Chapter 7

From "lands at the end of the earth" to "lands of progress"? Communication and mobility in South-Eastern Angola

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Abstract

During the colonial era the South-Eastern parts of Angola (Kuando Kubango) were called the "lands at the end of the earth". This marginalised region was at the frontline during the civil war in Angola and a large part of the population was forced to flee. Since the peace accords in 2002, this region has, however, become central in the development efforts of the Angolan state and authorities have re-baptised it "*the lands of progress"*.

Transport and communication form an important ingredient of these development efforts, mainly conceived of in terms of technology: road construction, railway infrastructure, radio, television and other mass media, and also mobile telephony and internet.

For the people in this region, mobility is not just a means to get from one place to the other, in many ways it forms the gist of life; the freedom to choose one's routes and whereabouts is highly valued in these societies. The war interfered with individuals' options in this respect and it is in this sense not surprising that peace is largely associated with the freedom to travel. In such a context of marginality and movement, interconnection is a very important issue. How do communications relate to distance? How do people make use of means of communications to stay in touch? In this, technology as such is not the issue, but how technology is related to the different forms of mobility people make use of, is.

During the colonial period and the civil war, the few educated people in the region, mostly not born locally, made use of letters and the radio as a means to convey private and public information. Nowadays, written correspondence has become a possibility for more people, but people prefer to use the mobile phone. Radio, television and other media were completely destroyed during the civil war and at present, radio and television still only have a limited reach, being restricted to the immediate environment of Menongue, Cuito Cuanavale and Mavinga.

New ICT are likewise still only used to a limited extent. Not many people can afford to buy regular credit for their cell phones, in many areas there is no electricity to upload the battery pack and the network is in any case restricted only to Menongue and Cuito Cuanavale, although people in the border zones make use of the providers of neighbouring countries. Concerning internet, generators produce the only electricity and in the capital Menongue just three places offer an internet service, at a slow and interrupted speed.

In which ways do people communicate then? This paper explores the changing processes of communication and interconnection in this marginalised area of Africa.

**Keywords:** South-East Angola, war, communication technologies, mobility

PART I. A history of mobility in South-Eastern Angola

Introduction

In this paper we will discuss communication and mobility in South-East Angola. "The South-East" roughly coincides with the province of Kuando Kubango, although we prefer the term "South-East" as the southern parts of the Moxico province form part of this common cultural area (see Maps 7.1 and 7.2). Our aim is to show how historical patterns of mobility changed over time and what limited means to communicate were and are available in this region. Hitherto, hardly anything has been published on this region and as our study has only just begun, the results can only be regarded as preliminary. South-Eastern Angola has throughout its history been a marginalised region with few services and an extremely limited infrastructure; and as it was at the frontline during the wars in Angola, even these were destroyed or collapsed for lack of maintenance and a large part of the population was forced to flee. Since the peace accords in 2002, this region has, however, become central in the development efforts of the Angolan state and authorities have re-baptised it *"the lands of progress".* Are these development efforts related to new communication technologies and if so, in what ways?

Map 7.1. Map of Angola

Map 7.2. Map of South-East Angola
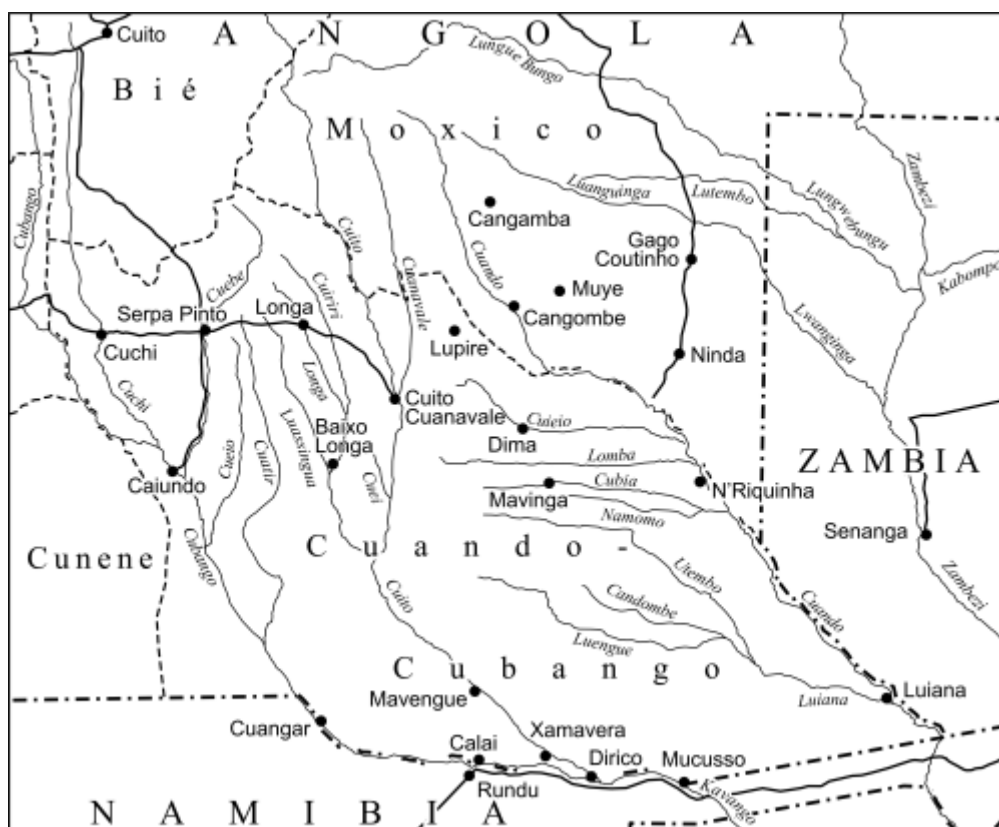
Cartography: Monika Feinen.

