

Chapter Three

Youth, Conflict and Identity: Political Mobilisation and Subjection in Angola

*Imogen Parsons*¹

The dynamics and structure of Angola's war are so firmly intertwined in its political, economic and social structures as to be inseparable from them. However, while the political economy of war in Angola has frequently been dissected and analysed,² the social and political dimensions of the conflict have received considerably less attention.³ This chapter seeks to analyse the internal dynamics of Angola's conflict; in particular, the way in which the two parties have sought to mobilise youth to their own ends, and the concomitant processes through which youth have been constituted as political and social subjects in their own right. Contrary to the beliefs of many, during the Cold War especially, it was a war propelled from the inside, driven by its own logic and dynamics, the role of youth being only one of these. Nevertheless, it is one that has become increasingly important over the later stages of the war, and from 1992 onwards in particular. As the conflict progressed, both sides increasingly realised the importance of perpetuating themselves and the support that allowed them to carry on the war. Making up over half of the population,⁴ youth provided a fertile resource to the armies and, with few opportunities available to them in terms of formal education and jobs, youth could easily be mobilised and incorporated into the dynamics of war, uprooted from their home communities and traditions.

Angola's youth were therefore a major target for the internal mobilisation of each party during the war, a policy which meanwhile drew them into a broader process of polarisation and politicisation of the country as a whole. The result today is tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of youth who are emerging into Angola's peace with their beliefs and identities fundamentally transfigured in ways not yet fully understood. For while it may have been intended only as a top-down indoctrination, the process of co-option and subjugation of youth explored below has had the effect of re-creating

Angolan youth as political subjects in their own right, often with strong and coherent views, and on whose shoulders the future of Angola will eventually come to rest.

This approach contrasts with the common perspectives taken on youth and children in Angola. “Angola is the worst place on earth to be a child.” So said UNICEF in its *State of the World’s Children* report in 1999.⁵ Angola’s 27-year-long civil war is held to be the cause, and children are mere passive victims of a tragedy beyond their control. This chapter intends to give an alternative interpretation to the place of youth in Angola’s civil war, while not condoning for a moment the brutal and coercive use of children in Angola’s civil war, nor criticising or sidelining the laudable work being done by the many NGOs in Angola attempting to help them. It tries to move beyond a straightforward victim/perpetrator dichotomy, and to consider from their own testimonies their perspectives and views on their pasts as well as on their futures. To focus on war trauma and suffering located at the level of the individual child often assumes a normative path of child development which can simply be resumed following the end of a conflict, an assumption which is at the very least questioned here. Real changes in the identities, beliefs and aspirations of young people brought about through their integration into Angola’s conflict must be taken seriously. This will include the greater number of young people who may have been children when they joined the conflict but, owing to the longevity of the conflict in Angola, have now reached their 20s or even 30s. This chapter therefore approaches the broader question of ‘youth’, rather than ‘children’, and conflict, reflecting also the different status of childhood and youth in Angola, as in many parts of Africa.⁶ Youth will be understood to include young people who are, or were, at the timing of the events discussed, aged up to 30, in order to encompass those young men who have had no real experience of life outside UNITA, and whose identities and subjectivities have been formed through their experience of war, but who still have in front of them the greater part of their lives, and who thus form a part of that group on whom Angola’s future will rest. The term ‘child soldiers’ will be used only when referring to people under the age of 18 in the context of NGO interventions, in line with their own terminology.

Genesis of the War: From Revolution to the Perpetuation of the Old Guard

The civil war in Angola and its leaders have fed on and reinvented a number of ‘traditional’ beliefs and motifs in order to consolidate their own power and

status, epitomised by Savimbi's manipulation of witchcraft beliefs to enhance his own support and eliminate his rivals.⁷ In Angola's political system, as well as in the ideology of both UNITA and the MPLA, a defining motif has been the paternal relationship of father to son, and of the family. In Angola, as in many other African societies, authority is traditionally largely derived from age, elders being accorded a special status and respect. The state, or more precisely the government, is frequently portrayed as a 'father', with a reluctance to criticise government being explained as 'a son should not criticise the father'. This common societal and political feature, while not unusual in Africa, has a particular relevance to the history and structure of Angola's civil war, highly dependent, as it was, on the ability of two leaders to mobilise people beneath them. UNITA were particularly successful in this, exacting an unquestioning loyalty directed personally at Jonas Savimbi, self-styled 'father' of the movement. The government, meanwhile, developed an increasingly personalised style of power centred around President dos Santos. This style of power has commonly been described as neo-patrimonial, based on a reinvention of pre-colonial client-patron relations through the model of a centralised, bureaucratic state.⁸

Angola's civil war ran for 27 years, without including the 14 years of anti-colonial struggle that preceded it. It began with the transition to independence from a Portuguese colony in 1975, mutating, but barely faltering, through two periods of 'peace', more often and more accurately described as 'not-war, not-peace' in 1991-2 and 1994-8. The roots of the conflict, however, came before independence, in 1961, if not earlier,⁹ with an armed attack on São Paulo prison in Luanda by the supporters of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), who sought to free imprisoned members of the party. Agostinho Neto, a young poet and revolutionary, escaped from house arrest in Portugal a year later and became leader of the MPLA, which drew its support primarily from young, mestiço intellectuals and students, as well as from the Mbundu people. A month after the prison attack, in March 1961, a revolt was launched in the north of Angola, led by Holden Roberto and the Union of Peoples of Angola (UPA). Based in Zaire, the UPA became the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), a nominally national movement but sustained primarily with support from the Bakongo people, establishing a revolutionary government in exile led by Roberto and with Jonas Savimbi as Foreign Minister. Savimbi broke ranks with the FNLA in 1964, however, and, failing to reach an agreement with the MPLA, established his own movement, UNITA - the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. Upon independence, a transitional government made up of all

