Making New Mine Towns and Reviving Old Ones on the Zambian Copperbelt

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Since the copper boom from 2004 in Zambia, new mine towns are being built and old ones revived. This paper draws on two case studies, a new mine town in formation, Lumwana, in North Western Province also known as the 'new Copperbelt'; and an old one, Luanshya, on the Zambian Copperbelt experiencing a revival of mining activity after a period of decline. The settlement in Lumwana offers an opportunity to study the process of making a mine town that is dubbed to become an important regional centre for the North West region of Zambia. In Lumwana new houses and other infrastructure are being built and like Luanshya in the 1930's a town is literally 'emerging out of the bush', changing a rural landscape to an urban one. Luanshya, on the other hand, one of the oldest mine towns on the urban Copperbelt underwent a period of rapid decline, being called a 'ghost town' at one point and experienced a perceptible trend towards 'de-urbanisation'[i]. As formal mining activity gave way to subsistence economic activity, Luanshya showed visible signs of a process of 'villagisation'[ii] as urban agricultural activities intensified and a rise in costs and decline in quality for services like piped water and electricity made people turn to digging wells for water and charcoal for energy. The recent boom in mining activity in the town does not seem to have significantly changed these trends and new mine settlement in the town has been sporadic and somewhat stuttering in nature, transposed on a largely worn infrastructure. Drawing on ethnographic data, the paper begins by drawing out the individual narratives of mineworkers making home in these two areas. Contextualized within the recent history of the Copperbelt, the paper seeks to link these micro processes of settlement to wider political economic trends of spatial zoning, for example the creation of special economic zones; planning regulations, infrastructural development and service delivery. The paper argues that like early Copperbelt discussions on the stabilisation of the labour force and urbanization; a study of contemporary mine settlement provides an empirical background to understanding contemporary processes of urbanisation and local perceptions of the stability of new mine investment.

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[i] Debra Potts indicates trends of counter-urbanisation on the Zambian Copperbelt. "Shall we go home? Increasing urban poverty in African cities and migration processes", *The Geographical Journal* 161, no. 3 (1995): 245-264

[ii] Rene Devisch writing on Kinshasa describes the domestication of the modernist vision of the city by a rural social logic that he refers to as villagisation, similar processes can be described in Luanshya. "Pillaging Jesus: healing churches and the villagisation of Kinshasa", *Africa* 66, no. 4 (1996): 555-586