

The Institutionalisation of Informal Politics Beyond the State: The Case of UNITA-MPLA Conflict in Angola

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Abstract: Using the sociological approach to international relations, this article considers the institutionalisation of informal politics beyond the state in Angola's postcolonial history. It is argued that war can become an alternative form of societal order to the extent that actors lose interest in bringing the conflict to an end through peaceful means. The article illustrates how promoting political disorder has become politically convenient for involved political elites, whether in government or in opposition, given that the continuous state of emergency dominates the debate on the legitimacy of their cause. Under such conditions, informal political regulation, considered as a pattern of behaviour not being officially recognised or controlled, might become particularly salient. Following the weakening of formal state structures, the MPLA and UNITA have accommodated violence and disorder through informal political strategies, aimed at the private extraction of Angola's natural resources and the coordination of informal and transnational international relations. Ultimately, informal political regulations have been more convenient for both movements in war, and today continue to be so in peacetime for the MPLA.

Keywords: Informality, Angola, MPLA-UNITA, non-state orders, transnational relations.

INTRODUCTION: REALIST THEORY AND INFORMAL POLITICS

How has informal politics become institutionalised beyond the state in the Angolan conflict? What does the sociological process of institutionalisation of informal political order imply for international relations theory? By tracing the process of emergence and consolidation of informal politics in Angola's postcolonial history, this paper aims to formulate a critique of mainstream realist theory [1]. It applies the sociological approach to international relations to the case of UNITA-MPLA conflict in order to reassess the emergence of informal political regulations. The Angolan case is especially interesting given that it raises the question of how state as well as non-state actors can accommodate non-state orders of violence in the aftermath of the weakening of formal state structures. Here, informal politics is taken as the exercise of political power free from conventional constraints and institutionalised forms of formal politics regulated by rules, agreements and direct relations between social actors. Sociologist Norbert Elias has argued that "in all differentiated societies [...] there are categories of social situation where, according to the code, *informal behaviour*, that is, a more or less high degree of *informality* is appropriate" [2]. Thus, informal politics refers to a pattern of behaviour which is not in accordance with prescribed regulations and is neither officially recognised nor controlled [3].

This paper does not aim to provide new empirical or historical evidence on Angola's contentious politics, but wishes to illustrate the limits of conventional international relations (IR) theory in understanding intra-state conflict dynamics. By over-emphasising formal political processes and state institutions, the realist school neglects more subtle sociological logics linked to the informal strategies of political actors. Tracing the process of institutionalisation of a broad range of informal political regulations beyond, but also above the state in the case of UNITA-MPLA conflict, enables us to refute several core propositions of realist theory in international relations. Indeed, the realist school formulates five central propositions:

- international relations differ from internal politics because states are characterised by a monopoly of legitimate physical violence in a given territory, while such monopoly does not exist at the international level;
- intra-state conflicts differ from inter-state wars, in the sense that they imply the collapse of a societal order and contract which simply do not exist between nations;
- states are unitary actors and constitute the central elements of international relations;
- states are rational actors that seek to maximise their national interests defined in terms of power in the international system; and finally
- non-state entities are not autonomous actors, because their behaviour is mediated through states [4].

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While realist theory privileges formal political processes, considered as the *outcomes of social regulations*, through the state, the sociological approach tells us more about the *processes of interaction* between distinct social actors. It considers that international relations are not limited to state actors, and that the internal-external distinction taken for granted by realist theory is in practice much more blurred [5]. Transnational relations, non-state actors and economic dynamics (and not exclusively military dynamics as realists argue), also importantly affect contemporary international relations [6].

This article develops the hypothesis, on the basis of illustrations drawn from the Angolan case, that if political actors lose their interest to bring an intra-state conflict to an end through peaceful means, then informal politics beyond the state become institutionalised to the extent that war transforms into an alternative form of societal order. This hypothesis has several implications. If war becomes a persistent and institutionalised process of interaction between political actors, the distinction between international relations and domestic politics becomes blurred. The state itself might no longer be considered as a unitary actor exercising its monopoly of violence over its territory. If war and informal politics beyond the state become institutionalised, non-state actors might also play a greater role than predicted by realist theory. Under such conditions, state actors might no longer act rationally to maximise their national interests on the international scene, but rather get an interest in the continuation of the internal conflict, even though this would imply the weakening of formal state structures. The promotion of political disorder can become politically convenient for political elites, whether in government or in opposition, as the continuous state of emergency opens new economic opportunities and prevents debates over the legitimacy of their causes.

To support this argument, the remainder of the article is divided into five sections. The next section presents a brief assessment of the process of conflict formation and the emergence of informal politics in Angola. The informal economic logics that have triumphed over the formal state apparatus are discussed in the second section, while the informal strategies of internationalisation used by the MPLA and UNITA are analysed in the third. The fourth section analyses the recent political developments in Angola and the de-institutionalisation of war. The final section of the article discusses the broader implications of the Angolan case for international relations theory.

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT FORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF INFORMAL POLITICS IN ANGOLA

The starting point to buttress our argument is to analyse the process of conflict formation and the emergence of informal politics in Angola, which has led to the reproduction of the conflict over time, as actors have progressively lost any interest in bringing the conflict to an end through peaceful means. Historical, ideological and socio-territorial factors shed light on the reasons underpinning the consolidation of war as an institutionalised process of interaction between the MPLA and UNITA.