three parties was supposed to take over, as agreed in the Alvor Accords of 1975. However, in the event, UNITA and the FNLA broke with the MPLA, leaving it as a *de facto* government, UNITA establishing a rival capital in Huambo, and civil war began. Each, having previously turned to external support for the anti-colonial struggle, now turned to those same patrons again to request support to fight each other.¹⁰ Thus the MPLA received Soviet and Cuban support, including up to 50,000 Cuban troops, while UNITA turned to South Africa and the USA to 'counter the communist threat', and the FNLA was also briefly supported by a variety of actors including the USA, Britain and France. The FNLA quickly collapsed as a fighting force, however, leaving UNITA and the MPLA to become increasingly deeply entrenched in a hugely destructive civil war that was to last 27 years, propelled by the support of the Cold War powers, until the end of the 1980s, and then maintained by its own internal logic of insatiable personal lust for power on both sides, but Savimbi's in particular, and elite economic exploitation of oil and diamonds. This was complemented by a nationwide social and political polarisation, which frequently sought to mobilise previously relatively weak ethnic and national identities. Attempts by the international community to intervene failed twice, in the Bicesse Accords which collapsed after UNITA refused to accept the results of multi-party elections held in 1992, and the 1994 Lusaka protocol, which had greater international weight behind it, but gradually stuttered and finally stalled in the resumption of war in 1998. Of the three original protagonists, only Holden Roberto is still alive and leading the FNLA as a political party. Agostinho Neto died in 1979, to be replaced by José Eduardo dos Santos, today President of Angola, while Jonas Savimbi continued to lead UNITA's fight until his death in February 2002. While both Savimbi and Roberto were known popularly as *mais velho* (elders) popularly, dos Santos has never been accorded this title.

In February 2002, Savimbi was shot by government forces, and less than two months later, a cease-fire was signed between the FAA and FMU. The Lusaka Protocol was revived as the basis for the transition to peace, but this time the government has had additional force, able to claim a definitive military victory rather than a negotiated settlement. It is believed by many that UNITA were seriously weakened by the UN-imposed sanctions and the government's 'scorched earth' military strategy, and had planned to initiate negotiations soon. Indeed UNITA commanders in the Northern Region claim to have received orders about a month before Savimbi's death to prepare to cease fighting.¹¹ As of

January 2003, around 80,000 former soldiers and 300,000 family members are in the process of return and resettlement, many still remaining in quartering areas and waiting to leave.

In terms of youth politics and involvement, the long duration of the war and its particular origins in the anti-colonial struggle already mark it out as different in nature from many other wars in sub-Saharan Africa. This was not a war born out of restless youth, economically marginalised by a failing post-colonial patronage system and spurred on by a spurious identification with TV heroes such as Rambo, as many have argued happened in Sierra Leone or Liberia.¹² A similar dynamic may be imputed, in the origin of the war, to an uprising of young men (and women), students and intellectuals in particular, against the exclusionary, paternalistic rule of colonialism which was unable to satisfy their expectations and desires. This comparison does not hold up much to further scrutiny. In Angola, the war increasingly became a battle of age, of privilege and of the right to rule, with power increasingly concentrated around each of the opposing leaders, Neto/dos Santos and Savimbi. The idealism with which the war began was increasingly lost to the pursuit of power and wealth, a pursuit that sucked in all around it like a black hole. Youth were subjugated and manipulated in order to further the ambitions of each leader and to ensure the absolute concentration of their own personal power. Rather than simply feeding the conflict from the bottom-up, youth were also co-opted from the top-down in order to ensure the perpetuation of the 'old guard' of Angola's war. Indeed, the common distinction between top-down (elite-driven) and bottom-up (mass-driven) violence made by many conflict theorists does not hold here.¹³ It was rather a process of 'subjectivation', or 'production of modes of existence or lifestyles'¹⁴ and hence '-subjection', or 'constitution of subjects' whereby youths are not only made subject to a discipline imposed from above but also, through the same process, constituted as individual 'subjects' capable of action in their own right.¹⁵

The ways in which each party achieved this varied, and a shift in patterns can also be seen over time as the conflict evolved. Both evidently realised the importance of youth to the continuance of their party as well as their own power, both in terms of fighting power and support. Involvement of youth in the conflict can thus be seen principally in two ways: in their recruitment into the armed forces, which served primarily to increase fighting strength; and a more generalised process of 'politicisation of youth', which was meant to indoctrinate youth to ensure their loyalty and support, and to perpetuate the two parties. This included the creation of youth movements, which accomplished this aim primarily through 'education' and organisation of

youth activities. The relative ease with which youth could be controlled and manipulated, at least when compared with older soldiers, may also explain the increased concentration, post-1992 in particular, on forced recruitment of child soldiers by both sides.

That the motivation for focusing on youth was not simply a question of fighting effectiveness is clear from the overall objectives of both dos Santos and Savimbi, who were at least as concerned with their own political status and security as with actually winning the war against the other. As the war went on, both increasingly tried to minimise their dependence on high-ranking aides, who may have been perceived to be a threat. Savimbi became well known for the elimination of political rivals who were seen as becoming too popular or too powerful, often through accusations of witchcraft and even through burning.¹⁶ A notable example is the death of Tito Chingunji, on Savimbi's orders, after his return from the USA, where he had been a prominent UNITA representative, and deemed too popular and too powerful by Savimbi.¹⁷ The effect was an increasing centralisation of power on Savimbi himself, where he styled himself as founder and father of the movement, and where UNITA children were to address him alone as 'father'. In this way he was able to mobilise a pre-existing tradition in Angolan society, that of respect for the father/elders, and to turn it to his own advantage. It also had the effect of dissociating children from their own families, thus increasing their reliance on UNITA as 'family'. UNITA women recently interviewed by the author talked about the desire to return to their "blood families", which they distinguished sharply from the "UNITA family here in the camp", which "is not our real family".¹⁸ The MPLA also attempted to style itself as a 'family' but with less success, doubtless partly because of its more urbanised and necessarily less concentrated structure.

