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*Brokers of crisis: the everyday uncertainty of Eastern Congo's mineral négociants**

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ABSTRACT

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) artisanal mining sector is often linked to the violent conflicts that have beset Central Africa for over two decades. While many analyses emphasise its 'criminal' and 'illegal' nature, less attention has been paid to the ambiguity of this economy, most prominently incarnated by the intermediate mineral traders called *négociants*. Focusing on their entrepreneurship, networks and everyday activities, this essay offers a more nuanced understanding of local mineral trade in the context of a 'crisis economy' framed by competing governable orders. It investigates the uncertainty along eastern DRC's mineral supply chains, that are undergoing major regulatory changes to curb the trade of so-called 'conflict minerals'. Drawing from extensive fieldwork, this essay demonstrates how this

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uncertainty shapes the négociants' role as brokers of socio-economic life in the provinces of North and South Kivu.

INTRODUCTION

For it does seem that mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power. It is not simply a question of unequal distribution, that some people move more than others, and that some have more control than others. … Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak. (Massey 1991: 27)

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) artisanal mining sector (ASM) is frequently assimilated with the violent conflicts that have beset Central Africa since over two decades (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2004; Stearns 2011, 2012; Vlassenroot 2013). Concretely, 3T (tin, tantalum and tungsten) minerals and gold take the blame for fuelling war, an assumption that has led to large-scale transnational advocacy and regulatory reform (Autesserre 2012; Cuvelier *et al.* 2014). While many analyses emphasise the 'criminal' and 'illegal' nature of mining, less attention is paid to the ambiguity of a market that also fulfils vital socio-economic functions for local populations. Through an ethnographic study of intermediate traders, *négociants*, we investigate how this ambiguity plays out along eastern DRC's mineral supply chains and offer a more nuanced understanding of how mineral trade evolves in the context of a 'crisis economy' framed by competing governable orders. We demonstrate how everyday uncertainty is further compounded by external intervention and shapes the négociants' role as brokers of socio-economic life in North and South Kivu.

While we do not dispute that mineral rent can contribute to financing violence, the 'exploitation of minerals is an important source of income for many communities [and] mineral wealth is not one of the root-causes of conflict' in the DRC (Matthysen & Zaragoza 2013: 41). While recent transnational attempts to regulate 3T mining fundamentally impact on their everyday activities, négociants continue to do both harm and good to local economies they form part of. Analysing the spatio-temporal aspects of their entrepreneurship and their position across networks (state/non-state, armed/unarmed, economic/social, etc.), we aim at generating a deeper analysis of mineral trade in contexts of physical insecurity, socio-economic uncertainty and regulatory change. Drawing from in-depth ethnographic fieldwork in the Kivu provinces, we employ the concepts of brokerage and crisis to underpin our argument. Despite extensive qualitative data, it needs to be highlighted however, that research on trade in the twilight between unrecorded and official streams remains tentative (Ellis & MacGaffey 1996).[1] After presenting the négociants and our analytical framework, we sketch the wider political economy of 3T in the Kivus. We then examine the négociants' role in terms of debt, regulation and security before concluding with a discussion of our findings.

WHO ARE THE NÉGOCIANTS?

Négociants are intermediary traders who embody qualities of middlepersons and brokers. They purchase minerals at the mines and re-sell them in urban centres, thereby connecting production with trade. As middlepersons in the supply chain, they link miners (*creuseurs*) and cooperatives with trading houses (*comptoirs*) by trading minerals from pits to exportation. Négociants limited to local trade around the mines are also called *managers*, *chachouleurs*, *commissionaires* or *fournisseurs*, and subsumed as 'category B'. 'Category A', refers to négociants connecting mines with regional hubs, like Goma or Bukavu. While this article focuses on the latter, it is worth bearing in mind some of the socio-economic factors that differentiate négociants from creuseurs and comptoirs. Due to their mobility and ability to access resources, the négociants' position comes with a higher status than that of creuseurs or category B traders. However, négociants do not always reach the status of comptoir owners, who are often settled enough to not have to go to the mining areas themselves. Any actor's capacity to be a creditor rather than a debtor increases along the supply chain, with négociants in the intermediate position between miners and financiers. To assess the socio-economic role of négociants and how they connect and disconnect mines through managing debt and making markets, it is important to observe their position within a supply chain, as shown in Figure 1.[2]

The left side shows the mine level, often with cooperatives framing a multiplicity of actors. Black arrows indicate the flows of raw minerals, grey arrows the associated (pre-)financing. Dashed arrows indicate state agencies' and security forces' taxation and control. SAESSCAM is the *Service d'Assistance et d'Encadrement de l'Artisanal et Small-Scale Mining*, and CEEC is the *Centre d'Expertise, d'Evaluation, et Certification.* With the négociants in the centre, the thicker arrows indicate the key commercial transmissions in the supply chain.

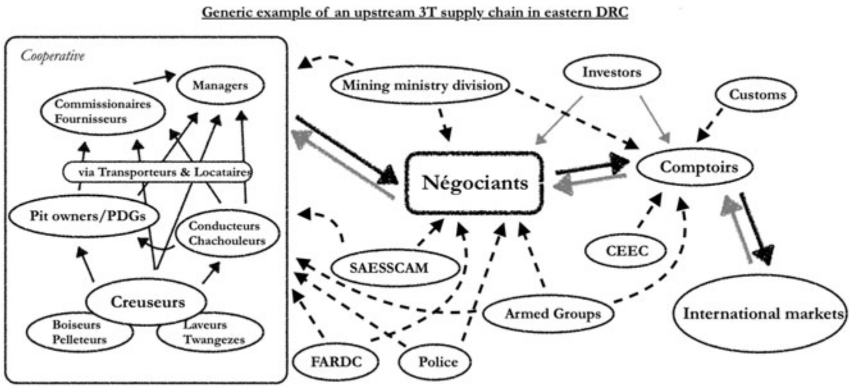

Figure 1 Locating the négociants.

To buy minerals from other intermediaries, creuseurs or cooperatives, it is key for négociants to gain access, understood as the 'ability to benefit from things' (Ribot & Peluso 2003: 153). A key question here is '*why* some people or institutions benefit from resources, *whether or not* they have rights to them' (Ribot & Peluso 2003: 154). Two types of access are relevant to négociants: primo, market access – the possibility 'to gain, control, or maintain entry into exchange relations' (Ribot & Peluso 2003: 166) by way of acquaintance to comptoirs, credit institutions, local politicians, kinship networks or security forces. Secundo, legal access – is regulated under the DRC's 2002 mining law through the *carte de négociant*, a registration granting permission to trade minerals for US$250 per year and substance.

