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بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

رهانات و آفاق

When the Future is in Reverse: Temporality in the aftermath of Industrialism in Democratic Republic of Congo

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It was 2pm. The intense sun that afternoon made the 15 minute wait at the city centre of Likasi in Katanga province of Congo all the more tedious for Papa Kabongo¹, my research assistant, and I. We were waiting for some informants for an interview and they were not appearing. Half an hour passed and we spotted two brand new “Bajaj” motorbikes whiz past us and turn around rather noisily. The riders were both without helmets but they wore some fancy sunglasses. The blue bike came right up to me. The rider slowly lifted his eyeglasses and with a cheeky grin said, “*Timoté, ni je?*” (Timoté, how is it?). It was Francis, my informant. I was perplexed, unsure of whether I should comment on his looks, that suspicious grin, or the flippant greeting. Francis knew and could see that I looked visibly surprised because only the day before, Papa Kabongo and I had stumbled into him in an artisanal mine near the city of Likasi where I was conducting my fieldwork. Then, he wore shorts soiled with mud, a tired T-shirt browned by the dust and, he spoke to us about the Sunday meeting while standing knee-deep in brown murky water as he oversaw his copper ore being washed. At one moment he would be speaking calmly to us and at the next, he would be flailing his arms and hollering at some teenage boys at the stream nearby to hurry up with the rinsing of his malachite rocks. Francis was a *creuseur*, or “craft digger”.

That Sunday afternoon when I met him you may have mistaken him for a *sapeur*². He donned a Yankees Baseball hat, aviator sunglasses, blue jeans, a Chelsea Football Club soccer jersey, moccasins, and, just for effect, two fake Seiko watches – one on each wrist. Time obviously mattered to this guy, I mused. So why was he late?

The momentary shock of seeing Francis “*sapé*” wore off. Jules, Francis’s friend and business partner approached me. He laughed as he came off his bike in his black three-piece suit and greeted us in the respectful Katangese manner of bringing our heads to touch each other from side to side. I realized that their laughter and smiles were a response to what they must have perceived to be my exaggerated sense of surprise. I am sure they were wondering why it so strange to me that they were *a la mode*, akin to the male dancers of the Congolese pop-music sensation Werrason³. Of course, they did not

¹ Papa Kabongo was my research assistant in the *carrières*. He worked for the Association of Artisanal Miners in Katanga (EMAK, *Exploitants Miniers Artisanaux des Katanga*), a department in the Ministry of Mines in Katanga charged with organizing artisanal mines for *creuseurs* and *négociants*. It was also the organization that acted as a liaison between the State and *creuseurs*.

² To *sapé* in Congolese French refers to an ostentatious display of clothing. When taken to the extreme by *sapeurs* – those who *sapé* – it refers to what Gondola (1999) has described as a “dreamlike hedonism” expressed through particular forms of clothing which allows one to reconstruct both time and space and in doing recreate one’s identity. Put simply, it is a form of “dandyism”.

³ Werrason is a famous contemporary Congolese musician from Kwilu province. He sings lingala music that is very popular with youth because of the elaborate dancing styles employed in his videos as well as his



say that but they knew they had surprised me and from their smiles, that pleased them. With their arrival complete, Jules and Francis carried Papa Kabongo and I to what they called a “quiet place”, where we could talk.

My talk today is about young men like Francis and his friend Jules who work as *creuseurs*⁴ or, “craft-diggers”. They are part of the 60,000 to 200,000 individuals working as *creuseurs* in Katanga alone (Global witness 2006, Group One 2008). Typically, *creuseurs* are young men between the ages of 15 to 40 and they earn a living by digging for copper, cobalt, and gold in the hills of Katanga. Most work independently or in small groups of four or five individuals in what are usually remote locations that the Congolese State has demarcated for small-scale artisanal mining. The majority of *creuseurs* are not contractually bound to person or place and tend to work when and, more or less, how they wish. In theory a young man going into the artisanal mine needs a permit from the Association for Artisanal Miners of Katanga but in practice no one gets one. Young men insert themselves as their circumstances demand. For usufruct rights, they are charged a tax by local authorities, which is often 10% of the ore they produce from deep shaft copper/gold/or cobalt mines. Mining is only carried out by men, a fact that can be traced back to a colonial division of labor in the early industrial era where, generally, urban life forced men to serve as wage laborers (miners) and women as reproductive subjects (mothers). Over the years this gendered division of labor has come to attain interesting cultural justifications in artisanal miners. One very common view I often heard was that the presence of women in a mine angers the spirits in the mine and is said to make the ore disappear. As a consequence, women are taboo in the mine and this had turned artisanal mines in Katanga into hyper-masculine spaces populated by young men anywhere between the ages of twelve to forty.

My paper looks at the emergent phenomenon of the *creuseur* and its uncomfortable co-existence with private concession mining that has been ushered into Congo with the liberalization of the mining industry and the flow of financial capital into remote areas that were previously only mined by the now almost defunct state-run mining company, *Gécamines*⁵. I grapple with two interrelated concerns linked to natural resource extraction in Africa. The first is a conceptual problem: what does the existence of artisanal mining, or *creusage*, inform us about theories of social change in the new enclaves of capitalism in Africa today? I pose this question because it is not only the scope of *creusage* in

lyrical and compositional artistry. He is also known to be one of the Congolese musicians most sympathetic to the plight of the *shegue*, or street-children, in Congo.