UNITA developed and enforced a sophisticated system of politicisation of youth. It created a group called *Alvorada*, meaning "dawn", which it was compulsory for pre-adolescent children in UNITA areas to join, and JURA - UNITA's youth military wing for older youth. In both of these, children were taught songs and dances that celebrated UNITA heroes and victories. *Alvorada*, in particular, then entertained visiting troops with these when they came to the villages.¹⁹ JURA went further in separating youth from their families so that they could work for UNITA troops transporting food and weapons to the frontlines, growing food or even fighting. It also had an additional element, however, of explicit political sensibilisation and preparation. This was a recurrent theme of education in UNITA, which on the one hand 'bought' their loyalty by offering them a concrete opportunity and a form of

'normalisation' of life and, as Spears points out, provided a means by which they could be "indoctrinated into the war movement".²⁰

The children went to class under the shade of trees, 4500 of them chanting their way through a little math, a little geography, a lot of propaganda. 'UNITA, the guide; UNITA, the people.' At the roadsides they were taught to snap to attention when trucks of visitors or dignitaries sped by in billows of dust.

UNITA youth education covered the political history of Angola and of UNITA itself, and transmitted acceptable political ideas. "*O 25 de Abril de 1974 e a Guerra Civil; A em Angola UNITA na Resistencia a invasão russo-cubano em Angola.*"²¹ Themes covered were the history of the war, certainly from UNITA's point of view, of "why Angola is not at peace"²² and a political-ideological exhortation to continue the fight, which appears to have been remarkably effective.

I joined the armed forces of UNITA in 1992 ... I did not begin fighting immediately. In 1992 we were still in political preparation. We were given material. The reason why we were fighting, who we were fighting against, why we had to fight. This was the politics of the party. ... We had to learn all this. So that when I fought I would understand.²³

The MPLA, for its part, created a youth movement called the JMPLA (Youth of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), which aimed to mobilise and channel youth support for the party, as well as the Agostinho Neto Organisation of Pioneers (OPA), which aimed to provide "patriotic education" for children.²⁴ Later, as dos Santos increasingly concentrated power on himself and the *Futungo* (Presidential Palace) rather than on the party, youth were increasingly mobilised to show support for the President. In 1996, as dos Santos proclaimed an end to corruption and declared the start of a 'new life' (*nova vida*), he sacked his own Prime Minister and ministers with economic portfolios, while people 'spontaneously' spilled onto the streets of Luanda wearing t-shirts sporting the President's portrait.²⁵ The 'National Spontaneous Movement' was then made into a permanent organisation, aiming to rally youth support by offering travel and leisure opportunities, but conveniently bypassing the MPLA party.²⁶ This may be seen as an attempt to draw youth into clientelistic relations of power, centred on dos Santos, and also to capitalise on existing social tensions to divert attention away from the country's economic problems and towards his opposition, UNITA. Much of the abuse being shouted in those streets was

reportedly anti-Ovimbundu, directed at the Prime Minister, who had been appointed following the 1992 elections precisely because he was Ovimbundu, but also thus indirectly at UNITA. Youth, who may have had no desire to participate directly in the war, were thus inadvertently incorporated into its dynamics.

This co-option of youth also took place within the structures of power itself. As dos Santos sought to reduce his dependence on the 'inner circle' of the party, he also began promoting a number of young party members who provided him with a personal support base. After 1992, he promoted many of these to senior positions in the party, claiming to be privileging young talent and efficiency, while allowing himself to safely reincorporate the party to a greater degree.²⁷ As in much of sub-Saharan Africa, this process of 'renewal' or of 'recycling of elites' has the paradoxical effect of prolonging the current power structures and of assimilating the educated, potentially ambitious youth into them while sidelining rivals who may have more real power and authority behind them by virtue of their age.²⁸

Youth on the Frontline

A more direct involvement of youth in the conflict is quite simply the recruitment of children and youth as soldiers. As already noted, the ease with which children could be recruited and the compliance elicited from them was a factor in this, especially after 1992. The history and dynamics of the conflict are reflected in changes in the composition and structure of the two armed forces. Notable changes can be seen, in particular, in the last ten years of the war, spanning Bicesse and Lusaka. In 1991-2, the government's army was seriously weakened by the desertion of many of its troops during the quartering and demobilisation process. UNITA's troops, on the other hand, remained disciplined and in barracks and so were able to resume fighting quickly and efficiently. The government was then forced to step up its recruitment drive to match UNITA's strength, and also enlisted mercenary support in the form of the South African-based firm, Executive Outcomes, which has been accused of specifically targeting and training underage soldiers. During the Lusaka process, both armies initially began to demobilise again, although more warily.

