The mobile phone and society in South Sudan: A critical historical-anthropological approach

ABSTRACT
This article outlines the development of mobile telephony as it developed in the nascent Republic of South Sudan (ROSS). We focus specifically on Juba, during turbulent times from the end of the second Sudanese Civil War in 2005 to just after independence in 2011. We highlight the complicated political relations behind the establishment of mobile networks and the main functions and importance of the mobile phone throughout this period. Despite major technical obstacles, reconnecting with (war-) dispersed relatives, providing security in the post-CPA period marked by high insecurity and symbolizing hope and access to markets were important features of mobile phone use in Juba. Mobile phones were also essential to the rapid development of migrant dominated trade and business. Through this case-study we aim to shed light on the way in which (new) communication technologies become entangled with mobility, politics and entrepreneurship in a (post)war setting characterized by a displacement economy.

KEYWORDS
mobile phones South Sudan Juba new technology history displacement economy

1 This article is the result of research conducted with financial and practical support from Celtel, Zain, especially Zain Sudan. We wish to thank these companies, all the people who we interviewed, Peter Taban Wani and...
INTRODUCTION

In July 2007 we (ie: Mirjam de Bruijn, Francis Nyamnjoh and Inge Brinkman) set out to conduct research on mobile telephony in Sudan. The aim was mainly to conduct qualitative research and interview people from various networks to come to an understanding of the relations between social hierarchies, e.g. in gender and age, and mobile telephony within the wider context of Sudan’s history of communication technologies. The research was conducted in the North Sudan’s capital Khartoum, in a small town, Karima, with a history in the transport sector in the North, and the southern town of Juba that recently emerged from a long Civil War but was still in an extremely volatile situation. The research was partly carried out by two commissioned researchers, Peter Taban Wani (Juba University in Khartoum) and Hisham Bilal (Khartoum University), and through three visits to the three research places in Sudan, each lasting several weeks. A fourth visit was made in November 2011 to Juba specifically by the second author (Jonna Both). In this article we focus on the findings from Juba from 2007 to 2011.2

Since the start of the field research, the political landscape of South Sudan has seen some major changes. Elections were held, a referendum was organized and South Sudan became an independent country in July 2011, of which Juba has become the capital.3 Many of the recent developments and the historical background to these changes have also sharply influenced the history of new social media in the southern region and offer an excellent case for studying the process of the introduction of new ICTs in a society. In most analyses, new ICTs – such as the mobile telephone – are only studied in terms of ‘effects’. Here we want to show that society and new technologies stand in dynamic interaction: political developments, social relations, economic history, cultural background – history and culture in short – have a bearing on newly introduced technologies just as new technologies have an impact on society. It is these dynamic interactions that we want to describe here for the Juba case. The research that we conducted in Juba is of particular relevance to shed light on the way in which (new) communication technologies become entangled with mobility, politics and entrepreneurship in a (post)-war setting and displacement economy. Hammar defines the latter concept as follows: displacement is the ‘enforced changes in interweaving spatial, social and symbolic conditions and relations’ (2014: 9) and displacement economies, consecutively, are concerned with ‘what displacement generates in terms of new economies and political economies’ (Hammar 2014: 11).

The displacement-concept seems very applicable as Juba has become a rapidly growing city bringing together IDPs, returning formerly displaced people and refugees, a new government arguably displacing existing systems of governance (Vries 2012: Chapter 7) and a new military structure and migrants from all over the wider region attempting to tap into the economy of Juba with which they become intertwined, potentially displacing local (Equatorian) actors. All these forms of displacement influence the mobile phone economy in South Sudan as we shall see throughout this article. Before addressing the Juba case study in more detail, however, below we situate the recent developments in Sudan telecommunications.

SUDAN: TELECOMMUNICATIONS OPERATING IN A VAST AND CONFLICT-RIDDEN LAND

Before South Sudan became independent of North Sudan in 2011, Sudan was the largest country in Africa. This fact is not mere background information; it has serious implications for the history of communication, mobility and...
transport in the region. Throughout its history the sheer distances in Sudan have informed a strong emphasis on this realm in political decision-making. The presence of the Nile and the link to the Red Sea also historically shaped connections in the country. When the country became independent in 1956, war had already broken out between the North and the South. A peace agreement was signed in 1972, but some ten years later in 1983 war started anew and fighting lasted until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. In the meantime conflict also broke out in Western Sudan, in the Darfur region, causing international critique on the regime concerning human rights and even genocide. Sudan's recent political history has been influenced by the Cold War and also by the 9/11 attacks in 2001, after which the United States accused the government of Umar al-Bashir of sponsoring, harbouring and supporting Islamic terrorists. As a ‘rogue state’ the United States imposed an embargo on various Sudanese companies, affecting their operations outside the country. All these developments changed the telecommunications landscape of Sudan considerably.

