Civil domains and arenas in Angolan Settings.
Democracy and responsiveness revisited.

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Abstract

The authors employ a theoretical model, mainly based on Habermas' public sphere, to regard civil society as a space, hence civil domain, rather than a set of organisations and actors. Although this is becoming more and more common in the theoretical discourse, in the everyday practice of supporting the Angolan process most donors are still stuck in the 'actors' approach. Civil domains are nested in a larger sphere, the arena. Here the domains approach lends itself to an analysis of power. This two-sphere model is then used to try to analyse some of the constraints and possibilities of political development, and the prospect for responsive governance, in Angola.

We conclude that the civil domain in today's Angola is highly constrained. Its prominent formal members, NGOs often equated with 'civil society', lack the effectiveness that donors and other international bodies say they want. Explaining these constraints is a balance of forces – economic, political and military -- in a narrow and non-transparent 'public arena', that are strongly shaped by geo-politics.

We therefore argue that international development agencies, currently fixated on project-based development strategies (including support to NGOs as vehicles for delivery of relief and 'development' services and for 'advocacy') should put much greater priority on enlarging and protecting public domains and expanding and making transparent the public arena. Popular leverage and a shift in the balance of forces in the arena is important, but a viable objective in the middle run to enhance responsiveness of the Angolan state to citizens' needs, thus setting precedents for wider formal democracy in the longer run.

Introduction

A popular remedy for Africa's predicament is the promotion of 'civil society'. It is conventionally seen as a collection of various kinds of non-profit bodies separate from the state and business sector but capable of working in 'partnership' with both (thus within a consensual model of politics) in pursuit of common interests, particularly 'development' and 'democracy'[2]. Donors sought substitutes for the state in the private sector. In the 1980s they discovered the virtues of the non-profit branch of this sector. Here, older entities such as mission hospitals and newly-arrived non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been tasked with providing a range of services, from schooling

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[2] See Howell, J. and J. Pearce 2001, *Civil Society & Development. A Critical Exploration*, London: Lynne Rienner.

and healthcare to small enterprise promotion, that were once considered public sector responsibilities. Under a paradigm of 'civil society', donors have tried to raise the nonprofit sector's political status. Beyond service provision, its main task is to counter government power. Here civil society is cast as a hero, who routinely calls a villainous state to account. Yet this model of 'civil society' has evoked controversy.   Questions have arisen about the effects of NGOs not only as substitute providers of basic services, but also as vehicles of public politics, effectively substituting for opposition political parties[3]. Some argue that the whole concept of 'civil society' as promoted by outsiders does not match African sociological or political realities, and can ultimately weaken, rather than strengthen the power of common citizens. There are calls, in short, for a re-think.

1. Civil domains

How closely does the idea of civil society correspond to the ways Africans themselves go about their associational life and politics? How has it worked in the past? Can it foster robust citizenship in the future? At some times and places, answers to these questions have been affirmative. Where Africans could organise to transform the political order - the ending of minority rule in southern Africa being a major case in point - rights and collective self-esteem have advanced. The consensual politics of the conventional 'civil society' model is hard to detect in African history. More realism is needed. The concept of public space, as derived from the work on the foundations of democracy of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas[4], allows us not only to analyse players and issues at stake but also to pay attention to the history of the discourse in that space, which specifically is quite important in an African context with an authoritarian past, colonialism, and many times Marxism-Leninism in the years behind.

 Hence our preference for another conception of this public space, which we term the civil domain: A social realm or space apart from the state, familial bonds and for-profit firms, in which people associate together voluntarily to reproduce, promote or contest the character of social, cultural economic or political rules that concern them.

Such a conception makes it possible to include other powers as well as a great variety of civil society players (including - independent – churches, trade unions, vernacular civil structures - like the sometimes powerful Soubas in Angola – groups of intellectuals around universities and social movements).

Yet were this space to comprise the whole of what interest us, a glance at history would rapidly reveal its limitations. For where the interplay of global interests and national vulnerabilities have had the upper hand, the advance of public politics and citizenship has been halted or reversed.

Coerced by or colluding with forces abroad, many African leaders have squandered public goods and public trust. Sovereign powers and surpluses have been transferred abroad, open political competition outlawed and space for active citizenship reduced to nothing. In much of Africa, public institutions have decayed. In some cases - Somalia, Congo, Sierra Leone - they have collapsed outright. Explaining why states fail is a complex and disputed matter. Many home-grown villains from Mobutu to Mengistu are blameworthy. But as powers over fundamental political and economic choices have shifted even further

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[3] See for example: Langohr, V. 2004, 'Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics' *Comparative Politics*, 36(2), pp 181-200
[4] Habermas, J. 1989, *The structural transformation of the Public sphere*, Cambridge, Mass

upward and outward, to Western-based entities that make the rules - donor agencies, bankers, investors and policy think-tanks - external factors loom very large indeed.

Power in African settings is commonly constructed and deployed in spheres far wider than civil domains: the state, the armed forces, enterprises and the media. These have external as well as domestic dimensions; in a continent where power is highly extraverted[5], relationships with foreign actors are commonly decisive. Hence when talking of governance, democracy, and respect for human rights it is important to keep in mind differing levels – global, national, regional and local – and the interplay among them.