Each side, therefore, had to re-recruit upon the resumption of war, resorting increasingly to the forced recruitment of children and young people. Many underage soldiers were prevented from fully demobilising and

being reunited with their families by UNITA and, upon the resumption of fighting, were promptly re-recruited. Previously, UNITA had generally avoided forcible recruitment of children, but had developed a 'tax' system whereby *sobas*²⁹ in areas controlled by UNITA would have to provide (primarily young) people to be drafted into JURA for service. Alternatively, children would simply be drafted when they reached a certain age or maturity, with round-ups taking place anything between every few weeks and once a year.³⁰ There is little evidence that this could be resisted, although it was originally generally consensual. This changed over the 1990s, however, as UNITA became increasingly divorced from the rural communities that once supported it, and resorted increasingly to the use of coercion and intimidation. Tactics were generally straightforward abduction from villages and hijackings along roads, as well as intimidation of *sobas* and families to force them to relinquish their children. The government's Armed Forces (FAA), meanwhile, commonly rounded up young men in market places and around schools. Two years of military service is compulsory under Angolan law, beginning at age 20, with registration compulsory at 18. Many young people, however, were forcibly conscripted, regardless of whether they could prove they were exempt or underage.³¹ Those who could found a way overseas to study or work, taking advantage of the substantial educational bursaries made available by the Angolan government to those who fell under its patronage.³² The total number forced to enlist is unknown, but the effect was a sharp growth in the number of underage soldiers in both armies. During the Lusaka process, over 9,000 child soldiers were registered, although only just over half were officially demobilised amidst stalling by the FAA and manipulation of the process by UNITA.³³ The number serving in the latest phase of the war (1998-2002) is unknown since, on demobilisation, the majority were registered as family members rather than as combatants, but informal estimates put it at around 10,000. A recent study by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) further concluded that one in two of the over 4,000 ex-UNITA combatants surveyed had begun serving while still under 18.³⁴

UNITA officially denied having abducted children, claiming they were only taken when they wanted to join, had been separated from their parents, or when the parents had died. This is contradicted, however, by a number of studies³⁵ as well as by the research of this author. A 20-year-old woman, Semba, who had been kidnapped by UNITA when she was 16, said the following:

I left [home] in 1998. Since then I have lived in the bush. My family are in Maquela, I have seven brothers and sisters. I was captured by

[UNITA] forces in the confusion. My parents knew UNITA took me. I did not know where I was going. I only thought of life or death. I did not know if I would live or die.³⁶

Semba had a one-week-old baby, and was waiting for government-organised transport to take them to her family in Maquela (in the north of Angola, on the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Her 'husband', whom she had married in 2001, had left her to return to his home in Huambo. She was being looked after by former UNITA combatants who had accompanied her from the quartering and family area. This is confirmed time and time again in interviews with demobilised soldiers, with the majority of young ex-combatants and women (no women admitted to having served as combatants) who joined UNITA since 1998 claiming to have been captured (although this may also reflect the geographical location of the interviews, in the north of Angola, not a traditionally UNITA-supporting area). These captured soldiers are primarily children of the villagers who found themselves living within UNITA areas, or in areas where UNITA passed through, rather than the core UNITA-supporting areas of the Central Highlands. Some who were captured had no real link to UNITA or UNITA-held areas but, as fighting resumed in 1998, were unfortunate enough to be attempting to travel, and were caught up in a UNITA ambush or movement. Once within UNITA itself, loyalty was quickly enforced through a mixture of violence and indoctrination. It became increasingly common for newly captured children/young people to be incarcerated in a deep hole for several days, a tactic which aimed to destroy resistance and weaken people's will so they would not attempt to escape. If they did, punishment was a severe beating or even death, and their families and villages could also attract retribution. Parents could be seized and imprisoned until children handed themselves in again,³⁷ with the result that the majority, at least temporarily, accepted their new home and family as UNITA. As mentioned above, however, old loyalties may not be so easily destroyed.

We want to leave here, to return to our families. Not this family, the UNITA family, [arm gesture to show surrounding houses and people in gathering area], our real families. Our blood families. Our mothers.³⁸

This reflects very much the story of young women forced to join UNITA while still girls and given in marriage to soldiers they did not know. This was common practice, though it may be that these women were more fortunate than those girls whose job it was to 'service' high-ranking commanders, generally while still in their teens.

A number of young ex-UNITA soldiers, however, primarily men, report not forced conscription but political reasons for wishing to join and fight. While this may, of course, reflect the effectiveness of UNITA's 'political education' rather than pre-existing fully formed ideological beliefs it is, nevertheless, important. Commonly mentioned are frustration with the situation in which they found themselves living, and a perhaps surprisingly high level of political motivation and anger. This is frequently linked to a feeling of grievance against the government, whom young UNITA combatants blame for many of the problems they have suffered in their childhood - from the lack of educational opportunities to the constant fear of violence and displacement. This is perhaps understandable when it is considered that the majority of these young people had never really known anything except war when they joined or were taken by UNITA. It must also be set against a backdrop of a shortage of opportunities for young people in Angolan society, and a growing dissatisfaction with 'traditional' ways of life. Constant fear of violence and displacement by both sides further eroded any desire to remain in home villages and any feelings of security associated with home and community. Furthermore, there are many who grew up in UNITA-supporting areas and had seen family persecuted and perhaps even killed by government troops or police, or by the Cubans when they were there, while equally many in 'contested' zones had seen relatives killed by UNITA, or even by both sides. These young people cannot really be said to have made a political 'choice', but are rather a product of the ways in which conflict has politically divided Angolan society, and created new, politicised identities in its wake. The result has been a loyalty to UNITA, often by default. Common themes in these testimonies are bitterness against the government, which is seen as responsible for the resumption of war in both 1992 and 1998, and evocation of loyalty towards UNITA, '*o nosso partido*' (our party).

