of the organisation.³⁶⁴

Another former UNITA soldier, born about 1960, gave the following account of the relationship between UNITA and farmers:

There were bases from which people went out to do work missions. Both soldiers and civilians lived there. The people (*povo*) were out there [outside the base]. Food appeared in abundance. People cultivated – other goods came for free, in the name of UNITA. UNITA always depended on its own efforts. The peasants lived in peace through their own efforts. The peasants lived in good legality. The troops ate well through the efforts of the party. In the villages there were *sobas*, and the peasants were organised. The relationships [between UNITA and the *sobas*] were all-embracing, revolutionary, tangible. There were never any problems between UNITA and the *sobas* because UNITA defended what belonged to Angola. There was never any ill-feeling.³⁶⁵

This last interview presents a further example of the official UNITA discourse concerning its relationship with peasant farmers in the areas of UNITA influence.

This discourse marks the differentiation that has already noted, between people inside and outside the base. But it simultaneously conflates the interests of the peasant farmers and of UNITA, and partially erases the role of the farmers' labour, which is subsumed under the "own efforts" of UNITA: food simply "appeared", abundantly. It also suggests a seamless relationship between a moral order that existed before the

³⁶⁴ Interviewee 73, Caála, July 2008.

³⁶⁵ Interviewee 67, Caála, July 2008.

arrival of UNITA, under the authority of the *sobas*, and a moral order that incorporated UNITA. The choice of the word “legality” to denote this order is clearly an idiosyncratic usage, but it echoes a comment by another former UNITA soldier: “The order of the bush was better than the order of the city – people had order because people ate well.”³⁶⁶ Both these instances link the availability of food to the maintenance of social order.

In addition, the official UNITA discourse claimed an active role for UNITA in the process of agricultural production in the form of teaching agriculture. Junjuvili described the system as follows:

There were people who offered food [to UNITA], but there was also organisation. The so-called branches or UNITA committees were organised. All the villages had committees, and one of the tasks of the committees was to collect food that would stay there to give to whoever passed by. Whoever passed by would go to the committee and would eat – committees produced, they created production centres where there were ploughs and animals to pull them. In 1982 I was appointed commander of Region 63, north of Menongue, and we turned that area into the biggest maize producer in all of Huambo, Cuando Cubango and Bié: no one produced more than we did. [...] UNITA introduced hybrid seeds from South Africa. Good seeds.³⁶⁷

Those who fought in UNITA’s army echoed this idea that UNITA needed to intervene technically, rather than just take an existing surplus. According to Costa:

[UNITA] had an economic base to sustain the troops, to feed them. UNITA organised the peasants to cultivate. This helped UNITA in its great battles. All the population wanted to join us, to be part of us. There was education so that the people wouldn’t be hungry. It needed to be explained how to cultivate – that was the policy.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Interviewee 61, Caála, July 2008.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Junjuvili, Luanda, July 2009.

³⁶⁸ Interviewee 63, Caála, June 2008.

In a similar way, Simão, the former lieutenant, insisted that “UNITA offered [the peasant communities] services in terms of education, health and teaching agriculture”.³⁶⁹

This creation – or imagining – of a role for UNITA in agricultural production hides the fact that the peasant farmers had been self-sufficient for food before UNITA arrived, and that in their relationship with UNITA, they almost certainly gave more in material terms than they ever received. The “organisation” of agriculture described by the UNITA loyalists was above all a matter of extracting. There was little that a movement like UNITA could do in terms of providing basic foodstuffs. In favourable circumstances it could (and, as we shall see, sometimes did) try to supply manufactured items such as clothing, soap and salt, which had to come from the cities or from the coast, but this was not always possible.

Similarly, the political and service structures of which UNITA officials spoke so proudly were not consistently present in the areas where UNITA operated. This is evident in the account of a woman, born in 1957, of how her rural home area in Bailundo district fell under UNITA control soon after independence. Significantly, she speaks of UNITA above all as a military organisation.

The government hadn't yet arrived there. There was only one party, UNITA. We worked in the fields. We had lots of food but we lacked soap and salt. And clothes. There was no school, nor a hospital. When people were sick, they would be cured with herbal remedies.

[Were the UNITA people soldiers or civilians?]

They were just soldiers – and the actual people, who were us.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ Interviewee 72, Caála, July 2008.

³⁷⁰ Interviewee 17, Huambo, May 2008.

Another woman, born about 1940, had previously lived in a village some 30 kilometres from Huambo from which the government tried to evacuate people to the city as part of its counter-insurgency measures of the early 1980s. She and her husband, however, resisted the government's evacuation attempts, and moved into the Sambulundo region, where FAPLA never gained control. Her account illustrates that in an area that was on the edges of UNITA's secure zone of control, the farmers had little to gain materially from UNITA's presence.

After 1984 the government wanted to take the people from my village to the city of Huambo. I wanted to go with my husband [and stay with UNITA]. The government took the people because they were supporting UNITA. People didn't like being with UNITA because they had neither salt nor clothing. But they gave food – voluntarily. During the time we were with UNITA, we were always on the move. When the government caught us, we would burn our houses. When the government attacked, we would keep [carry away] part of our food. Then we would come back if the government had gone away. The government took food, cattle, clothes, chickens, whatever they could find. We could spend two years in a place, and we would grow crops. Then, when [FAPLA] came, we would burn the houses.³⁷¹

Pedro, a catechist, was captured by UNITA in 1978 and spent the years from 1979 to 1990 working for the Catholic Church in UNITA-controlled territory. He spoke of his experiences under UNITA in a way that indicates that the relationships between UNITA and the people in the villages were not as consensual as the UNITA loyalists portrayed:

No one was allowed to leave. [...] There was food, but almost nothing for the prisoners. Those people who had fields would sometimes give us something. The soldiers would ask for food from the natives.³⁷² They didn't threaten

³⁷¹ Interviewee 54, near Huambo, June 2008. Compare also the remarks in the previous chapter by interviewees 38 and 39, which suggest that villagers in the contested areas experienced both armies as violent and predatory, and experienced no attempts at political incorporation by either side.

³⁷² *Nativos*, in other words the local indigenous population.

them. The population gave it. When the soldiers captured cattle on this side³⁷³ they would take them back and sell them to the people. They would sell cattle and buy honey and rice, if the people were growing rice. There was no money – just barter.³⁷⁴ They would also sell soap, if they captured soap. Later I had a field, a small one because I was a prisoner, and I didn't have to give food to UNITA.

When UNITA entered an area it mobilised the population: “We have come not to retreat, but to save you from the hands of the Cubans and the MPLA. You can't go away. We have a lot of troops to confront the Cubans.” The people were frightened. Some went to the government. Others stayed in the bush. The population was divided.

At the bases there were only soldiers. The population lived in the *bairros*.³⁷⁵ In the beginning UNITA already had teachers and nurses but when there were no medicines they would arrange traditional medicine. As for schools, it was difficult, but there were schools, but not all the time. Later there were schools, only for the soldiers' children, and the teachers were soldiers. A teacher would go to a village and say study, study, then at age 15 or 16 they would be captured to the bases to become soldiers [...]. UNITA's policy was to mobilise people by saying: “If I come to power it will be better than with the MPLA. I will take you away from the slavery of the Cubans. The people accepted this because they were not very wise. Now we are seeing that that was not the case. If the people had known this, they would not have accepted UNITA. No one could have known anything. The three movements said different things and no one knew which was better. We just accepted. If [in a UNITA area] one said “I'm going to the MPLA” you'd be in prison. You had to keep your mouth shut. If you said you were going to the MPLA you could be killed.

[Was there a justice system?]

There was a system but it was complicated. Sometimes someone would say “this man wanted to go to the MPLA” or accuse someone of having salt.³⁷⁶ You would be put in prison where you would die.³⁷⁷

The relationship described here is both more distant and more reliant on coercion than the kind of relationships described by interviewees who remained loyal to UNITA.

³⁷³ Meaning “the government-controlled area”.

³⁷⁴ He is using “buy” and “sell” loosely here, to mean barter.

³⁷⁵ *Bairro* is here used in its less common meaning as a rural village rather than a peri-urban neighbourhood.

³⁷⁶ Possession of salt in a UNITA area led to the suspicion that the person had been in contact with the MPLA, since salt had to come from the coast, which was government-controlled. There were also accounts from government-controlled areas that anyone caught carrying large quantities of salt would be suspected of planning to deliver this salt to UNITA in the bush.

³⁷⁷ Interviewee 128, Chicomba, November 2008. Other interviews described the UNITA “prisons” as pits: see chapter five.

Pedro portrays the system of food provision as still consensual, but as a system of barter rather than the kind of social contract between UNITA and the peasants that was described by other interviewees. With regard to the people in and around the base, the category distinction that he makes is between “soldiers” at the base and “the population” in the villages. This suggests that in his experience, the base did indeed house only soldiers, or that if teachers and medical personnel were based there, Pedro saw their function as primarily military. His account of UNITA’s political discourse, about defending Angolans against the foreign threat of the Cubans, concurs with the account given by the other interviewees. He is nevertheless sceptical about UNITA’s powers of persuasion, noting that some people from the villages chose to leave the UNITA areas and go to the government-held towns, and that UNITA relied on force and threat to prevent them from leaving.

Jaka Jamba, a founder member of UNITA and currently a senior parliamentarian, acknowledged that many peasants for reasons of self-preservation accepted the authority of whichever movement was in command at the time, though he believes some had more lasting convictions:

When [UNITA] arrived in Bailundo there were already ladies who had UNITA wraps that they had kept hidden away. When the MPLA came, they had MPLA uniforms. There is a proverb in Umbundu: “*Omunu iyo tu tula. Omunu enda tu tuika.*” Whoever arrives, we help them to put down their basket. Whoever goes away, we help them to put their basket on their head. This means: we stay where we are, and whoever is in power is the one we listen to. But even so, there is still a base, a firmer core, which normally identifies either with the one who is coming, or the one who is going away.³⁷⁸

These two kinds of relationship with UNITA – compliance on the one hand, active identification on the other – can both be discerned in the interviews with people who

³⁷⁸ Interview with Jaka Jamba, Luanda, September 2009.

had lived under UNITA control. I would, however, qualify Jaka Jamba's characterisation in two important ways.

The first concerns the questions of which people were the active UNITA supporters, and which people merely accepted UNITA's presence. Among those I interviewed, those who spoke of always having supported UNITA's ideas and practices had, without exception, fulfilled some kind of institutional function within UNITA, whether as soldiers, village political officials or traditional leaders. (The former soldiers and officials were among those who had remained with UNITA until the last days of the war, and had continued to identify themselves with UNITA branches in the towns after the end of the war. The *sobas* were living in villages, and had been cut off from government patronage as a result of their continuing UNITA affiliation.) Peasant farmers who had no other status would sometimes indicate acceptance of UNITA's authority, but never active approval of UNITA.

The second point is that a dichotomy of the kind outlined by Jaka Jamba – active support versus passive acceptance – does not take account of UNITA's efforts to shape the perceptions of the people under its control. If people were reluctant to leave UNITA-controlled areas, this was not because they had any particular preference for UNITA's policies, but rather because their time spent under the control of UNITA had made them fearful of what they might encounter were they to fall under the control of the government.³⁷⁹ Such processes of politicisation are discussed next.

³⁷⁹ See for example the account of interviewee 180, quoted in the previous chapter.

Political education at the bases

In comparing the accounts of different interviewees who gave more or less positive accounts of UNITA's presence, it becomes apparent how UNITA's preferred discourse served to conceal the fact that as far as food supply was concerned, the relationship between UNITA and farmers was to the benefit of the UNITA professionals and soldiers at the base, and offered nothing to the farmers in the villages. UNITA therefore needed to convince peasants that they had something to gain by remaining in the areas controlled by UNITA. Most interviewees who remembered life at the UNITA bases recalled an element of political education. The former lieutenant spoke of "political experts tasked with organising the people to understand the guerrilla war".³⁸⁰ An important part of this meant promoting a perception of fear and threat, so as to convince people that they needed UNITA as a defender.

When we were in the bush, the villages were dispersed. If FAPLA was coming from one side, the people could leave on the other side. The people had places to which they could flee. FAPLA would try to infiltrate and capture people. The (UNITA) troops came from the base to instruct the people: FAPLA's coming, you must leave. When the enemy was coming, they always said we must go, to escape the bullets.³⁸¹

There was also an ideological element to this education, which was supported by a reading of history that emphasised UNITA's anti-colonial role and its claims to represent the interests of the majority of Angolans. The following two extracts are, respectively, from Estêvão, the former village organiser, and from a former soldier. They illustrate two key themes in UNITA's political narratives: first, that Angola's natural resources were a national patrimony that UNITA sought to distribute fairly,

³⁸⁰ Interviewee 72, Caála, July 2008.

³⁸¹ Interviewee 61, Caála, June 2008.

and, second, that UNITA stood for a participatory democracy.

The leaders explained in such a way that the people would accept to stay in the bush. It was necessary to nourish the word of the party.³⁸² They said they were fighting to liberate the black people of Angola with a different politics.³⁸³ Angola has resources that need to be shared – this is what UNITA said. The money that belongs to the majority can't be kept by the minority. The people accepted this, and this is why they agreed to stay in the bush, because they believed that one day UNITA would be in power.³⁸⁴

We had civic education. We learnt about the history of Angola: the arrival of the Portuguese, the enslavement of the people. In 1975 the MPLA refused elections because UNITA had the advantage over the MPLA. Agostinho Neto wasn't confident that he would win, and because UNITA always wanted democracy, Neto went to get the Cubans to chase the people out of the city and into the bush. UNITA went to the bush so as to have another strategy to struggle for democracy.³⁸⁵

General Nunda, on the other hand, identifies two distinct stages, between the anti-Cuban rhetoric and the pro-democracy rhetoric:

Explaining that the MPLA was with the Cubans, and that the Cubans were foreigners who did not want well for the Angolans: that was the politics that UNITA used more or less until 1985 when the possibility of support from the United States came along, that was when we got into the idea of fighting for democracy – raising the banner that was unanimously defended by the US, that of democracy, struggling against the communist states, the one-party

³⁸² *Alimentar a palavra do partido.*

³⁸³ *Política* can mean “politics” but also “policy”.

³⁸⁴ Interviewee 60, Caála, June 2008. The unequal distribution of the benefits from Angola's natural resources is a theme upon which UNITA officials have become particularly vocal since the end of the civil war, which have coincided with increased foreign investment in the Angolan oil industry and a soaring global oil price between 2003 and 2007. Scepticism is therefore necessary towards interviews conducted in 2008 with UNITA activists who suggest that resource distribution was always part of UNITA's programme; we may see some attempts here to claim a retrospective legitimacy for UNITA's activity over the decades by asserting a continuity in the movement's doctrine from the 1970s until the present. On the other hand, Bridgland (1986:313) witnesses an example of UNITA propaganda that suggests that the looting of Angola's natural resources by foreigners in collaboration with the MPLA was part of the movement's discourse as early as 1981.

³⁸⁵ Interviewee 64, Caála, June 2008. This and similar recollections erase the fact of UNITA's co-operation with Portugal in *Operação Madeira*, and that its actions against the colonial state amounted to little more than the sabotage of the Benguela Railway while most of its military efforts before independence were directed against the MPLA. See Marcum 1978:191-197, 211.

states.³⁸⁶

The secretaries and organisers – the villagers who served as the contact between UNITA and the villages – were the point at which the welfare and political functions of UNITA merged.

The secretaries organised food and civic and political education. The message (of this education) was to defend the national cause against our enemy, the Cubans. The intention was not to fight black against black, but to drive out the Cubans so that the indigenous Angolans could retake power.³⁸⁷

At the same time, as we have seen, the professionals were closely associated with the military, and political education included narratives of fear of an outside enemy. The women's structure within UNITA, *Liga da Mulher Angolana* (LIMA), similarly assumed political, humanitarian and military functions. A LIMA member recalled that “from the age of 18 I worked for LIMA – our tasks were looking after children, instructing activists, arranging food and clothes”.³⁸⁸ Even if women were not deployed in military combat, they were integrated into military logistics. A former UNITA military officer described how “when the troops went to the fronts, the mamas carried flour, carried [military] materiel to them”.³⁸⁹

As noted earlier, Savimbi saw the bases in the Central Highlands as a way of building links with a civilian population that could be relied on to support UNITA by providing food and as a pool for military recruitment. By maintaining these political links while also maintaining a distinction between the core UNITA population of the base, and the peasants who farmed within the base's zone of influence, it was possible for UNITA to keep mobile military units that could move relatively quickly when

³⁸⁶ Interview with Nunda, Luanda, September 2009.

³⁸⁷ Interviewee 63, Caála, June 2008.

³⁸⁸ Interviewee 74, Caála, July 2008.

³⁸⁹ Interviewee 72, Caála, July 2008.

under threat by FAPLA, and still be sure of finding people who would provide them with food, whether the soldiers returned to the base they had vacated, or moved to a safer location.

There were elements of coercion in the relationship, particularly on the margins of UNITA's areas of control, but to function effectively the relationship had to be built on consensus between UNITA and the village dwellers. UNITA discourses sought to define the relationship by presenting UNITA as an entity that acted in the best interests of rural people by defending them against a perceived external threat. These discourses were supported, to varying degrees at different times and in different places, by the provision of basic health and education services. To situate itself in this role, UNITA had to create a political space in which UNITA could operate within communities that had existed and been self-sustaining before UNITA arrived. In Jamba, by contrast, the creation of a society more or less from scratch was determined as part of a political project. The implications of this will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

Jamba

The tensions within UNITA's strategic thinking between the need for mobilisation in a well-populated zone of peasant agriculture and the need for a secure (and therefore remote) political base have already been discussed. Cuelel, where Savimbi based himself after the "long march", could never be a permanent base after the government began to attack UNITA bases in Huambo province from 1977 onwards. Savimbi's

central base was moved every few months to avoid detection, until UNITA established a base at Jamba in December 1979.³⁹⁰ Chiwale links the emergence of Jamba explicitly to UNITA's military capacity, and points to the significance of a permanent "capital" in terms of UNITA's aspirations to statehood.

In 1978 we had, apart from the guerrilla units, a regular and semi-regular army, which significantly increased our offensive and defensive capacity. Thus we were sowing the seeds for the creation of a state within a state. Angola was inexorably on the way to becoming a country with two capitals.³⁹¹

Settlement at the site began at least a year before it became UNITA's headquarters. As discussed earlier, the east of Cuando Cubango had been identified as the most suitable region for the headquarters because of its remoteness from the MPLA's centres of power. Equally important, however, was the region's proximity to Namibia, then under South African occupation. Chiwale writes that two men were sent to the region during 1978 to identify a spot with a suitable source of all-year water, and settlement begun thereafter. It should be noted that however much the existence of Jamba as a capital with civilian functions was evoked as a token of UNITA's political legitimacy, its first function was as part of UNITA's apparatus of repression.

In 1978 small groups of people were sent to the site [of Jamba] because, as is evident, one had to proceed with a level of settlement before it could be populated in its entirety. In a first phase, Jamba functioned as a centre for the re-education of convicts, tried at the Delta central base, who served sentence there. Only much later did it develop to the status that it had.³⁹²

This section deals principally with life in Jamba and how it was perceived, based on interviews with people who lived there. First it will consider what kind of physical, social and political infrastructure UNITA attempted to construct at Jamba. It will then look critically at how Jamba itself appears in the discourse of the people who remember it, and consider how the very existence of Jamba was an important basis for UNITA's claims to statehood.

³⁹⁰ Bridgland 1986:284.

³⁹¹ Chiwale 2008:253. Compare Chiwale's remark, quoted earlier, that losing a capital in Huambo signified that "the abandonment was total".

³⁹² Chiwale 2008:254.

People who lived in Jamba emphasise the fact that food was plentiful there and was available for free. Social services such as health and education were also available free of charge, more widely and on a more sophisticated level than was the case in the rural bases. The following description was from a man who had moved from Huambo to Jamba with his parents as a young child, and grew up in Jamba.

The way of living was as though it were a city. Health matters were looked after for free, not like it is with the [current MPLA] government. Education too. The first time I ever saw money was in 1995. If an individual were sick, they would go to hospital without paying. We were self-sufficient for food from agriculture, but there was also help from the party. Here [under the control of the MPLA in 2008] a six-year-old who goes to school has to pay fees and pay something [a bribe] to the teacher. The school lunches that the donors provided are being sold on the market. No educational material arrives. The government is saying these things exist, but they don't.

In the area where my father was stationed [Moxico, hundreds of kilometres from Jamba] there was no education. So I lived with my aunt so as to benefit from the education at Jamba. There were films, from which we learnt what a city was like. There were satellite dishes – after 1990 we could see international football.

I studied from first to seventh grade in Jamba. Then I reached military age – service in the military was the duty of every citizen. We received education in the army too. Civic education like in other countries – qualities of behaviour in relation to society. And political education, about our party. We learnt that a misunderstanding between brothers had led to the war. And some lessons about the origins of our kingdoms and the life in colonial times.³⁹³

This interview touches on most of the principal themes that emerged in the accounts of Jamba by other people who had spent time there. Briefly, these are the provision of services, which were linked to an idea of Jamba as a city and which included a politicised education; and the contrasting of life in Jamba both with life under the MPLA and with life in the more peripheral areas of UNITA control. Crucially, the same man pointed to the role of UNITA as a political organisation in ensuring the supply of food and other goods. We can see here, on a larger scale, a political

³⁹³ Interviewee 66, Caála, June 2008.

relationship comparable to the one that existed around the UNITA bases in the bush, involving the obligation to work and the right to receive benefits such as health, education and food, with the party itself at the centre of the relationship.

Everyone worked for the party. The party supplied all needs – right down to pregnant women, the children in their bellies already had rights. I never saw money there. The party bought things from outside. The people there ate, and worked.³⁹⁴

Given that this man had grown up in UNITA areas with UNITA parents and had been educated at UNITA schools, his completely positive portrayal of Jamba is not surprising. Yet some of the details are confirmed by people who had no particular reason to present UNITA's preferred version of life in Jamba. The next account is from Pedro, the catechist quoted earlier, who had ambivalent feelings about life with UNITA at the mobile bases. His recollection of Jamba is, however, entirely positive.

Life was good in Jamba. It had all the conditions³⁹⁵. Nobody told lies. They had means – vehicles came from South Africa with enough food. [...] It looked like a *bairro* but it was organised like a city. There were roads of beaten earth. The hospitals were well organised. The houses and government departments were built of wood. The hospitals were built underground out of mud bricks, and the operating theatre was made of wood. There was a parish church, St Mary the Mother of God, with houses for the missionaries, and Protestant churches too. I never had any problems with UNITA, but I didn't work for UNITA. I worked alongside the people, for the church.³⁹⁶

Amélia, who had been kidnapped in Huambo province and made to work as a schoolteacher in Jamba, also gave a positive account of life there. She had every reason to feel resentment towards UNITA. Instead, although her experiences ultimately left her cynical towards politicians and politics of any kind, the way in which she speaks of life at Jamba draws a connection between her appreciation of

³⁹⁴ Interviewee 66, Caála, June 2008.

³⁹⁵ *Condições*, particularly in Angola, is often used to denote necessities or amenities.

³⁹⁶ Interviewee 128, Chicomba, November 2008.

UNITA's powers of social organisation, and her recognition of the movement's political legitimacy.

I admired the way they knew how to look after amputees. I admired the way everything was distributed for free. UNITA people embraced a different way of studying. Young people from UNITA studied better than the ones on our side [the government side]. Jonas Savimbi, the president, said 'your weapon is your pencil, and your trench the school'. Savimbi determined the destiny of the party. For this reason people called him a dictator. If he said 'today we're all going to work at cleaning up,' then everyone would work. He was an admirable man.³⁹⁷

Bridgland's descriptions of Jamba during a visit there in June 1981 include immigration checks beneath a sign proclaiming "Entering Free Angola", a secretarial college where a woman in a "smart Parisian suit and high heels" taught girls to touch-type, and a hospital where surgeons performed an appendectomy.³⁹⁸ South African journalist Shaun Johnson, who was flown to Jamba as part of an organised media event in 1988, describes the immigration forms, a uniformed traffic officer stationed at a traffic roundabout where vehicles rarely passed, a clinic, a uniform factory and a weapon repair workshop.³⁹⁹

Even if much of what is described here may have less to do with everyday life in Jamba and more to do with a show put on for foreign journalists, this is nevertheless significant as an indication of what UNITA considered important to put on display as a demonstration of its legitimacy expressed in terms of its potential as a state, and, moreover, as a particular kind of state.⁴⁰⁰ The medical facilities can be explained in

³⁹⁷ Interview 88, Luanda, July 2008.

³⁹⁸ Bridgland 1986:321.

³⁹⁹ *The Guardian* (London), 27 June 1988. Excerpted in *Facts and Reports* 18 (N), 1 July 1988. Holland Committee on Southern Africa.

⁴⁰⁰ When I visited the UNITA quartering area at Calala near Cazombo in Moxico province in June 2002, I saw a traffic-free roundabout like the one Johnson describes,

terms of efforts to create a relationship with the population on the basis of service provision – even if the efforts in this case were only possible thanks to South African supply lines, and seemed incongruous in a settlement that was built of mud bricks and thatch. It is more difficult to find a practical justification for high heels, Parisian suits and traffic officers, and immigration controls. These appear to be a more deliberate attempt at what Das and Poole call “the mimicry of the state”⁴⁰¹: in particular, the mimicry of an urban and modern model of statehood which, as I have suggested, competed in UNITA’s political imaginary with ideas of peasant revolution. Similarly, Savimbi’s warning to his troops “that when they did reach Luanda they would be judged by the appearance they presented to the outside world”⁴⁰² suggests an appeal to norms that were foreign to the bush environment in which UNITA operated during the war.

Political education at Jamba

As was the case in the villages near UNITA bases, schooling in Jamba promoted narratives that posited UNITA as the representative of Angolan national aspirations. These emphasised UNITA’s role in liberating Angola from colonialism, and sought to legitimise UNITA’s continuing war against the MPLA by positing the MPLA as the agent of foreign interests.

and I was given a tour of the “hospital” that had been constructed even although the quartering areas were never intended to last more than a year. By this time, UNITA had been cut off from foreign support for years, and the resources available to it were limited to what had survived during the years when the leadership was on the run. Nevertheless, when I arrived for the tour, the hosts made sure I was greeted by a surgeon in gown and mask, and a man using a microscope in the grass-hut laboratory.

⁴⁰¹ Das and Poole 2004:23.

⁴⁰² Bridgland 1986:328.

[At Jamba] I learnt about what was needed for the well being of the country. About international history and the history of my country. That our country has wealth but the wealth is not helping everyone, only a minority.⁴⁰³

The political content of schooling appeared to promote the idea of statehood, and the idea that UNITA was a democracy. Again, this was part of a discourse that positioned UNITA as a better alternative to the incumbent MPLA government whose rule had never been experienced by most of the children in Jamba.

We had a basic idea that there was a government, but that UNITA was a state within a state. We had political education, which was part of the school programme. We learnt about economics, about rights, equality and citizenship. [...]
The MPLA had the wrong priorities – it was a machine, a prepared structure. That they chased UNITA people away and said that UNITA killed – but we wanted democracy.⁴⁰⁴

Public events in the *terra consolidada* provided further opportunities for political education. Bridgland describes a play performed at a parade at Mavinga in 1981, which presented UNITA as a nationalist movement defending Angola against an MPLA that was the agent of hostile foreign interests:

On the big, open parade ground Leonid Brezhnev, Fidel Castro and Agostinho Neto greeted each other in exaggerated fashion as *companeros* (brothers) before driving a devil's bargain. Brezhnev and Castro would send arms and men to Angola to drive out the UNITA *fantoches*. Neto would give them the country's diamonds, oil, coffee and fish in payment. In the next act Cuban soldiers arrived and began killing Angolan peasants – giving the soldiers full scope to display their acting talents – while in the forest UNITA was recruiting and training guerrillas. Finally, UNITA attacked and Brezhnev and Castro were driven from Angola.⁴⁰⁵

The churches were another vehicle for UNITA politicisation. At UNITA's Fourth

⁴⁰³ Interviewee 75, Caála, June 2008.