⁴ My research is based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in 2009, 2011, and 2013-2014. Over this period I was in the field for a total of 10 months, first for preliminary dissertation fieldwork and subsequently for extended fieldwork. I was mainly based in Katanga province in DR Congo.

⁵ *Gécamines – Général de carrières et des mines*. In colonial times this company was known as *L’Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK)*.

Congo that ought to arrest our attention (approximately 200,000 individuals are engaged in it in Katanga alone) but also its social location in the Copperbelt – a place once considered to be the bastion of modernity in Africa (see Epstein 1967, 1981; Ferguson 1999, Gluckman 1960:57, Powdermaker 1962). From the 1940s to the early 1980s, scholarship on urban change in Africa was modeled around concerns over how Africans were “adapting” to the multiethnic character of urban life (Epstein 1981; Powdermaker 1962). James Ferguson (1999) argues that at least within the early anthropological literature on the Copperbelt, there was a palpable sense that something was emerging. Focus on the newness of urbanization in Africa was informed by scholarship on questions about the “adaptation” of Africans in towns and the emergent forms the African family was taking (Powdermaker 1962; Mitchell 1961; Wilson 1941), the often antagonistic nature of marital relationships in the domestic sphere (Mitchell 1957; Parpart 1983), histories of labor relations between mineworkers and their employers (Higginson 1989, Fetter 1976), as well as the influence of missionaries on language and education of urban Africans (1971). Critics of this literature raged against the structural functionalism of much of Copperbelt anthropology but even more compelling was a stinging critique by Bernard Magubane (1971) to what he viewed as an anthropological fixation with viewing the urbanization, proletarianization, and Christianization of Africans as phenomena highlighting African aspirations to “westernization” rather than viewing the effects of these processes as pathological symptoms of sustained colonial oppression. In this early anthropological literature, James Ferguson (1999) mentions that modernity was framed as a teleological process in which Africans were supposed to have become more ‘Europeanized’ in so far as they were thought to be increasingly urbanized wage laborer living in structurally nuclear, sexually monogamous, and conjugally companionate families. The reality was of course quite different. Not only does ethnicity continue to define social practices like polygyny, funerary rites, and spiritual practices in urban life across Africa but also extended kin relatives still significantly account as members of many families in the Copperbelt and its neighboring towns (Dibwe 2001; Hansen 1997; Ferguson 1999: 203). Furthermore, de-proletarianization as a consequence of declining global commodity prices and Structural Adjustment Programs initiated by the World Bank (Rubbers 2010) has retrenched massive numbers of urban workers forcing many to seek work outside in rural and peri-urban centers. Modernity as urbanity, proletarianization, Christianization, and de-tribalization has been shown to be something of a myth (Ferguson 1999).

Can we then take seriously the view that miners in the Copperbelt are an historical embodiment of modernity in Africa? I want to insist that we can but we have to think of social change a little differently. The question as I view it is: what does social change look like in the aftermath of industrialism in the places like Katanga where, the majority of miners are no longer trained industrial wage laborers, but youth eking out a precarious

living as *creuseurs*? I want to suggest that *creusage* is not some anachronistic social practice that will soon disappear when private concession mining becomes the *sine qua non* means of resource extraction in Congo. It is *coeval* with the rise of private concession mining yet at the same time, oppositional to it. Like private concession mining both practices are legally enshrined in the *code minier* of 2002 that liberalized the mining industry. Competition for mining land between *creuseurs* and foreign investors has put both groups on a collision course that routinely results in the state sanctioned privatization of artisanal mines. This is akin to what David Harvey (2005) has called “accumulation by dispossession” and as he points out, it is a key feature of contemporary imperialism whose manifestation, particularly in the West, is the physical, occupational, and existential precarity of modern life (Butler 2006, Standing 2011, Muehlebach 2013). If in the West precarity has come to refer to a politically induced condition where social and economic networks of support are increasingly being dismembered by rapacious neoliberal forms of governance then in Africa, this has been the *taux du jour* since the 1990s⁶. The particularities of African history compel us to analyze precarity as a social condition linked to the foundational violence of the “colonizing structure” which, as Valentin Mudimbe (1988: 15) reminds us, entailed the domination of space, reformation of the natives’ minds, and the restructuring of local economic histories. It is no wonder that as early as in 1971 Bernard Magubane insisted on viewing the prevailing modernization of the Copperbelt as a pathology of colonial experience. Considering the manner in which rural life in colonial times was radically restructured to cater for the demands of industrialization in south and central Africa (Mamdani 1996), then the Fordist social welfare regimes of mining companies that catered for a minority in urban centers start to appear more the exception than the norm. If *creusage* tells us anything about social change in Africa, it is that the precarity faced by *creuseurs*, their dispossession, impermanence, impoverishment, social disenfranchisement, and inability to connect means and ends, is the norm for an overwhelming majority in Congo. Therefore, analyzing social change in Congo requires an *a priori* analysis of “coloniality” – the structures of power that were produced by colonialism but still to persist in its wake and that codify and hierarchically order global and domestic social relations (Quijano 2007).

