

RURAL
COMMUNITIES
IN HUAMBO

● Fernando Pacheco

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the life of a number of rural communities in Huambo Province in 1997, and specifically investigates the strategies and innovations these communities adopted during the period of civil war. Communities adopted strategies, which allowed them to survive. They attempted to rehabilitate their social systems and their production methods, even though the circumstances were always very difficult.

The study considers the factors that contribute to community disintegration, social cohesion or community differentiation, to increasing poverty, and to different levels of relative prosperity. It analyses the peasants' production systems, and the consequences the war had for these systems and for other community activities. It discusses strategies that might contribute to the rehabilitation of these systems. We consider the relationship between the State and the communities, the provision of state services, and the effects of various interventions from outside. Lastly, it sets out some conclusions and proposals for policies that can be adopted by various Angolan bodies and by international organisations, taking into account the communities' aims, strategies and capacities.

The villages were chosen using political, ecological and socio-economic criteria, which also took into account the circumstances that had affected each village. As far as possible the paper looks at the diversity of Huambo Province, though it may not represent all the situations and experiences in the Central Plateau of the civil war and the period after the signing of the Lusaka Protocol¹. The conclusions should not lead to exaggerated generalisations.

This report is the result of fieldwork done in slightly less than a month during January and February 1997, and at the start of the main dry season in May 1997. The first period coincided with the short dry season, when the rural population of Huambo suffers the greatest food shortages. There was some instability because the peace process, following the signing of the Lusaka Protocol, was moving slowly but some progress had been made; people were moving around more, and there was more contact between the government-controlled areas and those run by UNITA². A methodology that favoured community involvement in the study was followed. Group interviews were

1 The Lusaka Protocol between the Government of Angola and UNITA was signed in November 1994. At the time of the study it was being implemented slowly and had led to a period described by many Angolans as "not war, but not peace".

2 Acronyms are explained in an appendix

carried out and life histories were collected. Representatives of some institutions in Huambo, and various people involved in the economic and social life of the Province of Huambo, were interviewed. The staff of Save the Children Fund (U.K.), OIKOS, Concern, and CREA³ provided useful information and support. Useful information was already available as a result of the Pilot Project for the Agricultural Rehabilitation of Huambo Province, a project of FAO and the Provincial Delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. We consulted publications covering Huambo's history, anthropology, agriculture, and other areas of communal life: these writings are important and deserve to be better known⁴.

This is merely a case study of some rural communities in Huambo. The difficulties and duration of the negotiations with UNITA affected the work and, since time was an overall limitation, reduced the amount of time for fieldwork and the quantity of information that could be gathered. We wish to thank all those who made this study possible: members of the communities whose openness, collaboration, and enthusiasm were exemplary; political and administrative authorities at various levels in the government and UNITA; and the staff of NGOs, churches, and associations. We are grateful to certain individuals, but it would be excessive to list their names, partly to avoid the unpardonable mistake of forgetting someone.

2. NOTES ON THE METHODOLOGY

The initial fieldwork in Huambo province took three weeks. Two researchers were involved, an Angolan agronomist involved in rural sociology, and a British anthropologist who specialises in aid programmes to African rural economies affected by war. The need to analyse a new community led to the inclusion of a third researcher, another British anthropologist, with two years' experience of working in Huambo Province.

We consulted published works extensively, but the aim was to tackle the subject from the community's point of view. To achieve this, we favoured techniques involving direct contact with the people involved. Visits lasting a maximum of five days to a certain number of pre-selected villages constituted the core of the investigation. Individuals were interviewed, and there were community meetings, informal discussions, and exploratory walks through

³ Non-governmental organisations.

⁴ See particular Childs (1949), Pössinger (1986) and Bender (1978)

cultivated fields and neighbouring villages. The main techniques used were observation, interviews, and informal interviews. Informal interviews in the evenings were particularly useful because they enabled the researchers to get to know the people and to gain their confidence. The fact that “city people” slept in the villages and that one of them was British (a white person, as the villagers saw him) was helpful; the local people started to think that, at last, peace was certain. A variety of people were selected: ordinary men and women, young and old, church leaders, teachers, rich and poor, political and administrative leaders, and people chosen at random during the walks. In each case, whenever it seemed likely to be useful, we also studied neighbouring villages and interviewed people in them.

The researchers visited about a dozen communities in five districts⁵: Huambo, Kahala, Tchikala Tcholohanga (Vila Nova), Ekunha and Mungo. Map 1 shows the Province of Huambo and its Districts. Map 2 shows Agricultural Region 24 and its sub-divisions. Four rural communities were originally chosen for closer study:

Pedreira in Huambo;
Tchitwe in Ekunha;
Mbenda in the south of Tchikala Tcholohanga;
Chimbule in Mungo.

This selection was made using ecological, socio-economic, and political criteria, as well as circumstantial ones (being more or less affected by the war, for example). An attempt was made to reasonably represent the diversity of the Central Plateau of Angola. However, delays in obtaining authorisation from UNITA for a visit to Chimbule meant that little useful information could be gathered there. This led to the selection of another village, Tchivembe in Tchikala Tcholohanga district, which replaced Chimbule in the study. Even though Chimbule is in the north of Huambo Province and Tchivembe is in the south of the Province, they are in the same agro-ecological region.

5 District is used in this paper to translate *Município*. Each Province in Angola is divided into Districts (*Municípios*) and each District is divided into Communes. There is a Province of Huambo, a District of Huambo and a city of Huambo. The text specifies in each case what area is being referred to.

The communities which were finally included in the study are:

Pedreira in Huambo;

Tchitwe in Ekunha;

Mbenda in the south of Tchikala Tcholoahanga;

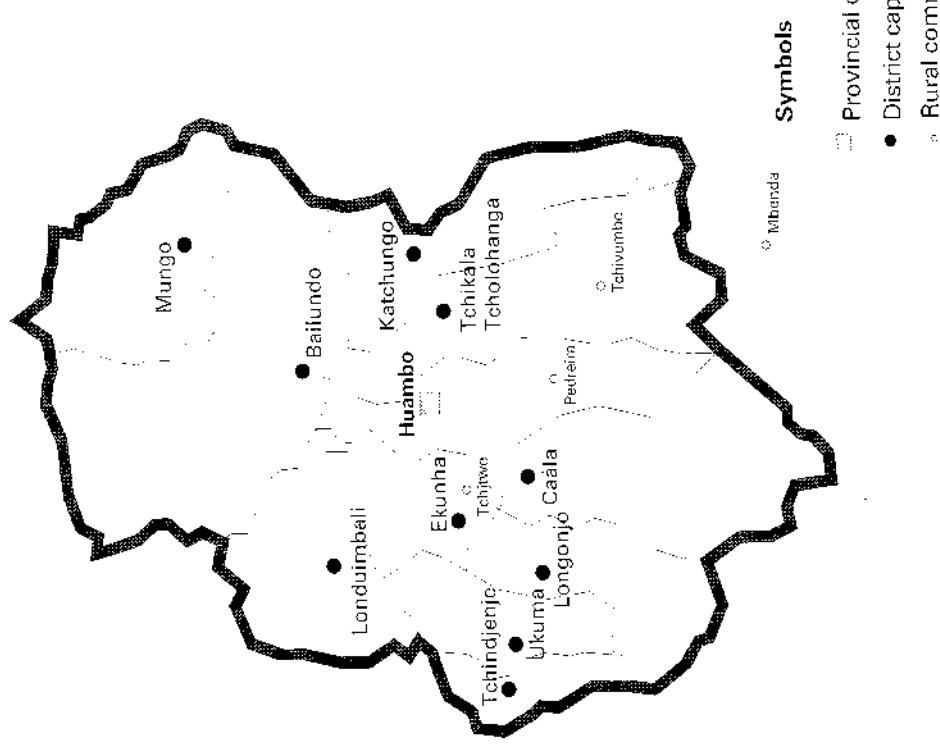
Tchivembe in the south of Tchikala Tcholoahanga.

The first two villages mentioned are in the area controlled by the government. The other two are in the area controlled by UNITA. At least six other significant aspects differ from one village to another: size; age; distance from the city of Huambo; agro-ecological characteristics; the extent of local conflict; and the presence or absence of NGOs.

Language was only a minor constraint in carrying out interviews, because the interpreters performed admirably. In the government areas we came up against no administrative or political obstacles. Though the same happened in the UNITA areas, officials from their administration were always present; this imposed some limitations when more delicate questions about wartime experiences were being covered.

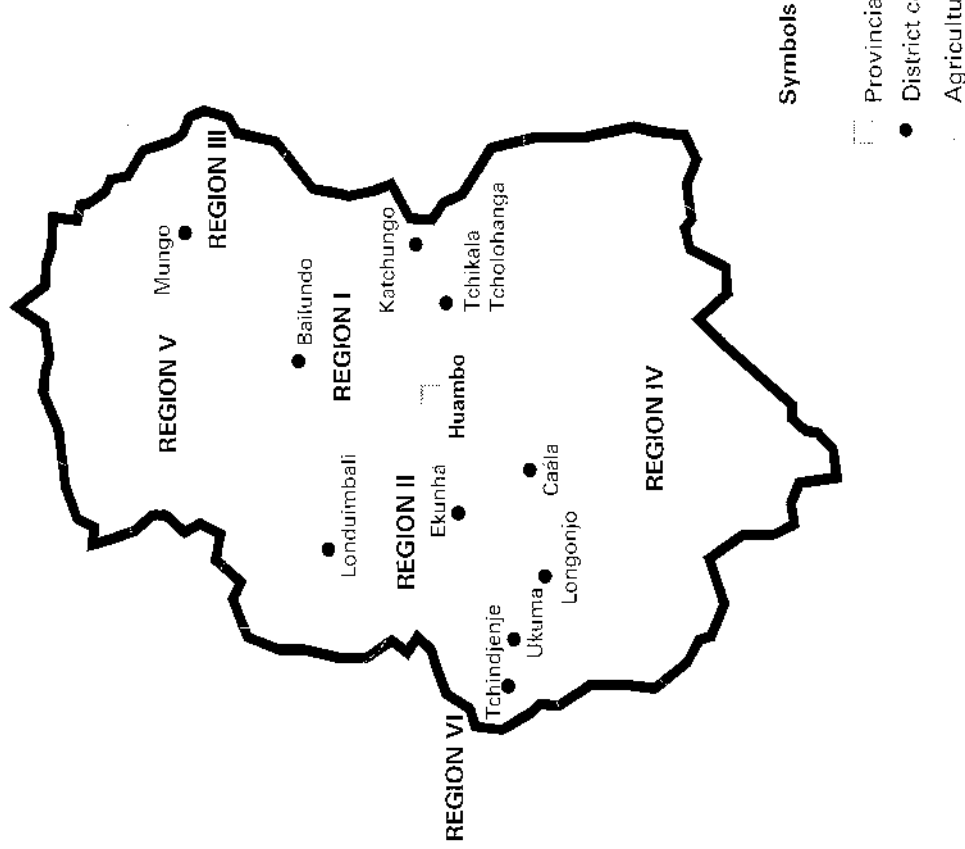
Map 1

PROVINCE OF HUAMBO SHOWING DISTRICTS, DISTRICT CAPITALS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY



Map 2

PROVINCE OF HUAMBO SHOWING DISTRICT CAPITALS AND AGRICULTURAL REGIONS



3. THE CENTRAL PLATEAU JUST BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

3.1 Transformations in the colonial period

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Central Plateau had perhaps the highest level of education and christianisation of all the regions of Angola. Moreover, the colonial administration was more active there than elsewhere, with a range of activities from agricultural research and extension services to the network of "bush" traders⁶. The area is the historical centre of the *Ovimbundu* people (plural of *umbundu*)⁷, and it became strategically and symbolically important in the Angolan conflict.

The region's history from the beginning of the 17th century demonstrates the importance of Atlantic trade for its inhabitants' lives. The *Ovimbundu* people took advantage of their proximity to the coast to become distinguished merchants. They organised caravans that initially traded slaves, and later traded ivory, wax, and rubber, with the Portuguese on the coast, principally in Benguela.

The rubber trade is still seen as responsible for a period when the *Ovimbundu* were at a peak, but it had some perverse effects. Peasant communities involved themselves so intensely that productive activities were abandoned; this may have facilitated the Portuguese occupation of the Plateau. The construction of the Benguela Railway hastened this process, as did the white settlement that started soon after. The *Ovimbundu* people were excluded from commercial activity, which was taken over by the Portuguese. They responded to the consequent economic hardship by expanding small-scale cultivation of crops for sale. To do this they took advantage of the men's longstanding commercial experience, and of the empirical and ecological knowledge of the women (who had always been involved in agricultural activity)⁸.

These transformations were rapid, and in this difficult context the activities of the Catholic, Evangelical, and Adventist missions expanded. They quickly understood that social development was the best way to lead the inhabitants

⁶ Translator's note: *comerciantes de mato* in the Portuguese original

⁷ When spelling words in the Umbundu language, the rules used by the evangelical churches are followed as they are closest to the official alphabet as defined by the Institute of Languages. But when a proper name has an established spelling, it is used: mostly these are names found on maps (cities, districts, villages and rivers)

⁸ Editor's note: the main period of the rubber trade was 1874–1911, though the trade began to decline from 1900. The end of this period coincides with the opening of the Benguela Railway and the arrival of European traders on a large scale on the Central Plateau. See Chitids (1949) and Pössinger (1986).

to Christianity. For the population this was not just a religious conversion, but also a conscious strategy. The missions and their evangelisation presented opportunities for access to medical services and, more importantly, to education (the gateway to modernisation), the civil service, and employment on the Benguela Railway. Throughout recent history the *Ovimbundu* have constantly sought opportunities despite the potential risks they might be taking⁹.

The actions of the churches, the existence of the Benguela Railway, and white colonisation explain most of the social transformations that took place in the Central Plateau during the first part of the twentieth century. These profound changes took place in a very short period of time. For their power relationships, social practices, and productive systems the communities tended to adopt westernised economic models and life strategies. This is explained by the great profusion of traders, large-scale farmers, missions, schools, and towns in the Central Plateau.

The deep and extraordinarily rapid transformation in the early twentieth century of the main economic activity on the Plateau – from commerce to small-scale commercial agriculture – has been called the “*Umbundu* miracle”. It was seen as one of the showpieces of Portuguese colonisation, and the myth arose that Huambo was the granary of Angola. Initially, when land was not a limiting factor, a system of production was possible which was in relative equilibrium with the environment; this enabled families to enjoy the minimum level of subsistence, and provided the conditions for their reproduction. The success was also due to the skills that the *Umbundu* peasants perfected. They acquired these mainly from contact with other technological systems that the Portuguese had mastered (in spite of their backwardness). However, the climate and mythical fertility of the Plateau lands attracted large numbers of European settlers who then occupied the best land, at the expense of areas of reserve that the natives possessed as part of their farms. This led to instability, because the system depended on the regular use of new areas to maintain a certain level of fertility.

