STATE-LED HOUSING DELIVERY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL PATRIMONIALISM: THE CASE OF POST-WAR ANGOLA

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ABSTRACT
This article examines state-led housing delivery in post-war Angola as an instrument of developmental patrimonialism. It draws on a growing literature on political settlements to highlight the role of rents, informal institutions, and power arrangements in managing political stability and economic growth. In the case of post-war Angola, key forms of rent distribution take place at the level of the presidency through the centralized use of actors and institutions that emerged historically outside of the ambit of regular government structures. These involve foreign business allies and special state agencies such as the state oil company Sonangol that respond exclusively to the Angolan president. While this has kept regular state institutions weak, the approach has been successful in terms of fast-tracking public investments that are important for rent distribution to key constituencies while keeping political competition at bay. The case of a resource-rich country such as Angola provides insight into the context-specific ways in which developmental patrimonialism translates into practice and the actors, interests, and institutions driving state-led housing delivery.

AFTER DECADES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS AND SOCIAL NEGLECT during the civil war that erupted between the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) and the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) after independence in 1975, the definitive end of the conflict in 2002 marked the start of a process of post-war reconstruction

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in Angola. Unlike in many other post-conflict countries, this process was neither led nor financed by Western donors and financial institutions. Instead, a homegrown approach to economic management was central to post-war reconstruction, combining technocratic measures to stabilize macroeconomic conditions with the use of the country’s oil revenues to finance the construction and rehabilitation of public infrastructures. During the first post-war decade, this approach turned Angola from a war-torn state into one of Africa’s fastest-growing economies.

Yet critics argue that oil has not been used to develop the country but to enrich long-standing President José Eduardo dos Santos and his family and inner circle who, ‘run the country like their personal ATM’ and use oil to lubricate a system of patronage that can successfully buy off or co-opt potential rivals and opponents at an order of magnitude that has few parallels elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. In this context, the official liberal democratic discourse that accompanied national reconstruction is considered to be little more than an exercise in lip-service, aimed not at strengthening the formal MPLA-ruled state but rather a ‘shadow’ government that is ‘controlled and manipulated by the Angolan presidency, with Sonangol, the national oil company, as its chief economic motor’. According to Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, this parallel system of governance has underpinned a process of ‘illiberal peacebuilding’ which is ‘managed by local elites in defiance of liberal peace precepts regarding civil liberties, the rule of law, the expansion of economic freedoms and poverty alleviation, with a view to constructing a hegemonic order and an elite stranglehold over the political economy’.

This article does not aim to dispute the hegemonic ambitions of the Angolan regime or to discredit any critiques of its authoritarian nature. It

recognizes that over the course of the first post-war decade, power increasingly became centralized in the Angolan presidency and that this power was used to serve private interests at the cost of democracy and (formal) state building. At the same time, it seeks to go beyond such views, which echo largely uniform accounts of the predatory and failed neo-patrimonial African state of the 1990s, by drawing attention to the ways in which neo-patrimonial rule and development may also go together. More specifically, it aims to show how under certain conditions patrimonial rule may even be central to producing developmental outcomes. This is illustrated through the case of state-led housing delivery in post-war Angola. With over 100,000 units delivered in recent years in the capital of Luanda alone, this has taken place on a scale that on the sub-Saharan continent so far has been rivalled only by the post-apartheid South African government.

In presenting this argument, the article draws on a growing literature that challenges some commonly held assumptions with regard to the conditions necessary for economic growth and development to occur. While there are important differences and sometimes tensions between the different strands of this literature, it draws on the work of the heterodox economist Mushtaq Khan to argue that in developing countries market solutions or prescribed forms of good governance do not necessarily represent an escape from the trap of underdevelopment. Rather than formal state institutions, Khan highlights the role of rents and informal institutions and power arrangements in managing political stability and


8. For my understanding of neo-patrimonialism, I draw on the definition used by Erdmann and Engel. What sets their definition apart is that they acknowledge that ‘neo-patrimonial rule takes place within the framework of, and with the claim to, legal-rational bureaucracy or “modern” stateness’, even if formal and informal spheres of governance permeate each other. Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, ‘Neopatrimonialism reconsidered: Critical review and elaboration of an elusive concept’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45, 1 (2007), p. 105.