2. Civil Domains in the Public Arena

Habermas concluded that in the 18th and 19th century 'real' democracy developed in feudal Europe when independent public spaces (as coffee houses, salons, reading rooms, the beginning of the independent press) emerged where issues at stake were debated, outside the influence of government structures. He argues that the independent media are also in the 'public space'. The importance of his research lives forth in the articles on freedom of speech, opinion, association, assembly, freedom of the media, now cornerstones of the Universal declaration of Human Rights.

Today in Africa public space is not necessarily confined to the media. Comerford argues with good reason that in the Angolan situation public space for the peace discourse in the time of the ever-resuming civil war was provided by the churches[6]. Yet the public space transcends national frontiers. In the case of Zimbabwe for instance it is internationalised, much of it being found outside Zimbabwe, in the diaspora in South Africa, U.K. and beyond. In this respect it is worthwhile to expand the 'public space model' beyond civil domains to embrace 'arena model'. A 'public arena' is a complex whole of 'antagonistic cooperation'[7]. The scope of the 'civil domain' allows for conflict, but cannot account for its non-territorial, externalised dimensions. Those are of great importance in accounting for what is really going on in the complex African context.

The Arena

The arena model gives us more possibilities to analyse the intrinsic power relations in day to day struggles. Power relations inside the different organisations figure in the arena model. Here organisations are seen as half-open systems interacting with other organisations in the context but at the same time influenced by it and this differently for different layers in the organisations.

Conventional civil society notions don't draw attention to this. Let us take an example. A large non-governmental organisation in Angola is dependent on international donors. At the same times it operates in the Angolan political reality where it is dependent of the Angolan Government. It faces further challenges are posed to it by its beneficiaries, in the field where things are really happening. But: all these three are different

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5 Bayart, Jean-Francois, 1999, 'Africa in the world: a history of extraversion' *African Affairs* 99(395)

[6] Doctoral thesis (2003) as well as: Comerford, M. (2005): *The Peaceful Face of Angola*, Luanda. Luanda page xxiii See also: Monga, C 1997, *Eight problems with African Politics* in Journal of democracy, 9:3, pp. 156-170, cited in Comerford (2005) and Habermas, J. 1989,*The structural transformation of the Public sphere*, Cambridge, Mass.

[7] Verweel, Paul 2002,*Bewogen en gewogen: the power and weakness of vision and division* Lecture for Forum, Utrecht, The Netherlands

organisations! Although the whole organisation is affected by the decisions of its donors, these are decisions mainly carried out on the level of the directors and the managers: they are judged mainly based on the needs of their donors who are all abroad and influenced by other political realities than Angola, while the organisations field officers are dealing with the direct needs of the people: the organisation is (as well as all others in the arena) a half-open system. Its inner workings can be described as an arena, nested in the arenas of political reality in Angola but at the same time that of international development assistance which in its turn is nested again in the overall international relations (e.g. USA-Europe-Africa-China). This complex 'nesting' of arenas[8] is an important part of the analytical model. International pressure cannot be omitted when analysing Angola. This pressure is exerted on many levels. At the same time the organisation is a half open system in the sense that the culture of the programme related officers inside the organisation is more geared towards the beneficiaries than that of the 'Angola or international related' managers and directors, while the organisation as a whole is more related to the beneficiaries than the Angolan Government itself. At the same time all parties have a fragile relationship, based on conflict resolution and negotiation, and this relationship is reflected inside the organisation as well.

Thus in the organisation's internal arena's, different players confront each other and may become interdependent[9]. These are not in the 'public arena'. But not taking these into account in analysis would overlook many things that drive relations in the 'public arena' and hence the complex power plays that are going on. This is *qualitate qua* of course also the case with media outlets and polical parties etc. So it's not enough to analyse 'the' organisation: an analysis needs to be deeper and more encompassing.

It is the public arena in which battles (cold or hot) are fought by various players and powers, resulting in the end more democracy – or less.

3. Democracy and state responsiveness

Consistent with neoliberal attitudes toward the state, official aid agencies have expressed their dismay at 'top-down' approaches; they now claim to be paid-up members of the 'participatory methods' club. Yet in practice, those new methods have often camouflaged old-fashioned autocratic power. Donors continue attaching coercive conditions to their loans and grants. Aid-givers' insistence on 'participation' in some places is experienced as manipulation, deception and unpaid local labour. Some now speak of the 'tyranny of participation', and discuss it only with adjectives: 'veneered participation' (going-through-the motions); 'inequitable participation' (women and minorities marginalized), and 'bureaucratic participation' (planning-by-numbers, discussing-by-checklists)[10].

Some wish to drop the term participation altogether. Real citizenship is not served by cheap substitutes; rather it requires 'teeth' -- concrete obligations and rights capable of being upheld in courts of law. Citizens should have real powers to "throw the rascals out", but credible mechanisms (truly competitive elections, independent parliamentary inquires, independent public auditing) for downward accountability are scarce or weak.

