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Advance Access Publication 29 June 2022

READING MOZAMBIQUE'S MEGA-PROJECT DEVELOPMENTALISM THROUGH THE WORKPLACE: EVIDENCE FROM CHINESE AND BRAZILIAN INVESTMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Propelled by a commodities boom and expanding South–South investment, mega-projects have reshaped the politics of labour in many African settings. Reflecting on such dynamics, this article critically engages with questions of employment, skills development, and contestation re-configuring capital–labour encounters in the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Brazilian’ workplace in Mozambique. We analyse two mega-projects: the Maputo Ring Road, implemented by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, and the Moatize Coal Project, led by the Brazilian mining company, Vale SA. Engaging with the complex realities at project ground level, the article unpacks how workplace regimes and outcomes reflect an intricate, multi-scalar array of spatial encounters, sector-specific characteristics, and national political economies. For both cases, this is associated with common promises of development and prosperity for Mozambique. While such promises take on different ideational guises, we show that the Chinese and Brazilian workplaces expose, nonetheless, overlapping patterns of inequality, contention, and hostility, reinforced by broader vulnerabilities and imbalances in global production networks and the Mozambican political economy. By providing a ground-level reading of the multi-scalar forces at play in the workplace, this article sheds light

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on the relationship between emerging South–South global encounters, national political realities, and labour geographies in African contexts shaped by mega-projects.

Introduction

IT IS NOW A FAMILIAR STORY: DURING THE 2000S, A GLOBAL COMMODITY SUPER-CYCLE SUSTAINED A POSITIVE ECONOMIC outlook in many African countries,¹ leading *The Economist* to famously coin Africa as ‘the hopeful continent’.² Alongside traditional Western presences, Africa saw the arrival of emerging market firms pursuing business projects and natural resource concessions across the continent.³ This conjuncture spurred economic activity and public expenditure, with much euphoria being captured through the explosion of ‘development mega-projects’. As large-scale, landscape-transforming ventures, such projects trigger a latitude of developmental aspirations. Presented as game-changing enterprises, expectations tap into mega-projects’ potential to establish critical infrastructures, enhance (trans-)regional connectivity, and contribute to peacebuilding and national economic development through employment, subcontracts, technology transfers, and skill formation.⁴

Research has largely read Africa’s mega-project landscape through three overarching analytical trends. The first has explored the dynamics of changing development and business geographies, investigating sectoral tendencies and production imperatives in the face of the commodity super-cycle.⁵ The role of South–South relations and the strategic concerns of emerging power investors on the continent, most significantly China, have merited particular attention.⁶ The second has examined the concomitant

1. Andrew Bowman, Tomas Frederiksen, Deborah Fahy Bryceson, John Childs, Emma Gilberthorpe, and Susan Newman, ‘Mining in Africa after the supercycle: New directions and geographies’, *Area* 53 (2021), pp. 647–658.

2. *The Economist*, ‘Africa Rising’, 3 November 2011, <<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2011/12/03/africa-rising>> (10 October 2021).

3. Pádraig Carmody, *The new scramble for Africa* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2016). For a critical perspective, see: Folashade Soule, ‘Africa+ 1’ summit diplomacy and the “new scramble” narrative: Recentering African agency’, *African Affairs* 119, 477 (2020), pp. 633–646.

4. See, for example, Jason Mosley and Elizabeth E. Watson, ‘Frontier transformations: Development visions, spaces and processes in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 3 (2016), pp. 452–475; Johannes T. Aalders, Jan Bachmann, Per Knutsson, and Benard M. Kilaka, ‘The making and unmaking of a megaproject: Contesting temporalities along the LAPSET corridor in Kenya’, *Antipode* 53, 5 (2021), pp. 1273–1293; Gediminas Lesutis, ‘Infrastructural territorialisations: Mega-infrastructures and the (re) making of Kenya’, *Political Geography* 90 (2021), pp. 1–11.

5. Carmody, *The new scramble for Africa*; Daniel Large, ‘A “Chinese scramble”? The politics of contemporary China–Africa relations’, *African Affairs* 106, 422 (2007), pp. 141–143; Sam Moyo, Paris Yeros, and Praveen Jha, ‘Imperialism and primitive accumulation: Notes on the new scramble for Africa’, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 1, 2 (2012), pp. 181–203.

6. Ian Taylor, *Africa rising?: BRICS-Diversifying dependency* (Boydell & Brewer, Rochester, NY, 2014); Chris Alden and Daniel Large (eds), *New directions in Africa–China studies* (Routledge, New York, NY, 2018); Barnaby J. Dye, ‘India’s infrastructure building in Africa:

effects on African political economies, accounting for fiscal circumstances, industrial development, and the (re-)positioning of domestic elites vis-à-vis investors and multinationals.⁷ The third has approached the spatially situated controversies, socio-economic struggles, and livelihood shortcomings in host environments, e.g. how 'enclavic' models of development have persisted as the defining features of arrangements.⁸ While these debates have made great strides in accounting for the emerging and problematic geographies associated with Africa's late wave of mega-projects, the terrain of research stands to benefit from more cross-fertilization as trends are frequently examined apart from each other, despite intersections and interlinkages.⁹

In this article, focusing on Mozambique, we seek to speak at the intersections of these analytical trends, through an empirically grounded exploration of the confluence of geopolitical, national, and spatial dynamics at play in contexts shaped by mega-projects. We do this by zooming in on capital-labour encounters through specific workplaces, seeking to add a novel perspective by turning attention to how South-South engagements play out 'on the ground'. Specifically, we approach and contrast workplace regimes and outcomes in the context of two critical, Mozambique-based mega-projects: the Maputo Ring Road, implemented by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), and the Moatize Coal Project, led by the Brazilian mining company Vale SA.

Workplace regimes are understood as the organization of the workplace co-shaped by industrial relations and the broader national political economy,¹⁰ and we posit that the 'workplace' provides a productive angle to read mega-project developments from the ground up and at the interstices of South-South relations, national political realities, and interpersonal encounters. Moreover' the ways in which workplaces are organized

South-South cooperation and the abstraction of responsibility', *African Affairs* 121, 483 (2022), pp. 221–249.

7. See, for example, Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 'Business success, Angola-style: Postcolonial politics and the rise and rise of Sonangol', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, 4 (2007), pp. 595–619; Giles Mohan and Ben Lampert, 'Negotiating China: Reinserting African agency into China-Africa relations', *African Affairs* 112, 446 (2013), pp. 92–110.

8. See, for example, Rohit Negit, 'The micropolitics of mining and development in Zambia: Insights from the Northwestern Province', *African Studies Quarterly* 12, 2 (2011), pp. 27–44; Charis Enns and Brock Bersaglio, 'On the coloniality of "new" mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa', *Antipode* 52, 1 (2020), pp. 101–123; Gediminas Lesutis, 'Spaces of extraction and suffering: Neoliberal enclave and dispossession in Tete, Mozambique', *Geoforum* 102 (2019), pp. 116–125.

9. Bowman et al., 'Mining in Africa after the supercycle'.

10. Carlos Oya, 'Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa', in Arkebe Oqubay and Justin Yifu Lin (eds), *China-Africa and an economic transformation* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019), pp. 239–262; Carlos Oya and Florian Schaefer, 'The politics of labour relations in global production networks: Collective action, industrial parks, and local conflict in the Ethiopian apparel sector', *World Development* 146 (2021), pp. 1–13.

encapsulates many of the associated developmental promises, often conveyed through watchwords such as ‘linkages’, ‘local content’, ‘job creation’, ‘capacity building’, ‘technical transfer’, and ‘corporate responsibility’. The article demonstrates how the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Brazilian’ workplace in Mozambique is co-shaped by variegated apparatuses, bundling together ground-level interactions, sectoral trends associated with large-scale infrastructure and mining investments, and characteristics linked to Mozambique’s political economy. While we build on country-specific research, this article engages with key dimensions pertaining to Africa’s economic development, relations of production, and spatial patterns more broadly.

This article is based on extensive fieldwork in Mozambique. The analysis of the Chinese workplace draws on one author’s study of Chinese construction projects in Mozambique, with qualitative data collected during fieldwork in Maputo, from May to September 2013, and data collected from September 2014 to January 2015. The analysis of the Brazilian workplace case is supported by the other author’s study on Vale’s extractivism in Mozambique, drawing on fieldwork conducted between June 2018 and December 2018. Our material consists of interviews, focus groups, and observations with Chinese, Brazilian, and Mozambican project employees, across leadership, supervisory, and rank-and-file positions, in addition to representatives from consultant companies, business associations, trade unions, officials from various ministries and governmental bodies, as well as local populations affected by such investments. Insights from the specialized literatures on China/Brazil–Africa relations, Mozambique’s development, and the politics of labour encounters complement the primary data.

The article will first outline our contributions to the wider scholarship by revisiting the prominent role of Chinese and Brazilian investments in Mozambique and the two mega-projects considered. This is followed by a presentation of our conceptual framework, demonstrating how workplace regimes can be used as tools for analysing Chinese/Brazilian-led workplaces in Mozambique. We then analyse the Sino-Mozambican workplace regime unfolding in the context of the Maputo Ring Road and subsequently the Brazilian–Mozambican workplace regime in the context of Vale’s Moatize Coal project. We conclude by drawing parallels between the workplace regimes under scrutiny, highlighting major similarities and differences, and show how our analysis contributes to uncover some of the shortcomings linked to Africa’s contemporary ‘mega-project developmentalism’.

