



## **Geographies of Construction and Trajectories of Agrarian Change in Oil- Boom Angola**

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By: Aaron de Grassi

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# **Geographies of Construction and Trajectories of Agrarian Change in Oil-Boom Angola**

*Aaron de Grassi*

PhD Candidate

Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley

507 McCone Hall, Berkeley, CA 94704

Tel: 001-831-438-2336, [adegrassi@berkeley.edu](mailto:adegrassi@berkeley.edu)

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper situates debates about three large high-profile agricultural projects by Brazilian and Chinese companies in north-central Angola within the overall trajectory of agrarian change in the region. I emphasize the importance of agrarian history and geography to understanding smallholder livelihoods, land deals, and state practices even in this foremost of so-called 'petro-states.' The Angolan state has contracted the private companies (through links to oil-backed loans) to implement the projects as part of the Kapanda agro-industrial pole encompassing 430,000 hectares. The projects are aimed at large-scale import-substituting domestic food production; two involve primarily corn and beans, and a third sugar cane. However, despite their size and expense, the projects have not resulted in much displacement nor generated many broader links, and have been less significant to local smallholder livelihoods in the area than private Angolan land holdings and other sectors of construction, public services, and commerce. I argue, consequently, that these three agricultural projects are rather better understood as part of broader state practices aimed at spatial transformation (primarily through sub-contracted construction of capital-intensive physical infrastructure). As such, the agricultural projects are somewhat contradictory framed by officials – and locally understood – as addressing very real experiences of uneven socio-spatial circulation of oil-derived wealth and still vivid memories of violent, racialized Portuguese agrarian colonization. These recent experiences from Angola call into question the ways in which much land-grabbing literature uncritically invokes only neo-patrimonial explanations of elite and state action that in turn are premised upon shallow or problematic appreciation of history and spatial economic dynamics. In relation, I discuss important implications for strategies of advocacy and international solidarity, particularly given increasing mineral production in many hitherto largely agrarian countries in Africa.