I left Bié in 1996 to come to Uige. When things began to get complicated, I had to return to the bush, where I stayed until 2001. The government was complicating things. The government was not complying with the Lusaka protocol. And so, as a UNITA soldier, I had to follow the orders of my party, which told us to come here. ... I joined UNITA in 1992, after the elections. I joined in order to be able to fight against oppression.³⁹

The events of 1992 made a heavy mark on their consciousness, with a feeling of betrayal of their people and families by the government, in UNITA's insistence that they were cheated in the elections, and that their return to war was prompted by attacks on the UNITA leadership in Luanda. These feelings

still persist today, reawakened by the failings and inconsistencies of the current demobilisation process. Inevitably, these ex-soldiers talk about 'being forced back into the bush' or 'fleeing death', and of having no choice when war resumed in 1992 or in 1998. They, even more than older soldiers, seem to have been carried along in UNITA's 'alternative history' of the war, caught up in the social and political polarisation of which 1992 was the pinnacle, a trend which is highly worrying in terms of the future reconciliation of the country. These feelings are strongest when other family members have been involved in the conflict, a common feature that is a product of the longevity of Angola's civil war. It is not uncommon to find entire extended families within gathering areas, although it seems they were rarely allowed too close to one another while in the bush, presumably to ensure that party loyalties took precedence over family ties.

My father left [with UNITA] in 1973, when I was born. In 1986 I went to find him, I went up and down, to Jamba, to many places but did not find him. In 1995 I got information that he was in the North, with General Numa I came here on foot and found him in June of 1995. In 1997 ... we fled from death back into the bush.⁴⁰

That this ex-soldier had left his home and family voluntarily when aged 13 to try and join his father, whom he had never met, in UNITA, is telling. This was a 'UNITA family' stretching over two generations from Huambo, but reunited only in Uige, in the far North of the country, where both are currently waiting for demobilisation to be completed. The son sought to follow in the footsteps of his father, without questioning the validity of the fight, speaking strongly in terms of the "struggle for liberation". This is not to say, however, that the conflict has always divided the country's loyalties so neatly. Individual families as well as villages and towns have been split by choice as well as by force.

I have family in Luanda, in Bié and in Uige... One part of my family is with UNITA, the other with the MPLA. The part in Bié are all with UNITA. It caused some problems, yes. But with the negotiations we are seeing at the moment maybe it will not be a problem anymore.⁴¹

This example further raises questions about the arguments put forward that Angola's war was essentially ethnic or, according to a more sophisticated version, based on an ethno-geographical split. According to this ex-soldier's testimony, his family were not split into MPLA and UNITA supporters because of their origin, but rather because certain family members had migrated according to this political/military split. The effects of this on

society in a context of return and resettlement of vast numbers of people, where members of the same family who chose opposite sides are reunited in the same place, are difficult to predict. Furthermore, the degree of exposure to war and violence may have had the effect of hardening these loyalties. In a survey of demobilised ex-child soldiers in 1998, 67% were found to have lost members of their family or close friends during the war, 76% had seen people killed, and 77.5% had actually shot someone themselves.⁴² There is no reason to believe these proportions will have lessened since 1998, especially given the rise in brutality used by UNITA over the 1990s. Given the amount of trauma this is likely to have induced, the politicised and militarised identities formed among the young people who participated in conflict may prove difficult to undo.

Living on the Margins: The Social and Economic Context

The ability of UNITA and the government to mobilise youth behind them on a genuine political and ideological basis must not be taken too far, however. Not only politically, but also economically, young people in Angolan society have few options open to them, a factor without which the recourse to conflict may have seemed considerably less attractive. While UNITA once was able to provide rudimentary education and health care, life in rural 'government areas' did not offer even these opportunities. In the context of an almost complete lack of educational and professional opportunities in Angola, and as both warring parties have increasingly lost legitimacy amongst the Angolan people, increasing numbers of youth have resorted to the informal sector and semi-illicit trade rather than become involved in a war they do not believe in and which has no real meaning for them. Paradoxically, however, those very youths have often ended up implicated in the economic structures that served to prolong the war, as much a part of it as the young soldiers who chose to fight. At the same time, for those who did join UNITA, whether by force or by choice, their 'political education' seems to have struck a chord with their complete lack of social and economic opportunities.

Angola's socio-economic infrastructure deteriorated during the war to even below colonial levels. In 1999, the overall school enrolment rate stood at 23%, and adult literacy was around 42%.⁴³ This data also masks a significant bias – in 1999, 60% of all primary and pre-secondary children enrolled in school were in Luanda.⁴⁴ There is little or no health care available outside

Luanda and the main cities, and even where running water was once available, it generally fell into a system of disrepair during the war. A recent survey of over 4,000 demobilised ex-UNITA soldiers highlights the (lack of) economic position of youth in Angola.⁴⁵ Of those younger than 25, less than 1% had been formally employed, with the largest group describing itself as 'self-employed', generally in agriculture. Of those younger than 18, roughly equal numbers (28%) were still in education and unemployed, while for those between the ages of 18 and 25 (the majority of whom were almost certainly under 18 when they first joined UNITA) the balance tilts towards education (18% to 13% approximately). Life in rural areas, and even in many provincial capitals, was bleak then and, on the basis of these figures, appears to have grown even bleaker than before over the past five years. The promise of a better standard of living must have seemed worth fighting for, a conditioning factor which must have served to facilitate UNITA's programme of political indoctrination.