By Angolan standards the population density on the Central Plateau was high. This fact linked to the economic pressures we have just considered made it a “favoured” region for the coerced provision of labour to areas with shortages. Also, many people went to South Africa to work in the mines, particularly before the economic boom of the 1960s. It is possible to talk of forced labour during various decades of this century, after the middle of the 1960s departure to “work on contract” was becoming inevitable for the peasants of the region.

⁹ See Neto (1981)

It is estimated that about 120,000 workers left the Central Plateau each year to work temporarily on the northern coffee plantations, in coastal fisheries, or in the mines of Lunda. The income thus generated was very important for the regional economy and for each productive farming unit – it enabled the people to purchase working oxen and transportation. Most of the villagers interviewed during this study viewed “contract work” in a positive way, at least as practised in the very late colonial period, when transportation and living conditions on the coffee plantations had improved.

Following the destruction of centralised states of the Plateau, these changes contributed to further reduction of the *osoma*'s powers in the communities¹⁰. Instead of being leaders or representatives of their people, the *osoma* came to be seen as delegates of colonial power, responsible for collecting taxes and recruiting labour. In some cases the traditional *osoma* (legitimate heirs of the lineage that held power) were retained, but in great secrecy. They role of the *osoma* was also weakened by the emergence of new leaders who undertook new roles in society – a prosperous farmer in a new social structure, a clergyman, a catechist, or a teacher.

In the final years of the colonial period, there were signs of change in the way the oppressive and antiquated Portuguese system regarded peasant communities. Significantly, the colonial regime became more interested in knowing about the territory and its peoples. The setting up in Huambo of institutes for agricultural research, agronomy and veterinary science, and the setting up of some extension services (with more modern ideas) contributed to this knowledge. However, it was in large part the publication of the first results of the Agricultural Census of the MIAA, and later its Current Agricultural Statistics, that sounded the alarm about the disastrous agricultural policy of the colonial government in Angola. The new rural extension service was a victory for those who fought boldly to expose injustices, but the liberation movements and the Portuguese traders and farmers distrusted it, while the authorities saw it as an attempt at social development within the framework of maintaining the status quo. This endeavour was too late, however, because the collapse of the empire was imminent.

The liberation movements did not manage to infiltrate their guerrillas into the Central Plateau. The frontiers were too distant, and there were no direct effects of the war. On the contrary, like almost the whole of Angola, the region experienced unprecedented economic development from the middle of the 60s; Huambo became the second industrial centre in the country. Although there was involvement of the *Ovimbundu* people in the liberation struggle, the rural

¹⁰ Translator's note: *Osoma* (an Umbundu word) meaning village chief or headman. See Section 5.2.1 for a fuller discussion.

population did not join the armed struggle, as happened in some other regions, and until 1974 there were very few clandestine groups belonging to the independence movements. With certain exceptions, the local elite was more interested in the *pax lusitânica*¹¹ and in taking advantage of the opportunities for upward mobility the system presented, mainly in the civil service. Another explanation is that the Portuguese had vigorously suppressed support for independence in the early years of the armed struggle.

Colonial domination ended in 1975 and independence was declared in dramatic circumstances. A civil war that would continue for almost twenty years had already started.

3.2 The perverse effects of the "miracle"

The groups of people who settled the Central Plateau during the *Bantu* expansion established and developed a land use system similar to those of the other peoples of tropical Africa. There are long fallow periods, and so a piece of land may not be used again for five to thirty years. How long it is left fallow depends on the restoration of the previous level of fertility, and this varies with soil conditions, vegetation, climate, and the intensity with which it is cultivated.

At the beginning of the 20th century, when the caravans of the rubber trade ended and the Portuguese occupied the Plateau, men started to participate in agriculture (it had been previously an activity almost exclusively for women and men had only cultivated the *ocumbo*, the small field around the dwelling). Men became farmers, and rapidly adopted strategies aimed at marketing their produce, perhaps influenced by their previous trading activities. The new type of agriculture required more space, and ploughing with oxen (introduced by Protestant missionaries in the 1930s) made such expansion possible. This, combined with increased settlement by Europeans, increased land pressure. The previous balance was overturned, soils became degraded, and the extensive forest turned into savannah.

Land-tenure legislation was confused in the years before independence. In customary law "ownership" was protected by the concept of possession; this was a legal or social norm defined and accepted by the communities¹². However, the law did not grant rights of individual possession to African farmers, it merely

¹¹ See Lima (1992)

¹² See Carrigo and Morais (1973)

made provision for areas of communal occupation to be defined and demarcation of these (described as second-class lands) by foreign farmers was not allowed. In practice the second-class areas were never properly defined or marked out, and land that had belonged to peasants for centuries was gradually transferred to the Portuguese. An even greater scramble by Europeans to get land began in 1965; huge concessions were granted for cattle or forestry, or just for land speculation. In Huambo Province (at the time called a *distrito*), the average amount of property held by peasants (the area they possessed, not the smaller area they actually used at any one time) decreased from almost nine hectares to four hectares¹³. Occupation of land by peasants was densest in the districts of Londuimbale, Huambo, Kahala and Ekunha, where land problems became most intense. All this forced the peasants to seek other ways of life, the most important of which was employment by coffee companies in the north of Angola. Another disastrous consequence was a dramatic reduction in the size of the reserve lands; on average, these shrunk from 3.35 hectares in 1965 to 1.20 hectares in 1970. Without offering a technological alternative, this trend for the reserves to disappear threatened the productive system, a way of farming based on long fallow periods.

Despite all these pressures from the colonial powers, the "traditional" sector performed better than the "modern" sector. According to statistics from the MIAA, only a tenth of the land allocated to foreigners was used. At the time Carriço and Morais showed that "traditional" agriculture contributed three times more to the Gross Agricultural Product of Huambo Province than "modern" agriculture¹⁴. Moreover, the gross product per unit of land was 415 escudos for "modern" agriculture and 511 escudos for "traditional" agriculture. Despite the imbalance in access to more "advanced" technology, the productivity per unit area was similar.

J. Carriço found very low figures for gross income per family unit. He concluded that most of the peasants had to look for work outside their units, to try to increase individual income for paying debts or taxes, or to invest in production. Peasants received much more cash for salaried work than from their own agricultural activities. The author commented that he "could not fail to understand the anguish that such a large population face in trying to survive"¹⁵.

The land problem intensified. Demographic pressure and increased European settlement reduced the length of fallow periods, which reduced soil fertility,

¹³ Data from MIAA (1971) and MIAA (1973)

¹⁴ See Carriço and Morais (1971)

¹⁵ See Carriço (1974)

production and productivity. To try to compensate, peasants increased the area that they cultivated, using ox ploughing. Land shortages increased. The only way to generate sufficient income was to seek "contract work" such as on coffee plantations in northern Angola.

Other policy measures for European farmers contributed to the land shortage, for example provision of credit, subsidies for barbed wire, improvements in extension services, and subsidies to promote forestry. So the "miracle" produced some peculiarities. Individuals and institutions spoke out against this situation and suggested solutions. Most of the information and knowledge produced at that time has been lost. We must make the most of the little that remains, and disseminate it, so that new generations can find arguments to counter ideas that are no more than illusions.

4. THE WAR IN THE RURAL AREAS OF HUAMBO

As already mentioned, Huambo Province was not directly affected by the independence war. When the colonial regime collapsed, the local elite plunged into politics, and most of them opted for UNITA. In 1975, for reasons outside the scope of this article, civil war broke out. Huambo Province was the main theatre of war, and the land and inhabitants were seriously affected. The lack of an MPLA policy that addressed the interests of the population of the region, errors in governance and repression of the elite gradually encouraged people to join the armed opposition to the regime.

Conflict broke out in different parts of Huambo at different times. The government had control over most of the region until 1981. Soon after this the railway service to Huambo was irregular, and this had important consequences for commerce and production. Attacks began to occur throughout the region. From the end of the 1980s, the most affected area was the Benguela Corridor (a narrow strip of land covering about 20 kilometres on each side of the railway and the road that links Bié to the coast); there was practically no fighting in areas further north and to the south-east after this time.

Until about 1981, the peasants of Huambo Province received considerably more fertilisers than in the colonial period¹⁶. Although the circumstances were not

¹⁶ According to Joaquim Russo, the first Ministry of Agriculture Delegate in Huambo after 1975, in an interview in April 1997. He said that in that period about 6 thousand tons of fertiliser was supplied to the peasants of Huambo Province, compared to about four thousand tons distributed to the whole agricultural sector before independence.

very favourable for trade, a system of exchange between the city and the countryside satisfied some needs. Some people in the villages we studied confirmed this when they praised the State's support for agriculture and rural commerce in this period (although they also had some criticisms). However, we see this more as a comparison with the current vacuum than real credit for the performance of the service then.

UNITA had little military power during the first years of the war. However, the MPLA lacked the capacity to provide a development project that was sufficiently attractive to the rural population, people who were eager for opportunities to improve their lives. It also did not understand the cultural, social, and political reality of Huambo, and so failed to see that economic and social advancement was much more enticing for that population than the uncertainty of war.

The growth of support to UNITA from the United States and South Africa had significant effects from 1981 onwards. UNITA gradually took control of the rural areas of Huambo Province; the government was left with little more than the capitals of Districts and some Communes, which became like fortresses. The Province was practically under siege, and after 1982 the only link to the coast by land was the road to Benguela. Even here one could travel only with the deployment of strong military support, and there were frequent ambushes that caused considerable loss of life and material.

There are no figures showing the number of people who, because of the effects of war or because of poor economic prospects, left the villages in the study. The existence of uninhabited parts of villages (or where houses had not been reconstructed) could be a sign of this exodus, but people who had been displaced from elsewhere occupied many such spaces. However, we have no doubt that there was an exodus from the rural areas. We compared the district population figures published by UNICEF in 1991 with their equivalents from the 1970 census¹⁷. This showed that there might have been considerable migration from the rural districts to the city of Huambo and to Kahala District. Districts along the Benguela Corridor to the west of the provincial capital also grew and many people must have left the Province. By contrast, there were significant reductions in Districts that were previously the most densely populated, Tchikata Tcholoahanga, Katchiungo, Mungo, and Bailundo. Significantly, these latter Districts were those that contributed most people to the labour exodus from the Province in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁷ Editor's note: the data for 1991 are estimates: see UNICEF (1991). The figure of 750,000 for the District of Huambo seem unrealistic especially as population figures by Communa in the same volume of statistics suggest a population of about 300,000. Even so, it seems likely that there was a large-scale movement of population in Huambo Province in the period leading up to 1990.

TABLE I

DISTRICT	POPULATION IN 1970	ESTIMATED POPULATION IN 1991
Huambo	98,600	750,337
Kahala	65,348	232,463
Londuimbali	72,688	100,437
Ekunha	36,813	57,216
Longonjo	57,127	56,731
Ukuma	35,679	44,822
Tchikala Tcholoehanga	78,882	44,620
Katchiungo	61,406	40,160
Bailundo	163,163	34,893
Mungo	63,238	19,000
Tchinjenje	11,988	5,691
TOTAL	744,932	1,386,370

Informants were sceptical about the possible return of the displaced population. In the colonial period, those who left to "work under contract" returned, but those who went to the city stayed there. Since 1981 most people have gone to the cities. Some may come back if conditions in the city become tight, as happened in Huambo in 1993 and 1994; but those interviewed during the study felt that most will not return.

When the Portuguese departed, Huambo's industrial and construction sectors were left almost paralysed. Only the Benguela Railway continued for a time, but its activities were reduced. In the colonial period, very few rural inhabitants went to work in industry compared with the number who went to work in other Provinces but the situation in Huambo city did affect the lives of rural people. Consequently the paralysis of Huambo's industry led to people continuing to look for work outside the Province. In the 1970s, when the MPLA government organised contingents of workers for the nationalised coffee plantations in the north, the number of volunteers exceeded expectations, in spite of political motivation in the opposite direction¹⁶.

Colonial settlement on the Central Plateau was a particular aspect of Portuguese colonisation in Angola. Initially the settlers formed groups that were almost exclusively white, advance parties of the administration and of trade with the local people, usually with the presence of the Catholic Church.

¹⁶ From the interview with Joaquim Russo, see note 15.

These settlements developed into small towns (*vilas*) and local people settled on the outskirts. The characteristics of this type of European settler and their isolation facilitated quite intense contacts with the local people, which led to social contacts and even alliances that went beyond commercial relationships. This influenced the lives of the rural people irreversibly. The small towns were a force for change in the rural environment, permitting a certain continuum between the rural and the urban, in contrast to the expressive and traditional dichotomy typical of colonial societies.

The civil war destroyed the small towns in Huambo Province, as in almost the whole of Angola. Merchants left, and so did the civil servants, teachers, priests, and tradesmen. Nowadays the small towns have little significance for the rural population, except for some physical safety provided by the administration and by soldiers during the war (for as long as they were stationed there). In many cases government forces made the people concentrate around the small towns (District or Commune capitals) to remove them from contact with the guerrillas. The number of people around the small towns grew, but they were displaced people, removed from their natural environment. The link between city and country that the small towns had facilitated disappeared. The rural communities were even more left to their own devices, in a context of complete improvisation and uncertainty.

The decline of the small towns severely damaged the marketing system in rural areas. "Bush traders" performed multiple roles: they bought, sold, exchanged, provided credit (in kind or money), transported people (including the sick to hospitals), prescribed medicines, gave advice, and arbitrated or even resolved conflicts. After their exodus at the time of independence, there was a vacuum. Neither the People's Shops nor those of ENCODIPA¹⁹ were able to fill the gap. So a new pattern started with the emergence of informal traders, *Ovimbundu* traders of a new kind. They were mostly young, and after a timid start they came to dominate at a later stage Huambo's commercial links to Benguela, Luanda, and even to Namibia. They worked with Zairians and Angolans who had returned from Zaire.

As the war became more serious in the countryside, missionary activity decreased. Thus rural communities lost another avenue of contact with the outside world, and the education system suffered, particularly since the post-colonial state removed the missions' right to run schools. Increasingly education was confined to the cities and a few small towns.

¹⁹ ENCODIPA was the parastatal company responsible in the first years after independence for marketing agricultural produce. Despite its problems, its operations in Huambo were among its most successful in the country.

In our study, peasants reported how they had been plundered over the years, at the times when the war directly affected their communities. They mentioned their houses with their meagre but valuable contents, and other minor items. But they always stressed their loss of cattle, it had been the product of many years' work and represented a great deal in terms of accumulation and reserve. They were deprived of a valuable resource for work and transportation, without which it would be difficult to begin a process of rehabilitation.

The threat that their communal and individual properties would be ruined produced constant insecurity. They had to learn to live with uncertainty, and to manage uncertainty by developing processes for survival, adaptation, or recuperation. In the reports that we received, one can see how this uncertainty affected intentions and decisions throughout the war even when, as now, other scenarios are possible. Our informants partly attributed the present levels of poverty to uncertainty.

