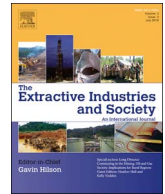




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Original article

## Imagining Booms and Busts: Conflicting Temporalities and the Extraction-“Development” nexus in Mozambique

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents three sets of divergent and competing understandings of temporalities in relation to the extractive industry in Mozambique, in order to explore the dynamics of power within expectations of “development” raised by extractive mega projects. The first set of understandings involves a forward-looking, long-term view of the extractive industry’s potential to bring transformational “development” to Mozambique and its people, generally expressed by the extractive industry and associated actors. Subsequently, the article zooms in on a specific extractive sector; the coal industry in Tete province. The second set is characterized by expressions of volatility by an elite group of businesspeople who were lured by the promise of a coal boom, and who explain the urban “development” in terms of before, during and after “the boom”. The third set delves into the experience and expressions of “waiting” by people who were resettled by coal mining companies in Tete. By presenting these three sets, the article aims to go beyond binary analyses of the local versus the national, and the community versus the company or state, and offers a layered analysis of the disconnections between understandings of “development” and the expected wealth of resource extraction.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, Mozambique’s economy has taken an extractive turn. The discovery of large reserves of gas, oil and coal has attracted foreign investors from over the globe, suggesting that the country’s “economic potential lies underground” (Besharati, 2012:1). The large-scale mining and other resource extraction projects evoke the promises of rapid wealth and “development”, but also bring about concerns about environmental degradation and exploitation of land and people. Particularly in the context of African resource rich areas, including Mozambique, the role of multinational extractive industry has been described as igniting processes of “enclavisation”, “respacing” and *de facto* governing of territory and populations (e.g. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2015; Ferguson, 2005; Hönke, 2010; Kirshner and Power, 2015; Symons, 2016; Watts, 2004). Such studies provide insight into how such enclaves are often differentially integrated in and intertwined with the structures of state power and global capitalism (Ferguson, 2005; Ong, 1999: 232). Yet such spatial approaches are less apt to uncover how people in different positions of power make sense of these rapid social and economic changes even before extraction has started (see also Weskalnys, 2014) and how they experience and envision the possible prospects (and problems) of the extractive industry in differentiated ways.

Resource extraction comes with distinctive and multiple

temporalities, including a variety of intervals, rhythms, and speeds, that are infused with affects of time, such as hope, expectations, dread, and nostalgia (D’Angelo and Pijpers, *this issue*). These mining temporalities (D’Angelo and Pijpers *this issue*), below also referred to as extractive temporalities may shape the narratives of the past, present, and future in particular ways, generate activities and influence decision-making, and are thereby also political projects, subject to manipulation, contradictions and conflicts (Ibid., see also Kirsch, 2014; Weskalnys, 2014). In this article I combine these extractive temporalities with another temporal project: “development”, which I will persistently refer to between quotation marks to keep a keen eye on its discursive function (Ferguson, 1990). “Development” is by design a temporal and forward-looking project (Lewis, 2009), to which a wide variety of expectations can be attributed (Davidov and Nelson, 2016). A temporal perspective on the extraction-development nexus is therefore particularly apt to uncover how (future) extractive projects are experienced and envisioned, particularly in countries such as Mozambique with long-standing aid dependency. Doing so, I aim to uncover the divergent and competing temporal understandings of this extraction-development nexus, and to explore how such an analysis can provide insights in dynamics by which some extractive futures are legitimized and by which others are silenced.

This article presents three sets of perspectives on the resource boom and recent coal bust in Mozambique that are shaped by different

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temporal imaginations and experiences. I have chosen to focus on these three sets as each represents the views of a group of people who are profoundly affected by the extractive industry and who perceive the extractive industry in relation to “development”. Yet, these sets also present diverse and sometimes contrasting ideas about what kind of “development” the extraction industry could (or should) bring and about *when* this “development” is supposed to happen. These three sets of perspectives involve actors who can be loosely regarded as “strategic groups”, by which Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1997:240) mean “empirical social aggregates of variable geometry” and which “help us to understand the convergence of strategies between certain individuals who can be assumed to share the same position in the face of the same ‘issue’” (Bierschenk and Olivier De Sardan, 1997:241).

The three sets of temporal perspectives revolve around the development of a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in the north of Mozambique, and—more in-depth—the coal mining industry in Tete. The first set evolves around the temporal perspectives of representatives from the extractive industry and those associated with the sector, such as consultants, representatives of the government of Mozambique and of donor countries with interests in the extractive sector. This set involved a forward-looking, long-term view of the extractive industry’s potential to bring transformational “development” to Mozambique and its people. The two subsequent sets zoom in on the coal sector in Tete, a province in central Mozambique. The second set consists of temporal narratives of Tete’s urban elite; the businessmen and women who invested in Tete province, lured by the promise of the coal-bonanza, and who explained the urban “development” in terms of before, during and after “the boom”. The third set delves into the experience and expressions of “waiting” (de l’Estoile, 2014) by members of the communities who were resettled by coal mining companies in Tete. While by no means exhaustive, I hope that by presenting these three sets of perspectives, the article goes beyond binary analyses of the local versus the national, and the community versus the company or state, and to provide (a more) layered analyses of disconnections between temporal understandings of “development” and the promised wealth of resource extraction.

The research material presented in this article is based on fieldwork in 2016 and 2017 in the capital Maputo and Tete province, during which I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of several extractive companies working in coal and gas sectors, with representatives of civil society organizations in Maputo and Tete, and with academics, diplomats, company’s community workers, and inhabitants of Cateme and Muiladzi. These are two resettlement areas in Moatize district (Tete province), where I spend several weeks in order to get a grasp of daily life in the resettlement area. In addition, I make use of newspaper articles, reports, and the websites of the multinational companies. From a ‘mining temporalities’ perspective (D’Angelo and Pijpers, 2018 this issue), it is worth noting that over the course of fieldwork the price of coal fluctuated, the plans for the gas industry took further root, and a truce was negotiated in 2016 that halted three years of armed conflict between the armed wing of the opposition party ‘Resistência Nacional de Moçambique’ (RENAMO) – Mozambican National Resistance and the government of Mozambique. As a result, interpretations of (future) booms and busts also shifted and this paper seeks to reflect on some of these changing perspectives in the article, which may serve as a reminder of the volatile and multiple temporalities through which we can start to untangle resource extraction from a temporal perspective (D’Angelo and Pijpers, this issue).

The article is structured as follows: I will first conceptualize the idea of multiple temporalities in relation to the extractive industry and “development.” Then I will provide the necessary background information to Mozambique’s recent “extractive turn,” and subsequently discuss the three sets of temporal perspectives in relation to the natural resource boom (and busts). In the concluding remarks I will reflect on the relevance of a temporal perspective for the analysis of experiences and expectations of extractive “development”, and how such

temporalities are situated in a field of different power relations and often conflicting interests.

## 2. Extractive times: temporality and “development”

In a recent edition of *Current Anthropology* focused on rethinking the economy, Narotzky and Besnier (2014:10) state that economy is “about projecting into the future” and that “[p]eople’s economic practices have a clear temporal orientation to horizons of expectation that are framed by past experiences and the mythical reconfigurations of that past.” Extractive booms (and busts) may be processes that par excellence inspire projections of the future, or “horizons of expectations.” The potential and imagined wealth generated by the resource extraction industry is a central part of such horizons of expectations, which, as this article will continue to show, are imagined in very different ways by different actors in extractive environments.

In this article I follow De L’Estoile’s (2014:64) use of Reinhard Koselleck’s (1976) notion of “horizon of expectations”, by which he understands “the future as it is present.” For De L’Estoile (2014:64), such horizons, collective as well as individual, are defined by a combination of a “space of experience”, meaning the past insofar as it is present, field of opportunities (or life opportunities), and frames of references, both shared and individual, that shape understandings and interpretations of the world. While such a perspective sets out an agenda for wide possibilities for ethnographic analysis, I have chosen to focus on one frame of reference that for many Mozambicans, as well as foreigners working or investing in Mozambique, has some kind of meaning, namely “development”. The country’s economy has been depending heavily on foreign aid since the late 1980s, and the extractive turn is regarded as a way out of this donor dependency (Macuane et al., 2017:4). At the same time it means that the envisioned changes the extractive investments are supposed to bring are very much shaped by the “development” discourse, and the variety of past experiences with “development” projects, resulting in multiple understandings of what “development” contains and how and when this is supposed to happen. As mentioned in the introduction to this article, I thus use “development” for its discursive power and as a multi-interpretable notion to which my research participants ascribe a wide range of meanings and expectations.

The coupling of “development” with the extractive industry can be situated in a larger shift in international development thinking and practice that increasingly privileges trade over aid, and in the “ethical turn” of big businesses, in which corporations are transformed into agents and architects of “development”. This “ethical turn” (Dolan and Rajak, 2016:3) has been analysed largely in relation to debates about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that have showed the linkages between “development” and CSR to be particularly close in the context of mining or resource extraction since this often takes place in remote regions with limited statehood and where companies assume a governing role (Hönke, 2010; Welker, 2009). It is particularly in such areas, or in the imagination of such areas, where CSR may grant corporations “a pass into Development World” (Gardner, 2016:129). Rather than understanding this “ethical turn” as a good or bad thing, I follow recent anthropological debates about CSR, which aim to uncover how in various ways “corporate power is rendered, exercised, limited or resisted through the discourse and practice of CSR” (Dolan and Rajak, 2016:16). This is helpful to think about “development” and the extractive industry in Mozambique, where the links between the two are not necessarily discussed in terms of CSR, but are formulated in terms of a “social license to operate”, the managing of “social risk”, “local content”, the percentages of resource revenues meant for community development projects, and population resettlement (see also World Bank, 2014). It is through these terms and others that “development” and the potential wealth of resource extraction projects become intertwined in a range of specific ways, creating differentiated futures, encompassing diverse time lines, and contradictory visions of social and

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