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Inside the Government, but Outside the Law: Residents' Committees, Public Authority and Twilight Governance in Post-War Angola

Sylvia Croese^a

^a Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Stellenbosch University

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*Inside the Government, but Outside the Law: Residents' Committees, Public Authority and Twilight Governance in Post-War Angola**

SYLVIA CROESE

(Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Stellenbosch University)

This article explores the workings of public authority in post-war Angola through an analysis of the history and current functioning of residents' committees at neighbourhood level in peri-urban Luanda, based on case-study research in the Zango housing project. While recognising that power in Angola is highly centralised, and the autonomy of regular state structures limited, it argues that, when power is studied from below, state officials and those they engage with can be seen to produce, recognise and negotiate public authority in multiple ways that are embedded in the country's political history. In doing so, the article aims to bring a sense of history and agency to what is commonly seen by scholars as a top-down and repressive project of state-building. Yet the twilight existence of residents' committees – as institutions that function, but are not officially recognised, as part of the state – also illustrates the deeply ambiguous nature of this endeavour as one that, although formally aimed at building a democratic state that follows the rule of law, continues to be deeply entrenched in informal practices that ultimately serve to preserve the ruling party's hold on power.

Introduction

Lund introduces the notion of 'twilight' as an analytical device to study local actors in Africa, such as vigilante groups, administrative brokers or traditional authorities, who are not part of the state but who exercise public authority. This authority may be exercised 'with greater or lesser success', 'waxing and waning' in the twilight between state and society and between public and private. Studying such institutions then challenges commonly held views of the state as a fixed entity that should exist separately from society, and allows for investigations of 'how public authority actually works' in what otherwise would be seen as cases of state failure and impending collapse.¹

The shift to a more empirical approach to the study of 'statehood' in Africa, or the 'real' ways in which 'local, national and transnational actors forge and remake the state through

*The author is a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. This article is based on research conducted as part of her doctoral studies, and made possible through the financial assistance of the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University. The author would like to thank all those who read earlier drafts of the article, and two anonymous JSAS reviewers, for their constructive comments and suggestions. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author alone.

1 C. Lund (ed.), *Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa* (Malden, Mass., Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 2. Italics in original.

processes of negotiation, contestation and *bricolage*² has gained prominence in recent years, but has not been widely applied to the case of Angola.³ Most studies on Angola, sub-Saharan Africa's second-largest oil producer (after Nigeria), and ruled by the second-longest serving leader (after Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea), conceptualise public authority as a function of oil-fuelled presidential neo-patrimonialism, while state institutions are generally considered to be little more than sources for rent-seeking activities.⁴ Post-war state-building in turn is seen by many as an elite-controlled modernist endeavour, which is 'focused on the limitation of popular mobilisation, the strengthening of the state apparatus, and the construction of a stable but non-egalitarian political order'.⁵ From this perspective, the study of local state or non-state actors seems possible only in the country's periphery, outside the purview of the central government.⁶

This article does not seek to negate the well-documented characteristics of power and politics in Angola. It does, however, argue that such perspectives provide little insight into the origins and daily workings of public authority. Thus, while recognising that power in Angola is highly centralised in the executive branch of the government, and the autonomy of regular state structures limited, I argue that, when power is studied from below, state officials and those with whom they engage can be seen to produce, recognise and negotiate public authority in multiple ways, even (or especially) in the country's capital. In addition, I argue that these local dynamics should be seen as deeply embedded in the country's political history. As a 'post-socialist' state,⁷ Angola's history as a nation freed from colonial rule by the socialist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) contributes in important ways to maintaining and strengthening the party's current hold on power. However, the mobilisation of socialist institutional and discursive legacies at the local level also contributes to the creation of multiple power poles, which turns governance into a highly fragmented and fluid affair.

This becomes especially clear when looking at local systems of land and property management. As Juul and Lund affirm, 'land tenure is a field where social and political relations are multifarious, overlapping and competing' and thereby an important issue 'over which political and legal struggles intertwine, where local powers and less localised power structures interact, and where political and cultural symbols of power and authority are brought into play'.⁸

To illustrate these dynamics, I draw on research conducted between 2011 and 2013 on and in Zango, a government housing project located in the outskirts of Luanda.⁹ Here residents'

2 T. Hagmann and D. Péclard, 'Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa', *Development and Change*, 41, 4 (2010), p. 544. Also T. Bierschenk and J-P. Olivier de Sardan (eds), *States at Work: Dynamics of African Bureaucracies* (Leiden, Brill, 2014).

3 For a notable exception, see J. Pearce, 'Control, Politics and Identity in the Angolan Civil War', *African Affairs*, 111, 444 (2012), pp. 442–65, which examines the state-like qualities of UNITA, the rebel movement that during the civil war controlled large parts of the national territory.

4 See, for prime examples, the contributions in P. Chabal and N. Vidal (eds), *Angola: The Weight of History* (London, Hurst, 2007).

5 R. Soares de Oliveira, 'Illiberal Peacebuilding in Angola', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49, 2 (2011), p. 308.

6 See, for instance, I. Ruigrok, 'Facing Up To the Centre: the Emergence of Regional Elite Associations in Angola's Political Transition Process', *Development and Change*, 41, 4 (2010), pp. 637–58.

