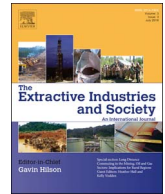




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Original article

Configuring the living environment in mining areas in Angola: Contestations between mining companies, workers, local communities and the state

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ABSTRACT

The creation of residential areas near diamond mining operations in Angola has been since its inception in the 1900s both the main driver of settlement and the condition for economic inclusion. Today, private corporations and the state manage mining towns associated to large-scale ventures. The local population rarely has access to employment in these mines or to the residential facilities of mine villages. At the same time, the increased control of artisanal mining leaves most local communities with fewer economic options and infrastructural improvements out of the cities do not reach all. Claims for better livelihoods and infrastructure in towns linked to large-scale mines have increased over the years and constitute an unprecedented strategy to access mining wealth. Resettlement areas, where state and companies are building new towns agglomerating the scattered surrounding villages as part of social responsibility programs become places of contestation among local communities, companies, and the state. This paper addresses the negotiations surrounding such programs, focusing on the expectations of the local community amid the conditions set by the urbanization policies of mining companies and the state, ultimately showing how these are new interplays within the Angolan mining contexts.

1. Introduction

Towns and urban spaces related to large-scale mining are arenas of negotiation and contestation between corporate capital, the state and the local population. However, this has not been the case in Angola until recently. The Lunda Sul case study analysed here is an example of transformed possibilities for negotiation, providing insight into specific claims within these processes, while supporting the main argument that the potential and space for negotiation on the part of local populations have increased, at least compared to the colonial (until 1975) and wartime periods (1975–2002). The colonial state, inherently totalitarian and dictatorial, gave 'quasi-state' power to the international diamond-mining corporation Diamang to operate in the Lunda region (Clarence-Smith, 1983; Cleveland, 2008). As a result, the room for social and economic manoeuvre of the local population was doubly limited, with state and company coercion setting all the rules. With independence and the simultaneous start of the civil war, the local population was subject to the operations of either the militarized government or the UNITA guerrilla movement, both of which forcefully imposed economic and social domination (Malaquias, 2001a,b; Udelsmann Rodrigues, 2014; Udelsmann Rodrigues and Tavares, 2012) and defined settlement and livelihoods.

Although recent research has shown the continued legacy of the colonial privatized governance of mining companies in Angola (De

Alencastro de, 2014), this article focuses on transformations and argues that new housing projects in mining regions provide examples of transformation involving new processes of negotiation. Evidence of the changing nature of state-society relations is provided not only by the accounts of Lunda residents but also by the mechanisms created by the state and companies to respond to the social, economic and residential claims. While participation in decision-making on the part of local residents is still reliant on weak consultation systems, some provision of services and infrastructure to the population has resulted from specific claims and assessed needs. This is now radically different from the past and suggests the potential exists to 'resist' unwanted aspects of urbanization.

For decades, village building has been a key instrument of social intervention for the state in Angola and, in the mining sphere, of private companies. Literature analysing the historical relationship between social projects and residential configurations, in Angola and broadly, makes abundant reference to – for the colonial period – urban segregation planning or model villages, or – for the post-colonial era – villages built to contain counterinsurgency and post-colonial villagisation schemes (Coghe, 2017, p. 19). Colonial-era mining sector residential initiatives have been analysed (Bender, 1973; Cleveland, 2008; Varanda, 2004; Coghe, 2017), but recently, as increased pressure is placed on firms to meet social responsibility demands, more cases of local housing and/or infrastructure projects and activities have arisen.

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These local projects involve complex and constantly evolving processes of negotiation, contestation and compromise between mining companies, the local population and the state, which need to be analysed. Issues and conflicts often arise between mining company operations and the environment and community (Jenkins, 2004), as well as between states and private capital (Bush, 2010), and between local artisanal miners and private large-scale mining corporations (Carstens and Hilson, 2009). A wide range of areas of contestation and conflict has been extensively analysed in the literature: for example, related to the local economy or livelihoods, land or water access, environment, gender, social cohesion, cultural beliefs, and human rights, among others (Kemp et al., 2011). Mining regions are commonly perceived as arenas of contestation and intense relationships between companies, states and local stakeholders (Calvano, 2008; Ballard and Banks, 2003). As companies desire and seek to maintain social and economic stability in the areas where they operate whilst, at the same time, they seek to avoid existing or additional responsibilities for local development, the conditions are created for intense and constant dialogues between themselves, the state and local constituencies (Rey and Weber, 2016, p. 172).

In Angola, the development of new residential and infrastructural arrangements have created unprecedented opportunities for community claims that seek to channel the benefits of mineral wealth to the regions where they are produced. These claims for greater benefits for the mining provinces have spread from the community to the political arena, an interesting area for investigation as well, with the 'Lundas party' PRS (*Partido de Renovação Social/Social Renewal Party*), actively asserting these ideas and achieving impressive local results in the last elections.¹ This article focuses on settlement in general and on a case study of village unification – a territorial reorganization through relocation and concentration of scattered villages and of infrastructure and services –, providing insight on the implications of these processes for political developments in the Lunda provinces. However, a discussion of their wider political repercussions is beyond the scope of this article.