In their approaches to the state in Africa, aid donors have shown ambivalence and mood swings. In the 1960s they favored the state and 'nation-building.' By 1980 they had changed course, mounting an offensive to 'roll back' government through privatization,

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[8] Antonissen, Anton & Boessenkool, Jan 1998,*Betekenissen van besturen*. Utrecht: ISOR page 208
[9] Verweel, Paul 2000,*Betekenisgeving in organisatiestudies* Inaugural lecture, University of Utrecht
[10] Richard Heeks, 1999, *The Tyranny of Participation in Information Systems: Learning from Development Projects,* IDPM, University of Manchester

decentralization and de-legitimation of the public sector. Up to the mid-1990s, donors showed great optimism about the powers of private for-profit and non-profit sectors. This harmonized with prevailing neoliberal orthodoxies, namely that Greed is Good, and that horse-and-sparrow economics would be sufficient to tackle poverty - that is, "feed the horse well and some benefits are sure to pass through for the sparrows to eat".

Where African governments poured public resources into such luxuries as four-star hotels and automobile assembly plants, cutting back state engagement in the economy was not a bad thing. But deligitimizing the public sector rapidly became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Schools, health services, police and other public sector services - especially those serving the politically weak - rapidly lost good staff and other means to meet citizen needs. Unable to deliver basic services of acceptable quality on a fair basis, and ravaged by corruption, the state lost legitimacy for citizens. Readiness to pay taxes and fees declined. The public sector lost whatever responsive character it may have had. The 'social contract' between states and citizens lost any meaning.

Donors and lenders aggravated decay of African public sectors simply by choosing to by-pass them. Increasingly, they channeled aid via special project units, consulting firms - and nonprofits. NGOs became aid vehicles of choice, and their supply both in the North and the South boomed in response to donor demand. The resulting organizational islands could deliver their agricultural extension, health care and training project services for a while. But disconnected from public institutions and local taxes and fees, those services stopped when the stream of aid dried up.

Institutional decay, combined with low and declining reciprocity between political classes and citizens, have made states dangerously fragile. There has been no lack of disaffected politicians or disgruntled army officers ready to spark a coup or a war. The sequel is collapse, sometimes with unspeakable violence. Victims have been chiefly civilians. In the case of Rwanda, the system of foreign aid - including that helping create 'civil society'- set the stage for genocide[11].

After 11 September 2001, strategists at the centre of world power began paying more attention to the periphery. People in supposedly secure Western countries turn out to be vulnerable to the breakdown of public order and security in faraway non-Western places. Washington DC today regards weak and failed states as among its top security priorities. Its main development agencies are re-tooling themselves to promote 'nation building' – a theme of the 1960s. The task is no longer to shrink the state but to reinforce it.

That's not a bad idea. Contrary to some conventional thinking about civil society, stronger states can advance anti-poverty and human rights agendas. Weak and poorly institutionalized states offer unpromising venues for emancipatory associational life. But where there are robust institutions to provide basic services and to conduct open politics, many things become possible. Citizen action in South Africa, for example, has scored victories for landless people and those living with HIV-AIDS because special courts and official commissions have grown (partially as a result of civil society pressures) to promote provisions of the Constitution's bill of rights. In Mozambique, an important pre-condition for achievement of smallholder land rights was the rehabilitation of the public cadastre (land title office).

Charitable giving and government subsidies to NGOs are commonly justified by claims about their responsiveness in combating poverty. Indeed in many African settings, a lot seems to be happening thanks to NGOs: sewing circles, street children centres, HIV-AIDS

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[11] Peter Uvin, 1998, *Aiding Violence. The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*, West Hartford: Kumarian. This important and surprisingly neglected study by a Belgian political scientist includes a devastating analysis in the chapter 'And Where Was Civil Society?'.

counseling, kitchen garden and small livestock efforts, micro-lending, literacy, and so forth. Africa seems abuzz with little projects supported from abroad. But does this add up to anything people can count on? For many citizens such beehives of activity can be a 'tyranny of structurelessness' – a situation in which benefits are indeed flowing to some, but not according to any priorities or plans ratified by wide popular consent. Nonprofits claiming to be more responsive than the state in service provision seem to have a point when people flock to their clinics and schools. But in the absence of public steering and comprehensive coverage, overall outcomes can add up to fragmentation, instability, unequal access and no reliable ways for citizens to call service providers to account and get what they are entitled to.

In this framework an interesting study has been conducted in the Balkans[12] where the authors ask themselves: 'Why is economic growth not generating support for market capitalism and why is state weakness reproduced in the Balkans? Their study shows that economic growth is not sufficient to create a social base for a market society and that state building in the Balkans can not and should not be simply reduced to an EU-guided reform of public administrations (both of which are assumptions underlying the actual discourse on 'reconstruction' of the Balkans, mainly driven by EU-forces. The answer of the researchers in the Balkans is that state building should be viewed primarily as a constituency building. The paradigm shift proposed here (a shift from emphasis on the state to that of the constituency of the state, including different civil domains) is a virtual reversal of the neoliberal paradigm shift from state building to civil society.