During the prolonged wars in the South especially the communication and transport system was destroyed and little maintenance could be carried out on the roads, bridges and railways. Many people fled the country to South Sudan's neighbouring countries and Egypt (Cairo) as refugees or moved to safer places in the North as Internally Displaced People. Oftentimes these refugees lost contact with their relatives and friends; the war had serious consequences for social networks. Some people maintained contact through letter-writing, although literacy was not general, while oral messaging has retained its importance from precolonial times to the present (cf. Impey 2013).

At the beginning of the second Sudanese Civil War in 1983 war landline telephony was virtually non-existent in the whole of Sudan and only limitedly available in Khartoum, but in the 1990s, the number of subscribers quickly increased. At the same time the state postal and telecommunications sector was privatized and Sudatel was established as a private landline company, albeit with the Sudanese state owning the majority of the shares. In line with the privatization policy, a regulatory body was called into existence: the National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC). In 1997 a group within Sudatel opted to establish a private mobile phone company, which was named Mobitel. In 2005 Areeba started as a second mobile phone operator; a year later Areeba was bought by the South African company MTN. Initially Sudatel possessed shares in Mobitel, but after these were sold, the company started its own mobile telephone provider, called Sudani. With its state ties, Sudani, after 2001, was one of the companies under US embargo, although as the company was predominantly active on the Sudanese market this was of limited consequence. These operators restricted their activities to the North of Sudan.

Despite the war, separate operators started activities in the South as well. Two companies received a licence from NTC in 2005: Network of the World (NOW) and Gemtel via the Uganda gateway. NOW was bought by Vivacell during the course of 2007. The latter has been relatively small, but with the independence of South Sudan in 2011 it aimed at sharp growth (tripling subscribers). Like Sudani this interest for the South Sudanese market grew particularly at the eve of independence, despite the fragile post-conflict situation. The South Sudanese market was seen as a virgin market ready to be explored, while the northern telecommunication market was becoming saturated (Babington 2011), and yet for Zain and other large players in the field,
the legal situation was still insecure. Thus the costs of operating in a region with largely inexistent infrastructure notwithstanding, South Sudan was seen as a potentially lucrative market.

Nassar, who was speaking on the sidelines of an industry conference, said his company intends to capitalise on an influx of South Sudanese returning to the region following the peaceful referendum in January. ‘As the country becomes a republic in July, most people will come back to their areas,’ he said. ‘The first things they will want are going to be water, electricity and then ways of communication’. (Khalil Nassar, Vivacell’s chief technology officer, speaking to Reuters in 2011, see Maasho 2011).

Gemtel started activities in Southern Sudan in 2003 and during the war it was important in rebel-controlled areas. Considerable controversy arose as Gemtel continued using the Ugandan country code, but by 2008, this was formally changed. In practice the situation continued until 2010, when Gemtel was bought by a Libyan firm (Babington 2011; Maasho 2011).

Many Sudanese people are migrants themselves or have been migrants at some stage of their life. If not, they may have relatives abroad or in other parts of Sudan. Khartoum is an important destination and internationally, especially Saudi Arabia has received many Sudanese looking for work opportunities. Maintaining contact with relatives abroad has always been an important aspect of social life in Sudan. But, while migration and mobility have always been factors in Sudanese history, the various wars added new dimensions to these factors. People were forced to flee to the capital Khartoum, to ‘transition zones’ between North and South Sudan (Duffield 2002: 84), to Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, the United States or other countries. It may be clear that in such a context of high and dispersed mobility, communication plays an important role in many people’s lives. These three factors together – a complex conflict environment, a high degree of mobility and the importance attributed to communication – make Sudan an interesting case to study mobile telephony. In the town of Juba, where the new government of South Sudan has established its capital, these factors have been dominant in the history of new communication technology.