For the rural population of the Benguela Corridor, the renewed war of 1992 to 1994, and the battle for possession of the city of Huambo, was the greatest disaster. Access to the coast is vital, but the encirclement of the Province prevented it. Paralysis of services forced many people to leave the city – some went to Luanda or Benguela, while others sought alternatives in the rural communities they had originally come from. The peasants living in areas where there was fighting (basically those in the Corridor) suffered most dramatically when the Province was reoccupied by government forces. As the UNITA soldiers withdrew they took all the cattle they could. When the others entered they took all the "remains": zinc sheets, bicycles, motorcycles, vehicles, household utensils – everything possible, in fact. People were left with almost nothing, despite the effort to rehabilitate that had started in 1991.

The extensive areas controlled by UNITA, to the north and south of the Benguela Corridor, were not directly affected by this new fighting in 1993 and 1994. The inhabitants enjoyed relative peace after 1991. Starting in that year communities had begun the process of re-installation in their areas of origin. Paradoxically, the reopening of the war reinforced this process in the UNITA areas, given that the fighting mainly affected urban areas. After the cease-fire that followed the Lusaka Protocol the Province was divided; the government controlled almost nothing except the Benguela Corridor – the most densely populated area, and the route to the coast. Inhabitants of areas controlled by UNITA were penalised by their limited access to markets. This led to the growth of the important market at Vila Nova, and later of others, strategically situated on the front line between the areas controlled by the two sides. These are important points of contact for a people who do not want to be divided.

5. FOUR COMMUNITIES IN HUAMBO PROVINCE

The study examined four communities in the province of Huambo. These were selected using ecological, socio-economic, political and other criteria, and were Pedreira in Huambo District, Tchitwe (Ekunha District), Mbenda (Tchicala Tcholoehanga District) and Tchivembe (Tchicala Tcholoehanga District).

Pedreira is in the area of influence of the city of Huambo, within the Benguela Corridor, and is in government-controlled territory. Tchitwe is in the area called the Montanhas coastal range, an area that traditionally produces potatoes; it is in the government-controlled area but is outside the Benguela Corridor. Mbenda is a village in the south of the Province with a long-established tradition of growing maize for the market, and it was controlled by UNITA for almost the whole of the war; unfortunately brief visits and delicate circumstances made the study less detailed than the others. Tchivembe is in Tchicala Tcholoehanga district, and was previously an area that was a labour reserve and, more recently, was controlled by UNITA.

5.1 Pedreira and Apúli Trés: pushed around and plundered

5.1.1 A history of suffering

At the start of the 1960s, at the time of Portugal's new policies for Angola, the Benfica *colonato*²⁰ was established twelve kilometres south-west of Huambo city, in what is now the commune of Calima. With very few exceptions, *colonatos* were a failure in Portuguese colonial policy and the settlers abandoned them: this was the case for the Benfica *colonato*.

A family from the Azores left the *colonato* of Benfica settlement and started a farm nearby producing milk and pigs. When this family departed in 1975, the farm was abandoned. Later a man from Huila, who had worked on the farm, occupied it and subsequently his brother-in-law joined him. Towards the end of the 1970s, other people (relations, or refugees from areas affected by the war) joined them. This was the origin of the present community called Pedreira though the name came from a community that had existed nearby but had been destroyed by the Portuguese administration.

²⁰ Translator's note: *Colonatos* were agricultural areas in the Portuguese colonies set aside for Portuguese settlers. Despite the heavy investment, they rarely were successful. See pages 157 onwards of Bender (1978).

In the middle of the 1950s other people had settled near there, having been expelled from their land in a village called Trés, near the city of Huambo (that was then called Nova Lisboa) to make way for the airport: these people founded a new settlement called Apúli Trés. But at the end of the 1960s the Portuguese decided to transfer the inhabitants of Apúli Trés to a Protected Village²¹. The few people who lived in the old village called Pedreira were also moved to this Protected Village.

The civil war affected the lives of these two groups of people more than any of the other communities that we studied (or even visited).

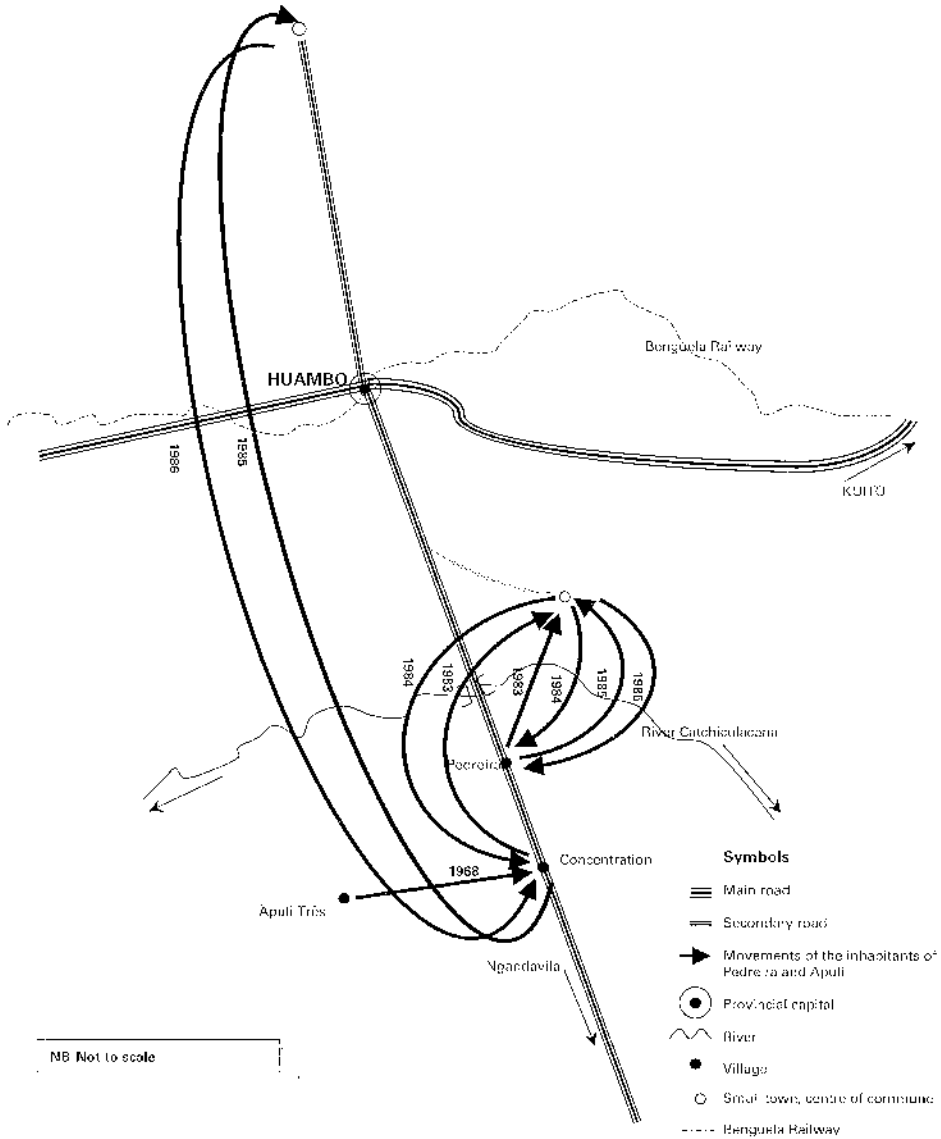
In 1983, during UNITA's general advance, its soldiers approached Calima, thus threatening the city of Huambo. The government decided to evacuate the inhabitants of the two villages to Calima. Subsequently there was a further evacuation to Tchipipa, north of the city of Huambo, but this time only the people from Apúli Trés were moved. The population of Pedreira spent almost two years in exile in Calima, where some cultivation was possible, but with serious risks of being ambushed by guerrillas and of stepping on mines. In 1986 the people of Pedreira were able to return and rebuild their village. The people of Apúli, however, had to build on a new site, at the side of the road near Pedreira.

For the people of Pedreira and Apúli Trés the worst experience of the war occurred, ironically, after the Lusaka Protocol was signed. The UNITA forces fleeing from Huambo decided to steal the people's cattle and other valuables. Then the government forces pillaged the "remains". It was only in 1996 when the UNITA troops were accommodated in camps, and the government forces withdrew, that people in the area could breathe freely. Until the time of our study the demarcation line between the areas controlled by the two belligerent parties ran less than a kilometre south of Apúli Trés. However, there were incidents from time to time. Map 3 shows the movements of the people of these two villages.

21 In the second half of the 1960s the Portuguese decided to use a programme of Protected Villages to isolate civilians from the nationalist guerrillas. Faced with the possibility of these guerrillas reaching the Central Plateau, from 1968 onwards they established Protected Villages in Huambo as a preventative measure.

Map 3

MOVEMENTS OF THE INHABITANTS OF PEDREIRA AND APULI TRES (1968-1986)



5.1.2 The characteristics and context of Pedreira and Apúli Trés.

Pedreira and Apúli Trés are in the so-called Corridor, a strip of territory that has been seriously destabilised ecologically, economically, socially, and demographically. It was affected by the war more than any other area in the province.

Pedreira village has 66 families, and Apúli Trés has 106. Houses are mostly built of adobe with thatched roofs. In Pedreira there are some tiled roofs, a sign of a certain level of economic power in colonial times. There are almost no animals (all were stolen); almost the only tools are hoes. The communities are very poor, as the war impoverished everyone. Even so, there is some social differentiation. The poorest (mostly older or single women) work for the few people who can afford the payment for a day's work, which is about one dollar.

These are recently established communities. Although Pedreira is newer, it is less poor and more cohesive than Apúli Trés. This may be because it has closer kinship, a stronger leadership, and more influence from the Baptist Church. Moreover, Apúli Trés suffered more from displacement and being forced into Protected Villages.

The colonial government and later the MPLA organised Protected Village programmes, and both administrations justified them on security grounds. In both villages alliances and splits resulted, but each community maintained its identity. People left the villages. Some signed up (mostly with the FAPLA army). Others, particularly from 1989 onwards, departed to avoid being drafted; their destinations were Benguela, Luanda, or even Namibia. Very few went to the city of Huambo (which lacked opportunities). Almost nobody returned. Even during the Bicesse period of peace no former soldiers came back.

5.1.3 Natural resources

The areas used for production by the two villages are defined fairly well. Each controls its own area, in which the inhabitants possess individual or family plots. Some areas are communal, such as the watercourses and the forest reserve from which firewood and charcoal are freely taken. It seems that lack of land has not been a problem, but some people who arrived from the city have had to rent land. Few people occupied or used plots of land that belonged to colonial farms or to the *cofonato*, because they feared that later the State would expel them.

The villages have reasonable water supplies. Many dwellings have wells; otherwise the people obtain water from nearby rivers or streams, or from unprotected springs.

The only animals hunted are rodents, because the better hunting areas are controlled by UNITA. Making honey is important for family economies, and they also use honey to prepare mead. The diet is supplemented with a wide variety of wild fruits, these being important for the children's diets.

Throughout the history of the two villages the inhabitants moved frequently. In various cases men left to work under contract (called *gabela* or *ngalia* locally) but usually they returned. Others, with the necessary skills, worked in the city but kept their families and fields at Pedreira or Apúli. At weekends they visited their villages, and they provided income that was important for the communities.

After independence, industry and construction in the city ground to a halt. Many people from Pedreira and Apúli returned to work purely as farmers as they had no other sources of income. Others sought new opportunities in other regions (mainly in Benguela or Luanda) and never came back. Some left the country and have never been heard of again.

5.1.4 Trade, services, and external links

The proximity of the city of Huambo with its consumer market, although it is currently weak due to the low level of purchasing power, still has a visible influence on the lives of the inhabitants of Pedreira and Apúli, and on their economy.

They prefer to sell goods in the city of Huambo because they get better prices, and then they can buy items they need. Usually women make this trip, either on foot, or by getting a lift with a *kandongueiro*²². There are no traders in the area, and the *kandongueiro* will only transport people and goods together. They are not usually traders in their own right and they do not want to run unnecessary risks. Transportation is more profitable.

²² Editor's note: *kandongueiro* can mean an unlicensed trader or a private provider of public transport. In this case the meaning is the latter, and is likely to mean a lorry or van carrying fee-paying passengers and their goods.

Although there has been this restricted contact with the city, many people have not been there since the colonial period. Calima has very little influence on the two villages: although it is an administrative centre, there are only rudimentary health and education services.

5.2 Tchitwe: a village that was not displaced

5.2.1 Characteristics and context of Tchitwe.

Tchitwe village is six kilometres east of the capital of Ekunha District, at the side of the road that connects that town to the city of Huambo. It is part of Region II of Zone 24 of the agricultural zoning of Angola, noted in the past for its small irrigation systems and its production of wheat and potatoes.

Maps 4 and 5 show the location of Tchitwe and its organisational divisions.

Tchitwe is also known as Tchitwe-Ombala because it is not an ordinary village (*imbo*): it is the village of the *osoma inene* of Tchitwe who has authority over a wide territory belonging to the Tchitwe clan and in which there are seven other groups of villages: Calei Cusila, Cacoio, Caliamano, Muehombo, Limundo, Tchicala, Tchambaluka.