China and Brazil in Mozambique’s mega-project developmentalism

During the 2000s, Mozambique saw the expansion of a wide range of mega-projects. Including initiatives in the extractive, energy, and transport sectors, such dynamics represented a prominent facet of Mozambique’s

developmentalism in recent years, inspiring optimism about the country's future after more than a decade of civil war (1977–1992).¹¹ Yet, scholars have also scrutinized and interrogated these processes, pointing at the controversial nature of foreign investments, ranging from dispossession practices and lack of local content formation to forms of elite capture in detriment of wider societal concerns.¹² Building on such criticisms, we hold that Mozambique's broader political and economic trends in recent years, predicated on resource-intensive growth and mega-projects, have reconfigured the geographies of development in problematic ways that merit further reflection.

Particularly from the early 2000s, capital from Southern countries like China and Brazil has been active in the development of mega-projects. Mirroring its broader trajectory across Africa, China's presence in Mozambique has been of wide-ranging significance, and China has consistently figured among Mozambique's most important investors since the mid-2000s.¹³ The blending of grants, technical assistance, and loans in China–Mozambican bilateral deals makes it difficult to distinguish between development assistance and investments. Still, Chinese institutions have encouraged Chinese companies to establish themselves in Mozambique since the late 1990s, who in turn have gained a strong foothold in the country's agricultural, extractive, and construction sectors, i.e. through Chinese funding of large public projects.¹⁴ It is estimated that Chinese companies are responsible for carrying out about one-third of Mozambique's road construction, whereas about 70 per cent of Chinese foreign direct investments is now allocated to natural resources, including gas and oil.¹⁵ Without downplaying the important role of Chinese credit and companies in contributing to closing Mozambique's infrastructure gap, scholars have also questioned whether effected projects are catered to commercial (often foreign) needs rather than local and social, pointing at projects' weak linkages with their socio-economic environments.¹⁶

11. Aslak J. Orre and Helge Rønning, 'Mozambique: A political economy analysis' (NUPI Political Economy Reports, NUPI and CMI, Oslo, 2017).

12. See Carlos N. Castel-Branco, 'Growth, capital accumulation and economic porosity in Mozambique: Social losses, private gains', *Review of African Political Economy* 41, sup1 (2014), pp. 26–48; Nikkie Wiegink, 'Imagining booms and busts: Conflicting temporalities and the extraction–"development" nexus in Mozambique', *The Extractive Industries and Society* 5, 2 (2018), pp. 245–52; José J. Macuane, Lars Buur, and Celso M. Monjane, 'Power, conflict and natural resources: The Mozambican crisis revisited', *African Affairs* 117, 468 (2018), pp. 415–438; Kei Otsuki, 'Who is in "the Public"? Infrastructure of displacement and urban resettlement in Mozambique', *Built Environment* 44, 4 (2019), pp. 493–508.

13. Chris Alden, Sérgio Chichava, and Paula Cristina Roque, 'China in Mozambique: Caution, compromise and collaboration', in Chris Alden and Sérgio Chichava (eds), *China and Mozambique. From comrades to capitalists* (Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2014); Francisco Proença Garcia, 'China's economic presence in Mozambique', *Estudos Internacionais: Revista de Relações Internacionais da PUC Minas* 8, 3 (2020), pp. 110–127.

14. Garcia, 'China's economic presence in Mozambique'.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Carlos N. Castel-Branco, 'Os mega projectos em Moçambique: Que contributo para a economia nacional?' (Prepared for the Fórum da Sociedade Civil para Indústria Extractiva,

While the ‘Brazil rising’ story has lost much of its lustre in recent years due to economic distress and a dwindling foreign policy engagement with Africa,¹⁷ Mozambique has emblemized much of the aspirations of Brazil’s quest for increased global protagonism post-2000. Particularly during the Lula presidency (2003–2010), Mozambique saw a revamped Brazilian presence, bundling together public, private, and civil society actors.¹⁸ Relations have been defined by a growing commercial appeal, with Brazil being Mozambique’s largest source of foreign investment between 2009 and 2012.¹⁹ Developments such as the ProSAVANA agribusiness initiative, the involvement of Brazilian construction firms in port, airport, and urban mobility ventures, and the arrival of Vale SA to explore coal in Tete have firmly inserted Brazilian business actors at the heart of Mozambique’s mega-project landscape.²⁰

Chinese and Brazilian engagements have also merited comparative investigations, particularly in the field of rural development. Scholars have examined the transfer of models and technologies by both countries, as well as their appropriateness and receptivity in Mozambique.²¹ Additionally, Chinese and Brazilian investments have been central to Mozambique’s second generation of mega-projects, which was largely driven by coal mining in Tete, spearheaded by Vale, and the construction of transport infrastructures, many by Chinese firms, to redress the country’s war-affected bottlenecks.²² This succeeded Mozambique’s first mega-project generation, advanced amid a conjuncture of structural adjustment and funded prominently by Western and South African capital, with the establishment

2008), <http://www.iese.ac.mz/lib/noticias/Mega_Projectos_ForumITIE.pdf> (29 September 2013); Castel-Branco, ‘Growth, capital accumulation and economic porosity in Mozambique’; Ulrikke Wethal, ‘Beyond the China factor: Challenges to backward linkages in the Mozambican construction sector’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 56, 2 (2018), pp. 325–351.

17. Mathias Alencastro and Pedro Seabra (eds), *Brazil-Africa relations in the 21st century: From surge to downturn and beyond* (Springer Nature, Cham, 2020).

18. Chris Alden, Sérgio Chichava, and Ana Cristina Alves (eds), *Mozambique and Brazil: Forging new partnerships or developing dependency?* (Fanele, Johannesburg, 2017); Eric Cezne and Jana Hönke, ‘The multiple meanings and uses of South–South relations in extraction: The Brazilian mining company Vale in Mozambique’, *World Development* 151 (2022), pp. 1–13.

19. Isabela Nogueira, Ossi Ollinaho, Eduardo C. Pinto, Grasiela Baruco, Alexis Saludjian, José P. G. Pinto, Paulo Balanco, and Carlos Schonerwald, ‘Mozambican economic porosity and the role of Brazilian capital: A political economy analysis’, *Review of African Political Economy* 44, 151 (2017), pp. 104–121, p. 109.

20. Notwithstanding, much of Brazil’s revamped presence in Mozambique was aspirational. Major projects like the ProSAVANA never materialized, due not least to intense civil society mobilizations. Other proposed large-scale ventures such as the construction of the Moamba-Major and Mphanda Nkuwa dams have stalled following funding suspensions by the Brazilian Development Bank.

21. See Ian Scoones, Kojo Amanor, Arilson Favareto, and Gubo Qi, ‘A new politics of development cooperation? Chinese and Brazilian engagements in African agriculture’, *World Development* 81 (2016), pp. 1–12; Kojo S. Amanor and Sérgio Chichava, ‘South–South cooperation, agribusiness, and African agricultural development: Brazil and China in Ghana and Mozambique’, *World Development* 81 (2016), pp. 13–23.

22. Celso M. Monjane, *Rethinking the political economy of commodity-based linkages: Insights from the coal sector in Mozambique* (University of Roskilde, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2019).

of the MOZAL aluminium smelter in the outskirts of Maputo in 1998 being the main example.²³ Yet, rather than separate sequences, these transitions are part of a broader continuum within Mozambique's postcolonial political economy, defined by the dominant role of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) ruling party. Sweeping economic reforms and (non-transparent) privatization programmes in the 1990s have only reinforced FRELIMO's control of the state and the economy, enabling what Anne Pitcher aptly described as the party's 'transformative preservation'—its ability to navigate the transition from socialism to capitalism and preserve itself in the face of transformation.²⁴ This has been further aided by Mozambique's era(s) of mega-projects.²⁵ Bolstered by increasing access to finance, Mozambican power elites have pragmatically sought to reaffirm political power and amplify personal economic interests, including vis-à-vis Chinese and Brazilian investments, a point that we expand on in our analysis below.²⁶

While much has been said about the workings of South–South relations in Mozambique,²⁷ little is known about the 'Chinese' or 'Brazilian' workplace as such and much less so in a comparative fashion. This research lacuna partly stems from access constraints as corporations, particularly among emerging power investors, tend to be more restrictive systems for scholars due to limited transparency and disclosure records. We investigate the Chinese and Brazilian workplace in the context of two flagship, capital-intensive Chinese and Brazilian mega-projects: respectively, the CRBC-led Maputo Ring Road and Vale's Moatize Coal Project. The first project tapped into the long-awaited promises of soothing Maputo's bustling traffic, and the second became the main source of Mozambique's major exporting commodity. As such, our study offers insights

23. See Carlos N. Castel-Branco and Nicole Goldin, 'Impacts of the Mozal aluminium smelter on the Mozambican economy' (IESE Report, Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Económicos, Maputo, 2003).

24. Anne M. Pitcher, 'Forgetting from above and memory from below: Strategies of legitimation and struggle in postsocialist Mozambique', *Africa* 76, 1 (2006), pp. 88–112. See also Anne M. Pitcher, *Transforming Mozambique: The politics of privatization* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

25. Castel-Branco, 'Growth, capital accumulation and economic porosity in Mozambique'.

26. While not implicating Chinese or Brazilian finance, the so-called 'hidden debts' scandal, which erupted in 2016, offers a pertinent glimpse on how Mozambican political elites have harnessed opaque international loan instruments to maximize their personal discretion in spending funds. See Edson Cortez, Aslak Orre, Baltazar Fael, Borges Nhamirre, Celeste Banze, Inocência Mapiisse, Kim Harnack, and Torun Reite, 'Costs and consequences of the hidden debt scandal of Mozambique' (Centro de Integridade Pública and Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2021), <<https://www.cmi.no/file/4442-Costs-and-consequences-of-the-Hidden-Debt-FINAL.pdf>> (21 March 2021).

