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Reference:

Geenen Sara, Gleiberman Mollie.- Superfluous jobs in extractive industries : the usefulness/uselessness of job creation after dispossession
Work, employment and society / British Sociological Association [Belmont] - ISSN 0950-0170 - 37:2(2023), p. 394-411
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211008721>
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1778540151162165141>

Superfluous jobs in extractive industries. The usefulness/uselessness of job creation after dispossession

Please cite the published article in *Work, Employment and Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211008721>

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Abstract

Job creation has become central to the global development agenda. Extractive industries in particular highlight employment opportunities for the host communities in which they operate through direct, indirect, and induced jobs. Exploring literature on surplus populations/dispossession and distributive politics/Corporate Social Responsibility and using evidence from the Democratic Republic of Congo, we scrutinize the idea of job creation in the extractive industries as a development strategy. We argue that 1) superfluous jobs are being created to keep people alive yet silent in the wake of dispossession; and that 2) while they may help certain people to 'stay alive', these jobs also produce new inequalities and further marginalization.

Keywords: dispossession; distributive politics; extractive industries; superfluous jobs; surplus population

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1. Introduction

Jobs and employment have taken center stage in current development discourse, forming the crux of efforts to eliminate poverty and drive inclusive economic growth. In the international arena, the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG8) promotes 'inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all' and is the inspiration for the Decent Work Agenda of the ILO (2020). In the context of low-income but resource-rich countries, the job creating potential of the extractive industries is particularly highlighted (ILO, 2019; UNCTAD, 2017; the World Bank, 2014; 2018). For instance, a 2016 report prepared by the World Economic Forum illustrates how the mining industry can contribute to achieving SDG8 by creating 'multipliers through local procurement' and linkages with the broader economy (WEF et al, 2016). In this article we scrutinize the idea of job creation in the extractive industries as a development strategy. We do so by combining two streams of literature: surplus populations/dispossession and distributive politics/Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The idea that emerges is one about superfluous jobs being created to keep people alive yet silent in the wake of dispossession.

Rather than focusing on socio-economic outcomes or on the quality of these jobs (is this decent work?), we want to examine the process and the purpose of creating jobs in this specific context: large-scale mining projects that thrive on the dispossession of local communities and the extraction of raw materials that are processed elsewhere. The particular place such mining projects occupy in global production networks, providing the material foundations for everything we make, transport and consume, raises questions about the utility of extractive labour for global capital. From the perspective of labour, we may wonder whether superfluous jobs constitute incorporation into the global economy, or if such jobs function merely as holding pens that keep workers on a permanent periphery. Findings from gold mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are used to investigate this. In the next section we develop our conceptual

framework, inspired by the literature on surplus populations/dispossession and distributive politics/Corporate Social Responsibility and centring around the concept of superfluous jobs. Section three introduces our case studies and methods, while section four filters the empirical data through our conceptual lenses. The article concludes with an analytical discussion linking those empirical observations to larger questions about inclusive and sustainable development.

2. Conceptualizing superfluous jobs

Surplus populations and dispossession

The concept of surplus populations refers to the people whose labour is not needed by capital; it is the 'population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it' (Marx, 2002 [1973]: 334), or as Tania Murray Li (2009: 68) notes, 'their labour is surplus *in relation to* its utility for capital.' Marx uses the term relative surplus population to denote the reserve army of labour from which labour is drawn when needed. He further distinguishes between the those who are *floating* (workers who are cyclically employed, floating along with [mobile] capital), *latent* (rural people who are partially but not fully integrated into capitalist production) or *stagnant* (people engaged in extremely irregular employment, working for very low wages). The bottom stratum of the stagnant part 'dwells in the sphere of pauperism', the paupers being those who are unable to work (Li, 2009: 68). Barbara Harriss-White (2006) distinguishes between the latter two categories in relation to their functionality for capitalism: the unemployed constituting the reserve army of labour are inherently functional to capitalism, while the unemployable are simply excluded, or 'waste'.

In her article 'To make live or let die', Li (2009) asks whether the pauperized population of the global South fulfils the same function in relation to capital as the paupers of industrializing England, described by Marx.

First, she claims that capital investment today is more uneven (spatially and temporally) than in Marx's time, as 'capital incorporates some places and peoples, and ejects or rejects others' (Li, 2009: 68). Ferguson (2005) describes transnational capital hopping over *l'Afrique inutile* to settle in the 'useful' (to capital) parts of the continent. However, Li (2009: 68) notes a second, and 'potentially more lethal,' dynamic wherein the material resources located in particular spaces are considered useful, but the people within such spaces are not. Hence they are dispossessed of land and livelihoods, without any prospects for inclusion in the capitalist project.

Li therefore criticizes the linear relation often drawn between dispossession and capital's need for cheap labour elaborated by David Harvey (2005). Dispossession, Harvey argues, is instrumental in solving the overaccumulation problem by releasing assets such as labour, land and natural resources at very low cost. These assets can then be used by capitalist investors to turn them into profitable use and accumulate more capital; whereas the 'historical holders of land rights (e.g. family peasants, indigenous communities, pastoralists) [...] lose access and control over natural resources and are transformed into low-paid workers' (Merlet and Bastiaensen, 2012: 22).

Li (2009) rejects the assumption of a direct link between dispossession and proletarianisation *in situ*, by drawing on the work of anthropologists such as Jan Breman (1990), who shows that colonial plantations and mines rarely employed the local people they displaced, preferring instead to recruit more easily-controlled migrant labor (see also Moodie and Ndatshe, 1994). These migrant labourers had also been dispossessed in their home areas, albeit 'through processes quite unrelated to their eventual employment' (Li, 2009: 71). More recently, Frederiksen and Himley (2020: 59) have confirmed that 'little suggests that international extractive firms' need to appropriate land and resources is linked to a concomitant need to recruit the dispossessed as labourers'.