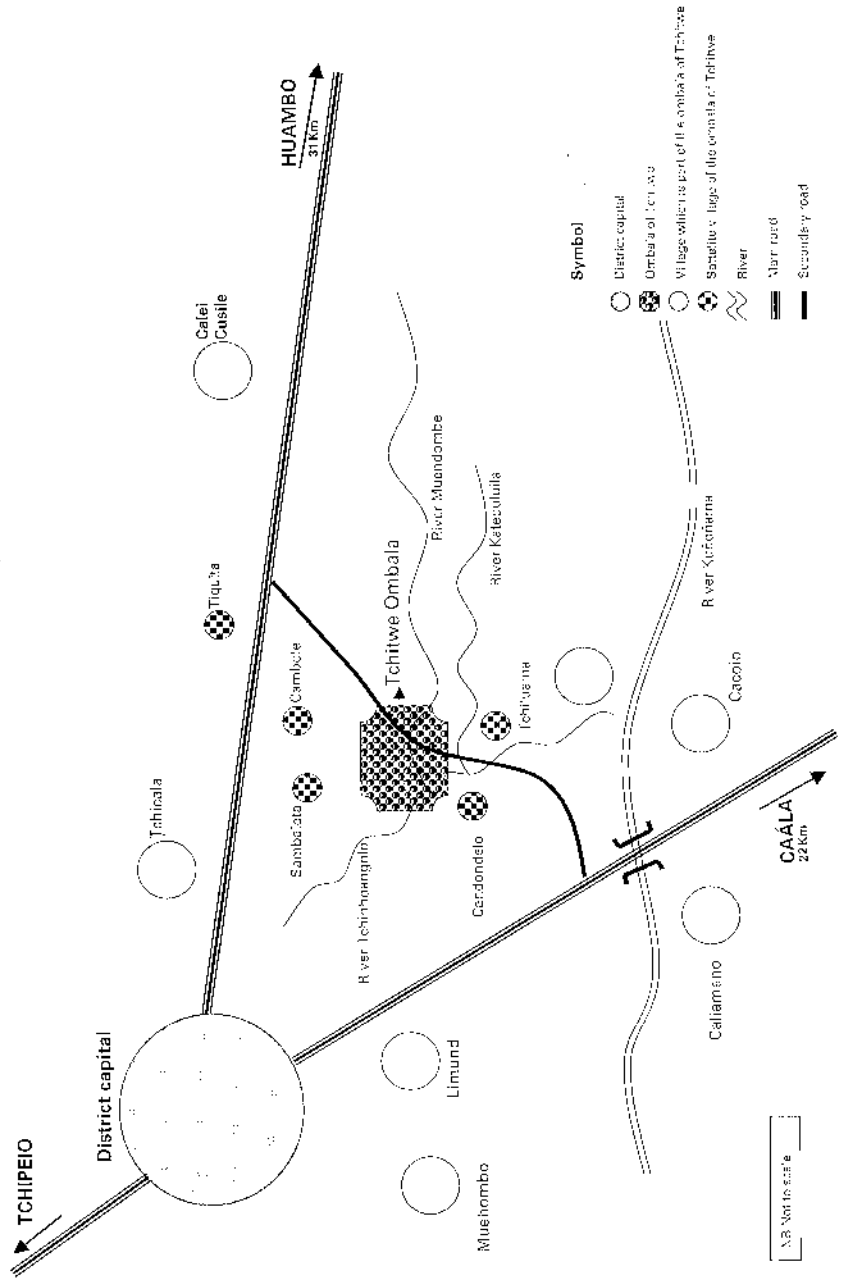
Tchitwe-Ombala is, in its turn, not a single village but a group of villages made up of the main village (*imbo inene*) and five satellite villages (*imbo*): Cambole, Sambaieta, Candondelo, Tchiluama, and Tiquita. Some of these villages were founded by segments of the original clan of Tchitwe who went in search of new lands as space became scarce, but others were formed by groups from other territories. The village of Tchitwe-Ombala is also divided into *osongo* (*bairros* in Portuguese).

The "traditional" authority covering the whole of the territory of Tchitwe is the *osoma inene*. Under him are *osoma* whose authority covers each principal village (*imbo inene*). Each satellite village has a *sekulu* and each *osongo* (*bairro*) has an *osungui*. See Table 4.

Ombala means both the principal village, the residence of the *osoma inene*, and the whole territory which is under the authority of the *osoma inene*. In the present text, Tchitwe-Ombala will be used to refer to the principal village (*imbo inene*) and Tchitwe will be used to refer to the territory as a whole.

Map 4

THE OMBALA OF TCHITWE



Tchitwe-Ombala is an old village, perhaps more than a hundred years old. The houses usually have a courtyard in which most domestic life takes place, enclosed by a kitchen and a granary, and sometimes by a small enclosure in which small animals are raised (chickens, pigs, rabbits, and so on). Normally the buildings are constructed of adobe and are thatched with grass, though the roof may sometimes be zinc sheeting or tiles. There was never any massive exodus from Tchitwe – the only time UNITA occupied the village was during 1993 and 1994 when it expelled government forces from the whole of Huambo province.

Generally people are classified into three social strata:

1. The rich harvest more than five tons of maize, own more than ten heads of cattle, have ploughs to rent out, may hire workers, and have a house with a roof of asbestos-cement, zinc sheeting, or tiles.
2. Peasants who are classified as well-off harvest between half and two tons of maize, own at least two heads of cattle and a plough, occasionally hire workers, and have a house with tiles, old roof-sheets, or even thatch.
3. The poor are those who have few or no resources, have no reserve of food, and who normally have to supplement the family income by taking paid work.

The vegetation (savannah grassland) shows that people have been there for a long time. They eliminated the previous growth, which was *mata de panda*²³ although vestiges of it are still visible in the protected woodland at the village cemetery.

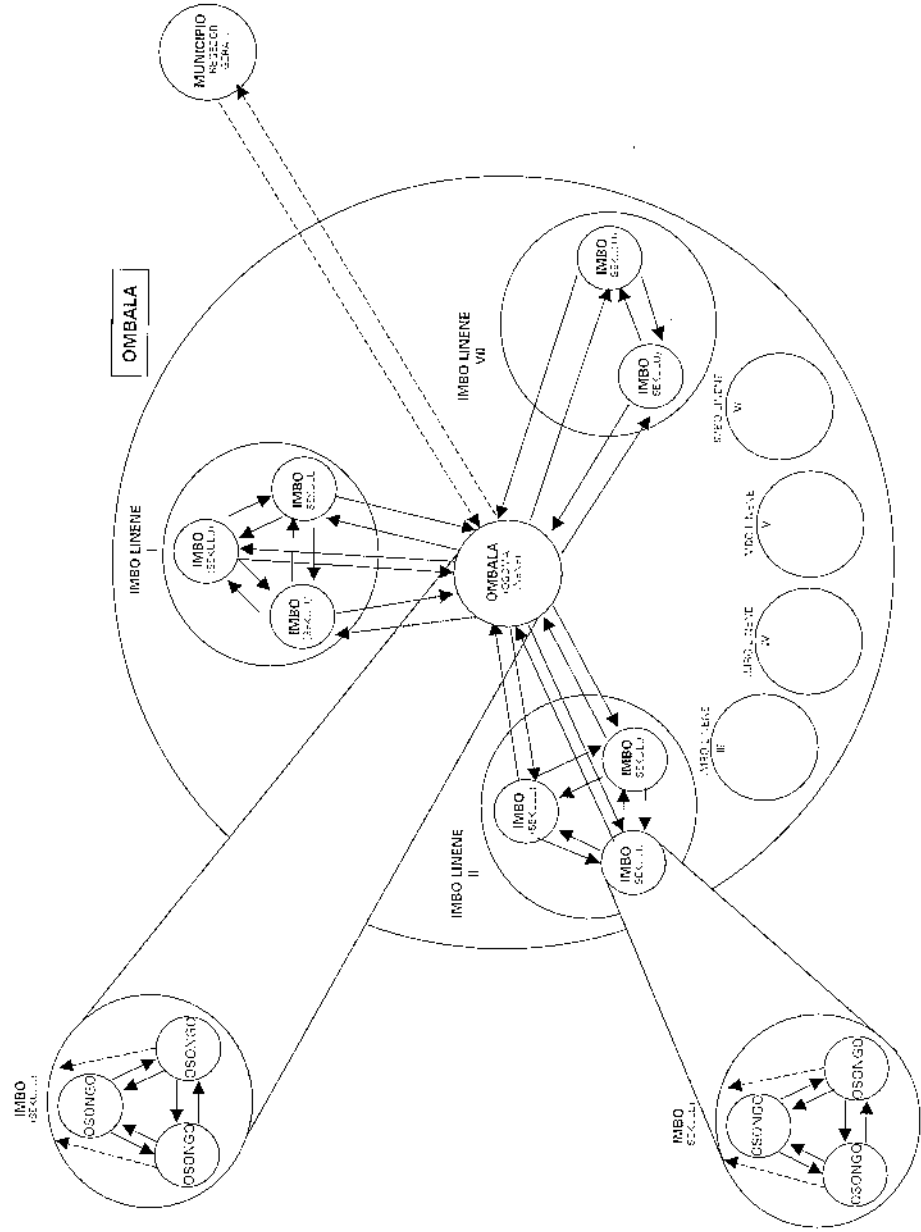
The village's productive area is well defined. Each family or individual possesses agricultural land and reserved land (*mata de panda* that is regenerating). The communal areas are forests some distance to the north of the village, near the hills of the Montanha coastal range. There, people can collect firewood and other products of the forest, and can make charcoal. Animals can be grazed freely, as long as the cultivated areas are respected.

²³

Editor's note: *mata de panda* is the common local name for the former natural vegetation of the Central Plateau of Angola. It is an open-floored woodland with straight-trunked trees approximately 12 metres in height dominated by *Brachystegia* and *Isolberlinia* species. The branches provide an almost continuous canopy while undergrowth is removed by burning, which does little damage to the trees themselves. Little *mata de panda* remains due to extensive clearance. See Diniz (1973) pp 317 – 319 and Urquhart (1963) page 67.

Map 5

DIAGRAM OF THE ORGANISATION OF OMBALA OF TCHITWE
(Based on Lima, 1992)



The physical form of the nearby villages is similar – where there are differences this is due to the direct effects of the war. In Calej Cusila, for example, the dwellings are more scattered, as more people are absent since, in contrast to Tchitwe, the village was completely abandoned for ten years (1983 to 1993).

5.2.2 Some history

The inhabitants of Tchitwe-Ombala realise that they did not suffer as much during the war as other nearby places. Villages like Calej Cusila or “those in the mountains” had to be abandoned by their inhabitants for long periods. Although the sixteen years of war had been terrible, the episode when the people of Tchitwe-Ombala lost the most goods was quite recent. In 1994. Government soldiers stole seven motorcycles, a large pump, pots and pans, plates, and televisions though they left the cars and tractors. Many people have begun to recover and reconstruct, but it is difficult. There are no fertilisers nor seed potatoes and, if there are any, these items are very expensive.

In Calej Cusila it was worse. The war began to have a direct and serious effect on the inhabitants of the village in 1983, when the government decided to billet a military force nearby to protect the television transmitter. The village became an area of direct conflict, physically attacked by one side and accused of collaboration with the “enemy” by the other. So the government decided to move everyone in the village to Petróleo (Huambo District) and to Tchitwe-Ombala, in more secure areas. These people developed a strategy for “recuperation”. They rented, bought, or occupied land, and in the first year concentrated on producing sweet potatoes to get through the famine, while the women earned money working for the “bosses” in Petróleo. They were able to sell sweet potatoes the next year, and then buy fertiliser, and invest in vegetables. These two items enabled them to rebuild their lives in Petróleo, and then managed to accumulate some cattle and other possessions. In 1993 UNITA encouraged them to return home; they were starting to recuperate again, when once again the war stripped them of all their belongings. The fleeing soldiers took the cattle, while the soldiers who arrived stole chickens, goats, asbestos-cement sheets, pots and pans, plates, and other household utensils. Each family had to try to rebuild their economy yet again.

5.2.3 Natural resources

Tchitwe-Ombala village has a reasonable amount of water in permanently flowing streams. The inhabitants consume water from unprotected springs, and from domestic wells. To obtain firewood and charcoal they go to increasingly distant places, in the woodland reserves they possess or in the forests on the slopes of the mountains. The wood is partly for their own use, and poorer families sometimes sell it to increase their incomes. At present the women walk more than two hours to reach suitable woodland, but “even there the wood is running out”. Now they can only find *mata de panda* “on the other side”, meaning in areas controlled by UNITA. The same is true of hunting. Nowadays it is difficult to find animals to hunt except rodents in the dry season.

Apparently there is no lack of land. In general the structure of the soils is average. They are quite degraded, poor in terms of organic material, and of low fertility.

5.2.4 Production methods

5.2.4.1. Agriculture

Umbundu peasants whose soil has little fertility, and who face ecological conditions unfavourable to their normal crops, are skilled at making the most of whatever environment and physical features they find. We will describe a typical productive unit – usually these comprise at least three separate cultivated plots. Their number, dispersion, and type are exactly related to the family’s position on the social scale.

Except in the poorest families, it is common for each family to have four different types of fields:

- Onaka, a low-lying field which farmers keep moist or dry by controlling the water table. It is normally cultivated after the rains, to enable vegetables and potatoes to be grown; and starting in July or August farmers plant maize there, timed to be harvested in November or December when the reserve from the main harvest (May/June) is already low.

- *Ombanda*, a field on the border of the low area where water and drainage management is easier. Usually it is sown with maize in September for harvesting in January or February, or it is used for growing potatoes.
- *Ongongo*, a high field which usually is not very fertile and has little organic material. It is called *osenda* when it is in a recently cleared area and *epia* if it has been cultivated for several years.
- *Ocumbo*, a field near the house. It has more organic material, originating from animals and from human wastes. Recently these fields have been used mainly for growing food in association with others. They may also contain fruit trees and sometimes tobacco. Nowadays *ocumbo* is very important for food security in the Benguela Corridor.

Sometimes there is another type of field, *elunda*, which is on land where there has been a village or some kind of human settlement. Usually such land is rich in organic material as a result of the previous presence of people and animals.

The fertility of the most common type of field, the *ongongo*, is low and is decreasing. Therefore the peasants need the expertise to maximise productivity by planting different crops in the various planting seasons. Maize, on its own or intercropped with beans, is the most common product in the first two years; sometimes an oleaginous crop is also planted (sesame, or maize intercropped with beans. After five or six years a crop of groundnuts or sweet potatoes is grown, and then the land is left fallow.

The choice of crops depends on the characteristics of the soil and the climate, and on market factors. For the people's own consumption the most important crop is still maize, so space is reserved for it in the *ocumbo*. Sorghum is also grown in the *ocumbo* as a crop which will produce something even in a drought and which is less attractive to thieves. Sweet potato is very important in terms of food security, mainly for the poorest people. Because it is difficult to buy cooking oil, they always grow one or more oleaginous crops: sesame, groundnuts, sunflowers, or even soya. The cultivation of potato and wheat is limited by the lack of fertilisers.

The seeds are usually poor quality, because they have become degraded. The NGOs distribute seeds but the peasants do not always plant them, mainly

because they are not drought-resistant. In the absence of chemical fertilisers, peasants use manure. But, because of the shortage of animals, there is not much manure; it is mostly used for cultivating vegetables and potatoes. Any fertiliser that arrives is used almost entirely on the potato fields.

In the production system used before the “troubles”, peasants had to incorporate new areas regularly, so they cleared areas of bush annually or every other year. At present this clearing is done less frequently, since the fields are significantly smaller.

Normally the family or the individual has possession of all the plots in their productive unit, including the reserves. Nobody mentions vacant land. In many cases free occupation or inheritance still determine who possesses the land, but increasingly there are instances of purchase, renting, or lending.

The lack of males in many households is a concern, and it leads to greater poverty. Women have taken on responsibility for marketing products, a role they did not have in the past. To do this they travel to the nearest markets “because women are better at haggling over prices”. Children start to work in the fields quite young, when they are 10 to 12 years old.

In the particular case of Tchitwe, demonstrating the increasing social differentiation of recent years, there are four types of productive unit:

Type I

- Single women (widows, separated, or whose husbands are away). Despite a well-established strategy for subsistence, they do not manage to produce enough for their own sustenance; therefore they often have to earn money working for the better-off peasants who employ people.

Type II

- Men who are “traditionalist”, closed, and resistant to change (some, but not all, of them are old). They concentrate their energies entirely on subsistence. Like Type I, they are unable to guarantee sustenance for themselves and their families purely from their own produce; so they seek paid work with the peasants who employ people.