economic growth. The ways in which economic rents are created and distributed, and the degree to which they contribute to development, depend on the characteristics of each country’s ‘political settlement’, which according to Khan represents the ‘social order’ or the ways in which ‘a society solves the problem of violence and achieves a minimum level of political stability and economic performance for it to operate as a society’. Building on Khan’s work, Tim Kelsall and colleagues argue that in countries where a person or group at the apex of the state is in charge of the creation and distribution of rents with a long-term perspective, this can represent an important kick-start to economic development. Applying this approach to Africa, these scholars argue that ‘the most successful developers in Africa all qualify as neo-patrimonial regimes’. Rwanda, which has experienced impressive economic growth in recent years, at least partly through the use of party-owned companies for the management and distribution of rents under President Paul Kagame, is seen as a contemporary model case of such ‘developmental patrimonialism’, while Angola, South Africa, Malawi, and Ethiopia are seen as possible sub-types or examples of ‘aspiring developmental patrimonialists’. Zimbabwe on the other hand, where rent management under President Robert Mugabe has been centralized but distributed in short-term and growth-retarding ways, is seen as representing an anti-developmental form of neo-patrimonialism. Angola shares certain characteristics with these countries, such as the presence of a strong dominant ruling party. However, in Angola, key forms of rent distribution take place at the level of the presidency through the centralized use of actors and institutions that have emerged historically outside of the ambit of regular government structures. These involve

foreign business allies and special state agencies such as the country’s national oil company Sonangol. While this has kept regular state institutions weak, the approach has been successful in terms of fast-tracking public investments that are important for rent distribution to key constituencies while keeping political competition at bay. Housing represents an effective instrument in this regard, as it is a tangible good that can be strategically distributed with opportunities for capital accumulation at various stages of the housing delivery process. Although the link between property, politics, and development in Africa has been subject to scholarly attention, most studies tend to focus on land instead of housing. The case of Angola draws attention to the rise of state-led housing development across Africa in recent years and the actors, interests, and institutions that may drive emerging practices of housing delivery on the continent and beyond.

This article does not argue that state-led housing delivery equals development in and of itself or that this approach represents the best or most sustainable path towards long-term, productive, or more impersonal forms of development. Nevertheless, the use of the concept of developmental patrimonialism allows for an analytical distinction between purely predatory and more redistributive or developmental forms of neo-patrimonialism, as well as insights into the logic that underpins such forms of distribution. The case of a resource-rich country such as Angola in turn provides insight into the context-specific ways in which developmental patrimonialism may translate into practice in contemporary Africa. Moreover, it illustrates that political settlements not only vary across countries but also can change over time within a single country, depending on the elements that sustain them. This may very well be the case for Angola as a result of the latest precipitous decline in oil prices that began in mid-2014.

The article starts by unpacking the notion of developmental patrimonialism in the context of the literature on political settlements in order to lay the grounds for a discussion of Angola’s political settlement. It then examines state-led housing delivery in post-war Angola and its use as an instrument of developmental patrimonial rule. The analysis draws on doctoral research conducted between 2011 and 2013 and post-doctoral research conducted in 2014 and 2015, involving interviews with government officials representing central, provincial, and municipal government


as well as local party officials, private sector representatives, and individuals working in the non-governmental and academic sectors in Luanda. Interviews were complemented by observation and the analysis of relevant literature, Angolan legislation, and (online) newspaper archives.

**Unpacking developmental patrimonialism**

If neo-patrimonialism was once seen as the cause of underdevelopment, a growing body of scholarship now argues that neo-patrimonialism does not exclude the possibility of development. Different degrees of neo-patrimonialism may exist and need not represent a fixed or permanent state of affairs, nor is neo-patrimonialism exclusively an African phenomenon.

Drawing on evidence from Asian countries such as Indonesia under General Suharto, Kelsall and colleagues argue that Asian states have not been less patrimonial, rent-seeking, or corrupt than their African counterparts. Their ability to achieve economic growth under these circumstances resulted from the type of patrimonialism employed. Examples from early post-colonial African countries such as Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, and Malawi as well as contemporary Rwanda affirm that when neo-patrimonialism is centrally organized, clientelist pressures and corruption can be kept from spinning out of control, and even channeled into growth and development when this is in line with the interests of those in power. In contrast, countries where rent management is short-term or decentralized tend to perform poorly.