27. See Chris Alden and Sérgio Chichava (eds), *China and Mozambique: From comrades to capitalists* (Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2014); Alex Shankland and Euclides Gonçalves, 'Imagining agricultural development in South–South cooperation: The contestation and transformation of ProSAVANA', *World Development* 81 (2016), pp. 35–46.

into the practices of two distinct foreign investors across two different types of projects: one mega-infrastructure venture in urban mobility and the other set around large-scale natural resource extraction. While incorporating miscellaneous industries, we hold that both projects provide valuable empirical windows to account for the relationship between South–South relations, national political realities, and localized capital–labour encounters. Moreover, as the road construction works and coal production started in 2012 and 2011, respectively, and unfolded over the 2010s, the two projects relate to similar timeframes, providing another relevant comparative angle.

Understanding capital–labour relations through the workplace

Conflictual labour relations and poor conditions have often been associated with emerging power investors, particularly Chinese-led projects.²⁸ Here, the issue of refusing to hire local workers has been central.²⁹ However, this has been contested by showing how Chinese and Brazilian firms largely hire local workers, although often in subordinate positions.³⁰ The question is then not the extent to which local workers are hired, but how, and the ways in which workplaces are created and unfold in specific contexts. Moreover, several scholars have also recommended caution in relation to the idea of Chinese and Brazilian ‘exceptionalism’ in how work is organized, highlighting the importance of understanding how global, national, and local dynamics interact in creating specific labour relations.³¹ We use an analytical framework of workplace regimes to analyse capital–labour relations in the Mozambican socio-economic context.

The workplace has emerged as a lens through which to understand broader labour–capital relations, particularly in economic and labour geography. Central to such understandings is how various scales and factors

28. Anthony Yaw Baah and Herbert Jauch, ‘Chinese investments in Africa’, in Anthony Yaw Baah and Herbert Jauch (eds), *Chinese investments in Africa: A labour perspective* (African Labour Research Network, Accra and Windhoek, 2009), pp. 35–76; Ching Kwan Lee, ‘Raw encounters: Chinese managers, African workers and the politics of casualization in Africa’s Chinese enclaves’, *The China Quarterly* 199 (2009), pp. 647–666.

29. Howard French, *China’s second continent: How a million migrants are building a new empire in Africa* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY, 2014); Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia (eds), *BRICS: An anti-capitalist critique* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2015).

30. Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, ‘Localizing Chinese enterprises in Africa: From myths to policies’ (HKUST IEMS Thought Leadership Brief Series 2015–05, HKUST Institute for Emerging Market Studies, Hong Kong, 2015); Amanda Rossi, *Moçambique: O Brasil é aqui* (Editora Record, Rio de Janeiro, 2015); Cezne and Hönke, ‘The multiple meanings and uses of South–South relations in extraction’; Ulrikke Wethal, ‘Workplace regimes in Sino-Mozambican construction projects: Resentment and tension in a divided workplace’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, 3 (2017), pp. 383–403.

31. Oya, ‘Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa’; Barnaby J. Dye and Mathias Alencastro, ‘Debunking Brazilian exceptionalism in its Africa relations: Evidence from Angola and Tanzania’, *Global Society* 34, 4 (2020), pp. 425–446; Wethal, ‘Beyond the China factor’.

are interrelated in the development of labour relations and how practices may differ between sectors and workplaces.³² Workplace regimes are thus multi-scalar in nature,³³ and the position of workers must be understood 'in relation to the formation of capital, the state, the community and the labour market in which workers are incontrovertibly yet variably embedded'.³⁴ Michael Burawoy's work on 'the politics of production' has been particularly influential in connecting the micro-politics of workplaces and specific labour relations with the macro-politics of national and global capital-labour relations.³⁵ Through the concept of 'factory regimes', he sought to differentiate between specific labour, capital, and state relations.³⁶ This conceptualization has later been developed to encompass a broader set of workplaces beyond the factory floor, e.g. through the term 'labour regimes', defined as 'the different methods of recruiting labour and their connections with how labour is organized in production (labour process) and how it secures its subsistence'.³⁷ The concept of 'labour control regimes' further points to the dynamic interplay between exploitation and discipline, where particular places of production connect with broader spaces of labour control, shaped at global, national, and local scales.³⁸ Although different conceptualizations are of use in the literature, here we adhere to the concept of 'workplace regimes' as a way of connecting everyday dynamics and forms of exploitation in a particular workplace with more abstract labour-capital relations, including how broader state policies and the interests of foreign capital reinforce strategies of exploitation and disciplining.³⁹

In order to capture the multi-scalar dynamics of workplace regimes, Carlos Oya develops a three-layered understanding for operationalizing workplace regimes analytically. He differentiates between (i) the organization of a particular workplace; (ii) industry and sector dynamics; and (iii) the national political economy.⁴⁰ The first set of dynamics plays out in the

32. Oya, 'Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa'.

33. Ben Selwyn, 'Global value chains and human development: A class-relational framework', *Third World Quarterly* 37, 10 (2016), pp. 1768–86.

34. Niel M. Coe and David Jordhus-Lier, 'Constrained agency? Re-evaluating the geographies of labour', *Progress in Human Geography* 35, 2 (2011), pp. 211–233, p. 4.

35. Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of production: Factory regimes under capitalism and socialism* (Verso Books, London, 1985).

36. Michael Burawoy's initial differentiation was between market despotism, hegemonic regime and hegemonic despotism.

37. Henry Bernstein, *Class dynamics of agrarian change* (Kumarian Press, Sterling, VA, 2010), p. 53.

38. Andrew E. G. Jonas, 'Local labour control regimes: uneven development and the social regulation of production', *Regional Studies* 30, 4 (1996), pp. 323–338; Mark Anner, 'Labour control regimes and workers resistance in global supply chains', *Labour History* 56 (2015), pp. 292–307; Erica Baglioni, 'Labour control and the labour question in global production networks: Exploitation and disciplining in Senegalese export horticulture', *Journal of Economic Geography* 18, 1 (2018), pp. 111–137.

39. Jonathan Pattenden, 'Working at the margins of global production networks', *Third World Quarterly* 37, 10 (2016), pp. 1809–1833.

40. Oya, 'Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa'.

organization of the workplace, the specific encounters between workers and employers through ‘wages, productivity, safety, effort, and labour time’.⁴¹ Furthermore, the workplace itself contains specific ‘dynamics of control, consent, and resistance’ and forms the basis for the creation and capture of surplus value.⁴² The second layer focuses on the specific industry, involving the dynamics in sectors and production networks, supply-chain management, standard requirements, and technology. These aspects are intrinsically connected to the labour process in prescribing specific skill requirements and depend on spaces for work and even sector-specific work cultures and management strategies. The third layer is the national political economy and the macro-economic structures that shape relations between capital, state, and labour, including the institutions involved in creating and maintaining them.⁴³

While the first layer more directly focuses on the workplace itself, the other layers succinctly place attention on how workplace regimes are co-shaped by local, national, and global regulations and institutions. This allows for a stronger articulation of the role of the state, which traditionally has been downplayed in studies focusing on the (global) organization of spaces of production.⁴⁴ However, the ways in which different scales ‘interact to shape employment relations is an empirical question’,⁴⁵ which requires scrutiny of actors and their relative autonomy across scales. In the following, our main contribution is to give an empirically grounded insight into the workplaces in question, while seeking to explain the ways in which sector-specific dynamics and the national political economy co-shape the organization of workplaces in the Mozambican context.

The Maputo Ring Road: precarity and segregation in a Sino-Mozambican workplace

From the mid-2000s, Mozambique’s capital Maputo experienced an upsurge in foreign-funded mega-projects, including the flagship project, ‘Maputo Ring Road’ (*Estrada Circular*) launched by the Mozambican government in 2011.⁴⁶ The period was characterized by a general optimism, fuelled by high economic growth and Mozambique’s international image as

41. Oya and Schaefer, ‘The politics of labour relations in global production networks’, p.7.

42. Liam Campling, James Harrison, Ben Richardson, Adrian Smith, and Mirela Barbu, ‘South Korea’s automotive labour regime, Hyundai motors’ global production network and trade-based integration with the European Union’, *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 59, 1 (2021), pp. 139–166, p.142.

43. Oya, ‘Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa’.

44. Rory Horner, ‘Beyond facilitator? State roles in global value chains and global production networks’, *Geography Compass* 11, 2 (2017), pp. 1–13.

45. Campling et al, ‘South Korea’s Automotive Labour Regime’, p. 143.

46. Vanessa de Pacheco Melo and Paul Jenkins, ‘Peri-urban expansion in the Maputo city region: Land access and middle-class advances’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 47, 4 (2021), pp. 541–565.

a development success,⁴⁷ which spiralled a drive for foreign investments, particularly in visible mega-projects.⁴⁸ While this in retrospect has been portrayed as an example of former President Armando Guebuza's 'punchant for costly public projects',⁴⁹ the Mozambican trajectory should be understood in relation to broader tendencies of mega-project developmentalism. Moreover, the project formed part of an overarching development strategy, where foreign investments would contribute to Mozambique's economic development.⁵⁰

The Ring Road held the hefty price tag of US\$315 million, funded mainly through a non-concessional loan from China Export–Import Bank (the ExIm Bank) (funding US\$300 million). In an ExIm-Bank-controlled tender, the state-owned company CRBC was selected as the lead constructor. A state-owned development company, Maputo Sul, was established to oversee this and other infrastructure projects, under the guidance of the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Finance. Construction was initiated in June 2012, with most of the work being finalized by 2015.⁵¹ By 2020, Mozambique owed the ExIm Bank US\$1.97 billion, which had been used to build roads and bridges, including the project in question.⁵²

The Ring Road workplace was characterized by overlapping material, social, and spatial segregation between nationalities, shaping the daily encounters between workers. Smaller groups of Mozambican workers in low-skilled positions operated under the supervision of higher-skilled Chinese workers. The exact ratio between migrant and local Mozambican workers is unknown, but at the time of fieldwork, CRBC held that they employed 540 Mozambican workers and 70 Chinese workers.⁵³ The Ministry of Labour reported about 3,000 Mozambican workers being

47. Andrew Brooks, 'Was Africa rising? Narratives of development success and failure among the Mozambican middle class', *Territory, Politics, Governance* 6, 4 (2018), pp. 447–467; Melo and Jenkins, 'Peri-urban expansion in the Maputo city region'.