My second line of inquiry concerns temporality in neoliberal times. I seek to address the question, what does the temporal incongruity of *creusage* make possible? By temporal incongruity I am referring to the discordance of *creusage* as a seemingly prescient, post-industrial form of flexible work but peculiarly one that draws inspiration and legitimacy from a pre-colonial moral matrix and landscape. If we acknowledge the archaeological record, then copper mining in Katanga dates as far back as the 9th century (De Maret

⁶ Africanists have long referred to this phenomenon through the idiom of uncertainty (Werbner 2002, Johnson-Hanks 2006) or *la crise* or crisis (Mbembe & Roitman 1990, Petit & Mutambwa 2005)

1977:335). The written history of Congo mentions the existence of 19th century copper miners in Katanga locally known as “*bakudya mukuba*”, which in texts was translated as “*les mangeurs de cuivre*” or “the eaters of copper” (see Herbert 1984:49-75; De Hemptienne 1926). These metal smiths were renowned in pre-colonial times for their copper *croisettes* that served as an early form of trading currency across Central and East Africa. Today, these ancestors are invoked by *creuseurs* as a source of legitimacy to the lands that miners occupy oftentimes in defiance to the state and foreign mining investors. As I will show, because the contemporary neoliberal moment in Congo threatens *creuseurs* with the dispossession of what they view as their ancestral lands which is both the source of their livelihood and cultural identity, resistance to dispossession attempts often take violent and deadly forms. The optic of the state and foreign investors is that mining land is an alienable resource which can be prospected and traded to bring future profit. To *creuseurs* the future is less important than the hardening present or the moral matrixes of the past that links them as benefactors of the ancestors – the “true” owners of the land. As such, *creuseurs* are *out-of-sync* with the temporalities of market capitalism in Congo, which sees the future as an ever-expansive source of profit and *creusage* as an antiquated, crude, recidivist social practice.

Below I begin by first providing a historical backdrop to mining in Katanga with the purpose of highlighting how artisanal mining re-emerges after industrial decline. I then move on to provide an ethnographic analysis of *creusage* to show how it is structured in ways that reproduce colonial relations of force. I close with a discussion of the temporal incongruity of *creuseurs* in capitalist times.

History and the African miner

What is the relationship between political power and copper mining in Congo? Archaeological evidence of copper production in South Central Africa has been dated to as early as the fourth century AD near the springs of Naviundu River at the outskirts of what is today the city of Lubumbashi (De Maret 1985: 138). Prior to the discovery of the Naviundu copper remains, archaeologists discovered copper *croisettes* that dated to the 8th and 9th centuries in an ancient necropolis named *Sanga* near Lake Kisale in the Upemba depression of Katanga province, hundreds of kilometers away from any known copper deposits (De Maret 1977). The archaeological evidence from the *Sanga* necropolis points to an early use of copper in the making of ornaments that were markers of both status and power in the societies living around Lake Kisale in the 8th to 10th centuries. Gradually, changes to the use of copper become increasingly common in burial sites dating to the 11th century, and later, the metal took the shape of ingots and *croisettes* of increasing standardized sizes suggesting copper was being used as a form of currency possibly for marriage payments in the savanna regions of Central Africa (Bisson

1975:280, 2000:118; De Maret 1977:384). The copper *croisettes* found in the Sanga necropolis have been traced to the mines on the western side of the Congolese Copperbelt, near what is today the town of Kolwezi, south of the Lualaba River. In numerous other sites along the Copperbelt ingots of various shapes and sizes have been discovered in areas as far south as Zimbabwe in the *Mwene Motapa* Kingdom and southern Malawi – further highlighting the existence of a vibrant trade corridor in pre-colonial Central Africa (Bisson 2000: 120).

The relationship between political power and copper mining in the Copperbelt of Congo obtains most vivid description from the former apostolic vicar of the parish in Lubumbashi, *Monseigneur* de Hemptinne (1926). He describes how a Yeke leader named Nkuba organized and run one of his copper mining campaigns having been trained and initiated into a guild of “copper eaters”. Originally these were Sanga people that had developed smithing and smelting techniques in *Kalale*, the mining region in south central Congo in present day Katanga. Msgr. de Hemptinne mentions that “ Chief Nkuba was a master *ngang’a* – healer – and village head who paid tribute in ingots of copper to *Mwenda* Kitanika” of the Bayeke. Just as it is among the Luba, customary authority – *bulopwe* – among the people of the south central Congo was considered sacred and thus, in Nkuba paying tribute to Kitanika he was reinforcing his allegiance to his political leader but also symbolically, recognizing the authority of “father” to “son”.

Mining in Congo Copperbelt begun in the dry season, around mid-May, after the harvest of sorghum. It began with the “chief” pronouncing “*Tuye Tukadie Mukuba*”, “Let us go eat copper” (1926: 381). It was the “chief” himself who launched the mining campaign and he summoned the *ngang’a* to invoke the assistance of the spirits of the ancestors, “*Bakishi*”, which were ancestral spirits of old Basanga chiefs. In De Hemptinne’s description the *ngang’a* invoked “Chief Muyeye, the father of Chief Nkuba”. The *ngang’a* is recorded to have said to the *bakishi*:

“You who have gone before us
It is you who have opened
For your children the belly of the mountain
Allow us to find the treasure”⁷.