7 M.A. Pitcher and K.M. Askew, 'African Socialisms and Postsocialisms', *Africa*, 76, 1 (2006), pp. 1–14.

8 K. Juul and C. Lund, 'Negotiating Property in Africa: Introduction', in K. Juul and C. Lund (eds), *Negotiating Property in Africa* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2002), p. 5.

9 A total of 70 informants were interviewed for a study on state-led development 'at work', which included residents of Zango, current as well as former residents' committee presidents in Zango, government officials representing central, provincial and municipal government, and local party officials, private sector representatives and individuals working in the non-governmental and academic world in Luanda. The fieldwork was complemented by the analysis of relevant literature, Angolan legislation and newspaper archives.

committees, created by the state under socialist one-party rule, fulfil administrative tasks, including tasks related to land and property management, in many ways functioning as a local government tier. Yet, unlike in other post-socialist countries where residents' committees have been given a statutory role, these committees are not recognised in Angola as part of the state: *bairros* (neighbourhoods) have no formal representation in the state administration. Senior officials representing government agencies involved in housing and urban development projects in Luanda whom I interviewed generally knew about the existence of committees but discarded my questions about them, referring to residents' committees as 'obsolete remnants from the one-party era'¹⁰ or nothing more than 'communitarian organisations'.¹¹ However, in Zango I found that lower-level government officials, sometimes representing these same institutions, were working daily with committees to execute the tasks assigned to them. As a result, in the words of one president of a residents' committee, they are '*dentro do governo, mas fora da lei*' [inside the government, but outside the law].¹²

While aiming to bring a sense of history and agency to what, in the literature, is so often seen as merely a top-down and repressive project of state-building, the twilight existence of residents' committees in Angola then also illustrates the deeply ambiguous nature of this endeavour as one that, while formally aimed at building a democratic state that follows the rule of law, continues to be deeply entrenched in informal practices that ultimately serve to preserve the ruling party's hold on power.

From People's to Party Power

Residents' committees in Angola emerged in the capital, Luanda, in the context of the war for liberation from Portuguese colonial power, as part of grassroots *poder popular* (people's power) structures. These structures included myriad organisations such as Action Committees, student associations, trade unions, labourers committees and unarmed political parties.¹³ While most associations were not politically active and under the strict control of the Portuguese secret police, they shared a 'real, albeit diffuse, sympathy for the MPLA', even though few had ever having been in organised contact with the movement, owing to the fact that the MPLA leadership operated from outside the country.¹⁴ Yet, as the liberation struggle became more violent, these networks became increasingly active. This turned them into useful instruments of popular and military mobilisation for the MPLA, which had started to lose ground in the fierce power struggle with the two other liberation movements, the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which followed the signing of an agreement to create a transitional government for an independent Angola in January 1975.¹⁵

After the MPLA proclaimed independence in November 1975, it institutionalised people's power by means of the Law on People's Power. This law provided for the

10 Interview with head of the legal department of Ministry of Territorial Administration (MAT), Luanda, 7 December 2011.

11 Interviews with Provincial Social Housing programme (PHS) co-ordinator, Zango, 8 December 2011; Luanda Institute for Urban Planning and Management (IPGUL) representative, Luanda, 19 March 2012; Programme of the Relocation of the People (PRP) co-ordinator, Zango, 27 March 2012.

12 Interview with Mr Paulino, Zango, 18 September 2012.

13 J-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Dissidências e Poder de Estado: O MPLA Perante Si Próprio (1962–1977). Ensaio de História Política, Vol. II: 1974–1977* (Luanda, Nzila, 2001), pp. 49–50.

14 M. Cahen, 'Syndicalisme Urbain, Luttres Ouvrières et Questions Ethniques a Luanda: 1974–1977/1981', in M. Cahen (ed.), *Bourgs et Villes en Afrique Lusophone* (Paris, Harmattan, 1989), p. 217.

15 Groupe Afrique Centrale du Cédétim, *Angola: La Lutte Continue* (Paris, François Maspero, 1977), p. 124. On the period of transition to independence, see also F-W. Heimer, *The Decolonization Conflict in Angola, 1974–1976: An Essay in Political Sociology* (Geneva, Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales, 1979).

organisation of elections for organs of people's power at the provincial, municipal and communal level of government. Through these organs, the people would 'execute power under the orientation and control of the revolutionary vanguard, the MPLA, with the aim of defending, consolidating and developing the revolutionary conquests of the popular masses'.¹⁶ Yet, after an attempted *coup d'état* in 1977, which was seen to have involved people's power structures, committees in neighbourhoods where people's power had been most active were disbanded and taken over by the 'competent entities of the MPLA'.¹⁷ Moreover, the Law on People's Power was annulled on the grounds that it had been passed too soon after independence.¹⁸

As part of a massive rectification campaign in the following years, aimed at purging the party of possible enemies, centralising party control over state and society, and countering the mounting offensive from the countryside of its remaining rival, UNITA,¹⁹ new People's Committees (*Comissões Populares de Bairro*) were established in Luanda's neighbourhoods.²⁰ Several decrees were adopted in the following years to formalise and regulate the workings of these People's Committees as local government tiers. In the context of single party rule, People's Committees also came to function as conveyor belts between the party and the people, just like other MPLA mass organisations of the time.²¹

With the transition to multi-party democracy in the early 1990s, the Provincial Government of Luanda renamed the People's Committees 'residents' committees' (*comissões de moradores*), defining them as

organs constituted by residents of buildings, building blocks, quarters, streets, sectors, communes or *bairros*, villages and municipalities that seek to create conditions for a healthy co-existence and social collaboration among residents through the development of activities related to the maintenance of hygiene and conservation of communal property, as well as cultural, sportive, recreational and other types of activities.²²