48. Mozambique experienced a major spike in foreign debt between 2012 and 2017, caused for instance by foreign funding sought for projects such as the Zimpeto National Stadium, the new Mavalane airport, the new Presidency building, and the Maputo–Katembe bridge, in addition to the Ring Road, see Garcia, 'China's economic presence in Mozambique'.

49. Kevin Amirehsani, 'How Adriano Maleiane is transforming Mozambique's economy', 14 February 2016, *Global Risk Insights*, <<https://globalriskinsights.com/2016/02/how-adriano-maleiane-is-transforming-mozambiques-economy>> (16 September 2021).

50. Government of Mozambique, *Programa quinzenal do Governo para 2010–2014*, Maputo, April 2010; Government of Mozambique, *PARP 2011–2014, Poverty reduction action plan*, Maputo, 3 May 2011.

51. One remaining intersection expected finalized by 2020, see Peter Fisker, David Malmgren-Hansen, and Thomas Pave Sohnesen, *The effects of the Maputo ring road on the quantity and quality of nearby housing* (WIDER Working Paper, 2019, 111, United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research).

52. Adrian Frey, 'Mozambique: No indications that China may seize assets due to debt – government', 19 November 2020, *Club of Mozambique*, <<https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-no-indications-that-china-may-seize-assets-due-to-debt-government-177782>> (16 September 2021).

53. Interview CRBC directory, Maputo, 19 June 2013.

employed between June 2012 and summer 2013.⁵⁴ While these numbers were highlighted as evidence of the project's contribution to the national economy, they also reveal the amount of short-term casual positions offered. Moreover, investigating the dynamics of workplace encounters reveals how management strategies concerned with control, productivity, and protection of Chinese workers came at odds with overarching developmental promises of capacity building and social upgrading of workers.

Communication and flexibility strategies appeared as main impediments of capacity building. The official project language was English, but in practice this applied only to the administrative level. The company had hired a few Chinese interpreters who spoke Portuguese but were located at company premises often in large distances to work sites, reducing their practical implication 'on the ground'. Consequently, most interactions between Mozambican workers and Chinese supervisors developed by combining body language and selected English, Portuguese, and Chinese wordings. This became an important source of confusion and distrust, which in turn inhibited in-depth teaching/learning.⁵⁵ Capacity building was further challenged by CRBC's management strategy, considered intrinsic to the workplace regime.⁵⁶ Firstly, a strategy of numerical flexibility led to excessive use of short-term contracts for and high turnover of Mozambican workers, contributing to job insecurity and constraining long-term relations and learning. Secondly, the use of functional flexibility allowed the management to move Mozambican workers around to perform multiple tasks depending on the project need.⁵⁷ While this latter flexibility strategy can be considered positive when it involves multiskilling and knowledge sharing,⁵⁸ the strategy made Mozambican workers feel part of a replaceable pool of manual workers, with existing skills dwindling:

Even worse, you only lose the practice that you've known, you don't do anything, because here it is the Chinese who tells you to do this, say 'sweep here', 'you have to line up here', so you're losing your practice, you do not learn anything.⁵⁹

54. Interview Ministry of Labour, Maputo, 14 August 2013.

55. For similar encounters in Ethiopia, see also Miriam Driessen, *Asphalt encounters: Chinese road building in Ethiopia* (University of Oxford, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2014); Miriam Driessen, 'Pidgin play: Linguistic subversion on Chinese-run construction sites in Ethiopia', *African Affairs* 119, 476 (2020), pp. 432–451.

56. Oya, 'Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa'.

57. Suzette Dyer, 'Flexibility models: A critical analysis', *International Journal of Manpower* 19, 4 (1998), pp. 223–233.

58. See e.g. Mingwei Liu, 'Toward labor flexibility with Chinese characteristics? The case of the Chinese construction machinery industry' (Industry Studies Working Paper: 2009–10, 2009).

59. Workers interview, Maputo, 17 May 2013.

Moreover, Mozambican workers entering the project with higher degrees of training and certificates tended to leave the project, as previous qualifications were not respected, salary expectations were not met, and promotional prospects were limited.⁶⁰ Through this particular form of brain drain away from the project, the division of labour between Mozambicans and Chinese strengthened. CRBC acknowledged communication as an obstacle to capacity building, in turn lamenting how this was traded off with efficiency gains.⁶¹ Maputo Sul and other governmental bodies, however, paradoxically rejected this challenge, arguing that the work performed by the Mozambicans did not require complex communication.⁶² This exemplifies some of the contradictions between longer-term development and project delivery inherent in many mega-projects, and the role of state actors in upholding them.⁶³

Segregation was also apparent in material aspects, beyond wages. CRBC employed the dormitory model, commonly used in the construction industry both in China and in other African contexts, where Chinese workers lived on company premises.⁶⁴ While this workplace organization embodies aspects of labour control and cost efficiency,⁶⁵ the company also highlighted security, protection, and socialization for the Chinese.⁶⁶ This demonstrates how sector-specific work cultures and practices inflict on workplace regimes elsewhere,⁶⁷ albeit transformed to fit the specific context. Moreover, Chinese workers received meals, medical services, and equipment from CRBC. The Mozambican workers, on the other hand, were considered the responsibility of the Mozambican state, with similar services inaccessible to them:

Apartheid exists here. If it's the Chinese, they go to the Maputo private hospital, even with a dog bite they go to the Maputo private hospital. And if someone [Mozambican] has been electrified, they go to the central hospital. We have witnessed the death of a worker because of this type of behavior.⁶⁸

60. Workers interview, Maputo, 3 June 2013.

61. Interview, CRBC, Maputo, 19 June 2013.

62. Interviews, Maputo Sul, 20 June 2013, Ministry of Finance, 29 August 2013.

63. See also Ulrikke Wethal, 'Passive hosts or demanding stakeholders? Understanding Mozambique's negotiating power in the face of China', *Forum for Development Studies* 44, 3 (2017), pp. 493–516.

64. See, for example Ding Fei, 'The compound labor regime of Chinese construction projects in Ethiopia', *Geoforum* 117 (2020), pp. 13–23.

65. Ngai Pun and Chris Smith, 'Putting transnational labour process in its place: The dormitory labour regime in post-socialist China', *Work, Employment and Society* 21, 1 (2007), pp. 27–45; Ngai Pun and Xiaomin Yu, 'When Wal-Mart and the Chinese dormitory labour regime meet: A study of three toy factories in China', *China Journal of Social Work* 1, 2 (2008), pp. 110–129; Driessen, *Asphalt encounters*.

66. Interview, CRBC, Maputo, 19 May 2013.

67. Oya, 'Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa'.

68. Worker interview, Maputo, 29 September 2014.

Clearly, differential treatment related to material aspects reinforced spatial and social divisions. Furthermore, disrespectful behaviour from Chinese supervisors was consistently reported on, interpreted as demonstrations of superiority:

It's normal here that when you eat, he walks passed and spits. We understand this as racism. You are eating, and he just spits in front of you.⁶⁹

Concepts of 'race' and 'racism' have more recently come under the scrutiny of scholars working with China–Africa relations.⁷⁰ While such scrutiny is beyond the scope of this article, how workers perceived actions of Chinese superiors as expressions of 'racism' reveal how power relations and hierarchies are sustained through everyday experiences in the workplace (see below for similar accounts in the Vale workplace).

While the dormitory practices contributed to mechanisms of control and discipline in relation to Chinese employees, control of the Mozambican workers was obtained through work insecurity and dependence, particularly through frequent threats and sudden lay-offs:

With or without proof, they send you away just because your boss doesn't like you. That is simply a reason to be out of the company.⁷¹

The constant fear of dismissal made Mozambican workers strongly dependent on the likings of their Chinese superiors. Moreover, work insecurity was strengthened by broader dynamics in the Mozambican labour market, with high levels of unemployment and informality,⁷² combined with weak governmental support. Despite decent work and formalization of labour being a major concern for the Mozambican government,⁷³ this has so far not translated into sufficient support mechanisms, reinforcing the overall precarious position of Mozambican workers.⁷⁴

Lack of governmental support became evident when examining resistance among Mozambican workers. Indeed, despite companies' strong control regimes, workers are capable of both more 'disguised forms of

69. Workers, group interview, Maputo, 17 May 2013.

70. See e.g. Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong 'The discourse of racialization of labour and Chinese enterprises in Africa', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, 12 (2016), pp. 2149–68; Roberto Castillo, "'Race" and "racism" in contemporary Africa-China relations research: Approaches, controversies and reflections', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 21, 3 (2020), pp. 310–336.

71. Workers interview, Maputo, 17 May 2013.

72. Pitcher, 'Forgetting from above and memory from below'; African Economic Outlook, 'Mozambique' (African Economic Outlook, 2012), <<https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Mozambique%20Full%20PDF%20Country%20No%20te.pdf>> (16 September 2021).