Yet it appears that neither 'building civil society', nor 'building the state' are in themselves the answer to public issues. Rather, viable answers may be better sought in the 'public arena' where the question is not one of shrinking or developing substitutes for the state, but challenging it to become more responsive while at the same time helping it gain the capacities to respond. As the authors of the Balkan study say: 'What is needed is a new generation of democratization policies that focus on the quality of political representation. What we see as a priority is a shift from the normative approach to democratization that focuses on democratic institutions (elections, courts, and media) and which is most often expressed with the idea of "accountable government" or "good government" to the idea of "responsive government" that underlines not the state's autonomy from civil society but the influence of major social constituencies over state decisions.'[13]

In our view that is the synthesis of the three different approaches we described in our theoretical notes: Civil society needs to be replaced by civil domains, but this is not sufficient: in the end it is all about the 'balance of powers' in the public sphere, or rather public arena. This nested constellation of public and private entities has non-territorial, global dimensions; in a place like Angola, where so much power is anchored offshore, that is a crucial concept. A functioning public arena is precondition for a functioning state as well as functioning constituencies of that state, herewith making responsiveness possible, as a first requisite for genuine democracy.

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[12] Center for policy studies (Central European University), 2003, In search of responsive government, Budapest
[13] Center for policy studies, 2003, In search of responsive government, Budapest, page 52

Part II. From model to practice: the public arena in Angola.

4. Angola's Public Arena

What institutions, rules and incentives are driving or blocking change, and shaping the civil domain and public arena in post-war Angola? The following sections look at four dynamics: economic, state-party, civil, and vernacular.

Economic Power

Since the early 1970s oil has dominated the economy. In the period 1995-2002, oil accounted for 70-89 percent of state revenue and 85-92 percent of export earnings. Yet with only 10,000 employees and almost no forward or backward linkages with other productive sectors, the oil industry is an enclave. Its economic significance for Angola therefore is chiefly that of filling a small number of bank accounts – most of them outside the country.

A lot more oil will soon be pumped up from Angola's new deepwater wells. Expanded output and upward pressure on prices might suggest that a Valhalla for the poor is just around the corner. But such visions continue receding into the future, pushed back by other claimants with greater powers to tap Angola's wealth. Constraints on those powers are few in part because the business of tapping wealth is deliberately kept murky, and out of public view.

This lack of transparency is an issue both of Angolan governance and global governance[14].

State and Party Power

More than in other African settings, Angola's post-colonial order displays some striking lines of continuity with the colonial order:

• Far-reaching "extraversion" of national sovereignty; that is, foreign private corporations and banks decisively set the parameters of national policy;

• Centralized, authoritarian state power managed in alignment with elite interests;

• Politics run according both to particularistic norms of "know-who" and to universalistic norms of legal and administrative codes -- the choice of norm depending on which was more convenient to those in authority;

• State repression as standard responses to political discontent;

• Officials with one foot in public institutions and another in private business;

A weak and corrupted judiciary.

In the colonial period, Africans were not considered citizens; they did not matter politically because they were *indigenas* and subalterns. Nevertheless they were needed for their labor, taxes, and to some extent their ability to consume Portuguese goods. Today Angolans may matter to some degree politically (chiefly as ballot fodder) but not very much economically, since most of what the political class needs can be obtained

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14   Disreputable practices by oil industry firms -- paying off or otherwise influencing national and international officials, massive use of tax havens &c. -- can affect governance everywhere. See for example *The Politics of Oil. How one of the World's Richest Industries Influences Government and Policy*, Center for Public Integrity, Washington DC, http://www.publicintegrity.org/oil/default.aspx

without Angolan labor, taxes and consumption.   The "resource curse" is fundamentally a political curse, in that it destroys reciprocity between rulers and ruled.

Politics today

Today there are naturally a number of important differences from the colonial order:

- Citizenship is extended, in principle, to everyone -- although inclusion/exclusion according to party affiliation and class usually nullify the norm of equality of opportunity; moreover "citizenship" as a concept based on the actual practice of political rights & duties is rather empty of meaning;

- Political competition is no longer pursued by force of arms; multi-partyism was recognized in law in 1990 and routinely present in the National Assembly since the 1992 elections, but is unwelcome by the regime;

- Political co-optation of constituencies in civil domains is standard operating procedure for the MPLA[15] – as shown in the creation of posts for defectors from the FNLA[16] in the late 1980s, and generous support to defectors from Unita[17] who chose to retain seats Unita won in the 1992 elections;

- Foreign affairs carried on through both formal diplomatic channels and informal mercantile channels (clearly shown in the case of French state-owned companies, but including private or semi-state channels based in the US, UK, Italy, The Netherlands &c.);

- The oil economy has created powerful new semi-autonomous institutions – an oil ministry and parastatal company -- acting as a state within a state and enjoying alliances with offshore interests and only marginally accountable to the central bank and public treasury.

- Some concessions to regional privilege -- a proportion of oil tax revenues are conceded directly to the provinces of Cabinda and Zaire – but no serious moves to decentralize political power or adopt federal arrangements.

