

Preface

The world appears to have entered an environment where well-established economic laws no longer apply. Rising private debt and government deficits, negative or miniscule interest rates in all time scales, low inflation bordering on deflation, lower unemployment levels in many economies, all appear to coexist amiably without adverse consequences. This runs counter to economic orthodoxy and more and more experts question aloud whether this is sustainable. Gold and other precious metals have greatly benefited from this novel economic environment and are experiencing a renaissance as a hedge against the unknown. This in turn has led to some headline-grabbing M&A [Mergers and Acquisitions] activity among major gold miners as they seek to replenish reserves.¹

This ethnography retraces negotiations on resource extraction during and after specific moments of global crisis. Originally it intended to investigate a particularly significant period in and around Burkina Faso's gold industry – the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse, “heralding the biggest global economic crises since the 1930s”.² What scholars, policy-makers, and local populations have since been described and experienced as “the Burkinabè mining boom” is not simply happening *anywhere* and *anytime* in a resource-rich context of the Global South. It is deeply entangled with Burkina Faso's political history and how people have made and continue to make sense of the mineral abundance of its subsoil. Yet the mining boom in Burkina Faso also tells us something about “global capitalism” as a project, the spatial and temporal make-up of mining economies, and even more specifically, about gold as a natural resource in times of global crisis.³

This book has been completed during the global COVID-19 pandemic that erupted in late 2019. At the time of writing, the social, economic, and political costs of the pandemic for individuals and collectives worldwide can only – if at all – be estimated. In terms of the financialization of mining assets, however, its impact has been described as “uneven”, leading to cuts in production for some minerals and metals, whilst the demand for others is ever growing.⁴ As far as predictions can already be done, the global mining sector faces a similar

1 E. Richer La Flèche, “Preface”, in: Richer La Flèche (ed.), *The Mining Law Review*, 8th edn, London: Law Business Research Ltd, 2019, p. v.

2 P. Dicken, *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*, 7th edn, Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015, p. 2.

3 I borrow the term “capitalism as a project” from Hannah Appel who understands the latter “as a constant construction project to be followed through [ethnographic] research”. (H. Appel, *The Licit Life of Capitalism: US Oil in Equatorial Guinea*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019, p. 22).

4 E. Richer La Flèche, “Preface”, in: Richer La Flèche (ed.), *The Mining Law Review*, 9th edn, London: Law Business Research Ltd, 2020, p. vii.

state of general immobility of people and (to a lesser extent) things and ideas as other segments of the globalized world economy. As a result of supply chain disruptions, sanitary restrictions, travel bans, and global politics prioritizing pandemic control, COVID-19 has certainly left its profound imprint on the sector. This specifically relates to effects on the more volatile exploration and development activities that are particularly dependent on the on-the-ground-presence of a multiplicity of globalized and highly mobile mining professionals. Geologists, investors, consultancies, and engineers, among many others, are key to a successful transition of a mining project from early exploration to production of minerals and metals through the conduction of geological surveys, technical studies, or social and environmental impact assessments.

With its accompanying surge in gold and other precious metals, the pandemic situation still tells us a more complicated story than that of global capital simply being removed from places of production in times of global crisis. In early 2021, the world of finance and mineral investment estimates that “mining has done better than other sectors”, with gold as a “standout performer” increasing in value by 17 per cent from April to September 2020 and reaching USD 2,000 per ounce in August 2020.⁵ This new gold price record topping the crisis aftermath value of USD 1,900 per ounce in 2011 seems to confirm the above mentioned “renaissance” of gold “as a hedge against the unknown”.⁶ An empirical investigation into the make-up of the global mining economy therefore urges us to not only study the repercussions of global moments of crisis on the rise and decline of (specific) mining economies, but also to analyse how in mining governance moments and expressions of “the global”, “the national”, and “the local” are intrinsically entangled and reproduce each other.

The emergence of this book is also closely linked to what many of the key actors appearing in it have called a regional, national, and local crisis. The specific political-economic history of Burkina Faso during the past ten years is emblematic for an enduring “mining boom” against the backdrop of socio-political turmoil and a worsening security situation. While the amount of on national territory produced gold increased tenfold from five tons in 2008 to over 50 tons in 2018, citizens of Burkina Faso experienced a profound change in political leadership by 2014 and a significant surge in violent, often jihadist attacks since 2016. The latter are especially frequent in the northern and eastern parts of the country, notably the border regions with Mali and Niger where many of industrial gold

⁵ Ibid., p. vii; Investing in African Mining Indaba, “The Impact of COVID-19 on African Mining: Opinions, Findings and Commentary from the Most Senior Stakeholders Across the African Mining Sector” (September 2020).