A Historically-Grounded and Personalised Conflict

First, the historical aspect concerns the divisions between the Angolan movements for national liberation that existed from the outset. Contrary to most of the other sub-Saharan African countries, or other Portuguese-speaking countries such as Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, a united nationalist front did not emerge in Angola. The numerous movements for national liberation have never been able to co-operate among themselves in the pursuit of a common cause against the colonial Portuguese forces. While the two early movements, the Union of Populations of Angola (UPA) and the Party for the United Fight of Africans from Angola (PLUUA), experienced important disagreements, the subsequent National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA), never united either. In 1954, Barros Nekaka was one of the founding members of the UPA, the predecessor to the FNLA. In 1956, Viriato da Cruz created the PLUUA. While a dynamic form of cooperation was initiated by the fusion of the UPA with the Angolan Democratic Party (PDA) into the FNLA in 1962, the inverse dynamic led Jonas Savimbi - a dissident within the FNLA - to establish UNITA in 1966. The PLUUA similarly experienced intra-personal struggles, which led dissident members to form the MPLA [7]. The armed uprising which started with the Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) in 1960 further fragmented the insurrectional landscape.

The war for Angola's liberation from colonisation by Portugal commenced in 1961, but decolonisation only started after the "*revolução dos cravos*" in the Portuguese metropolis, the rebellion of the Portuguese army led by Ernesto Melo Antunes and Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho on 25 April 1974, which had immediate consequences for the country's colonies. In Angola however, the breakdown of the regime led by Marcelo Caetano paradoxically reinforced the existing rivalries between the FNLA, UNITA and the MPLA. On 15 January 1975, the three movements signed the so-called Alvor agreements with Portugal on the transition process in Angola. Despite this seemingly welcoming development, the fights between the militias of the FNLA and the MPLA could not be avoided and started in March 1975. While UNITA had previously collaborated with the colonisers at various instances, the Portuguese supported the MPLA in this emergent intra-state conflict, which succeeded in conquering Luanda. The initial divisions between the movements of national liberation were highlighted by the absence of a common "national" statement of independence. Instead, the statement was pronounced in four different places. On 1 August 1975, the FLEC unilaterally declared independence of the northern territory in Cabinda. On 11 November 1975, Agostinho Neto (MPLA) declared the independence of Angola in Luanda, while Jonas Savimbi (UNITA) did the same in Huambo and Holden Roberto (FNLA) pronounced a competing declaration of independence in Ambriz. Thus, these historically grounded divisions have from the outset questioned the legitimacy of the nascent postcolonial state.

Second, the absence of clear ideological objectives of UNITA and the MPLA also explains the reproduction of the conflict over time. War became institutionalised in the sense that neither the MPLA nor UNITA were fighting for ideo-

logical purposes. Rather, they were guided by the strategic desire to gain power at any cost. After the FNLA suffered a painful military defeat in Luanda in 1976, Holden Roberto decided to quit the rebellion and went into exile in France. This exit gave prominence to the MPLA-UNITA divide which therefore became the central cleavage of the conflict. The dissidence of Jonas Savimbi from the FNLA was more guided by the informal support he found among the Ovimbundu ethnic group in southern Angola, than by ideological concerns or programmatic differences with the leadership of the FNLA. Although competing political ideologies, socialism and liberalism, were formally embraced by the two movements, they remained secondary. Formally, both the FNLA and UNITA developed a pro-Western attitude, while the MPLA privileged a more Marxist-Leninist orientation. However, the FNLA and UNITA's ideological inclinations were purely instrumental and should be considered as strategic responses to strengthen their opposition to the MPLA. Because it was easier to obtain informal support from the US and direct support from South Africa through its cross-border relations, UNITA traded its strategic alliance with Communist China for a relationship with the US and the apartheid regime.

The MPLA itself adopted Communism as a result of circumstantial factors, rather than out of ideological conviction. The party responded to the changing structure of opportunities that enabled the establishment of informal contacts with and support from the transitional administration and the Portuguese communist party in Lisbon. As paradoxical as it might sound, although the MPLA was formally a Marxist party denouncing neo-colonialism, the majority of its militants came from middle and upper class urban strata, which led the movement to be perceived as an elite and neo-colonial organisation in the eyes of the majority of the rural Ovimbundu population. The conflict between leaders has become increasingly independent from the respective ideological causes they initially pretended to defend. The personal rivalry between Jonas Savimbi and José Eduardo dos Santos transformed the quest for power into an issue of honour between the two highly personalised movements, so that the conflict moved from a pattern of "traditional" opposition on the basis of ideas and political programmes, to a conflict of "personalised" opposition grounded in the mutual rejection shared by the leading political actors themselves. Nowadays, the MPLA is no longer a Marxist-Leninist party, which illustrates how its ideological stance was (and still is) first and foremost the result of strategic considerations. The movement has gradually accepted liberal free-market principles since the mid-1990s, using capitalist oil companies to enhance its own government revenues and preserve its *party-state* status quo.

Informal Socio-Territorial Orders Beyond the State

Socio-territorial factors also explain why war progressively transformed into an institutionalised process of interaction between the MPLA and UNITA, leading informal political regulations to become particularly salient. Informal politics indeed prevailed in Angola due to the institutionalisation of two alternative and mutually exclusive territorial orders that were both endogenously sustained by the support, or at least the active or forced mobilisation, of local populations. Both UNITA and the MPLA institutionalised alterna-

tive forms of societal order – beyond the state and in parallel to it – while mobilising informal supports amongst local populations. These competing socio-territorial orders can be distinguished on the basis of several elements:

- the ethnic composition of local populations;
- their positions in Angola's social structure;
- their territorial assets; and
- the nature of their institutional features.

The FNLA, originally established in Leopoldville (Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo) on 20 July 1954, gained support amongst the population of the north, especially the Kongo in the north-west and the Lunda and Tshokwe in the north-east of Angola. UNITA had its major support base in the south of the country, amongst the Ovimbundu ethnic group, which already constituted approximately a third of its total members in 1966 [8]. On the basis of the rejection of the domination of the MPLA, UNITA also progressively gained support amongst the Bakongo, since it offered and gave a political voice to marginalised people in rural and urban settings. In contrast, the MPLA has mainly been composed of Mbundu, which remain the major ethnic group in Luanda. The militants of the MPLA have been more present among the bourgeoisie, the urban middle classes and the "assimilados" (*metis*). While working people and the rural population have generally been supportive of UNITA, they have remained only marginal in the ranks of the MPLA. Yet, the distinct ethnic composition of the movements only played a secondary role in the personalised conflict that was driven by the search for power and wealth. The mobilisation of Luandans or rural-based people, either through incentives or forceful compliance, became necessary to legitimise two movements that slowly transformed into authoritarian factions based on the personality of their leaders.