The supreme seat of authority is in Futungo de Belas, the Presidential complex on a seaside hill on the outskirts of Luanda. The term Futungo refers to the cluster of personages and patronage networks centered on President Dos Santos.   Until recently there was a small rival MPLA faction, referred to as the colossi, including wealthy but liberal-minded figures from the party's past such as former Prime Minister Lopo do Nascimento. Dissent and outspoken journalism emerged later in the 1990s, at least in Luanda. Against this background, optimists in Luanda's network of human rights NGOs, small parties and church intellectuals thought the colossi might make a comeback, and the domestic public space for opposition widened. But the comeback never took place and the civil and public space has failed to grow.

The social underpinnings of the political class are a matter of speculation. According to Angola's pop sociology, the top of the elite comprises "One Hundred Families". In early 2003 the Luanda newspaper *O Angolense* reported on 59 rich Angolans with a combined

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[15] Originally one of the liberation movements, now de facto the ruling party.

[16] One of the liberation movements in the 19-seventies, now opposition

[17] One of the liberation movements, fighting with MPLA up to 2002, now de facto the most important opposition party.

wealth of nearly four billion dollars. The wealthiest among them are or were government/party officials.

New ways of getting rich opened up after Angola joined the IMF in 1989 and launched a wave of privatization. Out of public view, and at bargain prices, the political elite sold off state-owned businesses, farms, houses, apartment blocs and special export franchises to themselves and to their domestic and foreign political friends. These acquisitive dynamics, under conditions of non-transparency and mal-administration, illustrate the uses of disorder as a political instrument[18]. This syndrome -- opaque, non-accountable authority, a weak and corrupted legal order, few boundaries between formal and informal sectors – also figures in other African states. Conditions in Angola have made disorder an especially effective mechanism, serving a diverse range of interests.

In peacetime, it is more difficult to reproduce disorder. Yet opacity continues and open and active political competition is constrained by:

- Widespread public distrust and cynicism toward all political parties, as shown in recent attitude surveys;

- State-party powers of patronage, exercised since the 1980s to neutralize or co-opt rival political forces, such as the Bakongo-based FNLA. Today patronage is formalised in the dependence of most political parties on state funding, and in Futungo's charity arm in civil society, the Fundação Eduardo dos Santos;

- State powers of repression, including anti-riot police and the National Spontaneous Movement – a rent-a-mob party youth league;

- State powers over national radio, TV and most printed journals, coupled with restrictions on independent media, particularly outside Luanda;

- State-party powers to put off democratization measures: slow consultation about a new constitution; postponement of local-level elections; nullifying proposals to end impunity and to carry out a formal process of reconciliation; continual re-scheduling national presidential and legislative elections, &c.

- Proliferation of political parties (some 150 are said to exist), most of them pivoting on one aspiring "big man" and few followers. Confined mainly to networks in Luanda, their scope is small, their ideas & initiatives few; in short, most opposition parties lack credibility and momentum.

Historically, party-political rivalry corresponded to (a) the MPLA as rallying-point for the "insider" urban, westernized, white/creole-intellectual-dominated, wage- and salary-earning strata and (b) two "outsider" rallying-points for the rural, black, agrarian, petty producer/trader and poor peasant strata (one a Bakongo-dominated hierarchy, one an Ovimbumdo-dominated hierarchy, both led by Big Men).

While a repetition of Angola's three-way, ethnically-charged split today looks unlikely, appeals to ethno-regional loyalties are by no means things of the past. Many continue to explain political events in terms of ethnic interests and bias.   Nevertheless parties may seek to improve their electoral chances by appealing across ethnic divisions to populist sentiments pivoting on "insiders"/ "outsiders" themes.

The state apparatus

Angola's public sector is big but feeble. Government jobs account for about three-quarters of all formal sector employment (whereas in Tanzania and Zambia for example

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[18]   Patrick Chabal & J-P Daloz, 1999, *Africa Works. Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford: James Currey.

they account for about one-third). Provinces and districts least affected by war (the Southwestern provinces, the coastal zone of Benguela, Cabinda, and of course Luanda) have disproportionate numbers of civil servants. Yet many state systems are dysfunctional. Basic services by public sector providers are poor in quality and limited in coverage.

Provision of health, education and security services through private channels, on the other hand, is advancing. This has the encouragement and patronage of the political class and better-off strata and their foreign partners. In 2003 the government passed enabling legislation for a national programme of social protection; but that hardly opened the way for downward redistribution. Stronger has been the encouragement (not yet expressed in formal subsidies or contracts) to NGOs and churches to fill gaps in social services for the poor.

5. Typology of Civil Domains in Angola

Vernacular Ways of Associating

Most Angolans' experience of associative life takes place informally, in ways of associating that may be termed 'vernacular'. Together with extended families, such ties constitute the social bedrock. And some kind of bedrock has been badly needed. As an Angolan protestant theologian observed at the height of the war in 1996, "People feel totally abandoned." Ordinary citizens had been cast adrift by their leaders; they had to face war, predation and *capitalismo selvagem* (jungle capitalism) wholly on their own.

Most Angolans cope by relying on social connections they were born into and on *jeito* (street smarts, savoir faire) they develop themselves. Through not systematically known, survival strategies include exchanges of labor and goods and the management of access to natural resources, credit, and services such as child care. In urban areas, people quietly encroach on natural resources through such practices as wood-cutting, and on public resources through the clandestine tapping of water and electricity from public mains.