However, such access is subject to constantly changing social environments. This is linked more generally to competition over authority and resources in spaces marked by oligopolies not monopolies of violence, negotiated rather than enforced statehood, and overlapping instead of clearly demarcated sovereignty (Sikor & Lund 2009; Hagmann & Péclard 2011; Englebert & Tull 2013). For the 'political analysis of … production, distribution, and exchange in Africa requires more than describing and tracking individual or group strategies in the present economic crisis' (Roitman 1990: 693), research on négociants fills a gap between studies on comptoirs (Raeymaekers 2002; Johnson 2013) and creuseurs (Geenen 2011; Smith 2011). This essay's key motivation is the hitherto modest amount of scholarship dedicated to the 'governance and the power structures that condition the position of middlemen and miners' (Landa 1981; Cuvelier 2010: 66; Iguma 2014).

BROKERS OF CRISIS

In the ubiquitous reference to *la crise*, Congolese paraphrase the struggle for survival, linking conflict-related insecurity to socio-economic uncertainty across competing 'governable orders' (see Watts 2003). As Roitman (2016: 18) argued, 'the very idea of crisis as a condition suggests an ongoing state of affairs', meaning that uncertainty becomes normalised in the everyday. Therefore, and noting that 'war is not a matter of "all terror all the time"' all over the place (Korf *et al.* 2010: 386), we conceive of eastern DRC – in emic terms – as a 'crisis economy' more than a 'war economy'. This is neither meant as a counterpoint to an imagined normalcy, nor to endorse 'what went wrong' questions (Roitman 2016: 27). It is a way, instead, to revisit the greed paradigm imbued in neoclassic assumptions on resources and violence (see Cramer 2002; Korf 2006).

Governable orders and the 'crisis economy'

What is crisis? In a fine-grained historiography of the word, Koselleck and Richter meticulously trace the history of the Greek *krísis* and its verbal root *kríno*. Its oldest retrievable meanings include 'separate', 'choose', 'judge', 'decide'; but also 'quarrel' or 'fight', often in eschatological contexts (Koselleck & Richter 2006: 358). Through times and languages, it took until the 19th century for the term to adopt a distinct economic, social and political connotation, often teleological though:

> Conceptualized as chronic, 'crisis' can also indicate a state of greater or lesser permanence, as in a longer or shorter transition towards something better or worse or towards something altogether different. 'Crisis' can announce a recurring event … or become an existential term of analysis. (Koselleck & Richter 2006: 358)

While tautological usages of crisis gained the term epithets like 'transcendental placeholder' (Roitman 2016: 19), one of its productive features is the allusion to uncertainty and 'between-ness', relating to a spatial idea of crossing boundaries, for instance, between risk and opportunity. This is linked to the idea of something begun yet uncompleted – a 'permanent or conditional category' or 'immanent transitional phase' (Koselleck & Richter 2006: 372). Just as '[t]he wars of the nineteenth century were only a part of … larger crisis' (Koselleck & Richter 2006: 388), cyclical violence and recurrent socio-economic challenges in eastern DRC represent more chronic uncertainty. The ways in which seemingly punctual crisis turns out to be a rather stable state of affairs also speaks to more recent contextual work:

> [It] is in everyday life that the crisis as a limitless experience and a field of the dramatization of particular forms of subjectivity is authored, receives its translations, is institutionalized, loses its exceptional character and in the end, as a 'normal,' ordinary and banal phenomenon, becomes an imperative to consciousness. (Mbembe & Roitman 1995: 325)

The notion of crisis also informs the concept of navigation in Vigh's anthropology of urban youth 'muddling through' (Vigh 2009). Seeing crisis as cyclical rather than exceptional, Vigh suggests that countless ruptures form a continuum as crisis becomes steady (Vigh 2008). As 'motion within motion', navigation addresses the movement of actors and their environment, like a moving boat in moving waters performs simultaneous risk assessment (passive, strategic) and risk mitigation (active, tactical). This alludes to an aleatoric mechanism of infinite combinations between structure and agency. Emirbayer & Mische define agency as

> temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures. (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 970)

Vigh's metaphor remains partly voluntarist – countless ruptures do not just *produce* normality, they might just simply *be* normality – one needs to also take into account structural factors that allow for négociants to emerge as brokers. Both temporally but also spatially, négociants are exposed to environments marked by uncertainty, both physically (checkpoints, warzones, hazards, etc.) and socio-economically (markets, villages, mines, etc.). Confronted with that, négociants need to make rapid but informed choices.

Through the idea of a 'crisis economy', we conceptualise uncertainty over debt, regulation and security with reference to a landscape of fluid and competing governable orders where 'normative pluralism is the rule and not the exception' (Olivier de Sardan 2008: 14). A governable order can be defined as a 'non-territorial, social figuration of power, norms and rules that transcends spatial scales' (Korf *et al.* 2010: 389). In eastern DRC, the manifold volatility provided by the coexistence of such orders (evolving insecurity, price fluctuations, etc.) blurs the boundaries of opportunity and risk. At the same time, there are more stable features in the négociants' environment, since, even under normative pluralism, kinship networks persist and authority is oligopolised by 'bigmen' vying for power (see Utas 2012).

The négociants' uncertainty is enacted both temporally due to fluctuating networks of sellers and buyers, and spatially through the volatility of competing spheres of authority through which they circulate to transport minerals and money. In a wider environment of poverty and violence, this is exemplified by the négociants' strife to make ends meet against their opportunity to amass wealth, and their exposition to physical insecurity against their collusion with security providers such as the Congolese army (FARDC) as well as numerous armed groups. The négociants, within a 'ragged, unstable dynamics of multiple systems of authority, navigate through the perilous terrain of a given power topography and at the same time contribute to its re-shaping' (Korf *et al.* 2010: 390). In the context of eastern DRC's mineral markets they perform as brokers of risk and opportunity, in other words as brokers of crisis.

Brokering risk and opportunity

Boissevain gave a helpful starting point to conceptualise brokers, as entrepreneurs placing 'people in touch with each other either directly or indirectly for profit' (1974: 148). This creates both connection and friction, for brokers thus reify boundaries and 'to avoid redundancy, they have to simultaneously maintain the tension' (Raeymaekers 2014: 145) that justifies their presence. While other entrepreneurs also build upon material and immaterial resources, a broker's prime capital is the latter: like bigmen, brokers need to acquire a 'large network with a high score for multiplexity and exchange content' (Sahlins 1963; Boissevain 1974: 154; Utas 2012). The brokers' between-ness creates room for manoeuvre to which, Boissevain continues, three factors are central: centrality, time and power. Centrality refers to positionality, such as the négociant's shuttling position in space and embedment in social networks. Time means to move unrestrained from social or economic obligation that requires constant presence at one place. Négociants have time to travel across the supply chain and connect its segments. Power refers to the capability to acquire 'first-order' resources – in the négociants' case this means cash to buy minerals or pre-finance mining (Boissevain 1974).