Marginality

The South-East of Angola is a land of sand and rivers. In the rainy season the rivers are filled with water, in the dry season these may turn into river beds without water. The Kuando and the Kubango form the borders of the province and they always have water. Also in the western parts of the area, for example Menongue, the capital of the province, there is quite a lot of water during the year. More to the east and the South it is drier.

This region was called "the lands at the end of the earth", by Portuguese colonials and regarded as one of the most remote areas of the country. While the Portuguese had begun to colonize the coast of Angola as early as the 15th century, the South-East never really became colonised: colonial control remained nominal. Some parts of this region were even exempted from taxation throughout the colonial era, because the costs to collect them were higher than the revenues. A few administrative posts were

built, called *mbongi* (town); the main town was then called Serpa Pinto, after independence re-baptised Menongue. During colonial rule and administration, road construction, education, health services, and other activities and facilities in the region were extremely limited.

The South-East also remained a land "without missionaries": quite exceptional for 20th century Africa. Not even the Bible was translated in Ngangela before the 1960s, at a time when it was the most translated book all over the world. There were no missionary schools and, as indicated, state schools were few and far between. This meant, as a consequence, that no local educated elite developed. No churches were built, no catechists trained, no Christian communities flourished, unlike in so many other parts of Africa.

After independence a civil war started, so educational facilities still did not improve, thus, the educated elite currently present in South-East Angola were either born in another region of Angola, or were educated abroad, mostly in Zambia, Namibia, or South-Africa.

Dwelling-in-travel

Mobility plays an important role in this region. An example is formed by the very question: "Where are you from?" In Ngangela (Ngangela being the language spoken in most of South-East Angola), this question will be translated with the word: "Ndonga?", meaning "river?". The answer to this question will be formed by one of the rivers in the region. So a person may answer: Longa, or Quiriri or Quelei, etc. This example shows that in South East Angola, home and origin are not conceived of as one fixed, particular place, but origin is regarded as fluid, moving, as connecting various places, like a river does.

In the region villages were moved from one place to the other, the agricultural form of slash-and-burn also gave rise to a high incidence of mobility, people visited relatives or

went to live with them for shorter or longer periods, girls moved upon marriage, etc. Travelling is in many ways crucial for social existence: the idea to have one fixed abode is rather foreign to the people of South East Angola. "Dwelling-in-travel", a concept coined by James Clifford (1997: 2), seems very apt to describe the way of life in this vast area. For the people in this region, mobility is not just a means to get from one place to the other, in many ways it forms the gist of life, and the freedom to choose one's routes and whereabouts is highly valued.

Mobility in itself does not need to be explained: people often moved not because they *had* to, but because they *wanted* to. Of course, in some cases people fled from war, disease, famine or slave-raids, but mobility could equally come in the form of visits to relatives and friends.

In pre-colonial times, people relied on footpaths and rivers to make their way. This changed to some extent only during the colonial epoch. Footpaths and rivers continued to remain important, but over this a limited and rudimentary colonial network of roads was constructed that connected the administrative centres. This imperial grid was mainly used by colonial officials but also occasionally by local people, especially in their interaction with the colonial state and economy.

As explained, the South-East of Angola was considered a marginalised area: politically, economically, socially the region was seen as unimportant and backward. Often it was also considered "isolated"; yet as a matter of fact marginalisation and isolation were more opposites. Many people from the region travelled widely in search of work and food, not only within the region, or within Angola, but also to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), South-West Africa (Namibia), and South-Africa. Portuguese was not widely spoken in the region; if a European tongue was known at all it was rather English or Afrikaans.

