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Urban Youth Activism and the Peace Process in Angola

Florindo U. Chivucute

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Abstract

This paper will look to analyze urban youth activism in Luanda, the capital city of Angola. The paper will look at the tactics that the Youth Movement (YM) are using in Luanda since 2011 in order to socially navigate and mobilize the masses and raise awareness about various political, social and economic problems that many are facing throughout the country. The waves of protests organized mainly by the youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), prompted Angolan youth to reconsider their role within a society by looking to more nonviolent strategies of resistance against the government. First, Movimento Revolucionário (the Revolutionary Movement) also known as Geração da Mudança (Generation of Change) was formed in 2011, in Luanda. Although there have been restrictions imposed by the government of Angola on traditional media such as national print and televised news which are controlled by government, Angolan youth have still found ways to get their messages across by employing the use of music such as hip-hop, social media such as twitter and facebook and DVDs with videos to raise awareness throughout the country. As such, the untold story of Angolan youth as agents of social, political and economic change is worth exploring to help us better understand the role of youth in this post-conflict country in southern Africa where the majority of its population is young.

Introduction

For decades, Angolan youth were recruited by both the Angolan's Armed Forces (FAA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), to fight during the civil war that lasted almost three decades. After the end of the 27-year civil war, more than 118 ex-combatants were demobilized and many young former combatants without any technical or academic skills were left to fend for themselves, (World Bank report, 2003). Despite the exceptionally high, rapid economic growth that Angola has experienced after the end of the civil war, the country is still facing high unemployment (in particular among youth), extreme poverty, lack of quality educational and health care services and environmental degradation. As Nirit Ben-Ari (who is a writer and social media editor at United Nations) "Angola's economy grows, but what about the poor?," put it, "as major public infrastructure investments in energy and transport kick in, Angloa's growth is projected to reach 7.9% in 2014 and 8.8% in 2015. Yet, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that around 36% of Angolans live below the poverty line and one in every four people is unemployed" (The Africa Report, 2014). In 2011, a group of youth formed a YouthMovement (YM) in Luanda and started to mobilize Angolans and raise awareness about various political, social and economic problems that many people are facing throughout the country. Indeed, the rise of the YM in Luanda marked a new era for the civil society since Angola became independent in 1975.
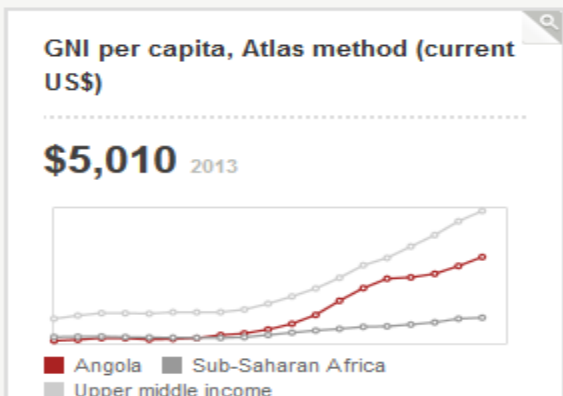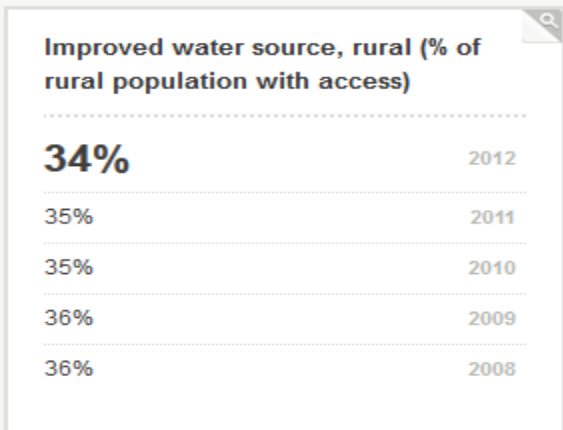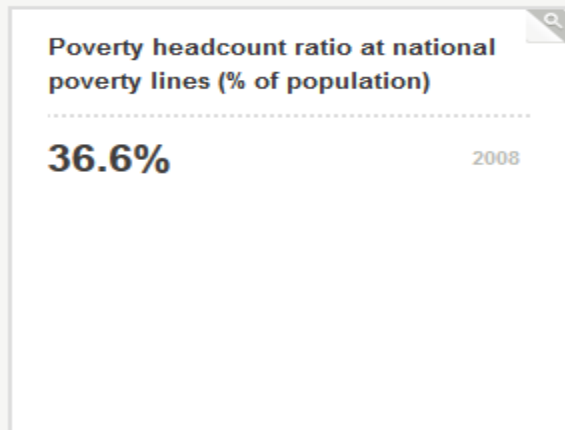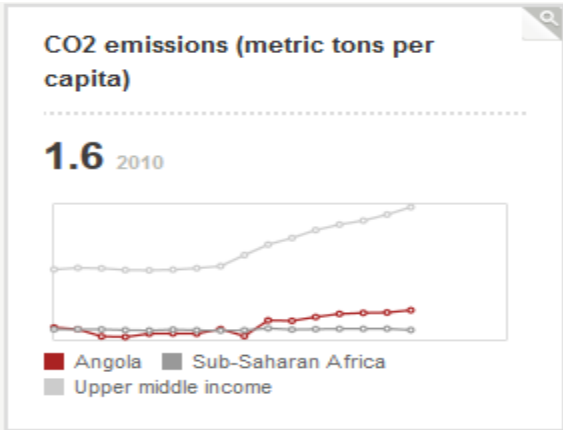
The aim of this paper is to help us understand the dynamics of urban youth activism in Luanda by examining the tactics that the Youth Movement (YM) are using in Luanda since 2011 in order to socially navigate and mobilize the masses and raise awareness about various political, social and economic problems that many are facing throughout the country. In order to explore these themes, I will examine the dynamics of social movement diffusion in Luanda, specifically why and how urban youth social movements choose their tactics and strategies to make their voices