Consequently, rather than immediate monetary gain, the idea of intermediate, time-unbound revenue is a key feature of the broker, analogous to the deferred reciprocity found in patron-client constellations (see Scott 1972). Such gain often arises from credit/debt schemes. In the present case, this is a two-sided coin: while négociants typically provide upfront credit to creuseurs, their role as middlemen trading from the mine to urban trading hubs also entails a credit/debt logic as they sell on behalf of creuseurs, the surplus of the revenue being kept as a sort of debt payment, or rent, in cash or kind (see Boissevain 1974). The concept of 'local development brokers' also stresses brokers' relevance as intermediaries. Due to polycephal governance and legal pluralism, local political arenas are framed by competition and coalition and social interactions characterised by negotiation. Competition within contested spaces of authority posits a broker as 'active mediator between social units who benefit from this mediation' (Bierschenk *et al.* 2002: 12).

Négociants also fulfil vital functions of channelling non-mineral resources to mines.[3] Hence, brokerage is social activity that implies connectivity and human agency: brokers operate in between and within social networks framed by negotiation and bargain over material (mineral, consumer goods, money) and immaterial (access, power, networks) resources. In DRC, such negotiation has mushroomed during Mobutu's reign, the concomitant rise of the informal economy and the asphyxiation of bureaucracy – boosting both bigmen networks and uncertainty (de Villers 2016).[4] As connecting agents, brokers articulate exchange not only with business partners but also among third parties. The power relations in such arrangements are uneven though: négociants hold more power than creuseurs due to familiarity with trade networks, pricing and individual mobility. However, while négociants also outdo comptoirs as to local knowledge and networks, they lack their transnational and political connections. Hence, the locus of a broker's power is never a person itself, it is activated through the spatial position between two clients (Adams 1970). Exposed to manifold uncertainty, brokers 'surf on the edges' of human interaction, they constantly reify and re(b)order. Like bigmen, they perform a patron role towards some, such as creuseurs, and a client role towards others, such as military commanders (Sahlins 1963; Roitman 2005; Utas 2012; Raeymaekers 2014).

LOCATING THE NÉGOCIANTS IN EASTERN DRC'S MINING ECONOMY

Throughout disciplinary and area studies, a vast body of research deals with how political and economic order is made, unmade and remade. It is now widely recognised that in many areas "state order' is only one of a number of orders claiming to provide security, frameworks for conflict regulation and social services' (Boege *et al.* 2008: 6). In addition, scholars agree on the artificial dichotomy between formal and informal in order to understand state-market relations in (post-colonial) political economies (Roitman 2005; Rubbers 2007; Meagher 2009). The DRC is no exception, since

> the violent encounter between members of state administrations like police, customs and army, and the range of cross-border entrepreneurs and smugglers active in the 'informal' economy have given rise to new patterns of authority and regulation. (Raeymaekers *et al.* 2008: 12)

Roitman's work on the Chad Basin paints a detailed picture of contested public authority and economic exchange at the 'intersections of 'informal' activities with the 'formal' economy by way of mediators' (Roitman 1990: 695). This further blurs a yet arbitrary distinction mocked by the notions of 'formalised informality' and 'informalised formality' (Rubbers 2007: 324). Called *système D* and *article 15*, such dynamics have shaped the Congolese everyday for so long that it is hard to trace an exact beginning (see Jackson 2002; Mueller-Koné 2015). It is in this environment that négociants emerged and persist as a professional category.

Here, we take ASM liberalisation in 1983 as a more recent related event, as a starting point.[5] Pressured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to comply with structural adjustment, Mobutu, then-President of Zaire, allowed for private mineral trading houses, comptoirs, to emerge. In sequence to the Zairanisation policies introduced in 1973, this led to increasing, and paradoxically state-sponsored, informalisation in a state that had not yet 'abandoned any pretence of formality' (Hart 2008: 7). While the progressing decay of the Zairian state turned out to be irreversible, economic privatisation paralleled the intensification of private rule and an infrastructural bust. With the erosion of state mining companies and the transformation of a hitherto agro-rural economy, populations upped their conquest of decrepit concessions held by SAKIMA (*Société Aurifère du Kivu et Maniema*), SOMINKI (ex-*Société Minière et Industrielle du Kivu*) or MIBA (*Minière de Bakwanga*). Both the breakdown of central production structures and liberalisation, allowing for private to take over from state-run comptoirs, provided the springboard to the négociants (even if their status was only officialised by the 2002 mining code): since comptoirs were structurally and legally unable to access remote mines, négociants came up as intermediaries. Strikingly, this did not immediately result in violence or conflicts over access or property.

Only around 15 years later, mining began getting international attention in relation to violent conflict. Since then, Mobutu had been ousted by the Rwandan-supported patchwork rebel movement *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL) and war was ravaging across the meanwhile renamed DRC (Stearns 2011). But while increasing militarisation of the mines was quickly ascribed to a whole bouquet of militias' greed, things proved more complex: although violent modes of exploitation skyrocketed around 2000 – following a long but largely unnoticed history of Zairian army officers involved in mining (Reno 1998; de Villers 2016) – ASM was not per se a root cause for a 'war economy', but rather a precarious form of subsistence for many and a cornucopia for some:

> insecurity reinforced the isolation of far-flung rural areas and made markets inaccessible, leading many communities to retreat into subsistence farming. Others were pushed towards the exploitation and trade of natural resources. … violent modes of appropriation and economic collaboration with armed actors became institutionalised practices. (Verweijen 2013: 70)

Recurrent displacement made farming less viable – people could not securely reach and work their fields anymore until the harvest was ready – and the relicts of the formal sector continued to evaporate throughout the 'Second Congo war' (1998–2003) and subsequent, so-called 'low-intensity' conflict (2004–present). Even though a narrow 'war economy' reading is spurious, violence did sediment into the everyday. Early into these wars, Jackson showed how 'eroded are people's survival margins' while 'coltan remains the only survival strategy in response to a local economy profoundly destroyed' (Jackson 2002: 531). The multifaceted embedment of ASM into the wider political economy of armed conflict notwithstanding, international resonance to the wars' assumed economic logics exclusively focused on what became known as 'conflict minerals' since the early 2000s – 3T and gold (Johnson 2013). The United Nations (UN) and international advocacy began stressing the role of these minerals in conflict financing, leading to the simple narrative that 'greed' for resources motivated violence, an idea limited to neoclassic economics until then (UN 2001; Raeymaekers 2002). The ensuing pressure – epitomised by the 'no blood in my mobile' campaign in reference to the use of coltan capacitors in cellular phones – unleashed a chain of political consequences.

Driven by the idea that minerals were the main cause of the wars (and sexual violence a main consequence), international policy began developing mechanisms that resulted in three strings of interventions

(Autesserre 2012; Cuvelier *et al.* 2014): benchmarks, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) due diligence guidelines, laws such as section 1502 of the US Wall Street and Consumer Protection Act ('Dodd-Frank 1502'), and practical interventions such as ITRI's Tin Supply Chain initiative (iTSCi).[6] Halfway through their rollout, the rising naming-and-shaming triggered a presidential mining ban for eastern DRC in 2010, placing 3T and gold under a de-facto embargo (Geenen 2011). While the ban and the incoming body of transnational regulation put négociants and other stakeholders in eastern DRC's mining sector out of jobs *de jure*, these interventions into a complex local context provoked ambiguous outcomes de facto, in line with the idea that

> innovative legislation or other attempts to direct change often fail to achieve their intended purposes; and even when they succeed wholly or partially, they frequently carry with them unplanned and unexpected consequences. This is partly because new laws are thrust upon going social arrangements. (Moore 1973: 723)

Flanked by other projects to formalise and regulate mineral trade, iTSCi's industry-led 'bag-and-tag' traceability has become a de facto requirement for minerals to be legally exported with a regional certificate from the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), an intergovernmental body regrouping the DRC and its neighbours (Cuvelier *et al.* 2014). In an attempt to follow minerals 'from mines to markets', each 3T bag that is tagged at the mine follows a trajectory of control points before reaching an exporting comptoir. The system is implemented in a slowly increasing number of mines in collaboration with state institutions, most notably SAESSCAM. However, the limited number of smelters registered with iTSCi has led to monopsony (a buyer-end monopoly) and a stiff decrease of local 3T pricing, even beyond global price drops since late 2014 (Radley & Vogel 2015). While négociants had been exposed to myriad taxes before, traceability has fostered new parafiscal practices (Hayes 2010: 86). Caught between the rock of formalisation and the hard place of unrecorded trade, the négociants legal and economic uncertainty is accentuated by a double juxtaposition between mines and comptoirs, between 'new regulation' and 'old habits' that dismiss them as 'illegal' or 'unruly' actors (see Panella & Thomas 2015). This notwithstanding,

> (i)nformal processes are indispensable to the trade … . Rule-breaking takes place both within bureaucracy and outside it; and so the informal is often illegal. This compromises attempts to promote the informal sector as a

legitimate sphere of the economy, since it is hard to draw a line between colourful women selling oranges on the street and the gangsters who exact tribute from them. (Hart 2008: 14)

The OECD guidance, Dodd-Frank 1502, iTSCi and concomitant approaches embrace a technical, market-centred logic to enact social change. While they aim at de-linking violence and mineral exploitation, they partly fail to account for the complexity of violent conflict. In prioritising the role of minerals, they eclipse root causes such as continuing contestation over political power, citizenship and land access, as underlined by the recent multiplication and fragmentation of armed groups in eastern DRC (Stearns & Vogel 2015). Through the prism of the négociant, this essay investigates how these initiatives add new layers to a yet pluralist regulatory space and lead to unexpected outcomes, including the reconfiguration of the négociants' position, the exclusion of 'informal' participants from mineral markets, as well as new incentives for fraud and increased 'parafiscality' that further adds to uncertainty.

EVERYDAY UNCERTAINTY: DEBT, REGULATION AND SECURITY

There is no pre-defined set of determinants to become a négociant, but a few factors do matter, for instance education: while having a degree is no ultimate condition, many négociants completed at least some years of secondary schooling. More important though, are networks: in certain areas, ties to customary power or local militias are, beyond formal registration steps, a *sine qua non*. Many négociants have previously been commissionaires or pit owners, but the occasional soldier of fortune – via *système D* – also figures amongst their ranks. In most cases, prior knowledge or quick acquaintance (through kinship) of the required skills are pivotal, as well as a social network that enhances mobility and access to credit.[7]

Several of these qualities link to the négociants's role as brokers: to be successful, they need to feed their respective networks of subordinated middlemen, to connect (and simultaneously disconnect) urban business to local economies and bail out creuseurs under strain (securing future rent). Despite, or thanks to, occasionally illicit activities, négociants can be motors of local development, for many of them working in their areas of origin. In all that, uncertainty remains a certain feature: this includes price fluctuation, local insecurity, access to capital and supply chains but also dynamics linked to increasingly monopolised mineral markets. In other words, the terrain in which négociants operate is increasingly 'in motion'. In the following, we examine how négociants broker uncertainty in relation to debt, regulation and security.

Debt: négociants in relation to miners and trading houses

Négociants occupy a strategic spatial position along the supply chains, but not only to their own benefit: they also fulfil vital tasks of economic exchange (Smith 2011: 21). In the DRC's so-called post-conflict period (after the wars when politico-military outfits such as the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie*, RCD, had partly monopolised the local mining economy), most of the Kivus' remote mines depend on these traders to broker the supply of cash and consumer goods that serve as lifelines for local markets: 'When I bring money, everyone benefits. When there is no [mining] work, businessmen and farmers are idle too; if the money does flow, shopkeepers weep for not selling anything.'[8] The nexus between *madeni* ('debt') and *madini* ('minerals') underpins this economy. Miners lack leverage for their dependence on credit to cover operational and subsistence expenses in real time (Observatoire Gouvernance et Paix (OGP) 2010: 27), for 'only middlemen are really aware of what is in demand at any given time and they try to fool diggers about this when they can' (Smith 2015: 3). This highlights unequal power relations in a highly stratified debt market, ranging from tiny sums to high amounts up to thousands of US dollars (see Geenen 2011). However, these power relations materialise on different scales: for instance, négociants voice their unease in dealing with Rwanda-based traders, as they have no option to sanction them in case of non-payment or theft. A veteran négociant recalls how, in 1997, he lost US $60,000 in a deal with a cross-border counterpart, arguing that DRC's reputation pushes international traders towards Rwanda. The same négociant in turn, recounts how his cross-border connections once turned into an advantage:

> In RCD times, I was a North Kivu intermediary for high-level Rwandan authorities. One day in 1999, I was held in Minova by a colonel who did not know the destination of my minerals. I called Kigali and it took just a few hours until soldiers came and arrested him. I even cuffed him on the cheeks! I could do that because I traded for these authorities. During that era, my ties to RCD often helped. Once, an RCD colonel gave me a gun and a Motorola handset for my security.[9]