Marginality and the war

The war interfered with the historical patterns of mobility. In the South-East of Angola war started in 1966 when guerrillas from the UNITA and MPLA movements entered the region from Zambia to fight against Portuguese rule. In 1974 the nationalist war ended and in 1975 Angola became independent, but civil war had already started then. The civil war lasted with some interruptions until 2002, when long-time UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi was killed in combat.

This marginalised region was at the frontline during the civil war in Angola. UNITA's leader Savimbi established his headquarters in Jamba, a hamlet in the far South-East while Menongue remained in the hands of the government army of the MPLA throughout and became a military centre. It was in this region that the famous Battle of Cuito Cuanavale (1988) was fought. MPLA army officials could at times see the bombs exploding a few kilometres away from their desk and at the airport incoming troops were greeted with a placard saying: *há entrada, mas não há saída* (one can enter, but there is no exit). Death rates among troops were high and the population suffered under the violence and hunger. UNITA troops regularly neared the town and civilians tilling small fields at the edge of town ran the risk of being kidnapped or killed by the UNITA.

Although this area was crucial during the war, it has received little attention internationally; its marginality has continued and it remains a little known area. A major indication of this is the scarcity of scholarly literature on the region as very little research has been carried out in this area. The war certainly has to do with this: it was well-nigh impossible to carry out fieldwork given the violent circumstances.

The war and (im)mobility

During the war for independence (1961-1974) the patterns of mobility were disrupted. Firstly, a huge number of people were obliged to move. Because of the violence, they

were forced to flee, either over international borders or to the relative safety of the towns. Furthermore, many villagers were taken captive, captured by Portuguese troops (and taken to "town") or by the MPLA guerrillas (and taken to the "bush"). After independence: these patterns of force in the sphere of (im)mobility continued: MPLA troops caught civilians to take them to "town", while UNITA guerrillas would capture people and take them to the "bush".

These forms of forced mobility were much resented by the population. Forced immobility was equally resented; people were not allowed to move where they wanted. Once captured by the Portuguese or later the MPLA, they *had* to stay in town. Once captured by the MPLA, or later the UNITA, they *had* to stay in the bush. Many relatives had no contact with each other during the war, as visits and even exchanging messages became impossible.

These remarks show how difficult it was to stay in the region. Flight, however, was not easy. In Namibia and Zambia many Angolans lived as illegal immigrants, without papers or documents, and hence without work permits, without access to land, education, social security, etc. Others ended up in refugee camps, where there were often few possibilities for self-realisation in flexible, creative ways and where they might provoke the jealousy of the local population, as certain facilities were provided to refugees that local people had to do without. Relations between host and refugee population was in general not very easy and Angolan refugees were not always accepted in their country of exile. Despite long-time interaction across the borders, the host population feared that the Angolan immigrants would "bring violence into the country". This played a role particularly in Namibia, as the country was still under South African rule and SADF (South African Defence Force) troops already gave rise to much instability in the country. In Zambia, many refugees depended on the assistance of relatives who had already migrated to Zambia at an earlier stage (usually to work in the

mines) and relations with the "owners of the land" (the Zambian population) were sometimes problematic.

Exile was of course crucial in the course of peoples' lives. Children were born and went to school in exile; despite the problems, people established relations with the host population, with fellow refugees, etc. Some Angolans, especially women, married local residents.

While some people fled to neighbouring countries, some others moved to not-yet affected areas inside Angolan territory, and became Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). Staying within the borders of Angola entailed risks. As soon as boys became young men they were obliged to enrol in the army. Some of these young men tried to turn the tide by attempting to obtain a state bursary so they could study abroad. Many, in any case travelled a lot, as this example shows:

> *I was born in Cuchi, I studied in Cuba and the USSR, I worked in the Province of Namibe in the army and then, after the discharge of 1992, I started working in Menongue. It was very easy to find a job here, as public servants preferred to be dismissed rather than working in Kuando Kubango. A lot of them couldn't withstand the violent atmosphere.*

This refers to a rather exceptional case of a local young man who received a higher education abroad and then returned to the South-East to work as a state official, but moving from one place to another for reasons related to the war, to education, to work, etc. was commonplace for many people. Obviously these movements also led to new networks of interaction, new contacts, and new links between people in different places. Young men from the Angolan highlands might run the additional risk of being captured by UNITA troops and forcibly taken all the way to the South-East to be enrolled in the UNITA forces.

To sum up, it is clear that patterns of mobility and immobility changed during the war. Men and women were forcibly moved, and then forcibly kept in one place, entire families had to flee, becoming IDPs or refugees, young men were forced to join one of the fighting parties or moved to foreign places in search of education. In general we can say that the patterns of movement became more enforced. This was what people resented: not so much mobility (or immobility) as such, but the lack of options, of the choice to move as they pleased and to stay as they pleased.