73. Governo de Mocambique, *PARP 2011–2014, Poverty reduction action plan*.

74. Wethal, 'Workplace regimes in Sino-Mozambican construction projects'.

struggle' and 'organised, systematic resistance to the power of capital'.⁷⁵ Larger strikes occurred several times a year, with timing often coinciding with delayed payments.⁷⁶ Other forms of resistance were described as ongoing struggles, e.g. where workers would organize *ad hoc* work stoppages. 'How' resistance unfolded is exemplary of the precarious position of Mozambican workers. In fear of dismissal, several workers did not participate, and those who did hid their identity underneath their work masks: 'We have to ... demand our rights with the mask on so that our boss does not recognize us, because if your boss sees you, tomorrow you will be out of work'.⁷⁷ Press coverage functioned in some instances as a way of forcing the company to solve material issues, but everything would quickly return to normalcy without resolving deeper issues of everyday tension; 'it's like throwing water on a crocodile to make it disappear'.⁷⁸ The lack of institutional support was evident here, where for instance instead of contributing to strengthening workers' position, trade unions could be summoned by the Ministry of Labour to solve immediate conflicts, without having established knowledge of or presence in the workplace.⁷⁹

The extractive sector has been particularly scrutinized for lacking local socio-economic integration and creating exclusionary enclaves (see also the discussion on Vale below). This is often justified on the basis of remote location of extractive activities that in turn inhibits local content.⁸⁰ However, similar enclave dynamics were also evident in the Maputo Ring Road despite (at least partly) being located in a densely populated urban area. Overall, the project had minimal impact on the local economy, considering that CRBC did not report any use of sub-contractors and relied heavily on imported goods. If sub-contractors were needed, they would opt for South African companies,⁸¹ reflecting established industrial relations and hierarchies in the Southern African region.⁸² Moreover their supervising company was Zimbabwean, justified on existing relations and ease of communication (similarly to the Vale case below).⁸³ The weak local integration reflected both company strategy and broader sector dynamics such as supply-chain management and standard requirements.⁸⁴ Despite construction being considered a stepping stone for industrial development

75. Fei, 'The compound labor regime of Chinese construction projects in Ethiopia'.

76. See e.g. AllAfrica, 'Mozambique: Workers on Maputo Ring Road on Strike', 7 January 2014, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201401071365.html>> (8 January 2014).

77. Workers interview, Maputo, 17 May 2013.

78. Worker interview, Maputo, 29 September 2014.

79. Interview trade union, Maputo, 14 June 2013.

80. See e.g. Jana Hönke, *Transnational companies and security governance: Hybrid practices in a postcolonial world* (Routledge, London, 2013); Lesutis, 'Spaces of extraction and suffering'.

81. Interviews with CRBC, Maputo, 19 June 2013 and 22 August 2013.

82. Castel-Branco, 'Os mega projectos em Moçambique'.

83. Interviews with CRBC, Maputo, 19 June 2013 and 22 August 2013.

84. Oya, 'Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa'.

given the local linkage potential,⁸⁵ it has often not been the case in low-income countries.⁸⁶ This can partly be explained by how loans from the ExIm Bank require that at least 50 per cent of procurements come from China⁸⁷ but also reflects how transnational companies increasingly make use of established supply chains stretching across borders and continents or make use of follower-suppliers located in proximity to project locations.⁸⁸ Such sector dynamics effectively allow lead firms to ignore local suppliers and sub-contractors.

Moreover, industrial policy in Mozambique has predominantly been concerned with facilitating capital accumulation, reflecting the interests of large multinational and domestic capital.⁸⁹ Despite the local content highlighted as essential to economic development,⁹⁰ both CRBC and Mozambican bureaucrats rejected the possibility of local content beyond employment, given the low quality and high prices of supply in the Mozambican market, combined with Mozambican companies' lack of experience with larger projects.⁹¹ Furthermore, local content was not part of contractual arrangements, again paradoxically explained by government actors with how Mozambican companies needed time to learn from foreign companies.⁹² This should also be understood in the light of how the Mozambican elite has consolidated political and economic power⁹³ and used local content rules instrumentally to advance the business interests of actors

85. World Bank, *The construction industry: Issues and strategies in developing countries* (Washington, DC, World Bank, 1984); George Ofori, *The construction industry: Aspects of its economics and management* (NUS Press, Singapore, 1990).

86. Christine Zhang and Jeffrey Gutman, 'Aid procurement and the development of local industry: A question for Africa' (Working paper 88, Brookings Global Economy and Development, June 2015).

87. Lucy Corkin, *Uncovering African agency: Angola's management of China's credit lines* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Oxon, New York, 2013).

88. Ramadhan S. Mlinga and Jill Wells, 'Collaboration between formal and informal enterprises in the construction sector in Tanzania', *Habitat International* 26, 2 (2002), pp. 269–280; Wethal, 'Beyond the China factor'.

89. Carlos N. Castel-Branco, *An Investigation into the Political Economy of industrial policy: The case of Mozambique* (University of London, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2001); Carlos N. Castel-Branco, 'Dependência de ajuda externa, acumulação e ownership' (Cadernos IESE No.7, IESE Maputo, 2011).

90. Novella Mageri, Vasco Nhabinde, and Rogerio Quintella, 'Estudo de base para a elaboração de políticas e estratégias de desenvolvimento da indústria de construção e materiais de construção em Moçambique' (London, International Growth Center, 2015).

91. Interview CRBC, Maputo, 22 August 2013.

92. Interviews, Maputo Sul, 20 June 2013; Mozambican Federation of Contractors, Maputo, 14 May 2013.

93. Lars Buur and Celso M. Monjane, 'Elite capture and the development of natural resource linkages in Mozambique', in Melanie Pichler, Cornelia Staritz, Karin Küblböck, Christina Plank, Werner Raza, and Fernando Ruiz Peyré (eds), *Fairness and justice in natural resource politics* (Routledge, London/New York, 2017); Jason Sumich, 'Modernisation redirected: Socialism, liberalism and the national elite in Mozambique', *Cambridge Anthropology* 28, 2 (2008), pp. 1–23; Jason Sumich, 'The party and the state: Frelimo and social stratification in post-socialist Mozambique', *Development and Change* 41, 4 (2010), pp. 679–698.

within or with close political connections to FRELIMO.⁹⁴ While there are examples of linkage development between Chinese and Mozambican companies in projects where the political elite has had strong business interests,⁹⁵ the majority of local small and medium companies has remained politically weak and thus been blocked from accessing publicly funded mega-projects. Moreover, foreign companies have continued to dominate higher-value-added segments (e.g. engineering services), with local companies outcompeted in terms of capital, skills, and technologies.⁹⁶

The Maputo Ring Road provides one example of local contestations to the win–win rhetoric surrounding China–Africa relations and demonstrates how socio-economic inequalities are sustained and reinforced through the workplace regime. Moreover, the socio-economic inequalities created in the Maputo Ring Road stretches beyond the workplace itself and into the broader dynamics of urban development in Maputo. Vanessa de Pacheco Melo and Paul Jenkins⁹⁷ note that road project forms part of a larger urban strategy to make previously inaccessible land areas available for housing for growing middle and upper classes in Maputo. This largely occurs at the expense of lower-income families. Over 2,000 families have been displaced by the construction of Maputo Ring Road and the Katembe Bridge, exemplary of the city's rapid urbanization and urban development with a simultaneous disregard of social housing provision.⁹⁸ As we proceed to discuss below, project-induced displacement dynamics have also led to major disruptions in the context of Vale's engagement.

Powered by extraction: forming a Mozambican workplace with a Brazilian accent

Formerly a Brazilian state-owned enterprise until privatization in 1997, Vale SA is currently one of the world's largest mining companies and the leading iron ore producer, overseeing activities in 25 countries.⁹⁹ Leveraged by the favourable winds of the commodities boom, Vale's

94. Michael W. Hansen, Lars Buur, Ole Therkildsen, and Mette Kjær, 'The economics and politics of local content in African extractives: Lessons from Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique', *Forum for Development Studies* 43, 2 (2016), pp. 201–228; Buur and Mojane, 'Elite capture and the development of natural resource linkages in Mozambique'.

95. See e.g. Joseph Hanlon and Marcelo Mosse, 'Mozambique's elite—Finding its way in a globalized world and returning to old development models' (Working Paper 105, UNU-WIDER, 2010); Ana Alves, 'Chinese banking in Mozambique: The Macanese connection', in Chris Alden and Sérgio Chichava (eds.), *China and Mozambique: From comrades to capitalists* (Sunnyside, Fanele, 2014), pp. 39–49; Sérgio Chichava, 'Assessing Chinese investment in Mozambique', in Chris Alden and Sérgio Chichava (eds.), *China and Mozambique: From comrades to capitalists* (Sunnyside, Fanele, 2014), pp. 24–38.