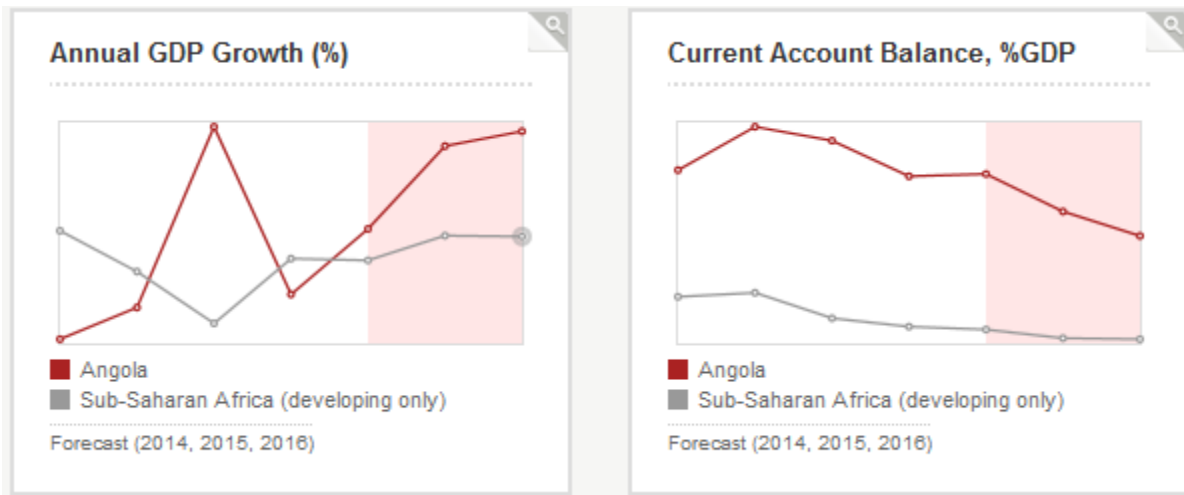heard. This paper will not examine all the social movements in Angola; rather it will focus only in Luanda as noted above. This paper will benefit from a multiple sources of data; articles, documents, videos and narrative account of participant's history, will be analyzed. Before proceeding further, it is worth to take a moment and briefly examine Angola's history and it's main current social and political issues to help us fully understand the current political, economic and social equation.

Angola political and social Background

Angola achieved its independence in 1975 after a protracted liberation war against Portugal. After independence, Angola embraced communism and was the scene of fighting between the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), first led by Agostinho Neto and then by Jose Eduardo dos Santos, and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi. The civil war claimed more than one million lives (World Bank report, 2003). An estimated four million were displaced and hundreds of thousands of Angolans flee to neighboring countries. After a 27- year civil war that ended in 2002, Angola is still facing enormous challenges as it aims to meet its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As noted above, despite the exceptionally high, rapid economic growth that Angola has experienced after the end of the civil war, the country is still facing high unemployment (in particular among youth, women and former combatants), extreme poverty, lack of quality educational and health care services and environmental degradation. After the civil war in Angola, more than 85,000 National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and 33,000 Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) ex-combatants were demobilized, according to the 2003 World Bank report. Many among the former combatants are young without any technical or academic skills. Angola is the second largest producer of oil and the third producer of diamond in sub-Saharan Africa, but it has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0,526, (HDI 2013). And it is among the lowest

human development countries (ranked 149 out of 187 countries) (HDI, 2013). In addition, female adult mortality remains high (331 per 1000) and adult male mortality rates is also extremely high (383 per 1000). (HDI, 2013) And the expenditure on education is extremely low (3.48% of GDP), (HDI, 2013.

