

Gold Mining in West Africa - Worlds of Debts and Sites of Co-habitation¹

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West Africa is a region with a long and infamous history of gold mining. The soaring gold prices of recent years, together with neoliberal politics, have pushed gold mining, both artisanal and industrial, to the centre stage of land use in West Africa. Over the last fifteen years the organization of mining in countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso has made a shift from dominant state intervention - both on the level of production and the selling of gold - to a sector giving ample room to private companies. This process of liberalization, and the increase of Africans being involved in artisanal mining have triggered heated debates on the pro's and con's of gold mining for Africa's future, debates on gold as curse or blessing. This volume seeks to move beyond the dichotomy of winners versus losers, beyond rigid monolithic models, and beyond rhetoric on gold mining and development.

Positive assessments of current developments in gold mining, voiced by strong international protagonists such as the World Bank and big mining companies, promote mining as a panacea to decrease national debts and to stimulate development. These assessments are based on monolithic stakeholder models and ideal type schemes of mining cycles. They express a belief in unilinear growth, towards a higher economic and technological status. In this public discourse mitigation of negative effects is possible by international agreements in combination with Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives working towards community development.

Negative views on artisanal and large-scale mining presuppose a Wild West frontier model. The immigration of foreigners is often described as fully eradicating existing land rights, and the subsequent social situation appears to

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