

'War and mobility. Southeast and Northern Angola in historical perspective'.

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Paper Announcement

When discussing conflict and mobility, the case of Angola is particularly intense because there was war in the country, with only some brief peaceful intervals, from 1961 to 2002. The historical patterns of mobility in many regions were completely destroyed and are only now being rebuilt. For this paper I chose to focus on northern and south-eastern Angola to compare the various ways in which mobility and war are interlinked.

Introduction

In this presentation I will attempt to describe the relations between mobility and warfare in two areas; namely Northern and south-eastern Angola. Although since colonial times, these areas are part of the same nation state, they are vastly different in their historical and cultural context.

Figure 1: Map of Angola

The two regions and the recent history of Angola as a country and in these regions will form the core of this presentation.

What *kind of areas* are these? This is a tricky question: not ecological determinism (people behave like this when it is dry; like this when there is ice, etc), but geography, framed in the context of historical change, does play a role.

Northern Angola : [picture 2 North]

This area formed the heartland of the kingdom of Kongo, with as its capital the town of Mbanza Kongo; a centre of commerce and diplomatic relations in West-Central Africa. However as of the seventeenth century, decline set in and upon colonialism the area became divided (over Angola, Congo Léopoldville and Congo Brazzaville). The old heartland of the kingdom became a border region of Angola, a country strongly dominated by its capital Luanda. In social, political and economic terms, northern Angola became a marginalized region within the Angola context.

Despite this relative political and economic insignificance, strong elite formation continued throughout the colonial epoch, mainly under the influence of British Baptist missionaries. So in this region there are many Christians and considerable education. A prominent local political and religious elite developed.

Culturally speaking, there is no border with Congo (now RDC), and many people have relatives there. There was much migration to Belgian Congo, notably to the towns of Matadi and Léopoldville: Angolans went there to visit relatives, look for jobs, to avoid higher taxes in Angola, to study (educational opportunities were much higher in Congo), and if there was colonial conflict (rebellion in 1913) people also moved over the border.

It is quite fertile land; enough water, forests and agriculture. During the colonial era rather some Portuguese settlers came to start coffee farms in the North, an endeavour that was also tried by local farms. This resulted in conflicts over land and labour.

Little was done to improve health services, transport and communication structure in the region, etc. There existed a church infrastructure of health and education institutes. And

oddly during the final years of colonialism rather something was done in this respect in a hearts and minds campaign of the Portuguese. Especially after independence, however, matters in the realms of health, education, transport, public services, communication, etc declined rapidly: destruction by war, neglect by the Angolan state.

Southeastern Angola: [picture 3 southeast]

The south-east is a land of sand and rivers, by the Portuguese colonials called: ‘the lands at the end of the earth’, regarded as one of the most remotest areas of the country. While the Portuguese had started some colonies at the coast of Angola in the 15th century already, the south-east never really became colonised: some parts remained 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), but nothing much was done in the realm of colonial rule and administration, road construction, education, health services, etc. The south-east also remained a land ‘without missionaries’: quite exceptional for 20th century Africa. In contrast to the North then, there was no development of a local educated elite, of Christianity during the colonial era. And after independence there was the civil war, so what there is in terms of educated elite is either originally born in another region of Angola, or educated abroad, mostly in Zambia, Namibia, or South-Africa.

The south-east of Angola was a marginalised area: politically, economically, socially the region was considered unimportant and backward. Often it was also considered isolated: yet as a matter of fact marginalisation and isolation were more like 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 Zambia (n-Rhod), Namibia (South-West Afr), and South-Africa. Portuguese was not widely spoken, if a European tongue was known at all it was rather English or Afrikaans. Travelling was in any case crucial for social existence: the idea to have one fixed abode was quite foreign to the inhabitants. ‘Dwelling-in-travel’, a concept coined by James Clifford, seems very apt to describe the way of living in this vast area. As an example: the English question: ‘Where are you from?’ is translated with ‘Ndonga?’, ‘river?’ The answer will be one of the rivers in the region. Home and origin are fluid, moving, connecting various places. Here there never was much in terms of health, transport, education etc: remote area.

So two different areas, also with different histories. Let us look at the recent histories of these two regions: the late colonial and the postcolonial period, during which war raged in these regions.

North 1961: we start in North Angola in 1961. 1961 forms a watershed in Angolan history. Because it was in that year that war broke out.