**JUBA DURING THE WARS**

Juba is a town in Southern Sudan, a region with a long history of war. Before the civil wars (1955–72 and 1983–2005) Juba formed an important nodal point in the communication lines between North and South Sudan. Steamers from Khartoum followed the White Nile up as far as Juba and there was a bridge over the Nile; there were also telegraph lines and mail services. This connection was reinforced by Juba’s position as an international trading and transport centre: gravel roads connected it with Kenya, Uganda and Zaire/RDC.

Under Turco-Egyptian rule in the nineteenth century, the regional administration of Equatoria Province was established near Juba in Gondoroko on the opposite bank of the Nile. Equatoria Province was split into East and West and the Bahr al-Jabal States, with Juba as the political centre of the Bahr al-Jabal State. In 2005, Bahr al-Jabal came to be known as Central Equatoria. In 1947 and 1954, conferences were held in Juba at which political representatives from the South discussed future relations between Southern and Northern Sudan (Johnson 2003: 25, 27).

In 1955 a mutiny took place among southern soldiers stationed at Juba and this sparked off the first Civil War between Northern and Southern Sudan.
Infrastructure and communication lines broke down. After the first Civil War had ended in 1972, people who had taken refuge elsewhere returned to Southern Sudan. Some plans were made to implement infrastructural projects and several projects, such as the building of a new bridge over the Nile at Juba, were realized. People hoped that their standard of living would soon be at a level similar to what they had seen in Uganda and elsewhere, but their expectations were not fulfilled: ‘Inadequate state services, limited markets and ineffective or inappropriate international aid was a problem in much of Southern Sudan during the 1970s and the situation deteriorated further in the 1980’s’ (Okol 1994: 92).

A second Civil War started in 1983, essentially fought between the Northern government forces and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), although the Southern groupings at many times were not united. Juba became the scene of intense fighting, also described as the ‘centre of the civil war,’ as the SPLM/A was attempting to gain control over this ‘stronghold of Northern forces’ (Grant and Thompson 2013: 222). Moving in and out of town became very complicated as roads were blocked and traveling (and communicating) out of town was generally only possible through military or rebel links. The war had devastating consequences for the region, which suffered massive displacement, famine and disease, and Juba itself had many IDP camps. Juba was far from peaceful in this period according to Grant and Thompson; rather, it was the place where prisoners were held and executions occurred, and much of the Southern civilian population of the town and surrounding areas were forced to flee’ (2013: 222). The roads were mined and no maintenance could be carried out. Food in the town became extremely scarce and hence food prices increased sharply. The port of Juba could only be used by the central government army as the barges were frequently attacked; thus, private river transport came to a standstill. Furthermore, Juba’s bridge across the Nile was attacked and its state quickly deteriorated, also as a consequence of neglect and overloading with military vehicles. Many civilians felt forced to flee from the town and left for Khartoum, for Uganda and for other countries. Despite the hardships, some people decided to stay in Juba or in the SPLA-controlled zones within Sudan. This resulted in many families becoming separated and people greatly resented the lack of communication during the war as this rendered it impossible to remain in contact with relatives and friends. People reported a feeling of isolation in Juba in this period.

Despite these difficulties, people tried to remain in touch; the following statement during an interview of 2007 by an official of the GOSS (Government of South Sudan) Ministry of Telecommunications and Postal Services illustrates this very aptly:

[...] the government forces closed the border and the people here in Juba suffered a lot. The only way out for them was to Khartoum, but they could not go that way [...] Postal services only existed between Khartoum and Juba. But people were sending messages to SPLA-controlled areas. There was communication, linkages existed. There were people who came from the liberated areas to the town, they could stay and then go back. They could take messages. People could sneak in. Most messages were taken verbally.\(^5\)

When the first mobile phone services became available in Juba (Mobitel in 2003 according to our informants), it was still in the hands of the North Sudan
Food insecurity, however, remains a major challenge for South Sudan as, since the CPA and since independence, little has come about in terms of investment in agriculture and, combined with the continuous rapid growth of Juba, this raises major challenges (Grant and Thompson 2013).