Second, a class cleavage underlined the conflict because the Ovimbundu and Mbundu communities each had distinct relations with the Portuguese colonisation, which eventually engendered a differentiated perception of the legitimacy of the postcolonial state. As it took several centuries for the colonisers to control the provinces of the interior, the Ovimbundu only came under Portuguese domination in the 19th century, while the Mbundu were already under Portuguese colonial control in the middle of the 16th century. The Mbundu have consequently been much longer exposed to colonising influences so that they have lost their native language to a far greater extent. Nowadays, following Kyle, only 15 per cent of the Angolan population speak Kimbundu as their mother tongue, even though "ethnic Mbundu account for nearly one-quarter of the total population" [9]. This latent and historically grounded class cleavage consequently became distinctively pronounced during the decolonisation process. The urban Mbundu inherited privileged access to the central state, while several elite groups in Luanda wanted to extend their control over state structures to benefit from the oil resources located in the northern Cabindian region. These developments offer valuable explanations why, for example, the Kongos have long been discriminated, which eventually led to pogroms against them in Luanda in 1993 [10]. The process of decolonisation created the opportunity

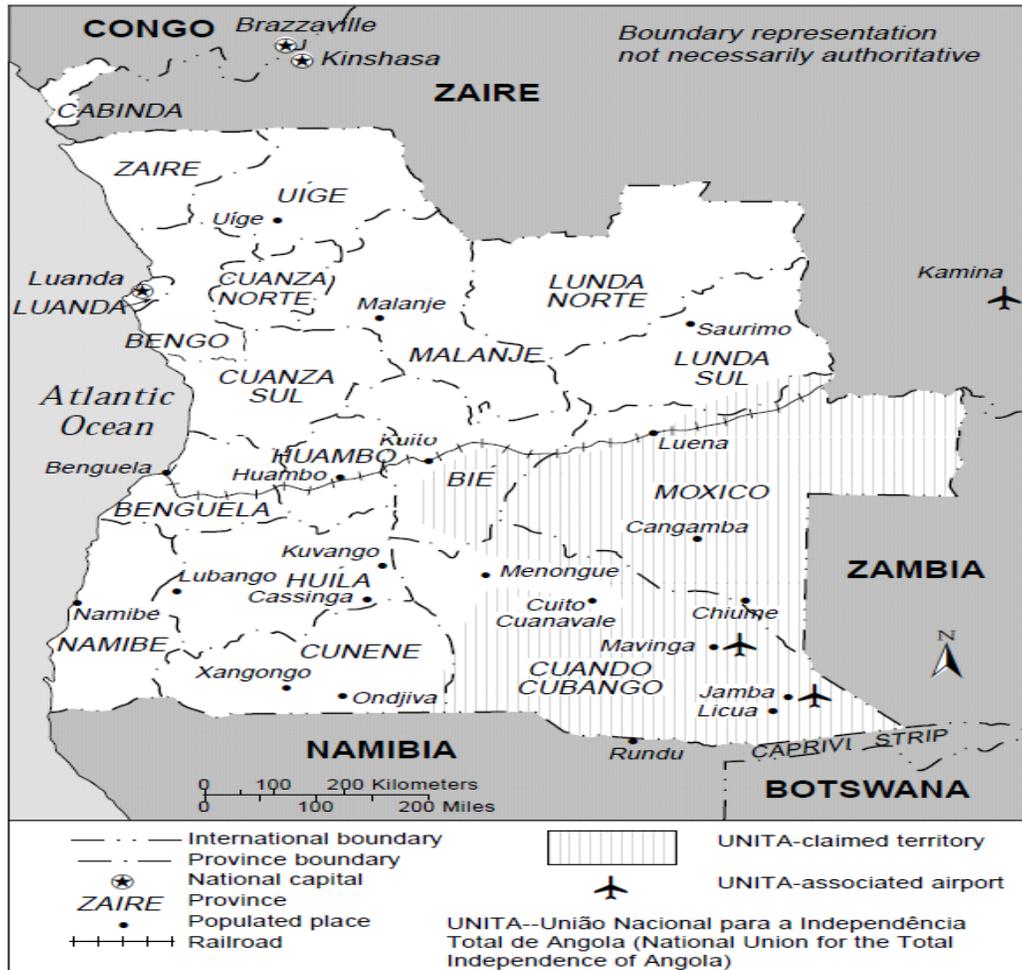


Fig. (1). Territory claimed by UNITA in 1988.

Source: Based on data from Hodges T. Angola from Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

for the Ovimbundu to reverse the old status quo, build new social structures and obtain more power and resources.

Third, the competing informal political orders of UNITA and the MPLA were also based on clearly distinguishable territorial assets, as Fig. (1) below illustrates. While Angola had formal borders with Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Congo, the authority of the MPLA was in practice reduced to the capital and the provinces of Bengo, Cuanza sul and Cuanza norte. Between 1975 and 1998 the movement only established its monopoly of violence over 10 to 50 per cent of the Angolan territory. The provinces of Benguela, Huambo, Lunda sul and the southern parts of Malanje and Lunda norte have always been disputed between the MPLA and UNITA. On the other hand, UNITA’s informal and “quasi-state” order was based on its control of more than a third of the country’s territory, especially in the central highlands [11]. On the southern side of the railroad, which links the west to the east of the country, UNITA’s effective authority was especially strong in the provinces of Moxico, Bie and Cuando Cubango. At several instances during the civil war, UNITA was able to partially or sometimes even wholly control the provinces of Cunene, Huila, Benguela, Huambo, Malanje, Lunda

sul and at times even Lunda norte. The movement controlled almost 80 per cent of the national territory in 1993. This territorial dominance was the consequence of the movement’s storming of the northern city of Soyo, close to Sumba, Quelo and the river Congo, and its conquest of Huambo in the centre of the country. After 1998, UNITA’s territorial control gradually declined. During Portugal’s colonial rule, the colonisers proved to be incapable of establishing a comprehensive monopoly of violence throughout the territory, while the same can be said for the MPLA before 2002.