In addition, committee members were now to be elected instead of nominated, with elections to be organised by the local administration.²³

Local Power in a Post-Socialist Context

At first sight, the recognition and formalisation of residents' committees by the Provincial Government of Luanda seems similar to a process that has taken place in other post-socialist countries where practices of co-optation of local power have returned under the banner of democracy or decentralisation. In Mozambique, for instance, former secretaries of Frelimo in suburban quarters or villages – often linked to former *grupos dinamizadores* ('dynamising groups') which, like Angola's People's Committees, were created under one-party socialist rule – have been formally recognised as 'community authorities' in the post-war era by the ruling Frelimo government. According to Buur and Kyed, around 4,000 former Frelimo

16 Diário da República, I Series – No. 29, Law 1/76 of 5 February 1976.

17 Diário da República, I Series – No. 128, Dispatch 26/77 of 2 June 1977.

18 M. Wolfers and J. Bergerol, *Angola in the Frontline* (London, Zed Press, 1983), pp. 165–6.

19 The FNLA had crumbled soon after independence, while UNITA increasingly received support from the United States and the (US-backed) apartheid government of South Africa.

20 No research has been conducted, to my knowledge, on the establishment or creation of these committees in other parts of the country.

21 The military functions that had been fulfilled by People's Committees in the MPLA's struggle to take control of the capital prior to independence were attributed to Popular Vigilance Brigades, which went on to operate as the armed militias of these Committees. See Diário da República, I Series – No. 221, Presidential decree 47/83 of 19 September 1983.

22 República de Angola, Governo da Província de Luanda, Gabinete do Governador (1993), Dispatch 209/93, article 2.

23 *Ibid.*, article 57.

secretaries and traditional leaders have signed a contract with the state since 2002, and have received emblems of the republic to wear and a national flag to place at their homestead.²⁴ In Maputo, these secretaries, known as *secretários de bairro*, are now paid, elected municipal employees who fulfil a wide range of local administrative functions, including solid-waste management.²⁵ However, they have also been described as a ‘trunk of the [Frelimo party] state’ and their elections as ‘merely an attempt to bestow false legitimacy’ on instruments that are meant to reinforce the power and control of the ruling party in the city.²⁶

Similarly, neighbourhood councils in Ethiopia, known as *kebele*, that were created under communist rule are now promoted as instruments to enhance ‘participatory democracy’ while still functioning as a method of control.²⁷ In China, residents’ committees are being upgraded under the banner of decentralisation, and assigned a new role in the development of the country’s rapidly growing cities, as part of a national programme of ‘neighbourhood construction’, while equally remaining an instrument of local control.²⁸ Residents’ committees in these countries have then become part of a particular mode of authoritarian rule in which local power functions as a mere extension of central power.²⁹

In Angola, committees have not been given this statutory role by the central government. This can partly be explained by the war, which re-ignited after the country’s first parliamentary and presidential elections in 1992.³⁰ In the absence of effectively present and functioning local government during the intermittent years of war that followed, committees are generally thought to have stopped operating, although a number of studies mention the role of residents’ committees in local land allocation and conflict mediation in Luanda’s peri-urban areas.³¹

With the ending of the war in 2002, Angola has entered a period of post-war state-building, involving the launch of a large-scale programme of national reconstruction with the

- 24 L. Buur and H.M. Kyed, ‘Contested Sources of Authority: Re-Claiming State Sovereignty by Formalizing Traditional Authority in Mozambique’, in Lund (ed.), *Twilight Institutions*, pp. 169–70.
- 25 J. Grest, A. Baudouin, C. Bjerkli, and H. Quénot-Suarez, ‘The Politics of Solid-Waste Management in Accra, Addis Ababa, Maputo and Ouagadougou’, in S. Bekker and L. Fourchard (eds), *Politics and Policies: Governing Cities in Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2013), pp. 117–43.
- 26 N. Bowen and A.L. Helling, ‘Demand-Side Governance Diagnostic of Maputo Municipality’, (unpublished report prepared for Africa Region Social Development (AFTCS), World Bank, Washington DC, September 2011), pp. 6–7. See also C. Bénit-Gbaffou, A. Dubressen, L. Fourchard, K. Ginisty, S. Jaglin, A. Olukoju, S. Owuor and J. Vivet, ‘Exploring the Role of Party Politics in the Governance of African cities’, in Bekker and Fourchard (eds), *Politics and Policies*, pp. 17–41.
- 27 L. Aalen and K. Tronvoll, ‘Ethiopian Local Elections: the Return of Electoral Authoritarianism’, *African Affairs*, 108/430 (2008), pp. 111–20.
- 28 J. Friedmann, ‘Invisible Architecture: Neighbourhood Governance in China’s Cities’, in G. Bridge and S. Watson (eds), *The New Blackwell Companion to the City* (Malden, Mass., Blackwell Publishing, 2011), pp. 690–99. See, for a comparative perspective, B. L. Read and C-M. Chen, ‘The State’s Evolving Relationship With Urban Society: China’s Neighbourhood Organizations in Comparative Perspective’, in J.R. Logan (ed.), *Urban China in Transition* (Malden, Mass., Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 315–35.
- 29 There is a growing literature on this type of ‘new authoritarian’ regime. See, for example, A. Schedler (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner, 2006). On the African context, see R. Otayek, ‘A Descentralização Como Modo de Redefinição do Poder Autoritário? Algumas Reflexões a Partir de Realidades Africanas’, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 77 (2007), pp. 131–50.
- 30 ‘People’s power’ is seen to have been revived in some areas of the city in the aftermath of the 1992 elections, when people were armed in order to drive UNITA supporters out of Luanda, just as had been the case in the transition to independence, although it is not clear to what extent committees as such were involved in these events. See A. Malaquias, *Rebels and Robbers: Violence in Post-Colonial Angola* (Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007), p. 170; and K. Maier, *Promises and Lies* (London, Serif, 1996), chapter 8.
- 31 See, for example, C. Lopes, ‘Luanda, Cidade Informal? Estudo de Caso Sobre o Bairro Rocha Pinto’, in A.C. Gonçalves and R.M. Sobral Centeno (co-ordinators), *As Ciências Sociais nos Espaços de Língua Portuguesa: Balanços e Desafios, Vol. 1* (Porto, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2001); P. Robson and S. Roque, ‘Here in the City There is Nothing Left Over for Lending a Hand’: *In Search of Solidarity and Collective Action in Peri-Urban Areas in Angola* (Guelph, Development Workshop, 2001).