School enrollment, primary (% gross)

140% 2011

■ Angola ■ Sub-Saharan Africa
■ Upper middle income

CO2 emissions (metric tons per capita)

1.6 2010

■ Angola ■ Sub-Saharan Africa
■ Upper middle income

Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population)

36.6% 2008

Improved water source, rural (% of rural population with access)

34%	2012
35%	2011
35%	2010
36%	2009
36%	2008

Life expectancy at birth, total (years)

51 2012

■ Angola ■ Sub-Saharan Africa
■ Upper middle income

GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US$)

$5,010 2013

■ Angola ■ Sub-Saharan Africa
■ Upper middle income

Source of figure 1- 8: World Bank

The tables above shows the Angolan Human Development Index (HDI) and environmental data, namely, school enrollment, CO2 emissions, poverty headcount ration water access, life expectancy and economic growth.

Music as a tool for activism in Luanda

There are few, if any, spaces where young people can make their voices heard. As noted above, there have been restrictions imposed by the government of Angola on traditional media such as national print and televised news which are controlled by government. In order to voice their grievances against the government, young activists have to use their moral imagination and creativity in order to transcend the restrictions imposed by the government. It is important to note that some young activists are also musicians and they use music to communicate with Angolans and raise awareness about various social, political and economic issues that many are facing throughout the country. So music in Luanda is not just a tool for an entertainment, it is also a channel of communication and mobilization. And the use of music to raise awareness is not a

new phenomeno in Angola. As the author describes, "for Mbanza Hamza, a student and activist who soon hopes to record his own rap songs, music has been used by the youth 'to awaken people's consciousness' – just as it was used by the generation before them. Indeed, music played an important role in Angola during the protracted liberation war against Portugal. The only difference between the previous generation and the new generation is the music style. In the past, musicians used Angolan traditional style like Semba to voice their grievances against the colonial power (Portugal) and raise awareness about various social, political and economic issues in Angola. In contrary, today, many young activists are using "conscientious" hip hop and Kuduro as a tool to raise awareness. Of course, hip hop is not from Angola, rather it is from U.S. and Kuduro is from Angola, but it is mostly a style of music used by young people in Angola.

Usually, most young people like music and the youth in Luanda are not an exception. So both hip hop and kuduro are widely popular dance styles in Angola among the youth. For many young activists, a live show became an avenue to voice their grievances against the government and mobilize young people to participate in protest. For instance, a young activist and musician (Luaty Beirao), spoke out against the government during a live performance by "urging the crowd to attend an anti-government rally" (Manny Santiago: 4). This performance was a milestone in Angolan's political history and change forever how Angolans, in particular the youth, voice their grievances against the government. It is also important to state that after his live performance, Beirao and his family have been "persecuted, beaten and framed and arrested, (Manny Santiago: 4).


Production and distribution of the music

Most of the music recorded by young people, in particular, "conscientious" or revolutionary hip hop is conducted underground. Thus, the young activists produce and distribute their music in informal market because music that criticizes the government is not welcome in formal market.

As Ana de Sousa put it, "Strolling through the heaving, dusty Congolenses taxi stop in Luanda and clutching a handful of homemade CDs, rapper Dioniso Casimiro explains: 'this is one of the few ways left for us to distribute our music, especially when it's critical of social and political issues,'" (ibid: 2). Thus, the youth use taxi's drivers to publicize their music. Before proceeding further, it is important to take a moment and examine how this operation works. First, the youth use their own studios to record their music onto blank CDs and print the CDs themselves. Then, they promote their music by offering their work to taxi's drivers also known as "*candongueiros*". The drivers play their music while they travel around the city every day transporting thousands of Luandans. Many use also USB memory sticks to upload and download and distribute music throughout the city. It is equally important to note that although the young activists enjoy a wide distribution of their work, they do not make enough money out of the business, (Ana de Sousa: 3). It is equally important to note that although the young activists enjoy a wide distribution of their work, they do not make enough money out of the business, (Ana de Sousa: 3). As noted above, the use of music to raise awareness is not a new phenomenon in Angola. Indeed, music played an important role in Angola during the liberation war against Portugal. Of course, today the youth in Angola have more tools to make their voices heard in addition to the "revolutionary" hip hop and kuduro - social media such as twitter and facebook are also important tools to echo young people grievances against the government. This topic, the role of social media in urban youth activism in Luanda leads us to my next theme.