Finally, both movements institutionalised informal rules and patterns of behaviour within the territories under their control. The formal MPLA-dominated state coexisted with an informal body of practices and institutions. “State” institutions remained limited to Luanda and its region, creating a state entity whose authority was limited to the capital and its surroundings, even though it paradoxically benefited from international recognition. In a certain way, the sovereign Angolan state was Luanda. State institutions were not only organised by and large in a partisan-like fashion, but they were also informally controlled by the same groups, i.e. Luanda’s elite of Mbundu and *assimilados*, who had strengthened their positions of power already during coloni-

sation. These urban elites managed to exercise an even greater control over the nascent state institutions given the massive flight of other qualified Portuguese professionals. The MPLA's informal political order could be characterised as a "paradoxical dictatorship", because the party-state did not tolerate any autonomous association and denied most civil and political rights, while letting important illegal and "undisciplined" margins of actions to its members [12]. These informal paradoxes were visualised in most spheres of social life: illegal extraction of public resources, support for the official discourse alongside the criticism in private of the "popular" state, while symbols of luxury progressively distinguished the MPLA nomenclatura from the local population. The MPLA gradually transformed into a kind of "cartel party" which became more dependent on state resources (and especially oil-exploitation) than on its own societal support and party militants [13].

In contrast, UNITA's personalised informal political order was characterised by a basic institutional setting that was directed by a president and consisted of services that were aimed at the empowerment of rural people. To enforce the population's compliance with the personal leadership of Jonas Savimbi, UNITA provided basic social services in exchange for people's participation in the war efforts. During the 1970s approximately 250,000 people lived under UNITA's authority, a number which represented 4.4 per cent of the total population of the country [14]. In 1991, this number was estimated to have risen to a figure between 600,000 and 1 million inhabitants or approximately 5.5 and 9 per cent of the total Angolan population which at that time had increased to nearly 11 million people. Although UNITA suffered from a relatively weak political structure, which worked informally on the basis of the willingness of Savimbi, the movement's military structures were better institutionalised. UNITA counted approximately 68,000 troops which included: generals, senior officers, captains, junior officers and sergeants [15]. Savimbi is also said to have used witchcraft and popular myths amongst the local population to both diffuse the idea of his omnipotence and legitimise his domination. The cooptation of traditional Ovimbundu authorities and leaders was a final crucial aspect in the continuation of Savimbi's authority.

THE INFORMAL ECONOMIC LOGICS OF "PETRO-DIAMOND" CAPITALISM

War became an institutionalised process of interaction between the MPLA and UNITA because it opened new opportunities of informal appropriation of economic resources. Disorder remained relatively convenient for UNITA and MPLA's political entrepreneurs, leading to a form of "petro-diamond capitalism" with new opportunities of raw resource exploitation. Instead of fighting for control over the state, political groups rather waged war to secure economically valuable regions. This is the reason why the massive, but relatively low-profit, Angolan coffee industry saw its production plummet from 400,000 tons per year in the early 1970s to around 2,000 today [16]. Agricultural production as a whole similarly fell from 29 per cent of GDP in 1991 to just less than 6 per cent in 2000, which forced the country to import over 725,000 tons of cereals in 2003. Although the country is potentially rich in raw resources (i.e. diamond and oil), it has become highly import-dependent. Following Le

Billon's argument, the civil war's formal political instability created new opportunities for the MPLA and UNITA to pre-date natural resources [17].

Oil Resources as Strategic Assets for MPLA's Strategies of Government

The discovery of large oil resources in Angola, during the 1990s, attracted big international companies to invest in trade relations with local political entrepreneurs. The MPLA, UNITA and the FLEC have all attempted to benefit from the exploitation of oil resources in Cabinda, but the MPLA has been the most successful in using oil resources as a strategic asset in its strive for power. The extraction of oil revenues has opened a new window of opportunity for the MPLA's militarisation and, given the numerous countries interested in oil, provided the movement with increased international support.

Although the country suffered from strong socio-spatial divisionism and a weak central state bureaucracy, informal relations with multinational corporations flourished throughout the 1990s. These informal economic relations have often been more beneficial to the actors directly involved than to the state and the population it should represent. Thomas Hodges and the international NGO Global Witness have, among others, emphasised that the north-western region of Cabinda played an exemplary role in this regard. In this area, the FLEC exploited the rich petroleum resources to the detriment of the Angolan central administration [18]. Hodges acknowledges that Angola's developmental potential is in actual fact overwhelming:

Angola's resource mix is quite remarkable: petroleum, diamonds, numerous other minerals, plentiful land and a generally favourable climate, and huge hydroelectric resources. Its oil industry has grown rapidly in recent years and is now the second largest in Sub-Saharan Africa, pumping out more than 900,000 barrels a day. Angola is also the fourth most important source of diamonds in the world [19].

Despite its vast quantities of valuable resources, Angola is one of the poorest and most politically unstable countries in the world. Angola's oil resources are huge; the country is very dependent on the export of oil, which accounts for almost 90 per cent of its total export value. Since the beginning of its oil boom, Angola has witnessed impressive economic growth and enjoyed a solid GDP growth rate of around 13 per cent in 2007. The oil industry has contributed directly to the MPLA's strategic assets, and has fostered the country's informal economic dynamics and corruption, however, without bringing corresponding social improvements.