overall aim of modernising and formalising the country and its economy, financed largely through its rising oil production. Reconstruction efforts include the construction and rehabilitation of public works, ranging from roads, airports, schools and hospitals to public administration buildings, markets and houses. This has been accompanied by a liberal democratic discourse which stresses the importance of local participation and the adoption of several new laws on local government.³² Yet, despite their rapid growth both during and since the end of the war, neighbourhoods continue not to have any formal representation in the state administration. Luanda now has almost 7 million inhabitants; this led to the reorganisation of its administrative boundaries in 2011 in order to respond to its 'intense process of urban and territorial growth and expansion'.³³ The borders of the province of Luanda were expanded and the number of municipalities was reduced from nine to seven, which are subdivided into districts or communes. However, this has not included the recognition or organisation of neighbourhoods as administrative entities.

Nevertheless, several provincial governors of Luanda have met with residents' committees, calling for their reactivation as partners of the local state.³⁴ Municipal administrations, for their part, already reportedly play an active role in their management. In 2012, for instance, the municipal administration of Cazenga, Luanda's most populated municipality, was reported to have 'restructured' its residents' committees in order to 'confer a new dynamic to its governance and bring government closer to the people'.³⁵ According to research carried out by a local NGO, in 2010 Cazenga had 46 established residents' committees.³⁶

The gap between law and practice reveals a deep-seated schism between central and local government, which Bierschenk, in his study of West African public services, calls the 'double bind'. This reflects a situation in which low-level or 'interface bureaucrats' adopt practical norms in the face of official rules and regulations that are ill adapted to reality.³⁷ Lindell describes the multiple sites of governance that may emerge as a result in the context of Maputo, where, despite 'extensive informalisation' and 'democratic transition', the local state 'often continues to exercise considerable influence'.³⁸

Yet, although the revival of residents' committees by local administrations in Luanda, in the absence of their recognition by the central government, seems to illustrate a certain degree

32 The law that currently regulates 'the organisation and functioning of the organs of the local administration' is *Diário da República*, I Series – No. 142, Law 17/10 of 29 July 2010.

33 *Diário da República*, I Series – No. 168, Law 29/11 of 1 September 2011, preamble.

34 See, for example, Portal Angop, *Governador de Luanda Defende Articulação Entre Administrações e Comissões de Moradores* (14 October 2005), available at http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/pt_pt/noticias/sociedade/2005/9/41/Governador-Luanda-defende-articulacao-entre-administracoes-comissoes-moradores,66439ad3-469b-4103-9e09-fc69651c4e74.html, retrieved 28 May 2014; Portal Angop, *Presidente de Luanda Defende Reactivação de Comissões de Moradores* (25 April 2012), available at http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/pt_pt/noticias/sociedade/2012/3/17/Presidente-Luanda-defende-reactivacao-comissoes-moradores,7dae944d-6222-4e4d-bb17-d53cd2eab3bc.html, retrieved 28 May 2014.

35 Portal Angop, *Administração do Cazenga Reestrutura Comissões de Moradores* (11 October 2012), available at http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/pt_pt/noticias/sociedade/2012/9/41/Administracao-Cazenga-reestrutura-comissoes-moradores,e0a69579-1e5b-4546-92d7-4bd377384cf1.html, retrieved 28 May 2014.

36 Development Workshop (hereafter DW), 'Perfil Municipal do Cazenga 2010' (unpublished report, Luanda, Development Workshop, 2010). There are no official data available on the total number of established residents' committees in the city, but studies of Luanda that include areas in the inner city such as Maianga indicate that residents' committees are also operational there. See, for example, N. Pestana, 'Os Novos Espaços de Participação em Angola', in Y-A. Fauré and C. Udelsmann Rodrigues (eds), *Descentralização e Desenvolvimento Local em Angola e Moçambique: Processos, Terrenos e Atores* (Coimbra, Almedina, 2012), pp. 181–200.

37 T. Bierschenk, 'Sedimentation, Fragmentation and Normative Double-Binds in (West) African Public Services', in Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (eds), *States at Work*, p. 239.