96. Brooks, 'Was Africa rising?'.

97. Melo and Jenkins, 'Peri-Urban Expansion in the Maputo City Region'.

98. *Ibid.*

99. Matthew Johnston, '10 Biggest Mining Companies', 14 September 2020, *Investopedia*, <<https://www.investopedia.com/biggest-mining-companies-5077594>> (5 June 2021); Vale, 'Integrated Report 2020', 16 April 2021, <<http://www.vale.com/en/investors/information-market/annual-reports/sustainability-reports/Pages/default.aspx>> (5 June 2021), pp. 42–43.

expansion into Mozambique formally started in 2004, when the company won a bid to explore the Moatize coalfields in the central Mozambican province of Tete. It reached a concession agreement with the Mozambican government in 2007 and started production in 2011. Besides the mining site, which is conventionally referred to as the Moatize Coal Project (*Projecto Carvão Moatize*), the overall investment included the development of the Nacala Corridor, which stretches over 912 km and functions as an integrated mine–rail–port export infrastructure. Involving a combined sum of approximately US\$8 billion, this is the biggest investment to date by a Brazil-based firm in Africa and was Mozambique's largest economic project in operation by the end of the 2010s, with Vale being the country's major exporter between 2016 and 2019.¹⁰⁰

As of 2020, the company's own workforce in Mozambique consisted of 3,320 employees, in addition to 6,076 outsourced workers hired by sub-contractors.¹⁰¹ Yet, considering the different stages of the mining cycle, fluctuating coal prices, and pandemic disruptions, employment numbers have significantly oscillated throughout the project's lifetime. Similar the CRBC case, the exact ratio between Mozambican and foreign nationals is hard to precise—due to, among other things, a lack of disaggregated data and the amplitude of sub-contracted relations. Vale's more labour-intensive installation stage (2006–2010) included a higher, and more rotating, Brazilian workforce, triggered by the involvement of other Brazilian firms and technicians servicing Vale on construction works and feasibility studies. The production stage (from 2011) saw a smaller, albeit more permanent, Brazilian presence, with functionaries often performing management, supervisory, and skilled positions. Vale's coal operations also employ a significant number of other foreign nationals, particularly from the neighbouring, English-speaking countries. As several works at the mine have been outsourced to South African sub-contractors, these have often preferred to hire Malawians, Zambians, and Zimbabweans due to an alleged ease of communication and the availability of a labour force more habituated to large-scale mining operations.

In early 2021, after posting a series of losses and alleging a strategic move to streamline operations amid a climate-driven commitment to end coal production, Vale announced a roadmap to divest and withdraw from

100. Amanda Rossi, 'Vale se torna a maior investidora do Brasil na África e é alvo de críticas', 31 October 2013, *Estadão*, <<https://brasil.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,vale-se-torna-a-maior-investidora-do-brasil-na-africa-e-e-alvo-de-criticas,1091746>> (5 June 2021); 'Extra active Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), Mozambique 2017–2018 EITI Report' (EITI Mozambique Report, EITI, Maputo, 2020), pp. 20–21.

101. Vale, 'Integrated Report 2020', p. 124.

Mozambique.¹⁰² In December 2021, the miner communicated the sale of its assets to Vulcan Minerals, a subsidiary of India's Jindal Group, for US\$270 million.¹⁰³ As the company's engagement draws to a close, a timely opportunity arises to reflect on earlier promises to employment, capacity building, and development that the investment triggered, particularly amid the optimistic prospects of South–South relations. As tellingly described by Vale's Mozambique country manager in 2013, 'Vale is a Brazilian company that arrives with a Brazilian *accent*, but with a desire to be a Mozambican company.'¹⁰⁴

This Brazilian 'accent' was deemed to positively shape the Mozambican workplace and work environment at large. *The Economist*, in an article titled 'A new Atlantic alliance', lent weight to the assumption by linking Vale's local hiring practices with a Brazilian disposition to form a Mozambican workforce: unlike Chinese firms in Africa, criticized for their working practices and for sending their own people, their Brazilian counterparts played by the rules, were good employers, and built enduring relationships.¹⁰⁵ Reportedly, by 2014, among the 2,000 workers employed by Vale at its Moatize mine operation, almost 90 per cent were locals, with 36 per cent of the positions with management attributions filled by Mozambicans.¹⁰⁶ Yet, alluding to a shortage of skilled professionals, Vale had persistently tried to lower this benchmark,¹⁰⁷ which derived from a hiring clause stipulated by the Mozambican government in its concession agreement with the company.¹⁰⁸ One of the attempts included Brazil's then former President (and labour leader) Lula da Silva, who accompanied the firm's CEO Murilo Ferreira in a meeting with Mozambican Labour Minister Helena Taipo in 2012 to lobby—although unsuccessfully—for a higher quota on foreign employees.¹⁰⁹

102. Vale, 'Vale assina HoA com a Mitsui para adquirir sua participação em Moatize e CLN como primeiro passo para sair do negócio de carvão', 20 January 2021, <<http://www.vale.com/brasil/PT/aboutvale/news/Paginas/vale-assina-hoa-com-a-mitsui-para-adquirir-sua-participacao-em-moatize-e-cln-como-primeiro-passo-para-sair-do-negocio.aspx>> (5 June 2021).

103. Mariana Duraó, 'Vale to sell Mozambique coal business, advancing divestment plan', *Bloomberg*, 21 December 2021, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-21/vale-to-sell-mozambique-coal-business-advancing-divestment-plan>> (21 March 2022).

104. As cited in Rossi, 'Vale se torna a maior investidora do Brasil na África', para. 4.

105. *The Economist*, 'A new Atlantic alliance: Brazilian companies are heading for Africa, laden with capital and expertise', 10 November 2012, <<https://www.economist.com/business/2012/11/10/a-new-atlantic-alliance>> (5 June 2021).

106. Rossi, *Moçambique: O Brasil é aqui*, p. 111.

107. Judith Marshall, 'Behind the image of South-South solidarity at Brazil's Vale', in Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia (eds), *BRICS: An anti-capitalist critique* (Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2015), pp. 162–181, pp. 165–166.

108. Government of Mozambique, 'Contrato Mineiro Relativo a Concessão Mineira da Mina de Carvão de Moatize entre Governo da República de Moçambique e Rio Doce Moçambique, Limitada' (Government of Mozambique Maputo, 2007).

109. Judith Marshall, 'Behind the image of South-South solidarity at Brazil's Vale', in Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia (eds), *BRICS: An anti-capitalist critique* (Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2015), pp. 162–181.

Moreover, the ‘local’ designation is also prone to scrutiny.¹¹⁰ Most ‘local’ jobs, especially as qualification levels increase, are traced to Mozambicans from Maputo and the country’s comparatively more affluent Southern regions, with Mozambicans from Tete performing primarily low-skilled, temporary tasks.¹¹¹ Such dynamics come to the fore in the context of Vale’s project-induced resettlement process, which triggered expectations of a ‘better life’ and ‘development’ among the resettled, particularly through employment in the mining industry.¹¹² During a discussion in a focus group with residents of Vale’s Cateme resettlement, implemented in 2010 and home to about 750 families, a man explained that ‘Vale’s promise was that there would be where to work and that you [the resettled] would be the first to be employed’.¹¹³ Upon the start of construction works at the mine, some had been employed for a few months to help with land-clearing services—but had never since worked in the mining project again. The Cateme residents also shared that, despite the existence of labour quotas for the resettled to work at Vale, most of the vacancies ended up going to politically connected people from Maputo.¹¹⁴

For others, the (temporary) workplace was at their own housing site, acting as bricklayers in the construction of the resettlement compound. Referring to the notoriously poor edification quality of the houses,¹¹⁵ one former bricklayer recalled that his remarks to the Brazilian and ‘maputekos’ supervisors in charge would often be dismissed with a ‘we know what we are doing’ styled response.¹¹⁶ Another man still wondered ‘why they had flown expensive individuals from Brazil’—without any knowledge about their local environments and dwelling patterns—to build houses in Africa.¹¹⁷ Among the resettled, others have experienced the dismantlement of their workplace altogether. This has been the case with approximately 500 artisanal brick-makers who lost their original livelihood sites due to Vale’s encroaching concession. The mining area fenced off the humid soil areas on the banks of the Rovubwe River, suitable to produce bricks, which were then sold to the nearby communities. Vale’s dispossession meant that the activity was no longer viable, and compensation schemes remain to date

110. Sara Geenen, ‘Gold and godfathers: Local content, politics, and capitalism in extractive industries’, *World Development* 123 (2019), pp. 1–10.

111. Joshua Kirshner and Marcus Power, ‘Mining and extractive urbanism: Postdevelopment in a Mozambican boomtown’, *Geoforum* 61 (2015), pp. 67–78.

112. Gediminas Lesutis, ‘The non-politics of abandonment: Resource extractivism, precarity and coping in Tete, Mozambique’, *Political Geography* 72 (2019), pp. 43–51.

113. Focus group, Catme residents, Moatize District, Mozambique, 7 June 2018.

114. *Ibid.*; see also Rossi, *Mozambique: O Brasil é aqui*, p. 134.

115. Human Rights Watch, ‘What is a House without Food?: Mozambique’s coal mining boom and resettlements’, 23 May 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/mozambique0513_Upload_0.pdf> (6 June 2021).

116. Focus group, Catme residents, Moatize District, Mozambique, 7 June 2018. *Maputeko* is a local designation to allude to Mozambicans from Maputo.

117. *Ibid.*

subject to fierce dispute between the firm and the brick-makers. The latter contest and resent the insufficient reimbursement received for the permanent loss of a business, alongside the lack of economically profitable alternatives.¹¹⁸

As a result, forms of resistance and contestation to Vale's extractivism have been more emphatically mobilized by the affected 'local' populations. To challenge their precarious position, lack of livelihood options, and health hazards, resettled residents, brick-makers, and neighbouring communities have repeatedly protested by blocking railway infrastructures, occupying mining sites, and demonstrating at Vale offices.¹¹⁹ Often, however, demonstrations were swiftly and violently repelled by Mozambican security forces, including through the deployment of the Rapid Intervention Forces, controlled by the Ministry of Interior, and highlighting how the quelling of dissent involved the direct repression from Maputo. Such dynamics have also been closely monitored by Brazilian state representatives. Bringing to light classified diplomatic cables produced by Brazil's Maputo embassy, Rossi recollects an episode from April 2013 when the Brazilian Ambassador had travelled to Tete on the day of a major protest against Vale held by displaced brick-makers, who were obstructing the mine's entrance.¹²⁰ While the Ambassador witnessed the dialogues between the firm and the group, the protest was repelled with overwhelming violence, resulting in arbitrary arrests and detentions. Ironically, such events have contributed to exposing the fallacies permeating oft-repeated Brazilian programmatic claims that the country's rapprochement with Africa in the 21st century, including through enhanced business ties, was vested with a mission to settle historical labour-related debts inflicted by centuries of slavery. As once tellingly asserted by President Lula: 'Brazil's debt with Africa ... has to be paid with solidarity, partnership, and aid'.¹²¹ Characterized, however, by little transparency and conflicting information, Vale's ongoing divestment from Mozambique reinforces perceptions of unmet solidarities, as it remains uncertain by whom and to which extent liabilities towards workers and the affected populations will be addressed.¹²²

118. See Rossi, *Moçambique: O Brasil é aqui*, pp. 134–137; Lesutis, 'Spaces of extraction and suffering'.

119. See Human Rights Watch, 'What is a House without Food?'; Lesutis, 'The non-politics of abandonment'.

120. Rossi, *Moçambique: O Brasil é aqui*, p. 136.

121. *Ibid.*, pp. 335.