De Hemptinne (1926: 382)

With these pronouncements, De Hemptinne suggests that “Chief” Nkuba ordered the start of the campaign and it lasted until about the month of October (for four to five months) after which time smelting begun. The entire village would relocate to the closest river or stream near the mine until the mining season was over. After each extraction campaign,

⁷ I translated this paragraph from French.

members of the village offered a portion of their copper ore to the Chief in recognition of his role in ritually maintaining the fertility of the land and its people. Even after paying those dues, those men digging and women cleaning the ore still obtained a substantial portion of the copper resource. It is estimated that from 1850 to 1910 the Basanga people produced approximately 700 tonnes of copper (De Hemptinne 1926: 402). In around 1880 it is said that Msiri, a guest of a Sanga *Mulopwe* Pande Kyamulemba, had usurped power⁸ in the region and was in control of the copper trade with the help of Arab slave traders from whom he obtained guns, gunpowder, and slaves (Vansina 1966:227-235). Msiri's monopoly on the copper, ivory, and slave trade gained him immense notoriety in the late 19th century and tales of his wealth and brutal exploits were narrated by early explorers⁹ ultimately providing part of the impetus for King Leopold II's interest in the Congo¹⁰. With Belgian colonialism the power of Basanga, Bayeke, and Balamba chiefs was significantly diminished for they lost total control of their ancient mines. For the Basanga these were the mines of Kamatanda, Kampobe (Kambove), Kakanda, Karabi and Kony.

The arrival of the railway from southern Africa in 1910 facilitated for the movement of copper ore but it also led to an increase in the number of Europeans arriving in Elizabethville¹¹ to work for either the Union Miniere, Katanga railways, or the *Force Publique*¹² (Fetter 1976: 34). In order to obtain cheap labor, Europeans imposed a head tax policy that was administered by local chiefs and village headmen. This resulted in a forceful push of Africans away from the countryside and into urban centers. Africans in Elizabethville lived in camps that had, at best, "primitive" conditions¹³ (Fetter 1976: 35).

⁸ Msiri established the Bayeke Chiefdom in Katanga around 1870 and demanded tribute from the earliest copper producing chiefs of Lamba and Sanga origin (such as Chief Muyeye, father of Chief Nkuba whom de Hemptinne observed).

⁹ Explorer accounts of Henry Morton Stanley and David Livingstone were particularly important in exciting European colonial imaginations. Stanley's second expedition in 1886 to the Congo was named the "Emin Pasha Expedition" and it was directly funded by King Leopold II of Belgium.

¹⁰ Leopold's claim that he was interested in stopping the East African slave trade was a ploy for his aim was the incorporation of Katanga into his private colony, the Congo Free State. The death of Msiri in 1891 at the hands of Captain Bodson, a member of an expedition group sent by King Leopold, and the subsequent failed revolt of the Basanga against Belgian rule ushered in the industrial era.

¹¹ This was the colonial name of the city of Lubumbashi.

¹² The *Force Publique* was a para-military unit created by King Leopold II during the times of the Congo Free State (1898 – 1910). It was responsible for enforcing Belgian colonial policy and it played a significant part in meting out violence during the "Red Rubber" campaigns in which millions of Congolese lost their lives. See S och   n and O'Sullivan (2003)

¹³ Stories of Africans being eaten alive by *batumbula*, terrifying creatures that ate the flesh and drank the blood of Africans in Katanga, circulated widely in Elizabethville and in Rhodesia during the early 1920s (White 2000: 270).

At the peak of industrialization in the 1960s, mining companies were the dominant social force in the African Copperbelt. In the city of Lubumbashi in Katanga province of Congo, residents lived according to the rhythm of the state-run mining company, *Union Minière du Haut Katanga* (UMHK). The company was at once authoritarian and paternalistic (Dibwe 2001; Fetter 1976; Jewsiewicki 2010). Faced with dwindling copper production and a shortage of workers in the 1920s, UMHK introduced a policy of "stabilization" that was intent on increasing fertility¹⁴ and survival rates in the mining camps. At independence in 1960, the company was providing food, housing, medical care, running water, and it was even paying the bridewealth for its workers and their families, whom it effectively considered its "children", or "*bana shaba*" ("copper children", see Dibwe 2001). In providing better housing to married couples and free primary schooling to children, the company was trying to entice men to sign longer employment contracts (Dibwe 2001). The strategy had some success for in 1965 the average length of an employee contract with the Union Minière was nine years (Fabian 1973: 301). All the children of mineworkers went to primary school; thirty percent of the boys went to professional school and the rest to the worksite¹⁵. Homemaking schools prepared wives and mothers for their new role as a "support system for salaried male workers" (Jewsiewicki 2010:9; Hunt 1997). According to historians, "stabilization" misrepresented the fact that the management of Union Minière was basically trying to "breed its own labor force" (Dibwe 2001; Fetter 1976: 466).

Evidence of the paternalism of the company in post-independence Congo was reflected in the often heard remarks that "*Union Minière [kaji] njo baba, njo mama*", that is, "Union Minière (salaried work) is father and mother"¹⁶ (Petit & Mutambwa 2005: 470). Through its system of "welfare capitalism" in which work, leisure, lodging, healthcare, education, marriage, and even spiritual life were controlled by the company and guaranteed on the basis of employment, the *Union Minière* tried to create the male mineworker as a domestic patriarch of a monogamous nuclear family. By offering bridewealth to new recruits, restricting the movement of its workers, and controlling their leisure time, historians argue that the company was gradually trying to substitute itself for the clan and extended family (Dibwe 2001:55).

¹⁴ Improved maternal health in the UMHK "camps" led to claims that by 1950, the "camps" had some of the highest birthrates in the world¹⁴ (Jewsiewicki 2010:9).