The work of Khan is instructive in explaining the importance of a country’s balance of power in determining political and developmental outcomes. According to Khan, all developing countries represent variants of clientelist political settlements which can be distinguished by the way in which their ruling coalition, or ‘the factions that control political authority and state power in different societies’, is organized. All ruling coalitions face distributions of power at the horizontal and the vertical levels, consisting of excluded factions on the one hand and lower-level factions on the other. In addition, they may contend with the power of domestic capitalists. The degree to which ruling coalitions are able to generate benefits

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in line with the relative power of these groups in society determines the stability of the political settlement and its ability to perform economically.24 Such benefits can consist of the creation of informal institutions such as clientelism or rent transfers, which can underpin both early capitalist accumulation and the political processes of maintaining political stability and legitimacy through the emergence of new capitalists and middle classes. If the distribution of benefits does not match the power of these groups, the order will be challenged and may ultimately collapse.25

Several scholars have sought to further operationalize this work based on various empirical case studies. With reference to the experience of African countries, Hazel Gray uses political settlement analysis to explain how intra-elite conflicts in Tanzania have contributed both to one-party dominance as well as to the persistence of grand corruption and primitive accumulation instead of productive industrial policies.26 Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai and Sam Hickey follow Khan’s notion of ‘holding power’, or the capability of an individual or group to engage and survive in conflicts, to analyse the link between the power of regional elites in ruling coalitions and patterns of resource allocation in Ghana.27 Tom Goodfellow uses political settlement analysis as an analytical tool for understanding patterns of urban development in the context of Kigali, Rwanda.28

The work of Lindsay Whitfield and Lars Buur provides insight into the conditions under which governments pursue and successfully implement industrial policy. They explain the success of the sugar industry in Mozambique and the cocoa sector in Ghana as deriving from the establishment of alliances between the ruling elites and powerful capitalist firms with mutual interests. In addition, the ruling elites must be able to control the higher- and lower-level factions of the ruling coalition to mitigate any potential resistance to the implementation of the policy and to allow for the creation of pockets of efficiency in the state bureaucracy and the productivity know-how necessary for the sector to produce rents and thereby

24. Khan, Political settlements, p. 20.
contribute to political survival. By contrast, Anne Mette Kjær’s comparative analysis of policy initiatives in different economic sectors in Uganda shows what happens when policies run against the interests of powerful factions beyond the control of the ruling elites: political support quickly wanes, pockets of efficiency are not sustained, and initiatives are not implemented to the extent originally intended.

These studies are important in terms of providing insight into the causal linkages between clientelism and the distribution of resources, as well as (the lack of) economic performance. However, most of them examine contexts marked by competitive clientelism and few of them consider contexts where ruling coalitions can generate large amounts of resources without having to extract revenue from domestic actors or having to bargain with other elites.

In Angola, war and the availability of oil produced an elite that for most of its rule did not need to distribute any benefits outside of the actors and institutions necessary to secure access to revenues and thereby nominal state survival. In post-war years, this parallel structure of power was redeployed to extend the scale of distribution with the aim of consolidating the post-war political settlement. In doing so, these parallel structures functioned as pockets of efficiency in the sense that they served to circumvent the weakness of the regular state bureaucracy in order to allow for the effective delivery of goods to key constituents. On the other hand, their purpose was to limit the emergence of potentially powerful factions by tying the delivery of strategic goods and investments to the President and his closest allies.

Angola’s political settlement

While the MPLA government has been in power since Angola reached independence from Portugal in 1975, its rule has been under constant contest. A narrow urban social base and external military support resulted in a victory that was recognized internationally, but internally MPLA rule was contested even before it had taken over the colonial state. During most of the war years that followed, the UNITA rebel movement challenged the MPLA’s hold on power, first with apartheid South African and American backing, and later through its control over the country’s diamond fields. Despite attempts, with Cuban assistance, to mount a socialist state-building project in the early years of independence, the

conflict led to an increasing neglect of the social sector to the point that the MPLA government failed to fulfil even its most basic state functions. Local administrations ceased to operate, and large parts of the rural population came to depend on international NGOs for food aid during the height of the war in the 1990s.33

In a context of political, economic, and military upheaval, the survival of the ruling MPLA coalition, headed by President José Eduardo dos Santos, who took over power in 1979 after the death of the country’s first president Agostinho Neto, was mainly guaranteed by two things: first, by keeping the oil production going, and, second, by the assistance of foreign allies. After Cuba’s withdrawal in the late 1980s and the country’s transition to a market economy, oil (as well as diamonds after UNITA was forced to give up its control over these fields) contributed to obtaining technical and military assistance from countries such as Brazil and Israel. As heavy debt and external arrears closed off more traditional forms of commercial financing to the country, it also allowed the government to obtain oil-backed loans.34