⁴⁰⁴ Interviewee 65, Caála, July 2008.

⁴⁰⁵ Bridgland 1986:313. *Fantoches* means “puppets”: a derisive term used by the MPLA for UNITA.

Congress, Catholic and Protestant priests led prayers that “sanctioned the war against the MPLA ‘in the name of God’”.⁴⁰⁶ Bridgland recalls a sermon at a Protestant service he attended in Jamba in 1981:

The Rev Marcellino’s theme was peace, but he had an unusual definition of the term. [...] “Peace comes with those who are able to fight. Our leader worked very hard to have all the political movements work together and build our country and have peace. But it proved impossible to do it that way. The power of the devil entered. Thus it was necessary for the people and the children to go into the forests to learn the work of shooting because peace comes with those who are able to fight.”⁴⁰⁷

A priest who had been in Jamba in the 1980s acknowledged the repressive political climate that had existed there but sought to justify it in the following terms:

Freedom of opinion in a war regime is a utopia. People were waiting for the end of the war. The general opinion was “stop the war”. What caused fear was the war and the bombing of the cities.

Asked about the forced marriages that took place in Jamba (discussed later in this chapter), this priest explained them in the following terms:

There were forced marriages in Jamba just as the rape of women, particularly minors, happens in Luanda, in France, in the United States. The situation of war is what gives rise to the idea of forced marriage.⁴⁰⁸

This echoed other explanations by UNITA officials of violence: if UNITA’s actions differed from the Christian norms that the movement’s leadership professed, this was justifiable as the result of war.

⁴⁰⁶ Bridgland 1986:250, based on a report by the American journalist Leon Dash.

⁴⁰⁷ Bridgland 1986:326. Bridgland notes that the sermon was delivered in Umbundu, which he tape-recorded and then had independently translated.

⁴⁰⁸ Interviewee 150, written correspondence, October 2009.

Social organisation

The people who lived in Jamba were there because they had left their home regions voluntarily because of their opposition to the MPLA, or because they had been abducted to Jamba by UNITA. Family and other social structures were shattered in this process, a state of affairs that created a space for intervention by the authorities in accommodating children or arranging marriages. Bridgland writes that during a three-hour speech during a parade at Jamba in 1981

Savimbi [...] plunged into the middle of a platoon and emerged with his arm round the shoulder of a recruit barely 16-years-old. “This young boy is away from his mother and his father for the first time in his life,” he announced. “He gets no pay in our army – only his food, uniform, rifle and the chance to fight for Angola’s freedom. You officers must therefore not neglect his needs. You are now his mother and his father.”

UNITA dealt with unaccompanied children by placing them in institutions or with adults. The following account is by a man whose account makes it clear that he was kidnapped as a child and abducted to Jamba, although he does not describe his experience as one of abduction.

I grew up in Jamba. My parents had stayed here in the interior.⁴⁰⁹ I went to Jamba as a result of military confrontations. I chose to go to Jamba when I was ten years old. We walked on foot, accompanied by soldiers and other officials – about 50 people together. When we arrived at Jamba we were selected for school. I stayed there for six years and was then nominated for battle.

There was an *internato*⁴¹⁰, a house next to the school. One for girls and one for boys. As well as children without parents there were some who had parents who lived in the *internato*.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ As noted earlier, “interior” (the word is identical in English and Portuguese) was often used to indicate central Angola, seen from the perspective of Jamba.

⁴¹⁰ School boarding house.

⁴¹¹ Interviewee 75, Caála, July 2008.

In addition to the *internato*, some children who had been separated from their parents were placed in the homes of unrelated adults in Jamba. Amélia, who had been captured and taken to Jamba with one of her own children, spoke of having fostered children in this way.

I looked after a child whose mother was in the isolation unit, accused of being a witch. I had three girls and two boys in my house. Some had been captured without their parents.⁴¹²

Even if the kind of social organisation that existed at Jamba was remembered positively by those interviewees who were still loyal to UNITA, it was nevertheless underpinned by fear and the threat of violence. Amélia, despite admiring certain aspects of UNITA's social organisation, spoke frankly about the atmosphere of fear in Jamba:

When we arrived in Jamba we were put into a pilot unit where we received political education, from soldiers and cadres. After politicisation, every one became the security of everyone else. Everyone knew that someone else was watching you – each one knew that if you did this or that you'd die. If someone transgressed the limits, they would be brought into a public space and killed. This is how they educated people. Or if someone was caught trying to flee. But we lived normally – adapted, just so as to avoid situations. Crimes included running away. They [UNITA] didn't like violence. For sexual abuse there were isolation camps, for re-education [of the accused]. They didn't kill many people. I also heard of them killing witches but I never saw this. I know the field where they used to burn people but they stopped doing this before I arrived.⁴¹³

If UNITA “didn't like violence”, this obviously refers to violence perpetrated without its authority. An aspect of the state-like functions that UNITA took upon itself was to define when and in what circumstances violence was permissible.

⁴¹² Interviewee 88, Luanda, August 2008.

⁴¹³ Interviewee 88, Luanda, August 2008.

A more personal account of violent political repression at Jamba appears in Samuel Chiwale's memoir. The memoir, which appeared six years after Savimbi died, speaks of an atmosphere of paranoia and mutual suspicion, and of the violence with which suspected dissenters were treated – including Chiwale himself, when he was accused of plotting against Savimbi.

I noticed that some long-standing companions were avoiding me, as though I had a contagious disease. Then, as if this were not enough, my wife continued to insist on the subject [of rumours of a plot against Savimbi]. [...]

On 15 June, about three in the morning, my sleep was interrupted by a man who took me to the presidential meeting-house, where Dr Savimbi was seated on a bench with a group of three men.

“Little brother Chiwale,” he said, “as you must have noticed that our relationship is not what it was in the past, one would even say we have turned our backs on each other. Little brother must have noticed this, and must also, I presume, know why. I have trustworthy information [...] according to which little brother got together with Chindondo and Sangumba to dethrone me.”

[...]

Dr Savimbi closed the meeting with a sigh of boredom.

Suddenly, his security men threw themselves upon me, tying me up. [...]

The group, led by Epalanga, took me brutally to their headquarters where I was interrogated. “You traitor!” they said. “We never thought you would one day betray Dr Savimbi.”

[...]

But worse was to come: not only did they accuse me of what I had not done, but to show my protests were in vain they attacked me with sticks on the arms, the head, the legs, as they shouted “come on, confess, traitor, confess”. They released me at five in the morning covered in blood and with my left arm broken.⁴¹⁴

Chiwale's memoir also tallies with Amélia's account on the matter of the burning of those accused of witchcraft. Chiwale recalls that UNITA burnt “witches” in 1983 and 1984; Amélia arrived at Jamba in 1985, and said the burnings had happened the year before she arrived. Heywood invokes the “witch” burnings in support of her contention that “Savimbi's willingness to incorporate rituals and beliefs from the Ovimbundu past helped to legitimise his role as one of the architects of modern

⁴¹⁴ Chiwale 2008:261-264.

Angolan nationalism”, although she leaves open the question of whether the UNITA leadership should be blamed for “manipulating” traditions.⁴¹⁵ She also quotes sources attesting to the burnings happening in 1982 and 1983. Chiwale’s account suggests that UNITA presented witch burning as African tradition, a characterisation that Chiwale does not directly challenge. Notable in Chiwale’s writing are his attempts to reconcile his faith in Savimbi with his outrage at the injustice that has been visited on a close relative, and the suspicion that his aunt’s death is part of a politically motivated plot of which he is the real target.

A judgement was organised with the participation of elders, officials and cadres from the highest echelons of the party: the innocent were set free and the guilty condemned to capital punishment, that is, death by fire as African customs demand.

But as always happens in these matters, there are people of bad faith who take advantage of the circumstances in order to settle scores. ...

One cannot say that the witches were thrown into the fire through the unilateral decision of Dr Savimbi, as some would sometimes have us believe, it was the result of popular consultation, and as one can read in Universal History, also occurred in certain European countries. [...]

The practice continued and a member of my family was inadvertently accused, involving me in this process in a way more brutal than can be imagined.

My aunt on the maternal side, Lúcia Chokovemba (my mother’s youngest sister), by an accumulation of bad luck, was judged and sentenced to capital punishment. This was something engineered very well by BRINDE [Information and Defence Brigade] officials. When they threw her into the fire they knew very well the target was me, creating ripe conditions for me to commit suicide.⁴¹⁶

Forced marriage was a further political tool for UNITA at Jamba. Amélia was forced into marrying a UNITA officer, although she was already married and had been separated from her husband at the time of being kidnapped. UNITA officials sought to justify this to her on the grounds that “my husband had remained in the MPLA”: a suggestion that government-controlled Angola was a separate moral universe from the

⁴¹⁵ Heywood 1998:166.

⁴¹⁶ Chiwale 2008:270.

one that existed under UNITA. Forced marriage was also practised as punishment for a husband's perceived wrongdoing. Chiwale writes that in 1983, after he had been accused of plotting against Savimbi, demoted and fallen from grace, he was summoned to a meeting house at Jamba.

I could not imagine what the purpose of such an order might be, but when I arrived at the place, I almost fell over: it had to do with my wife's marriage. That she would abandon me to avoid retaliation, that was fine, but for them to force me to be present at her marriage to another man and to seat me in the front row, bordered on the abnormal.⁴¹⁷

When, at the beginning of 1986, Chiwale was summoned before Savimbi and told that he was to be rehabilitated since the accusations against him were still unproven, Savimbi concluded their meeting by saying:

Also I would like to inform you that I know that your wives have abandoned you, but do not worry, I shall arrange you another.⁴¹⁸

Women, in other words, were a commodity that could be withheld as punishment or granted as a reward.

Few interviewees spoke of the violence and repression of Jamba so frankly. For the UNITA faithful, particularly those who had grown up there, Jamba was remembered as an embodiment of the ideas of personal freedom that were one strand among UNITA's sometimes self-contradictory official ideological discourses.

In the days of UNITA the whole population had the right to talk, the right to expression. Even if you only spoke Umbundu. I want the African continent to help Angolans so that what happens in Zimbabwe doesn't happen here: Robert

⁴¹⁷ Chiwale 2008:268.

⁴¹⁸ Chiwale 2008:272. Savimbi speaks of "your wives" in the plural, though elsewhere in the text Chiwale does not mention having had more than one wife.

Mugabe organising elections alone.⁴¹⁹

The MPLA has never given us opportunities – with UNITA there were opportunities. With UNITA those who were studying never had to pay – now we have to pay. To get a bursary you have to be the son of one of the bosses. In Jamba there was democracy because we were able to criticise. There we were able to ask for an audience with the president.⁴²⁰

The man in the latter interview had been born in a UNITA area and was barely an adult when UNITA abandoned Jamba. Since that time he had remained on the move with UNITA columns in the last years of the war, and since then had lived in communities that comprised people who had been with UNITA during the war. The impression of Jamba of a place of free political activity is unrecognisable as the place described by Amélia or by outsiders.⁴²¹

Accounts of Jamba contrast it not only with life under the MPLA, but also with life in the more peripheral zones of UNITA's control. One such description comes from a man who was born in a farming community in Huambo province in 1972, but grew up near the Namibian border, in and around the settlement of Calai. He said his parents had left the Central Highlands because “the start of the conflict caused separation”. Although he had received basic education in the border region,

at Jamba it was a very different kind of life. Because it was the headquarters, there was a different atmosphere. At Calai there was no high school, no electricity. At Jamba there was a school and electricity – the electricity never went off, 24 hours a day.⁴²²

A woman who had spent several years on the move with UNITA contrasted the

⁴¹⁹ Interviewee 62, Caála, June 2008.

⁴²⁰ Interviewee 65, Caála, June 2008.

⁴²¹ Bridgland 1995, which describes the violent and authoritarian manner in which power was exercised in Jamba, is the more striking for having been written by a man who had previously admired UNITA and Savimbi.

⁴²² Interviewee 64, Caála, June 2008.

availability of goods in Jamba with the situation elsewhere: “In the interior it was difficult to get things like soap and salt because we were far from Jamba.”⁴²³ An older former UNITA soldier, born in the late 1950s, contrasted the life at Jamba with the peripatetic existence of the guerrilla war.

Sometimes we moved every month, sometimes every two or three months – sometimes not very far. Whenever we moved there was always a new base – it was a defence strategy. In 1985 I was called to Jamba. Jamba made things easier because it was a strategic base. At Jamba we no longer ate the people’s food. We had food from outside – things such as rice or pasta. I was a military officer there from 1985 until 2002. Life was good. Education and health worked. There was good food, military and political training and good living quarters. There were not many foreigners there, just a few health technicians from South Africa.⁴²⁴

UNITA’s attempts to define a role for itself in supporting agriculture were discussed earlier in this chapter. At Jamba, UNITA appears to have made more systematic efforts to fulfil this role, including the creation of posts for experts who were part of an administrative structure. According to a man who migrated to Jamba with his family as a child and was educated there:

After seventh grade I did an agronomy course, and became a director of agriculture. We made the peasants produce better harvests. We went to Cuito Cuanavale, Moye, Kangamba, as far as Lumbala Nguimbo. As part of free Angola, the administration could travel to give instructions, so that the area would become richer, and so that there would be no more problems with food.⁴²⁵

Soldiers who were fighting in the bush remained conscious of Jamba as the place that provided for them.

We were sent to combat in Area 49, in Cuando Cubango near Menongue.

⁴²³ Interviewee 74, Caála, July 2008.

⁴²⁴ Interviewee 72, Caála, July 2008.

⁴²⁵ Interviewee 166, Chicomba, August 2009.

Vehicles would come from Jamba with food to Area 49.⁴²⁶

By contrast, “when we were far from Jamba, we could only get salt or soap if we attacked a [FAPLA] base”.⁴²⁷

This chapter has emphasised certain biographical details of each of the people interviewed, so as to situate the discourse of the interviewees in the context of their current political affiliation, the history of their affiliation with UNITA during the war, and the politicisation to which they had been exposed in earlier life. The most striking example of this is the way in which experiences of childhood kidnap were reconstructed as a voluntary, politically motivated decision to join UNITA.

Comparisons between life under UNITA and life in MPLA-ruled Angola were a recurrent theme in interviews with people who remembered Jamba – particularly those who had grown up with UNITA and experienced life in government-controlled areas for the first time only after the peace settlement of 2002. These comparisons invariably favour the past over the present, and as such must be read critically. Many of the interviewees who expressed these sentiments were people who still actively identified themselves with UNITA as a political party at the time of the interviews.

All were living in poverty, and felt – with some justification – that the promises made as part of the demobilisation process in 2002 had not been realised. They preferred to speak about UNITA rule as it was at times and in places when the organisation was better equipped to make a reality of the ideas it professed about the responsibilities of a political organisation. Their accounts suggest that this idealised vision of UNITA’s relationship with the people under its control was the normal reality of life in UNITA-dominated areas. Even if they are not always historically accurate, the narratives of

⁴²⁶ Interviewee 75 Caála, July 2008.

⁴²⁷ Interviewee 72, Caála, June 2008.

the past and the present are significant. First, we are able to discern in them something of the content of UNITA's official discourse as it was passed on through processes of political education to people who lived under UNITA's control. Second, the fact that interviewees chose to make comparisons between the past and the present are themselves significant. The act of comparing suggests an equivalence between UNITA's social order and the present-day social order of the MPLA: both were alternative possibilities of government, of which UNITA's was judged to have been more effective. Over and above the opportunities that Jamba presented for sustained political education, the very existence of Jamba was a symbol of UNITA's potential as a state.

Military conscription

Men who had spent their childhood in UNITA-controlled areas, whether in Jamba or elsewhere, spoke of having been incorporated into UNITA's military forces at some point during their adolescence. The way in which the conscripts described this process differed markedly from the accounts of conscription into FAPLA in government-controlled areas.

I received education from first to seventh grade in Jamba, then I reached military age. I joined the army, as was the duty of every citizen.⁴²⁸

I was at school for five years [at a base in Huambo province that was in a fixed location for that entire period]. Then I was nominated for the platoon, part of the armed forces. There I received military training. I was in combat during the 55-day war in Huambo.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ Interviewee 66, Caála, June 2008.

⁴²⁹ Interviewee 76, who said he was born in 1979. If this is accurate, he would have been 13 or 14 years old during the fighting in Huambo.

A man who had been kidnapped to Jamba and spent his childhood there described his entry into army life as follows: “When we arrived at Jamba we were selected for school. I stayed there for six years and was then nominated for battle [*campos*] [...] I received political and military training, in Jamba itself.”⁴³⁰

The accounts of conscription given by people who did not experience UNITA’s process of politicisation speak of a process that operated arbitrarily and by force. Joana, a woman farmer from the north of Huambo province whose home area had fallen under UNITA control at the time of independence spoke of UNITA recruiting people “just by catching them. [...] They disappeared and I don’t know if they were ever heard of again. Girls were also obliged to go to the bush and stay with them. A woman who had a husband who went, would go with him.”⁴³¹

Pedro, the catechist who was quoted earlier, also suggested that men did not join UNITA’s forces by choice. Again, his position as someone who was able to maintain his autonomy from UNITA’s politics while still part of the society controlled by UNITA allowed him a critical perspective. “A teacher would go to a village and say ‘study, study’, then at age 15 or 16 they would be captured to the bases to become soldiers – not in the proper way.”⁴³²

These last two accounts, by Joana and Pedro, not only reflect the more critical outsider perspectives of the speakers, but also different experiences. Joana’s account is of a time and place when UNITA’s control was mainly by force rather than being

⁴³⁰ Interviewee 75, Caála, July 2008.

⁴³¹ Interviewee 17, Huambo, May 2008.

⁴³² Interviewee 128, Chicomba, November 2008.

hegemonic. Pedro, too, experienced UNITA control at a time when it was not yet consolidated. But the conscripts themselves, those who had grown up with UNITA and been educated in its schools, spoke of their incorporation into the army as though it were an extension of their education. This was different from government-controlled areas where conscripts saw themselves as having been captured, or, at best, having been subjected to an arbitrary bureaucratic process over which they had no control and which removed them from the society of which they felt a part. As noted in the previous chapter, the military was present and visible in MPLA areas. Yet the dominant discourse of the MPLA areas allowed a distinction between military and civilian life, in such a way that the movement between one and the other could be construed, at best, as “conscription”, or, at worst, as “capture”. By contrast, in the spaces controlled by UNITA, the dominant discourse did not allow the possibility of imaging an alternative to joining the army. People who came from outside the UNITA space may have seen themselves as having been captured by UNITA, but within the UNITA space the lack of distinction between the civilian and military spheres precluded the concept either of “conscription” or of “capture”. For men who had grown up with UNITA, the process of entering the army did not seem to represent any sort of rupture. As I will discuss in the conclusion to this chapter, the differences in how conscription was practised and spoken of between the UNITA space and the MPLA space is symptomatic of more general distinctions between the political strategies on both sides, distinctions that were shaped partly by political choices and partly by circumstance.

Foreign connections and imported ideologies

This chapter has so far emphasised that the discourse that UNITA presented to its followers was one that defined Angolan nationhood by situating UNITA as the guardian of the nation against hostile foreigners, specifically Cuba and the Soviet Union, whose proxy, according to UNITA, was the MPLA.⁴³³ Nevertheless, much of the existing literature on UNITA has emphasised its links at various times with China, the United States and South Africa. These links with foreign countries, and the ideologies associated with them, were not prominent within UNITA's internal discourses. They were, however, evoked by members of the UNITA elite, notably by Savimbi, and it is worth considering them at least in passing here in order to situate them within the overall pattern of UNITA discourse.

Savimbi had met Mao in China in 1967, and had discussed ideas about peasant guerrilla warfare.⁴³⁴ According to Marcum, Maoist ideas, including that of self-reliance, informed Savimbi's strategy before independence of mobilising rural communities.⁴³⁵ Savimbi's evocation of Mao and the Long March were mentioned earlier in this chapter, and Mao remained important to Savimbi at least until the late 1970s. Chiwale recalls Savimbi saying in 1977:

We are not going to reject certain theses of Marxism completely, particularly that which says power must be seized from the bourgeois class and handed over to the worker and peasant class. [...] Marxism gives us a base, it's a good principle, but to apply it mechanically [...] in a socio-economic and cultural context like ours would be a mistake. [...] If [for the MPLA] the

⁴³³ Marcum 1978:195 describes UNITA's ideological themes in the early 1970s as "consistent and persistent [...] nationalist and anti-imperialist – including anti-Soviet 'social imperialism'".

⁴³⁴ Bridgland 1986:74.

⁴³⁵ Marcum 1978:195.

revolution moves from urban centres to the periphery, our perspective is the opposite, that is, one has to move from the countryside to the city, since in Angola [...] we don't have a working class in the real sense of the word.⁴³⁶

Jaka Jamba suggests that for Savimbi, Mao's significance was in providing the theory for a mode of struggle rather than an ideological template or a vision for a future

Angola:

Savimbi said that when he had met Mao he had become an admirer – he said that Mao had asked “do you have mountains?” and he [Savimbi] had replied, “no, the mountains are more towards the coast”. [Mao] said “to do this task, you need a zone that is not very accessible”. Savimbi said, “there's a part in the east with woodland,” and Mao said “that is where you must have your base”. On the other hand, there was the question of the relationship between the guerrillas and the people – like a fish in water, one has to have a good relationship with the people. As we were establishing the guerrilla struggle, theories that influenced us the most were that came from the people who had been best at making this kind of war. Hence the passion for China: theirs was the kind of rebellion that ended with them taking power. It wasn't about big doctrines, like Stalinism – more just the theory of guerrilla warfare.⁴³⁷

The last visit to China by a senior UNITA delegation was in 1978. It included the general chief of staff, Valdimar Chindondo, secretary for foreign relations Ornelas Sangumba, Tito Chingunji and Samuel Chiwale. This delegation returned to Angola with promises of weapons, but Savimbi seems to have turned his back on China in the years that followed.⁴³⁸ By that time, UNITA was in regular contact with the South African military and was receiving active South African support.⁴³⁹ The concern with preventing Soviet expansion, voiced first at the Fourth Congress, became more

⁴³⁶ Chiwale 2008:250

⁴³⁷ Interview with Jaka Jamba, Luanda, September 2009.

⁴³⁸ Interviews with Abel Chivukuvuku and General Nunda, Luanda, 2009. Nunda suggests that after this visit to China, Savimbi became increasingly mistrustful of his previous confidantes, including those who had gone to China. He sees the trip as having led to the estrangement between Savimbi and Chiwale that resulted ultimately in Chiwale's detention described earlier in this chapter.

⁴³⁹ According to Chivukuvuku, the UNITA leadership came under attack at a place where they had assembled in October 1978. The group scattered, and Savimbi was evacuated by a South African helicopter.

prominent in UNITA's discourse as Savimbi sought common cause with Western countries. When he spoke to Western audiences, Savimbi would emphasise UNITA's democratic credentials, supporting this – as he had done in Huambo in November 1975 – with the argument that the MPLA was avoiding multiparty elections. He would also call upon narratives of African authenticity:

The people want to taste freedom in peace. For that they need a democratic government, elected and representing the three liberation movements, MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. The building of African socialism cannot be the same as the Castro model. We have our past, our customs.⁴⁴⁰

This statement to a French journalist suggests that Savimbi realised that “socialism” was acceptable to a European audience, but the word was notably absent when spoke to Americans: here he would call upon ideas of freedom, often defined in opposition to communism. Talking to journalists in the US in 1979, he deployed a logic of African authenticity in order to reject the ideas of Marx, whom Savimbi characterised as “a man of German origin, in an era dominated by French philosophy, living in Britain and dealing with the economic problems of Britain at that time”.⁴⁴¹ On another occasion, he told an American journalist who thanks to a malfunctioning aircraft found himself stranded in Jamba on 4 July 1981: “We regret the circumstances in which you, Mr Richard Harwood, are celebrating this joyous day of yours, far away from your loved ones. But the values and ideals that have made your country the greatest on earth are the same values and ideals that bind us together – the struggle for freedom and liberty.”⁴⁴² Jaka Jamba recalled Savimbi's ability to switch between different political idioms as one of his strengths:

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Dominique De Roux, quoted in Bridgland 1986:231.

⁴⁴¹ Bridgland 1986:289-290.

⁴⁴² Bridgland 1986:335.

Dr Savimbi was very adept – he often told people what they wanted to hear [laughs]. [...] He studied people’s aspirations and concerns and within half an hour he could make people agree with him. He was a great mobiliser. But in terms of the context, at that time what were important were the concrete problems that existed: How to protect the population, feed the population, create the conditions for the population to feel they were able to govern. How a guerrilla struggle can defend itself and evolve.⁴⁴³

The apparent ease with which Savimbi could disregard the incongruity of the various international political discourses that he deployed is well illustrated in Chiwale’s description, in a single page of his memoir, of events during a visit to South African-occupied Namibia in 1976.

It was there, in South West Africa, that we received the news of the death of Mao Tse-Tung, the president of China.

“We have lost a great friend and a great ally,” said Dr Savimbi. “But let us not be despondent and let us hope for whoever will replace him.”

[...] We spent a few days swimming, and in between swimming and the well-earned rest that we could now enjoy, we discussed with General Malan, General Foliun and Brigadier Skuman the strategy to adopt to put down the red invasion.

Three days later they left that place, but returned later accompanied by Pieter Willem Botha, the South African prime minister.⁴⁴⁴

The result of this meeting was an arms consignment that created “the minimal conditions for us to begin the resistance struggle against our enemies”.⁴⁴⁵

As noted in the previous chapter, the MPLA and its sympathisers lost no opportunity to present UNITA’s connection with the apartheid regime as evidence of UNITA’s counter-revolutionary character. The South African link also cost UNITA the

⁴⁴³ Interview with Jaka Jamba, Luanda, September 2009.

⁴⁴⁴ Chiwale 2008:239. Malan is Magnus Malan, then chief of the South African Defence Force. “Foliun” is General Constand Viljoen, who was to become chief of the army the following year. “Skuman” is presumably Brigadier Dawie Schoeman, commander of the First Military Region. PW Botha in 1976 was in fact defence minister; he became prime minister in 1978.

⁴⁴⁵ Chiwale 2008:240.

sympathy of some European and most other African states.⁴⁴⁶ Chiwale takes pains to emphasise that Savimbi was vocally opposed to apartheid and defended the decision to seek South African help as a matter of survival at a time when a substantial Cuban force was defending the MPLA:

Weapons don't smell of their origin; they smell of gunpowder, and it's up to us to use them according to our interests. If they are in the hands of the South Africans, let's go there to get them in order to survive, in order not to disappear in such an unequal contest.⁴⁴⁷

Chiwale also claims that Savimbi used the opportunity of a meeting in 1978 with the then foreign minister Pik Botha and defence minister Magnus Malan to call for the release from prison of Nelson Mandela,⁴⁴⁸ and explained the continuing links with South Africa as follows:

Dr Savimbi, ever more critical of the apartheid regime, but still conscious of the need to maintain the alliance, announced: "When one is hungry, there is no wrong in eating from the same plate as the devil, but it is necessary to serve ourselves with a long spoon so the devil cannot grab us by the hand."⁴⁴⁹

But while the UNITA leadership felt obliged to justify the South African connection, for the majority of UNITA's followers in Jamba, South Africa was not the liability that it represented in the eyes of the world outside. A present-day UNITA local official acknowledged that "South African support was what made Jamba work".⁴⁵⁰ the fact that Jamba was positioned primarily as a conduit for foreign assistance did not prevent people from invoking it as a symbol of UNITA's achievement. On the contrary, the fact that UNITA had foreign connections could be presented as evidence

⁴⁴⁶ Birmingham 2002:147.

