Making Concessions: Extractive Enclaves, Entangled Capitalism and Regulative Pluralism at the Gold Mining Frontier in Burkina Faso

MURIEL CÔTE and BENEDIKT KORF*

University of Zürich, Switzerland

Summary. — This paper studies the regulation of concessions in the global gold mining rush. The liberalization of the gold mining sector has given way to complex forms of regulation where non-state and illegal mining entrepreneurs compete in governing mining extraction. Taking the case of gold mining in Burkina Faso, this paper analyses the conditions and dynamics under which such complex regulation takes place. We draw on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Northern Burkina Faso, in particular the Burkinañab mining sector. We argue that enclave economies in the gold mining sector are co-produced by state and market regulation through a “plurification” of regulatory authority. This “pluralisation” is the effect of competition among different frontier entrepreneurs, who seek to broker regulatory authority in mining concession sites. We show that concession sites are not discrete extractive enclaves, but are better understood as indeterminate or “open” spaces that are entangled in local politics and social relations. Rather than thinning social relations, as is often claimed, we observe that enclave economies thicken politics around concessionary regimes, where governmental bodies re-emerge as an arbitrating regulatory force. These findings problematize policy prescriptions to formalize the gold mining sector and draw attention to the role of the state in re-producing frontier entrepreneurs with unequal political rights to claiming concessions.

Key words — Burkina Faso, gold, concessions, frontier, enclaves

1. INTRODUCTION

During 2007–14, Burkina Faso experienced a remarkable gold rush: it jumped from sixteenth- to fourth-largest gold producer on the African continent. In 2012 alone, 941 mining permits and licenses were distributed. They have mostly benefitted international investors like those who have financed Burkina Faso’s eleven large-scale gold mines since 2008. This boom has also fuelled small-scale mining—*orpailleurs* as it is called in francophone West Africa—which is mostly undertaken without any permit or license.1 Alhamdou, a middle-aged man from Séguéñaga, a small district town in North Burkina Faso, works as shaft owner in one such *orpailleurs* mine in the nearby village of Bakou.2 Originally a farmer, he is now one of the most successful and respected men in town. The illegal gold shafts he supervises are situated on SEGÁ, an area that was held under the mining exploration concession—extending over 313 km²—acquired by the Canadian Orezone Gold Corporation during 2002–12. When asked how he managed to secure his shafts on the corporation’s concession, Alhamdou smiles: “It is precisely because I helped the investor 10 years ago that I knew where to dig and that I was able to secure a line up on this hill.” Since Alhamdou explained this, the exploration concession has upgraded to an extraction project undertaken by the British Amara Mining Plc. Extraction lasted two years, and after the British investor left, Alhamdou was able to return to small-scale mining in the same area.

Our story evokes an unexpected entanglement of fortunes in the gold mining rush. A number of mining concessions have emerged as “extractive enclaves” or government-sanctioned spaces of mineral exploration and extraction. These mining concessions have created new configurations of “haves” and “have nots,” with small-scale typically losing out to large-scale miners. As Ferguson points out, enclave economies are characterised by private capital that lands—or rather hops—onto “non-contiguous “useful” bits that are secured, policed and, in a minimal sense, governed through private or semi-private means” (Ferguson, 2005, 381). Indeed, “intensified processes and patterns of uneven development are increasingly expressed in enclave spaces” (Sidaway, 2007, 332). Enclosing and “enclaving” space through externalisation and extra-territorialisation of resource regulation is a particularly forceful way to attract private capital and securitise resource production (Ferguson, 2006; Geiger, 2008; Harvey, 2004; Hendriks, 2015; Hönke, 2010; Sidaway, 2007).

A decade ago James Ferguson asserted that enclave economies of mineral-extraction connect “discrete points” scattered around the globe which have essentially thinned out state–society relations and “hollowed out” states in Africa (Ferguson, 2005, 379). Yet our story suggests that these enclaves are not actually discrete spaces—for here capitalism is entangled in much more nuanced ways in local political economies and social relations. Our objective is therefore to complicate the claim that state power crumbles under the weight of large-scale international private investments in the new resource rushes (Borrás, Hall, Scoones, White, & Wolford, 2011; White, Jr, Ruth, Scoones, & Wolford, 2012). We start from the twofold observation that, firstly, private capital itself requires some regulatory framework to take hold on the ground; and, secondly, that *stricto sensu* state frameworks—laws and the practices of state officials—by no means exhaust the extent of regulatory relations that sometimes operate extra-legally and in “twilight” zones (Lund, 2006).

