Extraction and beyond: people's economic responses to restructuring in southern and central Africa

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People's economic activities in southern and central Africa have undergone major transformations in the last three decades, influenced by significant structural changes in the configurations of big capital and state–capital relations. The focus of this edited collection is on people's economic responses to restructuring in the three mining centres of South Africa, the Zambian Copperbelt and Haut-Katanga, DRC. There is a growing interest in comparing the central African Copperbelt, but, to our knowledge, there has not been any systematic comparison of these three interconnected mining systems.[1]

By 'mining system' we mean a specific historical configuration that developed from the interactions, negotiations and conflicts between mining capital, colonial powers, colonised polities, migrant and local labour, and local communities. While capital was internationalised from early on, the forms of state–capital relations that emerged in the three locales shaped them into separate, albeit interconnected and open-ended, systems. Mining companies competed over labour, with African migrants and their families often moving across these areas, but also capital and international markets. Dynamics of competition and cooperation also occurred between the different colonial states. While these systems developed their own specificities, the original goal of conquest for extraction of raw materials destined to the metropolitan markets was common to all three configurations. These processes produced massive displacements and large-scale disruptions of existing economic activities (including mining), international trade, and migration routes.

As a heuristic device, we selected articles that study people's economic activities in various geographic areas directly linked to the three mining systems. We included urban mining centres as well as rural labour-sending areas from within and outside the mining countries' national borders. In sectoral terms, we kept the focus as broad as possible, trying to provide some analysis of: how large-scale mining and its institutions have changed over time (Stewart and Nite, Macmillan, and Uzar, in this issue); how people residing in urban mining centres and formerly employed in large-scale mining moved to other economic activities (Rubbers, in this issue); how artisanal mining developed alongside the decline of large-scale mining (Cuvelier, in this issue); and how rural sending areas fared with the drastic reduction of mining employment (Johnson, and van der Waal, in this issue).

Most of the articles in this special issue are contemporary ethnographic case studies, rooted in an awareness of the political economy of the region and engaging to varying extents with the history of the three mining systems. Different scales are at work here – for example, while one article engages with the changes in the configurations of big capital and state–capital relations in South Africa (Macmillan, in this issue), another is a national case study of mining trade unions in times of privatisation in Zambia (Uzar, in this issue).

The next three sections will provide a synthetic comparative historical overview of the main trends in the complex interactions between race, class and capital in the three mining systems, from the inception of large-scale capitalist mining to the present day. The purpose is to bring together already available knowledge into a comparative framework, to provide key context to the collection and stimulate further discussion and research. The emphasis reflects recent academic and public debates around the issues of incomplete transformation and decolonisation in the study of Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Mamdani 2016).

The historical overview is followed by a thematic review of the articles in the collection, focusing on four main themes: agency, precarity and resilience; rural/urban interdependence and multiple livelihoods; family, gender and generation; and large-scale institutions and state–capital relations. A brief conclusion highlights the key methodological contribution of this project, and suggestions for future research.

The establishment of colonial capitalism

In all three areas, the main purpose for European conquest and settlement was the extraction of raw materials to fuel the development of the metropolitan centres. This happened at a great cost of human lives among the African population, and was a brutal affair marked by various forms of domination, dispossession and disruption of the autonomy and well-being of African societies. Economic expansion was accompanied by the might of racist political systems that excluded Africans from meaningful citizenship, privileging white settlers, workers and administrators.

The rich histories of indigenous mining (Chirikure 2015), architecture (Chirikure and Pikirayi 2008), political and religious systems (Diop 1987), health and healing (Flint 2008) and other domains were erased through physical conquest and destruction and the production of colonial knowledge that emphasised myths of African inferiority and underdevelopment (see Esterhuysen, Swanepoel, and Bonner 2008).

In South Africa, the Western rush for minerals started with diamond mining in Kimberley in the early 1870s and accelerated its pace and scale in the 1880s, with the extraction of gold in the Witwatersrand. British capitalist Cecil John Rhodes was involved since the beginning, and played a key role in diamond and gold extraction. His vision of building a railway from Cape to Cairo connecting the African territories conquered by the British well exemplifies the imperialist ambitions of white capital at the time.

From the 1890s, Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC) controlled what later became known as Northern Rhodesia – today's Zambia. Rhodes' railway did not make it to Cairo, but did reach Ndola in 1909, stimulating large-scale development of industrial copper mining (Mususa 2012a, 574). BSAC's mineral concession was exploited by the Rhodesian Selection Trust, funded by American capital, and Anglo American, created by Ernest Oppenheimer, who moved to South Africa from Germany. Anglo American would become one of the major players in South African gold and diamond mining.