⁴⁴⁷ Chiwale 2008:237. These words are attributed to Savimbi.

⁴⁴⁸ Chiwale 2008:251-252.

⁴⁴⁹ Chiwale 2008:257.

⁴⁵⁰ Interviewee 5, Huambo, May 2008.

of the movement's capability and prestige. In the words of a former UNITA soldier:

We were politically connected worldwide – people could go from there to the United States or South Africa. We kept in touch with all the world: South Africa as the regional power and the US as the global power.⁴⁵¹

Referring to the South Africans, Costa, another UNITA soldier, recalled the presence of “a foreign element with technology, for Angolans to develop”:⁴⁵² a resource, in other words, that supported what UNITA saw as its own modernising developmental project. A *soba* who had spent time at Jamba proudly recalled the visit by the then South African foreign minister, Pik Botha. UNITA officials still speak defensively about the connection, justifying it in terms of necessity in a desperate situation.⁴⁵³ UNITA's rank and file, however, knew little of the nature of the regime in Pretoria, and South Africa was nothing more than a little-known but friendly foreign power.

At the level of ideology any links that existed between UNITA and its various foreign allies were a matter of convenience rather than conviction. Ideas of freedom, democracy and African authenticity, which were central to UNITA's internal discourses, could be and were redeployed by Savimbi when he spoke for a non-Angolan audience, even if the meanings that these words had for his foreign interlocutors were different from the meanings that they had in Angola. Conversely, if UNITA's external links had any impact on its internal discourses, this impact came not so much from the ideological orientation of its allies as from the fact that international links could be evoked as a token of UNITA's legitimacy and potential.

⁴⁵¹ Interviewee 65, Caála, June 2008.

⁴⁵² Interviewee 63, Caála, June 2008.

⁴⁵³ UNITA's then foreign affairs official, Alcides Sakala, told me in an interview in 2002 that the alliance with South Africa was “a matter of circumstances and we wanted to survive that time within the framework of the Cold War”.

Conclusion

The way in which UNITA loyalists recall life with the guerrilla movement reflects UNITA's appeal to notions of stateness in its discourses and practices, and makes reference to specific moral qualities that people who had lived under UNITA control believed themselves to have possessed. Officials and followers used the words "state," "law" or, more frequently, "government" when talking about UNITA's operations. Less explicit appeals to statehood can be discerned in the narratives of national liberation that sustained a vision of the Angolan nation centred upon UNITA, in a similar way to the construction of national identities around post-colonial states elsewhere in Africa. All these narratives were linked to discourses about UNITA's responsibilities in relation to the people it controlled, all of which were framed as similar to the responsibilities of a state. These included the attribution of a state-like prerogative of violence to UNITA as the defender of the nation and the keeper of order, and the population's expectation and acknowledgement of certain services from UNITA. These discourses were supported by UNITA's fulfilling of state-like functions including taxation (in the form of food), the maintenance of an army and the provision of services and some goods, as well as ritualistic functions such as passport checks and the use of titles such as "minister".

At the same time, in the discourse of people who had lived under UNITA and identified with the movement, the idea of UNITA as a just, benevolent and state-like provider were complemented by narratives that attributed superior qualities of

citizenship to people who lived under UNITA control: nobody lied in UNITA areas; children in UNITA schools studied more diligently than those educated by the MPLA government. Ideas about personal, local and national history, about authority and legitimacy and about personal morality came to form a complex with an internal logic of its own: a mythico-history, to use Malkki's term.⁴⁵⁴

My interviews suggest that narratives of UNITA's state-like role and of the superior moral qualities of the people identified with that "state" had a more powerful impact on the population than did the inchoate appeals to the global ideologies that were linked to the Cold War. The interviews also illustrate how Jamba, quite apart from its strategic and practical importance to UNITA, also came to be essential to UNITA's political imaginary. This chapter has already discussed the tensions in UNITA's discourses between the idea of peasant revolution that Savimbi upheld as an ideal mode of struggle, and the reproduction of the urban-based colonial state that was the only model for statehood known to UNITA's largely mission-educated leadership. If the vision of peasant revolution could be put into practice amid a rural guerrilla war, it was only at Jamba, an environment that was secure against FAPLA attack and connected to supply lines originating from South Africa, that UNITA could create a social and physical environment that mimicked urban ideas of statehood: ideas which, as we have seen, were echoed in the discourse of people who had lived there and were evoked as indicators of UNITA's legitimacy and potential as a government. UNITA's role with respect to the farmers in the lands that surrounded Jamba was spoken of in

⁴⁵⁴ Malkki (1995:55) observes of Burundian refugees in Tanzania: "what made the refugees' narrative mythical, in the anthropological sense, was [...] the fact that it was concerned with *order* in a fundamental, cosmological sense. [...] It was concerned with the ordering and reordering of social and political categories, with the defining of self in distinction to other, with good and evil."

terms of a modernising developmental discourse: UNITA's officials at Jamba saw themselves as having a responsibility to offer the services of agronomists to help the peasants produce more, yet those who remember Jamba express their admiration for it in terms of its difference from the peasant lands that surrounded it, and the urban commodities such as electricity and imported food that were available there.

Interviews with the farmers themselves reveal a more ambivalent attitude towards UNITA's capabilities and a degree of scepticism about the possibility that UNITA's presence could be beneficial to them.

This chapter will conclude with a consideration of two significant areas of difference in the ways the MPLA and UNITA operated in the areas they controlled, as noted in this and the previous chapter. The first point has to do specifically with the ways in which each of the two parties used the forced movement of people as part of their military and political programmes. The second has to do with nature of the relationship between each party and the people who lived in the areas it controlled.

As noted in the previous chapter, both UNITA and the MPLA government habitually captured or removed people out of areas controlled or influenced by the enemy, and into their own secure zone of control. This began with the exodus of teachers and other educated people from the towns with UNITA in 1976, some of whom were later brought back to the towns by the government; other professionals were captured by UNITA by trickery or during raids. Also starting in 1976, peasant farmers were forced by one or the other army to leave contested areas and go to an area in which one army was securely in control. With regard to professional people, the MPLA and UNITA had similar intentions: both needed their skills to provide the services on which their

political legitimacy depended. However, where villagers were concerned, UNITA and the MPLA had different intentions in accordance with their different political needs.

A priest who had experienced life on both sides of the conflict expressed it like this:

UNITA needed young men for the military life, or to carry material. For the MPLA, it was about the security of the population. To know “they are not with UNITA”.⁴⁵⁵

All the accounts by people whom UNITA kidnapped or who voluntarily left government-controlled areas to live with UNITA emphasise how UNITA put people to work in service of its military and political project. By contrast, the peasant farmers who arrived voluntarily or involuntarily in the government’s secure zones around the towns were seldom integrated into any kind of programme of productive activity.

Sometimes they would receive assistance from the government or from donor organisations, but otherwise they would attempt to become self-sufficient. They were no great priority for the kind of state-building process envisioned by the MPLA. The government’s policy of bringing them physically under its control appears to have been motivated not so much by a political need to have them there, as by a political need to remove them from UNITA.

To turn now to the difference in the depth of political control exercised by UNITA and by the MPLA in their respective areas, Messiant draws the following distinction:

UNITA’s dictatorship was properly totalitarian, its power was founded on force and on the display of force and on the adherence to a leader, and was exercised in a closed world, barely penetrable to the world outside and to foreigners. [...] On the MPLA side, on the other hand, a “paradoxical dictatorship” developed, undeniably a dictatorship since the single party tolerated neither basic civil rights nor autonomous organisations nor associations, but not totalitarian, containing and therefore tolerating huge

⁴⁵⁵ Interviewee 105, Huambo, September 2008.

margins of illegality and dissidence, of “indiscipline”.⁴⁵⁶

The analysis presented in this chapter and the previous one illustrates that there were indeed differences in the levels of social control that the MPLA and UNITA were able to exercise in their respective areas of influence, and it was certainly true that UNITA operated in an isolated and closed world. I would suggest though that inasmuch as UNITA’s rule was more totalitarian than that of the MPLA, this cannot be separated either from the social environments in which the two movements sought to root themselves, or from the history of their engagement with their societies. Both in the bush bases and at Jamba, UNITA’s practices in relation to the people it controlled served to produce a discourse in which UNITA as a military movement was coterminous with UNITA as a welfare movement and which conflated UNITA’s political interests with local needs and interests. The previous chapter spoke of a merging of the political, economic and social spaces in government-controlled areas. The imbrication of these functions in the areas controlled by UNITA was, however, of a different order. In government-controlled areas the formal shops and supply networks were state-controlled, but small-scale farmers were still able to participate in a cash economy through the people’s markets where they could sell their produce to urban dwellers. In UNITA areas, farmers were considered to be “working for the party”, and UNITA functionaries themselves effected the redistribution of food from farmers to soldiers and other officials. Similarly in the area of education, the MPLA promoted the idea of studying being a “revolutionary duty” and teaching being a “frontline activity”, but this was not the same as the reality in UNITA areas, where bases that were primarily military in character were home to the teachers. When it came to military conscription, men conscripted into the FAPLA saw this as an

⁴⁵⁶ Messiant 1994:58.

imposition on their freedom, while for those who grew up in UNITA's political heartland of Jamba, avoiding conscription was unimaginable.

The society governed by the MPLA in the cities was the heir to colonial society in its complexity, and social organisation under the MPLA involved greater differentiation of social categories – civil servant, worker, party activist, farmer, soldier, student – even if people could occupy more than one category. In the bush, the arrival of UNITA and its imposition of a completely new kind of socio-economic relationship upon the farmers created a social order that was differentiated only along the lines of the base and the villages, each with its inhabitants. At Jamba the fact that the population comprised migrants, many of whom had lost families in the process of being captured or of voluntarily leaving the cities to live in Jamba, presented the opportunity for UNITA to create and to engineer social relationships to a greater extent than was possible for the MPLA, which operated in an urban social context that retained continuity with the past. UNITA's restructuring of social relationships in effect amounted to a redefining of the political space, creating spaces for direct intervention by UNITA as a political party and as a government in the spheres of economic activity and social organisation.

Chapter 5: The war of the cities, and UNITA's last redoubts

This chapter deals with the years following the elections in September 1992, until the end of the war in February 2002. Those elections were part of an internationally brokered peace process that was initiated in the global context of the détente in the Cold War, the terms of which were defined by the Bicesse Accords, signed between UNITA and the Angolan government in 1991. The accord prescribed a ceasefire, to be followed by a demobilisation process for the FAPLA and FALA, and the formation of a unified national armed force and police force. Neither side complied fully with these prescriptions, and the political leadership of both parties retained control over elements in the armed forces at the time of the elections. The conflict of the 1990s differed in nature from the conflict of the previous two decades in several important respects. First, UNITA took control of urban settlements for the first time since February 1976, giving rise to what became known as “the war of the cities”. Second, in the latter half of the 1990s the government’s armed forces made more thorough efforts to eliminate UNITA than at any time previously, while international sanctions against UNITA weakened the movement’s capacity to provide for its followers. A further difference concerned people’s experience and knowledge of the MPLA and of UNITA. In 1975 people supported one or the other movement on the basis of ideological appeals, or on the basis of having experienced life under the control of only one movement. By the end of the 1990s many more people had experienced life both under the MPLA and under UNITA, and were able to use this as a basis for political judgements.

In this chapter I argue that although political relationships in the 1990s were still understood on the same terms that had been established in the years of anti-colonial struggle and civil war, the altered realities had significant consequences for the political choices that people made during that decade. This chapter begins with an overview of the principal political and military developments of the period in question. It then moves on to review some of the available research that has a bearing on our understanding of relations between political-military movements and the civilian population during this period. The main body of this chapter comprises case studies, based mostly on interviews, of three locations within the Central Highlands: the city of Huambo, the city of Kuito, and the rural northern part of Bailundo *município* in Huambo province.

From failed settlement to military victory

By the late 1980s, the conflict between the MPLA government and UNITA had reached a military stalemate. The New York Accord signed by Angola, South Africa and Cuba in December 1988 led to the independence of Namibia and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. UNITA survived the loss of its South African allies in Namibia, thanks to the continued support of the Zairean government. A summit at Gbadolite in June 1989 failed to reach a solution, apparently because the MPLA government would not at that stage countenance UNITA's participation in a future political settlement. However, the changing global political situation was such that the MPLA's and UNITA's foreign allies were now more inclined to apply pressure in

favour of a peaceful solution to the conflict.⁴⁵⁷ Further talks between the MPLA government and UNITA led to the signing of an agreement in the Bicesse Accords in Portugal in May 1991. These provided for the demobilisation of UNITA and government armies and the creation of a new 50,000-strong armed force; committed the government to organising multi-party elections; and established a mandate for the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) to monitor compliance with the accords before and during the elections.

The implementation of the Bicesse agreement posed difficulties from the start. UNAVEM lacked personnel, funding and equipment while UNITA and, to a lesser extent, the Angolan government failed to respect the disarmament process.⁴⁵⁸ As the election dates of 29 and 30 September 1992 approached, only 41% of the government and UNITA armies had been demobilised and the political and security situation had “deteriorated significantly”.⁴⁵⁹ Both FAPLA and UNITA soldiers retained their different uniforms and different loyalties. For the first time since 1976, there were UNITA soldiers visible in the cities of the Central Highlands.⁴⁶⁰

Both parties retained control of media outlets: UNITA its VORGAN radio station, and the MPLA the whole of the state media, supported by Brazilian public relations professionals. This enabled both parties to begin disseminating results soon after polling closed. On 3 October, Savimbi announced:

We would like to draw the MPLA’s attention to the fact that there are men and

⁴⁵⁷ Malaquias 2007:140-148.

⁴⁵⁸ Goulding 2002:181-5.

⁴⁵⁹ Goulding 2002:187.

⁴⁶⁰ This was confirmed by the interviewees who were in Huambo or Kuito at the time.

women in this country who are ready to give up their lives so that the country can redeem itself. As far as we are concerned, it will not depend on any international organization to say that the elections were free and fair.⁴⁶¹

UNITA withdrew its generals from the FAA on 5 October, and the following day Savimbi flew from Luanda to Huambo and proceeded to set up his headquarters. According to Karl Maier, a journalist who was in Angola at the time, the decisive moment that marked the return to war was UNITA's occupation of Caconda, 200 kilometres south of Huambo in the north of Huila province.⁴⁶² Results announced on 17 October gave 53.7% of the vote to the MPLA and 34.1% to UNITA in the parliamentary election, and 49.57% to Dos Santos and 40.07% to Savimbi in the presidential election. The failure of either presidential candidate to secure 50% of the vote required a second round, which never took place.

By mid-October, the Ministry of Interior began distributing arms to civilians in Luanda in an ultimately successful effort to revive *poder popular* of 1975. In the countryside, UNITA was on the offensive, easily capturing towns and districts from poorly armed government forces.⁴⁶³

By the end of the year UNITA controlled 70% of Angolan territory.⁴⁶⁴ Early in 1993, the government began to regain ground; by late 1994, UNITA controlled only 40% of Angolan territory and was eager to sign a ceasefire. The government, having recovered the military initiative, was less enthusiastic about a ceasefire, but under diplomatic pressure signed the Lusaka Protocol with UNITA on 20 November 1994. The principal military requirements outlined in the Lusaka Protocol were a ceasefire, the incorporation of UNITA generals into the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) and the

⁴⁶¹ Maier 1997:13.

⁴⁶² Maier 1997:13.

⁴⁶³ Maier 1997:14.

⁴⁶⁴ Goulding 2002:190.

incorporation of UNITA troops into the national police. Political obligations included the completion of the electoral process (the holding of the presidential run-off necessitated by the fact that neither Dos Santos nor Savimbi had gained an outright majority of votes) and a vaguely defined process of “national reconciliation”. The UN was to monitor adherence to the protocol. A Joint Commission chaired by the UN and including representatives of the government, UNITA and the “Troika” of observer states, Portugal, Russia and the US, was to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

Although the government of national unity was established in April 1997 it was, according to Messiant,

‘united’ and ‘reconciled’ only in name. It contained ‘UNITA members’ who had been co-opted, through the terms of the agreement, into a government in fact led exclusively by the MPLA.⁴⁶⁵

On 2 September 1998, a group of UNITA government ministers and parliamentarians announced they were breaking away from Savimbi to form the UNITA Renovation Committee, or UNITA-Renovada. Critics of UNITA-Renovada saw it as a tool of the government; Isaias Samakuva, UNITA’s representative on the Joint Commission, who did not join UNITA-Renovada, spoke of “the government planning a new UNITA”, and the UN Secretary General noted that “the Government has been assisting the [Renovation] Committee in setting up provincial offices and holding political rallies, and was instrumental in transferring control over UNITA headquarters in Luanda to members of the Committee”.⁴⁶⁶ Manuvakola emerged as

⁴⁶⁵ Messiant 2004.

⁴⁶⁶ HRW 1999, chapter VII; Report of the Secretary-General on the UN Observer

the leader of the group. Since it was Manuvakola who had signed the Lusaka Protocol, the government announced that it would now recognise UNITA-Renovada as the interlocutor in negotiations to conclude the outstanding business of the Lusaka agreement.

The country's return to war in December 1998 has been blamed on bad faith on the part of the government and the UNITA, and on failures from the side of the UN. For Messiant, the most important reason for Lusaka's failure was that

the agreement was signed in a context of absolute mistrust between the parties, and it overlooked the fact that both parties were utterly determined not to abide by the rules of the game if necessary.⁴⁶⁷

By the time of the resumption of hostilities in 1998, the government had remobilised and re-equipped its armed forces, as increasing foreign interest in Angolan oil bolstered the government's position both financially and diplomatically.⁴⁶⁸ At the same time, UNITA's circumstances were straitened. In 1997 UNITA lost its most long-standing friendly neighbour with the fall of the Mobutu regime in Kinshasa. From 1998 the UN imposed a ban on the purchase of diamonds from UNITA and restrictive measures against UNITA officials living outside of Angola.⁴⁶⁹ This had the effect of cutting UNITA's lines of political and financial support from abroad. In October 1999, the towns of Andulo and Bailundo, the last urban centres held by UNITA, fell to the FAA.⁴⁷⁰ In April 2000, the UN noted that government forces had

Mission in Angola S/1998/931, 8 October 1998, ¶6.

⁴⁶⁷ Messiant 2004.

⁴⁶⁸ Maier 1997:16, Messiant 2003, Fernandes 2004.

⁴⁶⁹ UK Government, HM Treasury information on Angola: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/fin_sanctions_angola.htm (Accessed 3 June 2010).

⁴⁷⁰ IRIN 21 October 1999, "Angola: Military advance brings peace talks closer"

reduced the conventional war capability of UNITA, whose forces had regrouped to conduct guerrilla warfare, and that the army was responding with counter-insurgency measures.⁴⁷¹ The nature of these measures was made explicit on 20 June, when Deputy Minister of Defence Demostenes Chingulita addressed the Angolan National Assembly:

The Armed Forces and the Government designed a strategy for the total destruction of the forces and means of Savimbi's terrorist organisation and this strategy follows certain objectives, one of which was the withdrawal of the support of the people and organisation of Jonas Savimbi. [The army would] withdraw from [UNITA] the support of the people, confine them in inhospitable areas and, subsequently, deliver them the mercy blow. [...] Of course, these populations, after presenting themselves to the military are directed to the centres for welcoming IDPs and, subsequently, the organs and institutions of the Government mandated for this, [and] the Non-Governmental Organisations, have given what help possible.⁴⁷²

The annual humanitarian assessments compiled by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), although they avoid apportioning blame, suggest the scale of the impact of the UNITA and government strategies. At the end of 2001 OCHA reported:

Guerrilla and counter-insurgency warfare had a serious impact on civilians living in militarily contested areas. Tens of thousands of civilians were systematically attacked by armed elements and relocated, sometimes forcibly, into municipal and provincial centres where international agencies provided life-saving assistance. Many populations who entered safe havens were in appalling condition, having suffered extended periods of hunger and been subjected to harassment, looting and physical assault. Catastrophic malnutrition rates of more than 45 percent were recorded among several of the

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/OCHA-64BSXK?OpenDocument>.

⁴⁷¹ Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Angola, S/2000/304, 11 April 2000. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/OCHA-64DJN6?OpenDocument&cc=ago&emid=ACOS-635NGV>.

⁴⁷² *Diários da Assembleia Nacional*, Diário Numero 1, Ano Legislativo 1999/2000, I Série – No 4/Extraord/2000: Reuniao Plenaria Extraordinaria de 20/06/2000, Periodo da Tarde.

newly arrived populations.⁴⁷³

A year later, OCHA noted:

When hostilities finally ended [...] on 4 April [2002] [...] many Angolans expected a rapid improvement in the humanitarian situation. Instead, the devastating impact of guerrilla and counter-insurgency warfare, combined with years of under-investment in the social sectors, created crisis conditions affecting one quarter of the country's entire population.⁴⁷⁴

The movement of people for counterinsurgency purposes was nothing new in Angola, as the previous chapters have demonstrated. However, in earlier decades this strategy had affected people only in the marginal areas between the two armies' zones of control, its effect being to create a depopulated buffer zone rather than to present a serious challenge to the UNITA leadership who occupied zones beyond the reach of the MPLA state. After the fall of Bailundo and Andulo, the inner core of UNITA's leadership was on the run from a FAA which now had access to the entire national territory. Alcides Sakala, UNITA's secretary for foreign affairs who was in the eastern Angolan bush with UNITA military columns in those years, describes the effects of a scorched earth strategy, and notes the effects of hunger on UNITA's morale:

We found various burnt villages and, in the fields, they had pulled out all the people's cassava plants to deny them food and to oblige them to surrender.
[...]

With the mounting hunger, little acts of indiscipline also multiplied. But happily no one had run away, despite sixty men having gone out without authorisation just once today.

[...]

Food became effectively a strategic element for UNITA's resistance struggle

⁴⁷³ UN 2001:3.

⁴⁷⁴ UN 2002:2.

in the east of Angola. It was a daily challenge.⁴⁷⁵

Groups of UNITA soldiers and accompanying civilians across a large part of Angola would likely have had similar experiences. As my interviews illustrate, the response to the difficulties encountered by UNITA groups at local level was to make ever more severe demands on local people, and the increasing levels of hardship in UNITA areas facilitated the FAA's task of concentrating people in areas held by the government. Before considering these interviews, I briefly review previous relevant research-based literature that covers the period in question.

Documents on the post-1992 conflict

During the 1990s, it became possible for academics, journalists and NGO personnel to conduct research in Angola in a way that had not been possible in the first fifteen years of independence. This was due in part to the cessation of armed conflict after the Bicesse Accord, as well as to a relaxation of the restrictions on foreign visitors whose activities had previously been strictly controlled by the organisation – be it the MPLA or UNITA – that was hosting them.

The steps taken towards resolution of the Angolan conflict at the end of the 1980s led to an “opening up” of Angola to international aid and development organizations, which hoped to be involved in reconstruction and development programs after the elections of September 1992.⁴⁷⁶

In studying the 1990s we therefore have access to written material of a kind that does

⁴⁷⁵ Sakala 2006:250-251.

⁴⁷⁶ IRNCAC 2005:16.

not exist for the 1970s and 1980s. Of most interest to this thesis are reports that give an account of people's experience of the political movements. In particular, these written accounts can tell us something about the uses of violence and coercion by both sides. As noted in the introductory chapter, the study of violence through interview methods poses particular problems. Some interviewees were reluctant to talk about violence in any useful detail, while others, motivated apparently by the desire for personal or political self-justification, chose to understate the severity of violence. When studying events that took place thirty years previously, testimony is further weakened by the passage of time and the limitations of memory, and the dispersal of populations make it impossible to cross-check accounts of different incidents from independent sources, while still being sure that the different sources are indeed talking about the same incident. For this reason, I have avoided drawing any conclusions about the uses of violence based solely on oral testimony.

For the 1990s, however, the existing reports have the advantage of having been researched within a few years of the incidents having taken place. This chapter reviews some of the findings so as to complement the testimony obtained in my own interviews about the same period. The limitations of NGO reports must, however, also be borne in mind. Because they aim to highlight humanitarian needs and/or the violation of human rights law, their emphasis is on violence. They therefore tell us nothing about the periods of relative peace amid a time of war, or about the political relationships that the political movements sought to construct. As the interview testimony quoted later in this chapter will show, such political relationships endured or were renegotiated after the 1992 election, even though violence during this period spread to areas, notably the cities, that had not been sites of conflict during the 1980s.

The report published by Human Rights Watch in 1999 deals with abuses of human rights as defined by international and domestic law in the years following the Lusaka Accord, 1994 to 1998. The report accuses government and UNITA forces of torture, abduction, summary execution, indiscriminate killing, arbitrary recruitment into the military, and forced displacement of civilians. It additionally accuses UNITA of recruiting child soldiers, preventing children from being reunited with their families, and forcing people to work unpaid.⁴⁷⁷ The breadth of the HRW report's geographical scope and its focus on denouncing abuses means that it makes little attempt to relate the behaviour of soldiers and officials to the local political and military situation in which they found themselves, other than noting that abuses became more frequent as the war escalated in 1998. For this purpose the two later reports that I consider here, by UNICEF and International Research Network on Children and Armed Conflict (IRNCAC) offer more. The HRW report is nevertheless useful in providing further testimony about the kinds of abuses that were detailed by the other two reports: in particular, the abduction of civilians, especially minors, and their use as labourers or for sex.

Anna Richardson's research for UNICEF was conducted in refugee camps in Zambia over four weeks in 2001, its aim being "to find out everything possible about the current living conditions of children in UNITA-controlled areas of Angola".⁴⁷⁸ She conducted interviews with people who had arrived from different UNITA-controlled areas beginning in late 1999. Richardson's research is therefore useful for the insight it offers into life with UNITA in the years immediately prior to this: a time when

⁴⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch 1999: Chapter I (online text).

⁴⁷⁸ Richardson 2001:5.

UNITA was under military pressure, and attempting to prevent the people who lived under its control from going to government-held areas. Her research broke new ground in acknowledging the different experiences of life under UNITA reported by people who had come from various parts of Angola where people's relationships with UNITA had varied. These people included some who had lived at Jamba until its fall to the FAA in 1999; peasant farmers from rural parts of Moxico who had spent most of their lives under UNITA control; and members of the UNITA "elite" who had fled from Andulo and Bailundo – the Central Highlands towns that served as UNITA's headquarters between 1994 and 1999. Richardson acknowledges the constraints that she experienced through working in refugee camps where UNITA power structures remained intact, and where UNITA officials imposed limits on what residents could say to an outsider.⁴⁷⁹ Despite these pressures, Richardson's findings in no way endorse UNITA's preferred version of events; on the contrary, she emphasises the coercive nature of the relationship between UNITA's leadership and the people under its control. She acknowledges, however, that many had believed that UNITA was acting in their best interests.

In seeking to identify the conditions of "life under UNITA", Richardson disaggregates UNITA-influenced areas into an "internal zone", a "tax zone" and a "pillage zone".⁴⁸⁰ The internal zone, "at the heart of UNITA", was home mostly to people from the Central Highlands whose families "had suffered greatly at the hands of the MPLA and the Cubans, particularly in the late 1970's, and who fled to join UNITA in the bush as a means to survival".

⁴⁷⁹ Richardson 2001:8-10.

⁴⁸⁰ Richardson 2001:11-19. Compare Gersony's (1988) categorisation of RENAMO areas in Mozambique, and Kalyvas's distinction between "fragmentation" and "segmentation".

