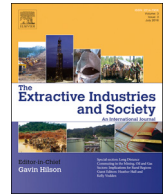




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Mining temporalities: Future perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In this commentary, I trace how temporal frames are embedded in spatial notions. I want to look into contrasts between 'old' mining regions and the newer terrains for resource extraction, and comment upon the recent resurgence of 'frontier' as analytical term. Subsequently, I want to focus on future makers, both in the field of planning and development. In both cases I will pay attention to the articulation of multiple temporalities at work within a social context. In analysing the politics of time in development discourse, the focus will be on moralities of money matters and time frames of debt relations. With this commentary, I want to emphasize that we need to analyse how multiple mining temporalities take place: how the making of temporalities is connected to place making; how the making of temporalities is best studied in tangible empirical events that take place; and how future projections are quarantined from, or directly affect social processes actually taking place.

1. Introduction

This is a most timely special issue. The recent booms in extracting minerals, as well as oil and gas have clearly triggered booms in studies on mining. In anthropology, the discipline of most of the contributors, the study of mining has triggered new lines of questioning about globalization, forms of capitalism and state-company-community relations. The subject of mining has forced anthropologists to rethink their traditional turfs and topics, as well as their ethical commitments and positionality. Recently published studies have set agendas for a radical rethinking of capitalisms, and corporate form (Golub, 2014; Kirsch, 2014; Rajak, 2011; Welker, 2014), but have also given rise to fierce ethical debates on how anthropologists should navigate in spaces created by conflict (Coumans, 2011). Building upon D'Angelo's and Pijpers' subtle analysis of the movement from the spatial turn to the temporal turn (in this issue), I want to analyse some of the linkages between space and time. I want to trace how temporal frames are embedded in spatial notions. First, I want to analyse characteristics of comparative frames bringing together old mining regions and the newer terrains for resource extraction, and, secondly, I want to comment upon the recent resurgence of 'frontier' as analytical term. I move on by focusing on future makers, notably planners, consultants and policy makers. In these cases I want to pay attention to the articulation of multiple mining temporalities (D'Angelo and Pijpers, in this issue) at work within a social context. In my comments on planning, I want to ask how contradictory time-frames are kept separate in the analysis of the development-mining nexus and I want to raise questions about the moralities associated with different temporalities, in particular in reference

to money matters. With this commentary, I want to emphasize that we need to analyse how multiple mining temporalities take place: how the making of temporalities is connected to place making; how the making of temporalities is best studied in tangible empirical events that take place; and how future projections are quarantined from, or affect social processes actually taking place.

2. Setting the scene: comparing mining spaces along temporal axes

The articles in this special issue cover a wide regional range from Australia, North and South America to Europe, to a substantial number of contributions based on fieldwork in Africa. Some of these regions have a long history of industrial mining history, but most – in particular in Africa – have only recently been targeted by transnational corporations for their resource potential. In the world of mining this scope is often placed on a temporal axis: the 'old' world of mining with its discoveries in the 19th century (North America, Australia, Southern Africa) and the 'new' terrains that have only been seen for its mining potential since older resource terrains have become exhausted and new technologies allow for the exploitation of previously uneconomical deposits. Emel and Huber (2008) have studied how this divide between 'old' and 'new' mining worlds is playing out in the ways mining companies talk about risk. They analyse how the shifts from 'mining at home to mining abroad' are assessed in what they call a 'topography of risk' in which a safe, well organized old mining world is contrasted strategically with a risky and volatile Africa. This discourse is functional in negotiating good tax deals for mining companies vis à vis African –

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risky – states. For this special issue, this line of enquiry is relevant in a twofold manner: 1) it shows how representations of terrains for mining often frame space in terms of temporal perspectives, and 2) it shows the strategic use of such temporalized spatial contrasts.

Contrasts between ‘old’ and ‘new’ mining terrains may take various forms (see [Akiwumi & D’Angelo, in press](#)), and need not necessarily have the strategic purpose of portraying Africa in a negative way. On the contrary, optimism about Africa dominates at conferences where mining companies aim to lure investors into their exploration ventures. A good example is the annual conference of the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) in Toronto, the largest organisation in the world that brings together companies active in exploration and mine development. Later in this article, I will use fieldwork information obtained at the PDAC of 2010 as a vignette to analyse how presenters in panels can uphold optimistic temporal outlooks even in times of heavy mining busts. One of the temporal axes that is often used for this purpose highlights the promises of Africa by linking ‘old’ and ‘new’ mining regions: what has already been mined in the old world is presented as index for what is still waiting to be extracted in the new mining terrains. This message is conveyed by looking merely at the geological potential of West Africa, a landscape of subterranean mineral wealth, stripped of any social presence. This scaling up of a gaze on a region – moving up from the social level of a country to a scale of pure geology – is a perfect strategy to turn West Africa into a resource frontier, an empty land just waiting for investment ([Luning, 2014](#)).

The ways in which regions with long mining histories are compared to areas where mining is relatively new, and the use of such framings in assessing the effects – curses and blessings – of mining merits further research. These sorts of comparisons are made by policymakers and NGOs (best practices moving from ‘older’ areas with more experience to newer mining terrains; [Hilson, 2008](#)), by law makers in the international arena (mining codes from the old world may be used as example for Africa. See [Campbell, 2009](#)), but also by communities who are positioned differently on the space-time axis of ‘greenfields’ to ‘brown-fields’ ([Owen and Kemp, 2015](#)), and by activists and people who may want to warn against the impacts of large-scale mining projects. In the first two cases the ‘past’ is seen as index for positive prospects, in the second as a warning sign of what may be in store for newly affected communities and areas.