Despite power imbalances, miners also commend the négociants' role in pre-financing: 'when a négociant comes with francs, business soars, without money, even eating is a challenge.'[10] This credit-debt system is an example of 'formalised informality' (Rubbers 2007; Meagher 2009). While debt is a source of uncertainty it also underpins networks of trust: sophisticated credit arrangements and clear-cut (though extra-legal) rules govern the pre-financing deals négociants engage in. Though 'informal', credits 'exist within a clear framework of cooperation and obligations, and serve both an economic and a social purpose' (Geenen 2011: 439). As brokers, négociants employ networks, time and mobility to their advantage:

> Miners cannot leave … to sell their material. The risks of losing their site and the opportunity cost of not digging during that period are too high. Traders provide a source of finance, cost efficiencies on transport, provision of merchandise to be traded in the mines. Miners don't have the network or expertise to command a significantly improved price than the negociant would have paid them. (Hayes 2010: 70)

In absence of more orthodox micro-credit schemes, négociants remain the pivotal creditors and the epitomes of ambiguity in a barely formalised economy: while miners benefit from the middlemen's brokerage function, they suffer from their leverage in pre-financing, sometimes covering over 50% of the operations. Négociants, in turn, depend on miners too: 'if a creuseur is arrested for a debt, I will not be able to buy minerals from him. If I have money, I can lend him so he is freed and he will pay me back as he goes to work again.'[11] Since around 2012, this fragile relationship became increasingly strained in a number of mines. Traceability and attempts at formalisation significantly alter the négociants' broker position: in Lemera, South Kivu, the advent of iTSCi had the local economy crumble and the number of négociants decreased consistently in 2014 and 2015. A local concession holder, backed up by a Bukavu-based comptoir, remains virtually the only creditor, dictating the terms of price- and debt-making in an attempt to co-opt négociants as its fournisseurs. This significantly asphyxiates their broker role and creates debt.[12] Many négociants claim these 'problems are because of [iTSCi] tags'.[13] Around the mining town of Nzibira, South Kivu, cooperatives began to bind négociants into exclusive agreements with iTSCi's onset. Putting a term to the négociants' broker role, this makes them de facto cooperative agents. A mineral transporter from Rubaya, North Kivu, lamented that 'before the tags, we were all fine'.[14] While his average monthly revenue dropped from US$250 to 50, the number of négociants dropped from 400 to 100. In Nyabibwe, a prominent pilot case for traceability in South Kivu, debt pressure and the lack of capital led many négociants to buy minerals by 'lottery' without a chance to verify the purity beforehand. While many négociants used to wait and see to broker the best deals, they are now faced with plummeting margins and incrementally lose their leverage.[15] With payment delays and debt spirals ensuing from monopsony, many turned to alternatives such as transporting passengers, running bars or working for humanitarian organisations, while others struggle:

I am négociant since 1992 but it becomes harder and harder. I sub-contract several commissionaires but they cannot always pay back debt. My income does not cover my children's schooling anymore. After rudimentary purification, I used to secure US$0.2–0·4 per kg, but nowadays less. The local price for cassiterite in early 2015 is between US$6–7, almost equal to the price in Bukavu. Taxation is US$0.38 per kg in Nyabibwe plus additional taxes in Bukavu, creating net losses for me. Although several comptoirs have joined iTSCi, my bargaining power is limited. Previously, Chinese comptoirs paid decent prices, but they closed. Colleagues from Numbi and Ziralo go via Rubaya to illegally sell in Goma. I prefer long-term relations with commissionaires. I give them up to US$1000 for 200–500 kg of cassiterite. Sometimes, comptoirs pre-finance us but then negotiation is impossible. These tags wind up our business in the same way they wind up the bags.[16]

Regulation: négociants' in relation to taxation and control

Each mining area in eastern DRC has a unique politico-economic fingerprint and patterns of regulatory (in-)formality and local governance, bearing in mind that many 'formal' actors are involved in 'informal' practices too (Rubbers 2007). Therefore, taxation is a helpful prism to analyse the négociants' relation to state and like actors. In Table 1, we list approximate taxation amounts in four areas (caveats apply, given the flexible nature of things).

Most values are variable, they diverge from official taxation and it is hard to measure informal types of taxation by the various security services. In some cases, state agencies explicitly acknowledge parastatal actors (and vice versa): at the *guichets uniques* (central taxation counters), some taxes are forwarded to (neo-)customary authorities recognised by the government. Some informal taxes are collected through rackets while others occur as *encouragement* or fees for weighing (though weight manipulation is common) or transporting minerals. Many négociants are at odds with SAESSCAM: 'we are told they are an assistance service but in fact they are a taxation racket and intelligence outfit'.[17] Some agents demand CDF500–1000 encouragement per tag

TABLE 1:
'Formal' and 'informal' taxation.

Tax type	Paid by/to	Rubaya (Ta)	Nyabi bwe (Sn)	Lemera (Sn)	Nzibira (Sn)
1) Carte Négociant	Négociant/Mining division	250 US$/p.a.	250 US$/p.a.	250 US$/p.a.	250 US$/p.a.
2) Identification I	Négociant/Local Authorities	60 US$	60 US$	60 US$	60 US$
3) Identification II	Négociant/SAESSCAM	15 US$/p.a.	15 US$/p.a.	15 US$/p.a.	15 US$/p.a.
4) SAESSCAM fee I	Négociant/SAESSCAM	3 US$/kg	.5 US$/kg	0.5 US$/kg	0.5 US$/kg
5) Transport waiver	Négociant/Mining division	0.5 US$/kg	10 US$/load	15 US$/load	10 US$/load
6) Customary tax	Négociant/Chefferie	N/A	0.08 US$/kg	0.1 US$/kg	0.05 US$/kg
7) Police or intelligence	Négociant/Police or intel	(variable)	(variable)	20 US$/day	(variable)
8) National Army	Négociant/Army	(variable)	Phone credits	30 US$/load	(variable)
9) Militia taxation	Négociant/Armed Groups	N/A	N/A	5000 CDF/load	ca. 20%
10) Road construction	Négociant/Cooperative	10 US$/year	N/A	N/A	N/A
11) Transport fee	Négociant/Driver	0.5 US$/kg	0.1 US$/kg	0.1 US$/kg	0.1 US$/kg
12) Cooperative tax	Négociant/Cooperative	0.5 US$/kg	10%/load	N/A	0.05 US$/kg
13) Basket Fund*	Négociant/Ministry	50 US$/t	50 US$/t	50 US$/t	50 US$/t
14) 'Fiche Controle'	Négociant/Mining division	N/A	1.5 US$/tag	5 US$/load	N/A
15) 'Late charging tax'	Négociant/SAESSCAM	0.5 US$/kg	10 US$/load	N/A	N/A
16) SAESSCAM fee II	Comptoir/SAESSCAM	1%	1%	1%	1%
17) Export taxes etc.	Comptoir/CEEC	3%	3%	3%	3%
18) Prov. government	Comptoir/Mining division	1% (repartition)	1% (repartition)	1% (repartition)	1% (repartition)
19) Carte creuseur	Creuseur/Mining division	10 US$/p.a.	10 US$/p.a.	10 US$/p.a.	10 US$/p.a.
20) Registration	Cooperatives/Mining division	100 US$/p.a.	100 US$/p.a.	100 US$/p.a.	100 US$/p.a.
21) Pit tax	Pit owner/Mining division	(unknown)	100 US$/p.a.	100 US$/p.a.	100 US$/p.a.
22) Processing tax	Comptoir/Mining division	(unknown)	60 US$/t	60 US$/t	60 US$/t
23) Anti-Fraud	Négociant/Anti-Fraud	N/A	30 US$/car	(unknown)	(variable)
24) 'Tag fee'	Creuseurs/SAESSCAM	N/A	500 FC/tag	N/A	N/A
25) iTSCi levy	Comptoir/iTSCi	360–480 US$/t		180–250 US$/t	