38 I. Lindell, 'The Multiple Sites of Urban Governance: Insights From an African City', *Urban Studies*, 45, 9 (2008), p. 1883.

of autonomy on their part, rather than representing a defiance or alternative to central government rule, this ultimately serves to extend and preserve its power. The following section looks at the history and current workings of residents' committees in Zango to show how this works on a daily basis.

Residents' Committees in Zango: History Continued?

Before the start of construction of the housing project in the early 2000s, Zango was an area largely inhabited by subsistence farmers, about 20–30 kilometres south-east of Luanda's city centre, in the municipality of Viana. Mr Paulino describes how, when he arrived in Luanda from the province, 'everything was *mata* (bush)'. As people arrived from different parts of the country, small communities were founded and settled in the area. Then, 'on 23 October [1982], we were taken from the bush by the government. We were considered UNITA people and we had to stay concentrated close to the road'.³⁹

In 1980 it had been established that each neighbourhood in all of Luanda's nine municipalities was to have a People's Committee, which was to function as the neighbourhood's headquarters.⁴⁰ Neighbourhoods in the main cities of the country in turn were attributed the administrative statute of commune, to be headed by a nominated commissioner (thereby ruling out local elections), who would have the same statute as a communal commissioner and direct all political-administrative, economic and social activities of the area.⁴¹

Mr Paulino was subsequently appointed 'co-ordinator' of the Popular Committee of his *bairro*. As per a decree promulgated in 1982, his responsibilities included the following:

- a) maintain the connection between the municipal commissioner and the population, working together with the structures of the Party in the mobilisation of the residents for political, economic and social tasks of interest for the *Bairro*;
- b) explain and defend the political line of the MPLA–Workers' Party, working towards its practical realisation together with the residents;
- c) incentivise residents to maintain hygiene, cleanliness, order and security in all areas;
- d) record the complaints, anxieties and concerns of the residents, taking initiatives towards an appropriate solution;
- e) keep the census of the residents of the *Bairro* updated, receiving for this purpose, from the civil registries, statistical maps of the registrations of births, deaths, marriages, etc.;
- f) record the movement of residents in the *Bairro*;
- g) perform other tasks that may be delegated from above.⁴²

39 Interview with Mr Paulino, Zango, 18 September 2012. This resonates closely with the work of Pearce, who shows how space during the civil war became intertwined with political identity. See Pearce, 'Control, Politics and Identity'.

40 See Diário da República, I Series – No. 270, Decree 187/80 of 15 November 1980; Diário da República, I Series – No. 224, Executive decree 36/81 of 23 September 1981.

41 Diário da República, I Series – No. 80, Resolution 7/82 of 6 April 1982. The organisation, functioning and attributions of the secretariats (which form the technical and administrative support structures) of the municipal and communal commissioners and the People's Committees are regulated in Diário da República, I Series – No. 75, Executive decree 30/83 of 31 March 1983.

42 Resolution 7/82 of 6 April 1982, article 3. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the continuities with the colonial legislation on traditional authorities, which lists similar tasks, such as the keeping of order and security, the registration of death, birth and marriage, and the movement of people in and out of the settlements under their control. See Decree Law 23: 229 of 15 November 1933, article 99.

In line with this decree, another long-term co-ordinator of a farmer's settlement in Zango explained his responsibilities as follows:

control of the population, who is living in the area, who is coming and going, control of the midwives, co-ordination of cleaning of the *bairro* and use of the latrines, control of crime, meetings with the population to discuss the concerns of living [*preocupações de vivência*] [...] sharing the minutes of these meetings with the communal administration twice a month.⁴³

For most of the 1980s and 1990s, close relationships existed between the committee leaderships, which expanded over time to include more than 20 co-ordinators, and the local communal and municipal administration, which at all times were informed of what was going on in the communities. While the population grew steadily over the years, with people arriving from all parts of the country, Zango remained predominantly a farming area, without any public schools, hospitals or services such as water and electricity.

This changed in 2001, when Provincial Government officials contacted one of Zango's committee co-ordinators to announce the construction of houses in the area, asking him to show them where it was best for them to start building.⁴⁴ The housing project was to accommodate residents from Boavista, a densely populated *musseque* (slum) located close to the port, in the municipality of Sambizanga, on the other side of the city, that was to be demolished. With the relocation of over 4,000 families from Boavista came leaders of the *Comissão de Moradores Unidos do Bairro Boavista* (Committee of the United Residents of Boavista), which had been created by Boavista residents to provide a channel for negotiation with the authorities after the first houses in Boavista had been registered for demolition.⁴⁵

Yet, upon relocation in Zango, the houses that had been promised had not yet been built, and people were instead provided with tents, often shared with other families. Consequently, local press reports portray Zango in those days as a heavily politicised area in which the 'displaced' were forbidden to speak about the conditions of the resettlement area or to receive donations from opposition parties.⁴⁶ After the first houses started to be delivered in Zango in November 2002, the Boavista residents' committee complained that most of the beneficiaries were not residents from Boavista but family members of officials of the municipal administration of Sambizanga and the provincial delegation of the Ministry of Social Assistance and Reinsertion (MINARS), which had overseen the registration of Boavista residents; this sparked unrest among the former residents of Boavista. Complaints about the irregularities were brought to court and the National Assembly in January 2003, but this did not speed up the construction of houses.⁴⁷ In June 2003, former Boavista residents reportedly occupied about 300 unfinished houses and burned down 121 tents.⁴⁸ They were forcibly evicted by the police the next day, while the leader of the Boavista residents' committee was arrested and accused of organising the burning of the tents.⁴⁹

The crackdown on the Boavista committee is indicative of the importance that the committee in fact had. Organised from within the community, the committee was able to monitor the state's distribution of the houses, voice its concerns, and even mobilise against

43 Interview with Mr Bernardo, Zango, 6 December 2011.

44 Interview with Mr Bento, Zango, 29 November 2011.

45 Amnesty International, *Angola: Mass Forced Evictions in Luanda – a Call for a Human Rights-Based Housing Policy* (AI Index: AFR 12/007/2003), pp. 8–9.