Social media and youth activism

The role of social media during the Arab Spring is well known. However, little is known about the use of social media in Luanda by the youth to socially navigate and mobilize the masses and raise awareness about various political, social and economic problems that many are facing throughout the country. The number of Internet and social media users are increasing in Angola, in particular among the youth in Luanda. According to internet usage statistics from the World Bank 2013 report, 19.1% of the population (out of 21. 47 million) in Angola have access to internet.
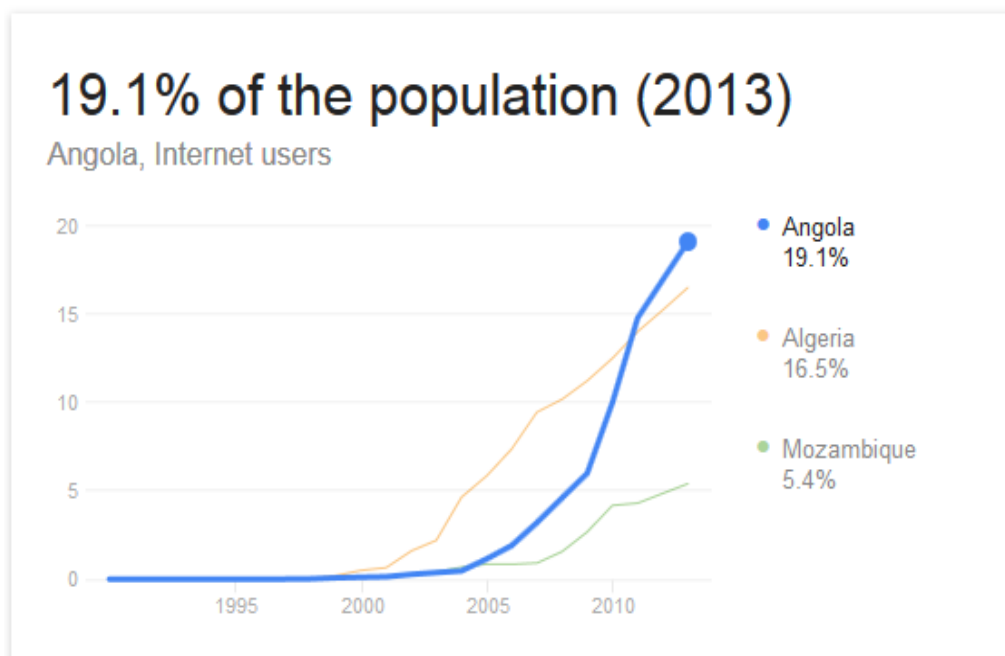
Source of figure 9: World Bank and Google

It is important to note that not all internet users are also social media users in Angola. And due to the lack of data I could not verify the number of social media users in Angola and/ or Luanda. Luanda is the capital city of Angola (as stated before) and has the largest number of habitants:

5.068 million and Huambo is the second with 1.098, according to the CIA World Factbook website. It is also important to note that in 2013, Luanda was considered the most expensive city in the world for expats for two consecutive years in three years, although "most of the Angolan capital's population lives in poverty on the outskirts of the city," (Claudio Silva: 2013). Despite the poverty level in Luanda, by far, Luanda has the largest users of internet in Angola. So similar to young people in the U.S., youth activists in Angola are using the "new media" to make their voices heard. Before proceeding further, it is important to define "new media." In this paper, I define new media as a form of mass communication in the digital world (i.e. Internet, blog, facebook, twitter, app, YouTubo, etc.). As noted above, although there have been restrictions imposed by the government of Angola on traditional media such as national print and televised news which are controlled by government, Angolan youth have still found ways to get their messages across by employing the use of music such as hip-hop, social media such as twitter and facebook and DVDs with videos to raise awareness throughout the country.
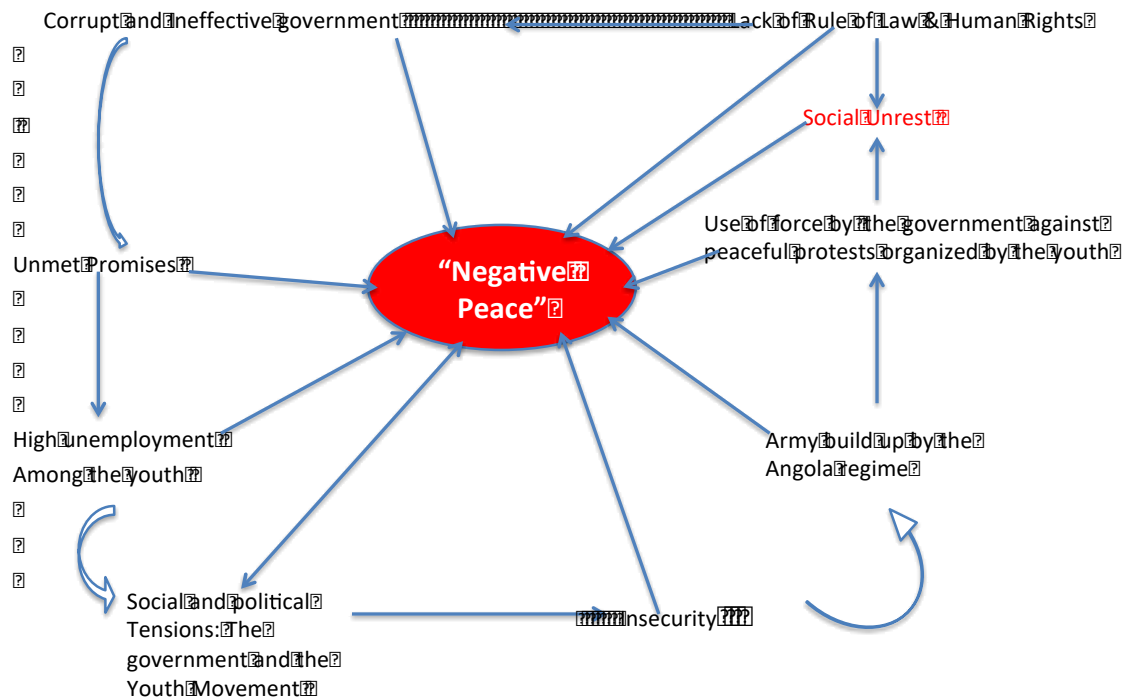

Angolan youth political agency

As the recent wave of protests in the Middle East and North Africa also known as the Arab Spring has demonstrated, once again, how youth can influent major invents within a society and around the world. History has proven that youth have the power to influence policies and make significant political and social change. For centuries, youth have been on the forefront of many political and social changes. Often, postcolonial youth have been perceived by their communities the media they as a source of problem rather than solutions. Clearly, this misrepresentation of youth's role within communities and the media is misleading. So unlike Nathaniel King argument that the youth of postcolonial Africa do not have political agency and are poorly equipped to make an effective opposition (2007: 14), the reality on the ground tells us otherwise.