*Plus US$30 from creuseurs, US$35 from transporters, and US$75 from comptoir, per ton (t).

(see Table 1, line 24). In South Kivu, a new anti-fraud unit occasionally demands transport authorisation fees – adding to the official transport waiver – up to US$30 per vehicle, to be negotiated (see Table 1, lines 5 and 23). In another case, it depends on how many drinks a clerk had before perceiving taxes (see Table 1, line 14), forcing négociants to adapt their tactics in dealing with him. This clerk also invented a new registration form when the 'classic' one became obsolete after the négociants' cooptation by a local concession holder.

Traceability impacts on regulation in various shapes, narrowing the négociants' room for brokerage: before iTSCi, négociants could easily (and illegally) choose whether to sell at higher prices to neighbouring countries. Now, iTSCi levies (see Table 1, line 25) and additional taxes narrow their margins, hence nocturnal operations increase. Officially, SAESSCAM does not allow charging at night but it is done against payments (see Table 1, line 15). The following paragraphs offer a more detailed vignette on the evolution of unrecorded trade in North Kivu's coltan markets.

'What is anti-fraud? These are our minerals!'[18]

Rubaya is a mining town in Masisi territory, an area that has known land conflict and politico-military competition along ethnicised lines since the 1990s. Rifts between the Hutu and 'autochthonous' people were deepened after the Rwandan Genocide that brought refugees mixed with *interahamwe* militia into eastern DRC. Intra-rwandophone tensions also rose between Tutsi and Hutu, epitomised by generations of antagonist militias such as the RCD and *Mongol*, *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP) and *Patriotes Résistants Congolais* (PARECO), or *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M23) and *Nyatura* (Stearns 2013).

The waves of violence influenced Rubaya's development as a shantytown mining centre. By 2015, it had become Masisi's largest urbanised area, depending on ASM and connected to Goma through a thriving network of négociants. But although security improved significantly (many Nyatura demobilised and reconverted into miners), underlying conflicts may persist: while the 'concessionaire-cum-comptoir' *Société Minière de Bisunzu* was previously linked to CNDP, the 'cooperative-cum-négociants' COOPERAMMA had ties to PARECO.

Despite iTSCi's introduction in March 2014, it is difficult to discern 'clean' from 'unclean' minerals, due to the system's spatial modifications: the 'tag mines' is given at the *guichet unique* (not at the mine) and the 'tag négociant' replaces the former in Goma (not at the *guichet unique*). This practice increases the leeway for fraud by mixing coltan from nearby non-validated mines. Meanwhile, payment delays – by June 2014 for instance, négociants held open bills for 50 tons of coltan – increase the incentives for unrecorded trade, including also tourmaline stones (tourmaline prices are calculated in debt on black markets, which, according to

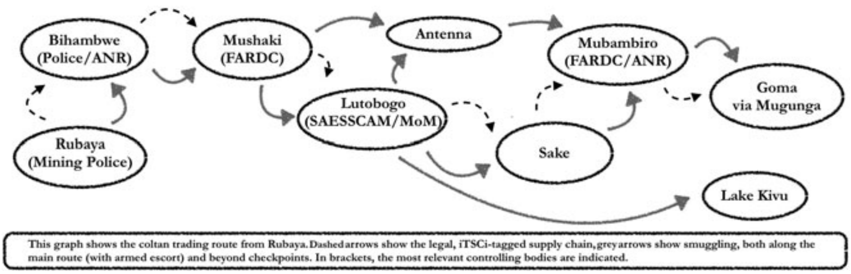

Figure 2 'Legal' versus 'illegal' trade.

some négociants, work 'like Russian roulette').[19] While traceability reduced the options to navigate, coltan prices in Rwanda are 10–20% higher, partly because iTSCi levies and taxes are lower. Many négociants thus combine 'legal' (iTSCi) and 'illegal' trade, called *kuchoresha* ('make something go out'). Figure 2 indicates how this spatially develops.

Usually, négociants get in touch with security services prior to such smuggling operations, negotiating a lump sum or a percentage of the goods. Several négociants team up to bargain collective deals and organise nocturnal transports to Goma, bursting control points or having soldiers prevent the mining police from controlling. One négociant explained his strategy: in Bihambwe, he first passes a checkpoint of intelligence agents and SAESSCAM. Afterwards, he has to stop at FARDC roadblock in Mushaki before reaching Lutobogo barrier. The last control post is Mubambiro, but there are various more or less secret paths (compare grey/fraudulent and dashed/legal arrows) to avoid control. Often, tags are not properly sealed so they could be re-used afterwards for legal trade. Other tactics include escorts by FARDC soldiers, pretending the cargo 'had already been seized', but also lacustrine smuggling.[20]

