

Symposium: Critical Restoration Geographies

**Reimagining Mining Operations Towards Local Ownership in the Kalahari
Copperbelt**

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The scramble for Africa by the colonial project was predicated upon certain high-value resources such as diamonds and gold. The colonizer and imperialist Cecil Rhodes, whose statue was removed from the University of Cape Town in 2015 and another decapitated in Cape Town in 2020, in fact founded the well-known international diamond mining company De Beers in 1888, setting a colonial foundation to the extractive industry in Southern Africa.

Contemporary mining displacements embody the process of ongoing colonial relations within the extractive industry as displaced people personally experience the violence of internationally funded operations. Anna Tsing (2015: 3) invites us to think about ways to “explore the ruin that has become our collective home”. For farmers displaced by Canadian- and US-owned copper mines in the Kalahari Copperbelt region of Botswana, their “ruins” are personal; their ruins are how they refer to the land and homes the mine has taken from them, and where they had intimate relations with their families, neighbors, and the more-than-human world, particularly livestock and wildlife. Farmers I interviewed between September 2019 and

March 2020 in the Kalahari for my dissertation research suggested that the mines should have made them stakeholders in the operation so that they could be developed alongside the rest of Botswana. Local ownership of extractive industry development projects would shift power and relations within these industries towards the people most intimately impacted.

Countries like the United States and Canada extract daily benefit and status from mined resources like diamonds, copper, coal, and uranium – industries that have their roots in violent colonization. Marence Bart-Williams (2015) has noted that through the process of outsourcing extractive industry to resource rich countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Botswana, the West has circulated discourses of poverty and violence on the continent to allow international development organizations to predatorily maintain regimes of power over Africa's riches. Perpetuating certain racist and colonial views that sweep the continent has been a primary pathway of Western countries to maintain access to resources they so desperately need.

In Botswana, a popular discourse both within and outside of communities impacted by copper mining is that mineral extraction will develop the country. As one farmer described: "The mines are good in terms of the nation, but they are not good in terms of our land". Status quo mining development perpetuates colonial ideals of land and power and predicates violent hidden costs of displacement, with the resultant effect of development for some and companies situated in the United States and Canada benefiting the most. As global copper demand is expected to continue rising with copper recycling unable to balance the need for new and continued mining operations (Elshkaki et al. 2016), displacement is likely to continue. The critical restoration of mineral extraction reconsiders the role of local ownership in fostering development (in lieu of dispossession) for local communities. As Kathryn Yusoff (2021: 663) writes, decolonization is "a geologic process", and to start the farmers displaced by the mine already know what they need: "If our government was clever, we would be the shareholders of those lands ... We are supposed to be the directors".

References

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