Through the case of Burkina Faso’s gold mining frontier and its concessionary landscape, we analyse actually existing social relations that make it possible to establish a mining con-

*The following people have provided generous comments that have helped improve the paper (in alphabetical order): Michael Eilenberg, Christian Lund, Andrea Nightingale, Timothy Raeymaekers, Mattias Borg Rasmussen and Rory Rowan. The empirical research was funded by an ESRC +3 scholarship, and by the Mosse Centenary Fund at the University of Edinburgh. Final revision accepted: November 1, 2016.
concession. We argue that analysing the everyday politics of “making concessions” that cuts across conventional governmental divides—private–public, illegal–legal—helps to shed light on the actually existing social relations that entangle global capital in messy local struggles around regulatory authority, and thereby reproduce the indeterminate spaces of enclave economies. We show that, rather than a thinning of state–society relations, a concessionary mining regime emerges through a “plurification” of regulatory authority. Resource concessions in the gold mining frontier in Burkina Faso are sites characterised by regulative pluralism and intense politics. We show that, rather than a thinning, rather than thins out. “Making concessions” requires more than the stroke of a pen or the threat of a gun—as Rasmussen and Lund put it in the introduction to this volume. Indeed, making mining concessions gives rise to political frictions—contest, disagreement, confrontation—and requires “making (political) concessions”—compromising, negotiating with, accommodating—between a number of actors. These concessions do not equally benefit all parties, and this is precisely why they are important to investigate. Not only do they help explain the seemingly contradictory configurations of extraction, such as the accommodation of Alhamdou’s illegal mining activities by the Canadian investor in the above vignette, but they also permit insights into the reconfigurations of state–society relations at the margins of the state.

Two overarching steps are taken in our analysis. We first show that the multiplication of mining concessions in Burkina Faso can be traced back to the production of a concessionary resource regime at the national level. This resource regime withdrew government regulation from sites of production. In the central government attempt to capture gold mining rents, mining concessions became sites of regulative pluralism, which involved a variety of mining frontier entrepreneurs in the struggle over regulative authority (Sections 3 and 4). Secondly, we probe the effects on state–society relations of the porous territorial and regulatory boundaries arising from mining concessions. We show that mining concessions are indeterminate spaces where regulative pluralism produces political frictions between different mining frontier entrepreneurs, yet, on the other hand, the messy, often violent politics of contestation and corruption erupts around the application of legible standards. Recent concerns over “land grabbing” portray dynamics of resource enclosures as discrete enclosed spaces of “accumulation by dispossession” (Borras et al., 2011; White et al., 2012). Yet these deals are also crucial to the reproduction of authority, territory, sovereignity and government subjects (Korf, Hagmann, & Emmenegger, 2015; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Wily, 2012; Wolford, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & White, 2013). The fragmentation of state frameworks must therefore be investigated through the social production of space, as occurs in contemporary resource concessions.

James Ferguson once claimed that what differentiates new from old enclosures in the extractive sector, is the expansion of an “enclave economy” model that seems to disenble resource extraction from the social context—local and national—in which it takes place (Ferguson, 2006). Many scholars agree that liberalisation reforms have fuelled dynamics of privatisation and informalisation of both economy and regulatory authority in the mining sector (Campbell, 2009; Hilson, 2011; White et al). Yet these deals are also crucial to the reproduction of authority, territory, sovereignity and government subjects (Korf, Hagmann, & Emmenegger, 2015; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Wily, 2012; Wolford, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & White, 2013). The fragmentation of state frameworks must therefore be investigated through the social production of space, as occurs in contemporary resource concessions.

We draw on extensive fieldwork conducted by the first author in Burkina Faso, including interviews with various branches of the central Burkinabé mining administration, with executive and technical staff of private national and international mining companies, and with a number of orpaillage miners who operate throughout Burkina Faso. We also draw on online material published by mining companies, which are integral elements of the “field of relations” in which making concessions takes place (Luning, 2008; Mégret, 2011). Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted on SEGA before, during and after a large-scale gold mining project was undertaken in Séguéna, North Burkina Faso, including intensive fieldwork in 2011–12 and several visits to the site since then. This allows us to trace both the regulative framing of mining concessions within their larger macro-political configuration (Section 3) and the micro-politics of negotiating this regulatory space within and outside of these concession sites (Sections 4–6). In other words, it enables us to understand the thickening of politics as an effect of concessionary resource regimes on the gold mining frontier. Indeed, it is this kind of convoluted politics that made Alhamdou smile.
دریافت فوری
متن کامل مقاله
امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات