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State-Corporate Alliances and Spaces for Resistance on the Extractive Frontier in Southeastern Madagascar

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State-Corporate Alliances and Spaces for Resistance on the Extractive Frontier in Southeastern Madagascar¹

Amber Huff², Yvonne Orenge and Barry Ferguson

Introduction

Extractive investments in rural areas of the Global South have proliferated and proceeded apace since the commodity boom of the 2000s, when surging prices in global markets for food, energy and minerals convinced investors to accept higher levels of risk in establishing ‘frontier’ operations. Consequently, the expansion and intensification of extractive investments has brought about important changes and contestations around resource governance and control, frequently in places where states are weak, state-society relations are tenuous and where local politics are contentious and characterized by gross inequalities in wealth and social power.

These trends have also brought together new types of crucial alliances. These include alliances between governments, researchers, donors, NGOs and multinational mining companies to establish and legitimize new extractive operations in the rural margins. But these trends also have brought together new alliances involving members of local populations, activists and community advocates, social scientists, journalists, legal experts and others who confront and resist the violence and dispossession that can accompany neoliberal authoritarian development.

Political ecologists have long emphasized the significance of understanding how dominant political-economic conditions articulate and manifest in rural spaces. In turn, this is central to grasping the contextual dynamics of agrarian change and associated contestations, conflicts and struggles. Contoured by the crises of ostensibly ‘progressive neoliberalism’ (Fraser 2017) – as well as its often contradictory nexus of elite cosmopolitanism, militarization, and unequal globalization (Rickford 2017) – the current political conjuncture has given rise to new forms and manifestations of ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall 1979, 1985) in diverse settings with wide-reaching implications (e.g. Scoones et al. 2017). Drawing insight from political ecology, agrarian studies and radical social movements, we use policy analysis, review of secondary literature and evidence, including oral testimonies, collected over nearly a decade of advocacy work to present the case of how agonistic alliances, or nexus of power and resistance, have coalesced around the establishment of the Rio Tinto / QMM ilmenite mine in southeastern Madagascar. The QMM mine is one of the largest development projects in Madagascar and one of the most controversial mining operations in the world due to the local social and livelihood conflicts it has engendered and critiques of its strategy for environmental mitigation, condemned as socially unjust ‘greenwashing’.

This case demonstrates ways in which, at the current conjuncture, distinctions between the state and private capital, local and international are blurred as the global politics of sustainability and political economy of resource extraction in and from ‘the rural’ enmesh with the politics of place. These dynamics shape emergent nexus of authoritarian state-corporate development and emancipatory resistance. On one hand, the rural ‘margins’ of state power are being transformed through powerful alliances into new ‘frontiers’ of resource control and elite accumulation at the cost of ecological despoliation, dispossession, intensifying grinding poverty and deepening inequality. On the other hand, emancipatory alliances can raise awareness of injustice, challenge powerful claims to territory

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and resources ‘from above’ simultaneously on a number of national and international fronts. The work of ‘internationals’ in these alliances is both important and risky. They can challenge and intervene in powerful discourses of ‘sustainability’, ‘development’ and ‘democracy’ that mask crises and contradictions and stifle dissent. They can work in solidarity to amplify the voices of those most profoundly affected by these developments to demand both dignity and the opportunity to articulate their own claims to rights, value and justice. At the same time they must work carefully to not undermine political spaces opened up by local action and resistance.

From contested margin to investment frontier

As in many parts of the rural Global South, Madagascar’s ‘margins’ have become re-envisioned as ‘new’ frontiers of development in recent decades. The restructuring of the Malagasy state in relation to economic production since the 1980s and the institutionalisation of mechanisms of economic liberalisation – privatisation, deregulation and decentralisation – have been formalised in a series of synergistic legislative reforms developed and implemented since the 1990s, particularly in the Investment Law, the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP), the Malagasy Mining Code, and the National Land Tenure Programme (see Huff 2016 for a detailed discussion of these reforms).

Over time, it has become clear that these reforms have exacerbated the problem of confusion around legal pluralism in the Malagasy mining sector, expanded the de-centralised state bureaucracy through the proliferation of a number of new quasi-private agencies and ‘opened up’ natural resource governance at the margins to new and powerful alliances. Despite a worsening development situation due to overlapping political and economic crises of the late 2000s, continuing food price volatility and continuing political unrest, the past decade has seen an intensification of international investment in land and mineral resources in particular. Multinational mining companies, often in cooperation with researchers, state ministries, state-owned companies and international financial institutions and even powerful environmental NGOs, have recently made the largest foreign investments in the country’s history (Corson, 2012; Rajaobelina, Rasoavahiny, Ratsifandriahamanana, & Rabenarivo, 2010; Sarrasin, 2006; US Department of State, 2015; Wingen, 2011).

This has resulted in deceptive acquisition or outright seizure of land and other resources from the control of direct users, usually small-scale farmers and pastoralists, to government agencies and investors for ‘greater good’ development. This is often framed in terms of poverty alleviation, enhanced livelihoods and rural empowerment, but often manifests in the form of private agricultural ‘leases’, restrictive protected areas for conservation, and large extractive operations. In fact there is notable spatial and strategic overlap between the latter two, as new mining concessions are often granted near or contiguous to the boundaries and buffer zones of national parks and reserves or are accommodated by redrawing protected area boundaries (see Huff 2012). Extractive operations also overlap with conservation in that they frequently involve the creation of new private conservation areas to compensate for or offset environmentally destructive activities under corporate social and environmental responsibility directives. This means that large-scale resource investments are unprecedented in their geographic extent and potential multidimensional impacts on the Malagasy landscape and the livelihoods and wellbeing of rural Malagasy people.

As the parsing of Madagascar’s resource frontiers has intensified, so has the frequency of conflicts around particular projects, some with national and international repercussions. The most widely publicized is of course the relationship between ‘back room’ large-scale land deals with Daewoo Logistics and Verun and the inception of the 2009 Malagasy political crisis. This is not surprising, considering that practices around these developments comprise a new, more intense strategy for extending and consolidating forms of bureaucratic control and authority over rural society and landscape.

Tensions between customary resource management practices and a ‘distant’ government bureaucracy have been complicated further by the diffusion of power to national and international NGOs, private companies, and other institutions in collaboration with an increasingly fragmented state. Even though

‘communities’ have ostensibly been empowered through policy reform as well according to the government, donors, and the letter of the law in some cases, the local involvement in decision-making is rare and consultation processes, when they are carried out, are done on a superficial basis or in ways that mislead locals in regards to what, precisely they are giving up, what they can expect to gain in the long term, environmental impacts. Disagreements and conflicts tend to emerge within communities in reaction to, rather than in anticipation of, land dispossession. This may be due a number of factors, including the fact that rural Malagasy are generally averse to airing disputes in public; high initial expectations of economic opportunities that fail to be delivered later on; capture of economic benefits and decision-making power by local leaders; a lack of access to economic and institutional alternatives; stifling bureaucratic complexity; political pressure; fears of retaliation by those in more powerful positions; the unauthorized destruction or removal of tombs or sacred sites and misconceptions about the legal framework and local people’s rights in the face of the law; unemployment and the transformative effects of large mining operations on of formal and informal economies (Ferguson et al., 2014; Perks, 2012; Gingembre, 2015, p. 562). It is unsurprising that rural Malagasy may be especially sensitive and resistant to directives and changes that are perceived as unjust after-the-fact, particularly those that eliminate important economic activities if close substitute practices that preserve economic and subsistence sufficiency, resilience and cultural salience are not an option (Huff, 2014; Wingen, 2011).

State-corporate-NGO alliance and the ‘greening’ of QMM

QIT Madagascar Minerals (QMM) is a mineral sands project based near the town of Fort Dauphin in southeastern Madagascar. Since the 1980s, QMM has been jointly owned as part of a public-private partnership (PPP) between the Malagasy government, which owns twenty per cent of the company though has yet to take up its option, and *QIT Fer et Titane*, a Canadian subsidiary of Rio Tinto (a UK-based British-Australian multinational mining company, one of the largest mining companies in the world) that owns eighty per cent of the company (Rio Tinto, 2015).

Starting in 1986, QMM conducted extensive exploration along the east coast of Madagascar searching for heavy mineral sands that are a source of titanium dioxide occurring naturally as ilmenite and rutile. This is mined, exported and refined into a stark white pigment used to colour consumer goods from paint to toothpaste. Following nearly twenty years of research and exploration, these investigations led to the discovery of viable ore deposits in the Anosy region of Madagascar near Fort Dauphin. Identified at the sites of Mandena, Sainte Luce, and Petriky, these sites are located in one of the poorest, most underdeveloped and ecologically sensitive parts of Madagascar. Most of the residents of Anosy are members of farming families dependent on land and forest resources for subsistence and market income, and the ore deposits lie underneath what were some of the last remaining littoral forest in southeastern Madagascar in one of the most ecologically diverse areas of the country (Vincelette, Dean, & Ganzhorn, 2007, p. 1). The three mine sites involved in the project are set to be mined sequentially using active dredge mining under a long-term land lease from the Malagasy government (Gerety, 2009; Rio Tinto, 2014; Seagle, 2009, 2012, 2013). QMM completed an environmental and social impact assessment (EISA) in 2001, and received legal license to begin operations in 2005, when the Malagasy Government also agreed to contribute US\$35 million from a World Bank Integrated Growth Poles project to fund the renovation of the Ehoala Port and urban infrastructure of Fort Dauphin to facilitate QMM’s export (Seagle, 2013).

At the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) World Conservation Congress in Bangkok in 2004, representatives of Rio Tinto historically announced that it ‘aims to have a net positive impact (NPI) on biodiversity by minimising the negative impacts of its activities and by making appropriate contributions to conservation in the regions in which it operates’ (Turner, 2014). This is the central selling point behind Rio Tinto’s claims to being pioneer of so-called ‘sustainable mining’. Rio Tinto’s global strategy uses ‘net positive impact’, or NPI, approach, which the company claims involves a number of methods meant to ensure that the company’s cumulative activities result in a higher degree of cumulative positive environmental impact than negative. Methods for achieving NPI are controversial, even among advocates of market-based conservation, involving spatial

strategies of compensatory biodiversity offsetting (creating protected areas in one place to compensate for biodiversity that it has destroyed in another place) and Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes based on bundled carbon offsetting and ecosystem services trading meant to support conservation activities outside of active mining zones (Anstee, 2008; WBCSD, 2015).

This approach, which the company claims to have piloted in the contexts of the Dampier Salt operations in Western Australia and copper mining Mongolia, links place-based extractive and conservation activities to both international voluntary markets for Ecosystem Services-based commodities and a variety of international voluntary and compliance-based finance mechanisms and market-like instruments, which vary depending on the national policy contexts of particular mining projects (Turner, 2014). While the QMM Madagascar project is described by company literature as a third 'pilot project' for the NPI approach, the company has experience outside the NPI with environmental impact mitigation activities in diverse contexts, from conservation banking in the USA to linkage with the national REDD+ strategy in Guinea (Anstee, 2008; Rio Tinto, 2014).

In addition to the support of the World Bank and the partnership between Rio Tinto and the Malagasy government, a number of international environmental and development organisations support Rio Tinto's NPI approach in Madagascar. The IUCN entered a formal partnership with Rio Tinto in 2010 after nearly ten years of less formal cooperation. Other partners include organisations such as Bird Life International, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Conservation International (CI), Kew Botanical Gardens and USAID. Rio Tinto's partner organisations praise the company's scientific approach to biodiversity offsetting and portray the company as an ethical, 'model' mining company with that goes above and beyond legal requirements for addressing social and environmental issues (Seagle, 2009:15).

Against this spectacular backdrop of their corporate sustainability strategy, the QMM project began operations in 2005 with infrastructure development, securing leases for and removing local smallholders from approximately 6,000 hectares (23 square miles) of territory in rural southeastern Madagascar. Active extraction at the first site, Mandena, began in 2009, and mine managers contend that, at peak capacity, it could produce as much as two million tonnes of unrefined ilmenite ore, worth about USD 200 million per year to be exported for processing abroad (Seagle, 2013). Of the full 6,000-hectare project concession, the Mandena portion of the project comprised approximately 2,000 hectares, and 230 hectares of this were set aside for the Mandena biodiversity offsetting area, which is advertised as a 'biodiversity gene bank' for future restoration activities (under the NPI strategy) in the area and is further promoted by QMM as a destination for ecotourism (Seagle, 2009).

Contested development and failed consultation

Rio Tinto claims that QMM is a model mine and the best solution for poverty reduction in the region, having won a Nedbank Green Mining Award in 2009, and claiming to have rehabilitated over 1000 hectares of forest, provided jobs for thousands of local people, initiated new livelihoods, and promised a net positive biodiversity impact (NPI) for the region (Turner, 2014). However, the QMM project has in fact long been fraught with controversy on a number of grounds and to say the least not everyone agrees with this official version depicting 'wins' for all involved. Internationally, despite Rio Tinto's alliance with a variety of the biggest and richest environmental BINGOS (Big International NGOs) in the world, the NPI biodiversity offsetting strategy is considered by a number of researchers and international environmental groups to no more than an environmental shell game, an attempt to 'greenwash' inherently destructive and harmful industrial activities and the harmful social consequences of resource grabbing.