Many of them may be disillusioned with UNITA's failure to deliver on its promises, and with the incredibly harsh life they have led under UNITA control. However, most feel that they have no choice but to remain with UNITA, as they firmly believe that the Angolan government will kill them if they fall into its hands.⁴⁸¹

This description corresponds to the characterisation made in chapter four of this thesis, of a UNITA elite that comprised urban people who had left the cities of the Central Highlands, and whose relationship with UNITA was based on a belief that it was acting in their best interests. Richardson's interviews suggest that the civilian professionals associated with UNITA had initially lived separately from the UNITA military, but that this distinction had collapsed as UNITA suffered military setbacks during the 1990s, and the civilians came to live at the military bases for security reasons.⁴⁸²

Richardson's "tax zones" correspond to the area occupied by the "*povo da UNITA*" described in chapter four: there, UNITA "provided protection, health care, education and a form of criminal justice system to the people, in return for which people were expected to provide food, labour and members to the party". Richardson argues that the consensual relationship between UNITA and the people in these areas began to break down as UNITA came under increasing military pressure from the mid 1990s onwards, and its relationship with people became in some places "increasingly parasitic and abusive".⁴⁸³

"Pillage zones" for Richardson are those areas whose inhabitants are "powerlessly

⁴⁸¹ Richardson 2001:11.

⁴⁸² Richardson 2001:12.

⁴⁸³ Richardson 2001:13.

trapped between two hungry, marauding armies, accused of collaborating with the enemy by both sides”. This is similar to the situation I described in chapter three, experienced in the 1980s by people on the periphery of Huambo city, for example, who were on the shifting frontier of military control. Richardson points out that increasing numbers of people found themselves in such a situation in the late 1990s as the FAA and the state administration made inroads into areas that had previously been unchallenged UNITA territory. It is in such situations that violence against the civilian population became most brutal.⁴⁸⁴

Richardson reports that life under UNITA control “entails exposure to an alarmingly high level of violence”, but also makes it clear that much of this violence was the result of confrontations between UNITA and FAA. Only in the “pillage zones” does it appear that UNITA specifically targeted civilians. While rape by government soldiers had always been common, rape by UNITA soldiers became more frequent in the latter phases of the conflict.⁴⁸⁵

In terms of social services enjoyed by people under UNITA control in the 1990s, Richardson found that levels of education and perspectives on the future were much better among children from the Central Highlands and Cuando Cubango (where the “internal zones” were) than in the “tax zones” of Moxico, while in the “pillage zones” UNITA took no responsibility for people’s welfare.⁴⁸⁶

Richardson’s findings demonstrate that even in the 1990s, people’s circumstances

⁴⁸⁴ Richardson 2001:17.

⁴⁸⁵ Richardson 2001:21-22.

⁴⁸⁶ Richardson 2001:36.

varied according to the kind of relationship that their communities had with UNITA. Her research also suggests that consensual relationships between UNITA and people were progressively replaced by more violent and coercive encounters as UNITA came under increasing military and economic pressure during the latter half of the decade.

The 2005 report commissioned by the International Research Network on Children and Armed Conflict used a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology, using a random sampling technique within the geographical area that had been chosen for the survey, namely the province of Huambo.⁴⁸⁷ This report alone gives an idea of what proportion of the population of Huambo province had been affected by violence in the years prior to the research. It concludes that the “majority of the present population of Huambo province has been affected by war,” defining this in terms of death, injury, loss of assets or displacement.

The report confirms Richardson’s model of “zones” in which the relationship between UNITA and the population was more or less coercive, and suggests that the abductions of men, women and children were most likely to happen in “pillage zones”.⁴⁸⁸ It also confirms Richardson’s observation that as the war progressed during the course of the 1990s, people’s experience of UNITA was more likely to be one of violence.⁴⁸⁹ The report’s focus on children causes it to pay close attention to the recruitment of minors by both armies: it notes child recruitment had happened

⁴⁸⁷ Questions were put to heads of households concerning those members of the household who were 23 years old or younger at the time of the interview (2004). The oldest of these would only have been nine years old in 1990, so it is reasonable to assume that most, if not all, the experiences recorded in the surveys would have been from the post-1990 phase of the war. Qualitative interviews were conducted with young people themselves about their experiences.

⁴⁸⁸ IRNCAC 2005:47.

⁴⁸⁹ IRNCAC 2005:46-47.

regularly from the 1970s until the end of the war, but had risen sharply in 1997 and 1998. The report found that 9% of the boys and young men surveyed and 7% of the girls and young women had “lived with an armed group” at some point in their childhood. Although the report does not define “living with an armed group” explicitly, the context suggests that it refers to children who had been recruited for work in or alongside the military and who had been separated from their parents, rather than children living with parents who were themselves soldiers. While the percentages were highest for the oldest age category (21 to 23 at the time of the survey: 28% of men and 33% of women in this category had lived with an armed group), many respondents in the 15 to 17 age category also reported having lived with armed groups: 12% of boys and 16% of girls.

Of those children reported as “living with an armed group”, the majority had been with UNITA. On the basis of interviews, the report confirms that captured children were generally allocated to live in the home of a soldier, some of them first being held in prison-like conditions.⁴⁹⁰ The report accounts for UNITA’s use of children as follows:

UNITA made extensive use of children from the age of about 10 years old and that they were a low-cost, efficient and flexible source of labor. [...] UNITA had bases in many areas of the country but needed an undetectable means of transport. Children made less noise than lorries for transport of goods (munitions and goods stolen from fields, towns or convoys), they were easily hidden from view, they left few tracks and did not create clouds of dust. They could be made to cross rivers and mountains more easily than vehicles. Children were thus more useful than vehicles for transporting goods close to enemy lines or behind enemy lines in a form of warfare where there was not always a clear division of the country between the two sides.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ IRNCAC 2005:48.

⁴⁹¹ IRNCAC 2005:49.

The report offers a perspective on the notions of social organisation and justice that UNITA's followers cited in support of their claim that UNITA was an effective and state-like institution:

All of the interviews paint a picture of a highly regulated society, with rules and punishments. However, the interviews also suggest that the objective of the rules was the effective prosecution of the war. The rules may have changed as the phases of the war changed. Whatever UNITA's original intentions, the war became one of survival where girls were essential means of transport and soldiers had to be kept motivated. Interviewees say that some of the soldiers were punished, even executed, for abusing a girl. But this applied mainly to the lower-ranking soldiers. Higher-ranking soldiers would not be punished and girls had little protection against abuse except by forming longer-term relationships.⁴⁹²

The report gains credibility from the fact that its research design guarded against bias by asking initially about "armed groups" rather than making any assumptions about which side was involved. Its value for this thesis is as a reminder of the violence on which UNITA's rule depended in many cases: the report's observations are a useful counterpoint to the more idealised descriptions of life with UNITA offered by some interviewees. The report is also useful as a systematic account of how patterns of violence changed over the period under consideration: the individuals quoted in the following sections in this chapter concur that UNITA's relationship with the people it controlled became less consensual as the organisation came under increased military pressure towards the end of the 1990s.

Three locations

⁴⁹² IRNCAC 2005:51.

The interviews that form the basis of this chapter come from three principal areas chosen on the basis both of their historical significance and of the practicalities of conducting research there. The first is the city of Huambo, which during 1993 fell under the complete control of UNITA for the first time since Savimbi's departure from the city in February 1976. UNITA troops had been present in the city from the time of the ceasefire, and remained in uniform and loyal to their UNITA commanders. UNITA took complete control of the city after 55 days of intense fighting during January to March 1993, and remained in command until the following year.

The second area is the city of Kuito, the capital of Bié province some 150 kilometres east of Huambo. Kuito is of particular interest as the only urban settlement in the Central Highlands that was not entirely occupied by UNITA during the war that followed the elections. It has entered official histories, as well as some accounts by foreign writers, as a centre of popular resistance against UNITA.

The third area comprises rural areas in the far north of Huambo province, within the *município* (municipal district) of Bailundo. The town of Bailundo was one of the last two urban settlements in the Central Highlands to fall to the FAA in 1999, but UNITA remained active in the district, which extends more than 80 kilometres to the north of Bailundo, until the very end of the war. Interviews with people who had lived in this area throughout the war can therefore tell us about the kind of relationships that UNITA had with local populations in the final phase of the war, and enable us to compare these with UNITA's political strategies in the period before 1990.

Huambo

Huambo's status as the principal city of the Central Highlands gave it a particular significance for UNITA. As discussed in chapter three, it was UNITA's base in 1975 and 1976, and as noted earlier in this chapter it was in Huambo that Savimbi based his operations after he lost confidence in the electoral process in October 1992. Before the 1992 election, there were already soldiers from both sides in the city, and the failure of the demobilisation process ensured that they retained their separate uniforms and lines of command. The rival armies at first made themselves known principally by means of roadblocks. In the weeks following the election UNITA consolidated its position in the Cidade Baixa (downtown), São João and Benfica neighbourhoods. The former FAPLA soldiers controlled little more than the Cidade Alta (uptown) area, which contains the administrative quarter. Hence, although it is recorded that UNITA took control of Huambo in the course of a fierce 55-day battle, this was not a case of UNITA coming from elsewhere and taking the entire city by force. Before the heavy fighting happened, UNITA had already assumed effective control of part of the city. The most intense conflict was in those parts of the city that the FAA sought to defend.

The people quoted below lived in Huambo throughout the conflict. While none of them portrayed UNITA's presence in the city as beneficial to the population, there are notable differences in the ways in which people spoke about UNITA, which I suggest may be related to the various interviewees' relationship to the MPLA state, their prior political identities, and the circumstances of their encounter with UNITA: this last factor being closely related to which part of the city they lived in.

Those who spoke of UNITA's occupation of Huambo in wholly negative terms were people who had spent their lives working within the MPLA state system. Their narratives linked UNITA's lack of legitimacy to the way in which its members behaved during the occupation, something that these city-dwellers also associated with the fact that UNITA was from outside the city. Rui, a lawyer who had been a young man during the occupation, expressed it as follows:

UNITA took control of the city by force of arms, and I had the misfortune to be there with them. It was a matter of running the city in a worse manner, with the habits of the bush. It was a dictatorship without precedent. That's normal, because they were coming from the bush. It's normal for someone coming out of the bush, this way of running things, but it was complicated for us because we were used to urban life and they weren't – this was part of the first big differences between us.⁴⁹³

Roberto, who had joined the MPLA as a young man at the time of independence, emphasised the killing of civilians and the atmosphere of fear that this created. The killing of the Marcelino family was one of the most written-about acts of violence during the occupation, and indeed during the whole war.

In 1992 the situation started turning bad because the confrontations started in Luanda, just like in 1975. UNITA was driven out of Luanda. I don't know how it started. And after that, once it was positioned in the provinces, UNITA created situations where people would be fearful – that was easy. For example, killing an influential family, in their home – the family that was killed was called Marcelino. Engineer Marcelino was one of the greats, in the Portuguese world, he was known as a soil specialist. Chinaga, the Agricultural Research Institute, was at the time the best research institute in Africa. Marcelino was the director at that time, a person very well known in intellectual circles – most of the educated people in Huambo were agronomists because the faculty functioned so well. When he died and his wife died, and his sister who was a nun, it left everyone in a panic. After that, UNITA started to create reserve zones. It captured São João, it didn't allow anyone to go through there,

⁴⁹³ Interviewee 9, Huambo, May 2008.

captured Benfica, didn't allow anyone to go through there. To the point where downtown and in São João there was only UNITA. The MPLA was only here [in the upper city]. When war broke out, all those houses were destroyed, that have since been rebuilt. When the war broke out, the war was so fierce that regardless of whether you were with FAPLA or UNITA, wherever you were when the first shot was fired, you didn't leave there. It stayed like that for three months, and you didn't know who was on the other side. On that side you had to say you were with UNITA. The only lucky ones were the ones on the government side who managed to go with the government [when the FAA retreated] to Benguela. But only some arrived there, others died on the way.

UNITA killed, it didn't recruit anyone new. Because ... they didn't have civilians. Old or young or whatever, everyone was a soldier. That was sufficient – not only sufficient, but more secure in terms of ideology, because ideologically they were strong. All those who were in UNITA were soldiers, not civilians. They were groups that had been in the bush. There were no farmers. Every farmer had a gun and a uniform. Agriculture wasn't a factor for them because they had great support from South Africa – they depended on the American Congress to give them a sufficient grant. I'm not saying they lived well, but they lived all right. In a guerrilla war, agriculture doesn't work well. Agriculture needs peace and stability.⁴⁹⁴

Roberto lived in the part of the city which was the last to be occupied by UNITA in 1993, which saw some of the heaviest fighting, and which retained an identity as the MPLA part of Huambo. His experience of UNITA would therefore have been that of a force that attacked and then occupied where he lived. His narrative of UNITA's essentially military nature is linked to his view of UNITA as having no political legitimacy. Also significant is his statement that UNITA did not practice agriculture: an assertion that is precisely counter to UNITA officials' invocation of the movement's involvement in agriculture as a sign of its legitimacy.

According to Roberto, UNITA did not attempt military recruitment – its soldiers remained identifiably the group who had come from outside the city. Nevertheless, as in the past, people had to pretend that they had no political links with the opposition.

⁴⁹⁴ Interviewee 3, Huambo, May 2008.

It was recruitment by fear – if they are here, this is their zone, and they didn't tolerate in their midst anyone who said "I am from the other party". You had to pretend to be with UNITA. That way they tolerated you.

Others pointed to the minimal and inadequate nature of UNITA's attempts at governing the city. Mário, a schoolteacher who had served in the FAPLA and worked in the state education system since the early independence years recalled:

It was tough. Those of us who were used to earning salaries – it became very difficult for us. There was no employment. Employment was just with a hoe in a field. It was very tough.

Asked whether as a former FAPLA soldier he came under threat, Mário insisted that it was possible to remain politically neutral by not expressing support for the MPLA during the time that UNITA was in the city. His use of the word "citizen", in the same way that other people used the word "*povo*", refers to a category of people who were not political actors, but rather subject to whichever political movement was in control of the place where they were:

I suffered no direct threat because I was a citizen – I identified neither with the MPLA nor with UNITA. But if someone made a complaint, if they denounced you... I stayed with my brother who was a priest. One day a woman arrived who was with UNITA's security, looking for a generator. When she found me there, she made it known that she knew who I was but, thank God, she took no action against me.

[With the denunciations, was there any judicial system?]

There was, but we didn't know UNITA's way of working, we didn't know where these structures were. But, for example, a person who was denounced was sent to be interrogated. But people didn't know for sure. My wife who at that stage was a teacher was working in the municipal education office – but it didn't function. She just stayed at home – to survive she worked in the field and sold things here and there.

[Were there schools that continued to function?]

There were. They gave lessons during the school year. The people who worked there were the same. They were MPLA before, and when UNITA

came they only changed the boss.⁴⁹⁵

Referring to the violence and the breakdown in state services, he concluded that “the experience of this period turned people away from UNITA”.

The rejection of UNITA expressed by these last three interviewees is not expressed only in terms of suffering caused by UNITA, but no less significantly in terms of the fact that authoritarian rule provided evidence of UNITA’s guerrilla nature, which in itself was proof enough that UNITA had no place in the city. Nevertheless, as Mário pointed out, those who expressed no affection for either party could escape punishment. They could survive as long as they had land to cultivate, and no expectations of state services.

Yet the violence and the deprivations of the period when UNITA controlled Huambo ultimately served to change attitudes towards the organisation even among those who on ideological or identity grounds had once supported it. This emerges clearly in an interview with a brother in a religious order who had grown up in Huambo in the 1980s. Although he and his family had suffered violence perpetrated by both sides in the conflict during his childhood, he expressed support for UNITA in the same terms used by the UNITA leadership, suggesting that the organisation understood and promoted “southern Angolan” values, which he defined as follows:

Values of solidarity – the concept of the extended family, as opposed to the western family concept. Our life is very shared, we are very together. [...] And hospitality. [...] Before the Portuguese came we didn’t write, but there was a wisdom in proverbs. In the *jango* [village meeting house], proverbs and history could be transmitted to new generations [...] who could become adults

⁴⁹⁵ Interviewee 22, Huambo, May 2008.

within a culture, within a family. [...] José Eduardo dos Santos doesn't speak Umbundu, he doesn't know the culture of this tribe. Savimbi could speak almost all the Angolan languages.

While he continued to assert the importance of such values, this man recognised that for most people in Huambo, anything that UNITA might have to offer in terms of cultural solidarity was outweighed by the violence with which it became associated after 1990.

What destroyed UNITA's reputation was the problem of killing. The war manifested itself more and more fiercely, and they killed more each time. This created a contradiction. Some preferred to work with the MPLA. With the government, they felt more secure. But UNITA was the party that had grown out of a culture that we know.⁴⁹⁶

Previous family political affiliations also had an impact on the kind of value judgments that people made about UNITA while it was in Huambo. According to Patrícia, a schoolteacher whose family members had supported both UNITA and the MPLA at different times:

In 1993 many people I knew left Huambo. [Among those who remained] I knew people who would work in the hospital and then go to the fields [where they grew their food]. UNITA tried a system of management – but it was more by force of arms. I was asked to teach, but was not paid. No one could leave [the UNITA controlled area] – you'd be punished if you were caught.

Asked whether her role as a government employee had caused her difficulty under UNITA, Patrícia said:

I wasn't punished as a civil servant, but those who were partisan were punished. It was the same under the MPLA – someone suspected of being on the other side was punished. My husband was imprisoned – he was accused of

⁴⁹⁶ Interviewee 2, Huambo, May 2008.

communicating with the MiGs [government aircraft], but it was just a personal grudge. He spent 28 days in prison. They just sent troops to fetch him. There was no trial. Military crimes were considered treason.⁴⁹⁷

Patrícia talks openly about the injustices of life under UNITA, without displaying any particular preference for the MPLA, and is less judgmental than the other interviewees concerning the two movements' relative legitimacy as rulers. People who were accustomed to making a living from agriculture and therefore less dependent on an urban economy had less to lose with the arrival of UNITA in the city. Bárbara, a farmer at the time of the interview, described an early life similar to some of those quoted in chapter three. She had grown up in a rural area of Huambo province which after independence fell between the zones of control of UNITA and the government, in which she had seen villages burnt by both sides as they sought to purge the area of people who might support the enemy. After she eventually settled in a government area, she had worked for several years in a state-run shop, but had lost her job when it was privatised. After that she had made her living as a small farmer. At the time of the election she was living in the São João area of Huambo, where UNITA took control early and with little resistance.

We didn't suffer much because we were under the control of UNITA. There were no problems for those of us who had fields. The problem was with salt and petrol. We could even go and cultivate in Katchiungo [some 80 kilometres to the east, and also under UNITA control].⁴⁹⁸

Asked if UNITA sought revenge against the people of the city, Bárbara replied:

We are people (*povo*) – they only punished those who were soldiers. If I said “so-and-so works for the government”, that person would be tied up. We

⁴⁹⁷ Interviewee 108, Luanda, October 2008.

⁴⁹⁸ Interviewee 115, near Huambo, October 2008.

didn't choose (UNITA) – I'm religious, I'm not from any party. All that time, people accepted (UNITA) because they were occupying the area. If you didn't, they'd kill you.

Of life in the post-war period, she said: “We don't have to make slaves of ourselves as in the time of UNITA. Not having war any more is enough for Angolans.”

Other people from farming communities on the city's periphery were more vocal about the lack of basic manufactured items – particularly salt and soap – during the UNITA occupation. This was particularly noticeable in those neighbourhoods that had served as resettlement areas for people who in the 1980s had been moved en masse, for security reasons, out of the countryside and resettled on the edges of the city, and who had been the most strongly influenced by the MPLA politicisation that accompanied the provision of land for resettlement and the management of humanitarian aid from international donors. The following description of life under UNITA was typical of the farmers who had been resettled to the urban fringes.

[Under UNITA control] people did badly. There was a lot of hunger. UNITA killed those who had been wrongfully denounced. A person could say that someone had done this or that which they hadn't really done, and they would be killed. One could be accused of being a thief, or an MPLA sympathiser.⁴⁹⁹

Urban people, whether MPLA loyalists or politically neutral, had become dependent on a definition of statehood based on the maintenance of peace and order, and the creation of conditions for an adequate supply of food. Of course, such a definition is similar to the one invoked by UNITA in the bush, but two differences are noticeable in how it was understood and applied in (MPLA-ruled) cities as opposed to (UNITA-dominated) rural areas. Urban people, for example, expected salaries with which they

⁴⁹⁹ Interviewee 15, Huambo, May 2008.

could buy manufactured products from shops. They expected that state functions such as education and justice would be conducted according to certain norms and procedures. The social service functions that UNITA had implemented at Jamba, and to a lesser extent at its guerrilla bases, were highly regulated, as we have seen in the previous chapter. But the UNITA that arrived in the towns of the Central Highlands around the time of the 1992 elections had neither the means nor the expertise to govern a city. It arrived as an organisation that was above all military in character, and which was suspicious of an urban population that it judged to be hostile to it. In the relatively short period in which it remained in control of the city, it seems to have made few attempts to secure hegemony.

Kuito

In a study of the Central Highlands during the 1990s, Kuito, the capital of Bié province, is of interest as the only location within the region in which the MPLA state maintained a presence throughout the conflict. The innermost section of central Kuito did not fall to UNITA after the return to war in early 1993. Civilians participated in the efforts to defend the city centre against further UNITA incursions, while the severing of supply routes caused severe hunger in the city. Kuito's peculiar history has given a particular political significance to the memory of events there. The memorialisation has been given substance in the years since the end of the war by the exhumation of the thousands of bodies that were buried in the city's public places and private yards, and their reburial in a monumental memorial cemetery on the outskirts of town. The official version of the siege of Kuito appears in a slim book called

Esteve em chamas o Kuito (Kuito was in flames) by a former army officer, Samuel Pequenino. I quote some extracts that illustrate the tone and content of the book:

Amid the senselessness on the part of Jonas Malheiro Savimbi in relation to the first free and fair elections held in 1992, the people of Angola and particularly of Bié saw themselves obliged to organise themselves to confront the new challenges that the moment made necessary.

[With] the return to war on 6 January 1993, at 2.30 on Thursday morning, civil society of this town [Kuito], using the faculty of defending their fundamental rights, self-defence of their lives, their families, their goods, their way of life etc, organised itself into sectors that defended themselves in almost all directions around the city of Kuito.

...

On 16 March the city's defences were breached owing to the fall [to UNITA] of the city of Huambo on 6 March. At this point UNITA intensified its bombardment using large calibre arms [...] At this point, the group of youths who named themselves the "Salvation Patrol", led by the late "Pimpolho", were formed in the areas next to the Provincial Hospital that constituted its defensive zone.⁵⁰⁰

The book goes on to detail a gradual retreat by the army under enemy fire, and the death of Pimpolho and successive leaders.

In June 1994 at the time of the liberation of the city, this group participated in the expulsion of the enemy from the martyred city, together with other civil defence forces from the Gabiconta [city centre] sector and the National Police.⁵⁰¹

The book also records the efforts of the populace in keeping the city supplied with whatever food could be obtained.

As resources dried up and rejecting the call of the enemy for us to survive by

⁵⁰⁰ Pequenino 2008:51.

⁵⁰¹ Pequenino 2008:52.

eating asphalt, the famous and very difficult “*Batidas*” were adopted.⁵⁰² *Batidas* were incursions made that crossed enemy lines and mine fields and travelled long distances in search of sustenance in areas controlled by the enemy. In this battle many compatriots remained on the ground [dead], the victims of attacks, ambushes, landmine detonations and weakness. In such situations there was no medical help, something that contributed to the unspeakable death of various compatriots. These *batidas* involves thousands of people: men, women and children.⁵⁰³

Interviews conducted in the city during 2009 paint a more complicated picture of what happened during the siege of Kuito. The people whom I quote here were teachers aged in their fifties or sixties. All were working in the state education system, and all appeared to be firmly pro-MPLA in their political convictions. Their recollections of UNITA’s soldiers’ behaviour during the siege include accounts of violence and callousness towards human life even more extreme than what is described in Pequenino’s book. Their narratives of the siege nevertheless challenge the official account: far from confirming the image of a population united in defence of the state against UNITA, they tell of people motivated by pragmatic decisions, and of political identities that were no less fluid than at any other time of the conflict. They also speak of violence and self-serving behaviour on the loyalist side. To explain the teachers’ unequivocal loyalty to the MPLA in contrast to the ambivalence of their accounts of events during the siege, I situate their narratives in the context of the discourses about political identity that had emerged around the time of independence and continued through the years of war preceding the elections.

One of the teachers, Adriana, recalled the *batidas* as follows:

⁵⁰² *Batida* – generally a hunting party or reconnaissance mission – is the term that was adopted for the expeditions that left Kuito to gather food across enemy lines.

⁵⁰³ Pequenino 2008:55.

As soon as the war started again the food shortages started. [...] As time went on, hunger closed in and people had to work out ways of organising food. The way we used was to go out in columns with soldiers to go to the fields – this movement was what we called the *batida*.

When we started, the food was close by – we would come back the same day, even two or three times in a day, but later the food became ever more distant, to the point where it took 15 days before we returned. It was very risky. Many people died on these *batidas*. There were attacks – UNITA, when they discovered that a group had passed that way would put down mines, when they realised that a route was being used. Sometimes a mine was a sign to know that someone had passed by – when they heard an explosion they knew there were people there and they would shoot. Many people died: shot dead, or from weakness. A person was already weak with hunger, and unprepared for such a journey. [...] A very hungry person who finds sugar cane and chews sugar cane is left with no strength – they have to stay there, and the others can't stop: "you stay there". Either you die of weakness, or if [UNITA] find you, you die.

[Did you meet peasants during the *batidas*?]

Generally when people were coming, [the peasants] realised people were coming, and fled, went away. The people [from the city] would find fields and start taking. Houses with storerooms inside, people would take from there. Sometimes they found people. War turned them irrational. They would kill people. And if they found someone and the maize belonged to him, they would kill him as well. So, when people heard the *batida* was coming, they would run away. [Peasants] knew that if [the townspeople] found them, either they would give you a heavy load to carry, or else [...] We walked with soldiers and everything. If one found a civilian in his field, or in his house, it was a case of grabbing a bag of maize that was then given to him to carry. The weight was such that sometimes the person didn't manage to pick it up – and if he didn't pick it up, he would be killed.

Adriana acknowledges that the *batidas* involved violence against the farming communities. Also noteworthy is her description of the involvement of the state, in the form of the FAA, in accompanying the expeditions. However, not everyone participated in the *batidas*. Another teacher, Elena, explained the start of the conflict as follows:

The war broke out because the group that lost the elections made *confusão* on a global scale. The people who lived in the city didn't have food. People had to go and do a sort of robbing of food in the villages. I didn't go because I had

children. So I made liquor and bought food.⁵⁰⁴

She said the ingredients to make alcohol came “from the parachutes,” referring to the airdrops that the Angolan Armed Forces made to the garrison in Kuito: “The soldiers sold sugar.” On the behaviour of the government soldiers, she said “most troops respected people, though there are always some who don’t behave well”.

Another survival strategy was to leave, though government soldiers initially tried to prevent this. Elena slipped out of Kuito at the end of 1992 to the Kunhinga district, 30 kilometres north of Kuito.

We left on foot at night – we stayed in Kunhinga four months, then went back to Kuito [...] because of the behaviour of UNITA troops. There was lots of food there in Kunhinga. But UNITA didn’t like us because we hadn’t lived there very long. Their soldiers tried to rape my daughters who were aged 12 and 14.

When I was back in Kuito I grew things in the yard – made sauce, sold it in market. Food was coming in from the parachutes – the troops went to fetch it, but sometimes the opposition [UNITA] got there first. Sometimes *povo* [civilians] too. This continued until President José Eduardo dos Santos thought of having dialogue.

Marta, originally from a village in Andulo district, had moved to Kuito when she began her career in the 1970s. As hunger took hold of Kuito in 1993, she returned to the village where she had grown up, claiming that the government had sanctioned this.

I left the city on 18 March. On the UNITA side I ran into difficulties. They called us *anti-motim*.⁵⁰⁵ My son got left behind on the road. Other boys stayed in the place where the government were collecting [recruiting] young men.