Type III

- This group could be described as ordinary peasants. They give priority to subsistence farming, but they do organise their activities to fit in with the market. At present they are adversely affected by pilfering, but they are willing and able to reactivate their production. Some have already obtained one or more teams of animals, and employ poor people of types I and II. They now harvest between a half and two tons of maize.

Type IV

- These are the richer peasants, who like to be described as farmers²⁴. They "are not worried about food because it is already guaranteed, normally harvest more than two or three tons of maize, own at least ten heads of cattle, have a house with a tiled, zinc, or asbestos-cement roof, and can employ many workers". Some of them have tractors, lorries, or motorcycles. They are in a different sociological category. They have contacts with the district capital (where they may live) or even with other authorities in the cities. They hope to reach a different socio-economic status as soon as possible.

Before the war there was another group of people, those who were only involved in agriculture part-time. They had an occupation or trade in the village or in the city of Huambo, which guaranteed a livelihood. For them farming provided a safety net, and it was their wives or other family members who did the agricultural work. Nowadays lack of employment or an occupation places them in type III.

5.2.4.2 Raising cattle

In other areas the thefts of 1994 left the inhabitants with no cattle, but in Tchitwe this was not the case. According to our observations the community has more than a hundred cattle, although they are unevenly distributed with more than half owned by the rich. In the colonial period there were also goats and pigs that were sold to a butcher, but there are few now.

²⁴ Editor's note: *Agricultores* in Portuguese. The implied difference between *campesones* (peasants) and *agricultores* is that the latter are better at farming, but figures for production per hectare indicate little difference between them. The difference is in access to resources, rather than in the use made of resources.

Almost always cattle belonging to several people graze together in herds. The shepherds are usually cattle-owners' children who are between ten and fifteen years old. They work as shepherds for periods of a week. Only rich people have their own herds. The cattle's main functions are for animal traction and to produce manure.

5.2.4.3 *Other sources of income*

We have already mentioned that during earlier periods migration to the north of the country, to fisheries, and to the mines was important for survival. We became aware that many people who have skills enabling them to work in the city (masons, carpenters, mechanics, tailors) now live almost entirely from agriculture.

Apart from paid work, the most common activities in which the poor engage in to survive are production of mats or charcoal, and selling firewood. People who are "richer" increase their revenues in other ways, either hiring out ploughs (and sometimes tractors), or lending maize from their reserves to be repaid at harvest time with 100% interest. This intensifies social differentiation.

People who sell their produce in Huambo or Petróleo (instead of locally) get better prices.

It seems that now, as before the war, most peasants need extra income, on top of what they get from their agricultural activities. They require this to be able to resume production on a sound basis. Almost all the young people interviewed in Tchitwe wanted to leave to earn money.

Only the rich manage to establish food reserves for themselves and their families. There are families that are able to produce and manage reserves that sustain them for the whole year; they bring in inputs from each field, with separate harvests throughout the year. But the harvests of these "well-off" peasants do not carry over into the subsequent agricultural year, because they stop at the beginning of the rains (when they resort to sweet potatoes). This nutritional drama is very simple to calculate. An average-sized family needs at least 720 kilos of maize per year. At present, two hectares or more must be planted (without intercropping) to produce that amount. Fieldwork showed us that it is difficult for an average-sized family to cultivate such an area without animal traction. It is impossible for a single woman. These circumstances are responsible for the current poverty. They prevent people from breaking the cycle and beginning a new activity without the injection of other inputs (fertilisers and traction animals, for example).

The most critical period for food security is January and February. By then people have finished the reserves from the previous season, but the maize from the *onaka* and *ombanda* is not ready. Moreover it is the time of the short dry season, when agricultural activities are almost paralysed and the rich do not employ anyone. So it is a time of hunger.

Generally families prepare two meals per day. If they eat maize porridge at one, then they have sweet potatoes at the other. Any beans they may have are served with the meal. During periods when crops are growing, *tombis* (sauces) made with beans or pumpkins are common. The diet is supplemented by wild fruits, mushrooms, and other foods picked in the bush. People rarely eat food containing animal protein.

5.2.4.4 Effects of the war on the productive system – adaptations and solutions

Before the war the market influenced the productive system. The breakdown of the market caused a fall in production. The rural trading network did not work properly, and paid work disappeared. The extension services collapsed, and the supply of fertilisers and seeds ended. Thefts of cattle during the war, and the final plundering, limit the availability of animal traction for ploughing and transport, and reduce the supply of manure. With few exceptions, production has decreased to just above survival level, although in some cases even that is uncertain.

Insecurity restricted cultivation to smaller areas, and this in turn made it difficult to rotate the fallow lands so fertility diminished even more. Lack of capacity to do the work, mainly in households headed by single women or where the active males were away, also prevented the cultivation of new areas. So cultivated areas diminished and *ocumbos* were used more. Production went down dramatically, and the poorest people had to go to work for others.

No answer was found to the problem of the migratory work force. During the war migrants mostly went to the cities and, as in colonial times, almost everybody who went stayed there. Other people who departed were the young people who joined one or other of the armies, voluntarily or involuntarily. There were repercussions on the productive systems, since the productive units lost important parts of their workforces and much of the capital necessary for investment.

5.2.5 Power, social relationships, and institutions

The present *regedor* of Tchitwe was appointed in 1987. He was already rich, as he had made good use of the money he earned in the 1960s on “contract” in South Africa. He is now the most prosperous person in the community and enjoys unmistakable prestige with the people. They see him as the largest employer, the only moneylender, the contractor who rents out tractors and ploughs, the man who introduces technical innovations, and the man who finances the local football team. He has a set of characteristics that bear hardly any relationship to those of the known “traditional leaders”.

The current succession or nomination mechanism for chiefs is unclear, as is the nature of the power exercised by “visible” or known traditional leaders. After a certain date, to preserve the dignity of their real chiefs, the native communities started to have a kind of “administrative” chief, who acted as their point of contact with the Portuguese administration and with the outside world in general. However, the “original” chiefs carried out the internal management of the community; they were the descendants of the “traditional” lineages; the “administrative chiefs” were subordinate to them. In the case of Tchitwe, it seems that this hidden power does not exist at present.

Significantly though, the *regedor* agreed that “in moments of crisis or war” it is natural that the people protect the real chiefs; he said that this had happened in the history of Tchitwe, but added that “it happened in our grandparents’ time”.

The *Ovimbundu* communities have been losing their traditional characteristics for almost one hundred years. This has affected the whole system of power and kinship. At present the arrangements for succession seem to be indirectly influenced by the State and by the political parties.

Conflicts are discussed in the *onjango* (communal meeting), which deals with thefts in the community, adultery, and minor violence. But unnatural deaths, violent aggression, or theft by people from outside the community are sent to the district administration and the police. Normally matters follow a hierarchy: *usongui* (the leader of a neighbourhood or hamlet) – *sekulu* (an elder) – *osoma* (chief) – *osoma inene* (*regedor*) – *regedor geral* – the State administration (at Commune or District level). When a matter is sent to the administration by the village, the *regedor geral* (who lives in the district capital) deals with it initially. Only if he, with the help of his advisers, is unable to adjudicate the case is it sent to the administrator or the police.

The *onjango* appears to have some importance as a forum for debate – for the *osongo* (neighbourhood), for the *imbo* (subsidiary village), and for the *ombala* (principal village)²⁵, and as a court to try cases that do not need to go to the administration. But the *onjango* has ceased providing a complete education, because the churches demanded the right to influence the education of young people²⁶. *Onjuluka* (mutual aid) is almost never practised, but there is still the *vakucisoko*, an alliance between families of two villages or two *osongos* to organise funerals.

5.2.6 Population movements

The population of Tchitwe-Ombala did not move en masse, unlike almost all the other villages we studied and other villages in its *ombala*. The most dramatic case was Calei Cusila, which had a history of moving similar to the other case studies; the whole community was displaced for more than ten years, although this did not deprive it of its identity.

5.2.7 Trade, services, and links with the outside

The inhabitants of the communities talked a lot about the gap left when the State stopped promoting peasant agriculture. This, and the lack of a minimally organised market were the factors that limited the possibilities of resuming production for any purpose except subsistence. When they talked of a “normal” past they were not just referring to the colonial period, but also to structures that the Angolan State had set up after independence but had subsequently disappeared. However, people with a more entrepreneurial spirit and more access to resources continue to concentrate on the market. It provides profits, which in due course can be invested in cattle and fertilisers.

²⁵ Translator's note: *Ombala* has two meanings, the territory that is under one *Osoma*, usually an area including one principal village (where the *Osoma* resides) and several subsidiary villages, or the principal village itself. Here the meaning is the latter.

²⁶ Editor's note: the *Onjango* was described by Childs (1949) as the “men's club house” in which an evening meal was taken communally by all men of a village and at which the daily activities were discussed. It was an important part of education for male youth. It was in decline at the time of Child's observations (the 1930s and 1940s) due to pressure from the Churches and the effects of migrant labour that removed a large number of males from the villages for long periods of time.

5.3 Mbenda – a refuge in the forest

Two short visits were made to Mbenda. The understanding of the community gleaned from observations and interviews is less thorough than that of the other villages we studied.

The *ombala* of Mbenda is south of the River Enhele, near its confluence with the River Kubango. It is a typical area of *mata de panda*, and the vegetation is regenerating well because so few people live there.

Mbenda is in the territory of the *Ngangela* people, who have long maintained a cultural relationship and have exchanged goods with the *Ovimbundu*, their neighbours, though the association has not been without conflict. Differences based on ethnic origin do not seem to have played a part in questions of power and distribution of wealth.

A long-established *Ngangela* community lives in the principal village of the *ombala*. Around it, within ten kilometres, there are six subsidiary villages; *Ovimbundu* people who were displaced from Huambo and from Caconda (in Huila Province) during the 1980s inhabit these, which are smaller than the principal village.

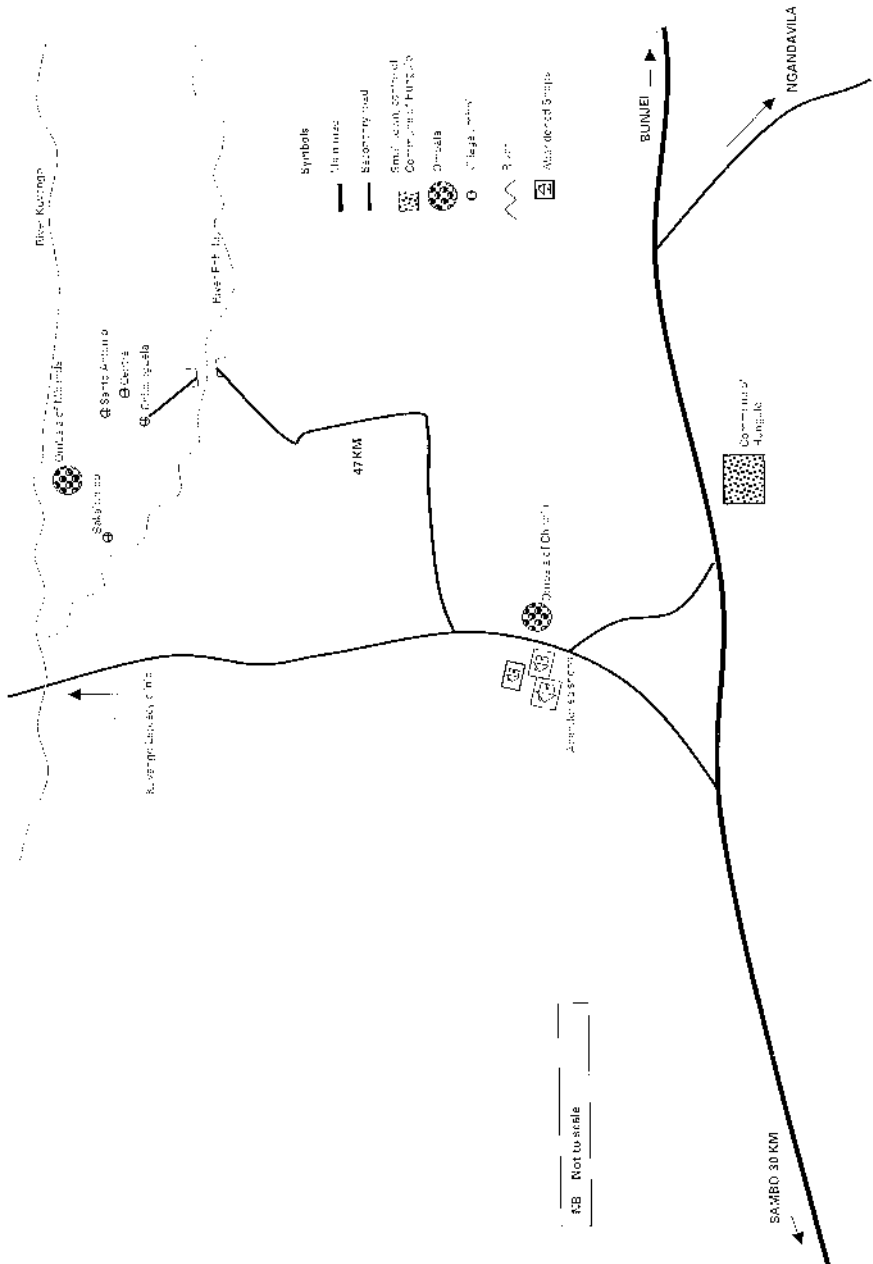
Mbenda was a reserve area for UNJITA, a rearguard for Huambo and Huila in terms of security and logistics. There is no shortage of land. The government attacked Mbenda and the inhabitants of the central village had to abandon it in 1987. This coincided with the arrival of most of the *Ovimbundu* people who established themselves in the subsidiary villages. The abandoned village was reconstructed (very near its original site) only after the Bicesse Accord. Thus the inhabitants of the principal village in the *ombala* of Mbenda have also suffered displacement in the same way as many communities in Huambo Province.

There are differences between the villages. Some villages are considered "rich", as they have some adobe houses, cattle, and cultivated areas that average about 4 to 5 hectares. Their inhabitants were able to produce some surpluses.

At the other extreme there are villages with no oxen, and where the cultivated areas are much smaller (less than 2 hectares); their inhabitants have part-time paid work in order to survive. The circumstances of these communities may be due to their lack of interest in investing, and a greater interest in short-term returns.

Map 6

THE OMBALA OF MBENDA



Cattle are usually obtained in Huila in exchange for maize (one ton of maize is bartered for one ox). Such an acquisition is every family's greatest aspiration, even though cattle thieves are currently a constant threat.

There is no land problem, but the low productivity suggests that fertility is quite low (informants speak of an average of 300 to 400 kilos per hectare). The peasants do not evaluate it in this way, and they use neither fertiliser nor manure: according to one of the interviewees "our soil is good". After four or five years of cultivation, fallow land takes about twenty years to recover its fertility. Extending the areas under cultivation compensates for the low levels of fertility. The presence of animals means that fields are far from the dwellings; *ocumbos* are rare or are used just for growing tobacco. The main crops are maize, beans, sweet potato, cassava, sugar cane, and tobacco. In other areas where instability is greater, cassava is no longer grown, but in Mbenda people continued to cultivate it, as they did not move so much, and they could plant cassava and wait long enough for completion of the growth cycle. Maize surpluses allow them to raise pigs, and there are also quite a number of goats and poultry. We found that the people are very open to granting land to outsiders (displaced people) or to returnees. But they firmly reject the idea of large-scale farmers moving in²⁷. We found no other income-generating activities, but selling honey (which they make already) and mushrooms could become important in the future. Maps 6 and 7 show the location of Mbenda and its the lay-out of its fields.