Rhodes' ambitions were however curbed in Katanga, on the other side of the border, as King Leopold of Belgium had already established his claim over the area and secured British approval in 1885 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). As elsewhere, different Western interests entered a dynamic of competition and partnership. The *Union minière du Haut-Katanga* (UMHK) was established in 1906 to mine copper, but later also cobalt, uranium and other minerals. It was controlled by Belgian companies with interests closely tied to the Belgian royal family. A minority share was given to Tanganyika Concessions Limited (TCL), financed by British banks and owned by British entrepreneur Robert Williams, who was close to Cecil Rhodes (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002).

The growth of colonial urban infrastructure went hand in hand with the expansion of the mining industry. The companies were in dire need of labour. Colonial rule was aimed to a large degree at securing African cheap labour through a mix of hard and soft coercive mechanisms, including the imposition of tax on African households and the repression imposed on those who wished to escape forced integration into the cash economy. Large-scale migration across the region in this era was largely dictated by such factors. Mining companies competed for labour, and, over time, there were significant differences in wages and other benefits received by African miners.

The South African system was certainly the worst in terms of labour stabilisation policies: companies and authorities did not offer male migrant miners the possibility to settle with their families in urban areas, and enforced strict controls on African migration through the infamous Pass Laws, which were established well before the formalisation of apartheid under the National Party. Workers came primarily from Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, and the 'native reserves' within South Africa (Feinstein 2005, 64–65), to which Africans were confined for permanent settlement after mass land dispossession was imposed by the white-only parliament with the Natives Land Act of 1913.

UMHK spearheaded stabilisation from early on and, from the early 1920s, actively encouraged the creation of a disciplined permanent urban workforce that would have reproduced with less need for migrant labour. African migration from other areas of the Congo, the Belgian possessions of Urundi-Rwanda, and what the Belgians called the 'Rhodesias' (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi) remained significant throughout the colonial period (Higginson 1988a, 1988b). The Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt followed a trajectory that was closer to Katanga than South Africa. Some measures of labour stabilisation were implemented after World War II when large-scale provision of family housing to African miners started (Macmillan 2012, 543), but the policy only gained momentum in the 1950s, in the last decade of colonial rule (Phimister 2011).

The imposition of capitalist production regimes was accompanied by resistance and repression. Higginson's history of the UMHK highlights how the state apparatus punished workers resisting attempts at incorporation into the alienating bureaucratic structures of the mines (Higginson 1988a, 1988b, 1988c). Across the region, waves of spontaneous workers' strikes and urban protests were brutally quashed, often with large numbers of African casualties (Epstein 1958; Higginson 1988a, 1988b, 1988c; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002; Feinstein 2005).

Overall this kind of capitalist economic development established and reinforced economic dualism, where enclaves of mining and urban development were separated from rural areas under customary tenure which provided a large reserve of labour for the urban areas (see Lewis 1954, 1977, applied to southern and central Africa by Mhone 2001, Feinstein 2005, Hart and Padayachee 2013, and Laterza 2016).[2] The degree to which African workers were excluded from meaningful participation in capitalist economic growth varied, and the extent to which white workers and settlers were present was one, but not the only factor constraining Africans' opportunities to rise up in the colonial mining system (see Phimister 2011).

In South Africa and Northern Rhodesia, the presence of white miners was a major obstacle to African advancement and sustained a harsh racial bar in the mining sector (Feinstein 2005; Larmer 2016). In South Africa, the alliance of disgruntled Afrikaners impoverished by the Boer War and English-speaking white workers consolidated in the 1920s, and pushed against attempts by mining capital to implement labour stabilisation and substitute white skilled labour with cheap African skilled labour (Feinstein 2005, 77, 82–89). In Northern Rhodesia too, similar attempts by mining capital were delayed by the political influence of white miners and their trade unions (Phimister 2011).

Things were different in Katanga. White miners did not have the same clout, and could not count on the support of a large settler community (Higginson 1988b, 207, 210). Even though UMHK gradually reduced the number of white workers, the management cadres stayed in white hands, and the differentials in wages and benefits between white and black workers remained enormous (Higginson 1988b, 206).

Despite this hostile environment, African men and women built their own semi-autonomous spaces and engaged in various economic activities that complemented formal labour in the mines. Urban agriculture, in some cases supported by the mines, continued even in the more stabilised areas of the central African Copperbelt. The rural/urban divide was constantly subverted by the emergence of a growing informal economy that linked the two worlds and different forms of economic livelihoods. Initially excluded from wage labour, women were prominent in this economy that encompassed various activities from urban agriculture to beer brewing and petty trade. African miners and urban residents also created voluntary associations, fostering a thriving civic life that intersected with the various phases of anti-colonial popular politics and the constraints imposed on formal representation of workers and African citizens (see for instance Chipande 2016).