46 Centro de Documentação Development Workshop (hereafter CEDOC), *Deslocados de Luanda, impedidos de realizar vigílias no Zango* (1 September 2001); Agora, *Boavista – ex-moradores pensam em abandonar o campo Nzango* (1 September 2001); Agora, *Zangu-Calumbo e Terra Nova: Um exemplo das injustiças do poder* (12 January 2002).

47 Folha 8, *Batota na distribuição das casas no Zango* (21 December 2002).

48 CEDOC, *Habitantes do Zango invadem casas do projecto* (10 June 2003); CEDOC, *GPL quer normalidade da situação no Zango* (11 June 2003).

49 Amnesty International, *Angola: Mass Forced Evictions in Luanda*.

perceived irregularities. After the release of the Boavista committee leader, rumours started circulating that he had started to collaborate with the authorities and was involved in the growing illegal sale of houses in Zango, leading to another arrest, this time followed by a prison sentence.⁵⁰ Hereafter, a new residents' committee was formed by the municipal administration of Viana, which came to be led by a MINARS official from Sambizanga.

Between 2005 and 2011, the president of the newly formed committee came to represent the residents of the entire area of Zango, which expanded rapidly as thousands of houses were built by the government. The committees that represented the original farmer communities, most of whom were not accommodated in the housing project, continued to be recognised by the local administration, and went on to be referred as 'sub-committees'.⁵¹ Due to the growth of the project, in 2011 the number of committees representing inhabitants of the government-built houses was expanded in a process referred to by the municipal administration as one of 'decentralisation'.⁵²

By means of this decentralisation, each sector in Zango – numbered 1, 2, 3A, 3B and 4 – was to have its own committee, and elections for the leaderships of these committees were held accordingly. These were organised by the municipal administration (which allowed it to control candidates for the leadership of the committees), with block representatives voting on behalf of residents (rather than residents voting directly). The inaugural ceremony for committee presidents was held at the communal administration. Administrative aids, such as identification badges and stamps, were also issued by the communal administration. In addition, a house in Zango 1 was allocated to function as an office for the residents' committees, while a new office was built in order to accommodate the leadership of the residents' committee of Viana town. Lastly, a municipal administration official was appointed in order to liaise with all committees and the municipality's traditional authorities.⁵³

All committees were to operate according to a new regulation adopted by the municipal administration of Viana. This document largely follows the regulation that was adopted in 1993 by the Provincial Government of Luanda, a little booklet to which numerous committee presidents made reference when interviewed. The 2011 regulation for Viana further outlines, among other things, the objectives, organisation, attributions, mandate and the relation between the committees and the municipal administration 'until its substitution with a legal or normative instrument established by the Central Executive or the Province of Luanda'.⁵⁴

As per the regulation, residents' committees in Zango are now seen as 'strategic partners of the local state administration' from whom they receive 'methodological, administrative and instructive support'.⁵⁵ In this capacity, they are expected to be involved in 'local conflict resolution' and to 'promote activities related to hygiene, communal property maintenance, cultural, sporting, recreational and any other activities that contribute to the well-being of the community'.⁵⁶

While party membership is no longer officially a requirement to enter government, all of the presidents I met, from the old People's Committee co-ordinators to the current presidents of the committees, had a history of activism in the MPLA: from being a member of Agostinho

50 Agora, *Ex-moradores da Boavista vendem casas no Zango* (26 February 2005). According to current residents of Zango, he recently died in prison.

51 Interview with Mr Lito, Zango, 23 November 2011.

52 Interview with official municipal administration, Viana, 8 December 2011.

53 The municipality of Viana has two *sobas* (chiefs) who are recognised by the authorities: one in Viana town and one in Kassaka, in the *comuna* of Calumbo.

54 Government of the Republic of Angola (hereafter GoA), 'Regime Jurídico Provisório das Comissões de Moradores' (unpublished document, Luanda, Municipal Administration of Viana, 2011), article 1.

55 *Ibid.*, article 10, paragraph 1.

56 *Ibid.*, article 3.

Neto Pioneer Organisation (OPA – MPLA's national children's organisation), at independence, to having served in the MPLA's People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) during the war. Most of them also fulfilled a position in local party structures, or had done so in the past. Similarly, local party officials, such as the current first secretary of the MPLA's Special Committee for Zango, which was created before the first post-war elections of 2008, would often have a history in their local residents' committee.