⁵⁰⁴ Interviewee 189, Kuito, August 2009.

⁵⁰⁵ Literally “anti-rebellion”: normally used of riot police, but adopted by UNITA supporters as a derogatory term for the MPLA.

[The government soldiers] took my clothes, ordered me to open my bag. Some who were carrying litres of cooking oil were killed. They showed the route that went to the place where there were people who killed them. If there were young men in civilian clothes this meant [to the government soldiers] they were UNITA troops and they were killed as they left the city.

I arrived in Andulo. UNITA ordered me to teach, without a salary. They said I must work as I had worked for the MPLA. Whoever didn't work didn't have the right to live. I didn't receive anything. I had to go back to my village and sell the tiles.⁵⁰⁶ The UNITA people [*povo da UNITA*] who were rebuilding houses gave me maize.⁵⁰⁷

Many of the men who remained in the government-held enclave in Kuito participated in civil defence. Alberto, another teacher, spoke of how the civil defence was organised.

As workers we took up arms in civil defence. There was no worker who didn't. I'd teach a class and then take up my gun. Everyone was obliged to do this. It was organised by the government for the protection of the people. The people in general participated. The government gave out the weapons and it was necessary for each one to protect himself.⁵⁰⁸

His colleague, João, also participated in civil defence before hunger drove him to leave the city in 1993 and to live in a UNITA-controlled village. His main complaint about life in the village was the unavailability of salt, as was the case with many people who had experienced life under UNITA.

We worked in the fields, and were ignored by UNITA. There were no UNITA troops stationed there. Whoever was in the village was *povo* – considered to be a peasant.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ The roof tiles from the family home. To have a tiled as opposed to a thatched roof is a marker of prestige.

⁵⁰⁷ Interviewee 188, Kuito, August 2009.

⁵⁰⁸ Interviewee 190, Kuito, August 2009.

⁵⁰⁹ Interviewee 191, Kuito, August 2009.

The way he views the political status of *povo* is clarified by his description of what happened in 1985, when he left his rural village to go to Kuito.

Civil servants are controlled – *povo* are not. In 1985, we functionaries had to abandon the area and go to where there was protection. But the people stayed there. You know, the people weren't controlled. It doesn't matter whether UNITA appeared or the government. But functionaries, if you stayed you were captured.

This possibility of the *povo* being apolitical was one that he could turn to his advantage when he went back to the village: like the man in Huambo who felt he escaped punishment because he was a “citizen”, João recognised that by presenting himself as a farmer, he was improving his chances of survival since farmers were seen not as political actors, but rather as people who simply by their presence in an area belonged to the political movement that was in charge there. Similarly, when Marta talks about “*povo da UNITA*” having helped her, she appears to acknowledge the fluidity of this designation. To her, they were “*povo da UNITA*” because that was how the official discourse defined people who were living in a UNITA-dominated area, yet she acknowledges solidarity between them and herself.

It is difficult to discern a clear pattern in UNITA's attitude towards civilians in Kuito. Accounts of the siege suggest that in Kuito more than anywhere else that is dealt with in this thesis, life or death could depend on an individual soldier's decision. In Huambo for most of 1993 UNITA was defending a precarious military victory, but in Kuito UNITA was still on the offensive. What is evident is that the most violent encounters took place at the boundaries of control between the two movements, or when either government or UNITA soldiers made incursions into the territory of the other side. Soldiers of both armies used their guardianship of the frontlines as an

opportunity for extortion, recruitment, or sexual exploitation, while expressing their authority in state-like terms of defence against an enemy, which rendered anyone coming from or going to the opposing side liable to violent punishment. Young men in particular were assumed to be enemy soldiers. Elena found herself and her family subjected to unbearable threats from UNITA, yet others found that UNITA could disregard the fact that they had previously worked for the MPLA: for Marta, acceptance depended on working in UNITA's education structures, while for João, it was a matter of working as a peasant and concealing the fact that he had worked as a teacher. The discourses from the past on control and identity ensured that they could come to be seen as "UNITA people" even if they were initially treated with suspicion as government people. We can see here the logic of Cooper's "gatekeeper state" surviving where the power of the state had been reduced to brute violence, in a way that recalls Reno's observation about the difficulty sometimes of distinguishing states from warlords.⁵¹⁰

The interviewees themselves considered themselves affiliated to the MPLA regardless of whether they were in the MPLA-controlled city enclave or in the UNITA-controlled countryside. This contrasts with the situational shifts in political identity that have been noted in earlier chapters of this thesis. Indeed, the people quoted here had all experienced life under UNITA in the villages of Bié province after independence: the choices that they made in 1992 and 1993 and how they spoke about these choices are best understood in terms of their earlier relationships with the two political movements, in the 1970s. Adriana's experience of living in a UNITA controlled area, and initially fearing "capture" by MPLA forces, is described in

⁵¹⁰ Cooper 2002; Reno 1998: see discussion in chapter one.

chapter three. Other interviewees of the same generation in Kuito spoke about how they had come to accept the MPLA, and indeed to become actively involved in the process of state-building that took place under the MPLA.

Alberto described the situation: “There was one party in the bush, one in the city. Those in the city were of the city. Those from there [the bush] submitted themselves to that life.”

He characterised the role of the MPLA as being:

To save the people – so the people could liberate themselves and achieve peace. As a teacher – I had to take part in party activities. No one working in the framework of the government could work independently. They had to be in the party. Every human being has to work. Only the government could give work, and the party controlled the government.

Adriana described the process of politicisation that began from childhood:

[Our] school was good, with classrooms, good teachers and materials. But the threat [from UNITA] was permanent.

[Did you participate in party organisations?]

Because of the age I was, I joined OPA, participated in OPA activities. It was mostly political activities – when there was a rally we would go along and march and sing. But they also gave us military training: running, tracking, shooting. Girls as well as boys. The message was to struggle against UNITA. When we were there [in the UNITA-controlled area], the message was to denigrate the MPLA and FAPLA – here the message was to denigrate UNITA and FALA. Each side spoke ill of the other. There we stayed, I began to study – we were living in war, with that insecurity, but it was enough to make some sort of a life – we in the cities were able to study. Until that peace of 1992 came along.

Adriana’s account of what happened next– the arrival of UNITA as a result of the Bicesse Accord, and the subsequent siege – is rooted in the understandings of political

legitimacy that had become current in the years between 1975 and 1990. As we have seen, she witnessed brutality on the part of FAA soldiers as well as UNITA. What preserved her loyalty to the MPLA was not only the fact that the FAA was less violent than UNITA's troops, but also the fact that she believed the FAA was defending something that UNITA only threatened to destroy.

I think that in Kuito, if the people hadn't been involved [in defence], UNITA would have taken the city. As the people had already suffered a lot from the war, and then that peace came along, people were excited that the war had ended. When they realised that the war was starting again, people organised themselves to fight against [war], so it wouldn't happen again.

During the time when [the MPLA] lived together⁵¹¹ with UNITA, it was evident that UNITA didn't like MPLA people. The intention was to limit everyone who was MPLA. So that only they [UNITA] would be left. Among the population that was with the MPLA, the feeling was to defend themselves so as not to fall into the hands of UNITA – it was known that if UNITA were to retake the city, everyone would die.

In an MPLA-ruled urban enclave like Kuito, ideas of citizenship were constituted in a narrative of state building in which the MPLA was the only protagonist. According to this narrative, the main functions of the state were education and job provision and, crucially, defence against UNITA. Peace was a necessary condition for the social order that the MPLA had created, and people came to perceive UNITA as a threat to that peace. The interviewees acknowledge that in 1975 and 1976 they had lived with UNITA and accepted the understandings of power and legitimacy that UNITA offered, but had readily accepted the MPLA's legitimacy once they were living under MPLA control. But a similar change of political affiliation was not possible in 1993. People had become accustomed to an urban order that was associated with the MPLA. UNITA had come to represent the disruption of that same order: when, after the

⁵¹¹ “*Durante o tempo quando conviveu com a UNITA...*” She refers to the pre-election period when both parties had representatives, and troops, in the city.

Bicesse Accord, UNITA appeared in Kuito in military form and tried to take control of the city by force, this was recounted as part of the same narratives that linked state building to the MPLA and to peace. Alberto's description of how the Civil Defence was constituted links the role of state in organising employment to its role in organising defence, and the duties of the citizen as a worker to the duties of the citizen as a defender. Similarly, this merging of the civil and military functions of the state can be seen in the involvement of the FAA in the *batidas*.

The schoolteachers acknowledged the abusive behaviour of troops on both sides, and the violence that was involved in the *batidas*. They justified the FAA's actions in terms of a legitimacy that was rooted in the government's position as the creator and defender of a society and an economy that UNITA threatened only to destroy. The fact that UNITA was presiding over productive agriculture a few kilometres outside the city allowed the urban population to see the UNITA areas as a short-term survival option, but not as a longer-term political option. The narrative of heroic resistance referred to at the beginning of this section, which has come to dominate the official accounts of the siege, stems from the older official discourses that linked control and political identity. In order to construct a memory of an urban population united in purpose on the side of the MPLA, it was necessary to ignore the fact that some had taken the pragmatic decision to live with UNITA.

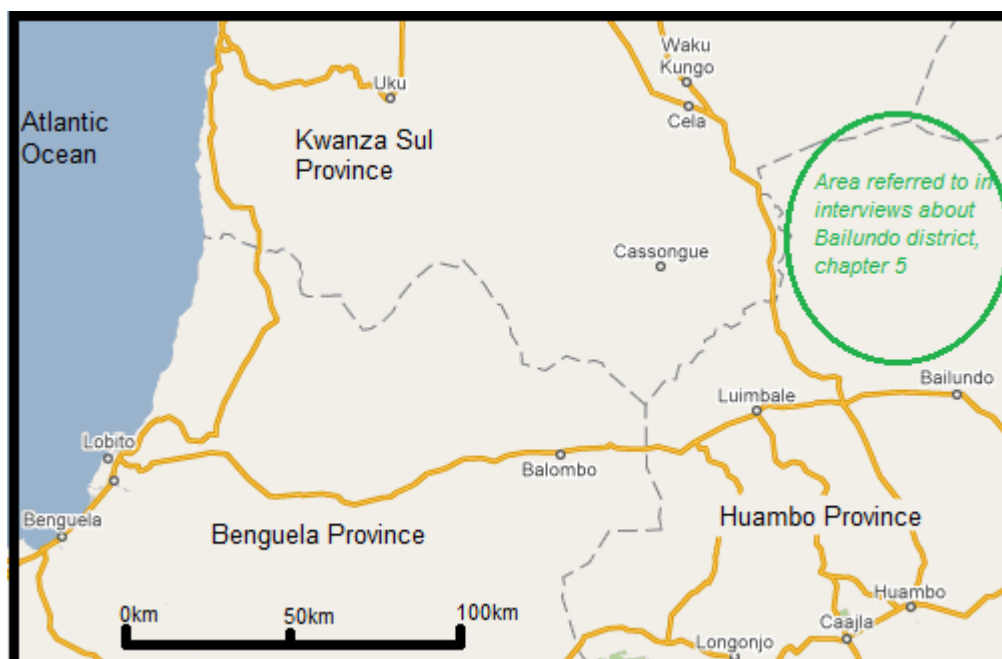
Bailundo district

The town of Bailundo lies about 100 kilometres north-east of Huambo. North of

Bailundo, the next town is Waku Kungo, more than 150 kilometres away in the neighbouring province of Kwanza Sul. The *município* of Bailundo extends all the way to the provincial boundary, as much as 80 kilometres from the town itself. Interviews were conducted at a mission close to the provincial border, and also in a village further south, some 40 kilometres to the north of Bailundo town: 40 kilometres that even in peacetime represented a two-hour car journey often through thick woodland. Both locations were for many years beyond the reach of the MPLA state.

Bailundo: The mission

The area surrounding the mission was contested between the MPLA and UNITA around the time of independence. In the early 1980s, the MPLA state evacuated a large part of the population to Waku Kungo. According to interviewees' accounts, the only people who did not go to Waku Kungo were those whom UNITA took to bases still further from the main roads and towns. After the Bicesse accords, people returned from Waku Kungo to the lands around the mission, believing that the war had finished. The MPLA state seemed to have had no presence in the area during the brief



peace after Bicesse. UNITA deployed soldiers in the area, who in the weeks after the election assumed control here as they had done elsewhere in the province. As one resident explained: “UNITA troops entered Bailundo [town] in 1991, secretly, and lived among the population – they only let us know after the elections. Whoever was MPLA was killed.”⁵¹²

However, the more distant rural parts of Bailundo district saw little violence in the post-election period, since – unlike in the towns – there were no troops present who were loyal to the MPLA. When Savimbi was expelled from Huambo in 1994 it was to Bailundo that he retreated, and made the town his principal base until in 1999 it became – along with Andulo in Bié province – one of the last two Central Highlands towns to be captured by the FAA. Nevertheless, elements of UNITA remained active in the remoter parts of Bailundo *município* until Savimbi’s death in 2002. As already noted, UNITA faced severe difficulties after 1997 following the loss of its ally in Kinshasa, the imposition of sanctions and the rearmament of the FAA. During the last years of the war, the FAA applied more systematically than ever before the counter-insurgency measures that its predecessor, FAPLA, had used from the earliest days of the civil conflict. People interviewed in this part of the province speak of having lived in peace under UNITA until the late 1990s, but spent the last years of the war on the move or in remote mountain areas as UNITA tried to prevent them from defecting to or being captured by government forces. As with all the interviews conducted for this thesis, the versions of history given here appear to be entwined with the interviewees’ political beliefs, and what they perceived to be the preferred versions of history put forward by those in power at different times.

⁵¹² Interviewee 133, Bailundo, November 2008.

José was born near the mission in 1967, and began his education at the mission school before the government moved him and his family to Waku Kungo in 1976, when he was nine years old.

We were taken from here [to Waku Kungo] by the MPLA's forces, FAPLA. [...] Others remained here [near the mission] under the control of UNITA. [...] Life in the town was normal, despite a separation between the natives of the town and those of us who were considered displaced people. The authorities told them 'you mustn't mistreat one another'. [When UNITA tried to attack the town] the local people said to us: 'your cousins are coming because of you'.⁵¹³

When asked whether the people did indeed have contact with UNITA, José said UNITA soldiers would come into the peri-urban *bairros* of the town at night, and talk to the displaced people. They would talk about common home areas, or share information about common friends. There were also people in the town who helped UNITA, he said.

[UNITA] created bases near the town and they would come into the town, talk to the *sobas* and explain the reasons for the war between the parties. They would say 'our war is for everyone to be the rulers of this fatherland – for people to cease suffering and to live in peace'. They said our country's wealth was being taken away by others.

Asked whether the people accepted these ideas propagated by UNITA, José replied: "some did, others didn't". Aged 15, he was "captured" by FAPLA. Because of "suffering" in the army, he ran away to Luanda, living with relatives and engaging in small trade, so as not to be caught by the army again. After the Bicesse Accord, he returned to the area of his birth before the 1992 elections:

⁵¹³ Interviewee 134, Bailundo, November 2008.

There we found houses destroyed, bush where there had been villages. [...] [But] when we arrived we were well received by UNITA, each of us was directed to an area [in which to live]. We then came to know we must abandon the politics of *there* [i.e. the other place, the government] and enter the politics of UNITA. Because I had passed sixth grade I went to do a teacher training course and was placed in a school as a teacher. I was a teacher with UNITA for ten years. There was a difference between UNITA's teaching and the government's teaching. With the government it was just about passing grades. With UNITA, it was so that a person would know things.

There were, however, practical difficulties in the provision of health and education.

There was no electricity. There was no chalk – just charcoal. We worked very hard. [...] With UNITA each area had a health post, although medicine was not abundant. So they had ways of using roots and other things (as natural remedies). But it was all free of charge. With UNITA each village was obliged to have a field for the party (used to grow food for official visitors) and also had to contribute food for the troops. Each village created a granary where maize was stored.

He described a hierarchical system of administration with officials at provincial, municipal and local level. He spoke of a justice system with trained magistrates, who would mete out punishments ranging from sentences in “prisons” – underground pits – for serious offences to extra work in the fields for minor offences. The well-organised systems that he had described started to break down, he said, as UNITA's army was put to flight by the government's offensives that began in 1998.

With the end of the war in 2002, José proceeded to one of the quartering areas that had been set up in terms of the peace settlement for UNITA soldiers and adherents. As someone who had experience as a teacher under UNITA, he was able to register as a teacher with the government education department, and later was granted a job. However, teachers formerly attached to UNITA had been ordered to join the MPLA.

Since he refused to do so, his salary was withheld.

Another man, Ramos, had also been taken by the government with his peasant farmer family to Waku Kungo in 1976, when he was 12.

The (FAPLA) troops supported us with vehicles and put us in a resettlement area (*aldeamento*) called 15. The government supported us with food and clothing. We got our educational material for free, and minimal amounts of food, milk and clothes.

All pupils joined OPA.⁵¹⁴ In OPA we played sport, and made fields for the school. Wherever the MPLA was, OPA was there. I learnt to respect the symbols of the country. We learnt about the independence heroes, and Ekuikui II, Mandumbe, King Kwanhama, and Queen Ginga. It was peaceful there, a liberated zone. Here [where the interview was conducted], there was intense war. There were [UNITA] attacks, but there were more on the borders [of the MPLA-controlled area]. Not in Waku Kungo. The war only came in 1990-1991. My parents worked on a big farm, an agricultural complex. The residents of Waku Kungo offered land, and the government also arranged land for free. I worked with my father.

I left school in 1982 when I completed sixth grade. It was obligatory to go to the military life [with FAPLA]. I abandoned school because I was being chased to go to the troops. At school, it's easy to be caught to go to the troops – in the village it is more difficult.⁵¹⁵

The village to which he fled was about twenty kilometres from Waku Kungo. Asked whether UNITA had attacked the village during his time there, Ramos replied:

Only after 1990 – and there were even attacks in the city [Waku Kungo] too. But they only took things: clothes, food, bicycles. In 1991 they entered [occupied] our village. They had a system – they organised things, and people went along with their policy/politics [*política*]. Instead of going to the [UNITA] troops I took up nursing, in Waku Kungo itself [which fell under UNITA control from 1992].

At the time of the elections, “UNITA and the MPLA were in Waku Kungo together,”

⁵¹⁴ Angolan Pioneers' Association: the MPLA youth structure.

⁵¹⁵ Interviewee 135, Bailundo, November 2008.

but as UNITA consolidated its control over the town, “the government made efforts to make people abandon Waku Kungo”. While in Waku Kungo in 1992 and 1993 he received training as a nurse, and when the MPLA returned and drove UNITA out, he left with UNITA: “If the government found you had been living with UNITA, if you weren’t lucky they could cut off your head.”

Ramos told how UNITA placed him in a hospital close to his home area, first as an intern and then as a nurse. He left the hospital in 1996 to live with his ageing father in his home village: “UNITA understood, and put me at a health post there.”

He spoke of UNITA’s efforts to promote a certain view of its own history:

[Political education was] only about what life was like before independence and after. But there were rallies. They would speak of life in colonial times and in time of war: the reason for the war, the struggle for power. In the beginning all three movements were together, then one movement organised the people in one way, and the other in another. This is how the war started. It was a question of who would win the war for the people to be freed from slavery, because slavery still exists.

But reflecting on this politicisation, he took a sceptical view: “With the suffering of war – slavery is war itself, and suffering. There was no difference at all [between control by one side and the other].” However, he spoke positively of UNITA’s efforts at organising health care and education.

The hospital comprised adobe buildings. It was well organised. They performed operations with the minimal conditions. Sterilisation, asepsis. They used Ketalar⁵¹⁶ as a general anaesthetic so as to control blood pressure and breathing. The hospital was mostly for soldiers at the battlefield, but also for

⁵¹⁶ A commercial name for ketamine, a drug that can induce general anaesthesia without the need for artificial breathing apparatus.

the people. They could treat appendicitis. There was only one doctor. In the surgery there were twelve nurses, and in the curative medicine section there were more than twenty nurses. There was a dentist from Luanda, and others who had been trained with UNITA. In addition to the hospital there were first aid centres.

My son studied up to fifth grade with UNITA. They had paper and pencils that the troops brought from the front, and exchanged for food. There were good teachers. By second grade one could already write, and by fourth grade one could already be a teacher.

As a nurse I received no salary but the teachers did – between 1993 and 1995 Savimbi gave them dollars. My family worked in the field, and as a nurse I received contributions from the people. Almost all the people contributed. It was divided up by the agriculture departments between the soldiers and professionals. I would work two days in the hospital, followed by two days in the fields. There were no days off.

People who had been more closely integrated into the MPLA's political structures while in Waku Kungo made harsher judgements on life under UNITA in the 1990s, even though they also spent time working for UNITA. Francisco was born in 1950 and was thus already an adult when the MPLA took him to Waku Kungo.

When the Portuguese withdrew, the MPLA and UNITA tried to organise people. The conflict caused misery. The government was left with the people in the city, while UNITA withdrew with its people to the bush. In our case, in 1975 UNITA destroyed the bridges. Because we were close to the asphalt, we went to Waku Kungo. The government offered us education, and we had the right to food. I qualified as a teacher there. We had the right to a shop where we could buy things at a low price: soap, rice, manufactured goods. We had the right to a plot to cultivate. It was a normal life. The people from here are religious, and we were able to hold religious services. I was a member of the party. My role was to mobilise people, to know the flag and the party symbols.⁵¹⁷

Asked whether he had felt under threat from UNITA while in Waku Kungo he replied: "Not so much. But there was [danger] on the outskirts of the town. The enemy would come at night, and arrest some people to take them to the bush. The

⁵¹⁷ Interviewee 131, Bailundo, November 2008.

government put the ODP in place to defend the people.”

Like others at the mission, Francisco returned to his home area in 1991, only to find himself trapped there as UNITA assumed control.

UNITA received me as a teacher. All of Bimbe was UNITA. They tried to organise schools, but they were grass schools, or just lessons under the trees. Some of us were obliged to carry food to the troops. When this happened we would have to walk night and day. UNITA put me in a village to teach, in a grass school. There were directors and co-ordinators of education – these people were civilians, not military. [...] There were no salaries. The pupils helped the teacher to cultivate his field. [...] There were political elements who explained UNITA’s politics. They explained this to the teachers:

“UNITA will free us, and attack the government.”

“UNITA is the stronger movement which will liberate the country.”

“The government can’t manage to supply what the people want.”

“The aim is to attack Luanda.”

As a teacher I was obliged to explain this to the pupils. There were also normal subjects like mathematics, Portuguese and science. Sometimes they would capture books from the government. [...] They would tear off the MPLA flags or pictures of the president from the books. For chalk we would use charcoal or cassava.

Paulo, some 20 years younger, also gave an account of events that suggested that early active involvement with the MPLA coloured his experience of politics throughout the time he lived under UNITA. Born in 1971, he went with his parents to Waku Kungo, where he was later an organiser in the JMPLA. He began by talking about events that had taken place when he was a young child, and his version of events must be based on what he had learnt from older people, whether in his family or in the course of his work in MPLA structures.

Before 1976, the people [of this area] lived without any party – they lived in the care of the mission, religiously. When the political movements – the MPLA and UNITA and the FNLA – emerged in 1976, the movements started

by presenting their objectives to the people, and then entered into conflict. The three movements drew their strength from the people. UNITA pulled people to the bush, the MPLA pulled people to the cities. The FNLA disappeared because it did not have acceptance. The MPLA managed to take a greater number of people to the cities, because it was able to mobilise, able to explain what the people liked to hear. UNITA killed intellectuals who were discovered – killed catechists, killed anyone with skills. So the people ran away from UNITA to the MPLA. The majority to the cities. UNITA killed the rest or took them away. [...] FAPLA caught people and evacuated them so they wouldn't be killed by UNITA.⁵¹⁸

Paulo described his work in the MPLA youth division:

I was the first secretary of the JMPLA in a sector. My main task was to mobilise the youth to study, to train themselves in various professions, to improve the future of the country through health and education. [...] After 1976 the youth started to understand development, that it wasn't possible in a war situation. The MPLA fought to unify people. UNITA didn't understand this, and that's why they lost. They only meant to enslave people.

In 1989 I entered FAPLA. It was obligatory for all young men at the age of 18. I was already being trained in health but continued that training [in the army]. I took myself voluntarily to join up. I worked as a military medical orderly. Physically disabled people appeared in the hospital, the result of combat.

He spoke of UNITA having deceived people during the period of peace before the 1992 elections:

After the 1991 [peace] accords, the people decided to return here. UNITA took the opportunity to mobilise them. Savimbi took advantage of the peace to promise free education, health and food. So people started returning to their areas of origin. When UNITA saw the area was full [of returnees] they started to close the access roads so the people could no longer go to the cities. He began to enslave the people, taking away everything that came from the people [i.e. agricultural produce]. Young men who had grown up in the MPLA were forced to join UNITA's troops. Anyone who had assets, such as a car, was killed. People had no right to possessions, nor to democracy. Everything a person had was taken away. It was against human rights. People were left without clothes or salt⁵¹⁹ – they walked naked.

⁵¹⁸ Interviewee 130, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵¹⁹ In all my interviews about life in UNITA-controlled areas, the fact that salt was unobtainable was by far the most common complaint that I heard – it was voiced even

From 1993 I was a UNITA military orderly. I was captured by UNITA and imprisoned for 18 months because I had FAPLA papers. I was captured on the road between Waku Kungo and here. I was held in an underground prison at a [military] base. It was the regional jail for the Bimbe *comuna*. One would piss, defecate, sleep in there. We were allowed out into the sun every three months – allowed outside for 24 hours. Some people died in there. Anyone who came from the MPLA with experience of tasks was put there. Men and women together, and children if they had been captured with their mothers. For food there was maize, sometimes raw, sometimes cooked.

From 1993 to 1998 I was an orderly in the regional military hospital at Bimbe, under the control of UNITA. We treated civilians as well as soldiers. I helped to build grass houses. Whatever the government had organised, UNITA destroyed. The hospital and everything were built of grass, in the bush. They didn't manage to control the administrative centre [*sede*] of the *comuna* even though they controlled the countryside.

In the hospital there were some doctors, Angolans who had been trained in South Africa. But there were many others who had been captured like me. Secretly we talked to each other about what had happened to us.

UNITA organised education centres by zone. But the young people there just carried food for the troops – there wasn't much time for studying. Some of them had parents [in the area] – others had been captured, and organised to take part in the youth group. [The captured young people] were divided up, two to three to live in the house of a soldier.

Later, Paulo was appointed second secretary of UNITA's party structures in the Luvemba *comuna*. He described his incorporation into political structures as a ruse to move him out of an area where he was too well integrated into the local community.

After 1997 I became ill with high blood pressure. After I recovered the party decided that I couldn't stay in the village because I had a good way of talking to the people. They took me out of the armed forces and moved me to the political structures. It was very difficult. They gave me a three-month political course in the Bimbe *comuna*. [Political work] was just a matter of teaching the people to work for the party for free. Anyone who didn't do so would be killed. That was the basis of the policy/politics [*política*] for mobilising the people: they must accept everything the party wanted without rewards. Part of mobilisation was putting people to work [in agriculture] – one part [of the crop] for the family, the other for the soldiers. Those who were captured did not serve in [UNITA's] military forces: they were organised, politicised, put to

by those who were generally well-disposed towards UNITA.

work. The same with *povos encontrados* [people farming in an area before UNITA arrived]: if they produced 150 kilos, then 100 kilos would go to the troops. Those who were working for the party also had to grow food.