PEACE, TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

In January 2005 a peace agreement was signed between the central Sudanese government and the SPLA rebels. This fact has had enormous consequences for the town of Juba, which was to become the politico-military centre of the Southern Government (GOSS) (Vries 2012). Rapid urban growth occurred (Grant and Thompson 2013; Martin and Mosel 2011) and many development agencies started activities in the region, operating with Juba as their base. Food became more readily available and hence cheaper: local agriculture started increasing again and importing goods, mainly from Uganda, has become much easier since the peace accords as the roads were opened again (cf. Schomerus and Titeca 2012) and demined. The port of Juba, rebuilt by Chinese companies, was reopened in 2007, although of course initially transport was still limited. At the same time repairs started of the Nile bridge, to be finished in 2008 by a Kenyan construction company. An ever-increasing number of vehicles from development agencies and the southern government started driving up and down the dirt roads in town.

As indicated, the mobile phone first came in Juba before the war ended (in 2003) and its use was only limited and for the privileged few. After the peace agreement of 2005 the mobile phone became more widespread. This immediately led to problems: the capacity to cater for so many new customers was not available and so the lines congested. When Sudani (also a northern company) and Gemtel (a company that had been used by SPLA and used the Ugandan country-code) started their activities in Juba, at first the situation improved somewhat as customers had a wider range of options. Yet soon after their coming to Juba, the network became worse again and oftentimes it was impossible to make calls.

Soon after the peace agreement, the negotiations between the Government of Southern Sudan, the NTC and the central government stagnated. There existed deep disagreements about the precise conditions of network licensing and gateway usage. Representatives of the southern government argued that Gemtel (and NOW) should be allowed to operate in the North, just as...
the northern operators were entitled to enrol their network in the south. The
central government saw it as a major problem, however, that Gemtel was
using a Ugandan dialling code, an issue also causing major debates in the
Ugandan government. While the GOSS wanted its own gateway separate
of the north, the national licensing council NTC did not at all agree to this.
Accusations of corruption and domination further aggravated the tensions
between the various parties. Because of these political controversies, both
the northern-based Sudani and Mobitel networks only functioned intermit-
tently in Juba and their roll-out plans were stalled by the responsible politi-
cians in the GOSS. The permission granted to Gemtel to use the Sudanese
country code has only been granted in 2008 and at the time of research in
2007, the Gemtel network often did not function at all. In this sense, the
legacy of the war still influenced the possibilities for communication technol-
ologies for a long time (Anon. 2007). Just to give an indication of the problems:
if somebody wanted to call a neighbour within Juba, she/he had to make an
international phone call through Uganda, provided that the network was not
down for some reason.
Because it saw its developments in the south blocked, Zain initiated nego-
tiations with GOSS independent of the central government and the NTC.
Zain’s CEO, Khaled Muhtadi, in 2008 expressed the following opinion about
the relationship:

[i]n the South what we face so far is that the political issues between the
governments of the North and the South reflect also in the relationship
that they have with and their trust in the northern companies. We have
invested heavily in this relationship and now have a healthy relation-
ship. We intend to roll out our network in several of these states. The
governments of these states are welcoming us as they have been waiting
for telecom for a long time. In other words, the international mobile phone companies sought to circum-
vent some of the political constraints, aiming to unleash the virgin markets
of South Sudan. However, newspaper articles from just before independ-
ence (April 2011) show that there were still several obstacles to communica-
tion companies operating in the South (anon. 2011). In any case, Zain, MTN
and Sudani were and are taking steps into a stronger presence in the south.
For these companies South Sudan forms a large untapped market, but many
disadvantages lead to a cautious attitude. There are high costs of investment
for lack of any infrastructure, the political situation is highly unstable and
the chance of conflict is very real. Although they are operating, it is unclear
whether or not the northern companies will obtain a separate licensing agree-
ment from the south and widespread poverty and low population density in
the south in general may not render the market very lucrative (Anon. 2011).
As explained, the referendum of January 2011 indicated widespread
support for secession (98 per cent) and in July of the same year, South Sudan
became an independent country under the name the Republic of South Sudan
(ROSS). The relations between the north and the south and between vari-
ous parties in the south are still extremely sensitive (conceptualized as ‘incon-
clusive peace’ by Schomerus and Titeca 2012), and in the meantime, war has
broken out again in 2013, the implications of which for the telecommunication
sector, its relation to communication politics and people’s access to communi-
cation remain to be studied.

[9] Interview with Khaled
Muhtadi Background:
CEO Zain Sudan Place
Khartoum, Zain office
Date: 21 November
2007. Present: Mirjam,
Sjoerd (filmmaker)
Interview in English, voice
recorder.