In contrast to African countries that were largely aid-dependent, such as Mozambique, Angola’s reliance on oil resulted in a certain degree of institution building for the purpose of capturing rents derived from oil exploration, albeit parallel to regular government structures.35 While regular state institutions such as line ministries and parastatals were largely staffed with political and often incompetent appointees, the state oil company Sonangol kept many of its pre-independence employees. Careful, consistent, and pragmatic management allowed it to thrive while most state institutions imploded, and by the early 1980s it even managed to surpass late colonial oil production levels.36 This turned Sonangol into a highly efficient and capable ‘state within a state’, which over the years came to provide services that traditionally would be considered to fall under the ambit of the sovereign government, such as the negotiation and servicing of public debt, international relations, wealth management/investment, and various forms of extra-budgetary expenditure, albeit never outside of the purview of the presidency.37

Taken together, this contributed not only to sustaining, and eventually winning, the government’s war against UNITA, but also to suppressing or co-opting any ideological, ethnic, or class-based divisions within its own camp, as well as political and military factions. This resulted in an interesting paradox. As in other socialist countries, decades of single-party rule resulted in political power coming to be largely consolidated within the formal institutions of the ruling party. As Christine Messiant has argued, this meant that the authority of the President rested on no other social base than the party-state. In practice, however, the availability of oil in a context of war allowed for the concentration of political and economic power outside of the party-state, effectively disarming it. Formally, in other words, political power rested with the MPLA because the President would not be able to rule without it, as he needed the party for both external and internal legitimation, and to run for elections. But the President’s control over oil production and revenues allowed him to exercise power through the use of actors and agencies outside of the party-state.

However, the recurrence of war and persistent economic crisis in the 1990s as a result of haphazard economic liberalization made the limits of this instrumental approach, in which the state was merely used as a front for self-enrichment, increasingly clear. Although there was little effective political competition to the MPLA, even after the advent of multi-partyism, discontent with the MPLA government increased inside and outside of the party as well as within the army. Calls started circulating amongst lower-level factions of the ruling coalition to protest on the streets against government corruption, especially in the capital of Luanda, while church, media, and civil society representatives became increasingly vocal about the need for the war to end. In addition, separatist factions in the enclave of Cabinda, which generates the bulk of Angola’s oil, became increasingly violent.
In response, at the height of the crisis in 1996 the President embarked on a mixed strategy of repression and co-optation through the extension of the scale of existing clientelist redistribution and the creation of new forms of clientelist redistribution. On the one hand, this included a certain degree of decentralized rent management: state and army officials were allowed to use their access to the state for private ends, contributing to the emergence of ‘MPLA entrepreneurs’. On the other hand, it involved the use of existing institutions such as Sonangol and the creation of new vehicles such as the President’s own charity organization Fundação Eduardo dos Santos (FESA) as well as other ‘non-governmental’ organizations to distribute rents to targeted constituencies.44

The post-war reconstruction approach essentially represented a continuation of this strategy with the aim of legitimizing and consolidating the MPLA’s victory after the death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi at the hands of government forces in 2002. A doubling of the country’s oil production from about 800,000 barrels in 2002 to over 1.8 million barrels a day in 2007, rising prices on the world market, and the increasing availability of large oil-backed loans made vast resources available to this end.45

Post-war reconstruction also involved technocratic measures to reduce skyrocketing inflation and stabilize macroeconomic conditions through the strengthening of key ministries such as Finance and the National Bank. Mass-scale public investments, estimated at a total of US$93 billion between 2002 and 2014, were devoted to the construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure, ranging from government buildings, schools, and hospitals to water and electricity networks.46 This opened up many opportunities for rent seeking and accumulation, which was allowed, if not encouraged, under the banner of economic development, local content policies, and the building of a national bourgeoisie.47

To ensure that certain strategic goods and investments were delivered effectively, the President created several new special state agencies outside of the regular state bureaucracy. These agencies included, for instance, the Office of National Reconstruction (Gabinete de Reconstrução Nacional or GRN) in 2004, with the purpose of ‘systematically and permanently

45. Soares de Oliveira, Magnificent and beggar land.
46. UCAN, Relatório Económico de Angola 2014 (Universidade Católica de Angola, Centro de Estudos Ciêntificos, Luanda, 2015), p. 11.
accompanying the most fundamental national reconstruction projects’. Headed by the President’s military adviser General Helder Vieira Dias, alias ‘Kopelipa’, GRN included among its projects the rehabilitation of the country’s most important railways and roads, as well as the construction of a new international airport and the construction of over 200,000 housing units with Chinese funding.