This can also be seen in the prevalence of Angola's informal economy, which was an integral part of Angola's conflict from 1992, particularly because UNITA's economic structure was forced to shift from a more structured, state-like organisation supported externally to an internal revenue-generating machine, based on its control of natural resources and its informal trade connections.⁴⁶ This was based primarily on its control of the principal alluvial diamond regions, and of the informal diamond mining and trade there. This trade has attracted large numbers of young men. In mid-1992, the number was estimated to have reached between 30,000 and 40,000.⁴⁷ Those attracted included large numbers of demobilised soldiers, and many more who were opting out of school and the possibility of formal employment.⁴⁸ They hoped to earn their fortunes by digging in the informal diamond fields as *garimpeiros*, or by diving in the rivers, in the Lundas in particular. The plight of this 26-year-old recently demobilised ex-UNITA soldier is a good illustration of the plight of Angola's youth generally.

I joined UNITA in 1994. My family are in Bié. I came from Bié to Luanda that year to find work. I was on my way to the Lundas. I wanted to earn some money there. I never arrived. The bus was attacked by UNITA and I went with them. [Were you captured?] Yes, I was captured by them.⁴⁹

Youth were involved in these activities partly because of their agility and size – being lowered down an improvised and highly unstable vertical tunnel into a kimberlite pipe requires not only these qualities but perhaps also the sense of bravado and recklessness that often accompanies youth. It was

common for the tunnels to collapse around the unfortunate *garimpeiro*, burying him there. Divers also frequently drowned in the rivers, caught by currents and swept downstream, where other youths pulled out the swollen bodies. Many of these youths were not Angolan, but Congolese, the 'children of Lunda',⁵⁰ having crossed the border in order to earn their fortune and intending to return, or from even further away, from West Africa. Life in the diamond fields, at least those under UNITA control, was subject to increasingly brutal control by UNITA, who sought increasingly to regularise operations and to enforce taxation. Attempts to escape or to circumnavigate UNITA's trade and taxation system were brutally punished, people often being shot at as they attempted to flee.⁵¹

While not actually combatants, young people were, nevertheless, an integral part of the whole trajectory of the conflict, directly and economically, as an integral part of the informalisation of the Angolan economy that was so central to the prolongation of the conflict, and also indirectly as a product of Angola's lack of alternative economic opportunities. It is not coincidental that the official resumption of war in 1998 was triggered by fighting in the Lundas, fighting for the control of this source of seemingly limitless wealth. It should also be noted that the end of the conflict has not brought this form of illicit activity to an end, despite the best efforts of the government and Ascorp, the half state-owned and half Israeli-owned company which, until recently, had an official monopoly on all diamonds mined in Angola. In the wake of the demobilisation of tens of thousands more former soldiers, and in the absence of many alternatives for their social and economic integration, it must be wondered what the effect on the stability of this ever insecure region will be.

In the current demobilisation process, the majority of young ex-soldiers are, again, poorly educated and with few real prospects. Many of those older than 18 already have families, wives and children for whom they are responsible. According to the IOM survey, the most comprehensive currently available, among under 18-year-olds, aspirations are generally to return to study, as the vast majority had not completed their schooling before becoming soldiers, while among those between the ages of 18 and 25, more profess a desire to become engaged in self-employed agricultural work.⁵² This must be set against the current absence of an educational infrastructure sufficient to accommodate all of these, however. A much lower proportion of this age group than of older ex-soldiers expressed a desire to work in the public sector,⁵³ perhaps reflecting their lack of positive experience or contact with that sector in their past. The ex-soldiers interviewed in the context of

research for this paper generally agreed with this pattern, but more expressed a desire to continue studying, while those in their 20's more commonly want some kind of professional training. Many had begun training before joining UNITA and been unable to finish, and would now like to resume their courses, while others wish to build on experiences gained within UNITA. Interestingly, they do not appear to blame UNITA for the disruption to their studies, tending instead to put the blame on the war in more abstracted terms, some even citing experiences with UNITA as providing the basis for their future choice of work.

I was a teacher. I entered UNITA of my own conviction. I learnt many things there, had many experiences. Now I want to continue my studies and my career as a journalist, to work as a journalist within my party.⁵⁴

A further question is how effective their reintegration into a civilian society will be. After a highly structured life in the military, where ultimately someone else was always in charge and therefore also responsible, young (male) demobilising soldiers frequently speak with a sense of nervousness about the future. Upon their demobilisation, 'child soldiers' often do not consider themselves as children, but rather as adults entitled to full demobilisation benefits, based upon the increased status being a 'soldier' has accorded them. In many cases they have been given significant power over civilian communities, over resources and over women. Their experiences of war mark them out as different, many having witnessed and often participated in killings and violence and been forced into adulthood while physically still children.⁵⁵ NGOs advocate segregation and treatment through a different process, which often involves recognising their status as 'child-adults' – children in body, but adults in their heads.⁵⁶ A study carried out in 1998 on the reintegration of child soldiers in 1996 revealed that only around half had returned to live with their parents and that within two years 16% had moved again, principally owing to the need to look for work/education or because of family problems.⁵⁷

While the change from a family structure to a military life may have been traumatic, the loss of any kind of higher authority or sense of family is likely to be equally, if not more, unsettling. The majority of these ex-soldiers have never lived independently or had any real kind of freedom, bitter as they may be about being "in the hands of the government"⁵⁸ to be left to survive with no assistance may prove worse. Reports of harassment and abuse of demobilised UNITA soldiers are beginning to emerge, and of young ex-soldiers, in particular, living in poor conditions in cities.

The first people who left went to Kituma [transit camp]. They tried to go to Uige but they were told they did not have the papers and they were beaten. They are controlled by the police wherever they go. So where can we go?⁵⁹

Movement in Angola is frequently subject to police controls and checks, and Angolan citizens are compelled to carry identity cards that, in this case, would show their status as former UNITA soldiers. This further reinforcement of their status as 'outsiders' serves to consolidate their identities as '-different' from the society and political system into which they are supposed to integrate, and appears, at present at least, to reinforce the polarisation of their political views. While they are no longer part of a military fight, the 'government vs. us' dichotomy may persist as long as coercive state power is effectively devolved to police forces and others in this way and with little need for legitimisation. Demobilisation and reintegration programmes are rarely equipped to cope with this kind of issue, and Angola's, so far, does not appear to be an exception.