[8] Grant and Thompson
(2013) And interview
with Siddig Ibrahim
Mustafa Background:
Deputy Directory
General, NTC Place
Khartoum, NTC, his
office Date: 01 August
2007. Present: Inge, Mr
Abbas. Interview in
English, notes taken.
‘Stalled north-south
MOU stalls mobile
phone expansion
in Sudan’, Gurtong
Peace Project, General
News (31 March 2007),
http://www.gurtong.
org/ResourceCenter/
weeklyupdates/wu_
contents.asp?wkupdt_
id=704&vswuOrder=
Sorter_WuType&
vswuDir= ASC&vswu
Page=73
COMMUNICATION IN THE CAPITAL OF A NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATE

In many ways Juba still forms an island in this new country emerging out of war. While the roads within Juba have improved, in most cases the new tarmac in 2011 still ended at the fringes of the city, where the military still check all people leaving town. Roads going out of Juba to other towns, such as Yi, were only poorly maintained and full of potholes. Not far out of the ever-expanding city of Juba the entire town is surrounded by enormous waste belts, setting it apart from the rest of the landscape.

Many Southern Sudanese have criticized the new government for the slow pace of infrastructural developments, and corruption is known to be widespread (cf. Pinaud 2014). All the same, within Juba town a new road network has been constructed and impressive construction works have been carried out, especially where it concerns the buildings meant to host the new government. New (memorial) spaces have been created, designed to celebrate the Independence Day of South Sudan. All this has rapidly transformed the landscape of the capital of the new ROSS between 2007 and 2011, the time of our last visit. Telephone companies have readily embraced the process of new identity formation at independence in their commercial enterprises. Huge billboards of the different companies congratulate, identify with or try to tap on the momentum of optimism of the newest state in Africa for business reasons referred to above (expecting subscribers to grow exponentially).

Yet underneath this new surface of nationalism and commercialization, making a simple phone call was still a huge challenge in 2011. To find a SIM card on market of Juba was much more difficult than in any small town in Uganda and even so most of these cards were dysfunctional. Zain during 2011, often hardly had any reach in Juba and as Gemtel has been in the process of changing to the new-country code, its services have also been problematic. New companies had entered the market, but the system frequently becomes overloaded, and access to electricity – necessary to charge the battery pack – is beyond the means of many common people. Therefore, the mobile phone, although in principle opening a world of (re-)connecting to the emerging new nation and its returning displaced population, generally requires enormous effort, investment and tenacity.

Many people are most willing to make the effort, however. A first reason is indeed the possibility of (re-)connecting with people; the new possibilities in transport and communication are widely considered a positive development. As one woman put it: 'The only positive thing is the freedom of movement and ability to meet again with relatives' (Martin and Mosel 2011: 29). Many people use the mobile phone to trace lost family members and to re-establish contact with people who fled abroad or to safer regions of Sudan and elsewhere during the war. The latter seems a particular attribute of the telecommunication landscape in South Sudan and thus an important factor in its 'displacement economy', now that walking with and using a mobile phone no longer raise suspicions. This attribute is obviously linked to the possibility of connecting to remittances as well (see below, and see Hansen in Hammar 2014).

(Re-)connecting with one’s social network is thus one major reason for mobile telephone use in Juba that the large companies have well predicted. A second reason lies in the realm of security. The town of Juba offers many new entrepreneurial opportunities in combination with a climate of uncertainty and violence. This involves a volatile political and migrant context without much infrastructure, with many poor, jobless people, especially young men,
sharing the dream of becoming rich in a short time. Problems such as gang
formation, discrimination, corruption, alcoholism, theft and crime in general
are very real. Ironically, the town is much less safe in this respect now than
during the war; as one young man commented: 'before the CPA there was
security within. Now there is no security; is this the meaning of freedom?'
(Anon. 2011: 30). In particular the large numbers of migrants also report very
high levels of insecurity and a high number of disappearances in Juba alleg-
edly carried out by people more or less loosely associated with the state appar-
ratus (Schomerus and Titeca 2012: 15).
Mobile phones, while not easy to use, provide a possibility to increase
security in this hazardous context. Participant observation in Juba in November
2011 showed that people from Uganda use their mobile phones to warn each
other about oncoming Security Services that operate and intimidate at random
in immigrant quarters. Another example is provided by Monica, a jobless, yet
educated woman, living in one of Juba’s neighbourhoods. She uses her mobile
phone especially to remain in contact with her husband, who works in Yei,
but she has also experienced how the mobile phone can be a useful device in
warning people of oncoming danger and in cases of emergency:

[It] happened one day that a group of men wanted to attack me because
they were having personal problems with my husband. So luckily one
of my friends knew about the plot and she called me telling me not to
use the usual route when coming back home from the market, because
these people were planning to attack me on that particular road. So I
took another road to avoid them.11

Another relation between mobile phones (but also satellite communication)
and security is visible in the operations of the large number of NGO’s operat-
ing in South Sudan and Juba in particular. These organizations, operating in a
volatile context, highly depend on the possibility to communicate and stay in
touch with their field-offices. In November 2011, a day of participant obser-
vation at an NGO compound and with NGO staff showed how deeply the
necessity to report one’s whereabouts / coordinates and security guidelines
informed the daily mobility of NGO staff.
The case studies show that the mobile phone is widely considered a tool
that can help re-establish personal networks in the aftermath of war and is
significant in helping to increase in security in Juba’s rapidly changing envi-
ronment.12 Some people also stated that more communication possibilities
could contribute towards an increased understanding between communities
and thus play a part in a more peaceful climate in the region (Schomerus and
Rigterink 2015: 3). As indicated mobile telephony in Juba is subject to many
problems of network functioning, battery uploading, sim-card purchase, etc.
Despite these problems, many people in Juba aspire to buy a mobile phone
and consider it a technological miracle. Mobile telephone use is hardly
self-evident and evaluations reflect the newness of the medium: ‘There is a
moment, before the material means and the conceptual modes of new media
have become fixed, when such media are not yet accepted as natural, when
their own meanings are in flux’ (Gitelman and Pingree 2003: xii). This espe-
cially holds true for local people; immigrants often have a more long-standing
experience with mobile telephony when they were outside the region.
In the last part of this article we focus on the other extremely important
angle of mobile phone research in Juba’s displacement economy (or the plural

10 Fieldwork Jonna Both
11 Interview with Monica
Mja. Background
housewife Place her
house in Juba, date
September 2007
Present Peter Taban
Wani.
12 However, the extent
to which the state
and (official and
unofficial) security
apparatus also uses
these communication
possibilities to
heighten the people’s
(and for example,
especially immigrant)
insecurity remains to
be investigated.
displacement economies; here all these elements of displacement intersect in Juba). Markets (informal), trade and immigrants rely and build heavily upon the possibilities to communicate and the mobile phone economy in itself in the newest capital of the world.

IMMIGRANTS AND (MOBILE TELEPHONY) MARKETS IN JUBA

Fortune seekers flock to Juba town since the promise of peace and development (expectations of new markets and economic – oil- and development aid related boom) in 2005, especially to engage in trade, business and construction. Business and trade is directly connected to construction, transport and communication: it is predominantly trade in construction materials, spare parts, mobile phones and credit transfer that is flourishing.

Networks and social relations are important for business people. Those who come from outside Southern Sudan have almost all received advice and assistance from relatives and friends who came earlier. Usually newcomers are initially accommodated by this people and advised on how to start a business. Because of this, trading networks in Juba generally have clear regional patterns. As contact between northern Uganda and Southern Sudan is longstanding, people from these areas are likely to cooperate, while people from Western and Northern Sudan in most cases belong to separate networks.

Most of the traders have a history of mobility related to the war. Northerners may have arrived with the central government or army, westerners have often fled from the war in Darfur, Ugandans may first have established contact with Southern Sudanese refugees in their country and, finally, Southern Sudanese have often lived elsewhere during the war. Many have relatives in Canada, the United States, Uganda and elsewhere.

Relations between migrants and local are not always easy. Immigrant businesspeople selling mobile phone calls sometimes complain about local people: they state that these had little or no schooling and so often hardly know how to count and have limited knowledge of modern technologies. The traders assert that especially the local young men may be aggressive in their reactions and even attack the traders.\footnote{Various anonymous interviews.} On their part, local people accuse newcomers of taking up too many places on the limited job market, engaging in illicit activities and not behaving according to local moral norms. They are often regarded with envy by local people (Martin and Mosel 2011: 30).

