

Werthmann, Katja; Grätz, Tilo (Hrsg.): *Mining Frontiers in Africa. Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag 2012. ISBN: 978-3-89645-832-2; 134 S.

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There is extensive literature on non-industrial mining in Africa. Nevertheless, much of this scholarship has been geared towards shaping development policies for this sector.<sup>1</sup> This book presents a welcome deviation from this policy-oriented trend by examining the social worlds of artisanal mining in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Angola, Benin, and Burkina Faso from a historical and anthropological perspective.

Werthmann and Grätz have chosen „mining frontiers“ as a unifying theme for this book. The „frontier“, being an enigmatic concept, allows for the capturing of these mining centres of the past and present from a social, territorial, and metaphorical perspective. The mention of non-industrial mining in Africa tends to conjure up negative images of a Wild West frontier, defined by insecurity, chaos, disorder, and the temporality of work. Nevertheless, the authors' arguments about the social organization of mining and related livelihoods, the character of the miners themselves, and the social changes that emerge in and around mining towns help to highlight some of the paradoxes of this livelihood, including its liberating effects and its regulatory features.

There is an interrogation of mining frontiers as a space wherein outsiders are able to reinvent themselves. For the editors remind us in their introduction that they are also speaking of „frontiers in the sense of imaginary spaces that consist of ideas about a better life, and social spaces where alternative modes of livelihood and lifestyles are possible“ (p. 15). Having observed non-industrial miners in Burkina Faso since the 1980s, Katja Werthmann agrees that ambitions of self-improvement are pervasive. Yet, countering the image of a „mad rush“, she frames miners' strategies as being equally structured and planned as the career-building tactics of employees in the formal sector or other informal sectors. They engage in similar forms of professional develop-

ment activities and establish long-lasting non-ethnic social networks among their peers. Tilo Grätz shows how a moral economy and a cash economy have given order to social relations on the Atakora gold fields of Benin since the 1990s. In spite of the volatility and temporality of their livelihood and lifestyles, the social worlds of these miners are understood as being shaped by distinctive moral codes, patterns of behaviour, and networks (or, friendships) that expand beyond the mine's confinements. Paul Richards describes youths in the diamond mining district of Sierra Leone as starving from a lack of self-realization up until the 1990-war. He contends that their forced induction into the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) army ultimately provided them with desired cultural and economic freedoms. It also provided them with a platform to hold their state accountable for the lack of transparency over mineral rights and the limited re-investment of mineral wealth into local social services. However, according to the author, populist organization dissolved with the loss of leader Foday Sankoh, and the group fell into a pattern of self-destruction.

Some chapters also address the new social situation emerging with the arrival of foreign groups of miners. Eugenia W. Herbert highlights lesser-known interactions between migrant miners and residents in precolonial Africa. She notes that despite sharing a common copper mining site on what is the border of present-day Namibia and Angola, the Kwanyama and migrant Bushmen developed interdependences, but remained largely separate social groups; their relations remaining predominantly of a professional nature. Filip de Boeck uses the expanding mining frontier in diamonds in Lunda Norte, between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, as a metaphor for capitalist intensification in general. He demonstrates the acute negative impacts of commercial expansion (both of a

<sup>1</sup> Some recent publications include: Steven Van Bockstael / Koen Vlassenroot (Hrsg.), *A Farmer's Best Friend? Artisanal Diamond Mining and Rural Change in West and Central Africa*, Ghent 2012; Gavin Hilson (Hrsg.), *Small-Scale Mining, Rural Subsistence and Poverty in West Africa*, Bournemouth on Dunsmore 2008; Bruno Sarasin / Pascale Hatcher / Ariane Lafortune (Hrsg.), *Regulating Mining in Africa: For Whose Benefit?*, Uppsala 2004.

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legal and illegal nature) not on the miners themselves, but on the indigenous political structures of social groups living around the mining centre.

Raymond Dumett breaks the mining frontier in colonial southwest Ghana into several distinct formations. He considers the parallel and interacting frontiers of non-industrial mining and mechanized mining. He also shows additional frontiers in technology, capital, and demography in the labour force as emerging out of aforementioned mining frontiers (and economies surrounding the mining centres).

From a historian's perspective, this book contributes to the study of mining in Africa by making accessible critical breaks and continuities in the social worlds of non-industrial mining throughout many parts of the African continent, and over a large span of time – insights that are also relevant to anthropological research. Though it is by no means a comprehensive overview (there is a heavy West African bias), the collection offers a broad enough range of scholarly accounts to engage a large contingent of academics. This wide spectrum approach however, is also one of the challenges of the book. The reader has to manage frequent changes in conceptual frameworks, in addition to chronological and geographical transitions. Regardless of this, the authors succeed in providing a very diverse and dynamic picture of non-industrial mining frontiers. The collection of essays in *Mining Frontiers* should be lauded for opening up dialogue between Africanists of an interdisciplinary background working on different regions of Africa and varying periods of time.

HistLit 2014-1-018 / Cassandra Mark-Thiesen  
über Werthmann, Katja; Grätz, Tilo (Hrsg.):  
*Mining Frontiers in Africa. Anthropological and  
Historical Perspectives*. Köln 2012, in: H-Soz-u-  
Kult 10.01.2014.