The land of progress

In 2002 the Angolan civil war came to an end, after uninterrupted violence since 1961. In 2009, seven years later, the peace is considered a very important occasion by the majority of the people and is commemorated with a public holiday. On this day people celebrate the peace dressing in white, and inviting foreigners, like co-author Silvia, to do the same and to join the Angolan population in the festivities organised for the occasion.

As we saw, the South-East of Angola was a marginalised region before and during the colonial era. This did not change during the war, rather to the contrary: the little infrastructure there was, was entirely destroyed and the population had to flee because of the violence. Since the peace accords in 2002, Kuando Kubango province has, however, become central in the development efforts of the Angolan state and authorities have re-baptised it "*the lands of progress".* So instead of "the lands at the end of the earth", Kuando Kubango province is now called "lands of progress" in official discourse.

Despite this new epithet, the South-East of Angola still remains one of the most impoverished regions of Angola; with next to no facilities in the spheres of education, health, transport, communication, etc. Travelling from Luanda to Menongue, one notices the stark differences in terms of poverty, transport, state facilities etc. Obviously

Menongue, as the capital of the province offers the greatest possibilities in all respects; further to the South-East facilities are even more limited. Still, as during the colonial era, some state officials in the region regard their stationing in Kuando Kubango as a kind of tropical Siberia: people like the Luandan clerk working at the DEFA (the Angolan immigration services) in Menongue who has a terrible desire to leave this place, his efforts to save money for at least visiting his relatives in Luanda falling short.

Such marginalized and poor areas are commonly associated with the provision of basic needs and not with new and "modern" communication technologies. And indeed, the few NGO's operating in Kuando Kubango are focusing, for example, on demining and providing agricultural services. All the same, in the areas of transport and communication, which we will be discussing below in more detail, the Angolan state is developing some activities in the region.

Post-war mobility

Since 2002 many people have returned to the South-East of Angola; IDPs from Luanda along with refugees who were resident in Namibia and Zambia. Many of them, however, still have relatives in these places and try to keep in contact with them. As indicated, the war interfered with historical patterns of mobility and as families were often divided between different spheres of influence, they could not always keep in touch. This fact resulted in some people looking for new ways of establishing social networks and interaction, beyond historical family ties. For some refugees, who arrived at a very young age in Namibia, "Angola" and the relatives living there have little practical meaning in their lives, as they grew up in a world without these ties. Although there is now peace in Angola, they do not feel inclined to go visit, let alone live there. For people who have memories of Angola, this is very different. Within one family one may encounter people with very different dispositions towards "Angola" and their relatives living in the South-East.

As we indicated, during the war many people, especially young men, from the highlands were marched to the South-East. Some of them stayed on and brought in other relatives and friends from Huambo or other places. So the entire kaleidoscope of settlement and population changed not only during, but also after the war. Obviously these changes were again not always easy to adapt to for the people involved. Returnees were regarded with mistrust by the people who had stayed during the war. Young educated returnees from Zambia and Namibia often became highly frustrated as their skills were not acknowledged in a Lusophone context. The new immigrants from the highlands were not accepted by all people who were born in the region.

The complex sets of networks, of relatives, of trading partners, of friends, etc, are extremely dear to the people: communities consist of people living at a distance from each other. As we saw, the war interfered with the options to move and/or to stay: people could no longer choose. It is in this sense not surprising that peace is largely associated with the freedom to travel and visit relatives:

> *To meet friends, to establish a family: this is peace.*
> [Interview in the internet point in Menongue, end of February, 2009]

During the war, families were spread out, without any possibility of receiving news from each other. Before the war, people had frequently moved, but now connections were cut and people lost contact against their will. One brother might be enrolled in the MPLA army, another in Unita, yet another might become a refugee in a European country, while the parents might live in Northern Namibia, a sister might go to school in Windhoek, some uncles might stay with their families in Luanda, an elderly grandmother continues to be in Kuando Kubango, etc. During and especially after the war, families tried to re-establish contact.

Mobility is, in many contexts, a crucial factor in life that has hitherto received too little attention in research. It may mean that one can start cultivating a field, one can gather

firewood, one can visit a clinic, etc. In the South-East of Angola it acquires many additional meanings in the light of the region's history of mobility. It is obvious, given the distances that communities and even nuclear families may be spread out, that communication is not a luxury but is of vital importance for many people in this region. In order to understand this, we need to look at technology not by itself, but in relation to the history of mobility. From this perspective, the foregoing should not be regarded as an introduction, as interpreting the history of mobility forms an integral part of doing research on communication technologies in this region.

In the next part of the paper, we will focus on the limits and possibilities in the sphere of communication technologies in the past and the present, and relate them to the changing patterns of mobility in the South-East.