Independence, apartheid and neocolonialism

The fight for African emancipation was fraught with difficulties, frustrated by an international neocolonial system still dominated by Western capital. Cold War propaganda equated socialist redistribution programmes to 'communist threats' and alignment with Soviet interests.

After nearly a century of colonial brutality started with millions of deaths caused by King Leopold's conquest, a mass insurrection in Congo brought about one of the shortest liberation struggles in the history of the continent, leading to independence in 1960. Congolese people lost their political freedom as quickly as they gained it. Patrice Lumumba became prime minister after his *Movement National Congolais-Lumumba* won the first democratic elections in the country. Lumumba had made it clear that his nationalist liberation agenda included wide-ranging economic redistribution and breaking dependence upon Western capitalism. He was killed as part of a campaign to quash his movement, with the active support of US and Belgian governments, the CIA and the UN Secretariat (de Witte 2001; Zeilig 2013; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2014).

A protracted 'civil war' – where Western powers had their people on the ground picking and choosing sides – ended in 1965 with the rise of Mobutu Sese Seko. Propped up by Western interests, Mobutu ruled as dictator of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), later renamed Zaire, from 1965 to 1997. In the early 1960s, Katanga tried its own secession, where the Katangese nationalist party CONAKAT proclaimed themselves the voice of the 'authentic Katangese' and promoted ethnic violence against people of Kasaian origins, who were filling the ranks of the Lumumbists, strongly in favour of Congolese nationalism (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2007, 76–77). CONAKAT and the Katangese gendarmes were supported by UMHK and Belgian settlers (Kennes and Larmer 2016), who saw Katangese secession as a way to secure their control over Katangese mineral wealth and a vehicle to ally with white Rhodesian interests pushing against African liberation (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002).

Mobutu used discourses of Africanisation and independence – under the rubric of 'authenticity' and Zairianisation – to mask the reality of an economy that remained in the grip of foreign capital (Young and Turner 1985). The Katangese mines were nationalised in 1967, when UMHK gave way to the *Générale des carrières et des mines* (known as Gécamines). But it was a nationalisation in name more than in fact. The international value chain continued to be controlled by UMHK's Belgian mother company. Management, processing and marketing contracts in Katanga were granted to a sister company of the UMHK in the *Société Générale de Belgique* group (Young and Turner 1985, 107–108; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). African hires in administrative posts increased significantly, but there remained an 'upward floating colour bar' of the kind Burawoy (1972) identified in the early post-independence period in the Zambian Copperbelt. White people moved up the ladder and continued to occupy technical and managerial posts, while also fetching higher wages than black personnel at comparable levels (Young and Turner 1985, 107–108).

Gécamines workers were in a situation of relative privilege compared to workers in other sectors, including public sector employees. The sharp decline in global copper prices from the mid 1970s, coupled with the Mobutu regime's mismanagement and corruption, caused widespread economic suffering. Gécamines' welfare system of food rations, housing and other benefits in kind was maintained, buffering workers from the worst of the downturn. The rest of the population did not have this safety net (Dibwe dia Mwembu 2001). The early period of Mobutu's rule saw the expansion of private foreign investment in mining alongside the nationalisation of Gécamines (Young and Turner 1985). This was an early case of neocolonial liberalisation in Africa, which became common across the continent with the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s. Western investors were prominent in this expansion.

The Zambian case was more successful, thanks to President Kenneth Kaunda's sincere attempt at taking control of the mining sector. Kaunda started the gradual nationalisation of the mines in 1970 and cancelled private companies' management contracts in 1973 (Mususa 2014, 28), leading in 1982 to the creation of the state-owned Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM). While an expatriate class of managers and miners was maintained, Zambians rose all the way to top management. ZCCM significantly expanded worker welfare provisions, enabling a prosperous life for African miners and their families marked by the availability of top schooling, recreational facilities, and well-kept garden towns (Mususa 2014). Many of the miners' children went on to take up top management and leadership positions in the mines, other sectors of the economy and national politics.

In the end, the hegemony of international market forces controlled by Western capital got the better of it. The commodity slowdown which started in the mid 1970s eventually led to economic decline and widespread suffering in the mid 1980s. As in Katanga, Copperbelt miners and their families were protected from the worst of it thanks to the ZCCM welfare system (Mususa 2014, 5–6). Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, Kaunda carried out the first sustained attempt at implementing structural adjustment policies in 1983, further worsening the situation (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2000). By 1987, Kaunda abandoned IMF policies altogether, but it was already too late. By the end of the 1980s, widespread riots had taken over the country, led by militant Copperbelt unions. In 1991, multi-party democracy replaced Kaunda's one-party rule.

