Dias (1981) Famine and Disease in the History of Angola

In this article Jill Dias explores the history and famine and disease of Angola from 1830-1930. This was the time period when Africa was gradually changing due to colonization from the Europeans, especially from the Portuguese. Dias explains exactly what she wants the readers to get out of her article in the first page of her essay. She makes an argument that colonization from foreign countries have worsened famine and epidemic disease in Angola. I believe this is one of her main arguments because she mentions it very often throughout the entire article. Dias also explains in her essay the basic reasons for food scarcity in Angola which include factors such as climate, geography, and advancements in technologies.

Dias begins her essay by explaining the irregularity of the rainfall in Angola. Irregular rainfall sounds like it's not a big deal issue, especially for those of us who live in a time period that benefits from advanced technology, but for those in Angola it was a huge problem. During periods of scarce rainfall droughts were common and regularly followed by locust invasions and plagues by other crop-destroying pests such as rats, frogs and ants, which multiply rapidly in dry weather (Dias 1981: 353). Droughts would also cause lakes to dry out, resulting in the death of the fish population in the lake. When there were periods of abundant rainfalls rivers would flood and the floods would destroy newly planted crops. These problems directly affect the food supply in Angola including cattle and fish, which were very insufficient to begin with because of the limited amount of arable land in Angola. Also there weren't many advancements in farming during this time period in Angola because settlements were usually around a river, where crops were more likely to survive and also irrigation was not yet discovered /adopted there.

Dias continues to explain the effects that scarce food supply have on people, many of which include revolts, war, migration of people, and famine. She then goes on to talk about the colonization of Angola, and how people are enslaved and put to work on crops that are sold to other countries rather than helping to increase the food supply in Angola. People were so desperate for food that they even resorted to selling their relatives and children for sacks of food and seeds. Since food was scarce many people were malnourished and diseases were easily obtained. The malnourished sick people would help spread the disease like smallpox and yellow fever by moving from place to place spreading the disease. Slaves were also very prone to getting these diseases because of their poor hygiene and close living arrangements. Diseases were also spread by caravans, which were used by plantation owners to transport crops and slaves. The introduction of rum due to the expansion of European labor also became a problem in Angola, for example Plantation owners used it to pay labourers on the plantations which produced it (Dias 1981: 375).

Dias says that the "malnutrition continued to be the most widespread and serious problem by the twentieth century, especially in areas affected by the spread of European trade and agriculture" (Dias 1981:375). She strongly correlates the expedition of disease and famine with the colonization from foreign countries. I think that she stresses the scarcity of food and the spread of disease to inform people that this is an important issue and many of these unfortunate events that happened in Angola are still happening. There are many revolts in Angola due to lack of food, and other reasons which Dias wants other people to explore and find solutions to. It seems to me that famine and disease have a strong correlation because if people are malnourished their resistance to diseases goes down, and since the climate in Angola makes it viable for diseases to grow and spread many people die. This makes many people unhappy and revolt against the institutions put in charge. This article makes me very grateful for all the things that I have and the my life in America.

I think this would also be very helpful for my research on Angola, because it gives me the background and history of what the conditions were like before in Angola, making it possible for me to compare and contrast the current situation in Angola.