⁶ Richer La Flèche, *Preface*, p. v.

mining projects are located. In November 2019, five busses with military escort of the Canadian-based mining company Semafo Inc. were attacked on their way to the production site in Bounboua in the eastern Burkina Faso. In what has been described as “one of the deadliest insurgent attacks in the West African country in recent years”, 37 people were killed and more than 60 injured.⁷ The company’s shares immediately dropped eleven per cent on the Toronto Stock Exchange and despite reinforced security measures (including helicopter transportation for all expatriate employees travelling between the capital of Ouagadougou and the operating mine sites), Semafo Inc. has not been able to resume production at its Bounboua mine for several months.⁸

At first glance, this example seems to counter narratives of African mining increasingly taking place in enclaves of mineral production which are able to coexist with endemic violence outside their walls and wire razors.⁹ Yet the “crisis year” 2020 tells us again a more complex story. Compared to 2019, mineral production and mining activities have increased in the country.¹⁰ In late March, the London-based mid-tier producer Endeavour Mining announced the acquisition of Semafo Inc. and with it of Semafo’s two gold mines in Burkina Faso, Bounboua, and Mana. Backed financially by La Mancha group of the Egyptian billionaire Naguib Sawiris which holds significant interests in the company, the merger led Endeavour Mining to become the “top 15 global” and the “leading West African gold producer”.¹¹ Only few months later, in October and November respectively, the company announced the restart of production at Bounboua and another merger with Teranga Gold. At the beginning of 2021, the company owned almost half of all producing industrial gold mines in

7 N. van Praet and G. York, “Dozens Dead in Attack on Canadian Miner Semafo’s Convoy in Burkina Faso”, *The Globe and Mail*, 6 November 2019.

8 Reuters Staff, “Semafo to Restart Mining at Burkina Faso’s Bounboua in Fourth Quarter”, *Reuters*, 6 February 2020.

9 See J. Ferguson, “Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa”, *American Anthropologist* 107 (2005) 3, 377–382; J. Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006; W. Reno, “How Sovereignty Matters: International Markets and the Political Economy of Local Politics in Weak States”, in: T. Callaghy, R. Kassimir, and R. Latham (eds.), *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 197–215.

10 E. Kaboré, “Secteur minier: Créer plus de valeur ajoutée en 2021” [Mining sector: Creating more added value in 2021], *L’Economiste du Faso*, 18 January 2021.

11 EDV, “Endeavour to Combine with SEMAFO to Create a Leading West African Gold Producer”, *Endeavour Mining Corporation*, 23 March 2020.

Burkina Faso and had “the largest exploration portfolio across the underexplored West African Birimian Greenstone Belt”.¹²

This book aims to retrace a specific moment of Burkina Faso’s recent history of industrial gold mining through an empirical and analytical investigation on actors, places, and topics of negotiation. It not only aims to shed light on how multinational companies, such as Endeavour Mining, within a few years successfully entered the world of senior producers by promoting West Africa (and specifically Burkina Faso) as a promising space of global capital investment. It also looks at corporate entanglements with national mining legislation and the processes of making large-scale mining feasible (or not) in the areas where mineral extraction actually takes place. The research on what this book is based was conducted primarily over a 12-month period in Ouagadougou, Houndé, Bagassi, Ottawa, Toronto, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, and Leipzig between October 2016 and November 2018. The process of navigating through the empirical material and constantly zooming in and out to balance empirical insights against theory building, however, took me much longer. The book writing process, from transforming a dissertation into a monograph, made me look back on the past five years I was working on company-state-community relations in Burkina Faso and beyond. I realized that the things, people and ideas in and around (gold) mining are constantly in flux. Indeed, is the example of Endeavour Mining rather typical for the volatility of mining capitalism, for the speed of constant mergers and acquisitions, and the constant de- and re-evaluation of places of production. What the book offers, can thus only be a glimpse on a specific moment of company-state-community relations. Yet it also serves as a puzzle piece to make the “dialectics of the global” more tangible.