At least a third of Angola's population resides in shantytowns, where most live atomized lives. Collective action to solve common problems does not take place spontaneously. The primary tendency is to tackle problems individually.   Open, horizontal community-based organizations tend to have wider appeal – although there too trust can be quite fragile. Neighborhood committees to resolve disputes and manage local public improvements have worked successfully in some Luanda and Lubango neighborhoods. Many forms of mutual aid were transformed or dissolved under pressures of war, forced urbanization and competitive scrambles for existence. Given the widespread damage to the social fabric, the strength of vernacular institutions should not be over-estimated. Efforts to mobilize the urban poor for protest have been routinely suppressed; indeed formal and informal state security units for precisely this purpose are continually at the ready.

Formal Organisations

Formal associational life has not fared much better. Throughout most of the 20th century, voluntary associational life lacked both the social basis and the political freedom to flourish. Churches were the only formal option open to most Angolans. Toward the end of the colonial period about 40 percent of the population was nominally Catholic, 10 percent Protestant; today those proportions are said to be 58 percent Catholic, 17

percent Protestant. Indigenous African churches drew huge followings. But the Portuguese kept a close eye on such churches and on secular groups, such as small cultural circles of *assimilados* in cities.

On assuming power in 1976 the MPLA likewise sought to confine civil space. Its Constitution did permit some rights of association, thereby allowing Catholic charities, Protestant umbrella bodies, the YMCA and the Angolan Red Cross to operate. The MPLA came down hard on Catholic institutions, while its stances toward Protestant mission churches ranged from very cordial (the Methodist church in Luanda came to be known as "the MPLA at prayer") to restrictive (as potential pro-Savimbi or US fifth columns). The party went about colonizing associational life by setting up Soviet-style "mass" organizations: one each for children, youth, women, peasants and waged workers.

Around 1990, its "Year of Enlargement of Democracy", the government stopped blocking autonomous associative life. Dozens of new organizations sprouted up – some of them at the instigation of party officials themselves. In anticipation of the 1992 elections, there came many self-proclaimed political parties. Several large development NGOs took shape under the aegis of liberal party leaders, and gained foreign funding. Some initiative came from ordinary citizens, who set up (with no foreign funding) residents' committees and neighborhood clean-up groups. Urban football clubs, on the other hand, have been backed by big firms or government branches like the police and army. Also with party-state help, business and political elites helped set up "Friends and Natives of [town X]" clubs linking Luanda residents with hometowns up-country. State/party-supervised organizations for wage-earners began diversifying and showing some militancy in the early 1990s. There were sporadic worker walkouts and stay-aways, but these were promptly quashed.

Business and professional associations: Particularly in Luanda there are formal groupings of professionals, such as the Orders of engineers, physicians and lawyers, and associations of architects, economists, sociologists and psychologists. Business people have formed numerous trade associations, including the eight-member Angolan Private Press Association. Some of these groups are quite close to the political class. A few deliver services directly to the public, such as the legal aid work of the *Ordem de Advogados* (Bar Association), as well as lobby for structural reforms.

NGOs: Organizations whose chief vocations are in service delivery have emerged under three main auspices:

1) the party-state structure: for example the Organization of Angolan Women (OMA) and the Eduardo dos Santos Foundation (FESA); the latter is a typical Presidential (or "First Lady") charitable fund relying on foreign business donations, thus allowing wealthy interests to pay off the political class under the guise of philanthropy.

2) churches: for example, Caritas Angola; social service branches of the protestant churches and their apex bodies; and a wide number of local NGOs inspired or led by churches;

3) foreign aid channels: NGOs have arisen from direct initiative such as Deutsche Welthungerhilfe's setting up of AAD in 1989, or in response to donor demand for 'partners' and for sub-contractors to deliver humanitarian goods and services, such as the many scores of NGOs delivering World Food Program foodstuffs.

As many as 500 Angolan NGOs are said to exist. However many are transient, informal bodies. Perhaps no more that a few dozen actually operate full-time. Some die and are re-born under new names. In circumstances like Angola's, NGOs are not neatly-bounded,

structured things but fluid processes. In this perspective[19], Angolans are not steering organizations like drivers of so many busses but rather are busy "NGO-ing" like freelance impresarios trying to build up theatrical repertoires.

Most NGOs represent initiatives of the salariat – teachers, middle managers, church pastors and so forth. Their orientation is chiefly toward the aid system, and its ever-shifting mix of donor interests and requirements. The curriculum vitae of just one organization can easily show a record of activities as diverse as food delivery, water supply, health care, gender, small enterprise promotion, conflict resolution, child care, social surveys, trauma counseling, micro credit, advocacy, and HIV-AIDS education. These jacks-of-all-trades NGOs, and the types of "trades" they claim proficiency in, grow more numerous every year with every passing donor fad. Most NGOs live from hand to mouth on an unstable series of grants from donors who themselves pay a lot of attention to the Next Big Thing in aid discourse and practice. Their domestic contractees operate essentially as enterprises in a skewed and non-transparent market for aid funding, thus illustrating the civil domain's extraversion, and the nested pattern of its structure.