¹⁵ The "benevolence" of the company nurtured a "myth of philanthropic paternalism" (Higginson 1989: 185) based on the fact that at independence in 1960, the Union Minière was directly responsible for the destinies of twenty thousand workers and total of a hundred thousand people (Jewsiewicki 2010: 9).

¹⁶ To economic importance of Union Minière not only to Katanga residents but also to the Congolese postcolonial state is made even more explicit if it is noted that just prior to the collapse of the company in 1990 with the closure of Kamoto mine, the Union Minière contributed almost 40% of all of the foreign exchange revenue earned by the country (De Herdt 2002:448).

By the late 1980s signs of industrial decline were afoot but few would have predicted the spectacular collapse of the company, which by then had been renamed *Gécamines*. It took many of the residents of Katanga by surprise, for unlike the rest of the Congolese, revenues from mining had for decades offered relative stability and cushioned the Katangese from much of the economic turmoil in post-independence Congo. However, the closure of Kamoto mine in 1990 signaled the veritable end of an industrial era (Rubbers 2009:29). In spite of the fact that the collapse of mining was symptomatic of post-Cold War political realignments, wider state failure, and the volatility of international markets, it was not experienced or explained as such. Children apportioned blame to their fathers for taking all the benefits of industrialism and leaving them with nothing. “Fathers” became a social group widely held responsible for mishandling independence and permitting the ensuing corruption of President Mobutu¹⁷ and his elites (Jewsiewicki 2010: 10; see also Dibwe 2001). Decades of a colonially produced institutional paternalism had eventually produced its own auto-critique.

Dwindling American support for the kleptocratic regime of President Mobutu set the stage for his violent removal from power in 1997¹⁸. This occurred at a time when the World Bank and International Monetary Foundation were implementing Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) across Africa. For the people of Katanga, structural adjustment resulted in the privatization of all state-owned companies and the loss of tens of thousands of industrial jobs. It is in the wake of this economic restructuring and the hardening of the times that the figure of the *creuseur* emerges.

Creuseurs and the colonizing structure

The liberalization of the mining industry in 2002 coincided with a rise of world metal prices at a time when the economic opportunities for many families in Katanga were in steep decline. Some of the skilled workers from the *Union Minière* managed to get jobs in private mining companies but the fate of a vast number of the children of *Union Minière* workers was painfully different. Unable to continue with school and with no means of support, these children and youth descended – in the thousands – to the copper, gold, and cobalt mines of Katanga to earn a living. Some came from as far off as Kasai and Kivu to work as *creuseurs*, *salizers*, *vendeurs*¹⁹, and *négociants*²⁰ in *carrières* of anything between 2,000 to 20,000 people. Francis my informant explained his situation to me as follows:

¹⁷ President Mobutu Sese Seko became the President of Congo in 1965 after the assassination of the Prime Minister-elect Patrice Lumumba. He ruled Congo for 32 years.

¹⁸ Laurent-Desire Kabila deposed Mobutu from power in a coup that led to warfare all across the country.

¹⁹ Refers to the vendors who sell food and drinks to *creuseurs* and other people working in mining sites. They are very often women.

²⁰ These are the direct buyers of artisanal mining products who work with *creuseurs* in the mines.

I was born in Likasi in August of 1986. My father worked for an industrial metal company called SOCRAL here in Likasi until he got sick in 1997. As the first born in my family I dropped out of school and started to choquer²¹. Four years later I ended up in the carrières. I started off as a salizer²², then I began carrying the ore from the mine the river for cleaning. Afterwards I joined the “chain”²³ and I was getting paid for removing the ore from the mining shaft. At last, they allowed me to start working on the “tableau”²⁴. I became a creuseur.

The narrative pattern that Francis outlines above of the sickness and, quite possibly, subsequent loss of employment of his father leading to the discontinuation of his studies was a recurring theme in the interviews and focus group discussions I conducted with *creuseurs*. If there was sickness involved then the explanation often given to me to explain how they ended up in the mines was reduced to one word: “*crise*”. The “*crise*” was an implicit reference to the relationship between the macro-structural trajectory of industrial decline and its attendant effects in the domestic life of individuals. It was the impetus for “*debrouillardise*”, or the “fend-for-yourself” culture that scholars have often identified as “Article 15” of Congolese social life (Petit & Mutambwa 2005, Trefon 2004, Young 1985). The particular manifestation of the need for improvisation so as to survive led Francis and others to the mines due to the abundance of minerals in southern Congo. It’s important to note that most of the mines young men moved descended upon in the early 2000s were ancient artisanal mines that had been taken over by *Union Minière* and later abandoned by the company as industrialism collapsed. These mines were often in peri-urban and rural areas, off the beaten track from urban centers.

Small-scale mines in Katanga have spawned a whole cottage industry of services in remote areas as productive *carrières* awash with real (and speculative) money attracted a multitude of other “informal” service jobs ranging from money transfer agents, sex workers, to “doctors”. Remote areas of Katanga are becoming bustling centers of commerce, turning the bushy environs into small towns of up to as many as 100,000

²¹ *Choqué* or *choquer* means “to shock” in French. However, here it is used in its slang form to mean something close to “hussle” or “struggle” to make a living by doing small jobs. It is an example of the paragon statement of the times in Congo today and resonates with the “Article 15” in Kinshasa, “*debrouillez vous!*” or, “make ends meet”.

²² *Salir* in French is “to make dirty”. The usage here is slang and it refers to the teenage boys get themselves dirty by sifting out the soil from the malachite in water so as to obtain a cleaner product.