The decline experienced in Katanga and the Zambian Copperbelt was marked by the increasing prominence of the informal economy, and a renewed effort in urban agriculture and subsistence food production. Women's and children's labour became more central in the household economy, as male mining capacity for income creation worsened.

As DR Congo and Zambia faced the early decades of independence, South Africa went through apartheid, starting with the instalment of the Afrikaner nationalist government in 1948. Apartheid saw the intensification of the exploitative measures of the colonial period, leading to further dispossession and mass evictions. A consolidation and expansion of job reservation for whites stifled any chance of African improvement in the mining hierarchy. The migrant labour system continued, but some changes were made. In the mid 1970s the gold mines – the biggest employer in the mining sector – started to reduce reliance on labour from other African countries (Harington, McGlashan, and Chelkowska 2004), and they later made adjustments by privileging returnees employed on successive contracts (Feinstein 2005, 207).

South Africa did not experience the downturn that affected the central African Copperbelt from the mid 1970s. Following the demise of the gold standard, gold prices were booming. However, the conditions of the black population were not improving: there were no substantial gains in wages, and overcrowded rural areas posed more challenges for African livelihoods.

The drop in gold prices from the mid 1980s triggered a structural crisis that was the end result of the skewed economic model of apartheid. The downfall of gold mining could not be replaced by the rise of other minerals, and industrial policies to expand manufacturing also failed. The fall of gold coincided with the expansion of international economic sanctions, the flight of Western capital, and increased militancy of African workers and the anti-apartheid struggle. The last job reservation measure in the mining sector was scrapped in 1988, and in 1990 South Africa's president, F. W. De Klerk, declared the end of apartheid, leading to the first democratic election in 1994 and black majority rule.

Neoliberalism

The aggressive wave of neoliberal reforms of the last two decades produced a convergence across the region.

In DR Congo, Joseph Kabila's rule (2001 to date) has been marked by various armed conflicts. Kabila continued Mobutu's and Laurent Kabila's practice of forging close ties with foreign interests, favouring a handful of Congolese politicians and business people who enriched themselves by allying to foreign investors at the expense of the vast majority.[3] In other parts of DR Congo outside Katanga, Rwandan and Ugandan governments have developed their own neocolonial ambitions (Kabamba 2012). Together with international capital and Western governments, these regional powers are involved in the exploitation of DR Congo's rich mineral resources (Abadie 2011) and in armed conflicts causing the death of millions of Congolese people (IRC 2007). In Katanga, Gécamines entered terminal decline in the 1990s and the copper and cobalt mining sector has been taken over by private companies – primarily Western concessions, but also Chinese and Indian investors (Rubbers, in this issue).

In Zambia, the privatisation of the mines in the 1990s had major negative effects on Copperbelt livelihoods. Zambians lost control of mining and other sectors of the economy, reconquered by foreign capital. Copper mining is dominated by Western companies, with a strong presence of Chinese and Indian capital (Fessehaie and Morris 2013). Southern African whites and Western expatriates, and, in smaller numbers, Chinese and Indians, have increased their prominence in the management of the top tiers of the economy. This is a significant setback from the gains made during the Kaunda era. Despite the endorsement of a pro-poor policy agenda since the late President Michael Sata was elected in 2011, politicians and government are closely aligned to the interests of global capital. In both the Zambian Copperbelt and Katanga, informality is now the rule (see Mususa 2014 and Rubbers, in this issue).

In South Africa, the negotiated transition has brought some changes in ownership, including a small share of black ownership, but the mining sector remains firmly in the hands of local white and Western capital (Macmillan, in this issue). White employees occupy a dominant position in upper-middle management across the private sector and are disproportionately represented in the professional and skilled technical levels (CEE 2016, 15–39). The percentage of white employees increases as one moves up the ladder – another instance of an upward floating colour bar (Burawoy 1972). Overt conflict between white and black middle classes is more pronounced than in DR Congo and Zambia, partly due to bigger numbers of white people. Data on current income and wealth levels show how stark the racial inequalities are (see Orthofer 2016 and Wittenberg 2014).