The history of the two Lunda diamond provinces is one of long-standing multiple displacements shaded by and shaping the changing economic landscapes within Angola (Udelsmann Rodrigues, 2014). However, the Diamang diamond company dominated the regulation of the local economy and society since the initiation of mining activities in the 1920s. The post-independence civil war (1975–2002) saw changes in and conflict over political authority, but both the state military and the guerrillas equally exerted an absolute domination over the economy and populace (Udelsmann Rodrigues, 2014; Udelsmann Rodrigues and Tavares, 2012). Today, in association with the state's grand projects for reconstruction and housing, both mining firms and the government are obliged to negotiate more often with local communities over the development of housing and settlement programs in the mining regions and infrastructural improvements linked to them.

This article begins by briefly reviewing the features and dynamics of settlement associated with large-scale mining operations in Angola – mining and urbanization features changed over the years and in different socioeconomic periods (Maconachie, 2012). It argues that the colonial, wartime and post-war periods are quite distinct in terms of the relations between the state, mine companies and the local population, specifically in regard to settlement and village unification programs. It then identifies the main areas of contestation and competing claims to demonstrate that there has been an unprecedented increase in the potential for negotiating matters related to the lived environment with both mining companies and the state. The material used to support this

argument is primarily qualitative, based on interviews and empirical research conducted between 2011 and 2016, but the article also draws on pre-existing documentation and publications.

2. Building and managing mining towns over the years: new opportunities for local claims?

2.1. Colonial mining towns – private 'state-within-a-state', privately run towns

The creation of residential areas near diamond mining operations in Angola has been, since their inception in the 1900s, both the main driver of settlement and a pre-condition for economic inclusion in these mining regions. In this context, the mining companies – and, to a lesser degree, the state – dominated the economy and society and were sovereign in all aspects of local lives.

In the period between the two world wars, efforts to build model villages, providing sanitary, agricultural, economic and social improvements for the indigenous population, emerged and multiplied in Angola and elsewhere in Africa, although many of the envisaged utopian outcomes remained at odds with reality (Coghe, 2017). The decidedly imperfect implementation of such villages in Angolan mining areas reflected a lack of settlement planning and management expertise, the diverging priorities of the local authorities, dependence on the initiative of local administrators, lack of funding and, importantly, instances of protest and resistance from African villagers (Coghe, 2017, pp. 36–38). The mining towns created by Diamang were however an exception to this relatively unsuccessful implementation of model villages. The company consortium – composed of Belgian, British, and American interests plus the Portuguese state, founded in 1917–controlled the colonial mining operations in the Lundas, the diamond provinces of Angola, and the residential settlements established for their workforce and community. As a consequence, for six decades and until independence in 1975, Diamang played such a dominant role in these settlements that the villages functioned as a 'quasi-state', with Diamang controlling these mining regions and being responsible for almost all the social, economic and residential aspects of life in the Lundas for decades (Clarence-Smith, 1983). The company provided housing, employment and infrastructure for the mineworkers (Cleveland, 2015, 2008), the majority of them migrants from other provinces and from the neighbouring Congo. Diamang not only controlled the mines and the technical operation of the exploration but also the workers' lives, including staff living in the mining villages and the wider population living in the mining concession areas, which would often incorporate pre-existing rural villages. Diamang mining towns operated as 'open' compounds, with facilities to provide medical and educational services for employees and their dependents. (Cleveland 2008, p. 7), services not found elsewhere in the region. The company controlled all aspects of the compound, including access to housing, food and residential arrangements such as mineworkers' ability to live with their families.

The population and workforce under Diamang's control steadily grew over the years as mining activities expanded: from 2300 in 1920 to approximately 10,000 in 1930, 15,000 in the next decade and 25,000 by 1960 (Varanda, 2004, p. 263). By the end of the 1940s, Diamang had an estimated 7000 African workers, 6000 of whom were contracted and the remaining volunteers² (Cleveland, 2008). Both the recruited mineworkers and the local population had little or no possibilities for participating in the organization and management of mining towns. Urban plans were in general more advanced in the main cities but a

¹ In the 2012 general elections, PRS elected three members of parliament with 1.7% of the total votes. This percentage was more expressive in the provinces of the Lunda Norte (10%, third most voted) and Lunda Sul (24.5%, second most voted) given its openly proclaimed ethnic and regional character. In all other provinces, their results were residual (except in the Moxico (5.3%) where the 'Lunda' population is also represented).

² Contracted labour (*trabalho contratado*) was in fact until very late the colonial system of forced work, based on specific local forms of coercion and work obligations. "Volunteer" workers would freely choose to work in agricultural or mining ventures, as they were the main sources of wage incomes, but the precarious conditions would be similar (Bender, 1973; Clarence-Smith, 1983; Cleveland, 2008).

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