The majority of the multinational corporations and the relevant government administrations still refuse to publish results of their financial activities. Confidentiality clauses imposed by multinationals and the unwillingness of the MPLA government to promote transparent business practices deny the Angolan population to understand or influence how their national resources are being used [20]. The oil money that is visible to the general public is, moreover, primarily used to pay foreign debts that exceed a total figure of US\$ 10 billion. Kyle has noted that "not only has Angola borrowed large sums of money, but its only viable source of revenue for repayment at present is oil revenue. Many loans are ex-

PLICITLY based on oil production and that future production is in effect 'mortgaged' to finance future debt service". Much of current revenue is not available for financing development, because it has already been promised to foreign banks or creditors. Oil exploitation has also helped maintain the rent-seeking positions of members of MPLA members at the cost of the country's development. Oil incomes have been used to the exclusive benefit of the elite in Luanda, which helped to support neo-patrimonial networks composed of high officials and military officers that are managed through sets of informal exchanges led by the "Futungo". As Kyle puts it, the presidency at Futungo de Belas is said to directly coordinate "the broader patronage networks that comprise the foundation of the state and controls the resources and major government decisions".

UNITA's Exploitation of Diamonds Beyond the State

UNITA has in a similar way used the existing informal political order for its foreign trade in diamonds which provides foreign firms the chance to benefit from the situation by the disproportionate allocation of contracts. Global economic interactions have helped UNITA to trade diamonds on informal international markets in exchange for financial and military support. Although the country's official total diamond sales amounted to almost US\$ 200 million in 1992, UNITA's revenues (from diamond trading) were close to US\$ 500 million. In the period between 1996 and 1997, when UNITA's control over the country's diamond mines was strongest, Savimbi's movement was estimated to have gained more than US\$ 900 million from the diamond trade. Official diamond trade in that period, which was being controlled by the MPLA regime amounted to US\$ 300 million. The informal diamond economy was organised around mines controlled by UNITA, in which the extraction of resources was done either directly by UNITA militants, or indirectly by foreign firms whose security was provided by the movement [21]. UNITA controlled sales of diamonds declined as of 1998-2000, as a result of the international ban on its activities.

The UN Security Council voted on 12 June 1998 for a ban on UNITA's unofficial diamond trade. This decision also included a travel ban and the freezing of the bank accounts of the organisation's senior officials. UNITA's control of the diamond industry during the 1990s enabled the movement to acquire an average estimated income of 380 million of dollars [22]. Because of their strategic importance, the diamond rich north-eastern provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul were more prone to conflict. Even though Angola is the world's largest producer of diamonds after Botswana, Russia and South Africa, most of the trading between 1980 and 1990 was in the hands of UNITA which enjoyed tacit and informal support from its external international partners. Transnational relations between UNITA and foreign firms constituted central elements in sustaining and providing economic assets for the movement's "quasi-state" and informal political strategies.

THE INFORMAL STRATEGIES OF INTERNATIONALISATION

The institutionalisation of informal political regulation has not only progressed beyond but also above the formal

state apparatus. This is evident from the MPLA's and UNITA's external relations, which demonstrate that the under-institutionalisation of state structures has led to the increased importance of informal international relations. Clapham is unambiguous on this point and argues that "African governments had to seek international alliances through which to obtain the arms and diplomatic support needed to maintain their conceptions of statehood" [23]. The case of Angola is exemplifying in this perspective since it illustrates the classic deficiencies of a postcolonial state and its weak popular legitimacy that is being compensated with the assistance of international support.

In the bi-polar context of the Cold War, the FNLA formed the Revolutionary Government of Angola (GRAE) in Leopoldville. The regime formed part of the alliance that received aid from the United States. The group included countries such as Zaire, Algeria, Tunisia, Niger, Ethiopia and Egypt. Savimbi's movement initially found its major allies in Zambia, South Africa and Zaire. Soon after the withdrawal of the FNLA, the United States also started to support UNITA. The MPLA, which was founded in Conakry by Viriato da Cruz, Mario de Andrade, Hugo Anzacot de Menezes, Matias Minguéis and José Eduardo dos Santos, instead entered into an alliance with the communists. The MPLA used its nascent alliance with the USSR and countries like Cuba, Mozambique, the two Guineas and Nigeria to legitimise its ideological backbone. In a certain way, the principal "axis of polarisation" of the internal political tensions between UNITA and the MPLA appeared to have been dominated by geopolitical factors. While these geopolitical forces may have been decisive in the movements' ideological formation, they have nevertheless remained generally informal in nature. The apartheid regime in South Africa is known, for example, to have provided covert military support to UNITA. The United States is said to have helped the insurgency movement after the Clark Amendment in 1985, and even though the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa and of the USSR have reduced geopolitical tensions, they have engendered internal dynamics that continue to be important.

From the outset, Portugal had supported the MPLA. It made a secret plan with Moscow which involved the transfer of Cuban military troops to Angola. The superior equipment and the human resources of the Cuban soldiers helped to counter South African troops in the south and proved decisive in securing the victory of the MPLA against UNITA during the battle of Luanda in 1975-76. The MPLA, which was founded with the tacit support of the clandestine Portuguese Communist Party and the Communist Angolan Party, swiftly received international recognition. The support that was provided in the name of the international socialist solidarity lasted until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. The Cold War compelled the US-led West to accept UNITA, despite its rebellious reputation, as its ally. The Reagan administration publicly supported the movement; it also received support from South Africa and Zambia which both armed the MPLA for decades. The MPLA and UNITA were in other words encouraged to contract external partners for their own subsistence. The formal independence of the Angolan state and its autonomy in domestic politics were therefore soon perverted by external pressures and informal diplomatic strategies.