Conclusion

Angola now faces the monumental task of ensuring an effective transition to peace and stability. Central to this will be the diffusion of the polarised and politicised identities of Angola's youth, identities that have been engendered through the particular historical trajectory of the conflict, and through the political strategies of the two parties. The conflict may not, as has sometimes been argued, have destroyed ethnic identities, but has rather unevenly fused the ethnic with the political and the economic. The result has been that economic problems can be attributed to ethnic causes and mobilised to political ends, as in 1996. Families meanwhile can turn against each other for political reasons, and while soldiers of different ethnic groups may fight alongside one another, those same (now demobilised) soldiers can stigmatise host communities as 'other' ethnically. In this confused and divided situation, what is certain is that new patterns of identity and solidarity have emerged, the implications of which are at present almost impossible to predict.

Considerable variation exists in young soldiers' and peoples' experiences of recruitment and of life with UNITA, and it is largely these that have dictated their current political views and identities. A shift occurred over the 1990s, with UNITA becoming more coercive and losing legitimacy among its

host communities and soldiers to such an extent that the most recently recruited show the least solidarity with the aims of the 'liberation' others speak of. It cannot be assumed, however, that all youth fighting for UNITA were simply traumatised and following orders out of fear. Many, while certainly mobilised and manipulated from above, have internalised and made part of their identity the struggle whose dynamics they have been drawn into to a great extent. This was certainly eased by the complete lack of alternative opportunities and incentives offered to them by the government's taking their latent frustration and channelling it effectively. Young ex-soldiers commonly demonstrate bitterness against the government, which many of them still see as the enemy, while on the other hand expecting it to provide training and opportunities for them. Their sense of betrayal is beginning to emerge as, almost a year after their surrender, they have still received little real assistance in terms of beginning their futures. It now seems unlikely that they will receive very much more. Even if this internalised political divide could be diffused somehow, young demobilised soldiers face the further stigmatisation of having their identity as UNITA combatants - which they may have been forced into through abduction and adopted to only a limited degree - branded on them forever through identity cards and other means of social identification.

The government and the presidency in particular have attempted to use structures of patronage to harness youth support, but this strategy is unable to extend far outside Luanda. Youth, whose subjectivities have been formed largely through their experience of the war, may yet emerge as potentially strong political actors or, at the very least, as destabilising forces driven by dissatisfaction with the circumstances and lack of opportunities presented to them. Almost half of Angola's population are currently under 15, and the vast majority of those cannot be incorporated in any substantive way into the shrinking capacity of the neo-patrimonial system of the Angolan state. Young people urbanised by forced displacement or dislocated from their communities through induction into the military may not be willing to return so easily to a traditional agricultural life. If the needs and demands of these cannot be met, Angola may yet be in for a bumpy ride.

Endnotes

- 1 The primary interviews cited in this paper were conducted in Angola by the author, primarily during October 2002 and January 2003. All

interviews were in Portuguese, translations author's own.

- 2 On the political economy of war in Angola, see for example: T Hodges, *Angola: From Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond capitalism, African issues*, James Currey, Oxford, 2001; J Cilliers and C Dietrich (eds), *Angola's war economy*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2000; P Le Billon, *Angola's political economy of war: The role of oil and diamonds 1975 – 2000*, *African Affairs*, 100, 2001, pp 55-80.
- 3 On the interrelationships between the war and the political system of Angola, see in particular the work of C Messiant, for example, *MPLA et UNITA: Processus de paix et logique de guerre*, *Politique Africaine*, 57, March 1999, pp 40-57.
- 4 An estimated 45% of Angola's population are under 15 yrs. UN, *Angola: The post-war challenges. Common country assessment 2002*, UN, Luanda, 2002.
- 5 UNICEF, *State of the world's children*, UNICEF, 1999, op cit, pp 40-57.
- 6 In Angola, one may cease to be a 'child' at 13, say, in order to begin work, as stated in A Richardson. *Children living with UNITA*, paper written for UNICEF, November 2000. Youth is harder to define, on the other hand, Bayart defining the term in an African context as "people who have educational qualifications but are without work". J-F Bayart, *Africa in the world: A history of extraversion. African Affairs*, 99, 2000, pp 217-67, p 228. Meanwhile, a request to interview 'youth' (*jovens*) during fieldwork for this paper produced a group of men aged 21-36. The definition used here is certainly open to criticism, therefore, but aims to allow for as inclusive as possible an analysis of the social and political dynamics at play.
- 7 L Heywood, *Towards an understanding of modern political ideology in Africa: The case of the Ovimbundu of Angola*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, (1), 1998, pp 139-167.
- 8 See P Chabal & J-P Daloz, *Africa works: Disorder as political instrument*, James Currey, Oxford, 1999; J-P Bayart, *The state in Africa: The politics of the belly*, Longman, New York, 1993.
- 9 For a longer and more in-depth historical view of the background to the conflict, see D Birmingham, *Central Africa to 1870. Zambezia, Zaire and the South Atlantic, Chapters from the Cambridge History of Africa*, CUP, Cambridge, 1981, Reprinted 1994; M Newitt, *Portugal in Africa. The last hundred years*, C Hurst & Co, London, 1981; J Marcum, *The Angolan revolution, volume 1: The anatomy of an explosion (1959-1962)*, MIT Press,

- Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969; J Marcum, *The Angolan revolution, 2: Exile politics and guerrilla warfare (1962-1976)*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978.
- 10 F Guimarães, *The origins of the Angolan civil war: Foreign intervention and domestic political conflict*, MacMillan, London, 1998.
 - 11 Interview, Uamba quartering area, January 2003.
 - 12 For example, P Richards, *Fighting for the rain forest: War, youth & resources in Sierra Leone*, James Currey, Oxford, 1996.
 - 13 M E Brown, *The international dimensions of internal conflict*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996; D Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*, Adelphi paper No. 320, Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Oxford, 1998.
 - 14 As described by Bayart, drawing on Foucault/Deleuze. J-F Bayart, Africa in the world: A history of extraversion, *African Affairs* 99, 2000, pp 217-67, pp 246-247; Deleuze, Gilles, *Pourparleurs, 1972-1990*, De Minuit, Paris, 1990; M Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, pp 217 – 67.
 - 15 This process is the heart of ‘governmentality’ as described by Michel Foucault, Governmentality in Burchell, Gordon and Miller, eds, *The Foucault effect*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1991; see also Bayart’s elaboration of the ‘politique du ventre’, J-F Bayart, *The state in Africa: The politics of the belly*, Longman, New York, 1993.
 - 16 L Heywood, op cit.
 - 17 F Bridgland, Savimbi et l’exercice du pouvoir: un temoignage, *Politique Africaine* 57, March 1999, pp 94-102.
 - 18 Interview, UNITA woman, Uamba quartering and family area, Angola, October 2002.
 - 19 A Richardson, *Children living with UNITA*, paper written for UNICEF, November 2001.
 - 20 I S Spears, States within states: Incipient political entities in the post-cold war era, Paper presented to the *States-within-states workshop*, Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, October 19-20, 2001.
 - 21 A Cowell, *Killing the wizards: Wars of power and freedom from Zaire to South Africa*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1992, pp 106-107. Cited in Spears, *States Within States*.
 - 22 A Richardson, op cit.

- 23 Interview, ex-UNITA soldier, aged 21, Uamba Gathering Area, January 2002.
- 24 I Tvetden, *Angola: Struggle for peace and reconstruction*, WestView Press, Harper Collins, (London)1997, p 48.
- 25 The degree of real spontaneity involved is debated, since only officially licensed demonstrations were allowed, although the means by which this could be engineered have not been outlined in detail.
- 26 Ibid, pp 287-309, p 308; T Hodges, op cit, p 55.
- 27 Ibid, p 305.
- 28 See Chabal et al op cit, pp 31-44.
- 29 Traditional authorities.
- 30 A Richardson, op cit.
- 31 B Verhey, *The prevention, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers: Angola case study*, World Bank Working Paper
- 32 In 1996, when the country's economy was floundering badly and hyperinflation hit its peak, overseas scholarships accounted for 18% of the education budget. In 1995, the figure was as high as 36%. T Hodges, op cit, p 41.
- 33 B Verhey, op cit.
- 34 IOM: Unita Ex-FMU soldiers demographic, socio-economic profiles for return and reintegration planning activities, IOM, October 2002.
- 35 A Richardson, op cit.
- 36 Interview, Kituma Transit Camp, Uige Province, Angola, January 2003.
- 37 A Richardson, op cit.
- 38 Interview, group of UNITA women aged 17-30, Uamba Gathering Area, October 2002.
- 39 Interview, former UNITA combatant, aged 21, Uamba Gathering Area, Angola, January 2003.
- 40 Interview, former UNITA combatant, aged 29, Uamba Gathering Area, Angola, January 2003.
- 41 Interview, former UNITA combatant, aged 21, Uamba Gathering Area, Angola, January 2003. Note this is the same combatant who spoke so fervently about his "political preparation" and defined himself clearly as "a UNITA soldier".
- 42 Christian Children's Fund: *Final report: Project of reintegration of child soldiers in Angola*, Luanda, September 1998.

- 43 Economist Intelligence Unit, *Angola Country Profile 2002*, p 13.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 IOM/IRSEM Database, collected in August 2002. Results published as IOM. *Unita Ex-FMU soldiers demographic, socio-economic profiles for return and reintegration planning activities*, IOM, Geneva, October 2002. Thanks go to IOM, Luanda, for allowing me use of the database.
- 46 M Duffield, *Global governance and the new wars: The merging of development and security*, Zed Books, New York, 2001, p 138.
- 47 T Hodges, *op cit*, p 150.
- 48 Mabeko-Thali describes the possibility of creating a “région de riches analphabètes”. J-M Mabeko-Thali, *L’Interminable transition angolaise et les multiples dangers de l’incertitude politique*, *Lusotopie* 1997, pp 87-103, p 100.
- 49 Interview, former UNITA soldier, aged 26, Uamba Gathering Area, January 2003.
- 50 F De Boeck, Postcolonialism, power and identity: Local and global perspectives from Zaire. In *Postcolonial identities in Africa*, R Werbner and T Ranger (eds), Zed Books, London, 1996.
- 51 Interview, Panzo, former *garimpeiro* in Lunda Norte, Benguela, December 2002.
- 52 IOM, *op cit*.
- 53 IOM/IRSEM, *op cit*.
- 54 Interview, UNITA ex-soldier, Uamba Gathering Area, January 2003.
- 55 Christian Children’s Fund, *op cit*.
- 56 Interview, Save the Children, Uige, Angola, January 2003.
- 57 Christian Children’s Fund, *op cit*.
- 58 A phrase commonly used in interviews and group discussions by ex-UNITA soldiers of all ages.
- 59 Interview, ex-UNITA soldier, aged 28, Uamba Gathering Area, January 2003.