

## Response by the author

I want to start by expressing my great thanks to the reviewers for reading the book, and for their illuminating and challenging reviews. Both reviews raise some excellent questions and insights, which would be impossible to fully address effectively in the space allotted here. I will begin with Brian Klein's very astute observations and questions about 'movement' and whether this 'bottom-up' concept is: (1) a value and a modus operandi that has a specific historicity that may or may not be generalizable to other (post)colonial African contexts; and (2) an end in itself for Eastern Congolese involved in the mining trade. With regards to the first point, I think that it would be wrong to identify a single source for this theme. All of the following have informed Eastern Congolese understandings and practices of movement: the history of colonial and postcolonial exclusion and dispossession, wartime immobilization, Congolese awareness of other places and situations that they need to access but cannot easily do so (e.g. the idea of the world market as an actual physical place that exists somewhere), the rapid fluctuations in prices for minerals, the ever changing multiplicity of mineral types and sources available in Congo, and the long history of state making through the extraction of value from movement.<sup>1</sup> Not all of these themes are generalizable to other places in Africa, but some of them are – particularly the experience of immobilization brought about by dispossession, although this has been experienced differently throughout the region (in Kenya, for example, it has taken the form of progressive restriction of movement, coupled with increased exposure and connection to distant places, mainly through technologies such as the internet and M-Pesa). I think that something similar to the Eastern Congolese theme of movement (which, I argue in the book, encompasses and also exceeds the concept of mobility) is central to vernacular understandings of 'development' (*maendeleo* in Swahili) in much of the continent, where development is often understood to entail breaking out of colonial spatio-temporal limitations (ideally, without being destructive to others). As for the second point, I think that Klein is absolutely correct – for those Eastern Congolese involved in the mineral trade, movement is generally not understood to be an end in itself, but rather to be the path forward for all those who have been dispossessed by war (and movement can be a dangerous, if also often desirable, condition). Here again, generalization is difficult: not all diggers were on the move (some oscillated between farming and digging), but many were, and many of those seemed to prefer this situation to others that they could realistically imagine (certainly, they preferred it to situations involving forced immobilization). At the same time, many Eastern Congolese wanted to transmute the power of movement into more durable forms of value, as Klein suggests; hence the interest so many people expressed in converting the money earned from digging into real estate (as Klein mentions, diggers often talked about their work as a kind of sacrifice that allowed others to buy or improve properties even if the diggers couldn't do the same because they were 'stuck in a hole'). There is more that could be said about this – with respect to both practical issues surrounding how and whether diggers could or should transition out of mining and more philosophical problems (e.g. is permanence necessarily the negation of movement?). This conversation will have to be deferred for now.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Schouten (2022) *Roadblock Politics: the origin of violence in Central Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