For a long period, until the international ban on its activities in 1997, UNITA maintained informal international linkages through its control over two strategic airports, in the cities of Chiame and Jamba in the south-eastern part of the country. The delivery of weapons and external military support was also channelled through the airport of Kamina in Zaire and over road networks which linked Luena, Luacano and the bordering city of Luao with Kasaji, Kolwezi and Lubumbashi in Zaire and Lusaka in Zambia. UNITA's socio-territorial control of Angola's south-eastern regions enabled the movement to develop links with Zambia, Botswana and Namibia. Their Cold War alliances strengthened the relationships of the MPLA and UNITA with the international system, but also embedded the Angolan conflict in a complex geopolitical game. This became, for example, apparent with the retreat of the Cuban troops, which only could become realised after the signing of an agreement involving Cuba, South Africa and Angola in December 1988. The persistence of the internal conflict, from 1961 until the death of Jonas Savimbi in 2002, has at least in part been the effect of the informal support that the opposing movements received from various players in the international system.

DE-INSTITUTIONALISING WAR: THE "WINNER TAKES ALL" LOGIC

When the political process is traced back to the 1990s, it is clear that the postcolonial elites, whether in the MPLA or UNITA, have never been engaged in the promotion of the common good nor did they act in the public interest. The attempt to de-institutionalise war through political negotiations is enlightening in this regard, because it shows the parties' structural lack of interest in ending the conflict by peaceful means. By contrast, it shows their mutual preference for the winner takes all logic, which eventually led to MPLA's final victory in 2002. The marginalisation of UNITA's ex-combatants and the emergence of a one-party democracy nevertheless highlight the path-dependent effects of the long-standing institutionalisation of war.

Negotiating Peace...to Better Wage War

In fact, the agreements of Bicesse in May 1991 and Lusaka in November 1994, both of which were reached under the auspices of the international community, showed that neither the MPLA nor UNITA were interested in reconciliation and democratisation. The 2002 Luena peace process emphasises that even though peace was formally achieved, the way it came about paradoxically reinforced rather than reversed the MPLA's strategy of power politics. Official negotiations between the warring parties commenced, under the auspices of Portugal, the USSR and the US, in Portugal in 1990. The negotiations forced the MPLA to limit its references to Marxism-Leninism and formally adopt a multi-party system.

Following the Bicesse agreements, the first free national elections took place in September 1992. The elections were held under the watchful eye of the international community which was represented by the UN. Total turnout was reported to be 91 per cent of the electorate. Dos Santos won the presidential contest with 49.6 per cent of the votes, while the MPLA obtained 54 per cent of the parliamentary seats. A second round was necessary since Savimbi had been sup-

ported by 40 per cent of the electorate and UNITA won 34 per cent of the seats in the national Parliament. The MPLA wanted to avoid defeat and accepted certain conditions only very reluctantly and under pressure. Christine Messiant explains that UNITA "only wanted peace because it was certain [...] that it would win the elections, and achieve its aim of gaining state power" [24]. The MPLA's control over the state and its informal links with members of the Electoral Commission helped it to reduce the airtime of the opposing parties and frustrate their campaigns. Savimbi, who was initially very confident of his chances to win the elections, did not accept the results, argued that the elections were neither free nor fair and refused to participate in the second round.

As a result, the elections did not resolve the political impasse. In the absence of rules of political transition, a "winner takes all" attitude prevailed. The MPLA had no interests in sharing any of its power and UNITA had no interest in accepting peace. The Bicesse agreement was followed by intensive rearmament campaigns. By early 1993, UNITA controlled the key cities of Soyo in the north and Huambo in the centre and controlled almost 80 per cent of the entire Angolan territory. The Joint Political and Military Commission (JPMC) created by the UN Security Council in 1991 made conflict resolution dependent on an improbable bilateral dialogue between solely UNITA and the MPLA. The absence of guarantees and of an attractive political future for UNITA made it prefer an agenda of war rather than peace. The MPLA and UNITA ironically together created a situation in which no other endogenous actor could possibly serve as a mediator. During the 1992 elections, UNITA's unyielding 'us versus them' ethos (i.e. poor and/ or rural versus educated and urban) alienated the Luanda, Benguela and Malange's workers and other sections of the population that desired change but whose support could only be won through inclusion. This bipolar "winner takes all" confrontation forced both movements to face popular distrust, as civilians blamed them for the human suffering caused by the endless war. This deeply rooted dissatisfaction with and contempt of the political elites were visualised in graffiti slogans that started to appear on Luanda's walls, such as 'UNITA Mata' ('UNITA kills') and 'MPLA Rouba' ('MPLA steals').

Given that Angola had known a one-party system from 1975 to 1991, UNITA could hardly trust the MPLA-led democratisation process. In September 1993, the UN imposed an oil and arms embargo on UNITA, which meant a clear change. The post-Cold war context and shifting geopolitical interests of Western powers and oil multinationals in Angola implied that the subsequent 1994 Lusaka protocol was mainly aimed at controlling UNITA. The attraction for UNITA was that it got the chance of participating in a government of national unity. The downside for this party, however, was the deployment of over 7,000 UN peacekeeping forces, which limited its influence. Savimbi criticised the partiality of the international community and its tacit supports of the MPLA government, and he decided not to come to Lusaka to sign the protocol. A government of National Unity was finally formed with Savimbi in 1997 but the war soon flared up again in 1998. UNITA was even more marginalised after Mobutu's death, its most important regional supporter. On 28 August 1997, the UN imposed a set of stricter sanctions which included numerous financial and travel bans for UNITA's officers. This substantially reduced

the movement's operational capabilities and its chances of rearmament, and complicated the organisation of local insurgencies. The MPLA began to organise a massive military offensive against UNITA in 1999, reasserting progressively its control over the major provincial cities. The killing of Savimbi on 22 February 2002 in the eastern province of Moxico implied the *de facto* end of the war. A situation of peace was finally achieved, but the way it came about reinforced the hegemony of the MPLA over the state apparatus and enhanced its resistance to democratisation.