While not the case for Rubaya, certain mines remain under control of armed groups, such as *Raia Mutomboki* ('angered citizens'), in South Kivu, often taking US$1–2 per bag and checkpoint.[21] Insisting on equal shares, certain armed groups even allow state agencies like SAESSCAM to tax alongside themselves, e.g. Raia Mutomboki factions in Shabunda territory or Mai Mai groups in Lubero territory. Such taxation is subject to uncertainty due to volatile conflict dynamics and the lack of clarity to whom, where and when they are paid: while some taxes are much more standardised than others, this uncertainty rests on the lack of knowledge of official amounts. Collaboration with armed groups thus can at least help attenuating this uncertainty to a certain degree. Moreover – and for state symbolism transcending beyond areas of government control – armed group taxation paradoxically tends to be lower if official paperwork is in order. Confronted with these forms of taxation, many négociants often seek *a priori* agreements, however not without negotiating prices. There are even solidarity funds to pool risks, called *horoscope*, a term by which négociants literally mock the uncertainty.[22]

In certain cases, former négociants have taken up administrative jobs, e.g. with SAESSCAM. This strengthens ties between négociants and their bureaucrat counterparts and is a means to informally negotiate formal taxation. Stressing to which extent extortive state and (state-mimicking) armed group practise can undermine their capacity to supply consumer goods to mining area, many négociants refer to their socio-economic role to justify 'defying state authority as an ethical practice in and of itself' (Panella & Thomas 2015: 6). Nonetheless, many négociants generally define their relations to state agencies (and even certain armed groups) as cordial, noting those often lacked a salary and 'also need to light their stoves'.[23]

Security: négociants' interactions with state and non-state armed actors

Négociants confront myriad challenges beyond the purely transactional ones. Being a theatre of violent conflict for over two decades, practises of 'othering' and economies of rumour are rife across the Kivus (see Jackson 2002). As brokers in contested spaces, where belonging as a political repertoire can be a source for animosity, négociants encounter risks due to their actual or perceived identity (see Pottier 2006). This is not limited to autochthonous-versus-rwandophone cleavages, it also occurs among the 'autochthonous' such as the historically competing Bashi and Barega in South Kivu. Other examples include the Bafuliiru, Barundi and Banyamulenge in Uvira territory (see Muchukiwa 2006; Verweijen 2016) or Batembo and Bahavu in Kalehe territory (see Jackson 2006; Hoffmann *et al.* 2016). Due to this and general insecurity, '(c)ollaboration with and protection and regulation by the military are common-sense practices that have become embedded in the routines of everyday life' (Verweijen 2013: 80), including that of many négociants:

> In many cases, military protection takes place in the framework of more comprehensive economic collaboration between the military and civilians. … the FARDC possesses specific qualities as an economic actor. As well as being a combat organisation, the FARDC is an economic network with wide geographical coverage. It possesses a labour force, infrastructure such as communications and transport systems, [and] symbolic capital due to its status as a state actor. (Verweijen 2013: 76)

Most négociants are aware of their variable situational power towards other actors. Some even differentiate between military ranks and functions when dealing with armed actors. They try to identify key individuals, with whom they strengthen ties through tributary payments, thus increasing predictability. Usually, these relations need to be constantly revitalised due to regular military reshuffles and parallel hierarchies. Collaborations depend on the type and size of the mineral cargo, the familiarity with involved actors and the seniority of commanders. Some négociants carry – like humanitarians – *enveloppes de sécurité* with cash in case of ambushes but whenever possible, arrangements are made in advance. It is important to know local army or militia commanders and to establish friendships with key actors, including customary authorities, in particular in areas where the state administration is weak.

Négociants may decide to pay one institution to avoid and navigate around (potentially higher) taxation by another, or simply to receive protection. In such instances, 'protection can indeed become a commodity that lubricates economic exchange in a situation where legal sanctions are either absent or difficult to enforce' (Raeymaekers 2014: 90). Collaborations with security actors can provoke important reverberations: in August 2014, a FARDC colonel confiscated a vehicle with illegally transported minerals as a rank-and-file from another unit intimidated him not to do so. The debate resulted in a clash involving his and the other unit. The next day, the colonel was summoned and sanctioned by his upper hierarchy (see also UN 2015 on this case). The involved négociants were not identified. In presence of competing armed actors, négociants can navigate between these actors, paying one side to protect them from another, for instance in areas where the police competes with the army. Such navigation can take different shapes. It is 'motion within motion' and from one circumstance to another the adequate course of action can be different. Another example from Lemera is illustrative:[24]

> We had a meeting as the [new] concession holder arrived and they confiscated our goods. I asked whether they had an authorisation to block our goods. I pay eight people. I pay my rent. I am here in Lemera. I have to send money to my family in Bukavu. I paid my fees at SAESSCAM, the mining police, FARDC, the mining division in order to receive all necessary documents and permissions. I paid everyone! As I prepared my goods, the concession holders called a FARDC commander. A little later, I was arrested with my minerals. The soldiers informed us they were mandated to detain us and asked for the paperwork. I called the local commanding officer, a FARDC major, and asked if my payment of US$30 had arrived. I called my elder brother who is an army commander in the same military sector.

He called me back and said I should 'let things go, his units would take the matter on within FARDC'. Afterwards we drove to the military base where I left my minerals and the vehicle. I found that the officer who had me arrested is also the one keeping the concession holder's nearby farms, against a monthly 'salary' of US$1000. I returned with my brother who told his colleague it was illegal to confiscate my minerals. Two days later, I got my goods back.[25]

In 2010, the presidential mining ban provoked increased smuggling, heightening the posture of FARDC and other state security services. Nonetheless, the ban was an era of 'anything goes' and literally business without borders, often in propitious partnerships with army commanders. Négociants with names as emblematic as *Carré Magique*, 'magic bluff', or *Madollar*, the swahilised plural of dollar, made their lives in this period. Certain state agents turned into (part-time) négociants, brokering their way across state services and public authorities and re-investing landslide gains, while eventually losing it all again in some cases.

NOUS VIVONS MYSTÉRIEUSEMENT

As much as the referral to *la crise*, the idea of 'we live mysteriously' is a famous Congolese saying that regularly features in discussions with négociants when it comes to defying everyday uncertainty (see Jackson 2002). This article investigated how they approach this uncertainty, in particular regarding regulation, debt and security. In a context of transnational regulation, violent conflict, economic hardship and competing governable orders, we asked whether négociants are brokers of crisis, or perhaps also brokers in crisis.

We examined how négociants perform their gatekeeper position to (dis)connect markets, and as they struggle to survive as professional category, traceability and formalisation risk rendering them redundant. While transnational regulation narrows the grey zone for mineral trade it paradoxically increases informal taxation too. The result – shrinking room for manoeuvre – encourages *kuchoresha*, or in the words of a successfully navigating négociant, 'with [iTSCi and state agencies] reinforcing control, they actually provoke fraud'.[26] This indicates how formalisation can have outcomes opposite to its intent and intensify tensions between 'legal' and 'illegal'.[27] While the contribution of minerals to the financing of conflicts is hard to estimate, continuing dynamics of fraud and taxation for the very least coincide with the fragmentation of armed groups and a new peak in levels of violence in eastern DRC by 2017.