In Luanda, as noted above, youth have been in the frontline of anti-corruption protests, demanding transparence, freedom of speech and good governance. Yet, in rare occasions, they were credited for their contributions for political and economic changes. Indeed, young people have been playing an important role in Luanda, in particular after the Arab Spring that began in 2011. As Rafael Marques de Morais and Susana A Moreira write, "that was before popular uprisings in North Africa showed that long-serving leaders could be removed without the country plunging into war, even in the absence of a clear leadership alternative. This gave hope to Angolans, particularly the young. Urbanites led by some of Angola's notorious protest rappers, such as Brigadeiro Mata Frakus, Carbono and Explosão Mental, used social media and text messaging to organise anti-government protests" (De Morais and Moreira: 2011). So youth activism and contributions for social and economic justice in Luanda is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. De Morais and Moreira also state that "after a first attempt in March, around 200 youngsters gathered in the capital, Luanda, in May to protest against the 32-year reign of dos Santos. Four months later, on 3 September, they returned to the streets wearing T-shirts saying "32 is too long", protesting against power and water shortages, corruption and poverty. In both instances the government reacted violently, making multiple arrests and physically abusing protesters and reporters" (ibid: 2011). So youth activism and contributions for social and economic justice in Luanda is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. To help us better understand the social, economic and political challenges that many are facing in Luanda, the following maps bellow were designed to show important variables within this conflict.
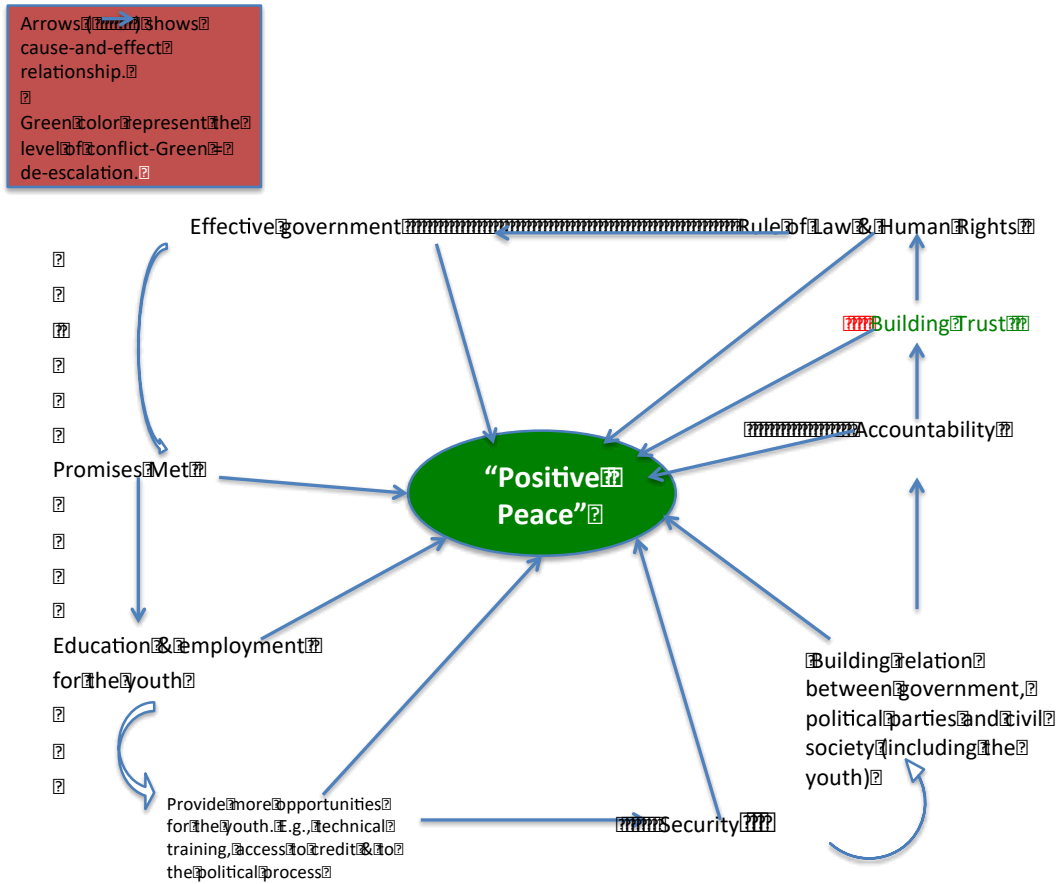
Conflict Maps

Arrows (→) shows cause-and-effect relationship.

Red color represent the level of conflict (e.g., Red = escalation).

Corrupt and Ineffective government

Lack of Rule of Law & Human Rights

Social Unrest

Unmet Promises

Use of force by the government against peaceful protests organized by the youth

"Negative Peace"

High unemployment Among the youth

Army build up by the Angola regime

Social and political Tensions: The government and the Youth Movement

Insecurity

Source of Map 1: Florindo Chivucute

To help illustrate the social, economic and political challenges that Angola is facing, the above map was designed to show important variables of this conflict and it is based on multiple sources of data, namely; articles, journals, books and reports. This map shows the parties that are involved in this conflict: The Angolan government and Youth Movement (YM). The map describes the relationship between different parties that are leading to a poor outcome of

reconstruction, in particular, high unemployment and poverty among the youth. And how it can

negatively influence the transition from formal peace to social peace in Angola.

Arrows (→) shows cause-and-effect relationship.

Green color represent the level of conflict-Green = de-escalation.

Effective government

Rule of Law & Human Rights

Building Trust

Accountability

Promises Met

"Positive Peace"

Education & employment for the youth

Building relation between government, political parties and civil society (including the youth)

Provide more opportunities for the youth. E.g., technical training, access to credit & to the political process

Security

Source of Map 2: Florindo Chivucute

Second, to help illustrate the social, economic and political challenges that Angola is facing, the

above map was designed to show important variables of this conflict and it is based on multiple

sources of data, namely; articles, journals, books and reports. This map (Map 2), illustrates the

variables recommended in order to cultivate a sustainable transition from formal peace to social

peace. In this paper, formal peace is defined as a short-term period when the parties involved in

armed conflict signed a peace agreement and different programs have been implemented to rebuild the country. Social peace, on the other hand, is a long-term process that leads to a sustainable peace. It focus more on the reconstruction process of the country by examining who is benefiting and who is left behind during the reconstruction process.