In February 1961, war started in Angola: in the capital Luanda there were riots, mainly attributed to the MPLA (Popular movement for the Liberation of Angola, mainly Marxist in inspiration) and in March of 1961 in the North of the country a movement called UPA, later FNLA (led largely by immigrants to Belgian Congo) started fighting the Portuguese colonial regime.

This is important then: war broke out in the North of Angola in March 1961.

On the 15th of March 1961 young men gathered together and, in many cases invoking the name of the UPA movement, started killing Portuguese immigrants. The Union of the Peoples of Angola (UPA)¹ was formed in 1958 in the Belgian Congo by Angolan emigrants, and its

¹ União das Populações de Angola.

leadership was based in Matadi and Léopoldville. By 1961 it had a large following in northern Angola and the Portuguese regarded the movement as the most dangerous threat to the colonial regime in Angola. In the first few of days after the revolt started, hundreds of Portuguese were killed, and the remainder of the settlers fled to the regional towns or to Luanda, the capital of Angola. In a couple of weeks the entire region, with the exception of the main towns, was withdrawn from colonial control and came to be ruled by the Upistas.

Reinforcements of the Portuguese army entered the area in May 1961 and counter-insurgency started. The Portuguese settlers formed militias, and later the Portuguese armed forces started a counter-insurgency and over 20,000 people were killed. By late 1961 the Portuguese army had regained control over most of the settlements of Northern Angola. In 1962 the Portuguese forces extended their military action to the large forested areas of the region and the majority of the UPA guerrillas withdrew to Congo. UPA changed its name into FNLA.

Of the civilians who stayed with them some tried to move over to the Portuguese side, but most of the civilian population also went into exile in Congo. In total more than half a million Angolans fled to neighbouring Congo (later Zaire).

Pockets of guerrilla presence continued to exist and especially near the border, there were frequent guerrilla incursions. The Portuguese controlled the movement of people still living in the region, and at the same time tried to build a road network for military purposes.

Southeast: as of 1966:

Now Angola is a vast country and some regions were not involved in this fighting of 1961. In the sparsely populated south-east of Angola, for example, no fighting took place in 1961.

In the southeast the war started only later when the MPLA and to a lesser degree UNITA opened the so-called eastern front in 1966/1967 from the newly independent Zambia. They tried to recruit followers, among immigrants from the region living in Zambia and among people in the region itself.

The war started here less abruptly and in the meantime the Portuguese army had some experience with counter-insurgency. Yet the consequences were similar: here also, some people stayed with the MPLA in the bush. Many people fled to neighbouring countries: Zambia and Namibia. The Portuguese, just as in the North, built 'security villages', settlements with barbed wire and watchtowers and also moved people to the regional towns (in local Ngangela language called mbongi).

The Portuguese army reacted by starting to move the inhabitants into and into the mbongi (the administrative centres).. The villages were emptied, agriculture sharply declined and instead of village life, an opposition between town and bush came into being.

Here also guerrilla actions continued.

Until the early 1970s Northern Angola as well as southeastern Angola can be characterised as military zones; with army presence, population in fenced concentrated settlements, guerrilla actions.

After the Portuguese army staged a coup in Lisbon in 1974, a cease-fire was signed and in 1975 Angola became an independent country.

Even before Independence Day however, fighting had started between the nationalist movements and notably between the UNITA and the MPLA there was heavy fighting. The Northern-oriented movement: FNLA (earlier UPA) was defeated and disappeared as an important factor (although it still exists).

The fighting was not continuously: in 1992 there were general elections (but the UNITA that lost, did not accept the outcome so fighting broke out again) and there were more intervals in the fighting. But the North of the country and especially the southeast were at the frontline.

People who had returned, both to North and southeast Angola had to flee again.

In the North many returned to Congo/then Zaire, but also a large group to Luanda, where many went into trade. Here they were called « Zairenses », a derogatory term attributed to Zairians, the returnees and any person from North Angola. In 1993 riots broke out in Luanda and these so-called Zairenses were attacked and their properties destroyed. So the relationship between Northerners and people from Central Angola has not been easy. Some of the Northern elite, who had been prominent in the FNLA, moved into the MPLA state echelons and other important people of the Northern elite, such as church and business people also established intensive relations with the Luandan elite.

People from the southeast largely moved back to Zambia or to Namibia. UNITA forces invaded the area and it became the zone where UNITA established its capital, in Jamba. UNITA started bringing in people from the Angolan Highlands, its major area of support (although many people were forced to move to south-east Angola).

In 2002 peace accords were signed in Angola. People now start to return to south-east Angola and to North Angola. In general, not as yet to the inner countryside, but more to the regional centres. This is because only in the regional centres there are services in terms of health, education, transport and communication available, and, on top, in the countryside there are still many mines.