Here too the continued dominance of big capital has coincided with the co-option of a handful of black business people and politicians at the top, rather than wider redistribution to the majority. Post-apartheid neoliberal governance has meant more restructuring in the mining sector and increasing casualisation of labour, which fuel labour and community unrest. Fractures along race lines also combined with emerging conflicts around class, gender and citizenship. The growth of discrimination and violence against migrants from other African countries is one such phenomenon, reflected in the contestations between constructed notions of 'locals' and 'foreigners' in the mining workforce (see Mnwana 2015).

Several decades after political liberation the vast majority of the black population of southern and central Africa is at the bottom of income levels and asset ownership, experiences harsh living and working conditions, and is afflicted by major health hazards and low life expectancy. For all the talk about the 'rising' African middle class, there is little sign of linear upward mobility among large sectors of the black population. In all three mining systems, the number of miners has reduced greatly, and the vast majority of the workforce is casualised and badly paid. The modest but significant social grant system instituted in post-apartheid South Africa buffers rural communities in the country from the worst of a tough economic climate, but the former labour reserves in other countries and the central African Copperbelt have seen no such system in place. In the central African Copperbelt, the disappearance of the welfare orientation of Gécamines and ZCCM has left a void that the burgeoning informal economy will not be able to fill.

The articles in this special issue

The historical outline above provides essential context for the works in this collection. When zooming in on local and national realities, it is important to bear in mind the structural inequalities and constraints that people face across the three areas under study. The main focus is on how people carry out their economic activities in times of crisis and restructuring, and their agency in interpreting the past and shaping present and future conditions. This attention to people's agency is not however delinked from the interaction of micro and macro levels. The cases presented here are grounded in political economy. They complement and enrich structural analyses.

Agency, precarity and resilience

One point that resonates strongly across our collection is a caution against the misuse of the categories of destitution, poverty and structural oppression. The latter should not become disempowering analytical tools that portray people as an undifferentiated mass of 'victims' of neoliberalism. This does not mean that we should gloss over the structural factors at play. The negative effects of a victim discourse on communities struggling against the ills of big capital and neocolonialism have already been discussed at length by scholars influenced by the black consciousness movement in South Africa (e.g., Pityana et al. 1991; Ramphele 1991).

The question of agency is closely related to how people respond to and cope with conditions of precarity – a concept now widely debated in discussions of labour and economy worldwide (e.g., Standing 2011). While there is no doubt that the recent decades of aggressive neoliberalism and austerity are producing a convergence of sorts between North and South, the structural conditions of precarity are not something particularly new in southern and central Africa (Bellucci 2017; Larmer 2017). They are rooted in the harsh labour systems of colonialism and apartheid. Even where the mining workforce in the post-independence period in the central African Copperbelt experienced more stable and prosperous livelihoods, miners and their families were still inserted into wider kinship networks linking them with people in urban and rural areas who were not protected by welfare measures.

In this case too, the need to move beyond structural analyses is evident: how do communities cope with adverse events? How do they deal with crisis? What are the factors that enable or inhibit people's capabilities to creatively adapt to external shocks? How do people maintain a multifaceted set of social, economic and political relations that nurtures the social fabric and their sense of belonging in an uncertain world?

Most of the articles deal with these complex interactions between agency, precarity and resilience. Benjamin Rubbers' article explores the economic trajectories undertaken by retrenched miners in the old mining centres of Haut-Katanga. His piece focuses on former Gécamines miners who joined the voluntary departure programme sponsored by the World Bank, and received a lump sum in lieu of their terminal benefits to start fresh with various economic activities. Rubbers takes issue with some of the recent studies which emphasise uncertainty in crisis (e.g., Whyte 1997; Haram and Bawa Yamba 2009; Mususa 2012b). Despite the enormous odds set against former miners turned 'entrepreneurs', the skills they acquired during the golden era of the structured bureaucracy of the Gécamines helps them plan and impose some order in a volatile market environment – see also Mususa 2014 for an analysis of similar trends in the Zambian Copperbelt, emphasising people's relationships with the material environment.

Jeroen Cuvelier's study of copper and cobalt artisanal mining in Katanga highlights the tension in artisanal miners' lives between the old ideal of the responsible male breadwinner and the new lifestyle of excess and living in the now. The former is a legacy of the heyday of the Gécamines. The latter emerged as a way to negotiate the relationship with a world characterised by multiple transactions across vast but impermanent networks, the constant presence of debt, a volatile market environment, and the threat of closure and eviction from legal and illegal artisanal mining sites due to encroachment from big capital and the state.

Jessica Johnson's work is located in a Malawian village and explores the effects of independent migration to South Africa, which became prominent after the demise of centralised recruitment of Malawian labour in South African mines. In Johnson's article, a similar contrast emerges between the increasingly precarious conditions of Malawian migrants in South Africa, exposed to the dangers of crime, xenophobia and a contracting labour market, and the enduring symbolism of South Africa standing as a land of riches in the discourses of rural dwellers back home.