By the time the first post-war elections were held in 2008, Luanda resembled a large building site and the entire national territory was under the government’s control. The MPLA won the elections with an overwhelming majority. Its majority in parliament allowed for the adoption of a new constitution in 2010, which ruled out previously planned presidential elections and concentrated power firmly in the executive branch of government, headed by President dos Santos who appoints all key officials in the state administration from ministers through provincial governors and judges to army officials. While officially designated as a ‘presidential-parliamentary’ system, observers argue that the constitution introduced an ‘extreme’ type of presidentialism. By virtue of the new constitution, the President is allowed to remain in power for two mandates of five years from the 2012 elections onwards. The following sections discuss how state-led housing delivery emerged as a key pillar of post-war reconstruction and how it was used to consolidate the post-war political settlement.

State-led housing delivery in post-war Angola

The Angolan government’s involvement in housing development goes back to the first years of socialist state building. Under Portuguese colonial rule, formal housing development was mostly the result of private investment and therefore mainly catered to the needs of the white settler minority living in the city centres. Although the Portuguese colonial government started to recognize the existence of a housing crisis in the final years of its rule as a result of rapid urban growth, local administrations could not keep up with the growing demand for housing in the cities. Their work was usually limited to the recognition of illegally built neighbourhoods in the absence of financial and administrative capacity.

51. Nelson Pestana, ‘Sistema “parlamentar-presidencial” ou presidencialismo extremo?’, Angola Brief 1, 16 (Chr. Michelsen Institute and Centro de Estudos e Investigação Científica, Bergen and Luanda, 2011).

With the transition to a market economy in the early 1990s, the government privatized the national housing stock, allowing those who had occupied housing left behind by the Portuguese settlers as well the politically connected to buy state housing for bargain prices, which in later years could be rented out at a premium.\footnote{António Andrade Tomás, \textit{Refracted governmentality: Space, politics and social structure in contemporary Luanda} (Columbia University, unpublished PhD thesis, 2012); Claudia Gastrow, \textit{Negotiated settlements: Housing and the aesthetics of citizenship in Luanda, Angola} (University of Chicago, unpublished PhD thesis, 2014).} However, most of the increasing number of city dwellers, who had fled the countryside in large numbers because of the conflict, had to rely on their own solutions to the immediate and enduring problem of shelter. By the end of the war in 2002, two-thirds of Luanda’s over three million inhabitants were living in overcrowded slums.\footnote{Paul Robson and Sandra Roque, “‘Here in the city there is nothing left over for lending a hand’: In search of solidarity and collective action in peri-urban areas in Angola’ (Occasional Paper No. 2, Development Workshop, Guelph, 2001); Development Workshop and CEHS, “Terra: Reforma sobre a terra urbana em Angola no período pós-guerra: pesquisa, advogacia e políticas de desenvolvimento” (Occasional Paper No. 6, Development Workshop, Luanda, 2005).} In 2006 the official formal housing deficit was estimated at 878,068 housing units, or 60 percent of the existing housing stock, while figures from a national survey conducted in 2008–9 indicated that 90.9 percent of the urban population lived in inadequate conditions.\footnote{INE, \textit{Inquérito Integrado sobre o Bem Estar da População 2008–2009: Principais Resultados Definitivos} (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, Luanda, 2010).}

In the first few years after the end of the war, state housing development mainly consisted of small-scale projects aimed at reintegrating specific social groups – the Aldeia Nova project for army veterans in the province of Kwanza Sul, for example – or at providing housing for public servants, as in the case of the Nova Vida housing project in Luanda. In addition, social housing projects were set up in Luanda to resettle evicted populations living in informal settlements in areas targeted for urban redevelopment. In order to compensate residents for the demolition of their former homes, houses in these projects were given free of charge. Amongst these social housing
projects, which by 2012 encompassed about 50,000 housing units, the Zango housing project was the main destination for relocation.58

In the run-up to the first post-war elections of 2008, the state’s role in housing development gained real momentum when President dos Santos announced the construction of one million houses throughout the country by 2012. Accompanied by the slogan ‘My Dream, My Home’ (Meu Sonho, Minha Casa), this plan was formally adopted in 2009 as the National Urbanism and Housing Programme.59 Whilst the target was not met by 2012, resulting in a five-year extension of the programme’s time-frame until 2017, existing housing projects were expanded, urban renewal programmes were introduced, and new mass housing settlements locally known as centralidades were completed. In Luanda alone this resulted in the construction of an additional 50,000 housing units by 2016. The best-known of these projects is the new city of Kilamba. With a total contract value of over US$3.5 billion, Kilamba is the largest housing project ever built in Angola, with 20,000 apartments completed in the first phase of the project inaugurated in 2011.60 Other lesser-known but equally large settlements built in the metropolitan area of Luanda include the centralidades of Sequele (also known as Cacuaco), Zango’s Condomínio Vida Pacifica, as well as Musseque Capari and Km 44. Outside of the capital, mass housing settlements were built in the provinces of Cabinda and Lunda Norte, and others are under construction in the provinces of Bié, Huambo, Moçico, Kwanza Sul, and Uíge.61