Similarities and differences

So we see here two regions within the same country: both borderlands: linguistic, cultural continuity over international border.

Both at the margins of the economical and political centre of the country: these 2 factors render them not only related to the political and economical centre of their own country (Luanda), but also to other centres: for Northern Angola this is clearly Leopoldville/Kinshasa, and to a lesser extent Matadi, for the south-east this is less outspoken, but Rundu and Windhoek in Namibia, Johannesburg in South-Africa and Mongu in Zambia. Both with high degrees of mobility. Both areas have a history of nationalist and civil warfare, for some 40 years.

But we also see many differences.

Both areas are marginal: yes, but for the North this is largely a political issue, that in the past was very different. So there is a history of centrality, of economic and political importance and it is quite a fertile region and has some population. The southeast is marginal is more respects, not only politically, also economically and in terms of climate: it is not so fertile. This was never a central region, always marginal and sparsely populated.

Both areas know mobility, yes, but the historical forms and patterns of mobility are very different indeed. In the southeast of Angola: mobility is a way of life (slash and burn agriculture, rotating family members, migration labour, etc). In the north agricultural economy is sedentary, yet migration for youth to experience and as tactics to avoid war consequences (Buta), taxes etc.

Politically speaking the north knows central power, and relations tend to be strongly hierarchical. In the southeast political power is much more negotiated, the ideal is to be self-reliant, also politically. And if people out of necessity become dependents, they vote with their feet: if they do not feel that patrimonial relations are in balance, they just leave.

In the North there is a longstanding tradition of Christianity, literacy and elite-formation, whereas in the southeast Christianity and schooling are late colonial processes and only to a limited extent. In the southeast there never was a strong state presence in terms of services

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and likewise private initiatives in the realm of education, health, transport, communication, etc were extremely limited. This was different in the north where some services were provided, especially in the private sphere, by settlers and missionaries. During the war most of these were destroyed or fell apart due to neglect, but this was different from the southeast, where there never was anything really in terms of services.

Ok, in February and March I visited these areas and it is striking to note that such similarities and differences in historical trajectories do have consequences for the legacy of war as it stands now.

I indicated that by now there is peace in Angola, since 2002 and in both regions there are attempts to change things for the better. In both areas people have returned, but mostly to the regional centres and not as yet to the inner countryside (because of the mines and the lack of services).

In both areas there are 'development programmes': state and private projects of international donors. Development in terms of communication, transport (especially road construction), media, education, health, etc. And some private initiative, in all provincial capitals, so also in Menongue and Mbanza Kongo there are banks, and a big supermarket [picture *nosso super*], private mobile phone companies have started.

Both areas are still hooked on the international links, that were intensified because of the war. Much contact between Northern Angola and RDC/ and between south-east Angola and Namibia/Zambia. This has consequences. Of course at the transport level: routes to RDC, Zambia and Namibia are very important. And also, in both areas foreign mobile phone companies were to arrive first. In the North Vodacom in RDC, at the border with Namibia, it was first a Namibian company. This is similar for both areas.

These are similarities.

There are also differences, however.

Picture pastor Rodriguez and church. The church buildings of the Baptist church were entirely destroyed during the war for independence in 1961, the British missionaries were forced to leave the country, many local catechists and pastors were killed as they were thought to be on the UPA side and the mission houses were turned into military barracks, so Portuguese soldiers instead of church people were living there. The situation hardly improved during the civil war, although some church activity was undertaken and the ruins of the building returned to the church.

Pastor Rodriguez is a key church leader of the Baptist church. The family resided in Luanda for many years, where the pastor was head of the church and established sound relations with the presidential clique, although never fully integrated, for that the history of suspicion between MPLA and the Bakongo elite is too deep. So a close, but critical relationship. Two years ago the pastor and his family returned to his place of birth and came to live in Mbanza Kongo again; To the great joy of the congregation, because obviously an important man like pastor Rodriguez could not only lead the church with a strong hand, and encourage people to become active in the church, his relations with the state also ideally positioned him to address the church infrastructural problems. And so it was indeed. Pastor Rodriguez, through his ties with the president, also established good relations with the provincial governor and 'reconstruction' started. It was argued that, since the church buildings were destroyed by the fighting parties, the state had to compensate for this loss in the framework of the reconstruction programme. So a beautiful church was built entirely equipped with benches,

altar, decorated windows etc. An ultramodern hospital infrastructure with a maternity, surgery, internet, xray etc.