Providing the committees with all the ceremonial and bureaucratic state paraphernalia and mobilising their party identity has proven to be a powerful tool for creating a sense of loyalty and commitment. All the presidents I met spoke with detailed knowledge and a sense of responsibility about their work, wearing their badges with a stamp of the communal administration, identifying them as representatives of the community, with pride, when they were, as they put it, 'on duty'. One president took great care to keep the picture taken after his inauguration at the communal administration, in which he solemnly featured in a suit. In the words of one president: 'we are people of the government, we are people of the party, we are people of the army, we are everything, that's why we were elected'.⁵⁷ The committee presidents also conveyed a strong conviction that loyalty is a sign of trustworthiness. Thus, 'a party in power will want trustworthy people in the rearguard'.⁵⁸

In a context where the ruling party continues to represent the main avenue for social mobility⁵⁹, the expectation that political loyalty and commitment will eventually translate into benefits has even contributed to the acceptance by the presidents of residents' committees, as was the case under one-party rule, to carry out their work without any direct financial compensation, a situation often referred to as working *por amor à camiseta* (literally, 'for the love of the shirt').⁶⁰ As one committee president notes, 'we have to work hard to show them [that we are capable] [...] I don't make anything, but if I stop working, things will go bad (*as coisas estragam*). I always have to work, one cannot be a troublemaker'.⁶¹ Another president concludes: 'In the end, if you work hard, you will be rewarded'.⁶²

Although all presidents would invoke similar discourses with regard to their relation to the state, presidents representing the more recently created committees would acknowledge that they were seen by residents as 'collaborators' of the state, while presidents of the older sub-committees seemed to enjoy more recognition and legitimacy as long-standing community leaders. In the words of one resident:

I cannot choose someone I don't know. [...] A new person cannot step in all of a sudden, we need to know who this person is, where he is from, is he a good person, a thief or a traitor. [...] The co-ordinator is a farmer [just like us], he knows who lives here without having to look it up in a book, otherwise people can just infiltrate into the *bairro*. [...] Each *bairro* needs to be able to tell the story of its people, a new co-ordinator, a new resident won't be able to tell the history.⁶³

Yet, while degrees of community recognition may vary, over the years the creation of a network of committees in Zango loyal to the local administration, which reaches down to the street level through block representatives, has suppressed the emergence of any other self-

57 Interview with Mr José, Zango, 19 November 2011.

58 Interview with Mr Julio, Zango, 30 November 2011.

59 See also J. Sumich, 'The Party and the State: Frelimo and Social Stratification in Post-Socialist Mozambique', *Development and Change*, 41, 4 (2010), pp. 679–98.

60 In Brazil, this expression is used when soccer players play for a team without being paid; a player then literally plays for the love of the shirt of the team. In a business or working context, the expression is used when someone works for the love of an ideal or out of passion or dedication.

61 Interview with Mr Rufino, Zango, 15 September 2012.

62 Interview with Mr Bernardo, Zango, 20 September 2012.

63 Field notes, Terra Nova II, Zango, 18 September 2012.

organised committees, and thereby possible challenges to the housing allocation process. However, a look at local systems of land and property management in Zango shows how residents' committees not only extend but also limit the state's power.

Conflicting Claims and Interests

One of the most significant mandates given to the presidents of residents' committees is that, as extensions of the local administration, they are allowed to issue a range of documents, such as proofs of residency (*certificados de residência*).⁶⁴ In the absence of a system in which land and property tenure is regulated, such documents have come to function as informal title deeds. Research confirms how informal mechanisms to occupy land have become the most common form of land occupation in Luanda, and how local leadership structures, such as residents' committees and traditional authorities, have come to play a role in recognising such claims to ownership.⁶⁵

While post-war legislation on land and territorial administration does not recognise these claims, in practice the government has few other instruments to exercise control over local land and property markets. The involvement of multiple actors in the local management of land and property in Zango has resulted in the emergence of a large informal housing market. According to unofficial estimates, about 50 to 70 per cent of the current residents in Zango 1 and 2 are not the original people who were relocated from Boavista, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the same is the case in Zango 3 and 4.⁶⁶

Since houses in Zango are given by the government in return for houses that have been registered for demolition, those with the authority to register or validate the registration of land or houses for demolition have become important players in the housing allocation process.

One example of such players are *fiscais*, state officials who officially carry out monitoring, supervision or controlling duties on behalf of the government. This authority, however, may easily be misused for personal gain. The illegal sale or appropriation of houses by *fiscais* in Zango is widely known among residents, and denounced by central government officials, such as the head of the agency created by the presidency to resettle people to Zango, the Programme for the Relocation of the People (PRP), who has frequently made reference in the press to the role of state officials in the sale and letting of houses in Zango.⁶⁷ In a bid to counter the practices of *fiscais*, the agency responsible for managing parts of the Zango housing project at the level of provincial government, the Provincial Social Housing Programme (PHS), has resorted to working with leaders of the residents' committees with a view to monitoring various aspects of the housing allocation process.

For example, in Terra Nova II, where farmers still live in what is now an island of shacks lying between the state-built houses of Zango, the PHS requested the assistance of the president of a residents' committee representing the farmers in validating the government's

64 GoA, 'Regime Jurídico provisório das comissões de moradores', article 7.

65 DW and Centre for Environment and Human Settlements, *Terra. Reforma sobre a terra urbana em Angola no período pós-guerra: pesquisa, advocacia e políticas de desenvolvimento* (Luanda, Development Workshop, 2005), pp. 125–7. For similar findings in South Africa, Mozambique and Malawi, see, for example, M. Napier, S. Berrisford, C. Wanjiku Kihato, R. McGaffin and L. Royston, *Trading Places: Accessing Land in African Cities* (Somerset West, African Minds, 2013).