By bringing such space-time comparisons into an analytical framework, we can address the different scales (both in terms of time and space) on which the comparisons are grafted, as well as the different actors on the mining scene who may be using such comparisons: mining companies, states, mining communities, activist NGOs and academics. Starting point is that we are dealing with constructed, politicized contrasts between past, present and future, and that the framing can ‘take place’ anywhere. Often ‘the old mining world’ is represented as frontrunner with parts of the ‘Global South’ as late-comer, but space-time contrasts can also be put to work within the western world. In various nation-states in Europe, extraction of resources is at times portrayed as a remedy for economic gaps between developed centres and backward peripheries of a country. In the Netherlands, coal mining was long seen as a way to bring prosperity to the marginal province of Limburg, and later similar discourse was voiced for Groningen with its gas. In both cases, spatial areas are seen as latecomers in processes of economic development. Notions such as ‘hinterlands’, ‘virgin lands’, and ‘frontiers’ have a long history in the politics of resource mobilities. They are used to describe all sorts of areas that may be ‘discovered’ or ‘opened up’ for the arrival of new forms of resource extractions, and capital accumulation. These areas have ‘not yet’ realized their potential, hence they are seen as terrains where time still has to do its inevitable work towards economic and governmental development.

3. Analytical framing of mining scenes: frontiers and mining mobilities

The politics of such spatial-temporal notions warn us to be careful with the use of these terms as analytical devices in our work. Yet, a main analytical term that has resurged in mining studies is the notion of frontier. Many researchers currently frame their analytical perspective in terms of ‘mining frontiers’ ([Akiwumi and D’Angelo, in press](#); [Bryceson and Geenen, 2016](#); [Grätz, 2013](#); [Peluso and Lund, 2011](#); [Peluso, 2018](#); [Rasmussen and Lund, 2018](#); [Tsing, 2005](#); [Werthmann and Grätz, 2012](#)). The concept is used to create room to think about powerful processes of defining (new) rules for access to land and labour organization in dynamic, often new, mining scenes. This revisit of the ‘frontier’ concept is critical of Turners’ assumptions in the analysis of the westward oriented frontier politics in 19th century USA ([Turner 1956, 1893 or.](#)). Scholars acknowledge nowadays that Turner presupposed processes of movement of land use and governance into ‘empty lands’, thereby erasing indigenous presence, precedence and histories. At present, authors use the notion of frontier to be able to analyse dynamics in territorialisation as a result of the arrival of new forms of extraction. Emphasis is put on how these extraction practices depend upon powerful processes of ‘freeing up’ land ([Rasmussen and Lund, 2018](#)) and destruction of existing property regimes, political structures and life worlds ([Geiger, 2008](#)). Moreover, [Akiwumi and D’Angelo \(in press\)](#) show how framing current mining operations in terms of targeting ‘new deposits’ at a ‘frontier’ may be a strategy to overlook longer mining histories.

Frontiers are nowadays seen as contact zones and spheres of friction ([Tsing, 2005](#); [Luning and Pijpers, 2017](#)), which can emerge not just on the fringe of state formation, or in between polities ([Kopytoff, 1987](#)), but at any place where new forms of extraction and techniques move in with some force in order to obtain access to resources.

Even though, this perspective on resource frontiers recognizes the presence of preceding inhabitants and users of land, this recent literature does tend to see new extraction practices a priori as fundamental challenges to existing institutional arrangements. In the light of the long history of the erasing effects of the notion of frontier, I would urge a most careful use of the term. When we use the term frontier, we should be aware of its role in the politics of representation and we need to keep a keen eye for the diversity and shifts over time in encounters between people already residing in an area and migrant miners, be they large-scale companies ([Pijpers, 2018](#)) or small-scale miners.

The contribution by [Lanzano \(in this issue\)](#) demonstrates the value of such a keen eye in the study of artisanal mining. The article is composed as a comparison between a region with a very long history of artisanal mining, Bouré in Guinea and a region where mining has arrived only recently (in the western part of Burkina Faso). This choice allows Lanzano to bring out how these specific histories affect dynamics of hosting new arriving miners. In Guinea mining mobilities were the norm and part and parcel of existing practices of host-guest relations ([Luning et al., 2014](#)). Lanzano describes the institutional features of accommodating mobile miners, and the shifts that occurred in the wake of the arrival of Burkinabé, who started hard-rock mining using new extraction and processing techniques. The technological innovations and moves away from alluvial placers into new geological terrain affect both the temporal and the institutional framing of access, organization of work and redistribution in mining practices in this part of Africa. The case Lanzano describes for West Burkina, on the other hand, is concerned with more vulnerable host communities that are not familiar with mining. The organization of the mining boom in that part of Burkina was primarily in the hands of mining actors. Local communities could not capitalize on their role as hosts by setting terms for regulating access. They did, however, make a comeback once the boom period had lapsed into a less hectic stage in the social life of this mining area. The departure of strong mining actors provided room for existing local communities to set fairer terms for autochthonous inhabitants. This

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