In terms of the promise of national development (i.e. economic growth and poverty alleviation) there also remain outstanding questions about whether Madagascar as a whole is benefitting sufficiently from the fiscal arrangements of the project (Harbinson, 2007; Parker, 2004). Most crucially, at the local level, many among the affected populations are the poorest of the poor and dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods in an absolute sense, and compensation for resources lost is widely

considered unfair in the local area and is far below World Bank regulations (Seagle, 2013). According to Seagle (2013), some Malagasy refer to the QMM mine as, ‘*mivarotra tanindrazana* – ‘selling off the land of the ancestors’ — an idiom that emerged during the French colonial era and is linked to historical experiences of dispossession’ (Seagle, 2013, p. 7). Thousands of Malagasy have complained of land flooding, dispossession, loss of forest access, insufficient employment, poor compensation, insufficient communications and information flow, enforced resettlement, and imposed conservation measures with ensuing economic and social hardships (Huff, 2016; Harbinson, 2007; Hai-Tsinjo Consulting, 2008; Ballet and Randrianalijaona, 2014; Franchi et al., 2013; Kraemer, 2012; Kill et al., 2016; ALT/PANOS, 2009).

Madagascar’s existing land laws and mining code suffer from a lack of clarity and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that developers adhere to ethical and legal practices. Once permits are issued by the relevant government agency, large investors are essentially treated as self-regulators responsible for ensuring that environmental regulations and land laws are respected at the level of the mine site and that consultation and negotiation with local communities are thorough, equitable and carried out with respect of people’s legal and human rights. However, environmental concerns and the legal rights and substantive interests of local populations are often subordinated to the primary profit goals of extractive operations, leading to increased risk of harm and conflicts on a number of levels. This leads to a common problem across conservation and extractive sectors, that ‘despite the rhetoric of local empowerment... governance arrangements are substantially controlled’ by non-local stakeholders, consultation processes, when carried out, tend to favor the interests of private investors and local elites, and governance arrangements are quite variable because significant gaps remain between policy discourse, legislation and practice (Raik 2007).

In the case of QMM, authoritative claims of local consultation, local benefits and the empowerment of local communities reported to media or in glossy brochures seem to come primarily from outsiders, with little representation of local perspectives and experiences. QMM’s consultation with communities at local level – what they call their ‘Social Engagement Programme’ – has proved woefully insufficient, communication has been ‘flawed’ (even by the company’s own admission) and coercive, and failed to include marginalized members of local populations or those with specific livelihood interests (e.g. coastal fishermen), when making strategic social and technical decisions (Kraemer, 2012; ALT/PANOS, 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Seagle, 2012).

During the port construction phase alone, hundreds of villagers were displaced from their homes, their land forcibly taken under the government’s land acquisition process, *Déclaration d’Utilité Publique* (DUP), to make way for the mine. They were rehoused but not provided with land of equal value, in keeping with World Bank regulations (Seagle, 2013; Harbinson, 2007). They were instead invited to participate in new livelihoods projects that did not replace the value of their land, and have been driven by sustainability agendas directed by QMM (Seagle, 2012), all of which has caused serious tension in the region and resentment against the mining company (Harbinson, 2007; Seagle, 2013; Huff, 2016; ALT/PANOS, 2009).

Antanosy fishermen were not consulted when Rio Tinto decided the location of the new regional port. As a result fishermen were displaced from traditional boat launching sites and expected to use a new site that proved highly dangerous. Boats were destroyed and income lost since fishermen could not launch boats in bad weather from the new site. The fishermen fell outside the formal Malagasy DUP (*Déclaration d’Utilité Publique*) process that was applied to compensate displaced and resettled families, so they were overlooked and excluded from recompense for their livelihood losses³.

Similar failures have occurred in Rio Tinto’s biodiversity-offset programme that aims to deliver a ‘net positive impact’ to the region (Rio Tinto, 2012). Villagers report that Rio Tinto did not explain to them that they were involved in an ‘offsetting programme’ when they were asked to participate in tree

³ In 2010, more than 1,000 villagers commenced a class action against Rio Tinto; consequently the fishermen and other affected communities started to receive compensation.

planting and excluded from accessing their forest resources, measures intended to mitigate for biodiversity loss where Rio Tinto are dredging for ilmenite (Kill et al., 2016). While the establishment of the offsetting site has been swathed in a narrative of sustainability, local participation and community forestry, in practice it represents an authoritarian means of enclosure that has involved effort to preclude locals from exercising their rights to assert claims to customary resources and fair compensation, as well as outright physical exclusion from ancestral lands.

Precarious protest and alliances of resistance

The lack of new economic opportunities, against the backdrop of rapid development, price rises, and broken promises, has been the cause of deep resentment towards QMM and a loss of trust in the company; it has caused conflict in the region and loss of workdays to the mining operation. The company has seen a succession of actions aimed at resisting evictions, seeking reparations, protesting environmental degradation, and most recently mobilizing against exclusion from ancestral forestlands at Antsotso in the Tsitongambarika Forest Complex (TGK) in the name of corporate biodiversity offsetting.