66 Interview with PHS official 1, Luanda, 8 December 2011.

67 See, for example, Portal Angop, *Programa de Realojamento Vai Apurar Situação de Venda de Residências do Zango* (5 December 2011), available at http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/pt_pt/noticias/sociedade/2011/11/49/Programa-realojamento-vai-apurar-situacao-venda-residencias-Zango,f2a5f7d7-84dd-4891-96f2-84b20332668a.html, retrieved 28 May 2014.

registration of shacks for demolition, and the subsequent compensation, as a way to exclude potential profiteers.⁶⁸ This has allowed some people whose houses were demolished (for instance, because they were absent at the time of registration and therefore not deemed eligible for compensation), to rebuild their houses with the approval of the president of the local committee, who could attest to their being long-standing residents of the area.

Similarly, residents' committees have also been mobilised in other areas targeted for demolition, such as 'Zango of the tents', inhabited largely by people waiting to be rehoused after being relocated to the area by the provincial government after seasonal tides hit the Island of Luanda (*Ilha de Luanda*) in 2009. When houses in Zango were finally ready for delivery in 2013, I observed the PHS working with residents' committees in order to, as a local official later put it, 'counter infiltrations' in the housing allocation process.⁶⁹

These examples show how the state's recognition of the committees may serve to compensate for the failure of its own *fiscais* to enforce the law. Yet, in doing so, it has opened up opportunities for residents' committees to get involved in the housing business, as the authority to recognise legitimate claims to ownership may also be used to recognise illegitimate claims. Indeed, various residents confirmed that committees in Zango have been involved in the concession or recognition of the occupation of plots of land as well as shacks, for which payment can be charged in the anticipation of a future demolition and subsequent compensation. Thus, depending on the area, a shack in Zango can be bought for up to US \$5,000, including 'documents', such as a proof of residency issued by the residents' committee, which is seen by residents as a valid proof of tenure.⁷⁰

Yet, as happened in the first years of the project in response to the perceived challenge represented by the Boavista residents' committee, there are indications that the local administration has attempted to curtail the power of the sub-committees. Recently, one sub-committee president, representing a community living in an area close to a water conduit, where land prices had been rising, was 'relieved of' his duties after decades of service, possibly to cut him out of the informal land market in that area. In a similar vein, the three residents' committee presidents of 'Zango of the tents', although elected under the auspices of the municipal administration, are not allowed to issue any type of documents, and have been offered land and construction material outside the tent area, which has weakened their ties to the community.

The recognition of claims to legitimacy and authority may, then, not only wax and wane between the community and the state, but also collide between different levels of the state, depending on the interests at stake. While the actions of government agencies such as the PHS may be seen as directed at ensuring a fairer housing allocation, the recognition and mobilisation of residents' committees for this purpose, outside the local administration's governance sphere, has led to efforts to curtail this power, making local power and authority the subject of constant contestation and re-negotiation.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to provide insight into the origins and daily workings of public authority in post-war Angola. Through an analysis of the history and current workings of residents' committees in Zango, I have shown how multiple sites, actors and practices can be seen to exist at the local level through which public authority is exercised. An examination of

68 Interview with Mr Paulino, Zango 18 September 2012.

69 Field notes, Zango of the tents, 20 May 2013; Interview with PHS official 2, Zango, 24 May 2013.

70 Field notes, Terra Nova II, Zango, 18 September 2012.

local land and property management in Zango reveals the conflicting claims and interests to which this has given rise, challenging dominant scholarly understandings of power in present-day Angola as being largely top-down and centralised.

Moreover, this authority is embedded in the country's history as a socialist, one-party state, and exercised through the mobilisation of institutional and discursive legacies from this era, rather than in a formal decentralisation of local governance structures. Although examples from other post-socialist countries show that the incorporation of residents' committees in the state administration may be used as a way to consolidate incumbent power at the local level, the Angolan central government allows residents' committees to function as state institutions, while not officially recognising them as such.

This reflects a more general strategy in managing local power. For instance, unlike residents' committees, traditional authorities have been put on the state's payroll in post-war years, and are currently recognised as one of Angola's pillars of local power through their seat in local consultative bodies of the state administration. However, the status of traditional authorities remains vague, and local councils remain unregulated, making them little accountable to the population and open to instrumentalisation by the state.⁷¹ Similarly, while municipal local government elections have been provided for by the constitution since 1992, they have been continually postponed, limiting the ability of opposition parties to prepare for these events.

The twilight existence of residents' committees in Angola as institutions that function inside the government but outside the law is then also a function of the twilight zone that is the country's 'democratic transition', which allows the government to control this space indirectly and informally, while officially employing a discourse of local democracy and participation. The post-war Angolan regime exists, then, by virtue of the incompleteness of its transition to democracy.

SYLVIA CROESE

*Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Stellenbosch University, 4th Floor, Arts and Social Sciences Building, Merriman Avenue, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
E-mail: scroese@sun.ac.za*

71 A. Orre, 'Entrenching the Party-State in the Multiparty Era: Opposition Parties, Traditional Authorities and New Councils of Local Representatives in Angola and Mozambique' (PhD thesis, University of Bergen, 2010). See also Pestana, 'Os Novos Espaços de Participação em Angola'.