122. See Jovenaldo Ngovene, 'Sociedade civil exige que a Vale resolva pendentes com comunidades', *Deutsche Welle*, 21 January 2022, <<https://www.dw.com/pt-002/sociedade-civil-exige-que-a-vale-resolva-pendentes-com-comunidades/a-60516853>> (27 May 2022); William Mapote, 'Antigos trabalhadores da Vale em protesto na mina de Moatize', *Vôa*, 16 May 2022, <<https://www.voportugues.com/a/antigos-trabalhadores-da-vale-em-protesto-na-mina-de-moatize/6575647.html>> (27 May 2022).

The above insights illustrate how micro-level tensions fuelled by marginalizing dynamics of capital–labour encounters reflect long-held and well-established sectoral arguments about the ‘enclaved’ metageographies of mining developments in Africa and beyond.¹²³ This is evidenced by exclusionary spaces of capital accumulation, whereby resources and profits are channelled through global commodity markets, leading to (mobile and ‘divestable’) private gains at the expense of (permanent) social losses.¹²⁴ As in the CRBC case, all of which has been facilitated by a tight state–business interweaving. As discussed elsewhere, Vale’s investment was notably underpinned by a privileged relationship with former Mozambican President Armando Guebuza (2005–2015), enabling key FRELIMO figures and interest groups to consolidate power and harness market opportunities, from influencing corporate appointments, to the sale of infrastructure concessions, to the award of service provision contracts.¹²⁵

Nonetheless, building on a common frame of ‘affectedness’,¹²⁶ of being negatively impacted by extraction, affected communities in Mozambique have begun to forge and work out new transnational spaces and instruments of struggle. One prominent example is their participation in the International Articulation of those Affected by Vale, which brings together a broad spectrum of civil society organizations, activists, and labourers.¹²⁷ The network has offered a platform for global exchanges and international meetings, connecting grassroots groups and affected communities in countries where Vale operates and thus illuminating a global countermovement to globally articulated extractive production networks. Recalling the company’s responsibility for the deadliest labour tragedy in Brazil, epitomized by the Brumadinho dam burst catastrophe, activists have repeatedly pointed at how the firm’s poor track-record at home is merely transplanted to the international level.¹²⁸

123. See James Ferguson, *Global shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2006); Muriel Côte and Benedikt Korf, ‘Making concessions: Extractive enclaves, entangled capitalism and regulative pluralism at the gold mining frontier in Burkina Faso’, *World Development* 101 (2018), pp. 466–476.

124. See Castel-Branco, ‘Growth, capital accumulation and economic porosity in Mozambique’.

125. Cezne and Hönke, ‘The multiple meanings and uses of South–South relations in extraction’.

126. See Laura Waisbich, ‘Participation, critical support and disagreement: Brazil–Africa relations from the prism of civil society’, in Mathias Alencastro and Pedro Seabra (eds), *Brazil–Africa relations in the 21st century: From surge to downturn and beyond* (Springer, Cham, 2020).

127. Eric Cezne, ‘Forging transnational ties from below: Challenging the Brazilian mining giant Vale SA across the South Atlantic’, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 6, 4 (2019), pp. 1174–1183; Atingidos pela Vale, ‘Relatório de Insustentabilidade da Vale 2021’ (Atingidos pela Vale, Rio de Janeiro, 2021).

128. *Ibid.*

Protest and collective mobilization actions, however, have been less recurrent among Vale's own (and sub-contracted) workforce in Mozambique. Notably, two major strikes—in January 2016 and December 2017, respectively—occurred, involving more than 1,000 workers and featuring disputes over bonus payments, wage reductions, and breaches to collective agreements.¹²⁹ Yet, Vale has largely been able to maintain the Mozambican Construction, Wood and Miners Union (SINTICIM), which is the main representative for workers in the mining sector, subordinated to the firm's interests by, among other things, co-opting union leaders, electoral manipulations, and arbitrary dismissals—further hindering labourers' ability to mobilize.¹³⁰ Pointing at SINTICIM's close links with the FRELIMO ruling party, criticism highlights how unions in Mozambique's twenty-first century mega-project-spurred political economy were ill-fitted to defend workers' demands and rights, lacking effective articulation at the workplace level and aligning themselves with the government to favour multinational investors.¹³¹ This configures what Edward Webster, Geoffrey Wood, Beata Mtyingizana, and Michael Brookes have interpreted as 'residual unionism': whereas Mozambican unions are largely free to operate and retain a residual presence in many workplaces, the effectiveness of organized labour has been constrained by government patronage and inability to challenge neoliberal orthodoxy.¹³² Reflecting broader trends seen in the CRBC case and demonstrating how characteristics of national political economies impact labour regimes on the ground, challenges are further compounded by Mozambique's endemic shortage of (formal) employment,¹³³ giving workers little leeway to bargain, made worse by a political landscape of rising authoritarianism and repression in recent years.¹³⁴

129. Reuters, 'Trabalhadores de mina de carvão da Vale em Moçambique entram em greve', 17 February 2016, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/mineracao-carvao-vale-sa-idBRKCN0VQ1WW>> (17 June 2021); Diário de Notícias, 'Greve em mina de carvão da Vale Moçambique entrou hoje no quarto dia', 19 December 2017, <<https://www.dn.pt/lusa/greve-em-mina-de-carvao-da-vale-mocambique-entrou-hoje-no-quarto-dia-8996630.html>> (17 June 2021). More recently in May 2022, the handover of Vale's concession to Vulcan Minerals has spurred protests and strikes among hundreds of mineworkers demanding clarity about the terms of the deal, particularly with regard to labour arrangements and guarantees, see Mapote, 'Antigos trabalhadores da Vale em protesto na mina de Moatize'.

130. Judith Marshall, 'Strikes, bread riots, and blockades: Mozambican workers and communities in resistance', in Jörg Nowak, Madhumita Dutta, and Peter Birke (eds), *Workers' movements and strikes in the twenty-first century: A global perspective* (Rowman & Littlefield, London, 2018), pp. 203–220, p. 212.

131. Patricia Fachin, 'Moçambique: "O menino bonito" da Vale. Entrevista especial com Jeremias Vunjanhe', *Instituto Humanas Unisinos*, 6 October 2011, <<http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/entrevistas/500479-mocambique-o-menino-bonitoda-vale-entrevista-especial-com-jeremias-vunjanhe>> (6 June 2021).

132. Edward Webster, Geoffrey Wood, Beata Mtyingizana, and Michael Brookes, 'Residual unionism and renewal: Organized labour in Mozambique', *Journal of Industrial Relations* 48, 2 (2006), pp. 257–278.

133. Pitcher, 'Forgetting from above and memory from below'.

134. Anne M. Pitcher, 'Mozambique elections 2019: Pernicious polarization, democratic decline, and rising authoritarianism', *African Affairs* 119, 476 (2020), pp. 468–486.

Nonetheless, mirroring broader characterizations of Brazil–Africa encounters,¹³⁵ one of the main appeals of the ‘Mozambican workplace with a Brazilian accent’ set around Vale has been projected in terms of language, cultural, and racial affinities. Exemplified through interactions such as mixed work lunches and weekend outings with their Mozambican colleagues, Brazilian professionals would project such affinities as advantages, particularly in comparison to the dynamics at Chinese firms—seen as more hierarchical and more challenging at the communication level (see above).¹³⁶ Yet, according to a Mozambican machine operator, the fact that he only spoke Portuguese was precisely what inhibited him to secure a more stable job in the mining industry, especially as most sub-contractors used English as a working language and preferred to hire Zambians or Zimbabweans.¹³⁷ Mozambicans with direct employment ties to Vale and hence more likely to deal with Brazilians in their chain of command appreciated the ease of communication facilitated by a common language, especially if they had worked at other foreign companies before. In a focus group with Vale mine workers, one participant said: ‘The language helps. Communication flows better’.¹³⁸ Yet, one of his colleagues added a caveat: ‘Due to the fact that we are not from the same race, the trust factor is lacking’.¹³⁹ Mirroring dynamics at the CRBC workplace, he complained that many qualified Mozambicans—including some who had undergone labour training at the company—ended up performing low-level functions as ‘they [Vale] would rather put someone of the same race, of the same ethnicity in a given position, even without any expertise in the area’.¹⁴⁰

Narrating in a field study her experiences as a Brazilian ‘mega-project’ functionary in Tete, Rodrigues suggests that segregation patterns also held a spatial component, with different housing compounds constructed for Brazilian and Mozambican workers—reinforcing, as in the CRBC project, material and social divisions.¹⁴¹ Allegedly, the construction of such compounds around 2012 and 2013 drastically reduced Brazilian–Mozambican interactions, in terms of both co-existence and downstream economic effects, as Brazilians had since circulated less in public spaces. Promoted as an affinity-based relationship, a closer look at the micro workplace

135. See Alencastro and Seabra, *Brazil–Africa Relations in the 21st century*.

136. Interviews, corporate responsibility professionals, Tete City, 28 November 2018; remote, 2 April 2019.

137. Interview, mine machine operator, Tete City, Mozambique, 4 June 2018.

138. Focus group, Vale mine workers, Tete City, Mozambique, 4 June 2018.

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*

141. Yssysay Rodrigues, ‘A Vale em Moçambique: Uma etnografia das relações entre brasileiros e moçambicanos no cotidiano dos megaprojetos’ (São Paulo State University (UNESP), unpublished master’s thesis, 2015), p. 89; see also Kirshner and Power, ‘Mining and extractive urbanism’.

dynamics and 'raw' (dis)encounters between Brazilians and Mozambicans in Vale's mega-project landscape thus reveals the range of disconnections that have emerged, paradoxically, through the operationalization of South–South connections—powered by extraction and shaped by a 'Brazilian accent'.