Paul Stewart and Dhiraj Nite's article is a testimony to the persistence of precarity in miners' working conditions across time. Their study focuses on South African miners' struggles and negotiations with health and safety practices from the 1950s up to the present period. The article describes the enormous dangers South African black miners had to face during apartheid, working within a system that disregarded their health and safety until major advances were made with the rise of the NUM, the black miners' union, in the 1980s. The significant strides made during the post-apartheid period resulted in the drastic reduction of fatalities, but miners' experiences and knowledge of health and safety on the ground are still largely ignored by the new regulatory apparatus.

Rural/urban interdependence and multiple livelihoods

Another thread that emerges in different forms throughout most of the articles is the interdependence of rural and urban. Despite the harsh dualism imposed by colonialism and apartheid, the linkages between the two were never broken or completely shaped in the image of colonial laws. However, the decline of large-scale mining and the changes in the political system have made the blurring of rural–urban boundaries more visible than in the past.

For all the talk about deagrarianisation (Bryceson and Jamal 1997), small-scale agriculture in rural areas continues to play a key role (Chitonge and Bwalya forthcoming) and urban agriculture is on the rise in areas such as the Zambian Copperbelt (Mususa 2014) and Katanga (Rubbers, in this issue). There are also data suggesting that urbanisation in Africa is slowing down (Potts 2009, 2012), casting further doubt on widely held assumptions about linear urban growth and the demise of the rural. Even in areas such as South Africa where land scarcity has been more acute, recent work shows that rural areas are productive agricultural sites (e.g., Chitonge 2013; Chitonge and Bwalya forthcoming) and are not merely 'dumping grounds' for welfare recipients and their dependants (cf. Eastwood, Kirsten and Lipton 2006).

While Ferguson's (2013, 2015) recent reappraisal of the rural–urban debate tends to focus disproportionately on deagrarianisation, there is value in his proposal to consider non-agricultural activities and various modes of circulation of cash across family and neighbourly networks as central to people's livelihoods, rather than a linear evolution from rural to urban. Effectively, the boundaries between the rural and urban appear ever more porous, and the piecemeal trajectories of people's economic activities are best captured by the concept of 'multiple livelihoods', which has gained currency in recent studies of African economies (see Bryceson 1999, 2002 and Francis 2000; see also van der Ploeg et al. 2000 on pluriactivity in Europe). The interdependence of migrant wages, social grants (in South Africa, more than elsewhere), various forms of urban and rural agriculture, petty trade and other informal activities across these spaces characterise human economies in southern and central Africa, more than Eurocentric understandings stressing the primacy of wage labour. Rather than focusing on 'miners', 'traders' and 'farmers' as separate economic categories, we should focus on how individuals, families and broader social groups engage with these various economic activities, often concurrently.

Rubbers' article is a good case in point. While he is somewhat pessimistic about the chances of success of agricultural livelihoods, he acknowledges that urban agriculture and informal trade played a key role in securing basic household needs of the families of retrenched miners.

Kees van der Waal offers a longitudinal study of a rural community in Limpopo, South Africa, where male labour migration to the mines and other urban formal activities used to be central to local livelihoods. He uses the concept of multiple livelihoods to show that rural residents' engagement with various forms of more localised wage labour, subsistence agriculture, other informal activities and social grants constitute the key strategies to get by in times of restructuring. He shows important trends in agriculture since the 1980s. These include the replacement of livestock with housing as primary storage of wealth, and the persistence of maize farming and vegetable gardens in the contemporary period.

Johnson's work highlights the central role agriculture continues to play in rural Malawi, where remittances from migrants to South Africa are often invested in farming at home.

In Cuvelier's case, there are multiple interactions between artisanal mining and agriculture. Some of the miners' proceeds are used to finance farming and other informal economic activities, carried out by the miners' families in both rural and urban settings. But there is a dynamic of competition between the two sectors, as high-risk but more profitable artisanal mining draws labour away from seasonal work in the fields.

Family, gender and generation

Family structures, gender dynamics and the general patterns of social reproduction have changed dramatically throughout the last century and this one (see for example Gordon

1996 and Schlyter 2009). As in other social domains, kinship and gender trends have also seen rising complexity and fragmentation brought about by neoliberal restructuring.