Although there is some degree of integration, social and trade networks often follow regional lines. This can even be seen in the markets, where new arrivals tend to stick together in one section. Juba’s markets have expanded over the past few years. After the peace agreement, trust in the market and hopes for new business prospects increased. There are various markets in Juba and their history mirrors the history of the town.

The mobile telephone industry itself offers several opportunities to newcomers, people looking for money and survival in the new and promising centre of the newest nation. Mahmoud, for example, fled from Western Sudan and settled with his family in Khartoum. Fellow businessmen advised him to go to Juba, telling him that profits would be good there. He is quite satisfied with his income and is now able to support his family in Khartoum.

Due to the war in Darfur the number of Western Sudanese traders increased because of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. One trader from Nyala sold his cattle out of fear of raids by the Janjaweed and reinvested the money in mobile telephony in Juba.
When mobile telephony started in Juba (probably in 2003), only a few people were active in the business. According to one early trader, only six traders were in the mobile phone business in 2003, although a year later the number had already increased. After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, business boomed and now Juba’s markets have a bewildering range of shops dealing in telecommunications, mobile phones, credit transfer, accessories and so on. Despite difficulties in the network, or perhaps precisely because of them, the diversity of the wares and services on offer is extensive. Of course, one of the reasons for the expansion is the reduced degree of politicization of the mobile phone. People from all social strata and background now use the mobile phone, whereas previously this was only possible for northern government, military and businesspeople. During the war, people trying to access mobile telephony without such ties were suspected of being SPLA supporters by the central government forces. Another reason is the overall expansion of trade activities, which has led to an increased need for communication between business partners. Mobile telephony is even more important as, despite its failures, it is one of the more functioning infrastructures in South Sudan and can allow people to avoid travelling along bad roads, losing time and facing the risk of accidents and robbery only to pass messages.

People hope that the mobile phone can link them with a future, i.e. with a modern system of remittances and business. Most of the businessmen and a few women had this market (of remittances) in mind when they decided to enter the mobile phone business, knowing that people would want to link up with their relatives in the Diaspora.

Local people are few and far between in the mobile telephone sector. Most of the people active in the sector are recent arrivals from outside town or even from Uganda and Kenya. A few local people businessmen decided to change their activities to mobile telephony, and yet even these people were not born in Juba or its surroundings. Adil, from South Kordofan, had a business in electrical appliances before switching to selling mobile phones and scratch cards in 2003. This was facilitated by his father who, having retired from the government army, invested money in Adil’s shop. Another example is Arnast el Agib, who arrived by steamer from Northern Sudan in 2002 and started dealing in grain. The grain trade came to be dominated by army officers and thus he decided to switch to mobile phones as he feared being branded a government collaborator after the CPA.

As such it is important to note that the mobile phone market in Juba is dominated by people from outside the city who have only very recently arrived in the town. While people from ‘outside’ engage actively in this promising market, and if at all, the few people from Juba or nearby towns who are involved in the trade in mobile phones, accessories and credit services only do so on a very small scale. Patrick, for example, is a young man from Kampala, Uganda, who, through some friends, learnt that there would be a job for him in Juba. When he arrived, however, it turned out that the job had already been given to someone else. Therefore, he started working in the mobile telephone sector.

In general the mobile phone market in Juba is dominated by relatively young people between the ages of 20 and 40 years. The great majority are men, although three female traders from Uganda were interviewed. Jane, for example, a woman in her early 20s, came by bus in January 2007. She arrived in Juba through her network of Sudanese friends who fled the war and were refugees in Uganda. Most Ugandans start as petty traders, selling scratch cards and phone calls.

14. Observations by Peter Taban Wani and interview with Adil Background trader Place: Custom Market, Juba Date: September 2007 Present: Peter Taban Wani
15. Interview with Patrick Background Local businessman Place: Juba, market Yei Bus Park stall Date: 28 July 2007 Present: Inge, Patrick’s companion, customers Interview in English, notes taken.
There are clear hierarchies in the mobile phone business. People who sell scratch cards and phone calls are usually not rich or are just starting. Many of them are from poor backgrounds and had only limited access to schooling. For example, John, a young man from Southern Sudan, sells cards and calls from a small table, two plastic chairs and a parasol. His income (2007) is an average 25 Sudanese pounds per day, although some people like him may earn up to 100–150 Sudanese pounds a day.