Part II. Communication technologies in past and present

Letter-writing

Even if postal services only started functioning after World War II, for colonial officials letter-writing was an important means of communication during the colonial epoch. Given the slow service, often messengers were used who carried letters from one place to the other.

As indicated, there was hardly a local educated elite and after independence people working in the state administration were nearly always from outside the region. They used the postal services to stay in touch with their families and friends. During the war, mail could not be taken overland and was transported through irregular airplane flights. This form of transport was risky, as aircraft were regularly attacked, but as this was often the only means of transport available, it was still used.

Gabriel Daniel Cassanga, who received a state bursary to study in the Soviet Union at the time, said that Menongue was not well connected to the rest of the country, and

sending news on from the region was really difficult; as families lived so spread-out this was a problem. For example, in his case, he often received news about the family in Luanda through his brother in Cuba. There were more frequent flights between Luanda and Havana than between Moscow and Luanda, and as his brother in Cuba send on the news immediately, it would even be quicker than straight from Luanda. So news travelled from Luanda to Havana on to Moscow.

For people living in areas under UNITA control matters were even more difficult. In MPLA areas, mail service was erratic, but in UNITA areas it was non-existent. Everything was blocked and contact with the outside world was next to impossible. Sanctions for trying to reach the outside world were harsh. Some people did try to circumvent this isolation, but the risks were high and people, who, for example, tried to keep themselves informed by listening to a radio station other than the UNITA service of Vorgan, would be accused of betrayal and punished severely. In addition, travelling on foot through UNITA areas to reach relatives in Zambia or Namibia was extremely risky and only a few attempted this for fear of capture or landmines.

Another form of messaging during the war was the use of the Red Cross services. The Red Cross began its activities in the region in 1986, later than in other provinces, with its main task being re-establishing contact between family members who had lost track of each other and sending on messages between them so that they could again keep track of each other. This was obviously very difficult, as many areas were no-go zones for the Angolan Red Cross and the international Red Cross had an even more limited area of distribution. Still, this was a form of messaging well-remembered by local people as many had managed to send messages between, for example, Zambia and Namibia through the Red Cross. At present, the organisation has stopped the message and contact service: it is thought that after so many years of peace, people are able to trace their relatives themselves.

Illustration 7.1. The post office in Menongue

Nowadays, people say that *the time of letters is over.* People no longer write letters: they use SMS messaging or call people on mobile phones. The post office of Menongue looks like an archaeological remnant: eerie silence, piles of dust, old files, a leaking roof and scattered pieces of broken furniture characterise the place and the officials working there sit and while their time away. Most mail boxes remain empty these days, the door is always open but nobody seems to enter. If letters are sent at all, it is no longer through the postal services, but through personal contacts with people who are travelling. Despite statements to the contrary, sending letters through visitors is still frequently used over the international borders, as calling is often not possible to areas without network and international calls are prohibitively expensive. It is an interesting development that mobile phone calls and SMS messages are more frequently used by educated people who generally have a stable income and greater access to new technologies, while the poorest groups of people who often are semi-literate or even illiterate still send letters through visiting family and friends. They will ask their (grand) children to help them read and write these letters.

Road, rail and air transport

During the colonial era roads were constructed to facilitate colonial rule. In the South-East these endeavours remained limited and only the most important administrative centres, such as Mavinga, Cuito Cuanavale and Menongue, were connected.

When the war started in the 1960s, the Portuguese tried to expand the road network to increase the movement of troops. But many bridges were destroyed and the road convoys were a target for the guerrillas, so travelling by road became ever more dangerous. Maintenance could hardly be carried out and the roads in the South-East slowly deteriorated.

Illustration 7.2. A road just outside Menongue

With the civil war, matters obviously did not improve. Maintenance became impossible in many cases and the roads were even more heavily mined than during the nationalist war.

These conditions still plague the area. Many roads cannot be used because of anti-personnel mines. As the roads are still not maintained, they become impassable during

the rainy season and even in the dry season some parts of the road network can only be driven on at a speed of 20 km/hour. Cars are predominantly used within the safe confines of towns and largely restricted to state officials and NGO personnel. There are a few public transport vehicles now and these run erratically between Menongue and Nkurenkuru, Cuito Cuanavale and other places. It is interesting that the first lines to be kept open in terms of public transport are the routes to Namibia and Zambia; as so many people have contacts there, they are willing to invest time and money to get there. These routes are developing extremely fast. In 2003 it took two and a half days to reach Menongue from Rundu in Namibia; an extremely tiring and tough journey. One woman remembered that "she even got tired" from that journey. When she visited Angola again in 2008, she was expecting the same, but to her great surprise the road was relatively okay. She reached Menongue in one day; the journey time having been shortened by two thirds (conversation with woman in Rundu, 5 December 2009). These routes are not only used for visiting relatives, with whom contact has been re-established since the war in the region decreased/ended, but trading networks that connect Luanda, Menongue and Rundu, Luanda, Menongue and Zambia, and Luanda and Windhoek are also growing in importance. Equally important are routes that link the Angolan Highlands to the Kuando Kubango province and on to neighbouring countries. Many people take goods, such as clothing, household items, electronic wares and food, along these routes to trade.

A few bicycles are used, but as many parts of region have thorn bushes and distances are enormous, usage of bicycles is not evident. Canoes are used mainly to cross rivers. In the past, villages were always established along the river banks and people travelled by water to visit other villages. Yet the patterns of settlement have changed and are more related to state services provided than to water, so canoes are now used to cross and continue a journey by foot or by car rather than as a means of transport in

itself. Walking remains a crucial means of transport and many people walk enormous distances.

For longer distances and even certain nearby destinations, it is recommendable to fly. This implies that only a very limited part of the population can travel to these places, as the majority of the population cannot afford to fly. As mentioned, aircraft were also used during the war; it was risky but they were used for transporting letters, food, material and people. As flights between Brazil and Angola were relatively cheap during the war some trading networks developed by air and some Angolan women engaged in business even used to travel on international flights. Nowadays, flights are relatively safe, although maintenance of aircraft and corruption are problems plaguing the local flight companies. As prices are now, relatively speaking, higher than during the war, they have become less accessible to the general public.

Illustration 7.3. The airport of Menongue

It is to be expected that air transport will become relatively less important over time, as most people will prefer cheaper road transport. Officials and international visitors may continue to use air transport, but with an expanding road network, more people will travel by car. Some roads and bridges have been restored and travel from Menongue to Luanda by car is already on the increase. Soon the railway station in Menongue will

also be re-opened, which may contribute to the transport of goods and people into the provincial capital.

Public media: Radio, television and newspapers

As already indicated, the radio has been an important means of communication in the public sphere. In developing countries, the radio has been widely used as an information mass medium, as it is relatively cheap and requires relatively little technological infrastructure. In addition, given the level of literacy, radio can fulfil important tasks and is often used by states as a means to convey information, education and propaganda (McLean, 1992).

During the war in Angola, the radio was mainly used by the fighting parties as a propaganda tool: the population was informed about the state of fighting, battles, victories and party propaganda would be given. Both fighting parties involved were known for twisting the truth to keep up the morale of their troops and discourage their enemies. All Angolan civilians interviewed knew this, so in a way this "keeping up appearances" failed, as people knew the information provided did not correspond with the truth. A noticeable example was the government's announcement in 1992 that it had nearly the entire territory under its control, when in fact, UNITA, with surprise attacks, had taken control of some rather important cities, along with large stretches of countryside and forest areas.

In the meantime, people attempted to use clandestine information channels. This could put people in severe danger; as the Menongue representative of Angop Arão Ruben explained, people tried to tune in to foreign radios emissions, like the BBC London or the Voice of America or even the South African radio station (prohibited for political reasons), in order to know what was really happening in Angola. Arão Ruben himself spent some time during the war in the UNITA controlled area in Jamba Mineira (the city in the Province of Huíla, where he worked in a hospital). He could not have any contact

whatsoever with his family in Kuando Kubango. Together with a very close friend, they would hide in the local cemetery so as not to be discovered listening to forbidden radio stations. During the war people were very suspicious of each other, as all feared being betrayed, and indeed there were many stories of families destroyed because of such betrayal. Rumours in many cases were the only way to know what was happening in the war zones. It was often impossible to tell whether a rumour was true or not. People in Namibia might hear that a person had died and only months later learn that that person was still alive.

Generally speaking, during the war, there was a lack of means of communication and information. The fighting parties tried to use all means at their disposal, both "stick" and "carrot", to win people to their side. Through pamphlets, mass meetings, slogans and songs both MPLA and UNITA sought to engage the population and create an electoral constituency. At the same time, civilians under control were threatened and punishment for "traitors" could be extremely harsh; often they were executed while the rest of the civilian population was forced to watch.

After the peace period of 1992, when fighting became highly intensive, many radio stations were destroyed. Massive destruction of public facilities and structures occurred, and nearly all the antennas went down. Before this, there had been *Radio Serpa Pinto* (*Serpa Pinto* being the colonial name of Menongue) - every Angolan province used to have its own radio station that functioned at a provincial level. Some of the interviewees remembered with nostalgia this *Radio Serpa Pinto* that initially was mainly meant for colonial officials.