The growing importance of women in economic livelihoods is one dimension evident across all three mining systems. This is due to the expansion of the informal economy where they have always been prominent, and their gains in formal sector jobs as well. Male contributions to household economies have declined due to the downsizing of traditionally male workforces such as those of large-scale mining. Another major issue emerging, implicitly or explicitly, in the studies in this collection is the increasing marginalisation of the youth. As population grows and viable forms of wage and non-wage livelihoods generally decrease, young people find themselves pushed to the margins of the economy.

Van der Waal and Johnson tackle these concerns more directly. Building on Niehaus (2012), van der Waal offers a compelling account of the changing symbolic and political status of young men. During the years of transition following the formal end of apartheid, they led witch-hunts against the elderly, who were seen as symbols of evil and the old order. Today, the roles have shifted, and young men are the target of community 'thief-hunts' (Niehaus 2012): they are the ones who are often perceived as unredeemable 'criminals', embodying moral decay and economic crisis in people's collective imaginary. Van der Waal provides hard evidence of how gender relations in the household economy have changed between 1986 and 2013. Male labour has decreased considerably and the balance of economic power has shifted in favour of women. This is reflected in an increased presence of women in local political roles, supported by the post-apartheid national movement for women's rights.

Johnson shows that women continue to play a key role in the rural areas, especially in agriculture and informal activities. She offers an important account of the importance of fluid kinship structures – in this case matriliny – in shaping gender relations in the household economy.

The expansion of the informal economy and urban agriculture in the central African Copperbelt has corresponded to a rise in the economic power of women. With the downsizing of mining labour, these activities have taken centre stage. Rubbers discusses the experiences of some of these women entrepreneurs (see also Mususa 2009 and 2014 for an analysis of similar trends on the Zambian Copperbelt).

Cuvelier's study is an important take on masculinity in an era of structural decline of male labour. Among Katangese artisanal miners, precarity and adverse conditions are turned into tests of one's manhood through the physical hardships and high financial risks of the trade. Miners' lifestyle of excess is also an important part of performing masculinity.

Large-scale institutions and state–capital relations

As mentioned before, any analysis of people's economic activities needs to consider the multiple intersections of micro- and macro-level realities. All the articles in the collection deal with these interactions in one way or the other, and shed light on some of the complex patterns of people's resistance, negotiation, adaptation and subversion of macro-level structures. The relationship between the state and the corporations that control the mines is a particularly crucial one in this respect.

Hugh Macmillan's comprehensive overview of the trajectories of ownership and regulation in the South African mining industry over the post-apartheid period focuses primarily on state–capital interactions. He shows that after more than two decades of political freedom in South Africa, the mining industry is still overwhelmingly in the hands of white capital. There has been limited transfer of ownership to the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) elite, but the latter is closely aligned with white counterparts, and embraced neoliberal policies.

The state made some rather weak attempts to enact the notion that mineral resources belong to all who live in South Africa, but mining capital behaves as if they were its private property, and organises the industry as it chooses according to neoliberal precepts – the casualisation of the workforce and the failure to provide decent housing are two tangible examples. Given the present balance of power between the mining corporations and the state in South Africa, there is small chance of reform in the mining industry. Macmillan provocatively concludes that the decline of mining might not be such a bad thing.

Stewart and Nite's assessment shows areas of convergence and divergence with Macmillan. On the question of miners' health and safety, the African National Congress (ANC) government did listen to its alliance partner COSATU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and took steps to push the mining companies to significantly improve standards. It went so far as to empower a Mine Safety directorate to close particular shafts or whole mines in the wake of accidents, until their cause had been determined and steps taken to prevent recurrence. But the authors also show the mining companies beginning to reassert their position in the field of safety. In agreement with state structures, they are creating a health and safety bureaucracy which is institutionalising the procedures to be followed to such an extent that workers can now be disciplined for failing to obey safety rules. The old disregard for safety was a brutal means of disciplining workers; the new concern for safety, while more benign, is another means by which the mining companies can discipline the labour force. Stewart and Nite warn us that the top-down nature of the beneficial changes in the regulatory framework, and the co-option of union structures in the state–capital alliance, are creating a gap between representative structures and the rank and file. This is reflected by the growing labour unrest across the mining sector, especially the platinum industry (see Capps, Moodie, and Bush 2015), and the emergence of new unions like the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, which display greater militancy than their COSATU counterparts.

Like Stewart and Nite, van der Waal paints a mixed picture. The positive effects of the post-apartheid arrangement on some levels of local politics are there, as are the economic benefits of social grants. Overall, however, the rural areas, like the rest of South Africa, are also experiencing growing alienation of local and national government from community interests. Van der Waal notes the pressing need for a solid industrial policy to help people transition towards an economy less reliant on large-scale mining and manufacturing.