²³ The “chain” is quite literally a chain of individuals who are situated on the walls of the mining shaft and work to haul out the ore as well as dug up soil as it is made available from deep in the hole. In deep mines chains of up to 10 people are necessary as the mining shaft moves down vertically and also horizontally

²⁴ *Tableau* in French means, a “board”. Like a black-board or a notice-board. As it is used here it refers to the surface on which extraction is undertaken.

people²⁵. In these bush enclaves, housing, restaurants and bars, pharmacies, money transfer stalls, and state offices are made of sticks and sackcloth, materials that are cheap, portable, and recyclable. Small fuel generators power fridges and televisions, and practically all transport is by motorcycles. Everything from mattresses to crates of beer is transported by “bajaj” motorcycles. If it cannot be carried by “moto”, as *creuseurs* say, “it’s not needed”. “*Bintu apa il faut kuwa portable*”, “everything here must be portable”.

The sense of portability, movement, and impermanence in the *carrière* was manifest in more than the architecture of their surroundings. I came to note that the need to move among *creuseurs* was informed by an awareness of fluctuating mineral prices. If gold was up, you shifted from mining copper or cobalt and went in search for the gold mines, and vice versa. It was especially when mineral prices were high that the traffic of people grew exponentially. Buyers of minerals, *négociants*, sponsored *creuseurs* to open mining shafts thereby attracting an increasing number of youth and petty traders to *carrières*. The downside to a boom in mineral prices was that it also attracted the attention of investors, or private speculators who have more money and sufficient influence to lease the very concessions that *creuseurs* worked in. Visibility invited the threat of expropriation of mining sites, resources, and local livelihoods – a threat that some *creuseurs* countered by saying to me that they were ready to die in defense of the *carrier*.

Talk of “dying for the mine” initially struck me as hyperbole, a locally accepted way of distinguishing a persona through exaggerated praise. In Kingwana they called it *kutapa*, and *creuseurs* were masters of exaggeration. I did not think much of the claim that young men would sacrifice their lives until I started to unpack the organizational structure of relationships within an artisanal mine. The more I observed, the more it seemed to mimic that of formal militaries. Occupational names of certain key jobs in the *carrière*, like *mercenaries* (hired hands/mercenaries), *négociants* (price brokers/peace makers), and *dirigents* (managers/commanders) spoke of a division of labor that sought to mirror that of a military battalion. Rasta *creuseurs* in the mines had an even more hierarchical organization that included generals, brigadiers, colonels, and officers. The very character of a *carrière*, which required portability; minimalism of many of the comforts of home; hard labor in remote environments made some *creuseurs* think of themselves as soldiers²⁶.

²⁵ Examples of such areas are Kimanyuki, Miringi, Luisha, Mbola, Kamatanda and Kansunga in Katanga.

²⁶ I conducted a focus group discussion in the office for the Association of Artisanal Miners of Katanga (EMAK) with a group of over 40 *creuseurs* just prior to their “deployment” to a private mine in Kifumpa in southwestern Katanga. I was invited to talk to them as they awaited instructions, counseling, and money before departing to the *carrière*.

“creuseur eko ça soldat; anapata bunduki barre de mine, mas, besh, na anatumika. Unapata bantu bakusaidia na habatauliza kama muntu ni ba Kisangani ama bapi. Mutatumika”.

[A *creseur* is like a soldier. He gets his “gun”, his metallic mining bar, hammer, and shovel and he gets to work. He can get people to help and they will not care if he is from Kisangani or wherever. They will all just get to work.]

The sense that working in the mines was like soldiering for a cause was reinforced by the fact that you had to work in *equipes*, or groups of four or five people. You often lived with your team in small shacks around the *carrière* or in the mine shaft itself. Every day, as you descend down the mining shafts to work, you risked your lives as a unit. It would not be a stretch of the imagination to compare the camaraderie of *creuseurs* with the sense of *esprit de corps* in organized state militaries. I want to suggest that the modeling on life in artisanal mines along militaristic lines is not a haphazard transplantation of war fantasies from elsewhere, it is in fact a manifestation of what Franz Fanon (1963) called the *atmosphere of violence*. That is, a general state of anxiety, nervousness, and insecurity that defines a colonial environment. Part of unconscious logic underpinning the structuring of the *creuseurs* work in militaristic fashion was the need for resistance against a state whose governmentality is still, by and large, informed by the “colonizing structure” (Mudimbe 1998:5). It is not entirely implausible that the hegemony of existing colonial structures that the postcolonial state of Congo has been largely unable to rid itself of account for the militant order informing the organizational structure of *creusage*. In many ways this autocratic, hierarchical, and in some ways arbitrary arrangement of work and power relations reflects what Achille Mbembe has called the *commandment* (2001). One may even speculate that it is a contemporary manifestation of the internalization of the violent histories that created the Congolese state and continue to perpetuate its existence.

If the structure of the collective organization hints of an attempt to discipline and organize young men then that same desire is also reflected in how mining space is regulated. The entire artisanal mine is a tightly controlled space littered with state agents from the military intelligence, mining police, the provincial ministry of mines, the provincial administration, and the provincial association for small-scale miners (EMAK). The entire machinery of state actors exists to extort *creuseurs* and their buyers, *négociants*, based on the volume of extracted ore. Mining police control entry and exit points in the *carrières*. The *chef coutumier* (customary chief) organizes the partitioning of land for mining, commercial, and residential purposes. Local villagers along with the wives and girlfriends of *creuseurs* and *négociants* run the majority of businesses in the villages surrounding the *carrières* providing food, lodging, and various other services.