Today the local radio station is still inoperative and only the *Radio Nacional de Angola* (the national radio) reaches the sets of Kuando Kubango. This also holds for the television and the daily newspaper, Jornal de Angola. The local representative of the news agency Angop has to report events in the region to the national services in

Luanda, and god-willing, they will then take up the matter and through Luanda the news may then again reach people in Kuando Kubango. During the war, information was transmitted to Luanda, but no signal was sent to confirm the receipt. The only way to learn whether the news had arrived was through encountering the news items published in the newspaper or broadcasted on the radio. At present still no direct local news services, in terms of radio, television or newspaper, exist. Sometimes local leaders may be offered a radio by visiting government officials. These are then installed in the public village meeting house, called *ndzango*. From here, however, they do not reach all villagers, as women and minors are usually not allowed to enter the *ndzango* and can only attend meetings in the framework of court cases organised during day time. During such meetings, the radio will not be switched on. In any case, the radio can only be received in a limited number of places and only within a limited reach. Television reach is even more restricted and can only be received in a range of a few kilometres from the towns of Menongue, Cuito Cuanavale and Mavinga.

Even so, radio, television and the newspapers have played a role in the reconstruction process begun after 2002, when peace was established. Since the repatriation programmes started, the Angolan state and the Red Cross have supported activities to reunify family members that had become separated in the course of the lengthy war. The national television broadcasting services created a programme called, in Portuguese, *Ponto de Rencontro* (Meeting Point), in which people, mainly children, are given space to explain their whereabouts and call upon family members to contact them. Red Cross was also supported by the national Television Service, as the Television Service provided ICT access for the organization of the repatriation programme.

The *Radio Nacional de Angola* is also a means to emit educational programmes in the post-war context. Angola has known forty years of warfare with limited educational services. Education through radio programmes is hence regarded as a means to

redress this situation. One such initiative is the programme Camatondo, written by the IRIN (*Integrated Regional Information Networks*): it talks about the lives of simple people who are not always aware of transmissible diseases, civil rights, public services and other issues that might affect them. Information about these issues is provided in a plain and clear manner, so as to reach as wide an audience as possible. Some of the interviewees even knew about Camatondo and positively commented on it. Yet, given the limited reach of radio broadcasting, the influence of these programmes is not extensive in the Kuando Kubango province.

The only newspaper that is available in the region is the state-related *Jornal de Angola*. Newspapers that have in the past expressed criticisms of the Angolan government, such as *Angolense*, *Terra Angolana* and *Folha 8*, do not reach there. Even the *Jornal de Angola* cannot always be bought or only days after its appearance in the capital. News on the Kuando Kubango province only appears on an erratic basis and generally reflects the atmosphere of the *terras do fim do mundo* notion: Kuando Kubango is presented as a remote and isolated region that is marginal to the political economy of Angola as a whole.

Furthermore widespread illiteracy and poverty are contrary to the development of a large newspaper readership: newspapers are seen as expensive, difficult to read and not available on all days and in all settlements. This situation has sharply influenced the position of the Angop team operative in the region. Angop is the most important press agency of Angola and started its activities in the province in the 1980s, providing the national authorities, radio stations, television and the *Jornal de Angola* with news items. Yet, the province team feels that insufficient attention is given to the news from the region and they generally feel neglected by the centrally based news workers.

Telephone and Internet

In terms of communication, the sharpest crisis fell between 1992 and 1997. After the elections of 1992, the war intensified and this time the Angolan Highlands were also severely hit. The antenna tower in Huambo (Nova Lisboa) was destroyed and radio and telephone contact between Kuando Kubango and the Highlands and Luanda became impossible.

For military reasons, it was obvious that connections had to be restored, but as the necessary investments were enormous and nation-wide, it took several years before the state telecommunication services considered Kuando Kubango; other regions, such as the Provinces of Luanda, Cabinda, Benguela and Namibe, were given priority.

After the restoration of the fixed telephone line, this infrastructure in the South-East also came to include the general public. In principle civilians could henceforth also use telephone services. However, very few people, mainly state officials, could afford a telephone line. Still it meant an increase in the possibility of tracing families and friends and re-establishing contact.

In 1997 the first infrastructure for civilian use appeared thanks to a programme called *Programa de Recuperação das Comunicações* (PRC, Programme for Restructuring Communications), providing telephone to Menongue. An additional advantage of this programme was that the felling of trees for the passage of the cables provided some jobs. In a context of widespread unemployment, this was also regarded as contributing to the region's development. Outside of Menongue there was a possibility to reach the emergency services through a service offered by the state telephone company, but that was all there was and no further telephone services existed outside the regional capital. Some new investments are currently being made, but the results are as yet not highly visible and the fixed telephone line remains of relatively little importance.

New ICT are likewise still used to a limited extent. An impetus was provided with the repatriation programme. Those who had lived in Zambia and Namibia were used to mobile telephones and some also to the internet and their demands in this respect were higher than had previously been the case. Given the networks and contacts over the border, there is now also sufficient market share in the South-East for companies to expand their business there.