Esther Uzar's article on the mining unions after privatisation in Zambia is another testimony of the negative effects of corporate rule under the current neoliberal dispensation. Uzar describes how the members of Zambia's once powerful mining unions were betrayed by politicians who entered a close alliance with the mining corporates as soon as they got into office through democratic elections following the demise of Kaunda's one-party rule. When the Patriotic Front (PF) ended two decades of governments controlled by the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), they were quick to emulate their predecessor in striking a deal with the corporations and turning against the unions. Uzar highlights the main consequences of this repeat cycle of events: the fragmentation of the union movement itself over the past 20 years and the emergence of several smaller, and necessarily weaker, unions whose leaders are open to co-optation from above. Given a much weaker state than the one the ANC inherited, successive Zambian governments have had little power to press for even the modest concessions that were extracted from the corporations in post-apartheid South Africa. The mining companies in Zambia have managed to subvert the government's attempts to raise revenue from royalties and taxation, and regularly threaten to abandon the country if government does not assist them by controlling union demands for higher wages and better conditions.

The cases from Katanga resonate with the others on their generally negative assessment of current neoliberal trends. Rubbers is critical of the free market ideology behind the voluntary departure programme sponsored by the World Bank, showing how it continues to cast in a negative light anything that moves away from the fiction of individual entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Cuvelier shows how precarious the situation of artisanal miners is, with the state and big capital often colluding to marginalise artisanal miners and undercut their livelihoods. The rapid expansion of large-scale private mines does not bode well for the future of artisanal mining.

Studying what people do, not what they should do

The articles presented here are rooted in the world historical moment that characterises contemporary economic life in southern and central Africa. Several decades of intense privatisation and flexibilisation of mining capital – mirrored in most other sectors of the economy – have weakened the capacity of states to deliver essential services, further reduced employment in an already small formal sector, and pushed more and more people into the burgeoning informal economy. This is however only one stage in the long-term trajectory of highly unequal growth dictated by racial and gendered capitalism that started its large-scale penetration in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. Racial, class, gender, rural/urban, national and other inequalities have intersected in complex ways with this intense wave of privatisation, and for the most part have not been addressed.

However, we are not proposing here a master narrative that captures these complex trajectories in one neat framework. The articles in this selection show the need for more research that focuses on the economic activities people carry out on the ground, and their perceptions and views. Too often, these realities have been obscured by the grand narratives of development pushed by expert approaches that privilege the views and categories of states, markets, non-governmental organisations and international institutions. Our work provides a different angle on the continuities and changes in the relationship between states and corporations, showing how people respond to them and carve their paths within the structural constraints imposed from above.[4]

We hope the articles in this collection will stimulate more research and debate on the key issues affecting African economies from a people's perspective. More work is needed to grasp the dynamics of localised economic activities and their relations to broader structural forces. This knowledge is crucial to develop sound policies that improve the lives of people in southern and central Africa. It can support civil society organisations, social movements and trade unions in developing effective campaigns and economic strategies to counter the negative effects of neoliberalism.

Notes

1. Two large-scale research programmes funded by the European Research Council are currently carrying out a comparison of the economies and societies of the Central African Copperbelt. WORKinMining, led by Benjamin Rubbers, University of Liège, explores the contemporary micropolitics of work in the mining industries. 'Comparing the Copperbelt', led by Miles Larmer, University of Oxford, explores the history of political culture and knowledge production in mining communities.
2. We are aware of critiques of Lewis' work that rightly emphasise how the original formulation neglects the negative economic effects on the African population of the political system of discrimination imposed by colonialism (see Arrighi 1970). We use Lewis' model (especially Lewis 1977) as complementary to studies that focus on the economic consequences of the

racial bar. In other words, we see the enforced element of racial discrimination as part of dualism, rather than outside it. See also Laterza (2016) for an integration of Lewis' insights with work on the articulation of modes of production by Wolpe (1972) and Hall (1980).

3. See a recent report by Bloomberg mapping Kabila's extensive business ties: "With His Family's Fortune at Stake, President Kabila Digs In", *Bloomberg*, 15 December 2016. The report also notes how two major Western multinationals – US-based Freeport-McMoran and Swiss-based Glencore – spearheaded the recent mining boom that has made DR Congo Africa's biggest producer of copper, tin and cobalt.
4. Similar points are made by scholars working within the human economy approach, whose work inspired the conceptualisation and development of this collective project. See Hart, Laville and Cattani (2010); Laterza (2013); Sharp, Powers, and Laterza (2013); Hart and Sharp (2014); and Hart (2015).
5. http://thehumaneconomy.blogspot.com/2014/08/hep-workshop-land-money-and-human.html.

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