For as long as there is money to be made, the state, in the form of the *agent de l'état*, or as indirectly represented by the customary authorities, is manifest and commands a fee.

The ubiquitous presence of the state was a source anger as well as satire. It was a running joke in Katanga when one asked you:

Q. “*Unayua maana ya L'état?*” [Do you know the meaning of The State?]

A. [after a guess] “*Apana*” [No]

Q. [snatching whatever the other held in his hands] *Leh Tah* [“Bring it!” in Swahili]

“To bring” in Swahili literally translates as “*kuleta*”. However, when used in its command form the prefix ku- is dropped leaving *leta*, which is pronounced “leh-tah”, phonetically similar to *L'état* (“the state”) in French.

The state and its functionaries did not in any meaningful way provide security or support to people in the *carrières*, in fact, their presence highlighted the onerous nature of seizure. It took only a moment's notice to bring the forces of State power to bear down on an area, seizing it and expelling all within it. For *creuseurs*, the army and police in Katanga exists especially for this purpose. It was regularly co-opted by private interests or *bazungu* (foreigners) as they say, making it the face of the violence of privatization for *creuseurs*. The very sight of a *muzungu* in the *carrières* was explained to me as the *death* of the *carrier* for it was perceived that this racial other always had dominating intentions. The presence of a *muzungu* in the mine was enough to get everyone to stop working in readiness for a fight. This encounter with the *muzungu* has echoes of the colonial moment when the social geography of the Congo was the private property of King Leopold II of Belgium and rubber extraction was the central focus of the Congo Free State forcing local villagers to either fight, flee, or submit to the colonizer. In this manner, *creuseur* relations with contemporary free capital can be viewed as rehearsals of the harrowing violence of the colonial past.

Possessing pasts and dispossessing presents

Fears that the *carrières* could be shut down or expropriated loomed large over *creuseurs* and others whose livelihoods were shaped and supported by artisanal mining. This fear is borne out of lived experiences of lost livelihoods and deaths as they occurred in places like Mbola. The *carrière* of Mbola was a booming cobalt mining site when in 2006, the State conspired with a private investor to lease land that was, at the time, highly productive for tens of thousands of *creuseurs* (Cuvelier 2011a). Demonstrations and protests lasted weeks and not even the brutality of the army could placate *creuseurs* from

abandoning what they claimed was “their mountain”. Chants of “*bulongo ni wa bankambo*”, “the earth is our ancestors’ ”, rallied all those disenfranchised by the privatization of the mine into a frenzy of violence. In Likasi, one informant mentioned that *creuseurs* from Mbola went on a rampage after the army arrived and upon reaching Likasi – which is over 50 kms away from Mbola – raided the office of the mayor and destroyed everything. They tried to capture the Mayor of Likasi so as to strip him naked and shame him for colluding to expropriate their ancestors’ land²⁷.

In a focus group discussion with a group of around thirty *creuseurs* who eventually had to leave Mbola, they described their predicament as follows:

Creuser njo anavumbula kirima, ni siye njo tunavumbula. Minasema creuser ni ça géologue anadépensé ya mingi mu kirima. Anaripa ceremonie, dépense ya nshimo chaque jour, mei muzungu anakuya anauza kirima ku prix anapenda. Muzungu na L’etat habaoni dépense. Situation iko je, ni ça, umeoa bibi mei après unakuya kuvumbula balishaoa bibi yako ku bwana mingine. Utaexpliqué je iyo situation?

[The *creuseur* discovers ore in the mountain; it is *we* who discover the ore. By this I mean we are like geologists, we expend a lot [of money, energy, time, knowledge] on the mountain. We pay for ritual ceremonies; we expend money every day on developing the hole but the whites come and buys the mountain at the price that he likes. The White man and the Government don’t see the expenditure [we have incurred].

The situation is something like this: You have just married your wife and then, sometime later, you come to discover that your wife was already married to another man. How would you explain that [stuff]?)

Land is viewed by *creuseurs* as an inalienable resource since it is tied to local histories, demanding efforts made to make it productive, and unique skills of discovering ores. All of this is local knowledge that is rendered obsolete and unwanted in the future-oriented optics of capital markets. As the young man explains, “the white man and the state” do not *see* their expenditure. This blindness is a negation of a history, time, and collective identity and it suggests that *creuseurs* are not *in-sync* and out-of-place with the neoliberal order. The affective dimensions of this temporal incongruity are what demanded for the *creuseurs* to compare the relationship between *creuseurs* and the mountain as being

²⁷ In discussion about Mbola with a *négociant* and friend of Chef Mfuko, Mr. Kasongo, he mentioned to me that he lost his son in the violence of Mbola in 2006. Subsequent to that, his wife left him and told him to stop working in the mines. He blames his woes on foreigners, *bazungu*, who come to Congo to “buy the country” leaving the locals with nothing. He was furious when it came to issues regarding *bazungu* involvement in mining.

inimical to a marriage between a man and his “wife”. Relationships between *creuseurs* and the spirits of the mountain underwent perpetual shifts and were deeply personalized. In all the mines I visited it was constantly rumored that there were individuals who used witchcraft, “*lawa*”, to obtain the minerals they extracted but these were often unproven claims. However, at a collective level of the mine, miners knew there was a constant need to appease the spirits “*mizimu*” of the mountain through rituals and offerings given to the *chef coutumier*. In the mine where I carried out my fieldwork, the absence of mineral ore and instances of injury or death due to collapsing mining shafts were directly attributed to be the work of the mountain spirit living in the mine. It was explained to me by the *chef coutumier* that mountains were spirits that were alive and when they got displeased, they swallowed up individuals. Angry mountain spirits had to be placated with ritual and offerings to release those it held and to allow the resumption mining activities as well as the flow of the ore.