Mbenda is far away from any commercial networks. The road linking the *ombata* with Tchicala Tcholohanga was only open to traffic in 1996. A *kandongueiro* organised this, and his vehicle was the first to arrive since the start of the war. The other mobile traders use carts, bicycles or even animals, and they barter manufactured goods for maize and other crops (beans, *cruetra*²⁸ and tobacco). The lack of non-agricultural consumer goods is severe, and their prices are high. For example, one kilo of salt is bartered for ten of maize, and one kilo of soap is traded for thirty-five of maize. Money is not used.

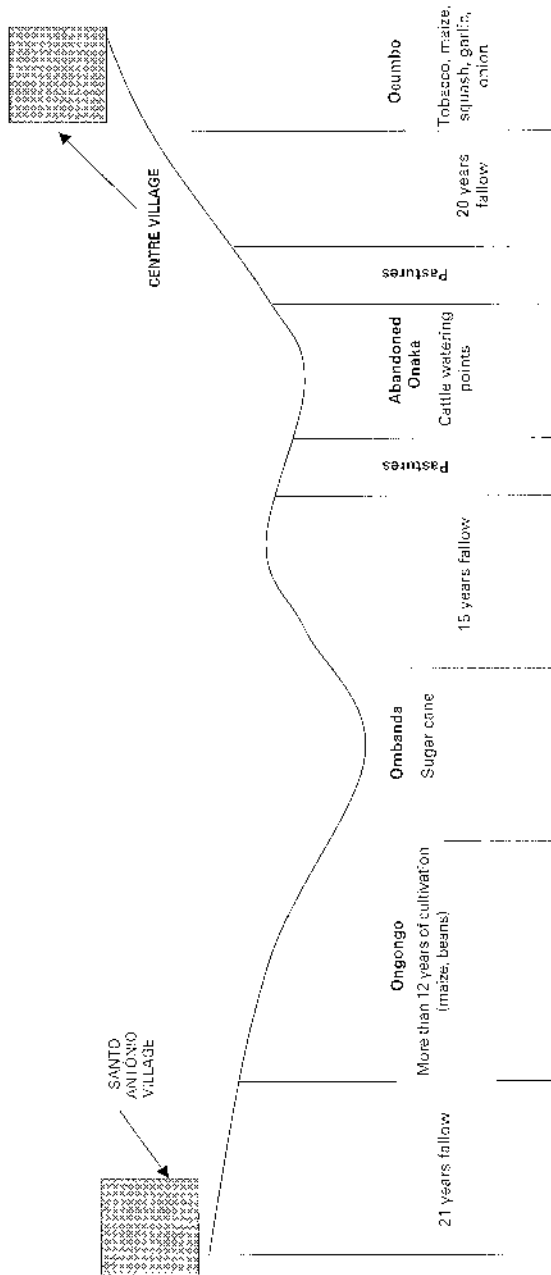
The idea of migrating to a city was mostly opposed, either for political reasons, or because people lack the necessary contacts such as family or friends who are already there.

²⁷ This refers to people who want to occupy large properties that previously belonged to the Portuguese.

²⁸ Dry cassava root, used for making flour.

Map 7

FIELD TYPES OF THE OMBALA MBENDA
(CROSS-SECTION)



Health and education services are almost non-existent. Many people hope to send their children to study in the city, most importantly learning Portuguese to facilitate wider contacts, and arithmetic “to avoid being cheated in business deals”. So schooling is valued more than in the two communities discussed above.

Each household, whatever its income level, pays the authorities 40 kilos of maize as an annual tax. According to the “administrative” leader of Hungulo, not long ago this quantity was larger. The poorest people obtain loans of maize from the better off at very high rates of interest.

The “traditional” leadership is increasingly symbolic, and the power of the chief (who is *Ngangela*) has mostly disappeared. He lost his political authority to the party (UNITA), and his spiritual and religious power to the churches. The chiefs now see that their positions are more an obligation than a privilege. Perhaps this explains why there is such a rapid turnover of chiefs.

5.4 Tchivembe – not waiting for Godot

5.4.1 Context and history

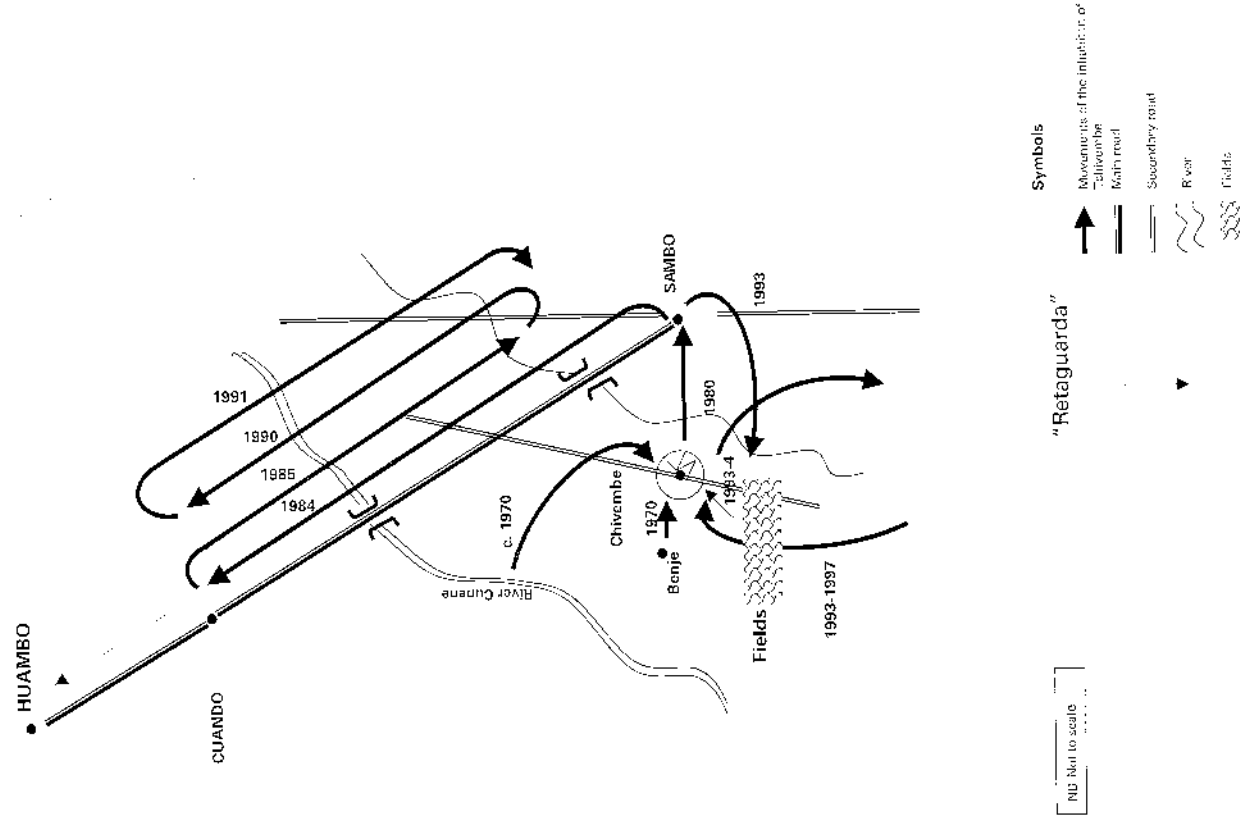
Tchivembe is an *ombala* about 50 kilometres south-east of the city of Huambo; it is in Tchicala Tcholohanga district, near the source of the River Kunene, and includes seven villages, all within six kilometres of the principal village. The current population is 1145 families. See Map 8.

The agro-ecology of Tchivembe places it in region I of zone 24: an economy based on widespread maize production for the market. In the final years of the colonial period the most important source of income for the peasants was migrant labour in the north of Angola. The soils are poor, as they are on almost the whole plateau. Areas of savannah grassland show how the old extensive forests have degraded, although there are still woodlands in areas where humans have not lived in recent decades.

The history of the *ombala* is one of forced displacements. The first of these came when the Portuguese moved the village from its previous location by the River Kunene to a nearby Protected Village on the road. The people’s ancestral lands were taken over by two settlers who used them for raising cattle.

Map 8

MOVEMENTS OF THE INHABITANTS OF TCHIVEMBE (1970-1997)



Independence brought great hope, and people started to leave the “protected” area in a first attempt to return to their houses. But the optimism did not last long. The village was vulnerable in various ways: reprisals from the government; and UNITA’s forces that they could not refuse; demands for support of recruitment by both sides. In 1980 government forces compelled the villagers to go to Sambo, the capital of a commune about seven kilometres away. It had been made into a stronghold. The government hoped that this would deprive UNITA of the “water it swims in” – support by the rural population. But some peasants preferred to flee in the opposite direction, towards the rearguard to the reserve areas from which UNITA organised and supported their side of the conflict²⁹. The division and dispersion of the village started at that time.

In 1984, harassed by UNITA attacks, Government troops temporarily withdrew from Sambo to Cuando, closer to Huambo and an easier place to defend. People living in Sambo went with them. However, in the area around Cuando there was little to support them; after four months most followed the government forces back to Sambo. Then in 1990, when the forces withdrew again, the peasants had no alternative but to follow them once more to Cuando. When the peace agreement was signed in 1991 the population went back again to Sambo, although not to the original location of their village, which they feared was mined. The war struck them again in 1993, when Mig jets bombarded Sambo. The villagers collected their properties and departed again, this time to shelters (called *ovipundo*) near their fields. Their dispersion enabled them to resist the attacks from the air and to avoid pillage by passing armed men. It was only in 1995, after the Lusaka Protocol was signed, that most felt secure enough to return to the site of their village. Since 1992 the area has been controlled by UNITA.

Developments in the village over the last generation diminished the “space” available for any authority. During the last twenty years the most important moves were forced on the community, they did not decide to leave. Each family (or, more rarely, each individual) determined which armed group they should go with. Leaders, whether traditional or not, did not decide for them, and so when the villagers moved they did not go together. Nowadays they say that the people were “scattered”. The process of dispersion destroyed the pre-existing social structure.

In 1991 people started returning to the village from the rearguard area, a process that is still going on. In Tchivembe reintegration was not complicated. Each family occupied its old land and those of relatives who had not yet

²⁹ Mbenda, for example

returned. Families do not seem to be divided by the political and military struggle. Soldiers demobilised after the Bicesse Peace Accords reintegrated with the other returnees, while some of those who came from the rearguard area brought cattle. They lent or hired out these animals to others, and this was simultaneously an integrating and differentiating factor. Returnees from Cuando (and even from Huambo) brought urban ideas and other influences, visible in the new churches and the way markets are organised. They have other skills for facing the new challenges.

When the village regrouped the inhabitants tried to shape new social practices based on the experiences they brought with them from periods on the move. This return is incomplete; many will never come back as some have died and others have organised a new life somewhere else. We were informed that three-quarters of those who went to Sambo and Cuando returned, but of the people who chose to go to the rearguard areas the proportion was less than half. The two groups of returnees brought back very different experiences of the war years. They immersed themselves in a process of accommodation and comprehension to facilitate the attempt to reconstruct a coherent social entity yet again. The most interesting aspect we found was that they did not "wait for Godot". They do not depend on UNITA or the government to reorganise their lives after such a tormented recent history.

At present young people express some interest in leaving to go to the cities, but less strongly than in the areas administered by the government. This could be because their communities are more isolated. Anybody who goes must have a family network in the city to provide initial support.

5.4.2 Agriculture and subsistence

The Tchivembe area is on the outer edge of the lands that surround Sambo. Soils in this zone are degraded due to continuous cultivation during the 1980s, and most trees were cut down for firewood. This explains why the village's best fields are further away from Sambo, to the south. From the centre of Tchivembe the distance to these cultivated areas is ten kilometres. The main crops are maize, sweet potatoes, beans, potatoes, cowpeas, and some tobacco for personal use or for sale. For years, the instability associated with displacement of people discouraged the cultivation of cassava, but this is now being restarted. Maize is still the main item produced for the market, despite miserable yields. People rotate crops to allow longer fallow periods. Land is assigned to families, and when people have not returned other relations use it.

It can be inherited but not sold – there is no market in land. The average cultivated area is 1.5 hectares, and productivity is low (300 to 350 kilos per hectare); these figures explain clearly why there is poverty. The villagers say that there is no lack of land, and that if necessary more land could be assigned to people who return from the cities. But they violently oppose the idea that rich large-scale farmers or speculators might take over the former Portuguese farms.

There are few cattle in the village, considerably less than in the past although the number is increasing. People can use animal ploughs and cultivate larger areas if they have cattle. Small animals such as chickens, pigs, and goats are raised. There is a hierarchy of domestic animals, and families try to move up this scale; they graduate from chickens to pigs or goats, and then to cattle.

5.4.3 Trade and income

Tchivembe is far from main roads, although this will change when the bridge over the River Kunene on the way to Gandavila is repaired. However, it is still one day's walk away from the end of the road in Sassoma, on the other side of the Kunene. Tchivembe is in a favourable location for trade in goods coming from Huambo as prices rise steeply at this point, and the people of Tchivembe take advantage of the position and act as intermediaries. They go to Huambo with maize and other products, then return with soap, clothes, oil, and so on; some of the final consumers of these items are people in their village, but others live in much more distant settlements. The traders from Tchivembe may go to these more isolated areas to the south; but more often they pass on the products to another intermediary who transports them there.

The other important revenue for Tchivembe comes from its labour force. During the period of greatest demand for labour, the September-October sowing season, some men or their wives (but not usually both) travel southwards. Without leaving Huambo province or even the district, they provide labour for a short period in exchange for seeds. This barter benefits both sides. We found no other activities that generate income for families.

The villagers have great hopes that their lives will improve when the bridge over the River Kunene opens. At present two NGOs are working together on this rehabilitation project. Lorries from Huambo will be able to come right to the village, and charcoal production in the area around Tchivembe will become

commercially viable. The inhabitants will benefit in terms of income, but the vegetation will suffer.

5.4.4 Religion

There are four churches in the *ombala's* principal village. They have become the most energetic bodies in the social structure, and perform many roles:

- introduce new social customs: for example, taboos against pork, opposition to polygamy, or the practice of circumcision.
- organise communal work in the church's fields, or help a member of the congregation who is in need.
- promote education by holding classes in one of the churches.
- collect for the church (a tithe, a weekly collection, or ad hoc contributions).
- take care of vulnerable groups, either by direct contributions or by doing work.
- act as a channel for communicating with the outside (contacts by pastors with religious leaders and with other congregations, or letters to family members who are away).