6. Angolan civic domains and public arenas

A few organizations are guided more by Angolan than by donor compasses. Some of these NGOs have developed vocations based on professional knowledge and calculations of what is politically feasible. They also enjoy a certain amount of political protection. Angola's leading development NGO is ADRA (Acção para o Desenvolvimento Rural e Ambiente), a product wholly of Angolan leadership. Since its creation in 1990 it has set the "gold standard" for NGO practice in Angola. Its repertoire includes community economic development, education, the promotion of human rights, participatory practice, and policy debates on fundamental matters of poverty and democratization. ADRA is one of very few Angolan NGOs pursuing policy innovations and scaling up together with public sector bodies, such as with education authorities in the Province of Benguela. Policy activism presents a riskier terrain, and few Angolan NGOs pursue advocacy without the backing of foreign aid agencies or the collaboration of other well-positioned NGOs.

A few younger NGOs have concentrated on civil and political rights in particular settings: residents of low-income neighborhoods facing abuse by the authorities or landlords (such as forced evictions); prison conditions. A network for human rights activism associated with Catholic institutions is perhaps the strongest current example of NGO networking, although it operates informally. Built up by lawyers and enjoying the discreet protection of political figures, church leaders and outsiders like the Swedish Embassy, Open Society Foundation &c., these NGOs are developing track records of effectiveness and public credibility.   Because they get in the way of urban gentrification, and call international attention to major abuses, these NGOs are special targets of intimidation by the authorities.

Moreover, journalists and trade unionists face curbs on freedom of expression; independent radio beyond the capital city is effectively forbidden. Even when armed with restrictions and blockages of information, the ruling political class and leadership show great sensitivity about their public image. Basic psychology is usually at play. The president evidently wants to be remembered as the president that brought peace and – according to some – prosperity. Many in the ruling party that genuinely believe that the

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[19] Dorothea Hilhorst, 2003, *The Real World of NGOs. Discourses, Diversity and Development*, London: Zed Books

party is the vanguard of development; consequently they distrust competitive politics where that vanguard role may be put in question and ridiculed.

It is hard to read Angola from the outside. No outsider knows exactly what the sphinxes of Futungo actually think and want. Is the Futungo the factor blocking the creation of a responsive state as Steve Kibble[20] suggests? He sees Futungo running a state without need for citizens to produce or pay taxes, let alone to exercise their full political potentials. Or is it a complex scheme to hold other elites at bay, limiting their access to oil and other resources revenues in order to prevent corruption spiraling out of control, as Nicholas Shaxson[21] suggests? Readings from the inside don't necessarily make things better. When Radio Ecclesisa sacked its executive director two camps with opposite explanations were quickly formed. One held that the director had been a victim of Machiavellian power plays within the radio and within the Angolan Bishops Conference – CEAST; the other camp accused the ex-director of being an agent provocateur paid by the ruling party to create this permanent state of confusion within the Radio and by doing this, destabilizing the trusted networks within that radio. Also Radio Ecclesia turned out to be a 'half-open-system'.

In Angola both can be true at the same time. This was shown in the fall of the chief of state intelligence, General Miala. He turned out to be one of the financers of a particularly critical weekly publication. Journalists there knew when they were fed certain information against the ruling elite, but at the same time they kept some independence with regard to other publications.

There is no such thing as independent media or journalism in Angola. A journalist's capacity to investigate and publish is directly related to his or her capacity to balance between the different (non-public) spheres and a genuine wish to inform the public. In other words: the public will learn only those facts that someone hasn't been paid to keep quiet about. In the words of one editor, "there is no story in Angola I can't make money with". These practices are relatively easy to maintain where the press is confined to Luanda and this is the real drama behind Radio Ecclesia's failure to push ahead with the expansion to the provinces. The flow of information resulting from this expansion would be far more difficult to control and the government and the party would be exposed as failures because of their inability to actually deliver some of the peace dividend the Angolan population is still waiting for. This is why the Radio has been targeted for black-ops by the security services and why the government will not allow it to expand before the legislative elections.

To control information is to control the discourse in the public domains and allows for a hegemonic control. Even amidst this political disorder, a logic can be found. Angolan public domains are under construction. For the time being information flows between private domains where small networks of trust operate based on family and ethnic ties. The single biggest operative is the predictability of behavior of members of these networks, a question of loyalty.

It is imperative to challenge *en force* a strong failed state like Angola's to be responsive to the existence of public domains. For those public domains to be nurtured, informed citizens and a notion of citizenship are needed. This is not beyond the possibilities of Angolan NGOs working in the field of civic education and the use of modern communications tools such as the Internet would allow for an exchange of information that would help build that citizenship.

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[20] Steve Kibble, 2007, *Angola: from politics of disorder to politics of democratization?* http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/06/africa/kibble.htm

[21] Nicholas Shaxson, 2007, *Poisoned wells; the dirty politics of African oil*, Palgrave Macmillan

NGOs engaging in this type of civic education understand the risks of this politicizing work. After all it touches on sensitive issues such as legitimacy of power and the building of countervailing power. This is not politics in the sense of opposition or party politics. By no means is the objective to grab the control over state. Nevertheless it is threatening for the government, elites and ruling party. It calls for a skillful application of a Socratic method; in the words of the dean of the Catholic University: "We don't do politics here but we discuss things in such a way that our students leave the university with their eyes wide open".