For so many of us, the beginning of the new decade has also been a period of personal crisis. All the more I want to thank those who have contributed in so many ways to the genesis of this book. The dissertation on which this book is based would not have been realized without the constant advice of my supervisors Prof. Katja Werthmann and Prof. Ulf Engel. I am particularly grateful to Katja Werthmann for offering so much guidance and connecting me to the first important contacts during the explorative research phase in Burkina Faso between October 2016 and March 2017 in Ouagadougou and Houndé, which we partly spent together. This research project would not have been possible without the advice I received

¹² EDV, “Endeavour Restarts Bounbou Mine and Begins Realizing Synergies Following SEMAFO Integration”, *Endeavour Mining Corporation*, 15 October 2020; EDV, “Endeavour and Teranga Announce Combination to Create New Senior Gold Producer”, *Endeavour Mining Corporation*, 16 November 2020.

during these first stages of field research. I am grateful too to Georges Bationo, Maturin Somé, Brahima Diabaté, and Mathias Ollo Kambou for their time and dedication in assisting me during fieldwork through their translations, the establishment of contacts and the provision of important documents. I particularly want to thank all persons who were willing to share their thoughts and experiences with me during interviews. For anonymity reasons, I will not mention specific names here. Without their readiness to talk about often sensitive issues, such as political bargaining processes, corporate hierarchies, their experiences with mining-induced livelihood loss or sex work, this work would not have come into existence. I am particularly grateful to the municipality of Houndé and the company Roxgold SANU for hosting me during most of my research stays in Houndé and Bagassi. In Canada, it was notably Prof. Rita Abrahamsen (University of Ottawa) who gave me fruitful advice on how to approach the Canadian mining sector.

I owe much to my colleagues at the University of Leipzig and the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Centre 1199 “Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition”. I am particularly grateful to the many in-depth exchanges I had on the conceptual elaboration process discussed during working group sessions with Prof. Ulf Engel and Prof. Ursula Rao and the various events of the Graduate School Global and Area Studies (GSGAS). Among the colleagues (and friends) with whom I particularly exchanged on theoretical and fieldwork issues figure notably Katharina Döring, Jens Herpolsheimer, Kai Roder, and Jens Reinke. The academic assistants of our research project B 06 Harriet Gardner, Benedikt Oehlmann, and Édith Nabos supported my work through fulfilling important proofreading, mapping and research tasks. I am also grateful to Houd Kanazoé who was eager to share with me his map-making expertise as a geographer. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) provided the financial means and office infrastructure that made all of the research process possible in the first place. During fieldwork in Ouagadougou and at several occasions in Europe and North America, I had the opportunity to exchange with the social science “mining community”, and especially those working on mining questions in Burkina Faso. I particularly thank Bettina Engels (Free University of Berlin), Muriel Côte (Lund University), and Tongnoma Zongo (University of Ouagadougou) for their thoughtful remarks on my research design and first drafts of my chapters. I also thank the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) and those working in the Department of Urban and Environmental Sociology for providing me with the necessary space and time to finally realize such a huge publication project. I am particularly grateful to Alena Bleicher and the members of the recomine alliance for their insights into and advice on mining issues in Europe and Germany. Expanding my empirical

horizon to contexts on my own doorstep made my research even more global in nature.

I give special thanks to my friends and family who supported me whenever I needed their help. They understood that a thesis or a book is not an immediate process, and accepted my partial “absence” from family, social, and political life, especially during fieldwork and the final writing process. Most importantly, they let me know what “solidarity” really means in times of personal hardship, offered me guidance and encouraged me whenever my goals seemed too far away. I am particularly grateful to my parents Martina and Karlheinz Hohner, my brother Clemens and my beloved grandparents Eva, Toni, Eberhard, and Dorothea. I want to thank Melly and Reike for their mental support and understanding during the writing phase, and Joshua and Ntswaki for their smile. I also want to thank my fellow musicians and dancers of MadamTamtam* who anticipated most of the back pain during the writing phase. I missed you so much during the lockdown.

I want to remember those who unfortunately left us too early to see this book coming into being. Hamdiou Valian not only was a close friend but also one of the persons with whom I had constant exchanges during my research stays in Ouagadougou. From deeply political questions about the global mining economy, Burkinabè society and politics, to more intimate questions on gender issues and race relations: there was no topic we did not debate (often very heavily). Your personality and your activism inspired me a lot during the research process and your thoughts continued to do so during the writing phase. Didier Koffi Ayeh has accompanied many years of my life, of my research, and of my work at Leipzig University like no one else. He has been a beloved husband and a person who had a laugh for everyone. Unfortunately, you both joined the ancestors too early and no words can capture what your absence means to your family and friends. Didier and Hamidou, I learnt a lot from you, and maybe above all, that no Western engagement with “Africa” is ever neutral. This book owes you much of the compassion for scrutinization and critical thinking.

Finally, I want to thank Tamana, the traveller, for being such a constant, inspiring, and empathic companion. I am looking forward to new destinations.

Anitie, barka, merci, thank you, danke.

Diana Ayeh, Leipzig, April 2021