Concluding discussion

By approaching the Chinese and Brazilian workplace in Mozambique, this article has discussed the dynamics of capital–labour encounters in mega-projects. Drawing on the range of ground-level experiences and processes configuring the Maputo Ring Road and the Moatize Coal Project, we demonstrated how the workplace reflects a dynamic, multi-scalar set of relationships aggregating spatially situated encounters, sector-specific trends associated with global capital circuits, and characteristics of national political economies. This conceptual perspective allowed us to scrutinize the complex entanglements configuring transnational labour interactions and to problematize relations that are often projected through sweeping representations of development, win–win partnerships, and South–South cooperation. We did so while speaking to different dimensions of Africa's late wave of mega-projects, providing insights at the interstices of South–South relations, national political economies, and everyday encounters, perspectives that are often treated separately in existing debates.

Chinese economic activities, particularly within infrastructure, have often been framed as a learning opportunity, given the competitiveness and experience of Chinese firms.¹⁴² In the case of Brazil, investors have built on notions of shared language, historical, and cultural affinities, especially with Portuguese-speaking Africa.¹⁴³ Despite their different ideational dimensions, we have demonstrated how both Chinese and Brazilian-led mega-projects were nonetheless anchored in converging rationalities of 'development', depicted through expectations and promises of local hiring, skill formation, and prosperity in Mozambique. Our analysis also uncovered how the two projects shared problematic convergences in the dynamics of labour relations. Commonly, these included grievances and resistance over precarious working conditions, low wages, and uncertain employment prospects. Furthermore, labour encounters between Mozambicans and foreigners have also revealed patterns of socio-spatial

142. See e.g. China-DAC Study Group, 'Economic transformation and poverty reduction: How it happened in China, helping it happen in Africa' (Synthesis Report, vol.2, IPRCC/OECD, 2011).

143. Ana Garcia and Karina Kato, 'The story of the hunter or the hunted? Brazil's role in Angola and Mozambique', in Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia (eds), *BRICS. An anti-capitalist critique* (Pluto Press, London, 2015), pp. 117–134.

differentiation, including the implementation of different housing compounds for Chinese and Brazilian employees, as well as their low interaction with host societies.¹⁴⁴ Mozambican workers have described their encounters with both their Chinese and Brazilian counterparts in the workspace through perceptions of racism and discrimination. This puts into question assumed Brazilian proclivities towards differentiated race relations, while challenging programmatic claims to horizontality in China–Africa engagements.

We highlighted that there is some degree of ‘local’ hiring and skill formation, which in turn nuances *sui generis* perceptions, especially in China–Africa relations, that there is a refusal to employ Africans. Yet, such prospects were significantly limited due to a reliance on expatriates for specialized and management tasks as well as elite capture of local linkages. In the Chinese case, capacity building was further constrained by unresolved communication issues within the workplace. In the Brazilian context, there was the complete destruction of original workplaces, often without adequate compensation or viable alternatives for displaced populations. We also discussed how the ability of labourers to collectively mobilize is obstructed by weak institutional support, leading instead to the pursuit of alternative approaches. In the Maputo Ring Road, this included strategizing on the momentum offered by press coverage, whereas in the Moatize Coal Project mineworkers and affected populations have engaged in transnational contestation alliances.

Against this backdrop, building on Carlos Oya’s understanding of the workplace as necessarily multi-scalar,¹⁴⁵ the article has demonstrated how situated, micro-level workplace interactions emerge as a complex interplay of broader processes encompassing changing global geographies of industrial relations, local political economies, and socio-economic struggles. On the one hand, we called attention to dynamics grounded in local Mozambican political realities, whereby regulatory insufficiencies, patterns of ‘residual unionism’, and elite intertwinements with market interests have unevenly shaped capital–labour encounters. This reveals how national political economies play a significant role, corroborating what others have documented about the embeddedness of Chinese and Brazilian investments within African countries’ pre-existing patterns of politics and

144. For similar encounters in other contexts, see e.g. Paul Wafula, ‘Revealed: SGR workers treated badly by Chinese masters’, *Standard Digital*, 8 July 2018, <<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001287179/revealed-sgr-workers-treated-badly-by-chinese-masters>> (12 October 2021); Charles Wasonga, ‘Workers’ lobby wades into SGR mistreatment claims’, *Business Daily*, 10 July 2018 <<https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/news/Workers-union-wades-into-SGR-mistreatment-claims/539546-4655828-2uqf5w/index.html>> (12 October 2021).

145. Oya, ‘Labour regimes and workplace encounters between China and Africa’.

business.¹⁴⁶ Relatedly, on the other hand, we also pointed at the influences of sectoral trends associated with large-scale infrastructure and mining projects beyond the Mozambican context (e.g. enclaved formations and dispossession), bringing attention to how the unequal economic geographies across Africa are moulded through the dynamics of global production networks.

In conclusion, this article highlights how patterns that have long characterized Africa's encounters with large-scale foreign investments are replicated, even amid seemingly transformative and empowering South–South development architectures. Reflecting on the workplace from the ground up, our final message thus levels a critique at the very intersections of Africa's South–South momentum and mega-project developmentalism. While this conflation has provided for a welcoming diversification on Africa's economic scene, bestowing countries with greater leverage and choice to shape the fate of arrangements, it has also perpetuated or intensified pre-existing trends and pressures, not least for labour and livelihoods. Indeed, the inability to build on international cooperation and investments to enhance local competencies was also considered a major challenge during the peak of interest in infrastructure projects from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee donors and the World Bank during the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, however, few steps have been made to increase the development outcome of foreign-led mega-projects in infrastructure and resource extraction.¹⁴⁷ Rather, they seem to rest on similar ambitions of modernization as those present during colonial empire building and state-building after independence.¹⁴⁸ Given that African countries are increasingly positioning resource extraction and infrastructure at the heart of national development plans,¹⁴⁹ these 'developments' warrant further attention.

Returning to the Mozambican case, the country has quickly moved from signalling an African development darling to being embattled by a lingering 'jihad' insurgency in its gas-rich province of Cabo Delgado. Accordingly, there is growing consensus on how the conflict's roots and intensification are connected to the shortcomings of Mozambique's late mega-project

146. See, for example, Mohan and Lampert, 'Negotiating China'; Dye and Alencastro, 'Debunking Brazilian exceptionalism in its Africa relations'.

147. Ulrikke Wethal, 'Building Africa's infrastructure: Reinstating history in infrastructure debates', *Forum for Development Studies* 46, 3 (2019), pp. 473–499.

148. Enns and Bersaglio, 'On the coloniality of "new" mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa', Wangui Kimari and Henrik Erntson, 'Imperial remains and imperial invitations: Centering race within the contemporary large-scale infrastructures of East Africa', *Antipode* 52, 3 (2020), pp. 825–846.

149. Enns and Bersaglio, 'On the coloniality of "new" mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa'.

momentum.¹⁵⁰ As Joseph Hanlon puts it, ‘the Cabo Delgado war is, at least in part, the much more expensive outcome of not investing in local jobs and development’,¹⁵¹ with the insurgents capitalizing on feelings of exclusion among local populations, including a lack of employment for young people in booming extractive industries and construction sectors.¹⁵² For one, the ongoing global energy crisis exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine brings renewed covetousness for Mozambique’s hydrocarbons and hastes the development of a long-awaited ‘third mega-project generation’ based on imaginaries of a gas bonanza, where Chinese actors are becoming increasingly central.¹⁵³ Yet, it also casts doubt over state and corporate actors’ commitment to redress the root causes of violence and to learn from the insufficiencies of earlier projects. At the time of writing, while the Southern African Development Community–Rwandan intervention has achieved some successes in containing the spread of the conflict, significant concerns remain as insurgents have lost little capacity for violence and attempt to move into neighbouring provinces.¹⁵⁴

On this account, we hope our approach and findings can aid further research on the intensified—yet uneven and inflammable—processes of development within contemporary formations of capitalism in Africa.

150. For a detailed discussion, see Emilinah Namaganda, Kei Otsuki, and Griet Steel, ‘Learning from Africana critical theory: A historicized contextualization of the impacts of Mozambique’s natural gas project’, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 10, (2022), 101075.

151. Joseph Hanlon, ‘Could Mozambique become a hydrogen hub?’ (Mozambique News Reports & Clippings no. 555, The Open University, 2021), p. 4.

152. See also João Feijó, ‘The role of women in the conflict in Cabo Delgado: Understanding vicious cycles of violence’ (Observatório do Meio Rural and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021), <<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/17970.pdf>> (10 September 2021).

153. Garcia, ‘China’s economic presence in Mozambique’.

154. Cabo Ligado, ‘Cabo Ligado Weekly: 22-28 November’, 30 November 2021, <<https://www.caboligado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-22-28-november-2021>> (21 March 2022).