Even though there are now more NGOs willing to take up this role, it cannot be left to the NGOs. It needs to be done with and by emancipatory groups such as the network of women leaders to build this kind of citizenship that Angola needs.

Working with the media to produce trustworthy information in the embryonic public domain remains a priority. Research on issues fundamental to Angolan and international elites, namely about oil and diamond revenues, is too dangerous for Angolan NGOs to undertake openly. Western-based bodies like Global Witness, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International rely to some extent on streams of information supplied by Angolan activists and intellectuals, but such collaboration poses grave risks. International Media organizations supporting concerned and civic journalism could step in here and publish what Angolan journalists can't, thus tying the knots together..

The politics of the internationalized arena impinges on civil domains. Protection, confidence and information needed to mount advocacy efforts are nowhere guaranteed in Angola. The major outside actors in that political arena are commercial enterprises, both Western and Chinese, who can continue to operate non-transparently with impunity. Privatized global governance is organized chiefly on their behalf. The balance of forces in the public arena today is tilted overwhelmingly against emancipatory initiatives in civil domains. The interests of the producers and consumers of hydrocarbons (and other sectors, especially financial services, serving producers and Angolan elites) have priority, severely constraining research, debate, and protest at both national and global levels.

7. Conclusions

In Angola the civil domain's formal, visible members have with few exceptions been marginal to political life either as protagonists pressing for policy change, or as vehicles to consolidate the hegemony of the political class. Established churches have tipped political balances at exceptional moments, such as when they lobbied for, and got, non-punitive terms of a post-conflict political settlement. There have been important tactical gains, such as improvements in land reform legislation, attributable to specialized NGOs. Finally, the political class has proven to be sensitive to criticisms aimed at it from public tribunes of the independent media; they tend to take it as disrespect bordering on treason. But as a rule, civil domains and what takes place in them are today not decisive in Angolan politics at any level.

In certain local circumstances, where political stakes are modest and where the local leadership of the ruling party takes relaxed attitudes toward actors not under direct Party control, representatives of NGOs and churches have been welcomed for consultation on specific matters. It remains to be seen if such practices represent the start of a deliberate opening toward the civil domain, or are merely one more instance of co-option – a political art in which the ruling party has shown great proficiency.

As national parliamentary and presidential elections approach, incentives to promote more dialogue with citizens and government responsiveness may increase. The 1992 elections saw competition between UNITA and the ruling party turning on claims of responsiveness in the provision of health care and other public services. Similar claims,

and thus pressures on government, are likely to intensify in the run-up to elections in 2008.

Open, routine dialogue between public authorities and citizens' organizations takes place on a modest scale in only a few locales in Angola; most are limited to small settlements. Pressures to call forth a 'responsive' state are thus still a far cry from those seen in Brazil. In that country, decades of popular agitation, political competition and development of public services have seen the growth of real constituencies for services and the wider public policies that drive them. Those pressures, combined with service delivery roles by NGOs, have led to the creation of statutory national councils in which both government and civil actors take part. From human rights and racial equality to food & nutrition safety, important policy realms have their own national councils. Such platforms open possibilities for constituencies to exercise real influence over statutory programmes and policies – things whose scale and concreteness far surpass the uneven and discontinuous endeavors in civil domains[22].

Can such public 'arenas' be anticipated in Angola? Current micro-initiatives offer no immediate prospects for rapid scaling-up. But at least they have established precedents. The 'public arena' in Angola is far from being a reality, but is not in any case an impossibility.

To sum up:

Angola illustrates the limitations of the conventional civil society story. NGOs are far newer and far less rooted and effective politically than are many institutions of vernacular associational life, and some large, established churches.

Being anchored in global flows and arrangements with powerful actors offshore, and therefore operating with no public accountability, the decisive institutions of power in Angola are well out of sight and beyond the reach most citizens and their organisations.

Investment in conventionally defined 'civil society', NGOs as independent agents of countervailing power' is provided under terms (scale, duration, level, apolitical intent and disconnection to actual political processes) that make it incommensurate with the challenges.

It is important to explore and identify more clearly what those challenges really are for the foreseeable future. A functioning set of formal political institutions (constitution, openly and freely chosen political representations at all levels, an independent judiciary, independent powers of public inquiry &c.) certainly merits pursuit. Public space for associational life is also without question a good thing. But a responsive state, built around public services and the active pressure of constituents (consumers and producers) to make them work well, seems to us to be an even more pressing and probably more feasible objective in the middle run. Therefore a chief priority for foreign support should be those organisations actively enlarging public space and fighting in the public arena, as well as to the means (e.g. media, communication) that de facto enlarge and protect the public domain.

In light of the nesting of organisations in a globalised pattern, and the degree to which Angolan power depends on offshore anchoring, investments in countervailing power will have to be designed in ways that correspond to those patterns of power. Improvements

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[22] A Brazilian civil umbrella body has begun a "forum on social control of public policies". See http://www.mobilizadorescoep.org.br/

in corporate responsibility regarding Angola will require confronting corporations in their global settings, where politics and governance are still weak and unresponsive to publics at large.