For *creuseurs* then, discovering ore in a mountain was as a result of the benevolence of the spirits. This relationship to the land mirrors that of their forefathers, *les mangeurs de cuivre*, who viewed mining as an animated process of “eating copper” that was offered to them by the spirits in the land. Due to the commingling of *creuseurs* with mountain spirits, the seizure of the mountain of Mbola by a *muzungu* – a foreigner – was perceived as an affront not just to their livelihoods but also on their sense of masculinity²⁸ and collective identities as the descendants of the ancestors. In rhetorically asking me “How do you explain that [stuff]?” the group of *creuseurs* were appealing to me – as a man –not for a *reason* but an *action*. You *cannot* explain why someone would seize the source of your livelihood. However, what you can do is *fight* them. Due to the tendency to employ the use of force as a tactic of resistance to foreign capital, polite society in Katanga has come to label *creusage* as a *voyou* activity, a job for hooligans, thereby depoliticizing it and minimizing its socio-historical complexity. If we recall that many *creuseurs* are in actual fact the children of former industrial workers then we must acknowledge that *creusage* as a social practice is a contemporary sign of compounded generational disenfranchisement in neoliberal times. Though *creuseurs* engage with the market in meaningful ways as petty traders, free capital continues to frame *creusage* as being incongruous with the times and therefore, a dispensable element of the inevitable march of capitalism in Congo.

²⁸ For lengthier discussions on the masculinity of Katanga miners see Cuvelier (2011b). For an analysis on the association between diamond mining and hunting among the Aluund see De Boeck (1998).

Conclusions

The aversion to risk, whether physical or material was *not* a feature that marked life as a *creuseur*. In fact, being a *creseur* for many meant living constantly on the edge; at risk of dying, being completely disfigured by the collapsing earth, getting financially ruined by the market, or having your mine abruptly expropriated by private interests²⁹. The work of *creuseurs* was a source of anxiety for parents as well as the traders who worked with them on a daily basis. People like Papa Felicien, a father of four, had grown up working in the diamond mining industry of Kasai province. He had gone on to university and studied theology and he become a pastor. His church collapsed and almost thirty years later, he came full circle, back to the mines. This time he was a reluctant *négociant*, buying copper ore from *creuseurs* and selling it to Chinese and Lebanese mineral buyers. For Papa Felicien *creusage* was “*un jeu de fous*”, “a game for the mad”,

“Cresage has no benefits. It sends people to enter into witchcraft and witchcraft kills. If you send a child to work as a creseur, you are killing them. All creseur activity is bad, it makes a child uncivil; dull of the mind. It’s a crazy game. It is death. [Among] These children, there are licensed university graduates; what is it they lack? ... When we grew up life was good but our children are growing up like vagabonds”.

The parental fear of moral corruption in the *carrière* was very real as Papa Felicien observes, but it weighed far less importance to the imperatives of a daily wage. Though the dangers of life in the mines were known people both young and old kept returning to the mines in spite of their better judgment and planning. Precarity was the constant feature of social life in contemporary Congo and neither education nor social status sufficiently insulates you from it.

Herein marks the difference with industrial life in Katanga, a life predicated on “stability” and a salaried sedentary social order based on welfare guarantees. The collapse of this industrial model of welfare capitalism produced distrust about employment and a salaried life, just as it engendered desperation and a “fend-for-yourself” attitude on an unprecedented scale especially among youth in Katanga. While many retrenched industrial workers would lament to me how tragically their lives have changed today and decry how telling it is that “the future was in reverse”, young men espoused a rather contrasting view. Youth lived in the *now* and for them; they were keen to “take the waiting out of the wanting” (Comaroffs 2006: 267-280). Their claims to subsisting off the

²⁹ I am aware that industrial mining is equally a life threatening activity nevertheless, the safety standards of small-scale mining are far more perilous than those faced by most industrial miners. Most *creuseurs* have little training in first-aid techniques and they lack the technical skills and equipment to rapidly recover miners in the event of a mining shaft collapse.

land were couched in a language of inalienable rights: “the earth is our ancestors” (“*bulongo ni wa bankambo*). So while *creuseurs* located a response to the dispossession they faced in a return to the past, their “fathers”, the industrial workers, lived in anticipation of the *yet* promised future.

With the liberalization of mining in Congo, the future appears to have a very restricted sense. To be precise, it has been construed by the state as a market-driven resource exploitative horizon of capital. This futurity authored by the state and its funders is being brought to life through violence and modes of domination that have more continuity than disjuncture with the colonial era. In the push for profit in Congo, the rights of artisanal miners are trampled upon, guarantees of the industrial past are withdrawn, and society is forced to fit the prescriptions and oscillations of the global market. With the optics of the state and its investors being so future-oriented they occlude an understanding of the *creuseur* as an uncanny figure of the African miner that mirrors future-pasts and the paradoxes of labour and time in post-industrial Africa.

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