I now want to address some of the more sceptical points raised by Duncan Money. Money states that he is 'unconvinced' by my assertion that the conflict at Bisie was world-historical, to the point of bringing about an important transformation in the history of mining, and implies that I have exaggerated the importance of the case. Although his point is very briefly stated, he appears to be arguing that, because conflicts between mining companies and artisanal miners have a long history, such conflicts in the present cannot also be historically transformative. This seems to me a little like arguing that, since things like private property and plantation capitalism have been around since the Dutch implemented nutmeg farming in Indonesia, today's massive land grabs aren't also new or transformative.<sup>2</sup> I suspect that Money may not have fully absorbed my argument here (in a similar vein, the author claims that my only real descriptions of the work of digging relate to a depiction of *plongeurs* diving for diamonds in rivers; in fact, these former diamond miners refitted machines formerly used for gold mining to extract the 3Ts, not diamonds). For the sake of clarity, I will briefly reiterate my argument about Bisie, which has a very specific aspect and a more general aspect. The argument is this: it is best to understand conflict minerals legislation pertaining to Congo (and specifically Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act) and the various consequences that followed (including traceability initiatives) not as the outcome of political efforts in Washington DC, nor even of the manoeuvrings of NGOs in Congo looking for a *raison d'être*. Rather, it is more illuminating, and likely more historically accurate, to see these initiatives as the outcome of conflicts between artisanal miners and mining companies. The mining companies invoked the already existing idea of 'conflict minerals', seeking out NGOs and media in order to obtain leverage against the artisanal miners. I am also arguing that Bisie mine in particular – because of its size, the military presence there, and the intensity of the struggles by mining companies to obtain control over it – became a privileged site in this world-historical struggle to gain possession of mineral resources and to secure the global supply chain in this time of heightened conflict over the mineral resources needed for digital devices and green energy. Indeed, the conflict surrounding Bisie may have been the key event that brought Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act and similar legislation into being (recall that, after the 'Battle of Bisie', VICE News came to Bisie and a documentary, *Blood in the Mobile*, was produced, and that all of this happened just prior to President Kabila's illegalization of artisanal mining and the passing of the Dodd-Frank Act). In making this argument, I am directly echoing the voices of my Congolese interlocutors, who were there at ground zero when all of this was happening, and who witnessed the corporate players who were simultaneously stealing the fruit of diggers' work and kicking them out, invoking the language of conflict minerals while doing so and helping to implement tracking initiatives for 'conflict-free' artisanal minerals. Why, these interlocutors ask, was there no concern about blood minerals during the war, but only years afterwards? Their answer points to mining companies' mobilization of already existing

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<sup>2</sup> A. Ghosh (2022) *The Nutmeg's Curse: parables for a planet in crisis*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

racialized perceptions of Congo and Congolese as representing the ‘heart of darkness’.

Beyond the specifics of Bisie, I am also making a larger point about artisanal mining and the conflicts between artisanal miners and companies, so I will take this opportunity to up the ante on Money’s challenge and make the claim as clearly and as boldly as I possibly can. I am indeed arguing that these conflicts between industrial and artisanal miners are among the most significant conflicts happening in the world today – politically, philosophically and morally – and that how they play out is going to have a major impact on future global political economy and state transformation. There are a couple of major reasons for this: one is the rising global demand for minerals used in green and digital technologies, combined with the phenomenal increase in the number of artisanal miners globally. This rising population of people dependent on digging has been brought about by their dispossession from land and from formal employment. Corporate efforts to control the supply chain will inevitably lead to more conflicts between artisanal miners and mining companies; uprooted miners will go on to other places, where their work will again be followed and exploited by the companies. Perhaps even more important, and more world-historically transformative, than the struggle between these entities (the diggers versus the companies) is the conceptual substance of the conflict. It is not just about the struggle for resources, but about what kinds of land and water use arrangements, and what ideas and values, will dominate the world scene in the future. Will the common denominator of all economic transactions continue to be private property, or will more collectivist, collaborative and complicated arrangements rear their head against that unquestioned monolith and the global corporate actors that benefit from it?

Artisanal miners are on the front line of this conflict and will help to decide in what direction it goes. This is essentially a struggle to define what matters to us as a species. We know this is true because we see it in diggers’ resistance (for lack of a better word) to private property and paper bureaucracy, and in their invocation of ancestors, friendship and mutual indebtedness in opposition to concepts of absolute ownership. One of the main arguments of my book is that diggers tend to be very aware of the fact that they are challenging dominant global understandings (‘the eyes of the world’ or ‘the ways of whites’). They are also often highly aware of their own world-historical economic, social and political importance vis-à-vis the owners of capital. Together with all of the different people and spirits that their work brings together, and all the many more who depend on their work, these diggers have the ability to give mining companies and the concept of private property a run for their money. For many diggers in Eastern Congo, what happened at Bisie is not only a case in point, but an important moment in this historical struggle against mining companies and the very concept of private property (mainly the idea that one company could own that whole hill). Who is anyone else to tell them they are wrong?

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