Paulo's more negative assessment of UNITA compared to the other two men, and his more explicit endorsement of the MPLA, appears to have been shaped by a series of encounters with the political structures of the two sides in turn over the course of his life; and, in turn, his political attitudes and choices also determined the ways in which he encountered the two movements. In contrast to the other two interviewees, he was more closely integrated into the MPLA's political structures from an early age through his role as an office-holder in JMPLA. This likely had a bearing on his acceptance of military conscription, even to the point where he described it as "voluntary". His service in FAPLA caused him to be treated as an enemy by UNITA: this suggests that UNITA sought to punish those who had served in FAPLA while tolerating those people who had lived under MPLA rule without working for it.⁵²⁰ Even though he later worked in UNITA's medical services, in describing these he emphasises the negative: he spoke of hospitals in grass huts, and only mentioned the presence of doctors when I specifically asked about this. Where others saw UNITA doing its best in difficult circumstances, he sees UNITA's inability to create the conditions for decent healthcare as evidence of its unworthiness as a governing organisation. Similarly, he sees UNITA's educational structures as being above all a way of recruiting young labour. His version of events nevertheless hints at UNITA's attempts at orderliness: he acknowledges that health was run according to regional structures.

⁵²⁰ Compare the discussion in chapter four of how FAPLA soldiers were ordered to distinguish between enemy troops and "*povo*".

In November 1998, the FAPLA retook Bailundo [the town, not the whole *município*]. I ran away in 2000 to join the MPLA. I fled to Waku Kungo and from there to Bailundo. In Bailundo I found peace. When peace came [to the whole country] in 2002, the MPLA committee sent me here to control⁵²¹ the people of the area, as I'm a native of here.

His voluntary defection to a government-held area two years before the end of the war put him in a position where he could present himself as an MPLA loyalist and be posted back to his home area as a representative of the ruling party: an experience which, we may assume, would have further coloured his memories of when UNITA was in charge of the area. His invocation of the lack of clothes, salt and other necessities under UNITA, and of the MPLA's superior capacity at building infrastructure and providing social services, echoes the words of MPLA campaigners before the 2008 parliamentary election.

The people discussed so far, who were interviewed at the mission, expressed differing views about UNITA, and their experience of UNITA varied over time. What they have in common, however, was that all had spent time in Waku Kungo, and all had at least basic professional training that caused them to be employed in the services that UNITA offered to people. In this way all of them were drawn into an institutional relationship with UNITA, which some of them construed as voluntary and others as a matter of necessity. Earlier chapters of this thesis have drawn a distinction between the people who worked for UNITA in professional roles, and those who tilled fields in areas under UNITA's control. This distinction is also evident in accounts of events in Bailundo *município* in the 1990s.

⁵²¹ “*Controlar*”: the Portuguese word has a sense of watching over someone rather than the English sense of directing.

Bailundo: The villages

People who came from the more isolated villages in Bailundo district gave a different account of their relationship with the state and with UNITA, which I will now consider. These villagers were not attached to the mission, had not lived in Waku Kungo, and did not have the skills that would have made them liable to be incorporated into UNITA's service organisations.

A few of these managed to avoid the demands of the warring parties, at least for the first few years of the 1990s. Horácio, born in 1947, had served in the colonial army from 1971 to 1975. After independence he believed that "if the MPLA found you, they would kill you, so people left to save their lives. I thought it better to be in Huambo because if UNITA caught you they'd take you to the bush. I had lived in Huambo in 1971 before recruitment." In Huambo he worked as a trader: "I got vegetables from the villages and sold them. It was illegal but I wasn't punished. The government allowed it." With the prospect of peace, he returned to his home area in 1992: the period during which UNITA established bases in the area. Yet by his account, as a village dweller his experience of UNITA was minimal: "We lived well, cultivated our fields, and went to Bailundo [town] to trade. I couldn't say whether the MPLA or UNITA was in control."⁵²²

Eugênio, a man from a peasant family, said he had been "captured" by UNITA in 1989 at the age of 20, and taken to a UNITA base in a remote mountain area. He said the population of the military base also included the wives and children of soldiers,

⁵²² Interviewee 172, Bailundo, November 2008.

while teachers and nurses – UNITA’s civilian professionals – lived at a base five kilometres away. At the military base he received military training and also “political education” of which the message was “not to go back to the MPLA” and “let’s make an effort to stop him who is in Luanda”.⁵²³ While still a soldier, Eugênio himself was put to work in a political role among the peasant farmers of the surrounding area.

The soldiers went to the battlefield. The people had to grow food and take it to the front. My work was to talk to the people and tell them not to become demoralised. To work hard so the troops could eat. To speak to them with respect. The *soba* had to be a UNITA *soba*. The *povo* knew only UNITA.

We taught people they mustn’t go back. I believed the words that I said – obligatorily. You had to understand – otherwise you lost your life. And to battle with the hoe.⁵²⁴

He spoke of basic necessities being supplied by “*comércio de tropa*” (troops’ commerce):

If they went to attack somewhere, the things they would bring back – salt, soap, clothes – they would give to the people. People paid with maize. Teachers and nurses worked in the villages. The nurses brought medicines from that place where Savimbi was. People went to Jamba on foot, brought back war materiel.

Carlos, another farmer, who was not involved in UNITA’s political work, described the situation as follows:

It was bad on UNITA’s side. We didn’t have conditions, salt, clothes. We still exchanged goods with troops who went to get them. Whoever wasn’t working for [UNITA] was [considered] enemy. Whoever wasn’t working for them had to run away. The quotas [of food to be delivered to the troops] continued. The

⁵²³ Interviewee 174, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵²⁴ “*Lutar com a enchada*”: a metaphor linking agricultural production to military progress.

administration organised this. In the *comuna* (Luvemba) and in each village. It was a hierarchical system. There were UNITA officials here. Some were from here, others from outside. There were political activities: [we were told to] struggle with the hoe, so they could get into power. Many people accepted this – if you didn't accept, you would be dead. It was still obligatory. But some people still ran away, because there was so much suffering.⁵²⁵

Bailundo: control and identity

The interviews from Bailundo *município* discussed so far, both from the mission and from the remoter villages, suggest that political identity in the 1990s continued to be associated with where people were situated, just as had been the case in the 1980s as argued in chapters three and four. People were aware that the course of their lives over many years might be determined by their proximity to MPLA or to UNITA forces at a particular crucial moment. Efforts by each side to move people into its territory were interpreted as a political strategy by the stronger movement to get people, politically as well as physically, onto its side. In José's words:

“Being with a party” means fleeing death, following so that life goes on. “I am with UNITA or with the MPLA” means I have to follow what they say. If I say I am from UNITA the MPLA will kill me. If I say I am from the MPLA, UNITA will kill me. They too knew that whoever had force, won the people.⁵²⁶

Francisco offered a similar explanation:

When UNITA occupied the areas, people knew they were government people. They had to accept UNITA's politics in order to be UNITA people – to receive instructions. After a while they were considered to be UNITA people.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Interviewee 175, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵²⁶ Interviewee 134, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵²⁷ Interviewee 131, Bailundo, November 2008.

Interviewees realised that they had no choice when it came to expressing support for the dominant movement and, more importantly in the case of UNITA, complying with its demands for labour and produce. Those who had previously been most closely involved with MPLA political structures spoke of this as a matter of UNITA suppressing more deeply-held pro-MPLA sentiments. Others accepted UNITA's authority without deeming it any more or less worthy than that of the MPLA. Where people spoke of making choices about which movement to join, there was invariably a survival motive rather than a political one, and the choice, such as it was, involved the risk of going to an area where the other movement was dominant. Even though all were talking about a period when the MPLA had been in charge of the state for 15 years and more, the legitimacy of the MPLA state is not taken for granted. Many of the interviewees, even if they did not actively support UNITA, regarded it as an alternative political possibility: when UNITA soldiers appeared in Waku Kungo by night, some saw them as compatriots and not as enemies.

All those interviewed recognised that political education continued to be important for UNITA during the years after 1990, just as those who had lived in the MPLA-controlled town remembered that political education had been important for the ruling party in the 1980s. Both movements sought to construct their legitimacy in terms of nationalist struggle. Yet the interviews suggest that this political education was barely effective. Political education seems to have had an impact only among those who had never been politicised in the past: the peasants who "knew only UNITA" accepted the UNITA version of events because they knew no other. Those who had lived under the control of the MPLA before finding themselves under UNITA control after 1990 were sceptical towards UNITA's narratives, or in some cases sceptical about the superiority

of one party over the other, or about the need to make political choices or to identify with one party or the other. Even some who, as teachers or political officials, were instrumental in propagating the UNITA political line, recognised that they were doing no more than encouraging people to produce food for UNITA's benefit.

Where people expressed approval or disapproval of political movements, this was expressed in terms of the movements' ability to organise society, but even more importantly in terms of their capacity to provide certain goods and services. Even those most critical of UNITA acknowledged the structures that it created: they expressed their disapproval of UNITA in terms of the fact that, despite the structures that it put in place, it lacked the material basis to provide goods such as salt, soap and school books that urban dwellers were accustomed to having, and that its schools and hospitals were in grass buildings rather than the concrete buildings of the city.

Such an understanding of how political identities were constructed in the years following 1991 has a bearing on how we understand people's reaction to the events of the last three years of the war, when the FAA began to expel UNITA's forces from this part of Angola. The interviews that follow speak of the time when people living in UNITA-controlled areas found their livelihoods constrained by the fact that UNITA was on the defensive, and responded by moving people further away from the government's military presence; and when the Angolan military and civilian authorities turned this situation to the government's political advantage: "After 1993 the war became more intense. FAPLA had more forces against UNITA, so the worst suffering was experienced by those people who were with UNITA."⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ Interviewee 130, Bailundo, November 2008.

Carlos, who had said that life under UNITA was always hard, spoke of the tactics employed by FAA and the government authorities in the last year of the war:

The situation got worse between 1993 and 2001. In 2001 FAPLA arrived.⁵²⁹ There were many conflicts with the people because the people already knew UNITA. FAPLA seized animals, goats, chickens – the people’s food. The people fled. The UNITA troops fled too. FAPLA surrounded the people to take us to the *comuna* to show us we were no longer with UNITA. The people accepted. If you fled with UNITA you were killed like an animal. Many UNITA troops also presented themselves to the government.

Then there was organisation for us not to think about UNITA any more. To fall into line. They came and spoke to the *sobas*, for the people to go to the *comuna* and receive soap, salt and clothes so they would know well which party was in charge. They spoke with the *soba* to talk to the people not to run away any more and to know the MPLA.⁵³⁰

Even those people who had taken a positive view of UNITA’s efforts at social organisation during the period of co-existence with the local people in the early 1990s acknowledged that this relationship broke down towards the end of the decade as UNITA came under pressure from the FAA. Although some stayed with UNITA until after Savimbi’s death, when they received orders to gather in the quartering areas, for others their political loyalties were overridden by the need to survive. Miguel, a schoolteacher who had worked with UNITA, recalled:

From 1998, with the war, we were running for no purpose.⁵³¹ If anyone was caught [by the FAA] they would be sent to the city and if they weren’t lucky they would die. Only at the end did we separate ourselves from the [UNITA] forces. The suffering was too much. For two years I didn’t teach, because they weren’t holding classes any more. With such suffering, some people went over

⁵²⁹ He said “FAPLA” rather than “FAA” – the de jure formation of the unified armed forces after the Bicesse agreement was forgotten amid a conflict which from the point of view of rural civilians remained as partisan as ever.

⁵³⁰ Interviewee 175, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵³¹ *Corríamos à toa.*

to the government while others continued in the resistance – those who best understood UNITA’s reasoning, and who believed that eventually there would be peace.

In the quartering area we received food as a favour. It was necessary to go to the quartering area in order to receive food, and to begin life. We went to the quartering areas and later the government called the teachers and nurses to register. Some people didn’t accept to go to the quartering area – they thought the government would kill them.⁵³²

Nevertheless, there were some who remained far enough from the conflict that they never came into direct contact with the FAA, nor indeed with the civil authorities until after the war had finished. According to José:

In 1998 the war started again. Not so much here, the war was more distant, closer to the *município* [Bailundo town]. It came closer in 2001. When the MPLA troops were coming the UNITA soldiers would advise us that we had to move. We went to live in the bush alongside the river. At night we would come out to gather maize from the fields. We continued to work in the fields, so there was plenty of food. The troops would bring things from the battlefield and trade them for food.

[In February 2002] we heard Savimbi had died in Moxico. The troops were forbidden from saying he had died, but later they began saying he had died. We as catechists didn’t go to the quartering areas, we went back to our villages.⁵³³

As well as food, some of those who came from UNITA areas, if they had professional skills, were offered the opportunity of working in the government system.

The situation got worse. It became a case of just working to save one’s own life. Those who tried to run away to find the government were killed. [...] The people left UNITA in April 2002. Some went to the quartering areas – mostly those who had been soldiers, and some of the teachers – but not me. I went from the bush to the village, then went to the *sede da comuna* to be registered as a new teacher. The government had set up officials in the *comunas* so the people coming in from the bush could give their names. I had come from Waku Kungo [in 1991] with government documents but I had had to burn

⁵³² Interviewee 133, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵³³ Interviewee 134, Bailundo, November 2008.

them, and this caused difficulties [when it came to re-registering].⁵³⁴

Yet incorporation into the state system was, for some, only on condition of demonstrating an affiliation with the MPLA. Those few who were not prepared to accept the MPLA's conditions suffered for it.

The MPLA ordered that all UNITA teachers must abandon UNITA and join the MPLA. When I didn't accept this they cut off my salary. Some accepted – those who didn't accept were persecuted. I wanted the truth. I could see the bad governance.⁵³⁵

Paulo said of the post-war era: "Since 2002 there has been peace. People have been enjoying peace and the right to democracy." Asked if there were still UNITA supporters in his community he replied: "People stopped supporting UNITA because of maltreatment. These days, the majority are with the MPLA. The only ones still with UNITA are those who resisted from 1976 until today. It was the MPLA who saved the people."⁵³⁶

People's responses to the events of the final years of the war, as well as their representations of post-war politics in the region are best understood in the light of the events of those years, interpreted through two distinct yet related discourses on political identity and political legitimacy. The ambivalence and ambiguity created between these two discourses has been discussed in chapters three and four. The first of these discourses has to do with identity as assigned to people by others: it assigns political identity to an individual on the basis of the political-military control of an area. The second discourse defines the legitimacy of a political movement in terms of

⁵³⁴ Interviewee 131, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵³⁵ Interviewee 133, Bailundo, November 2008.

⁵³⁶ Interviewee 130, Bailundo, November 2008.

its responsibilities towards the people under its control. These responsibilities might include the provision of health and education services, and the guarantee of essential goods, particularly things such as salt, soap and clothing that cannot be produced in the peasant economy. Particularly in a rural area, the minimal condition is the maintenance of a peaceful environment in which people may produce food.

What kept people in the UNITA-controlled areas of Bailundo was for the most part a combination of force and fear of alternative possibilities; only a few were motivated by a belief in UNITA's inherent superiority. Similarly, what compelled people to go to government-controlled areas was in most cases not political allegiance to the MPLA, but rather the government's force of arms, or the hope of relief from starvation. Yet the geographical displacement took on a political significance according to a discourse that linked control and political identity: an act of migration became an act of defection. The government, by this stage of the war, appears to have realised that simply having people under its control was not enough, and that by offering humanitarian assistance and the possibility of state employment it would consolidate its gains.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how discourses on the relationship between political movements and people that had originated around the time of independence and developed during the war years of the 1970s and 1980s continued to shape how people understood and responded to the events of the 1990s. The changes in the

discourses themselves, and in the ways in which discourses related to political and military realities and to people's behaviour and choices, must be understood in the context of the different terms on which power was contested in 1975, and after 1992; they must also be put in the context of the differing social, economic, military and political realities across urban and rural parts of the Central Highlands.

In 1975 the MPLA and UNITA struggled to occupy the power vacuum left by Portugal and the two movements competed for popular support on an equal footing. As we saw in chapter two, UNITA initially gained the political advantage amid a military stalemate by presenting itself as indigenous to the region, but this advantage counted for little once the MPLA had secured Cuban military support and the South African soldiers backing UNITA had left. In 1993, by contrast, the MPLA had an advantage of incumbency in the cities and towns of the Central Highlands. In 1975 both UNITA and the MPLA had appeared initially as civilian movements, and both later used violence against each other and against people who were perceived as belonging to the opposing movement. In 1993 and 1994, the fiercest fighting was experienced in those areas where government control lasted longest. For those whose first encounter with UNITA was one of violence the very presence of UNITA was contrary to their ideas of legitimacy, as defined by the ability to keep order. The people who lived in areas where UNITA took control by violence also happened to be those whose connections with the MPLA state were closest. For them, UNITA's actions only served to confirm propaganda that the MPLA had disseminated about the nature of the enemy.

Conversely UNITA was tolerated, or even accepted, by those whose experience of

UNITA had not been primarily a violent one. In the rural areas discussed in this chapter, the interviewees' accounts confirm the conclusions of the human rights reports cited earlier, that the 1990s witnessed forced labour and some of the worst violence in the entire war, but also that this violence was not uniform. The areas around Bailundo, before 1998, correspond in part to Richardson's characterisation of the "core" UNITA zone and in part to the "tax" zone. The period after 1998 saw the progressive destruction of the core and tax zones by the government's military advance. As UNITA's military position became more precarious, the zones it had occupied securely became more like "pillage" zones. People who had been in these areas were either forced to migrate with UNITA soldiers, or went, voluntarily or not, to government-held areas.

In this chapter I have identified five broad and interrelated factors that appear to have had an influence on how people interpreted and responded to their experience of the contestation of power during the years that followed the 1992 elections. The first of these concerned people's prior ideological affiliation. Those people who had sympathised with UNITA in the past, or at least had no strong links to the MPLA, were more hesitant to condemn UNITA's presence even if they did not endorse the way it governed the territories under its control. The second factor that helped to determine how people responded to the events of the 1990s was their closeness to or involvement in MPLA-led state building process. This was not the same thing as a purely ideological preference for the MPLA, but it was related to it: in a situation where the state and the ruling party were so closely identified with each other, being involved in the work of the state as a teacher or civil servant often involved active participation in the political work of the party.

The third factor is related to the second. It concerns to what extent people were dependent on an urban economy: an economy, moreover, in which the MPLA state was the most important investor, employer and guarantor of livelihoods. Ideas about peasant farmers' economic autonomy and the implications of this for political mobilisation have been discussed in earlier chapters. Just as it was those people whose livelihoods depended on the MPLA's urban state who felt they had most to lose as UNITA assumed command of some areas, so it was farmers who had the least to lose from a change of political control as long as they were still able to cultivate their land. There is a crucial difference here with the situation experienced in the late 1970s and early 1980s by those farmers who found themselves in the areas that were contested between the two warring parties. The greater economic autonomy of rural populations also explains how some of those people who left Waku Kungo for their home areas in Bimbe around 1990 found themselves able to work for UNITA with no objection, even though they had been educated in an MPLA-controlled town and trained for roles in the MPLA state system. Unlike the people who remained in the cities, and saw functioning urban social, political and economic formations threatened with destruction, these people had chosen to go back to a rural life, aware that this meant abandoning the amenities and the security of the city. Even if they had not necessarily expected to live in a UNITA-controlled countryside, in material terms it was of little consequence to them which party was in control. However, the different ways in which different people from Bimbe spoke about life under UNITA indicate that the political beliefs they had held prior to returning to the countryside also had an impact on how they interpreted subsequent events.

The fourth factor also concerns the dichotomy between town and countryside, but in ideational rather than economic terms. Previous chapters have already considered how town and countryside assumed political meanings, the former being associated with the MPLA and the latter with UNITA. In the current chapter such an association of meanings is present in the account of Francisco who said that his peasant farming community fell under the control of the MPLA because it was “close to the asphalt” and also in Pequenino’s comment, about the UNITA officers who told the citizens of Kuito to “eat asphalt” during the siege: an insult laden with meaning about the superiority of UNITA’s food-producing countryside over the MPLA’s city. This discourse that linked political identity to geographical space merged with the discourse about the differences in style and capability between the MPLA and UNITA. In the current chapter we have seen how the discourse of MPLA-supporting town dwellers in Huambo and Kuito denigrated UNITA explicitly on the grounds that its ways were the ways of the bush and not of the city: the city represented an economy and a way of living that was coterminous with the geographical limitations of state building efforts that were inseparably identified with the MPLA.

Fifth and lastly, the nature and circumstances of people’s encounters with UNITA, and indeed with the MPLA, also emerge as important in shaping how they spoke of the political legitimacy of the two movements. The people of Huambo’s Cidade Alta, which fell to UNITA only after a prolonged battle, and the people of central Kuito, which UNITA besieged and bombarded over months, came to associate UNITA with violence and destruction, while downplaying acts of violence by government forces on the grounds that these were defensive. People from other parts of Huambo city and from rural zones, where UNITA took over by stealth rather than by force, were less

inclined to speak of violent behaviour. The social geography of the city ensured that the central areas that suffered the worst of UNITA violence were also home to a substantial number of people in the higher echelons of the MPLA and the civil service: for them, the experience of UNITA violence seemed to be confirmation of long-held views about the nature of the rebel organisation. Nevertheless, the levels of deprivation and the constant threat of arbitrary violence or punishment experienced throughout the cities during the time of UNITA control was enough to change the views of people who had previously been inclined towards UNITA on ideological grounds. Even those people who expressed no strong political preference for the MPLA as a party, and who might have voted for UNITA in the elections, recognised the MPLA's capacity to maintain order within the urban enclaves it controlled and to guarantee the supply of at least basic goods to the cities. The UNITA that took control of the Central Highlands, the centre of Kuito excluded, early in 1993 had no such capacity. There are echoes here of the argument by Oberschall and Seidmann (2005) that links victory in civil war to the capacity to control the food supply.

These five interrelated factors formed the basis on which people accounted for the events that surrounded them, and for their political choices in the decade that followed the 1992 elections. Understandings about the relationship between territorial control and political identity that were the legacy of the earlier war years survived, at least to an extent. But more important in the 1990s was people's ability to make judgments based on a comparison between living conditions on the two sides of the conflict. In the 1970s, people's ideas about UNITA and the MPLA were based on the two parties' own ideological self-representations: UNITA's appeals to indigeneity and a mixture of Christian and "African" values, or the MPLA's promises of development led by a

modernising and anti-tribal central state. By the early 1990s, however, many people had experienced life under both movements. Others had lived only under the control of the MPLA and had become accustomed to a way of living which, with some justification, they knew did not exist in areas dominated by UNITA. Those who initially were willing to accept the more basic living conditions in UNITA zones found their acceptance of UNITA tested as the organisation found itself constrained by sanctions and military action. When interviewees spoke about questions of political legitimacy and affiliation after 1992, ideological considerations were almost entirely absent as people evaluated the MPLA and UNITA on the basis of the kind of living conditions over which each movement presided.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the relationship between political movements and people over the course of the Angolan civil war. The introduction suggested that explanations of the civil war have drawn on two main themes, which are applied to different phases of the conflict: before 1990, war as part of the calculus of global superpower relations, and after 1990, war as resource predation. Both these phases of the war are written about in terms different from the pre-1975 conflict, which is seen in terms of other narratives of anti-colonial struggle from across the world. In contrast, the approach that I have taken in this thesis has been to consider the entire period of conflict. This approach has made it possible to demonstrate how conflicting ideas about political legitimacy and Angolan identity that originated during the independence struggle continued to inform political leaders' decisions, as well as the ways in which people understood and responded to the conflict, until the war ended in 2002.

The circumstances in which encounters between people and political movements took place were widely different over the time period and across the different locations that I examined. Chapter two showed that for many people in the Central Highlands, the radio station operated by the MPLA was their first source of information about any of the nationalist movements. Information about all three movements also reached the region by word of mouth, and the Christian missions provided spaces within a repressive political environment where it was possible to talk, albeit still discreetly, about the movements and the ideas that they claimed to represent. The majority of the rural population did not enjoy the advantages of access to radio or to the discussions

that took place at the missions. The April 1974 coup created a free political environment in which the nationalist movements were able to compete peacefully for support, and to try to attract a following on the basis of their various visions for a future independent Angola. Those who favoured UNITA were attracted by an ideology that framed the construction of an Angolan nation in terms of the advancement of people who had been marginalised on the basis of their race (black), their regional origin (the south), and their cultural frame of reference (indigenous African rather than European or creole). Those who supported the MPLA envisaged the construction of a nation in non-tribal terms in which the state would have a modernising developmental role. During this period some people made choices between the parties on the basis of what they promised. Choice might mean simply agreeing with a party's political programme, though particularly for men, it could mean going for training as soldiers or political activists. Those who made such political choices were still almost exclusively in the towns or at the missions: the movements appear to have paid little attention to the countryside at this stage.

The months after August 1975 marked a distinct new phase in the conduct and discourse of politics in Angola as the nationalist movements began to assume exclusive control of particular parts of the country. As discussed in chapter two, political violence that began in Luanda and spread to the Central Highlands imputed political affiliations to people on the basis of their regional origins. In this way people who had previously not been supporters of either movement found themselves labelled, and punished, as "UNITA people" if they were southerners living in Luanda, and "MPLA people" if they were from Luanda or its hinterland and living in the Central Highlands. This marked the start of a tendency, which continued throughout

the war, whereby those with military or political power imputed political identity to others on the basis of where they were, regardless of their own political opinions. This was more than simply a process of labelling: it happened simultaneously with violence directed at people who were assumed, correctly or incorrectly, to be affiliated to the other side. In this way, people who previously had no strong political views were made to believe that they had a stake in the conflict, though this was principally on the basis of seeing their favoured party as the defender against the threat posed by opposite party. Initially, it was largely urban people who were drawn unwittingly into politics in this way, since they were most likely to have migrated to a different region of the country. However, as the political movements expanded their influence into rural areas in the months following independence, officials began to consider peasant farmers as belonging to one side or the other simply on the basis of where they were living.

For farmers in the Central Highlands, the first experience of politicisation was coterminous with the onset of war. This would have a lasting impact on how politics was understood in the villages. Farmers in areas that were contested between FAPLA and FALA remember their first encounters with one or both political movements as being an experience of plunder, destruction and sometimes abduction. Eventually, most of these people went to live either in government-held or in UNITA-held areas, either as a result of forced removal or to avoid the violence of the contested zone. In the zones that belonged securely to one side or another, there was no overt political contestation since neither party tolerated dissent in the area of its control. Both the MPLA and UNITA were nevertheless aware that control by force of arms was not enough, and that they needed to make efforts to secure hegemonic control. Each side

produced and propagated a discourse about the movement itself, its origins and its role in relation to the people, about the duties of the people with respect to their political leaders, and about the nature and origins of the enemy. Both movements used political education as they sought to convince people of the rightness of their cause: political education took place at schools, through public rallies, and in the armed forces on each side of the conflict. The next section of this chapter will consider the content of the ideologies that were promoted by officials on each side of the conflict, looking in particular how the idea of stateness was important as a tool of legitimation. I will contrast this with the realities experienced by people living under the control of the two movements: although there are evident parallels between the MPLA and UNITA at the level of discourse, the historical and social realities within which they operated ensured that the structures they constructed were different from each other, and different from the ideals propounded by both. The section after that looks at how the movements' official discourses were received and the extent to which they were adopted by people who came into contact with them.

Official discourses

On both sides of the war, the discourse of political officials sought to construct a commonality of interest between political movements and the people under their control. In earlier chapters I have presented interviews and written sources that indicate the principal themes in these official discourses. These themes include the construction of narratives about the enemy that served to position the political movement in the role of liberator and defender against this enemy; the discursive

construction of a nation with the political movement in a defining role; and the assertion of the legitimacy of the political movement in terms of a state-like social contract of rights and responsibilities between the movement and the people under its control.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, a significant part of the literature on mobilisation in civil war has dealt with the way in which grievance may be invoked to political ends. Underlying this is the assumption that rebel movements use grievances against established states. But, as noted, UNITA's early mobilisation efforts took place among people who had never known an MPLA state. My approach therefore has been to examine how both sides simultaneously competed for the adherence of people who were previously not aligned to any political movement. UNITA's ideology, as much as the MPLA's ideology, had its origins in a nationalist, anti-colonial project, notwithstanding UNITA's occasional co-operation with the colonial army against the MPLA. Both movements invoked memories of economic and racial oppression as well as making appeals to more abstract ideas of freedom. Later, after the MPLA had established itself in government, UNITA indeed spoke of the MPLA as an oppressor. However, in doing so, UNITA was not able to invoke any experiences of life under the MPLA, since most of the people it mobilised had not experienced life under any government other than the colonial regime. UNITA therefore needed to create enmity towards the MPLA. Its discourse with respect to the MPLA after independence was a nationalist one that portrayed the MPLA as an organisation of people whose blood ties and cultural affinity with the Portuguese, and their support by foreign powers in the form of Cuba and the Soviet Union, meant that their interests were opposed to the interests of Angolans.