From the start up phase in 2005, the cost of living increased in the regional capital, Ft Dauphin, and house rentals spiked with the arrival of mine workers from other regions and abroad (Harbinson, 2007). Coupled with increased cost of living, the failure to provide secure local employment over the following decade, which has not manifested except as short term, insecure and low paid temporary contracts, has created a profound sense of frustration and disappointment and been central to repeated complaints and protest by local people. It led Antanosy workers to join a campaign against Rio Tinto through an international Union movement (Industrial, 2015).

The promise of the mine to lever local people out of poverty has not translated for the rural people most affected who have been displaced from their lands. At the heart of their loss is Tanindrazana ('land of the ancestors') which denotes Malagasy attachment to the land, central to their spiritual and cultural identity and ancestral heritage (Franchi et al., 2013; Seagle, 2012); it is also vital for their survival, for food security and livelihoods, so the loss of land is seen as a worsening of their situation and wellbeing (ALT/ PANOS, 2009; Hai-Tsinjo, 2008) affecting not just the current generation but also future generations.

"[W]e cannot compete with these newcomers, so local people remain powerless and poor"
Tema Germaine, Ilafitsignana (ALT/PANOS, 2009: 82).

The lack of consultation and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) around the acquisition of land has been particularly and profoundly disabling and disempowering. QMM has been perceived as dominant and autocratic in the development of the region, blurring the role between the private company and the state (Hilson, 2012), and crushing any form of dissent.

'If they had asked my permission I would not have accepted their plan, but since they are powerful they came here and announced that they needed my land. I could not oppose them. They have such authority that it influences everything.' Reviry, Ilfatsignana.

Indeed, the lack of power local people have felt to contest the advance of the state-corporate relationship is well documented in oral testimonies that were collected (ALT/PANOS 2009- extract above). For example, by 2005 it was already clear that local people felt frustrated by the lack of information and dialogue about the mine. Most of the planning seemed to take place behind closed doors and the atmosphere in Ft Dauphin (capital of Anosy) had become increasingly polarized with an 'if you are not with us then you are against us' approach by QMM. The space for expressing concerns, raising questions or holding different views was shrinking.

This oppressive approach brought additional challenges into an already fragile social and political environment. As a result, protests and general strikes have occurred around the QMM project site

since mining activities began in 2009, with hundreds of Malagasy people from around the region striking against loss of forest access, involuntary relocation, unfair compensation for lost lands and livelihoods, the destruction of sacred forests and removal of ancestral tombs, and widely perceived unfairness in QMM's practice of importing mine workers from other countries and regions rather than training and hiring local people (as had been promised during consultations) to work projects. A particularly large protest occurred in January of 2013, in which hundreds of lightly armed protestors, many of whom had experienced eviction from lands now controlled by the mines, blocked roads and trapped employees (including the chief of Malagasy operations) in a mining site. After the company threatened to withdraw from all operations in Madagascar, the protest was put down through government military force (Seagle, 2013).

In the southeast region of Anosy, the majority of the rural population are non literate and have little formal education. Most people are living below the poverty line and are dependent on subsistence farming, fishing and local production (INSTAT, 2010). Living in poverty, hand to mouth, undermines the capacity of local people to organize over a long time frame or in structured and resourced ways. Moreover, cultural beliefs and traditional practices can act as barrier to challenging the status quo. Ancestral beliefs and customary laws regulate the social order; society is generally patriarchal and gerontocratic and women, girls and young men can be excluded from decision making processes, regarded as likely to upset the social balance (Ottino, 1998). People often take measures to avoid upsetting the social order, and fear of reprisals such as acts of sabotage, theft, arson, and sorcery further restrain the inclination towards open conflict or contestation; there is very little public space that is considered safe for expressing views. This even extends to a highly limited, self-censoring media environment (UNDP, 2008) alongside other ongoing constraints to press freedom (RSF, 2014). Those who have publicly protested have been suppressed by government forces, co-opted by the company, or vilified and imprisoned⁴.

Since the beginning of the project (including pre-start up), and because of the diminished governance / political space for public contestation locally, international activists, lawyers, development professionals and scholars have taken on multifaceted roles in both directly contesting the QMM operations at international level and/or in assisting local communities in actions to amplify their voice or to help leverage compensation.

For example, in 2006 Andrew Lees Trust (ALT) built collaboration with PANOS London with the aim of addressing the lack of voice of local people in the south of Madagascar. A number of opportunities emerged from this collaboration: one was an oral testimony project that enabled local people to record and publish personal stories about their experiences of poverty and environment in Anosy (ALT/PANOS 2009). These testimonies recorded multiple issues of flawed compensation, lack of communications, negative environmental impacts and power asymmetries all brought by the QMM mining operation. It also enabled ALT to broker relations between a PANOS researcher and Friends of the Earth to undertake a study of the mine, 'Development Recast', which explored and published questions arising from environmental, social and fiscal perspectives of the QMM project (Harbinson 2007).