An example that shows just how vital the churches have become for the social organisation of the village is the tendency for members of the congregation to live next to each other. The churches are in the front line of the cultural debate that tackles problems like circumcision, polygamy, alcohol, and others.

5.4.5 Social classes

The events of recent years have dramatically levelled the social classes in the village. Those who went off to Sambo and Cuando returned without their cattle, the main sign of wealth and inherited status. Those who spent the war years in the forests with UNITA brought one or two cattle on their return (although fewer of them came back).

The process of social differentiation is now accelerating, mainly because of unequal access to opportunities for commerce and for working. There are now three levels:

- Those who have a marketable surplus that they invest in cattle.
- Those who “get by” by cultivating their own fields, but cannot accumulate.
- Those who have to work some of the time in other people’s fields.

The community has mechanisms for helping its most vulnerable members. As well as widows, old people, and the disabled, this includes the families that have arrived recently. These poorer people profit from three sources: the payments in kind they receive for working on other people’s fields, gifts from church collections, and from their own production, however small that might be.

5.4.6 Political authority

The village’s political power seems to be subtly balanced between two entities – traditional leadership and the party (UNITA). The present *regedor* took office after the community returned in 1993. Old people in the village say that, as is typical, he is qualified for this work in two ways: his noble blood, and his good sense. We were given the impression that the chiefs’ spiritual and religious powers are gradually being taken over by the churches.

UNITA’s party structure parallels that of the traditional leadership. The *ombala*’s current co-ordinator has been in power since 1991. His tasks are to organise the contributions of maize the village gives UNITA, disseminate news and implement instructions coming from the district capital of Sambo, and deal with “political” cases. Other party functionaries are subordinate to the co-ordinator: the administrative secretary, the mobiliser, the women’s league (called LIMA), and the social secretary. All these posts have an equivalent in each village of the *ombala*. That is the theory, but in practice many of these posts are vacant, in the principal and subsidiary villages. At this level party activists receive few material rewards. It seems that UNITA’s presence here is not as strong as in other parts of the province.

One of the most complex questions we looked at in Tchivembe was the relationship between the party’s authority and traditional leadership. We are not completely clear about this because informants gave contradictory information about their relative powers, even during individual conversations. We did not hear of anything suggesting any significant tension between them. On the contrary, we came across many examples of co-operation.

6. EVALUATE THE PRESENT AND RETHINK THE FUTURE

There is a pressing need for a debate covering the major questions affecting rural people, as well as the relationship between the State and society on the Central Plateau. What is the future for agriculture, and for the peasants who are unable to make a fair livelihood from it? Is there a surplus or a lack of manpower? What social changes have taken place in the communities, and how will the State confront them when its administrative sphere is enlarged? What are the existing power structures, and how will they interact with state institutions? How will such bodies position themselves in relation to the services that now exist as a result of popular initiatives? Here we try to address some of these questions.

6.1 Is there enough land for everybody? The end of a myth.

Apparently peasant farmers do not perceive the land question as a problem: but only apparently. At present the peasants do not feel that there is a serious land problem – because at present agricultural production has shrunk, and pressures from new land allocations have not yet been felt. The “commercial redimensioning” programme³⁰ gave some people “rights”, officially sanctioned by the State, to certain lands. But they have not yet started to enforce these in relation to the people occupying that land, due to continuing political uncertainty. “Investors” have not yet appeared, for the same reasons.

Since the State recovered control of the city of Huambo in 1994, about 95,000 hectares have been allocated to 785 agriculturalists. Table 2 gives figures for just three selected districts, and gives an idea of the concentration of land ownership that would result if these allocations took effect in reality: the agricultural structure of the colonial period would be reconstructed. Just 11 proprietors have been allocated 46% of the total land allocated.

³⁰ Editor's note: a programme begun at the end of the 1980s in which parts of State-owned companies were privatised or their assets sold leaving the State-owned company smaller. This included State-farm land.

Table 2 Land concessions in three Districts of Huambo Province, 1995 - 1997, by area of concession

Area of concession	Number of concessions	Percentage of land allocated
10 ha or less	18	1 %
10 to 20 has	22	1 %
20 to 100 has	65	8 %
100 to 500 has	47	15 %
500 to 1000 has	11	38 %
1000 has or more	11	46 %

The three Districts are Huambo, Kaala, Ekunha.

Source, Provincial Delegation of Agriculture and FAO

Everybody should be worried about this. The Provincial Delegate of Agriculture told us peremptorily that "in the first phase the trend is to hand over all lands that were occupied in the colonial period". Asked about conflicts that could arise from this policy and its implementation, he did not hesitate: these will be resolved by negotiation. In Vila Brava village (near Pedreira) negotiation did not work, and is unlikely to work, for several reasons. Firstly, functionaries of the State are not clear about, nor are they trained to understand, conflicts over land. Even less are they in a position to deal with them; the State's power structures do not have the culture or outlook for conflict mediation. The communities' intermediaries are usually chiefs, though the people do not always accept them as their leaders and representatives for such questions, so they may not enjoy the necessary trust. Lastly, at each level the system is vulnerable to corruption.

Added to this are the ambiguities and imprecision of current legislation, as well as difficulties in applying legislation both for practical reasons and because of political pressures (which will run counter to the peasants' interests, as in the past). Moreover, as before, many things will be done which do not comply with the law. This is already happening; as far as we know nobody has lost a title to land after failing to make use of it, although the law stipulates

this. This is true even where the war, so widely given as justification, could not be the pretext.

Most soils are degraded, particularly in areas where people have converged in recent years. The situation was already worrying at the beginning of the 1970s, and these concentrations of population in certain areas have made it even worse. Recent studies show serious widespread lack of phosphorus and micronutrients³¹.

In present conditions any attempt to restart production at a profitable level requires fertiliser. There are two obstacles to this. The peasants do not have money, and would not be able to afford the prices of fertilisers imported by the Ministry of Agriculture (an example of how prices discourage agriculture in Angola). Secondly, a chemical solution is a quick fix – it may resolve the immediate difficulty, but not the medium-term problems which, in our case, are linked to acidification and the structure of the soils. Therefore we believe that solutions must be thought out, debated, and tested. Systems of production can be found which, when combined with resolution of the land question, are within the country's financial and technical possibilities.

6.2 Angola's breadbasket? The end of another myth.

What is the future for agriculture in Huambo?

Results from studies done in the colonial period show that Huambo Province cannot be Angola's breadbasket. The Portuguese created this myth and Angolans embraced it devotedly, but it is time to lay it to rest. It is true that the southern part of Huambo Province provides reasonable conditions for producing cereals, principally maize³²; but this is a restricted area, covering perhaps 20% of the Province. In this zone cultivation is important because people can work larger areas, not because of the level of fertility of the soils. The rest of the Province is not very suitable for growing maize, due to poor soils, excessive rainfall, and low temperatures during a certain phases of the growing cycle.

31 A study by Beatriz Marcelino showed that fertility levels were low and chemical or organic fertilisers would be required, even when land had been left fallow for about 15 years or when land had been occupied by non-native forests for more than 25 years. See Marcelino (1996).

32 See Marcelino (1973)

Table 3 shows some aspects of maize growing by the family sector in Huambo Province at the beginning of the 1970s. The figures show that productivity was extremely low.

Table 3 Production of maize, Huambo Province (1969 - 1970)

Agricultural Region (Sub-region of Zone 24)	Average maize production (kgs per ha)
Huambo city periphery	336.5
Region I	318.2
Region II	341.5
Region IV	469.6
Region V	522.2
Average	382.5

Productivity by the "modern" (commercial) farming sector was not much better; in that year it achieved only 650 kilos. All these statistics show that the production centre for maize in Angola should not be on the Central Plateau, but in an ecologically more suitable region, such as certain parts of Huila Province.

Although Huambo Province is not a region suited to its cultivation, maize is such an important food for the inhabitants that some will still be grown there, even if conditions are marginal. Even the colonial authorities tried experiments to reduce the importance of maize, because of its disastrous effects on soil fertility³³. At that time the proposed grand solution was to convert the Central Plateau to livestock farming and to forestry with fast-growing non-native trees. Without discarding this idea, we can also explore other possibilities. Some of these can be more orientated to production, and therefore expensive and rapid. An ecological outlook could inform other strategies, and these would be cheaper and take longer.

At present there are three other great challenges facing agriculture in Huambo Province. The first is the technical problem of dealing with the low fertility of

³³ See Marcelino (1968)

the soils, which are seriously degraded. The solution may involve investigating and adopting new production systems.

The second challenge is a political one concerning credit. In the areas most affected by the war, the peasants want access to fertilisers at reasonable prices, and they stress that should get these on credit. This would enable them to invest in "rich" crops – potato or wheat in Tchitwe, other crops where the circumstances are different. After two or three years of this, they could buy a team of oxen for hauling. Clearly this will not resolve everybody's problems, but we saw various people who from 1995 onwards had managed to implement strategies of this kind. Their ingenuity and enterprise had led to very visible results. We are convinced that without arrangements for credit (or even for subsidies) in present-day Huambo Province it will be very difficult to resume production in a sustained manner.

The third challenge concerns the market. The Portuguese model of rural commerce was centred on the famous "bush traders"³⁴, but this system was in decline in the final years of colonialism. Competition became enormous and such trade hardly gave any return, so many of these merchants began to concentrate on agriculture. Nowadays there are no "bush traders", not even performing their old functions in the district capitals. Other kinds of people move goods around. Most transportation from the countryside to the city is done by women farmers who want to sell at higher prices, although sometimes it is the work of city women trying to overcome lack of employment opportunities and low wages. Usually trade between the city and outside the province is the job of young people, most of whom have some education, and many of whom are dreaming of becoming businessmen. They go to Benguela, Luanda, Lubango, and even to Namibia, paying for any transport they can find. Market places are the centres of trading. Other licensed traders complain, sometimes rightly, that they pay taxes while others do not: the new, informal mobile traders keep the size of their business hidden.

It is very difficult for people in areas controlled by UNITA to gain access to trading circuits. Constraints on people's movements restrict everything, and UNITA has made every effort to prevent use of the national currency. However, some places are gradually coming into contact with the market, suggesting similar developments that may occur when the situation is "normalised". Bailundo, Vila Nova, and other markets that have sprung up, mostly on the borders of the areas still controlled by UNITA, show these trends; so do the young people who walk huge distances to trade cattle between Huila and

³⁴ Translator's note: *comerciante do mato* in Portuguese.

Malanje or Uíge. Peasant agriculture in the south of Huambo was more commercial than in other parts of the province but now, ironically, trade has been slowest to return there.

The Central Plateau of Angola has been trading with the coast for centuries. The idea persists in the collective memory that there was a glorious era of trade caravans, mainly during the period of rubber production. The possibility of trading means the potential for a return to prosperity and, once again, a chance for adventure, access to the world, and contact with modernity. Several interviewees showed us how they used commercial skills to deal with various circumstances. They took into account the laws of supply and demand when selecting the crops to grow at a particular time, and when assessing the opportunities for selling products. We do not know of other Angolan peasants who have such a sense of integration into trading circuits.

There is an aspect that the peasants did not mention, perhaps because they are so concerned about fertilisers that other matters are subordinated or forgotten (if so, it is an example of the law of limiting factors). Given the importance of seeds, their quality must be improved very quickly. We are convinced that slightly better seeds will rapidly and significantly increase production without great expenditure.

6.3 Employment, unemployment and migration: the irresistible attraction of the city.

In 1974 it was politically correct (using the modern phrase) to denounce the more vulnerable aspects of Portuguese colonial policy. One of the most sensitive questions was migration from the Central Plateau. It had ceased to be "forced labour", though what lay behind it was the inability of a family to survive through agriculture, which was due to colonial expansion. It was natural that the nationalist movements denounced this situation as part of their political agendas. However some leaders adopted a slogan that made no sense, saying that all the *Ovimbundu* migrant workers should return to their places of origin. This would have had the perverse effect of dumping these people on the Central Plateau with no employment, no financial resources, no technical support, and no markets. In the short term this would only produce even more misery than they suffered before independence.

There were few opportunities in agriculture in the Central Plateau during the first years after independence, and the peasants were battered by war and

assailed by the dysfunctional society around them. So they had few alternatives: joining an army, fleeing to a city, or adopting other schemes to survive.

Why did so many people, particularly youths, leave the countryside?

Agriculture had no future, and there was no employment. The small towns and the city of Huambo no longer absorbed manpower. Youths also wanted to avoid the press-ganging done by both armies.

But there are other reasons why people are still leaving. One concerns security problems in rural areas, where it is still difficult to escape arbitrary treatment and theft by people with guns. People are leaving the UNITA areas when there is free movement and will continue to leave, even simply to take advantage of this freedom. Another reason is the desire to flee from the control of the *epata* (extended family) and the community. Those who distinguish themselves, economically or socially, are the target of jealousies and sorcery³⁵.

In the short term, agriculture on the Central Plateau will not be economically viable for peasant families. Investment in rebuilding the city of Huambo, in rehabilitating industry and in reopening the Benguela Railway will provide employment opportunities. But these will be limited, and certainly there will not be enough openings to absorb all those currently unemployed. Rural people say they want to seek other sources of income, preferably outside the region, but they will continue to face the lack of opportunities for improving their lives. Although young people have a strong desire to migrate, they will not go if they cannot see financial advantages in it. Therefore there must be investments that promote other types of rural employment, and that improve the rural environment in general. This will decentralise activities from Huambo city. The old model of migration can be reconsidered by identifying alternatives that are realistic and sufficiently attractive for the rural people in the Central Plateau.

Few people want to leave the cities. In Huambo's current uncertain circumstances, is it legitimate to compel huge numbers of people to leave the cities and go to their rural areas (as some rehabilitation ideas imply)?

It would be more sensible not to induce a forced exodus. Certainly younger people will not be interested in it, except in very special cases. While everything suggests that reintegration of displaced people and demobilised soldiers into

³⁵ Editor's note: Childs (1949) suggests that an individual was likely to be related to the majority of people in a village, so that the *epata* could be most of a village. He also suggests that the decline of most other forms of village cohesion had left the *epata* as the main social unit and had led to an increase in accusations of sorcery.

rural communities does occur, rural people already face a wide range of difficulties.

There is another question that is much more complex and is practically ignored and that is the balance of the ecosystem. While there are extensive areas in the Province (mainly in the south but also in Bailundo and Mungo) where recuperation of the vegetation indicates that the soils may have recovered, this is because few people have lived there recently. In more populated areas it is important and urgent to reduce human pressure on the soil and the vegetation. The ecological risks are serious and there is a need for deeper and more localised studies to identify solutions in more detail.

6.4 Traditional authority or local authority

The nature and power of “traditional” leadership was one of the most difficult questions facing us at the start of this research. We have not been able to add much to previous knowledge about a subject that can be complex and opaque. “Traditional” authority seems to have lost its main features under the pressures it has experienced during this century.