Reintegrating or Marginalising UNITA's Ex-Combatants?

The protracted armed conflict ended formally on 4 April 2002 with the signing of the Luena accords. The accords provided amnesty for the crimes committed during the civil war and called for the demilitarisation of UNITA's military forces and their integration in the national army. All UN sanctions against UNITA were lifted on 10 December 2002 and the movement was pressured to become a political party. Consequently, UNITA no longer exists today as a nationally integrated fighting force. Yet, the major challenge remains the reintegration of UNITA's 105,000 ex-combatants (and the four-fold number of civilian dependents) into a mode of civilian life [25]. The combined effects of arms proliferation and the absence of perspectives in the labour market for the former UNITA soldiers could lead them to take up their arms again. There is in fact an increasing feeling of disenchantment among UNITA's former officers, as neither the promised support from the government has materialised nor have the living conditions in the country's rural areas been improved. There is no sign yet that the social and material infrastructure in the interior of the country is being rebuilt. It was estimated that in 2004 "nearly double the anticipated number of UNITA soldiers arrived in the quartering areas, most of them with their families". The lack of adequate planning and unrealistic timetables also resulted in "huge numbers of ex-combatants not receiving the necessary supplies or attention, and an increase in criminal activity" [26].

While the government declared the first phase of disarmament to be completed in August 2002, it was evident that many ex-combatants had not been registered and many weapons not been verified. Rural communities remain traumatised by the war and are thus reluctant to accept the ex-combatants back into their communities. This bottleneck situation is known to have caused communal conflicts in several instances. Although the government had established a special Commission on the Social and Productive Reintegration of Demobilised People (CSPRDP) in 2003, real commitment would only have been possible through a redistribution of state resources from Luanda to the inland provinces. The 2003 report of the International Crisis Group previously mentioned emphasises that the "Luanda based UNITA leaders, including General Gato, are unlikely to attempt to confront the government militarily. However, it is more plausible that officers left in the camps will create small gangs to engage in banditry in the absence of systematic delivery of promised support to the immediate needs of the population and long-term solutions leading to sustainable livelihoods".

The Informal Politics of MPLA's One-Party Democracy

A last aspect of the transition that should be addressed is the democratisation of the political system. Angola has formally moved from a one-party towards a multi-party system, but in practice the political regime seems to develop more and more towards a one-party system, in which opposition parties are allowed, but do not have a real chance of gaining power. Next to this, the power of the president as the head of state and of government is also increasing. The prime minister – a position which until recently was occupied by Fernando da Piedade dos Santos – is systematically being made subservient to the president's aspirations. The press is still being controlled by the government, and even though various opposition parties exist in Luanda, UNITA has been the only party to date with real electoral potential. The president was officially elected for a five year term, but after the earlier mentioned 1992 elections presidential elections were delayed almost indefinitely. This stalemate situation has enabled Eduardo dos Santos to govern for thirty years without interruption. Parliamentary elections were conducted in September 2008, leading to the victory of the ruling MPLA that managed to win 82 per cent of the total votes. The elections have been described as only partially free, but in no way could be regarded as fair.

While peace has been achieved, the political system still lacks legitimacy. The MPLA fought for 46 years to gain and maintain power and never had to rely on popular legitimacy, given the war-induced state of emergency and the margins of actions that oil revenues supplied. The MPLA's willingness to institutionalise pluralism and support freedom of speech has remained very limited. Its hegemony over the state prevents the rural population, in the absence of a political voice and mediators, from access to state resources. The political transition process should be characterised as the fortification of the MPLA's power rather than as the first step toward the institutionalisation of a pluralist political system with checks and balances.

The population's need for humanitarian aid and social services remains at a very high level. The war has left a million people dead and a third of the population displaced. Angola also has to face the challenge of landmine removal. The International Crisis Group estimates that up to fifteen million mines had been planted in the country's roads, fields and walkways. This situation, which puts Angola in the forefront of the worst places in the world in terms of landmine victims, complicates the reconstruction of state infrastructures and hinders the reorganisation of agricultural communities. The total of mine-disabled victims amounts to 70,000, which means that roughly one in every 415 Angolans suffers from the consequence of decades of war [27]. In the inland provinces, government programs are almost nonexistent and the survival of many people is entirely dependent on international NGOs. The long-term stability of the country will be influenced strongly by the rehabilitation of the Angolan state. Given the situation, it is clear that the political willingness to foster security and welfare and the state's readiness to build a well-functioning social service infrastructure will determine the prospects of the long-term consolidation of peace.

INFORMAL POLITICS IN ANGOLA AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

What does the sociological process of institutionalisation of informal political regulations in postcolonial Angola imply for international relations theory? In order to answer this question, several elements can be highlighted.

First, realist theory believes that there is a clear differentiation between internal and international politics, which follow clearly differentiated logics. The central element of differentiation between the two arenas is believed to be the capacity of the state to exercise a monopoly of violence over a given territory, while such monopoly does not exist in international society [28]. It is evident that there are currently no international institutions or bodies above the states that exercise such monopoly of violence. Yet, the ability of states to exercise a monopoly of violence is taken for granted by realists, while it needs to be questioned. In fact, the monopoly of violence of the Angolan postcolonial state was contested at the level of ideas and institutions until 2002. At the ideational level, both UNITA and the MPLA have formally used nationalist discourses that claimed to incarnate and represent the Angolan “nation”. In reality, however, they have both acted as ethno-nationalist and personalised movements that attempted to represent the interests of their respective leaders instead of those of the Angolan state and society as a whole. At the institutional level, the monopoly of violence of the state remained limited to Luanda and a small portion of the national territory.