The Anosy testimonies, titled *Voices of Change*, were published, in 2009. They were widely distributed in hard copy at local level to Mayors, decisions makers, donors and development agencies such as Unicef, UNDP and the EU, as well as the Malagasy press who published extracts in national papers. Internationally the testimonies went online via Panos and ALT websites, The Communications Initiative's (www.comminit.com) network and other e-platforms to upwards of 60,000 academics, practitioners, and researchers.

It was through the dissemination process in 2009/10 that a renowned human rights researcher / activist picked up the testimonies. She was particularly sensible to the issue of failed compensation process that was a steady theme throughout the book and saw potential for an international legal case. She took

⁴ <http://www.ejolt.org/2013/03/rio-tinto-in-madagascar-15-activists-arrested/>

the testimonies to UK human rights lawyers, Leigh Day (LD), who then met with ALT and an international researcher focused on Anosy. The discussions led to an agreement to research whether Anosy communities wanted to bring a class action against Rio Tinto. Meetings were arranged on the ground and a local translator/communications specialist assisted and became a point of communication between LD and the communities. Over the course of local meetings with LD representatives, 1000 villagers signed up and joined a class action in 2010.

However, QMM capitalized on legal delays and the fragility of the situation and made cash offers to claimants. As in the initial compensation process, there was lack of transparency about how sums were calculated and a lack of an accounting paper trail for local recipients. In paying out sums to over half the claimants, QMM managed to neutralize the class action; villagers were understandably more ready to take money in hand than await outcomes of a process happening thousands of miles away that was hard to see and understand. With less than half the claimants gone, LD had to suspend the action.

Despite the frustrating lack of closure to the legal case, the action catalyzed dialogue at executive level in Rio Tinto London. ALT's persistence to hold Rio Tinto to account on failed communications and compensation that villagers had expressed in the testimonies levered a case for greater oversight of the mine, and for a local stakeholder platform. External monitoring of the mine, it was argued was weak and biased.

Although the recommendation was for a local stakeholder platform that could be supported by independent international oversight, , Rio Tinto first agreed to a committee of NGOs and Anosy researchers for dialogue in London. The NGO Liaison Committee met over 18 months (Oct 2011 – March 2013) to air and discuss complaints of affected communities in Anosy. The aim was to identify key weaknesses and practices of QMM that could be addressed so that the mistakes made in the first (Mandena) phase would not repeat in the second (St Luce) phase; not least as the scaling up would prove more sensitive due to a greater number of people affected and a less degraded environment. Despite significant analysis and recommendations made, only a brief, broad summary of key recommendations was eventually produced the facilitator in 2013. By then the committee had already started to flounder; the failure of QMM to deliver the promised reviews of communications and compensation had precipitated ALT's resignation, and the company's 14 billion dollar write down had squeezed a number of personnel shifts and budgetary changes to RT's plans.

However this work laid down strong foundations for dialogue with the company following an AGM action in 2017. The AGM action brought together seven international organisations to raise awareness about the negative impacts of Biodiversity Offsetting on the Antsotso community, including through press articles, film showing and workshop; there were additional matters raised at the AGM in relationship to other environmental challenges around the mine⁵. The ensuing dialogue between ALT, *Collectif TANY* and Rio Tinto executives, including RT's CEO and Head of Energy and Minerals has benefited from greater credibility and traction since issues already raised in 2011-13, such as poor communications, could be referred to directly and with the Rio Tinto officers who have a track record with the previous dialogue e.g. with their communities team. The current dialogue with RT is ongoing and results are yet to be documented.

ALT has meanwhile supported an accompaniment process to provide third party legal witness and support to the Antsotso community via a local human rights organization *Trano Aro Zo* (TAZ) based in the Anosy region, and mandated under the UN to assist and educate Malagasy citizens about their rights. Under an MOU that ensures client confidentiality, the community have benefitted from training in human rights, communications, as well as advice on legal questions; also witness presence, audio and visual recordings, and reporting of meetings with government representatives and mining company officials. As well as aiming to support the community and promote greater transparency in the process on the ground, this accompaniment has (with the community's permission) enabled

⁵ ALT specifically raised questions about radioactivity and a buffer zone breach

information flow with ALT who has shared recordings with *Collectif TANY* to inform international strategies in the dialogue with Rio Tinto on land and biodiversity offsetting issues.

Relations between internationals and local communities have thus been maintained throughout the dialogue. Multiple actors have been involved in the overall biodiversity offsetting campaign including the diaspora organization, INGOs, activist organizations, the mining company, government actors such as *Office National de L'Environnement*, community leaders, a local human rights association, a local communications specialist, and media; this current phase of campaigning and advocacy therefore presents an important case study of the alliances between internationals and local actors and their respective interface with corporate and government actors.