The businessmen who sell mobile phones and accessories are generally richer. Most of them had money to start with, either from relatives or from previous business activities. They usually have a more elaborate shop in the market and their income is also higher. Adil, for example, has an average income of 400 to 600 pounds a day and on some days he may make as much as 900 to 1000 Sudanese pounds. A third category is the shops that focus on other wares than mobile telephony, but offer phone services in addition to these activities. There are at least two local restaurants offering food and beer where phone calls can be made. For these business people, the revenues from telephony are usually modest and seen only as an extra.

In view of the cost of living in Juba, where renting a house costs at least 250–350 Sudanese pounds per month, these incomes are at most moderate. Life in Juba is not cheap, although prices for groceries are now lower than during the war when everything had to be imported from Khartoum, whereas now most imports are from Uganda. All business people intend to send remittances to their relatives and mobile phone sellers usually send money to their parents, their family and cover the costs of schooling of their children. Their families may live in El Fasher, Geneina, Khartoum or elsewhere. But not all card- and call sellers earn enough to send money home. A young female trader from Uganda only had an income of 150–200 pounds per day, but expressed hope that the amount would increase so that she could support her relatives in Uganda. Despite the difficulties, there are examples of people doing well. One man, who started working in Juba with an NGO in the 1980s, opened his call shop in 2002 with a fixed-line service. After a few years he had earned enough to open a second shop selling groceries. He now runs the grocery shop and employs a woman to manage the telecommunications shop, from which he earns 350–500 Sudanese pounds a day. All in all, mobile phone business remains one of the promising markets and is highly tapped into by foreigners in Juba, while generally excluding local people, which occasionally raises considerable resentment and jealousy, and, like in other sectors, leads to feelings of insecurity amongst many foreigners in this frontier town (Vries 2012: Chapter 7, Schomerus and Titeca 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

The research that we conducted in Juba is of particular relevance to shed light on the way in which (new) communication technologies become entangled with mobility, politics and entrepreneurship in a ‘post’-war setting and displacement economy. Juba is a town that has shown spectacular growth over a very short time, but not without its particular infrastructural and security challenges (Grant and Thompson 2013; Schomerus and Titeca 2012). In a politically volatile and insecure situation, many people stress that the mobile phone has increased the possibilities for security in town, safe travel and contact with lost relatives: this was made amply clear during the Juba fieldwork. There is a clear break with the war period here, where mobile telephony was suspect.
The legacy of war influenced the interaction between North and South Sudan. While the boundaries between Northern and Southern Sudan became an increasing reality, the war dynamics led to increasingly porous borders with Uganda and Kenya. Thus, the legacy of war becomes apparent in the patterns of mobility in the past and in the present. Communication and transport have throughout played a role in refugee movements, the relation between returnees and people who remained in Juba, the new configurations of the rural–urban relations in South Sudan, the cross-borders trade, etc. and the newly introduced mobile phone is considered by many as a crucial tool in this respect, reinforcing the particular (dis-)connectivities that were shaped due to war connections and dis-connections.

The mobile phone market in Juba is dominated by people who come from outside Juba. These people invested in Juba as a promising market after the peace agreement. Only a few people from Juba or nearby towns are involved in the trade in mobile phones and accessories. Also in other sectors of transport and communication the Juba case-study shows the increasing presence of foreigners, mainly from Kenya and Uganda. For the organization of their business they strongly rely on the mobile phone and our hypothesis is that without these devices, Juba would not have attracted so many people exploring the new economic opportunities. This subject could be an interesting avenue for further research.

REFERENCES


**SUGGESTED CITATION**


**CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

Inge Brinkman is professor of African studies at Ghent University, Belgium.

Contact: African Languages and Cultures, Ghent University, Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Gent, Belgium.

E-mail: inge.brinkman@ugent.be
1. Jonna Both is a post-doc researcher at Leiden University, Institute for History, The Netherlands.
3. E-mail: j.c.both@hum.leidenuniv.nl
4. Mirjam de Bruijn is professor of contemporary history and anthropology of Africa at Leiden University, Institute for History, The Netherlands.
6. E-mail: m.e.de.bruijn@hum.leidenuniv.nl
7. Inge Brinkman, Jonna Both and Mirjam de Bruijn have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.