In short, young people are influencing reforms in Luanda by raising awareness throughout the country about various social, political and economic problems that many are facing. Unlike what the youth bulge theory suggest, young people chose non-violent approach to make their voices heard and influence policies although the majority of Angola population is young and unemployed.

Tactics chosen by youth activists in Luanda

Why young people in Luanda chose non-violent strategies (i.e., music and social media) to make their voices heard? As stated before, the some young activists (e.g., Luaty Beirao also known as Brigadeiro Mata Frakus, Dioniso Casimiro, also known as Carbono and Mbanza Hamza) are also musicians and their use "conscientious" or "revolutionary" hip hop as a tool to educate and mobilize de masses in Luanda. It is important to note that the young activists did not anticipate the impact of their music would have within society. As the author writes, "Luaty Beirao, one of the best known faces of the young activist movement and a prolific rapper says: 'we didn't start doing it to educate the masses, it was just a way of getting stuff off our chests,'" (Ana de Sousa: 2). The author goes further by stating that, "but what started as one of the only mediums for Angolans to voice their grievances against the government and president, has become an important tool for a growing activist movement with more political importance than the rappers

had ever imagined," (ibid: 2). In addition to the use of music as tool for communication and mobilization, many young people use also social media to amplify their voices. Of course, traditional media such as national print and televised news are not any option for the youth due to the restrictions imposed by the government of Angola.

To help us better understand why young people chose non-violent strategies, I am going to examine the Greed-Grievance theory. According to Schwartz, the greed-grievance theory is a "decision-making structure" which one has to decide whether to cooperate or continue the conflict (2010: 12). In other words, this theory looks at the "cost-benefit analysis" that individuals have to make before they make any decision. For instance, what they have to lose or win by choosing one action (e.g. deciding to cooperate with the peace process and choose non-violent tactics) over another action (e.g., choose a violent strategy). Of course, there is not a clear-cut and different variables can influence decision- making of those who are involved in the conflict. Also, the cost-benefit analysis that individuals have to make will depend mostly on success of the reconstruction and reintegration policies implemented by the local government. Of course, in some countries, the youth do not have this choice and joining a rebel group is the only option to survive and provide security and food for their families. (e.g., Sierra Leon, Liberia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, DRC). It is also important to note that many still remember the civil war that lasted almost three decades. As De Morais and Moreira put it, "until recently, Angolans have remained mostly silent in the face of Dos Santos's power-grabbing and the regime's egregious corruption. They had resigned themselves to the current state of affairs as they feared a return to the bloody civil wars were Dos Santos to be removed" (ibid). Although unemployment is significant among youth in Angola, many choose to cooperate with the peace process by embracing peaceful tactics to make their voices heard.

Youth bulge theory and the youth movement in Luanda

This approach emphasizes population structures (Schwartz 2010: 12). It examines how nations can be more vulnerable to conflict when its large number of population is young and without access to employment and education. Indeed, without economic opportunity, access to education and many other basic human rights to start a family or to have a stable life, many young people find themselves trapped. If they live in a society that has freedom of speech, assembly and is ruled by the rule of law, they will organize a peaceful protest to voice their concerns. Otherwise, they can become targets of rebel groups or gangs who can offer them employment so they can achieve their economic needs. As King suggests the main reason that "united youth" in Liberia and Sierra Leone civil war was the need to survive (2007: 13). Of course, the governments in both countries invested less in education, housing and health, instead, focused more on natural resources to fulfill their (politicians) expensive life style. Those who have political power, usually few, send their children to study abroad or to private school and care less about investing in public schools, hospitals and in the country's infrastructure. Most of the young people cannot afford to pay for private school nor to study abroad. Those who are able to enter public school after graduation cannot find work due high unemployment. For instance, many post-conflict nations like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola, the government expenditure on welfare programs, namely, education and health care services is insignificant in comparison with the number of its population. For instance, during the 2011/12 fiscal year in Angola, the government allocated more revenues on Department of Defense than education, health and housing. For a country that faced a 27-year civil war, it is difficult to understand why most of its revenues are allocated to weapons rather than investing more on education, health, road and housing. Research indicates that in Sierra Leon, Liberia and Angola, the government neglected the youth although the large

population in the army were young people. King illustrates how high unemployment was one of the major causes of the war in Sierra Leon (2007: 14). As he describes, the lack of employment, heath and political platforms to voice youth concerns, many young people see "the logic of violence" (Schwartz 2010: 12) as the most effective way to achieve their goals. The lack of peaceful avenues (freedom of speech and press) for youth to make their demands and engage the system leads us to my next topic: social navigation.

Music as a tool for activism

It is important to note that the young activists did not anticipate the impact of their music within society. As Ana de Sousa, "Angola: Music and Movement," writes, "Luaty Beirao, one of the best known faces of the young activist movement and a prolific rapper says: 'we didn't start doing it to educate the masses, it was just a way of getting stuff off our chests,'" (Ana de Sousa: 2). The author goes further by stating that, "but what started as one of the only mediums for Angolans to voice their grievances against the government and president, has become an important tool for a growing activist movement with more political importance than the rappers had ever imagined," (ibid: 2). Clearly, the impact of "conscientious" or "revolutionary" hip hop as a tool to educate and mobilize de masses is visible in Luanda. The young activists produce and distribute their music in informal market because music that criticizes the government is not welcome in formal market. As Ana de Sousa put it, "Strolling through the heaving, dusty Congolenses taxi stop in Luanda and clutching a handful of homemade CDs, rapper Dioniso Casimiro explains: 'this is one of the few ways left for us to distribute our music, especially when it's critical of social and political issues,'" (ibid: 2). Thus, the youth use taxi's

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Without a doubt, I am not attributing the rise of the Youth Movement in Luanda solely in music and/or social media. Nor it can be attributed only to the grievances within society. However, I argue that multiple variables played and continue o play a crucial role in the evolution social movement in Angola. In *Resource Mobilization and Social Movements*, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald argue that structural conditions or deprivation is not sufficient to explain the rise of social movements. As they put it, "recent work, however, has led us to doubt the assumption of a close link between preexisting discontent and generalized beliefs in the rise of social movements phenomena" (John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald 1977: 1214). Although the

authors' argument is mainly based upon the American case, it is safe to say that the same argument could be applied in Angola. For instance, as noted above, Angolans have been facing grievances or deprivation for decades yet a social movement did not emerge until 2011. But, take grievances out the new social movement equation could be misleading as well

The role of youth in a post-conflict

The role of youth in a post-conflict environment is mostly dictated by government programs and policies that are implemented during the reconstruction period. Young people will use the "cost-benefit" analysis to choose whether to continue using violence or cooperate with a peace process. In Angola where hundreds of thousands of young people joined the rebel groups during the civil war, the reintegration program did not fulfill youth's need: education, health, housing employment and so forth, as noted above on World Bank Reports. As noted on youth bulge theory, nations can be more vulnerable to conflict when its large number of population is young and without access to employment and education. Needless to say, the continued marginalization of youth undermines peace and may fuel conflict in Angola. As King describes, "yet it seems that with the gradual adoption and recognition of the youth as a social group, they often became mainly marginalized and when they were recognized, they were recognized as agents of the objectives of others, including politicians" (2007: 14). Indeed, the continue marginalization of the youth in Angola is a recipe for instability. In *Why Angola, Uganda and Somalia need to be on a 'revolution watch-list*, Christine Mungai who is a journalist from The Mail and Guardian Africa argues that "between 1970 and 2007, 80% of all new civil conflicts occurred in countries with a least 60% of the population younger than age 30" (Christine Mungai: 2014). The author

goes further by stating that "Angola is one of the few countries in Africa that is actually getting younger; in 2010, its median age was 16.0, the youngest that the UN Population Division has recorded so far" (ibid). This demographic shift in Angola cannot be ignored - It can be a source of economic prosperity or social unrest and conflict. As Mungai note, "A surge in youth population leads most nations in one of two directions: Economic boom or social bust. Policy makers have argued for the urgency to create structures to give opportunity to the rapidly growing numbers of young people, without which the region risks social unrest, conflict and instability" (ibid). In short, Angolan government cannot ignore the grievances raised by Angolan youth in Luanda.

Conclusion

In this paper I examined the dynamics of social movement diffusion and mobilization and how the Youth Movement in Luanda choose their tactics by looking at various articles and theories and youth Angolan activism in Luanda and their trajectories and moral imagination. Angola youth played and continue to play an important role on the transition from formal peace to social peace in Angola. I also argue that unlike some who claim that the youth of postcolonial Africa do not have political agency and are poorly equipped to make an effective opposition, the reality on the ground tells us otherwise. In Angola, youth have been in the frontline of anti-corruption protests, demanding transparence, freedom of speech and good governance.

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