Authoritarian populism, Madagascar style

The current political conjuncture has given rise to new manifestations of what activist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall theorized in regards to the rise of Thatcherism in Britain as 'authoritarian populism' (Scoones et al. 2017). In its most basic sense, authoritarian populism describes a type of national political terrain that emerges when the capital-aligned state seeks to manage 'uncurable' structural contradictions by building a veneer of active popular consent around itself (Gramsci, 1971). A formal representative institutional *structure* remains in place, though democracy in practice is undermined by the strong 'state – power bloc'. This can lead to intense partisanship and national elections becoming hotly contested, particularly when they are widely perceived to be only nominally democratic or 'competitively authoritarian' (Levitsky and Way, 2002).

Manufacturing popular consent is crucial to Hall's original conceptualization, and is done by reworking classic narratives of value, loss, threat and redemption and harnessing them to the practices and dominant personas of the radical right-wing (in the specific case he presented). Condemnation of 'elite' or 'status quo' political leadership; imagery of imagined golden ages of purity, stability and abundance; inciting moral panic over refugees, migrants, and ethnic minority groups taking more than their share create a diversion from structural and systemic understandings of relationships between the changing roles and alliances of the state on one hand and growing poverty, inequality, environmental despoliation and exploitative labour relations experienced by most members of society on the other. This spectacular shifting of blame for the very real struggles that people are experiencing masks contradictions between the people and the state – power bloc while putting them to use in a project of systemic transformation. To quote Hall (1979), the success of this strategy does not lie in its ability to simply 'dupe unsuspecting folk but in the way it addresses real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions – and yet is able to represent them within a logic of discourse which pulls them systematically into line with policies and class strategies of the Right'.

Some of these dynamics are at play in the national context of Madagascar and we see them in the QMM case in particular: weak democracy, widely perceived as nominal; strong alliances between state and capital; hotly contested elections. But the political terrain in Madagascar has been profoundly shaped by factors that have created a vastly different authoritarian-populist dynamic than in Thatcher's Britain or Trump's US. For example, transformations associated with structural adjustment and other reforms since the 1990s, resulted in a shift in the locus of meaningful policy production from a central Malagasy state to complex a global network of INGOs, private companies, donors, and international financial institutions (Duffy 2006). These shifts resulted in a hollowing out of the government's ability (at least hypothetically) to make choices on behalf of the population, and the necessity to maintain active approval by powerful 'outside' actors. Thus a strong rhetoric on democratization, liberalization, conservation and development (Duffy 2006) infuses high-level discourse around development and has been institutionalized with the growing urban middle class as core and unifying Malagasy values. But Malagasy politics has never been seriously bothered about the issue of popular consent unless it can be used to serve the interests of the patronage network in power at a given moment (when it can be mobilized to incredible ends). Rather, the image of democracy and will-to-develop must be projected outward, while rural populations have largely become scapegoats for the failures of the country to improve by international standards.

‘Territorialization’ describes the political process of extending and consolidating forms of bureaucratic control and authority over space and territory. Yet, territorialization is rarely complete, and the ‘margins’ or peripheries of states often remain complex and contested (Baird 2009). They may lie at the edges of state power, or exist in a state of institutional superimposition that lends a tense ambiguity to ‘state-society relations’. Such is the situation in much of rural southern Madagascar, where daily life often seems to be carried out at great social distance from the direct exercise of state power because it does not have the consistent coercive capability nor legitimate authority to carry out its functions or to impose and enforce binding decisions on members of society (Graeber 2007; Lund 2006).

Building on James Ferguson’s (2006) description of the unevenness of globalization (i.e. movements of capital ‘hop’ from point to point, skipping much of what lies in between, dividing the planet as much as it unites it), Lisa Cliggett (2014) conceptualizes the rural margins of Zambia as a complex social landscape shaped historically by the circulation of people, land and animals, and other actors. She explains how in some contexts cycles of attention and neglect from ‘external’ agents over long time horizons have produced a situation that she calls ‘chronic liminality’, characterized by enduring confusion over formal rights to land, livelihoods, identity and even life, a sort of conditioned and perpetual uncertainty that can lead to increased vulnerabilities related to growing social differentiation, violence and changes in land cover (Cliggett 2014).