Nationalist ideology remained equally important to the MPLA too, for years after the initial nationalist goal of independence from Portugal had been achieved: the party's accounts of its own history claimed – on dubious grounds – a role for itself in the prison break of 1961, and asserted itself as the first movement to take up arms against Portuguese colonialism. After independence, the MPLA expressed its nationalism in the context of a wider, international struggle against racism and against Western imperialism. In this respect, the support that UNITA received from the United States and from South Africa bolstered the MPLA's legitimacy by providing evidence of what the party sought to portray as UNITA's anti-Angolan nature. Much has been written about the consequences of the Cold War for the Angolan conflict, and the importance of the material support that was motivated by international political imperatives cannot be denied. However, in ideational terms the impact of the Cold War was not in the form of the official ideologies – capitalism and communism – of the Cold War protagonists, but rather by virtue of the fact that each side was able to portray its opponent's foreign linkages as evidence that the war was one between genuine Angolans on the one side, and foreign proxies on the other.

The task of politicisation was to create feelings of enmity. This is not to deny, however, that some people did indeed suffer at the hands of one political movement, and that this experience caused them to support the other movement. We see this in the events of August 1975, when first the MPLA and then UNITA mobilised their forces to attack people who were perceived, correctly or incorrectly, to belong to the opposing party. Among people who fled from Luanda to Huambo as a result of these attacks, the events bred suspicion towards the MPLA. MPLA discourses also invoke

the suffering endured by the victims of UNITA and South African attacks, and in later years during the UNITA occupation of Huambo, the siege of Kuito, and by the people who had been in the bush with UNITA as it made increasingly harsh demands during the final years of the conflict. However, before 1990, a great number of people had had contact with only one of the two political movements. In order to mobilise these people, the MPLA or UNITA could not invoke their own experience of oppression by the other side, but had to rely instead on versions of history that were disseminated by the parties themselves and which cast the enemy as the successor to the colonist. Other people had been the victims of violence by both armed forces: in such cases, the political movement that eventually took control had the task of promoting memories of the violence of the enemy, while silencing talk of its own violence. This was particularly evident in the stories told by farmers who had been in the contested zone immediately after independence, and who later lived in government areas.

Both parties construed grievance first as the product of colonial rule and latterly as the activities of its proxies. The two nationalist narratives that had emerged in the struggle against colonialism came to be used in a way that served to constitute two Angolan nations, each imagined with a political movement – the MPLA or UNITA – at its centre. For both sides, these narratives constituted the opposing side as an enemy that was to be feared. The cultivation of perceptions of fear towards the opposing party was the fundamental part of political education. People – particularly those from rural villages – whose stories suggested no other evidence of politicisation nevertheless spoke of accepting the presence of one army because it seemed a better alternative to the unknown and feared opponent. Both parties spoke of the opposing party as the agent of hostile foreign countries. The reverse side of this discourse put the party

itself in the role of the defender of the Angolan people against foreign interests. The emphasis on the hostile nature of the opposing side served to legitimise each party's own use of violence while delegitimising the other side's violence.

Fear of the enemy, then, was the minimal condition for the construction of political legitimacy. However, from the accounts of people who had been exposed to more systematic politicisation, in the MPLA-controlled towns or at Jamba or other UNITA bases, it becomes clear that fear of the opposing side and the concomitant need for protection were only one part of a more encompassing set of narratives. They were complemented by other narratives whose focus was on the role of the political organisation as a provider. People whose loyalty to the MPLA was cemented in the early days of state building spoke of the party's legitimacy in terms of its capacity to provide health and education services. UNITA loyalists usually evoked the organisation's attempts at providing health, education or agricultural services as a token of its political legitimacy. Before 1990, UNITA's service-providing role was better developed at Jamba and less so in the more marginal areas of UNITA's influence: accordingly, people who wished to assert UNITA's political legitimacy often chose to talk about Jamba as emblematic of UNITA's capabilities. Chapter five demonstrates how in the last decade of the war, UNITA's self-appointed role as a provider for the people under its control became impossible to sustain even in its most basic form, as UNITA suffered as a result of sanctions and military pressure, and that this cost UNITA the adherence of all but its most dedicated followers by the time that Savimbi was killed.

It is at this point that concepts such as stateness or "the imagined state" become

important to our understanding. Such a perspective allows us to analyse and compare the discourses and practices of different political groups regardless of whether or not they were universally recognised as states. Following Abrams's characterisation of the state as "first and foremost an exercise in legitimation",⁵³⁷ I have examined the aspects of state-like behaviour or discourse that political movements deploy in order to legitimate themselves both in the eyes of the people in the areas they control, and in the eyes of other states. Such appeals to the idea of the state are evident, explicitly or implicitly, on both sides of the Angolan conflict: it is the idea of the state that draws together the functions of defence and the legitimate exercise of violence with those of service provision. People who were most dedicated to the MPLA spoke of the party's legitimacy in terms of its efforts to create a state. They usually named the provision of education and health services, alongside defence, as the main functions and duties of the state, though ensuring a supply of food and other necessities was also mentioned as a state duty. This characterisation complemented the developmental ideological discourse that the party had presented in the years before independence, and which continued to be invoked through the war years. UNITA, as much as the MPLA, expressed its legitimacy in terms of the defence and welfare functions that are normally seen as state prerogatives. In some parts of Angola, particularly the Central Highlands, UNITA was the only nationalist movement present as the Portuguese administration and armed forces were withdrawn: in this process it assumed state functions even if it was not in control for long enough to engage in active state building. I have identified the similarities in how each movement spoke about its relationship with the people under its control: indeed, UNITA's officials sometimes explicitly referred to the movement, particularly in Jamba, as a "state". We can also

⁵³⁷ Abrams 1988:76.

observe state-defining rituals exercised by UNITA as well as by the MPLA state, notably Savimbi's independence ceremony in Huambo, and the passport stamps issued to visitors who arrived at Jamba. However, although these rituals may speak explicitly of claims to statehood, it was the more fundamental state-like tasks of welfare and defence that UNITA supporters more frequently invoked to justify the movement's legitimacy. For UNITA as for the MPLA, the dual developmental and repressive functions that constitute state-like behaviour came together in a preoccupation with order, which was expressed as the minimal condition for people's wellbeing and the realisation of party-led development.⁵³⁸

While only the MPLA was recognised as a state by the international system, UNITA nevertheless controlled cross-border trade and enjoyed quasi-diplomatic relations with South Africa and other sympathetic states. If we use the perspective of stateness to see the Angolan conflict as one of rival claims to a state-like legitimacy that remained under construction for the duration of the conflict, it becomes clear that the view of civil war as a criminal enterprise, which underlies much of the post-1990 literature on conflict, is sustainable only on the basis a normative assumption in which one party has a monopoly on defining a legality that the other party transgresses.⁵³⁹ More revealing is to consider the discursive process through which violence is defined as legitimate or not, the political process through which people are encouraged to accept this definition of legitimacy, and the outcome of this: whether they accept or reject the legitimacy of the violence perpetrated by a political movement.⁵⁴⁰ As noted in chapter

⁵³⁸ Compare Atieno-Odhiambo's "ideology of order" (1987:190).

⁵³⁹ See the discussion in chapter one of Marchal and Messiant's critique (2006) of "new war" theory (Kaldor 1999), and "greed" based models of conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2000, 2004).

⁵⁴⁰ This recalls Mitchell's argument that "producing and maintaining the distinction

five, the MPLA after the 1992 elections came to enjoy unequivocal international endorsement of its sovereignty, thanks in large measure to the attractiveness of Angolan oil: this signalled an end to the state-like privileges enjoyed by UNITA in its international relations, a loss that hastened the movement's eventual military defeat. Messiant writes of the "criminalisation" of UNITA's activities in this process: the war itself was not a matter of one side committing a crime against the other, but causing it to be portrayed as such was concomitant with the MPLA's victory.⁵⁴¹

As a locus for identity formation, too, the MPLA and UNITA functioned in comparable and state-like ways. For Benedict Anderson, "nations dream of being free [...] The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state".⁵⁴² If in independent Africa the project of nation building has typically been led by newly independent states, then the process of the imagining of the nation – to echo Anderson again – has been constituted around an idea of a state that finds its legitimacy in an aspiration to freedom. In the case of Angola we can see two mutually exclusive imaginings of the Angolan nation based, respectively, on the sets of discourses and practices that were associated with the MPLA and with UNITA. Each party's ideology defined the duties of people towards the party and of the party towards the people, and reserved the right to punish non-compliance. In this sense, just as UNITA's discourses sought to legitimise it in state-like terms, so these discourses constructed a relationship with its people comparable not so much as to voluntary political affiliation, as to citizenship.

Furthermore, the specific models of statehood invoked by the MPLA and by UNITA

between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power" (1999:83).

⁵⁴¹ Messiant 2003.

⁵⁴² Anderson 2006:7.

had much in common. The MPLA's discourse of statehood was openly one of modernisation, comparable to the discourses that elsewhere in Africa accompanied late-colonial state building and which were echoed in the independence era. It emphasised the role of the state in providing services. Development was conceived of as a project carried out by an "enlightened" urban social stratum. It shunned local difference, and situated the MPLA's activities of state building as part of a worldwide movement against imperialism: an internationalist discourse that was given substance by the presence of Cubans providing much of the expertise that was needed in providing the services in which the state's role was constituted. The MPLA had inherited the physical infrastructure of a colonial state whose apparatus was concentrated in towns: for the party, seizing power after independence was a matter of taking control of these towns. Even if the departure of Portuguese civil servants had left the state apparatus barely functioning, the authority conferred by the very occupation of offices of state was an important gage of legitimacy. The party's inability to eliminate UNITA from the countryside in the Central Highlands led to the reality of the "island state" described in chapter three, a fact that entrenched the urban character of the MPLA state.

At first glance, UNITA's state-like discourses and practices may seem qualitatively different from those of the MPLA. Pélissier, for instance, characterises the MPLA as a "modernist" movement in contrast to an "ethno-nationalist" UNITA,⁵⁴³ while Heywood explains UNITA's popular appeal in terms of its invocation of "traditional ideology" in which "rulers' power was based on their control of spiritual and secular forces, the notion of centralised and decentralized power, and the concept of misuse

⁵⁴³ Pélissier 1971:161-166.

of power through witchcraft, remained stable and retained their vitality”.⁵⁴⁴ It is also true that UNITA’s internal discourse emphasised the political importance of the peasantry, alluding to Maoist ideas, whereas the MPLA’s discourse was explicitly one of an urban-centred modernising state. Yet my interviews illustrate that discourses of modernity were no less important to UNITA – at least, to the UNITA political elite – than they were to the MPLA. As discussed in chapter four, Savimbi’s allusions to Maoist ideas were just as opportunistic as his invocation of various other ideologies, including free-market capitalism. What emerges as consistent in UNITA’s discourse was a commitment to the state as a modern, developmental force, although the possibilities for realising this vision were few, and it was only in the constrained and artificial environment of Jamba that UNITA was able to come close to making a reality of the kind of state that was implicit in its discourse. As I have shown in chapters four and five, UNITA’s relationship with the peasantry was based above all upon a need to supply food for its soldiers and cadres. Its attitude towards the peasantry had much in common with that of the urban-based independent African state, deploying modernising developmental discourses and practices and creating structures designed to ensure a flow of food from producers to consumers. When UNITA loyalists cited Jamba as a demonstration of UNITA’s capability as a state, it was specifically its urban and modern qualities that they invoked.

The MPLA and UNITA discourses on the state and its role in development, then, appear more similar than the outwardly different character of the two movements might suggest. The observable differences appear to have developed owing to the fact that the MPLA and UNITA were operating in different kinds of social environments:

⁵⁴⁴ Heywood 1998:151.

the towns and the bush. In the cities, stateness was judged in terms of people having a peaceful and orderly living environment in which there was employment, shelter, enough food to eat and access to services of health and education. In a rural environment, demands on the state were fewer: essentially, the expectation of a state was that it would ensure a peaceful and orderly environment in which food could be cultivated, and basic manufactured items like salt and soap be obtained. Other than at Jamba, UNITA was able to offer little more than the promise of security, and perhaps some rudimentary education and health services and basic goods. The recollections of former UNITA officials nevertheless indicate that UNITA judged its own worth in terms of its ability to match, and even to better, the MPLA in the provision of services that required the deployment of skilled professionals and which promised a healthier, more enlightened and more productive life than that which was known to peasant farmers before the arrival of UNITA. For both parties, the Portuguese colonial state was the most important model: a state that was thinly spread over Angolan territory, and whose institutions were concentrated in and controlled from the towns. For the MPLA, a minimal condition of state building was to maintain the institutions inherited from the colonial state. Even if UNITA did not keep control of any colonial infrastructure after the MPLA expelled it from the cities in February 1976, UNITA's discourses continued to invoke standards set by the colonial state as a yardstick for the success of its own developmental ambitions.

Discourses of stateness by themselves, however, are not enough to secure legitimacy unless they are accompanied by visible state-like activity. Before going on to discuss the degree in which the parties' discourses were adopted or rejected, I will consider the realities of rule by the two movements: in understanding how the MPLA and

UNITA operated in their respective spheres of control, we must take account not only of what they aspired to do, but also the means that they had at their disposal and the circumstances that constrained them. In the interior of Angola, as we have seen, the MPLA state for most of the war years was confined to “islands” of territory centred on the main towns. The roads between these centres were sometimes passable, but normally only to columns accompanied by a military escort. Surrounding each town was a zone of indeterminate and ever-changing size through which FAPLA soldiers could pass on patrol, but in which there was no fixed or permanent state presence. UNITA soldiers would sometimes be present in this same zone: people talked of how “FAPLA came by day, and UNITA by night”. UNITA’s most extensive area of unchallenged influence was in the south-east of the country, though even here there was a difference in the manner of its control between the society that it created and controlled at Jamba, and its more indirect relationship with farming communities in the rest of the south-east. In the Central Highlands, UNITA had bases staffed both by soldiers and by civilian functionaries, from which it conducted, with variable success, a rudimentary state-like relationship with peasant communities in the vicinity. Some of these bases were able to remain in place for years or decades, but in other places UNITA officers would order the dismantling of the base and the evacuation of the farmers from the area of the base’s influence as soon as FAPLA troops were known to be closing in on the area.

UNITA was state-like in that it was able to monopolise violence in a certain part of Angola, as could the MPLA government. However, neither movement was able to monopolise violence in a territorially bounded area, and in this respect any attempt to understand the stateness of both movements needs to heed Gupta’s suggestion that we

conceptualise state power “in terms far more decentralized and disaggregated than has been the case so far”.⁵⁴⁵ Herbst’s concept of the projection of power from administrative centres is of relevance to understanding UNITA’s exercise of influence (from Jamba) as well as that of the MPLA (from Luanda and from the various provincial capitals).⁵⁴⁶ Equally relevant is the notion of the “gatekeeper state” as characterised by Cooper as a way in which a state is able to assert its presence even when its territorial control is incomplete, by controlling the movement of people and goods across boundaries.⁵⁴⁷ For Cooper, the gatekeeper mode of power can be traced to the legacy of colonial states whose repressive apparatuses were thinly spread, and continued in independent states that also lacked the resources to assert their authority over the whole of a national territory. If the MPLA and UNITA discourses spoke of the role of the state as above all developmental, in reality much of the practice of statehood for both sides was a matter of controlling the movement of people in and out of the territories in which the movements exercised influence. This control was, naturally, concerned with preventing military incursion, but as far as civilians were concerned, both parties needed to keep them, or bring them, inside the secure zones of control: that is, the towns for the MPLA, and Jamba for UNITA. Both parties needed skilled people to work for them, and the MPLA needed to stop peasants from supplying food to UNITA.

Yet whatever the similarities that can be seen between the constraints that prevented the MPLA and UNITA from realising their ambitions, the MPLA enjoyed a fundamental advantage in controlling virtually all of Angola’s colonial infrastructure

⁵⁴⁵ Gupta 1995:376.

⁵⁴⁶ Herbst 2000.

⁵⁴⁷ Cooper 1997.

from 1976 onwards. However much UNITA might have spoken a language of developmental modernity it was unable to realise this modernity other than at Jamba, and then only partially. As discussed in chapter four, UNITA's manner of rule in the zones that it controlled was, in Messiant's term, "properly totalitarian", in contrast to the "paradoxical dictatorship" of the MPLA.⁵⁴⁸ In government controlled areas, even though the social, political and military spheres overlapped to a large extent and the state was practically indistinguishable from the MPLA, there was never the same degree of centralised authoritarian control that was experienced at Jamba and in other areas where UNITA secured a monopoly of violence. I interpreted this as being related to the fact that UNITA, at Jamba, built a society from the beginning, something that allowed the penetration of UNITA as a political organisation into every area of life, while the MPLA presided over a complex society and economy whose relationships were the legacy of urban colonial society. For those people who experienced the more realistically modern and urban life and the relative degree of liberty that was available in the cities, the experience of UNITA was that of an enemy and, in the early 1990s, a destroyer.

Popular discourses

Having discussed the discourses with which the MPLA and UNITA sought to legitimate themselves among the communities under their control, I will turn now to the ways in which these discourses were received and adopted by people who came into contact with the two movements. My interviews have pointed to the main

⁵⁴⁸ Messiant 1994:58.

characteristics of the official discourse of each movement, and shown how people adopted this discourse to different degrees and in different ways. The different world views that were current in government-controlled areas and UNITA-controlled areas were more than the sum of the discourses that were officially propagated by the two parties. I have shown, for example, how the town and the bush themselves acquired political meanings. This tendency to map politics onto space was not part of the official ideology on either side, yet the reality of territorial division ensured that spaces acquired political meanings that later came to inform how not only civilians but also soldiers and officials thought about the conflict and acted on it. Similarly, the tendency to assign political identity on the basis of a person's location was not something that was articulated in the official discourse of either party, but it nevertheless became current among officials and ordinary people alike.

I have argued for the need to problematise and disaggregate notions of political identity, or support for a political movement. This chapter has already discussed the question of political identity being imputed with no regard to where an individual's loyalties might lie. How people understood their own political identity depended on a complex set of factors involving their own material needs and the nature of any contact that they might have had with one or both political movements. Furthermore, the analysis presented in earlier chapters demonstrates the problems with using a concept like "support" when people had little or no choice about how they responded to the demands of armed political movements. If people used the word "support", such support was not always assumed to be voluntary nor on the basis of belief. "Support" could equally refer to complying with whatever demands were made for labour or to participate in events such as rallies. For this reason I have tended to talk

about the “adherents” of a political movement when referring to those people who lived under the control of the movement without challenging its authority: the idea of adherence does not make unsubstantiated assumptions regarding people’s feelings about the movement and its policies and practices, as distinct from their behaviour in relation to the movement. Indeed, given the tendency particularly among less educated interviewees to revise their own political narratives according to which party was in command at the time, in many cases it was possible to do no more than to make inferences about people’s past beliefs.

The introductory chapter considered some of the theoretical perspectives that reveal the connections between official discourse and popular consciousness. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as a process whereby a ruling bloc secures the “spontaneous” consent of the ruled allows us to see beyond a deterministic relationship between the discourse of officials and the discourses of wider society. Specifically with regard to the study of civil conflict, Kaarsholm has suggested that we broaden the basis of what we regard as “political” through an approach based on the study of “public cultures”, which he characterises as “the fora and the discourses through which political understandings and endeavours are constituted”.⁵⁴⁹ The perspectives that Malkki has suggested are more closely focussed at the level of individual and communal consciousness and demonstrate how subjects articulate “mythico-historical themes” in their narratives of their personal and communal histories, a process that Malkki terms the “making of worlds”.⁵⁵⁰ I have adopted these perspectives in discussing whether, how and in what circumstances the official discourses of either or both political movement might shape popular understandings not only within the political sphere of

⁵⁴⁹ Kaarsholm 2006:13-14.

⁵⁵⁰ Malkki 1995.

the contract between ruler and ruled, but also in the sphere of personal and communal history and identity.

I have shown how some people became accustomed to complying with the demands of either movement in turn only as much as was necessary to escape punishment. These demands might have involved expressing support, or attending rallies, or (in the case of UNITA) providing food. Compliance with these demands did not necessarily mean that the person in question believed that a political movement was indeed acting in their interests; in particular, people who had experienced frequent changes from the control of one movement to another acknowledged that they had no choice in what they said how they acted in relation to movement that was in control at a particular moment. However, this is not to say that all people were simply cynical or opportunistic in expressing support for one or other of the movements. On both sides there were those whose “worlds”, to use Malkki’s term – their understandings of history, of society, of politics and of their own place within all three – had been profoundly shaped, if not exactly determined, by the discourse of the political movement under which they lived. This is evident in the consistency in people’s accounts of their party’s history in fighting to liberate Angola from colonial oppression and to defend Angola from its enemies in the era of independence, the superiority of their party’s vision of development, the legitimacy that this conferred, and the duties that the subject bore towards the party as a result of it having established its legitimacy in this way. Those who were loyal to UNITA at the time of the interviews also expressed the superiority of the party in terms of the supposedly better moral values and standards of behaviour that they saw as being the result of the years spent with UNITA.

Some people maintained their belief in the legitimating ideology associated with one party even while they were living under the control of the other. On the other hand there were some who changed their opinions of a political movement, and all the narratives associated with it, as a result of having had prolonged contact first with one movement and then with the other. In an attempt to understand these continuities and changes in political adherence and belief, I explored how people's initial political adherence related both to the person's social position and to the circumstances of their first encounter with the political movement, and how these changed over time according to changes in military and political control.

On both sides there were people who had only ever been adherents of one movement. On the UNITA side, these were people who had been with UNITA from the mid-1970s, and their children who had been born in UNITA-controlled zones. The older men in this category had served as mid-ranking military officers or local political officials, and many of the women had been active in LIMA; although many of them came from peasant farming communities, it was this attribution of status by UNITA that set them aside from those who had worked only in the fields. Although they had lived under government control for several years – most of these people had entered government-held territory only after the Luena accord – the experience of life under the MPLA government had not been enough to make them abandon their long-held identification with UNITA. These people continued to speak of life under UNITA as objectively better than life under the MPLA in terms of access to food, education and health care. They also attributed superior moral qualities to the people who had lived with UNITA. Another group of people who were similarly consistent in their support

for UNITA were those who had joined UNITA in the towns in 1974 or 1975, and had stayed there working for the UNITA underground at great risk to themselves until the end of the war.

In the towns controlled by the state, the most dedicated MPLA supporters were educated people who had worked in the state system. They expressed their support for the party in terms of ideology – a belief in what they regarded as the party’s initial progressive, modernist and non-ethnic vision – and also in terms of what they saw the party as having achieved: the establishment and maintenance of the institutions in which they themselves had mostly made their careers. Rather than simply being the recipients of political education, those who were teachers and civil servants were involved in promoting the party’s narratives to others. Even those town dwellers who were not cadres experienced in the towns a level of security and basic service provision that they knew was not matched by life under UNITA. Some of these people had lived all their lives in the MPLA-controlled towns. Their only direct experience of UNITA was during the brief occupation of the Central Highlands towns at the end of 1975, or during the occupation of Huambo or the siege of Kuito in 1993. The contact with UNITA in 1975 was fleeting and in a situation of unstable and contested power; during the 1990s, they encountered UNITA in a situation of war that had destroyed, or threatened to destroy, the society that the town dwellers had been part of and helped to construct, and the economy that was their livelihood. At the same time, UNITA made no attempt at persuading people that it represented a just cause; indeed, its soldiers and officials displayed suspicion towards urban people, particularly those who were associated with the state, and often meted out arbitrary and violent punishment. The result of this was to confirm, in the town dwellers’

minds, what they already believed about the nature of UNITA.

However, the interviews reveal that some people did change their political beliefs as a consequence of changed political control. As already discussed, expressing or demonstrating support for anything other than the dominant political movement was not an option. My concern here is with those who changed not only their behaviour but also their political beliefs, and to find out what circumstances were favourable to such a change. These changes did not occur equally in both directions: they were usually a matter of rejecting UNITA's narratives and embracing those of the MPLA, as a consequence of having migrated or been forced to migrate from a UNITA zone to a government zone. Early in 1976, urban people who left Huambo or Kuito with UNITA as the MPLA advanced initially believed UNITA to be acting in their best interests against a hostile MPLA. However, some of these people later worked for the MPLA state, and through their participation in what they saw as a positive modernising project, they came to accept the MPLA's narratives. Their earlier acceptance of UNITA was the result of not having been in contact with any other political force. Consequently they had accepted a narrative that positioned UNITA as the protector of the people against a hostile MPLA. Once they were in the town, however, the possibility of education or employment better than UNITA could provide and the relatively secure environment of the town as opposed to the transitory life in the bush with UNITA led them to accept the MPLA and in time to acknowledge the validity of the MPLA's narratives of legitimacy. Others who had been living in smaller settlements not securely under the control of either military force went voluntarily to the towns because their homes had become part of a conflict zone: their realisation that the MPLA could provide security overrode any political

preference that they may have had for UNITA.

Just as I have argued that the nature of peasant farmers' encounters with political movements was of a different nature from those of town dwellers, so was their response to changing political and military circumstances. Peasants who were compelled to move to government-held areas in the 1980s spoke of a change in political identity: this move had turned them into "government people" whereas previously some had been attached to no party, and others to UNITA. The way in which they expressed the kind of relationship they had to the government was, however, different from that of the city dwellers. They had initially experienced the MPLA and UNITA not as political actors but as armed forces. Their self-identification as "government people" meant little more than having accepted the protection of the government against UNITA: it was a promise of security from further attacks. In contrast to the town dwellers who were incorporated into a process of state building led by the MPLA, these farmers felt that their move into MPLA territory had brought them nothing positive other than security. Another era that saw large-scale movement by peasant farmers into government territory was the last years of the war, from 1998 to 2002, when UNITA's political structures had broken down. In contrast to those who had moved in the 1980s, these people had previously lived for years in areas that were under UNITA's control, and they had considered themselves "UNITA people". They abandoned this UNITA identity as a consequence of their acceptance of government control as an alternative to the hardships of life under UNITA. Indeed, by this stage of the war the territory controlled by UNITA was almost coterminous with a zone of combat, as the FAA had captured or destabilised those areas where UNITA had previously established a consensual relationship with

local people. The fact that a move to government-held territory meant a move away from war was a further reason to identify themselves as government people. The fact that UNITA, as discussed in the previous section, was “properly totalitarian”, its social structures far more tightly bound up with military control than was the case with the MPLA,⁵⁵¹ further undermined UNITA’s ability to retain political adherence as it collapsed militarily.

I have also recorded instances in which people who had worked in MPLA-held towns were captured and forced to go to UNITA controlled areas. These include Pedro, the catechist, and Amélia, the teacher, quoted in chapter four, who were kidnapped, initially held prisoner and later put to work in Jamba. Their response to this experience, over several years, was to understand UNITA’s version of history and even to admire what UNITA had achieved at Jamba, but not to develop any profound feeling of attachment to the organisation. Finally, chapter five considered the narratives of the people in Bailundo district who had left Waku Kungo believing that the war was over, and settled in a rural area that soon fell under the control of UNITA. Those among them who had been dedicated to the MPLA found life with UNITA difficult, but those who had no strong partisan feelings had no objection to co-operating with UNITA during the years when it remained securely in control of the area. Among those who had first experienced life under the MPLA and later life under UNITA, this latter group were exceptional in that the poorer living conditions under UNITA did not cause them to judge UNITA negatively. This was because they had voluntarily left the city, without any expectations of what might await them in the countryside, and because they did not fall victim to violence as UNITA took control

⁵⁵¹ Messiant 1994:58.

of an area where the government had no military presence. In a situation of peace, it was possible for UNITA to establish a political relationship with those people who were willing to accept its presence.