Observers have criticized the forced evictions that accompanied the state’s housing development efforts,62 the lack of transparency in the ways in which they were implemented,63 and the modernist views that underpin them.64 Nevertheless, state-led housing development became one of the most visible

58. Interview, Programme for the Resettlement of the People (PRP) coordinator in Zango, 27 March 2012. Other social housing projects in Luanda include the Panguila and Sapú projects.
60. An additional 5,000 units were completed in 2015 as part of the second phase of the project, which also involves the construction of service-related infrastructures. A third phase of the project foresees the construction of a total of 70,000 apartments. Site visits and interviews, Kilamba, August 2015.
61. Numbers, images and further information can be found on the website of Imogestin, the management company for these settlements appointed in 2014, see <http://www.imogestin.co.ao/proyecto/centralidades/> (11 October 2016).
64. M. Anne Pitcher and Marissa Moorman. ‘City building in post-conflict, post-socialist Luanda: Burying the past with phantasmagorias of the future’, in Ntone Edjabe and Edgar
pillars of post-war reconstruction. In Luanda, which has doubled in population since the end of the war to almost seven million inhabitants, state investment in new roads, infrastructures, and services to state housing projects connected formerly peripheral areas to the city centre and expanded the city’s borders. This turned social housing projects such as Zango from remote rural areas into new areas of suburban development. For residents of these projects, government houses came to represent an important asset that could be exchanged or used as a source of income generation.65

Housing projects also attracted commercial developments, with the arrival of major commercial banks as well as supermarkets and other retail outlets in and around state housing projects. The new city of Kilamba was labelled a ‘ghost town’ in its early days,66 but the first phase of the project grew to accommodate over 70,000 residents after the initial market prices charged for the sale of houses in Kilamba and other new centralidades were replaced with more affordable rental and buying schemes in 2013.67 In a context where a formal housing shortage and the virtual absence of a domestic construction industry makes housing extremely expensive, studies on the Angolan property market indicate that state housing projects expanded the formal housing stock, making housing available at more affordable rates. Areas surrounding state housing projects in turn attracted additional housing development for lower income segments of the population by private developers.68

State-led housing delivery clearly represented a significant contribution to post-war reconstruction and development on its own terms. However, from a political settlement perspective the crucial questions are: how, by whom and to whom has housing been delivered? Answering these questions illustrates how state-led housing delivery became an instrument of developmental patrimonialism.

State-led housing delivery as an instrument of developmental patrimonialism

The one million houses plan was embedded in an extensive post-war legislative package, which included laws on land, housing, territorial planning, and...
a constitution that enshrines a universal right to housing. In addition, several
government institutions were created that are legally responsible for the pro-
motion of housing and urban development, such as the National Housing
Institute as well as Ministries of Public Works, Urbanism and Construction
and a myriad of high-level working groups and commissions tasked with the
implementation of the National Urbanism and Housing programme.69

However, the implementation of state housing projects was selective in
practice. While the National Urbanism and Housing Programme aims for
the construction of houses across all 18 provinces of the country, delivery
was heavily biased towards the capital of Luanda, as well as resource-
endowed provinces such as the oil-rich province of Cabinda and the
diamond-rich province of Lunda Norte. As shown above, these provinces
historically represented (potential) sites of political unrest and their inclu-
sion in the ruling coalition was therefore crucial. Evidence of preferential
access to state housing for MPLA supporters in the aftermath of the 2012
elections further illustrates the use of housing as a tool to guarantee or
reward the buy-in of strategic lower-level factions.70

Furthermore, while the government’s housing programme officially sti-
pulates that two-thirds of housing delivery should take place through
state-assisted, self-help building, virtually all its efforts and resources have
been concentrated on direct housing delivery by the state. State-assisted,
self-help building requires coordinated action by various government
structures in order to allow for the allotment, titling, and servicing of plots
of land. In contrast, direct construction not only allows for the fast-
tracking of housing delivery, but also for the centralization of the distribu-
tion of associated rents.