Of course not reconstruction, nothing like that was ever here; the Baptist church had buildings etc, but not this well-equipped and modern. Yet the fact that *something* was there in the past helps. So past developments of health services and religious infrastructures influences the present initiatives in this realm. And a second conclusion is that in North Angola the connections between the state and the local elite result in this sort of 'reconstruction'.

Pastor Rodriguez and his family and his daughter and her family intend on staying in Mbanza Kongo. The daughter's family is building a spacious house nearby the town where they will combine salaried work and farming. Pastor Rodriguez and his wife will slowly wind off their immense work load in the church and move towards retirement, for which they have taken all necessary steps in terms of comfort in the house, etc.

This pattern is also clear in the rest of Mbanza kongo.

Many permanent houses are built, people set up elaborate farms, at times even with fences. Schools and churches are being built. It breathes an atmosphere of permanence.

Now the southeast.

The southeast has been singled out for 'development'. In state language it is now called 'lands of progress' instead of 'lands at the end of the earth', perhaps in an attempt to challenge UNITA support in the area.

And attempts to address the dismal situation in the province are noticeable: there are food programmes, anti-mine captains, road construction, the railway will come again (from the coast up), perhaps even this year, the mobile telephone network has come and also here there is the supermarket.

But in south-east: everything is still more make-shift. What is there in terms of development is related to state and, to an even more limited extent, to the development sector. So one can see the buildings of the provincial government and the state media. There is hardly activity by the private sector: there are no such elaborate relations between local church leaders and political elite and also business is far more limited than in the North. For the rest the settlements of the local people are make shift and look as if they can easily be moved.

In terms of market for products a similar tendency can be noted: in the North local customers in the supermarket, in the south east: state officials, a few development workers, but rarely people from the local population. These you may see at the market, also make-shift, not permanent.

[picture matongue]

This is the pastor of the evangelical church Eduardo Matongue, his wife Irma Ana, daughter, son, niece, and Italian MA student and programme member Silvia Alessi with whom I had come. Pastor Matongue obviously also has relations, but these are situated mainly in the church sphere. He is in close touch with American pastors residing in Zambia, regularly visits Namibia and other parts of Angola than the southeastern region, where he then goes to visit other pastors, attends church meetings etc. He knows the members of the local political elite and some of them know him, although not all.

The church infrastructure is rudimentary and the congregation faces many problems of equipment, construction of buildings etc. The family has limited financial means, their housing is modest, food is basic and although respected by the church members, pastor Matongue clearly is not a man of fame and leadership tradition like pastor Rodriguez.

The political elite in town is to a large extent not from the area itself; but from other areas in Angola, and on top, during our stay it seemed as if many tensions were going on in the

political circles (cf the administrator who 'had fallen out of grace' and was being dismissed). For a man like pastor Matongue there is no such thing like negotiating about church constructions and health services. The argument that is used in the North about war destruction can hardly be used, as there was very little in terms of infrastructure, transport, communication, health, education, media etc, before the war. The history of poverty and limited possibilities to build a local elite thus influences present patterns in terms of political relations and development.

Also here we see how this pattern repeats itself at large.

It is not only so that it looks make-shift, people do in fact move, not only in terms of visits (this is also the case in the North), but also as their way of life. To many the most important consequence of peace is that are finally free again to move from one place to another.

In the South-east the whole process of 'repatriation' is difficult. Firstly because many people have never been in Angola, so what does 'repatriation' mean then?

And secondly because people do not repatriate to one place (as they are expected to), they move on. They always did and that they could not move during the war was source of great resentment. While international agencies like UNHCR focus their attempts at 'reintegration' on providing services in the 'place of origin' of former refugees, the major consequence of the peace for people in southeast Angola is that they can finally move again.² The atmosphere here is more one of mobility.

History is important to understand current developments. The legacy of the war becomes interrelated with the historical patterns of mobility, elite formation, relations to the state, etc.

² Report UNHCR, Crisp, 37, Kaun 24-26.

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UPA - União das Populações de Angola (Union of the Peoples of Angola) > 1962: FNLA.

FNLA - Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola).

MPLA - Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola).

UNITA - União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).

Mbanza Kongo: provincial capital in North Angola

Menongue: provincial capital in Southeast Angola

Luanda: Capital of Angola

Belgian Congo, Zaïre (1970), RDC (1997)

Léopoldville, Kinshasa (1966)

Northern Rhodesia, Zambia (1964)

South-West Africa, Namibia (1990)