Urban and rural experiences

This discussion of the factors that shaped political adherence has a bearing on how we understand the ways in which people's location in an urban or a rural place and their integration into an urban or a rural economy helped to determine their experiences and their understandings of the war. We have seen how for much of the duration of the war, the discourses of UNITA, of the MPLA and of people linked to neither movement associated UNITA with the countryside and the MPLA with the towns. In UNITA's discourse, the association with the countryside was a positive one, a token of the movement's African authenticity that UNITA did not see as contradictory to its aspirations to urban modernity; for the MPLA, UNITA stood in opposition to the urban modernity that the MPLA claimed as its own. At the same time, the interviews quoted here have demonstrated marked differences in the manner of people's encounters and interaction with political movements in the towns and in the countryside. I have sought to distinguish the political movements' discourses on towns and countryside from their practices in relation to urban and rural people, and from town dwellers' and village dwellers' experience of the political movements.

The introductory chapter raised questions about the role of peasant farmers in civil conflict, which has been an important debate in the literature on civil war in Africa

and throughout the developing world. To allude to two extreme positions within that debate: Ranger has suggested that guerrillas in Zimbabwe were able to mobilise among the peasantry since the peasants' class position and historical consciousness allowed the construction of a "peasant-guerrilla ideology", while for Mkandawire, peasants are no more than a resource that is exploited by guerrillas whose aim is the capture of the city.⁵⁵² A further body of literature has considered whether the economic interests of peasant farmers will cause them to resist incorporation into a state. Such arguments assume that state building is driven by the need above all to feed urban people, and/or by an ideology of developmental modernity that justifies bureaucratic control with little benefits to peasants. The most convincing arguments about peasants' resistance to state intervention are those that involve not so much about a rejection of statehood per se, but rather the rejection of inappropriate and damaging practices by the state.⁵⁵³ The inability of the MPLA state to extend its reach into rural Angola meant that unlike RENAMO in Mozambique, UNITA had no opportunity to mobilise around real grievance against state development initiatives.

Rather than looking exclusively at guerrilla-peasant interactions I have examined the processes of mobilisation both in towns and in the countryside, and have observed a dynamic relationship between rural and urban political processes. Ideas of the urban and the rural became prominent in the discourses produced by the conflict, as part of processes of legitimation that called on narratives of modernist development (in the case of both movements) and of African authenticity (in the case of UNITA). This, however, should not cause the conflict to be misread as a struggle between urban and

⁵⁵² Ranger 1985; Mkandawire 2002.

⁵⁵³ For instance, Geffray's conclusion that resistance in some areas to FRELIMO's villagisation schemes fostered support for RENAMO in Mozambique.

rural interests. The material presented here suggests that the different experience of the war in towns and in countryside, as well as the discursive associations between UNITA and the countryside and between the MPLA and the towns, were in both instances the result of historical contingency rather than of UNITA finding common purpose with peasants. I have shown that despite Savimbi's evocation of Maoist ideas, UNITA's struggle was not able to draw upon pre-existing grievances that were unique to peasant farmers. To secure hegemony among people in the rural areas that it dominated, UNITA needed to shape the political consciousness of people there, but the movement did not single out nor offer solutions to problems that were particular to peasants. Insofar as UNITA offered "services" to peasants, this was within the terms of a developmental logic that was as much about producing more food for UNITA cadres as about making life better for farmers themselves. Rather, in constructing grievance among peasants through its narratives about the alien nature of the MPLA, UNITA presented the main problem as being one of security, framed in nationalist terms. The modernist developmentalism of UNITA's discourse, linked to an economic relationship defined by the production and consumption of agricultural produce, served only to entrench the distinction that separated UNITA officials, soldiers and cadres from the peasants on whose produce they depended.

My interviews with farmers old enough to remember the early 1970s show them to be generally sceptical of the nationalist movements. This is related to the fact that in the Central Highlands, the movements first made contact with urban and educated people, and paid little attention to the rural areas until the war was under way. But it is also the case that the priorities of the MPLA and UNITA in wartime offered little to peasants. Most farmers co-operated with either movement to the extent that it this was

necessary to avoid punishment. But the fact that they received little or nothing from the political movements meant that they had little to lose. As we have seen in chapter five, when the MPLA state came under threat or was expelled by UNITA after the 1992 elections, it was farmers on the urban fringe who proved to be the most adaptable since it was they who were least dependent on the state for their livelihood. During the UNITA occupation of Huambo and the siege of Kuito, people who for decades had worked in an urban, state-centred economy turned to cultivation in order to survive, even if, in the case of Kuito, this involved migrating temporarily from the besieged city to the UNITA-controlled countryside: a shift that was possible only on account of ongoing family ties between the city and the villages. This does not indicate that either party was more successful at mobilising peasants. Rather it reflects the balance of resources between the two movements. The goods and resources on which the MPLA's urban state building depended were scarce. UNITA had land and little else: this was, however, enough to make farming during that period the better option for those who were able.

Insofar as peasants possessed a degree of autonomy from political formations, this autonomy did not look the same from the farmers' point of view as it did from the movements' perspective. Peasants saw political movements as entities that were not inherently beneficial to them. Of the generation of farmers who could remember the independence period, many had experienced violence or threats from both political movements. If peasants saw a political movement as useful to them, it was only as a guarantor of security against the violence of the other movement. The question of which movement was perceived as the defender and which as the aggressor was the consequence of one or the other side having established a relationship with farmers in

a particular area, and convinced them that the opposing movement was a threat to their interests. Among farmers, politicisation meant little more than this. Indeed, in some cases peasants remained equally sceptical towards both movements, but realised that it was in their own best interests to accept the presence of whichever movement was in control and to comply with whatever demands it made for food or labour. It is in these terms that “support” for a movement must be understood.

From the point of view of the political movements, on the other hand, the autonomy of peasants was acknowledged to the extent that peasants did not have a close relationship with either of the movements. My interviews have demonstrated that officials of both political movements spoke of the “*povo*”, by which they meant peasant farmers, as a prize in war rather than as a participant in the war. In this sense at least, the official discourses on the Angolan civil war are consistent with the “war for people” characterisation employed by Davidson and by Brinkman with respect to the anti-colonial struggle.⁵⁵⁴ In various interviews I quoted, officials have defined *povo* both in contrast to soldiers and to state functionaries: to be a soldier or a civil servant meant that one’s life and livelihood were more closely tied into a political movement than was ever the case for farmers. From the perspective of political elites, the *povo* are in themselves harmless, but they are a potential liability insofar as they may provide material support to the opposing movement.

For the MPLA, peasants were on the one hand to be treated with suspicion because the MPLA recognised that away from Jamba, UNITA’s livelihood depended on the extraction of food from peasant farmers. This recognition informed the systematic

⁵⁵⁴ Davidson 1972; Brinkman 2005.

strategy of moving farmers away from the contested zones of the countryside and into areas that were more firmly under the control of the MPLA. On the other hand, by believing in the essentially non-political nature of peasants, MPLA officials did not see them as inherently hostile. They were dangerous only if they were supplying food to UNITA. If, through forced relocation, they could be prevented from doing so, then they were no longer a threat. Any resistance to relocation, however, was interpreted as indicating loyalty to UNITA, and was punished.

UNITA kidnapped skilled people, and particularly towards the end of the war it kidnapped children for manual labour or sexual exploitation. But where peasants were concerned, UNITA was less concerned with bringing them into its territory than with preventing them from leaving. This was not a serious concern to UNITA as long as it was the only known movement, and as long as agricultural production continued. But its control of peasant communities became particularly violent towards the end of the war as UNITA lost control of territory, and worsening living conditions prompted farmers to go to government-held zones when possible. I have already noted that UNITA's appeals to farmers were chiefly on the basis of security: once it could no longer present itself as a provider of security, it had to rely on force to keep people from going to government-held areas.

In contrast to this rather distant relationship between peasants and political movements, both movements' aspirations to a modernising model of statehood was reflected in the higher value that they put on professional people, and in these cadres' belief that they had a stake in the political movement that employed them.

Professionals were more useful than peasants, but also more likely than peasants to

have an institutional relationship with the enemy. UNITA made a particular effort to capture teachers and health personnel to work at Jamba. When UNITA took control of Huambo in 1993, it allowed teachers who had previously worked for the MPLA to continue in their posts, but accounts suggest that UNITA officials kept a close watch over them. Even amid UNITA's hostility towards the town dwellers of Kuito, one schoolteacher reported being put to work in a UNITA school after she left the city and went to a village; another teacher who wished to avoid UNITA's attention was able to do so by pretending to be a farmer. On the MPLA's side, when people with professional experience arrived in towns after leaving UNITA areas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they were placed in government departments where their skills were needed, regardless of the fact that they had formerly worked for UNITA. This happened to a more limited extent after the end of the war in 2002, when in some cases incorporation into the civil service depended on becoming an MPLA member.

My research does not suggest any universal conclusions about the relationship between peasants and processes of political mobilisation. It suggests that essentialised notions of "peasant struggle" may be useful as part of the legitimising ideology of a political movement like UNITA, but they conceal more than they reveal about what actually happens in the relationship between political-military actors and peasants. In this respect I follow Ranger in stressing the importance of the specific historical experience of peasants in a particular country or region, although my research shows no evidence of the congruence in outlook between peasants and guerrillas that Ranger identified in Zimbabwe.⁵⁵⁵ In the case of Angola, my interviews give no indication that grievances specific to peasants were ever articulated at the level of political

⁵⁵⁵ Ranger 1985.

mobilisation, either by peasants themselves or by movements claiming to act on their behalf. Central to the political relationship was the political movement's ability to present itself as a provider of security and stability.

Conclusion

I have shown how the Angolan civil war had its origins in the struggle against Portuguese colonialism and in the differing visions of nationalism that that struggle produced, but that popular recruitment by the liberation movements began only after the April 1974 coup. In the years that followed, the MPLA and UNITA competed by force of arms for control of Angolan territory, and competed politically to establish hegemony over the country's people. Neither side ever achieved these objectives before 2002. The pattern that emerges concerning the relationship between violence and politicisation over the course of the Angolan war is as follows. Where hegemonic dominance of a region was threatened or contested, then political movements used violence to assert their control: the process that Kalyvas calls "fragmentation".⁵⁵⁶ Yet civilians' experience of violence had the effect of alienating people from the movement that they perceived to be responsible for the violence. Political relationships were more easily created at times and in places when there was no armed conflict. Consequently, in situations where power was contested by force of arms the fundamental political task of each movement was to convince people of the legitimacy of their own violence, while simultaneously delegitimising the violence of the other side. But the construction of a political relationship was possible only when

⁵⁵⁶ Kalyvas 2006:12.

a movement had at its disposal the military and other resources to guarantee a secure living environment for the people of the area, safe from attacks by the opposing movement: what Kalyvas calls “segmentation”. This provided the minimum condition for a process of political education in which the central theme was the exclusive state-like legitimacy of the party concerned. This process was, however, facilitated and reinforced by the provision of services and infrastructure above and beyond the minimal function of security. The political education process, if successful, would allow the political movement’s preferred narratives to become hegemonic, and to shape popular discourses on the history of the conflict, the role of the political movements and of foreign actors in the conflict, the responsibilities of the political movement towards the people, and the duties of the people towards the movement.

Military control and the forced relocation of people into an area of control created the opportunities for different political actors to influence public discourse and construct perceptions of common interest and of enmity. This process was sustainable as long as the life experienced by people in the new location or under the control of a different party was no worse than what they had experienced previously, judged in terms of safety and the availability of basic goods. At the same time, the experience of violence served to make grievance real. It is in this light that we should consider the role of identity factors and historical memory in the Angolan conflict: rather than identity-based grievance or rivalry causing conflict, war is constitutive of perceived identities and entrenches identities by making a reality of grievance. Although each political movement had an inner circle of supporters whose belief in their party’s innate superiority was deep and unchanging, outside this core group political identity was determined situationally and was subject to change with a change in political and

military control.

Such a view of the Angolan conflict has multiple implications for how we conceive of the processes of political mobilisation that happen during post-colonial state formation and in civil war, and indeed for how we study political identities and the relationship between state and society outside of a war situation. Most studies of civil war, notably those adopting a comparative approach and those that conceive of civil war as a process of looting, examine the recruitment of a rebel force in opposition to a state. I have demonstrated that to make categorical distinctions between “rebels” and “state” in the case of Angola is to obscure the similarities in how the MPLA and UNITA viewed their relationship with people, and how people responded to them. It is more useful to look simultaneously at the construction of political relationships, which include the construction of political legitimacy, both on the side of UNITA and on the side of the MPLA state. Similarly, the initial encounters between people and political movements were not always on the basis of the movements seeking to recruit people for participation in war. People who joined political movements after the Portuguese coup, even if they did so voluntarily, did not always see this as an act of military recruitment. In later years, people chose political identities, or had political identities imposed upon them, that did not necessarily involve taking up arms. This point might seem obvious, but it needs to be made in order to emphasise that a rebel movement is more than simply an armed force. Just as we do not see state formation simply as a process of militarisation, so to view civil war simply in terms of rebel military recruitment is to ignore a large part of the social and political processes in which the conflict is embedded.

Yet at the same time, for many people the process whereby they became attached to a political movement was not contingent on holding a particular set of political beliefs. In this sense the formation of a relationship between an individual and a political movement had much in common with the formation of national or ethnic identity: it was less an expression of political choice than the acceptance of membership of an imagined community. We have seen how the discourse of UNITA and that of the MPLA sought to situate the political movement as central to the imagining of a particular politicised vision of an Angolan nation. At the same time, political elites imposed identities – “our people” or “enemy people” – which had no foundation in the real political beliefs of the person concerned. Hence in studying conflict we cannot simply take the position that people in every case chose to ally themselves with a particular political movement: the “voluntarist” account of conflict as Kriger puts it.⁵⁵⁷ This is not to say, however, that we should take the opposite “structuralist” position that Kriger also warns against as excluding the possibility of non-elite agency. The accounts of the war that I have quoted show how popular beliefs and discourses deserve attention because they are embroiled in the politics of state formation and of war. Elite ideologies, sometimes with only a tangential relationship to the global ideologies of socialism and liberalism that dominate Cold War-based accounts of events in Angola, defined the preferred position of each party in relation to Angola and to Angolans. Central to these ideologies was an idea of the state as a device of political legitimisation. The idea of the state links a prerogative of violence to responsibilities for the creation of a peaceful and orderly environment, and for creating conditions in which the basic necessities of life may be obtained or produced. Given the centrality of statehood to nation building in independent Africa, it was the

⁵⁵⁷ Kriger 1992.

idea of the state that located the political movement at the centre of its own vision of the Angolan nation. The political task of each of the protagonists in the war was to secure hegemony for its own discourse of party, state and nation and to exclude the possibility of contestation by the opposing party. Its ability to do so, as we have seen, depended on the prior convictions and experiences of the people it encountered; it depended also on military dominance that would give it the security within a particular area it to make a reality of the aspirations that were contained in its discourses of stateness. This thesis has illustrated the need to study the interrelationship of military power and elite and popular discourses in understanding the politics of the war; and the need to avoid seeing political relationships according to a dichotomy between willing support and violent coercion, and instead to examine closely the always-changing nature and character of political adherence.

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Appendix: List of interviewees

date	iv number	dob	location	gender	occupation	name/pseudon/obs
02/05/2008	1		Luanda	m	military / academic	
08/05/2008	2	1977	Huambo	m	church	
10/05/2008	3		Huambo	m	lawyer	Roberto
12/05/2008	4	1962	Huambo	m	ex UNITA soldier	
13/05/2008	5		Huambo	m	UNITA politician	
13/05/2008	6	1942	Huambo	m	ex UNITA soldier	
13/05/2008	7	1970	Huambo	f	ex UNITA teacher	
13/05/2008	8	1974	Huambo	f	ex UNITA technician	
15/05/2008	9	1968	Huambo	m	lawyer	Rui
15/05/2008	10		Huambo	f	development worker	
15/05/2008	11	1975	Huambo	m	policeman	
18/05/2008	12		Huambo	m	farmer	
18/05/2008	13		Huambo	m	farmer	
18/05/2008	14		Huambo	f	farmer	
18/05/2008	15	1960	Huambo	f	farmer	
18/05/2008	16	1956	Huambo	m	soba / farmer	
18/05/2008	17		Huambo	f	farmer	
18/05/2008	18	1958	Huambo	f	farmer	
19/05/2008	19	1940	Huambo	m	church	
20/05/2008	20	1920	Huambo	f	nurse	
22/05/2008	21		Huambo	m	church	
23/05/2008	22	1958	Huambo	m	teacher	Mário
26/05/2008	23	1955	Soke	f	church	
26/05/2008	24	1950	Soke	f	church	
29/05/2008	25	1957	Londwimbali	m	teacher	
29/05/2008	26	1951	Londwimbali	m	teacher	
29/05/2008	27	1950	Londwimbali	f	teacher	
29/05/2008	28	1975?	Londwimbali	m	church	
31/05/2008	29	1951	Huambo	m	farmer	Albano
31/05/2008	30	1960	Huambo	f	farmer	
31/05/2008	31	1957	Huambo	m	academic / civil service	Bernardo
01/06/2008	32	1927	Huambo	m	farmer	
01/06/2008	33	1935	Huambo	m	farmer	
01/06/2008	34		Huambo	m	catechist	
01/06/2008	35		Huambo	f	mpla local official	
01/06/2008	36	1943	Huambo	m	farmer	
01/06/2008	37	1964	Huambo	f	OMA local official	
04/06/2008	38	1954	Near Huambo	m	soba / farmer	
04/06/2008	39	1965	Near Huambo	m	soba / farmer	
04/06/2008	40	1935	Near Huambo	m	soba / farmer	
06/06/2008	41	1961	Near Huambo	m	coordenador / mpla	
06/06/2008	42	1960	Near Huambo	m	farmer	
06/06/2008	43	1958	Near Huambo	m	farmer	
06/06/2008	44	1961	Near Huambo	m	farmer	
07/06/2008	45	1970?	Near Huambo	m	guard	
07/06/2008	46		Near Huambo	m	guard	
07/06/2008	47		Near Huambo	f	farmer	
08/06/2008	48	1945	Near Huambo	m	farmer	
08/06/2008	49	1956	Near Huambo	f	farmer	
09/06/2008	50	1948	Near Huambo	f	farmer	
09/06/2008	51	1938	Near Huambo	m	farmer	
09/06/2008	39	1965	Near Huambo	m	soba / farmer	
09/06/2008	52	1968	Near Huambo	m	farmer	
10/06/2008	53	1958?	Near Huambo	m	artisan	
10/06/2008	40		Near Huambo	m	soba / farmer	

10/06/2008	54	1956	Near Huambo	f	farmer	
15/06/2008	55		Near Huambo	m/f	farmers	group
15/06/2008	56		Near Huambo	m/f	farmers, local MPLA	group
17/06/2008	57		Near Huambo	m	church	
18/06/2008	58		Near Huambo	m	soba	
21/06/2008	59		Huambo	m		
26/06/2008	60		Huambo	m	farmer / ex UNITA	Estêvão
29/06/2008	61		Caala	m	UNITA municipal secretary	
30/06/2008	62		Caala	m	teacher, ex UNITA	
30/06/2008	63	1955	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	Costa
30/06/2008	64	1972	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
30/06/2008	65	1978	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
30/06/2008	66	1977	Caala	m		
03/07/2008	67	1963	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
03/07/2008	68	1975	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
03/07/2008	69	1955	Caala	f		
04/07/2008	70	1957	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
04/07/2008	71	1947	Caala	m	ex UNITA officer	
04/07/2008	72	1958	Caala	m	ex UNITA officer	
04/07/2008	73	1947	Caala	f	ex UNITA	
04/07/2008	74	1969	Caala	f	ex UNITA	
04/07/2008	75	1973	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
04/07/2008	76	1979	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
04/07/2008	77	1980	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
04/07/2008	78	1985	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
04/07/2008	79	1980	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
06/07/2008	80	1955	Huambo	m	government	
07/07/2008	71	1947	Caala	m	ex UNITA officer	
07/07/2008	81	1978	Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
12/07/2008	82		Huambo	f	ex UNITA official	
12/07/2008	83		Huambo	m		
13/07/2008	72		Caala	m		
13/07/2008	84		Caala	m	ex UNITA soldier	
15/07/2008	85		Huambo	m	UNITA official	
15/07/2008	86	1930?	Huambo	m	(ex) soba	
15/07/2008	87	1963	Huambo	m	UNITA official	
21/07/2008	88	1955?	Luanda	f	teacher	Amélia
22/07/2008	89	1934	Luanda	m	UNITA official	
22/07/2008	90	1945?	Luanda	m	ex UNITA official	
23/07/2008	91		Luanda	m	Development official	
24/07/2008	92		Luanda	m	ex UNITA general	
24/07/2008	93		Luanda	m	academic	
24/07/2008	94		Luanda	f	development worker	
22/08/2008	95		Lubango	f	UNITA official	
23/08/2008	96		Lubango	m	church	
23/08/2008	97		Lubango	m	PDP ANA official	
25/08/2008	98		Lubango	m	church / justice and peace	
25/08/2008	99		Lubango	m	FNLA official	
26/08/2008	100		Lubango	m	ex UNITA official	
28/08/2008	101		Huambo	m	UNITA official	
03/09/2008	102		Huambo	m	Electoral NGO	
21/09/2008	103		Huambo	m	church	
21/09/2008	104	1967	Huambo	m	Development	Anselmo
24/09/2008	105		Huambo	m	church / justice and peace	
30/09/2008	106		Huambo	m	catechists	group
03/10/2008	107		Huambo	m	farmers	group
13/10/2008	108		Luanda	f	development	Patrícia
17/10/2008	109		Luanda	f	development	
21/10/2008	110		Caala	m	soba	
22/10/2008	111	1968	Caala	m	MPLA official	

22/10/2008	112	1968	Caala	m	farmers	
26/10/2008	113		Near Huambo	m	church	
27/10/2008	114	1978	Near Huambo	m	farmer / ex-UNITA soldier	
27/10/2008	115	1957	Near Huambo	f	farmer	Bárbara
28/10/2008	116		Near Huambo	f	farmer	
30/10/2008	113		Huambo	m	church	
01/11/2008	117	1985	Caconda	m	ex UNITA soldier	
02/11/2008	118	1953	Caconda	m	teacher	
02/11/2008	119	1940	Caconda	m	catechist	
04/11/2008	120	1940	Chicomba	m	catechist	
06/11/2008	121	1970	Chicomba	m	catechist	Lucas
06/11/2008	122	1972	Chicomba	m	catechist	
07/11/2008	123		Chicomba	m	sobas	
08/11/2008	124		Chicomba	m		
09/11/2008	125		Que	m	ex soldiers	group
09/11/2008	120		Chicomba	m	catechist	
10/11/2008	126	1968	Chicomba	m	catechist	
10/11/2008	127	1960	Chicomba	f		
10/11/2008	128	?	Chicomba	m	catechist - ex UNITA	Pedro
11/11/2008	129	1954	Caconda	m	farmer - ex UNITA	
13/11/2008	130	1970	Bailundo	m	catechist	Paulo
14/11/2008	131	1950	Bailundo	m	teacher	Francisco
14/11/2008	132	1975	Bailundo	m	teacher	
14/11/2008	133	1967	Bailundo	m	teacher	Miguel
15/11/2008	134	1944	Bailundo	m		José
15/11/2008	135	?	Bailundo	m		Ramos
15/11/2008	136		Bailundo	m/f	farmers	group
15/11/2008	137		Bailundo	m/f	farmers	group
15/11/2008	138	1938?	Huambo	m	priest	
11/05/2009	139	?	Lisbon	m	ex UNITA official	
11/05/2009	140			m	priest	written
12/07/2009	141		Luanda	m	Catechist	Bento
12/07/2009	142		Luanda	m	Catechist	
14/07/2009	143		Luanda	m	UNITA politician	Abel Chivukuvuku
14/07/2009	144		Luanda	m	UNITA politician	
17/07/2009	145		Luanda	m	Government official	
17/07/2009	146	1953	Luanda	f	Public health worker	
23/07/2009	19		Huambo	m	pastor	
24/07/2009	147		Huambo	m	Priest	
24/07/2009	148	1929	Huambo	m	priest	
27/07/2009	149		Huambo	m	priest	
28/07/2009	150	1952	Caala	f	development	Paulina
28/07/2009	151	1970	Huambo	m	development	
28/07/2009	152		Huambo	m	teacher	
09/08/2009	153		Chicomba	m		
09/08/2009	154		Chicomba	m		
09/08/2009	155		Chicomba	m	Catechist	
09/08/2009	156		Chicomba	m	UNITA official	
09/08/2009	157		Chicomba	m	Teacher	
10/08/2009	158		Chicomba	m	Government / MPLA official	
10/08/2009	159		Chicomba	m	Farmer, ex UNITA	
10/08/2009	160		Chicomba	m	Farmer, ex UNITA	
10/08/2009	161		Chicomba	m	Farmer, under gov control	
12/08/2009	162		Chicomba	m	Farmers	Group
13/08/2009	163		Chicomba	m	Farmers	Group
14/08/2009	164		Chicomba	f	Farmer, ex UNITA	
14/08/2009	165		Chicomba	m	Farmer, ex UNITA	
14/08/2009	166		Chicomba	m	Agronomist, UNITA	
14/08/2009	167		Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	
14/08/2009	168		Bailundo	m	Farmers Group discussion	

14/08/2009	169		Bailundo	m	Former FAPLA soldier	Group
14/08/2009	170		Bailundo	m	development worker	
14/08/2009	171	1958	Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	
14/08/2009	172	1949	Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	Horácio
14/08/2009	173		Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	
14/08/2009	174		Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	Eugênio
14/08/2009	175		Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	Carlos
20/08/2009	176		Bailundo	m	Farmer, under gov control	
22/08/2009	177	1953	Huambo	m	MPLA politician	Marcolino Moco
24/08/2009	178	1967	Kuito	m	Priest	
24/08/2009	179		Kuito	m	Priest	
24/08/2009	180		Kuito	f	development	Adriana
24/08/2009	181		Kuito	f	teacher	
25/08/2009	182	1968	Kuito	f		
25/08/2009	183	1972	Kuito	m	Priest	
25/08/2008	184	1974	Kuito	m	Journalist	
25/08/2009	185	1930	Kuito	m	Priest	
25/08/2009	186	1973	Kuito	m	Trader	
27/08/2009	178			m		
27/08/2009	187		Kuito	m	UNITA official	
27/08/2009	188		Kuito	f	Teacher	Marta
27/08/2009	189		Kuito	f	Teacher	Elena
27/08/2009	190		Kuito	m	Teacher	Alberto
28/08/2009	191		Kuito	m	Teacher	João
29/08/2009	192		Kuito	m	Priest	
29/08/2009	193		Kuito	m	Priest	
30/08/2009	194	1951	Kuito	m	Catechist	
05/09/2009	195	1959	Chinguar	m		
07/09/2009	196	1960	Luanda	m	Military	General Wambu
07/09/2009	197		Luanda	m	Military	General Chiwale
07/09/2009	198		Luanda	m	UNITA	Marcial Dachala
07/09/2009	199		Luanda	m		
07/09/2009	200	1955	Luanda	m	UNITA	Jaka Jamba
07/09/2009	201		Luanda	m	Military	General Nunda