Compared to regular government institutions, special agencies involved
in delivering housing were well staffed and resourced, granted much more
autonomy, and experienced greater continuity in their leadership. These
special agencies include the GRN and Sonangol, both of which were
responsible for the management of the construction of the new cities built in
and outside of Luanda, the Office of Special Works (known by its Portu-
guese acronym GOE), which was involved in the management and con-
struction of social housing together with a Programme for the Resettlement
of the People, and the Office for the Urban Renewal of Cazenga, Sambian-
ga, and Rangel, created to manage housing construction as part of a project

69. Sylvia Croese, ‘1 million houses? Angola’s national reconstruction and Chinese and
Brazilian engagement’, Strengthening the civil society perspective series II: China and other
70. Following the 2012 elections a list of beneficiaries of houses in Kilamba was published
in the state-owned newspaper Jornal de Angola, which included the names of 23 musicians
who had participated in the MPLA electoral campaign. See Jornal de Angola, ‘Lista da
distribuição de casas da nova centralidade do Kilamba’, 13 October 2012.
to redevelop Luanda’s oldest informal settlements in the northern part of the city. As a result, these agencies reached a level of efficiency that was out of reach for regular government institutions, most of which continued to lack the technical competence or resources to function effectively and were subject to frequent leadership and organizational changes. For instance, the Ministry of Urbanism was repeatedly restructured: from Ministry of Urbanism and Housing (2008–10) to Ministry of Urbanism and Construction (2010–12), followed by a split into a Ministry of Urbanism and Housing and a Ministry of Construction in 2013. In contrast, the Programme for the Resettlement of the People and the Office for the Urban Renewal of Cazenga, Sambizanga, and Rangel were managed by the same person after 2011: Bento Soito, an architect and former vice-governor of Luanda for technical affairs. The appointment of figures close to the presidency for the management of key agencies in turn gave them access to vast opportunities for accumulation through commissions, kick-backs, and the creation of businesses linked to housing delivery. In return, these elites kept very low political profiles, thereby forming an important contribution to the President’s long-term, virtually unchallenged incumbency. Such figures included General ‘Kopelipa’, General Leopoldino Fragoso do Nascimento (alias ‘Dino’), the presidency’s head of telecommunications, and Manuel Vicente, Sonangol’s CEO from 1999 to 2012 and Vice-President of the Republic from 2012 to 2016. These three elite figures represent ‘the triumvirate that dominates Angola’s political economy’. Yet, while enjoying special status, these elites and the special agencies they head could be disbanded or weakened if they were seen as failing or becoming too powerful. This was arguably the case of the GRN, which was disbanded in 2010, or the reason for the dismissal of Vicente as Sonangol’s CEO in 2012. Nevertheless, General Kopelipa and Vicente retained important privileges and stakes in businesses resulting from their time in ‘service’, with their stakes in the agency appointed to sell houses in Kilamba on behalf of the government as well as a supermarket chain with branches close to each new housing project merely scratching the surface of their accumulated capital.

In addition to special presidential agencies, foreign business partners played an important role in consolidating the post-war political settlement. China extended oil-backed loans to Angola worth at least $15 billion on very favourable terms, allowing for housing construction on an unprecedented scale, even in times of crisis. When the drop in oil prices in 2009 forced the government to seek IMF assistance to restore

73. Morais, ‘The ill-gotten gains behind the Kilamba housing development’.
macroeconomic balances and rebuild international reserves, an additional loan by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China ensured the continuation and delivery of ongoing housing projects within the stipulated time frames. However, the scale of China’s contribution has overshadowed the role of business partners from countries such as Brazil, Israel, and Lebanon, who maintain long-term relationships of trust and loyalty with the Angolan presidency that were built up during the war, resulting in a closely knit network of patronial ties, alliances, and interests. Their involvement in housing development serves mutual interests as it comes with much-needed financing, technical experience, and knowledge in return for government contracts.

Brazil was the first country to recognize the MPLA government officially upon independence and has extended oil-backed loans in return for contracts and economic interests in the country since the 1980s. Brazil’s ties with Angola also extend to the cultural realm through the broadcasting of Brazilian soap operas and music. These cultural affinities contribute to a degree of trust and influence that reaches the highest echelons of the Angolan political leadership. Brazilian consultants have assisted the MPLA with its electoral campaigns since the 1992 elections, and ‘My Dream, My Home’, the slogan accompanying Angola’s housing programme, has an uncanny resemblance to Brazil’s housing programme ‘My home, my life’. Half of the projects carried out under the $3.2 billion in credit lines extended by the Brazilian Development Bank to Angola in post-war years were executed by the engineering and construction firm Odebrecht, whose CEO reportedly enjoys a close relationship to President dos Santos. As a result, Odebrecht became one of the main contractors in urban infrastructures and social housing development, and the largest employer after the Angolan government.