Writing about his time in Arivonimamo in the ‘hinterlands’ of highlands Madagascar, David Graeber (2007) presents a contrasting analysis of how historical cycles of state violence and neglect have allowed rural people to develop a way of seeing the world that draws strong distinctions between that which is ‘*Gasy*’ (Malagasy) and that which is ‘*Vazaha*’ (a category of ‘otherness’ that includes the alien, foreign, authoritarian, governmental and just about anything French, alongside resilient ‘institutional structures and political habits that allowed them to govern their own affairs’ with minimal recourse to ‘outside’ agents (174). Graeber describes the rural margins in this case in terms of the ‘provisional autonomous zone’. It is a space shaped through the interplay of state and local actors over time in which ‘[t]hey (local Malagasy) had also managed to develop forms of resistance sufficiently subtle that, when the state was emptied of its substance, they were able to allow it to effectively collapse with minimal loss of face’, leaving behind, a superimposed ‘ghost-image of authority’ (166).

Taking Cliggett’s and Graeber’s insights together facilitates a conceptualization of the rural ‘margins’ as historically complex and contested landscapes, spaces in which vulnerabilities and uncertainties have been co-produced alongside and vernaculars of freedom and subtle praxes of resistance. Throughout rural southern Madagascar, the *idea* of the violent, authoritarian and corrupt state is ever-present and can be a source of tension and worry. Nonetheless, as in Arivonimamo, people have developed other ways of getting by and of resisting (and at times acquiescing to or cooperating with) ‘others’, including successive pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Malagasy governments have aimed to pacify, conquer, sensitize and exercise political and economic control over territory and ostensibly unruly and ungovernable ‘*cotiers*’ across the island.

Conclusions

In regards to QMM, turning a lens on alliances offers particular insight into the ‘new’ global politics of extractives development and how contestations, conflicts and struggles can play out in emergent, polarized, yet at times, ambiguous political spaces. What has emerged in Anosy is a profound blurring of boundaries between the lived memory of state violence, the actually-existing state and the corporation, civil society and police — what can be perceived as a powerful nexus of authority and power. The Anosy testimonies exposed the perception that villagers saw no difference between the state and the mining company, such has been the power of QMM to determine the lives of local people. Most notably through the loss of lands, which are so central to rural Malagasy identity and survival. The inclusion of INGOs such as Birdlife International (through its Malgasy affiliate Asity) into the state-mine private-public relationship has further deepened the blurring of lines as Asity

becomes the ‘*gendarme*’ of the forest where villagers are told the state has agreed to the mining company’s conservation zone. So NGOs, who are arguably a source of support and potential alliance to defend villagers’ rights, resources, and agendas has become part of the power nexus that further erodes local ownership.

What has further exacerbated this sense of shrinking political space has been the well-documented lack of effective Free, Prior and Informed Consent, communications, and social engagement by QMM with local communities. All of the communities impacted by the mine, either directly or indirectly, have complained or reported to have felt undermined by the lack of transparency and broken promises made to them by QMM. The ensuing lack of trust has compromised the possibility to develop a sense of cohesion in the local development scenario. Those stakeholder initiatives that have been launched are regarded as tainted by the money or biased by the positions that QMM pays to have them in place. QMM’s domination of the narrative, supported by the wide co-option of local and INGO partners, is thereby seen to direct all development efforts towards supporting and reinforcing the company’s interests and agendas.

With both local authorities and the state implicated in the success of the project, and given the seriously poor institutional and weak governance capacity of Madagascar, local people have had no recourse to justice or rule of law to right wrongs or even to contest their rights. External monitoring of the mine has been of no value to the local people; indeed reports of the Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) and the biodiversity committee were only made public after lobbying by internationals (e.g. the Madagascar Environmental Justice Network).

Unsurprisingly, what has emerged is a picture of resistance to QMM that has no coherent or core set of aims, focus or strategy. Rather it has been sporadic and disorganized on the ground, entering into the radical space of protest and public disobedience in the absence of legal and state mechanisms to address citizens’ rights and their losses. The relations with internationals have consequently been equally sporadic, according to specific moments of resistance. With local and national NGOs either co-opted or too nervous to enter into contestation on the ground, e.g. for fear of losing their license to maintain operations in country, the relationships between local communities and international actors has frequently been dislocated by physical distance. The danger is that these alliances may also risk undermining the political space and local ownership if they are not closely responsive to community agendas and initiative. Activists are conscious of these risks and look for ways to amplify the voice of local people, and promote autonomy and empowerment of those communities whose sites are occupied or affected by the extraction (Bloomfield 2014).

“If our children are illiterate, certainly their future will be dark, because they will not be able to find jobs and they don’t have anything else left because our ancestral land has been appropriated”, Say Louise, Ilafitsignana (ALT /PANOS 2009: 89).

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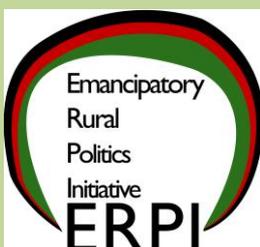
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