In cases where states do not have full control over their territory, they are not fully capable of exercising their monopoly of violence and thus the boundaries between internal and international politics become blurred. On that point, Jackson and Rosberg have emphasised how “negative sovereignty” (international recognition) has enabled weak states to compensate their lack of “positive sovereignty” (monopoly of violence on the ground) [29]. The behaviour of weak states in international relations tends to follow distinct logics when compared with more powerful states [30]. Angola’s internal politics has for instance long been embedded within broader international relationships.

Second, realist theory argues that intra-state conflicts differ from inter-state wars, in the sense that the former would simply involve the collapse of societal order. However, the case of the Angolan conflict shows that intra-state war should not necessarily be considered as a situation where social regulations no longer hold. In contrast, an intra-state war can become institutionalised to the extent that informal political and economic regulations become more convenient for the actors implicated in the conflict. Roland Marchal argues that the development of “these practices engender the economical means which enable the reproduction of the war conditions, and of its persistence within society over the long term” [31]. We share the view that “war is not equal to the breakdown of societal order, but represents an alternative form of social order”, which in turn could be characterised as the institutionalisation of structural human insecurity [32]. Organised state as well as non-state actors can profit from war situations by illegally extracting economic resources and by benefiting from informal international trade networks, which foster the reproduction of the conflict over time.

Third, the historically grounded divisions between the Angolan movements illustrate the limits of realist theory in considering states as unitary actors. Given that the central state was not able to impose its monopoly of physical violence before 2002, the persistence of competing national liberation movements based on distinct socio-territorial orders has de facto engendered the fragmentation of the post-colonial state, segmented between the formal state level and the informal sub-state dynamics. UNITA’s political existence beyond the state through its strategic extraction of diamonds and its informal institutional setting has coexisted with a formally unitary state. The MPLA-dominated state itself arguably became increasingly privatised, so much so that governmental actors have tended to follow distinct neo-patrimonial and personalised strategies of economic extraction. The executive has transformed into a *single-party government* rather than a *state government*, fostering its partisan interests rather than those of the state and of society as a whole. States should not be seen as given and homogeneous, while it is misleading to conceptualise them without considering the process of interactions among state actors themselves.

Fourth, realist theory considers that states are rational actors who seek to maximise their national interests defined in terms of power in the international system. In contrast, the Angolan case suggests that the MPLA government, the formal representative of the postcolonial state, has preferred to defend its specific interest as a movement against UNITA, rather than the national and social interests of the Angolan society as a whole. Thus, the MPLA has not sought to maximise the power of the Angolan state within the international system. Angola remained a weak state during the entire Cold war, while its protection was “externalised” and indirectly provided by external partners. The MPLA government has privileged the military defence of its control over institutions and oil economic resources against UNITA, even though it has been done at the cost of the viability of the central state. The MPLA has relied on the urbanised ethnic Mbundu, its control over the bureaucracy and the international recognition it enjoyed as a *party-state*, to maximise its power against its internal opponent, even though it implied a reduction of the power of the Angolan state at regional and international levels. Overall, UNITA and MPLA elites have shared a strategic interest to reproduce the conflict, and to support a form of “petro-diamond capitalism” which seems to have benefitted only them. The Angolan case shows that the private power of political actors can be perfectly maximised at the cost of the public power embedded in the state.

Finally, realist theory argues that non-state entities are not autonomous actors, because they would only behave through intermediation of central states. The in-depth analysis of the MPLA-UNITA conflict clearly falsifies this claim. UNITA has been able to impose extensive control over the country’s rural territories and the Ovimbundu population. As a non-state actor, it has developed its own political agenda, established informal diplomatic relations with external powers, while developing transnational trade linkages with other state as well as non-state actors. Hence, it did not require the central state as an intermediary to exist, as it has fostered its own socio-territorial order beyond the state and strengthened its autonomous military capabilities. Overall, the Angolan case illustrates how contemporary international relations

seem much less clear-cut than realist theory predicts. Under certain conditions, sub-state and non-state actors can act as dominant players in transnational relations. There does not seem to be a clear hierarchy between the distinct domains of world politics: economic factors can for instance play a central role equal to military considerations, and these international domains cannot be entirely separated from internal politics.

CONCLUSION

This article has focused on the institutionalisation of informal politics beyond the state in UNITA-MPLA conflict in Angola. It has used the sociological approach in international relations to refute several core propositions of realist theory in the light of Angola's postcolonial developments. It has also tried to understand the processes of social interactions which have made informal political regulation particularly salient. In conclusion, competing informal political orders have been formed in Angola, in response to the lack of legitimacy of the postcolonial state. The control of formal state institutions and the informal development of a set of practices have enabled the MPLA to sidestep and bypass the rule of law for consolidating its hegemony over the state and society. In contrast, for UNITA, building a quasi-state entity has proved the most effective way to obtain strategic assets in its struggle for state control, while mobilising local populations and using ethnic, territorial and class cleavages as political instruments. In these interactions between leading political actors, ideologies have played a formal role, while the conflict has nevertheless progressively become depoliticised and personalised.

The Angolan case shows that informal political orders may become institutionalised to the extent that non-state actors can control a sub-national territory, possess military capabilities and develop basic institutions. In support of our initial hypothesis, it is clear that war, under certain circumstances, does not need to be the equivalent of the collapse of societal order, but can be an alternative form of societal order that is a politically attractive opportunity for the political actors involved. Given the historical under-institutionalisation of the postcolonial state and the subsequent lack of internal democratisation within the MPLA and its 'party-state', the winner takes all logic has prevailed in war, and is today also prevailing in peace time. The Angolan case shows more broadly how a sociological perspective is better able to understand contemporary African international relations. While in several instances the 'formal' international community, represented by the UN, has tried to foster peace agreements since the 1980s, the 'real' international community, represented informally by multinationals, external partners and third countries, has shown diverging interests and has collaborated informally and through transnational partnerships with local actors, which has indirectly facilitated the resilience of the conflict.

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