During the war, Israeli involvement in Angola mainly consisted of the selling of arms and defence equipment to the government at a time when

75. For a background to Brazil’s presence in Angola, see Ricardo Valente Cardoso, The crude urban revolution: Land markets, planning forms and the making of a New Luanda (University of California, Berkeley, unpublished PhD thesis, 2015).
77. Interview, Odebrecht representative, Zango, 24 November 2011.
officially it faced an arms embargo. In addition, Israeli intelligence reportedly played a crucial role in terms of locating UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. In post-war years, Israeli companies came to hold interests in the diamond industry and agriculture, but the largest Israeli company in Angola is Mitrelli (formerly LR group). In 2011 it was contracted to build 40,000 houses in the provinces of Bié, Huambo, Mexico, Kwanza Sul, and Uíge, according to a master plan designed by the Brazilian architect and former mayor Jaime Lerner. For this purpose, it created the company Kora, a partnership with Sonangol’s real estate arm Sonip under a $2.5 billion credit line extended by the Israeli company Luminar Finance. Following presidential orders, Mitrelli was also contracted to undertake a large-scale titling project of state-built housing and to design plans for their management.

Lebanese companies have been present in Angola since the late 1970s and mostly operated in the food trade, but the chairman of the Lebanese engineering firm Dar-al-Handasah developed a personal relationship with President dos Santos during the war. In the 1990s, the company conducted a study on the metropolitan area of Luanda which was to provide the basis for a future master plan for Luanda. In post-war years it became a ubiquitous but always discreet presence in the city as well as across the country by overseeing virtually all major public infrastructure projects, including housing. The closeness of the company to the presidency is further illustrated when looking at its ties to FESA, the President’s personal non-profit charity organization, with the director of Dar-al-Handasah Angola being the president of FESA’s audit committee as well as a partner in FESA’s investment arm Suninvest.

Taken together, the mutual and intricate interests binding both foreign and domestic actors to the Angolan presidency were instrumental to the mass-scale delivery of housing in post-war years to key constituents. The rents and benefits generated in the process contributed to limiting political competition and reinforcing power in the presidency, thereby

81. The founder and chairman of the company writes about this and his relationship with the Angolan president in Kamal Shair, *Out of the Middle East: The emergence of an Arab global business* (I. B. Tauris, London and New York, NY, 2006).
representing an important contribution to the consolidation of the post-war political settlement.

**Conclusion**

While most of the scholarship on Angola sees post-war reconstruction as an exercise in self-enrichment at the expense of development, this article argues that one thing does not necessarily exclude the other. In line with a growing literature, the article shows that personal and centralized rule can be mobilized for developmental purposes if this is in the interests of those in power. The way in which this happens depends on the characteristics of each particular political settlement. In the case of post-war Angola, power in this settlement is highly concentrated in the presidency, which directly controls the management and distribution of rents derived from the country’s oil production through the use of actors and agencies that function parallel to regular government institutions.

During the war these rents largely served a narrow political elite, as generally found in other presidential regimes. However, the increasing inability of this approach to ensure political stability resulted in an extension and redeployment of these parallel structures to allow for a wider distribution of rents. Mass-scale, state-led housing delivery is illustrative of the emergence of a redistributive form of clientelism in post-war years which, even if selective, went far beyond elite clientelism. While keeping regular state institutions weak, critics acknowledge that compared to other African petro-states such as ‘chronically turbulent Nigeria’, the centralization of power in Angola contributed to ‘political stability and elite cohesion […] which allowed it to generate a strong degree of purposive power’. The use of this power for the purpose of housing delivery benefited strategic constituents, while limiting internal or external challenges to the ruling coalition through the maintenance of a close-knit network of important allies of the presidency.

The case of Angola shows that housing represents an effective instrument of such developmental patrimonialism, as it allows for the distribution and accumulation of rents at various levels of the political settlement. Moreover, it provides insight into the factors that may enable and drive state-led housing development, such as the availability of resource-backed financing, the role of foreign business allies, and the use of special agencies as pockets of efficiency which bypass regular state structures.

So far, Angola’s version of developmental patrimonialism has suppressed any effective challengers to the current political settlement, whether from within the ruling party or the political opposition. However, this hinges on a precarious balance. The most recent drop in oil prices has reduced the resources available for redistribution, and support amongst lower-level factions is decreasing as evidenced by reduced voter turnout and support for the ruling party in the 2012 elections. Outbursts of social unrest have been on the rise and have been met with repression.\textsuperscript{85} In this context, the study of how, by whom, and to whom state-built housing will or will not continue to be delivered will be key to understanding the evolution of Angola’s political settlement in the coming years.