However, the South-East was, and still is the most problematic area in terms of network services. As with television and the radio, the cell phone enjoys a limited range, being restricted to the cities of Menongue and Cuito Cuanavale, and the network is often interrupted. In the border areas people try to make use of the Zambian and Namibian cell phone networks. It therefore comes as no surprise that people may have up to 3 sim cards: in Ondjiva (in the South, capital of the Province of Cunene) and along the entire Kavango River, for instance, people may use two Angolans cards, MOVICEL and UNITEL, and one Namibian, MTC.

Additional problems are that not many people can afford to buy regular credit for their cell phones, and in many areas there is no electricity to charge the battery pack. People try to creatively use generators to this end, but it is not always easy. Still, the mobile phone does form an important means to re-establish family networks and to further trading routes in the region. Even if people are not living in Menongue or Cuito Cuanavale, they may know people there and many people have relatives in Zambia and Namibia whom they try to reach when visiting these towns. Many people find it difficult to use sms-messaging and calling is very expensive over the international borders, but all the same many people make use of the cell phone to announce visits, organise minor business, pass along important family news such as funerals and in general to let people know that they are doing well.

Concerning internet, generators produce the only electricity and in the capital Menongue just three places offer an internet service, at a slow and interrupted speed.

Internet encounters the same obstacles as cell phone use: the speed is slow and interrupted and the service really expensive for many people. We visited two of the three internet points, the main office of Angop in Kuando Kubango and the shop of Dario and Israel Evaristo, who explained that the price per hour was 300Kz[1]. This was justified by the fact that transport costs for any item into the region are prohibitively high and so all items are more expensive than elsewhere. At the time when we visited the internet shop, none of the computers were working and that had been the case for several weeks.

Illustration 7.4. Menongue Internet shop

Regarding the various functions of the internet, the transmission of information is one. Besides communication, internet can spread private as well as public information rapidly, substituting newspapers, for example, which are still insufficient and not cheap enough in the South-East. In this last sense internet could be a very helpful means for the news agency Angop in the region, especially given its vastness. And yet, Angop correspondents, who started working as of the beginning of 2008, are forced to use radio communication, with the exception of the correspondent in Cuangar, close to the

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[1] Approximately 3,9 USD.

Namibian border, where the Namibian network can be used. So in the entire region, the internet remains an extremely limited service, used by only a few officials and a few private persons.

Part III Conclusions

Final remarks: What "progress"?

As is clear from the above, no communication technology is adequately functioning in the South-East of Angola. The Angolan state has re-baptised the region and now calls it "lands of progress". There are some development programmes that aim at improving conditions in the region. Transport and communication do form an ingredient of these development efforts, mainly conceived of in terms of technology: road construction, railway infrastructure, radio, television and other mass media, and also mobile telephony and Internet. The services are not linked to the needs and wishes of local people and their functioning remains limited. It is, in general, state officials who make use and benefit from these services. For the general local population "the lands of progress" still remain a far cry from reality. Many of them do not have access to communication technologies, because they live in areas without reach or because they lack the financial means or because the infrastructure is insufficient to make things work.

During our interviews, one person said that "*moments of crisis give origins to ideas".* People try to creatively make use of the limited means available to them and as families and communities live so dispersed, communication is regarded as a real necessity. Given the traditions of mobility and networking in the region, we should not view mobility only in the light of emergency: in these societies mobility is a normalcy, not an exception. Hence the requirements of communication technologies may be different than in sedentary societies and development programmes may well have to consider this in their calculations. There have already been instances in which this

went wrong (e.g., in repatriation programmes, people were to be returned to "their place of origin", but in a mobile society, this is a problematic endeavour and the programmes that meted out services in one definite place soon found that "their" returnees had moved on again!). We argue here that technology alone is not enough; one needs to know how people use such technologies and why. The current state programme of defining "progress" as simply dropping off technologies clearly falls short, ignoring the history and cultures of South-East Angolan societies. It is high time to listen to local definitions of "progress".

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Abbreviations

Angop: Angola Press

Fesa: Fundação Eduardo dos Santos, state development organisation.

MPLA: Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola

UNITA: União Nacional para a Libertação Total de Angola

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[2] Director Angola Telecom, public and national service of telephone communications.
[3] Provincial delegate of Angop (set in Menongue since the beginning of the 1980s), national information Agency, in Kuando Kubango.
[4] Bible Institute of Menongue.
[5] Red Cross of Kuando Kubango.
[6] Provincial delegate of FESA, Kuando Kubango.
[7] Internet shop in Menongue.
[8] Interview, Rundu, December 2009.

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