We received information about the real power of chiefs, internal links in each *ombala*, and connections between *ombalas* and within each village. But these were confused and contradictory; it seemed that almost all informants had their own versions. Part of the confusion arises because “strangers” tend to compare and adapt things to modern organisations they know, without taking into account specific rules governing the relationship between kinship and territory. The actions of the Portuguese, the MPLA government, and UNITA have bewildered and disorientated the inhabitants themselves. Moreover, some communities, particularly the more closed ones, may have consciously kept their structures and relationships obscure to preserve them against outside aggression. Our main conclusion is that more thorough research of this question is needed³⁶.

³⁶ Editor's note: Pössinger (1986) and Heimer (1973) both indicate that the traditional authority structures and kinship systems had lost most of their importance, or been severely modified, by the actions of the Portuguese colonial system before independence. Pössinger writes about the disintegration of the *umbundu* social structure and the inability of the traditional authorities to protect individual families from the effects of colonialism. Pössinger also writes that for most *Ovimbundu* the term *soba* indicated a chief imposed by the Portuguese colonial system, while *osoba* (from which *soba* is a corruption) indicates an authentic chief. He suggests that a *soba* was no more than a caricature of the former *osoba* in the eyes of the *Ovimbundu* and symbolised the destruction of the social system.

Nevertheless, we can make some observations that may shed light on the organisation of land and of power. Table 4 shows the approximate relationship between them. The "traditional" terms (endogenous system) are shown alongside those introduced by the Portuguese during the 1961 reform (exogenous system).

Table 4 Traditional and administrative authority

Exogenous system of authority (in Portuguese)	Endogenous system of authority (in umbundu)	Territory where authority is exercised
Regedor	Osoma inene	Ombala
Chefe de grupo de povoações	Osoma	Imbo linene
Chefe de povoação	Sekulu	Imbo
-----	Osongui	Osongu

How much power do the chiefs now have? It is obvious that there is a crisis of political authority in the communities, but the power and authority of the chiefs varies considerably. The power of the leader of Tchitwe contrasts with the situation of the leader with "no power", and there are a series of intermediate states. In many villages the chiefs represent aspects of modernity: they travel, bring new ideas, and have special economic power. In some places the chief maintains a certain level of prestige, manages to make alliances, and organises the changes in party political power without harming himself. But in others he is held in low regard, as in cases where he has acted as an accuser or as a recruiter of youths for armies. It is no longer a lifetime role, and is now more of an obligation, one that may even involve risk of death. This explains why there is such a turnover of people in the post. Real power has been taken away from "traditional" authorities. The Portuguese wanted to use "traditional" leaders and transform them into their agents, mainly to collect taxes and recruit labour. The Angolan government practically ignored them. Nowadays, many people see the chiefs as the last link in an alien administrative chain and as a

representative of the State in the community, not as the main leader of the community. Thus the exogenous model dominates the endogenous model.

The power of the State, represented by the administration, still exists alongside "traditional" power. But in many cases the connection between the two is no longer at the level of the community, since there is now a *regedor geral*, a kind of delegate of endogenous power to the state administration. Recently they have been given uniforms and salaries, and this reinforces the perception that chiefs do not function as leaders of their people: they are simply facilitators of community relationships, administrators of justice, lands, and housing, conflict managers, and intermediaries between the community and the State.

The spiritual and religious component of the "traditional" authority has been diverted to other institutions. The churches have acquired an authority that has made them a dynamic part of society.

Therefore, the old political authority is now shared with the State and the churches. If political authority disintegrates faster than it is built up, we may need to think about how rural communities can maintain some autonomous authority. How can a balance be created between State authority and a community's ability to look after its own affairs? This is an important challenge for the future.

6.5 External interventions

6.5.1 The state and its services

During the civil war the State gradually withdrew from the role it had decided to play immediately after independence. This happened partly because UNITA steadily occupied most of the rural areas, and partly because the State turned away from these areas because it did not need them. Petroleum fed the country (although badly), while the Soviet-inspired agricultural model proved to be expensive and inefficient. The presence of the State reduced to a series of military strong points, normally in the district capitals. Rural communities were abandoned, in Huambo as much as in other parts of the country.

Therefore the State's only activities are services that barely function. A community's only points of contact with the State are the *osoma*, the *regedor*, or the police. The role of the *osoma* is as a channel of information, but the amount of information he transmits is small. There is a clear lack of

information from the State to the community, and not much material flows in the other direction either.

There is a political gulf between the State and rural communities. At one time small towns and their administrative bodies filled this gap, but this is no longer the case. For the communities, the state seems more concerned with control and containment than about defining policies or participation. Even when there is no institutional gap, rules and functions are unclear. People in UNITA areas want to re-establish contact with the State because of what it represents in terms of security, even if this just means an identity card and certificates, documents that are useful in life. But their perception of the State is an old one (from the colonial or post-independence period); they are not familiar with its more recent decline.

As part of this study we observed social phenomena, practices, and initiatives in areas under State control. We realised that there might be a more productive approach to the extension of State administration than sending in functionaries who, in many cases, do not have the knowledge needed to intervene effectively, and who know little about the people's social and productive systems and rhythms of life. It would be better to seek local and decentralised systems of governance, that emanate from the communities themselves, from their interests and aims, from their experiences and needs, and from their capacities and judgements.

However, the lack of a State presence should not suggest that the communities are passive. We must not believe the impression, held by government functionaries and NGOs, that there is just a vacuum. It is right to say that the health services, for example, are unreliable. There are no checks or supervision; payment is per pill or injection – not per consultation – and this accounts for inflated prescriptions. But health provision exists, and people know they must pay for it: the irony and tragedy is its low quality. The education system follows a similar pattern, although less strongly, so schools are not as attractive as in the past. Poor teaching and lack of employment prospects keep many children away. In UNITA areas the people retain an image of an active State, and they retain an illusion about the possibility of employment and upward social mobility.

So how can existing initiatives be built on to work in parallel with the state administrative structures, rather than “extending” the disorganised and almost non-existent government services into the countryside and UNITA-controlled areas? The government does not even manage to supply reasonable services to places close to the city such as Pedreira and Tchitwe: how then could it

manage to do so for the other communities which will fall into its hands with the advance of the peace process? Many rural communities in Huambo seem to be thinking this way, particularly where there is no government presence and UNITA hardly intervenes either (in Tchivembe, for example). They are not waiting for Godot. In these areas it would be a crime and a folly to present the idea of a paternal state, one which will return to take care of the inhabitants' needs. Instead, the discussion must be about actions to validate and improve initiatives that have already begun. There is a historic opportunity to build new institutions that are more sustainable, a chance that should not be wasted.

6.5.2 The churches

The communities evaluate the work of the churches positively. The level of christianisation has not gone down and if anything the reverse is true. It seems that proselytising by churches in rural areas is not related to the political and military crisis and a consequent need to move closer to God, but to the return of people from the cities bringing new religious habits with them. There are no new independent churches like the ones that appeared elsewhere; but those that have emerged are more participative and link with people's new expectations. Disillusionment with political parties leads many people to these new churches, looking for protection of any kind.

In many communities we had difficulty finding even one non-believer. The signs are that at present the people of rural Huambo are choosing which church to belong to, not whether to be a church member. A person's church influences their moral code and their choice of spouse, and provides certain types of social help as well as relationships with certain urban congregations. Assuming that the communities we visited were not unusually religious, the churches appear to be almost a "basic principle" that organises them. Except for the two big parties, almost the only outside institutions that stayed in the community were the churches, with their network of catechists, preachers, and priests. If their structures and leaderships were not so far away, they could work more efficiently in the dissemination of information: they could bridge the gap between rural and urban, as they did in the past.

6.5.3 The NGOs

The communities like the NGOs currently working in the areas we studied, mainly because they bring material aid. Another reason is that their activities, even just their presence, are signs of the prospects for peace, return to a normal life, and possibilities of contact with the outside. Clearly it would be different if their staffs lived in the villages, district capitals, or commune capitals; if they were closer to the communities they could draw nearer to the people.

While remembering that the three NGOs with which we had most contact (Save the Children Fund (U.K.), OIKOS, Concern) do not operate identically, it is important to question their role when they intervene. There is merit when they provide inputs, as long as they meet real needs. But it is debatable whether they have the knowledge and capacity to intervene in social structures and productive systems. Rapid diagnostics and assessments are important, but do not provide a deep understanding of social dynamics and their origins. The communities are not equal and are not egalitarian. Only constant contact can lead to an understanding of the various phenomena; then actions can be directed towards improving the systems rather than substituting them. This knowledge will lead to the understanding, for example, that social differentiation means that interventions must vary accordingly.

If communities manage to adjust in order to resist and survive in such adverse circumstances, and even try out rehabilitation strategies, the least outsiders can do is to recognise and respect such capacities. Certainly they can be helped to improve their performance and deal with new challenges. We think that, as well as providing material aid, the NGOs involved in rehabilitation could take on the task of providing information to enable the communities themselves to weigh up their options and decide their destiny. At the same time, it could be a better use of the donors' resources to support Angolan institutions such as churches, NGOs, associations, community organisations, and so on, as well as State bodies at local level. This would reinforce local capacities, enable the people to appropriate the processes, and allow interventions to be sustainable.

6.6 Constraints and the outlook for change

The inhabitants of the communities are very clear that the war, its effects and its possible resurgence, continues to be the main factor generating psychological instability and this is a serious constraint on reconstructing community life. It is not just what has been lost in the past; rural people expect that thefts will continue, by people with weapons and by others who are driven to it by extreme poverty with no way out, and this makes the atmosphere insecure and distrustful. Stability is needed for people to fully restart production and to invest, but this is undermined by uncertainties in the peace process.

Restrictions on movement are often mentioned, and there are two reasons for these. In areas still controlled by UNITA there is not free movement. Secondly, police control posts restrict the free movement of goods because they apply illegal "transit taxes" which transporters cannot avoid. These are so frequent and onerous that they lead to higher prices at the destinations and thus penalise consumers. Agricultural production is directly and indirectly influenced by commerce, so these restrictions on movement adversely affect it.

The local people believe that absence of free movement, combined with lack of employment in those other regions of the country to which people used to migrate temporarily, block the struggle against poverty.

Producers say that their inability to obtain credit is one of the greatest obstacles to restarting production. Although people know that the Portuguese traders exploited people by applying very high rates of interest, their former role as providers of credit are mentioned approvingly. Such references are worrying, and underline the severity of the difficulties people now face. Credit would give them access to working cattle and to fertilisers. They see this as a fundamental component that could enable them to restart productive activity, rise above subsistence level, and manage to save a bit for new investments.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In the villages that we studied, there is an idea of community. In spite of constant displacement (and all the villages we studied had moved except Tchitwe-Ombala) each village has kept its identity in terms of leadership, families, and institutions.

Tchivembe is a good example: without apparent conflicts, the community is reconstituting itself and recreating its economic and social life and institutions. But where the effects of war or social differentiation are greater, villages have lost some of their character. Inhabitants of areas affected by conflict were plundered and are equally poor, although their potential for recovery may vary. Where people were affected less, or the reconstruction process has developed further, there are wider social differences. Increasingly it is not possible to speak abstractly of the *Umbundu* peasant or farmer. The agriculture of a poor peasant or single woman is very different from the activities of someone in the same village who is considered to be "rich", and is already a farmer in their own and other people's estimations. The mechanisms of social cohesion are altered as habits change. There are still signs of kinship obligations and people fear jealousy or sorcery. However, unlike in the past, these do not completely block strategies for upward mobility. Moving away completely is not the only answer – for example, people can take up residence in the district capital without totally leaving the community.

The communities survive, but the same cannot be said of communal institutions, which are constantly in decline. It would not be easy to save them; the relative success UNITA has had in some places is due to the isolation of these communities. When the reach of the State administration is extended, traditions will be subjected to westernising tendencies and this will affect the process of saving them. Although there are clear signs that communal institutions have lost some of their structure and character, there are social rules, norms, and codes of conduct. The communities managed to fill the institutional vacuum, although this was when they were poor and insecure. It is not an exaggeration to imagine that in a stable context these people would succeed in adopting or inventing new institutions, as they have done in the past. But history also shows us that there are risks associated with passively receiving models imposed from outside.

In the rural communities that we studied, there were signs of such westernising of traditions (economic, social, and cultural). Many things lag behind and this is worrying: systems of production, the possibility of earning money outside

family agriculture, education, and contacts with the outside. Lack of education is particularly serious because it will impede or even block any short-term or long-term process for rehabilitation and development. It is not so devalued in UNITA-controlled areas, but this is something of an illusion. A leading figure in the recent history of Huambo pointed out that there are things that you do not learn at school. In 1975, after the Portuguese had left, there was a network of agricultural extension workers, teachers, and nurses – but this no longer exists. These people had a remarkable range of practical knowledge, and provided a minimum guarantee that activities would not grind to a halt. The provision of services is now a void. How is the torch being passed to new generations? There is a serious risk that ancient knowledge and acquired skills are being lost. Who knows whether some of the losses are already irreversible?

The future cannot wait, however. Many rural people have already started to demonstrate why they are known as an enterprising and adventurous people, at their own expense and carrying the risks themselves. They have done it before in the hope that the war was over. But then they suffered new violence and further losses. They did not wait for Godot. Despite all the uncertainties of the sinuous peace process and the thefts and other acts of violence, individual, family and communal strategies for recovery are being studied, tried out, and in many cases implemented. We were impressed to find people, who had moved house about a dozen times in the last twenty years, building houses with permanent characteristics simply because they want to stay in that place. All the agencies, even churches and NGOs, must analyse popular initiatives, listen to people's worries and proposals, and try to help solve them.

It will be necessary to invest in Huambo, in infrastructures, production, services, and in human resources. The rural people of Huambo (and others) must stop thinking that the solution to their problems lies in finding paid work outside the productive unit to allow investment in agriculture that is condemned to be poor. Using its experiences, even during the most recent period, Huambo can take advantage of the best resource it has. It is not a finite resource, like petroleum or diamonds, but is the most durable and renewable of all, and that is people. If there was a serious investment in education, in fulfilling the potential of the human resources, the "miracle" could happen, and it would come in less time than many people think.

There is a bad joke about peasants in Huambo, which is supposed to illustrate how destitute they are. Speaking about independence, they ask when it will end so the Portuguese can return. We brought this question up with some groups of informants. None of the replies suggested that there really are any sentiments of the kind suggested by the joke. We were witnesses, in fact, to

displays of significant patriotic feelings showing understanding of relationships between different peoples. We asked whether the Portuguese should return, given the afflictions of war, current adversity, and uncertainty about the future. The reply was "what we want is a normal life and this is possible without the Portuguese. If they want to come, they can, we're all equal now". This position contrasts with one found in some influential circles (and some opposition circles) about reconstituting the former status quo. Although today conditions are very difficult, it has been proved that colonial policy was completely out of date, as the most enlightened people working for the colonial regime believed. What is missing is new thinking.

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