In this context, négociants broker their security as they navigate past myriad security providers. However, the art of striking deals with FARDC and armed group elements, around the triangle of 'power, profit, and protection' (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2004: 23), also obscures their vulnerability and trivialises the dangerous spaces in which they operate. Few succeed in conserving gains, though their professional pride rests on the accumulation of debt and capital.[28] Compounded by a progressive exclusion from legal markets, their situation is increasingly dire (see Vogel & Raeymaekers 2016). One indebted négociant claimed he would join a militia if he were offered a mere 100 dollars.[29] In dozens of interviews moreover, négociants independently used prison and handcuff metaphors to describe their situation.

Given the auto-referential use of the term and in order to carve a conceptual difference to the notion of 'war economy', we worked around the notion of 'crisis' as emic frame to examine the négociants' broker role. Insecurity pushes them to collude with conflict actors to protect themselves and their goods. However, the same insecurity also enacts a social transformation that enabled négociants to become key social and economic brokers. At the same time, this has not relieved them from consistent uncertainty, as patterns of debt and regulation show.

While this article focused on the trade and regulation of 3T minerals in eastern DRC, further analysis on 'formalised informality' in other regions and sectors is necessary (see Roitman 2005; Rubbers 2007; Hart 2008; Englebert & Tull 2013; Raeymaekers 2014). Informality though does not equal chaos since 'there is order in the disorder. This applies to all social and political levels, ranging from neighbourhood, professional or ethnic associations and networks to the level where … decisions are made' (Tréfon 2004: 2). While the négociants' broker role is challenged in the insecurity-uncertainty complex generated by violent conflict and transnational regulation, their everyday practise continues to constantly re-adapt to a moving social terrain. Paradoxically, this could turn risk into opportunity once again as Congolese mineral négociants look into an uncertain future, living mysteriously.

NOTES

1. This article draws from over a year of empirical fieldwork between 2013 and 2016 in North and South Kivu, We fully anonymise all interviews with numbers, e.g. #654. Direct quotes are translated by the authors.

2. For a detailed overview on terminology and the set-up of supply chains (see Musamba & Vogel 2016).

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3. This is analogous to 'the double opportunity of Nande businessmen' (Raeymaekers 2014: 65).

4. Similar observations have been made across DRC: the 'Kinshasa bargain is an agreement between two or more parties that provides a return. … Anyone in need of either a good or a service, or anyone who needs to resolve a problem, is invariably the 'client' of one or more go-betweens' (Bilakila, in Tréfon 2004: 20–21).

5. Before, artisanal mining did exist in clandestine ways in various parts of then-Zaire, often at the margin of large-scale exploitation of gold and ferrous minerals by state-run corporations such as GECAMINES or SOMINKI. However, Mobutu's push for liberalising quickly motivated many non-miners to seize their opportunities in and around the parastatal concessions (see also Jackson 2002; Rubbers 2007; Ndaywel è Nziem 2009; Geenen 2011).

6. See http://www.oecd.org/corporate/mne/mining.htm, https://www.sec.gov/about/laws/wallstreetreform-cpa.pdf, https://www.itri.co.uk/index.php?option=com_zoo&view=frontpage&Itemid=60 (as of 30 June 2017).

7. Out of around 300 interviews and conversations with a wide array of stakeholders, this article is particularly based on 35 interviews with négociants (eight focus groups, five female and 22 male – out of which six are repetitive interviews). Their histories are widespread and do not follow social or geographic patterns.

8. Interview #106a: 'Quand j'amène l'argent tous en bénéficient. Quand on a pas de boulot, les commerçants et cultivateurs ne travaillent pas; lorsque l'argent ne tourne, les quincailleries pleurent car ils ne vendent pas.'

9. Based on interview #126 (shortened).

10. Interview #106b: 'Négociant anatoka na faranga, anafika mu terrain anapandisha économie. Sa faranga haiko mu terrain ni problème, même manger c'est un dossier.'

11. Interview #106c: 'Creuseurs bakimufunga miye négociant sitakuwa na kitu. Kama niko na faranga nita bapatiya ile faranga ya deni ili akuwe libéré, kisha atakuya nilipa nyuma.'

12. Interview #26.

13. Interview #117: 'Ile shida tuko nayo, ile ni juu ya ma etiquette.'

14. Interview #51: 'Mbele ya ma cracas, batu yote balikuwa bien.'

15. Interview #35.

16. Based on interview #114 (shortened).

17. Interview #149: 'On nous dit que SAESSCAM est un service d'assistance mais c'est un service de taxation et de renseignment.'

18. Informal conversation with local traders: 'Anti-fraude, njoo nini? Minerais ya kwetu.'

19. Interview #124: 'Oyebi, eza jeu de cartes omoni mundele.'

20. Graph and last two paragraphs based on interviews #124, #126, #127 and #199.

21. Interview #106: 'In Lubimbe II, you pay 2000 Congolese Franc (CDF); in Kibandamangobo 2000 CDF; in Mayimingi CDF 1000; in Isezya CDF 1000; in Nyalubemba CDF 1000.' (This example is in an area controlled by the Raia Mutomboki militia in 2014, per bag of minerals. 925 CDF equalled 1 USD then).

22. Interview #35.

23. Interview #125: 'Inabidii kwake nako kuwake mbabula.'

24. Lemera has a history of militarised mineral exploitation, partly initiated and maintained by armed actors (FARDC, FDLR and others), partly by customary power (the late *mwami* Ndare Simba and the pro-customary *biloko* militia). The struggle for customary succession has far-reaching linkages into provincial politics, the topography of mineral concessions and trading patterns, as well as to FARDC and armed groups.

25. Based on interview #106d (shortened).

26. Interview #125: 'D'ailleurs, lorsqu'on renforce les mesures de controle, ça facilite la fraude davantage.'

27. There are additional, wider negative impacts of formalisation and traceability: children leave school and go to the mines, while the corollaries of traceability also encourage parents to take them out of school. It also increases unemployment and the risk of militia re-enrolment. The emergence of Nyatura was not only correlated to that of M23, but also to the mineral embargo, and so was mobilisation around the Raia Mutomboki.

28. In connection to that, négociants in eastern DRC have also been infamous for investing their gains in extravagant lifestyles. This includes numerous examples of building luxurious houses in Goma and Bukavu, acquiring important stretches of land and cattle, i.e. in Masisi territory, but also buying fancy cars and clothes.

29. Interview #6.

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