
Rural Class Formation and Accumulation from Below: Artisanal Gold Mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ben Radley*¹

¹University of Bath [Bath] – Royaume-Uni

Résumé

Over the last few decades, a rising gold price and neoliberal mining reform have stimulated an ongoing process of foreign-led gold sector (re)industrialisation across rural areas of African low-income countries (LICs), within which more locally-led forms of rural artisanal mining have been displaced or marginalised. This has been theoretically sustained by a set of assumptions around the low productivity and inefficiency of artisanal mining. Through a case study of artisanal gold mining in South Kivu Province of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the proposed paper seeks to challenge these assumptions. By adopting the analytical lens of the capital-labour social relations that underpin and constitute South Kivu's artisanal gold commodity chain, the paper argues that artisanal gold mining in South Kivu is embedded within a social structure that is associated with local processes of rural labour absorption, class formation and capital accumulation. This dynamic is led by what might be considered a relatively prosperous and mobile capitalist class of artisanal trader-managers, emerging from the peasantry to invest in mine construction, mobilise and organise labour in production, control the (albeit limited) means of production, and reinvest profits to increase productivity via mechanisation. In other words, productivity might be low, but it is mostly captured by domestic groups and appears to be increasing. Yet these processes of class formation and accumulation from below have been suppressed and disrupted by the Congolese state, acting at the behest of a Canadian transnational operating in the region. These findings urge a reconsideration of the theoretical foundations driving mineral industrialisation across African LICs today, away from a foreign-led model of corporate ownership and towards a more locally-led model of artisanal mechanisation.

Mots-Clés: Mining, Social Differentiation, Accumulation, Capital, Class, Labour, Congo

*Intervenant