Denning's (2010) article on 'Wageless life' starts with the observation that those who are excluded and expelled from work become invisible, not only to policymakers, but also to scholars. According to Denning, neither of the classic Marxist designations for the wageless (reserve army of labour or lumpenproletariat) adequately captures the condition of 'the most numerous and wretched of the world's population' (idem, p. 79). In the developing world, wageless life is indeed the *main mode of existence* in the so-called informal economy, many of whose operators do not even have the hope to become a wage earner. In the words of Sanyal (2007: 53) they are 'condemned to the world of the excluded, the redundant, the dispensable, having nothing to lose, not even the chains of wage-slavery'. Yet mainstream development thinking remains teleological, dwelling on resilient narratives about transitions from traditional to modern, agricultural to industrial, farmer to wage worker, informal to formal (Li, 2009).

This certainly holds for the extractive industries, which have been widely praised for their potential to unleash economic growth, especially in Sub-Sahara-Africa (Africa Progress Panel, 2013). Even more, it is argued that such economic growth can trickle down to alleviate poverty and stimulate inclusive development through the development of linkages (channels through which extractive industries contribute to national and local economies; Hirschman, 1981; Morris et al, 2012). However, echoing Tania Murray Li's concern, we may question the process and the purpose of such job creation in a context where global capital is primarily interested in what is in the underground, and makes use of ever more sophisticated and automated techniques to extract these resources.

Distributive politics and Corporate Social Responsibility

If the logic of corporate capital is to dispossess and then dispose of the people living on the surface of rich mineral deposits, what policies can be adopted to 'make these people live' - to borrow Li's words again (2009: 67)? In this part we explore some distributive politics – ways in which mineral wealth can be

transferred back to the people living around the deposits, other than job creation – such as direct cash transfers and CSR. Paradoxically, we find that local job creation is increasingly being framed as part of companies' CSR.

In his study of basic income grants and unconditional cash transfers, Ferguson (2015) critiques the idea that it is possible to create jobs (and, particularly, good jobs) for everyone in the world, arguing that it is essential to find a different way to distribute wealth equitably. This idea is picked up by proponents of universal basic income, which is now also being piloted in African mining zonesⁱ. In countries like Mexico, Brazil and South Africa, oil-to-cash programmes transfer government revenues from oil extraction directly to all citizens in a transparent way (Moss and Young, 2009; Moss et al, 2015). Such programmes are based on the philosophical claim that a nation's wealth—and in particular its natural resource wealth—is owned by all citizens. Distributing a share of production thus simply provides citizens with what is already their own. It should not require reciprocity, nor should it be reserved for those most in need (Ferguson, 2015). On the other hand, by taxing these transfers, the social contract can be strengthened and citizens can be encouraged to hold their government accountable (Moss et al., 2015).

Extractive companies have long adopted CSR policies and practices to engage with the communities in and around their operations. In the 20th century, CSR first emerged as a way to compensate people and the planet for the harmful practices of corporations, such as environmental pollution, land grabbing and forced labour (Blowfield, 2005). Yet in the wake of neoliberal reforms introduced in the 1990s, private companies were increasingly urged to take up regulatory responsibilities and provide public services, making some of them act like 'de facto governments' (Hilson, 2012). This shifted the emphasis from compensation and confrontation to collaboration, so that in recent definitions of CSR the win-win (*good for business and good for society, shared value creation*) has come to the foreⁱⁱ. The scope of the activities under the CSR umbrella has been broadened from the traditional provision of equipment, schools and hospitals, to human rights issues, gender equality and environmental impact. More importantly for the focus of this article, job

training, skills transfer and local employment creation now also figure prominently in companies' sustainability reports. This is interesting, as one might think that creating jobs is the core of what companies do, and not something that needs to be managed by the CSR department.

Superfluous jobs

While there is consensus about the fact that the mining industry creates few direct jobs, the potential of indirect and induced job creation is widely acknowledged (WEF et al, 2016). In order for this to happen, so it is argued, governments should stimulate local content (local sourcing of goods, services and labour – see AFDB, 2016, Dziwornu, 2018; Esteves et al, 2013; Hansen et al, 2016; Ovadia, 2014) and economic diversification (World Bank, 2018). These are seen as policies that can redistribute some of the value added to the local level (through procurement and wages). They are often paired with skills and knowledge transfer programmes, since domestic firms and workers are deemed not to have the required capacities and skills. Such programmes are presented and internally managed as CSR programmes, implying that they go beyond what is required by law. Indeed, many African governments have adopted local content requirements in their legislation, but these requirements tend to be relatively soft and allow companies to source and recruit elsewhere if volumes and quality cannot be guaranteed locally (Ovadia, 2016).

What is often overlooked, is that local job creation also serves another purpose for extractive companies: it may help maintain social peace and gain a social license to operate. The mining company studied by Marina Welker (2014), for instance, employs up to 50% more employees than actually needed, simply to assuage local fears of redundancy and keep the community on its side. In contexts that are often characterized by fierce conflict between extractive companies and local communities, local job creation may be one way of appeasing specific groups such as young people, or dispossessed artisanal miners, and winning the legitimacy of local authorities and traditional leaders. As will be shown in the case study, some

of these jobs therefore exist simply to offer employment – they are superfluous, made-up jobs. This has some parallels with makeshift work-relief programmes, such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the United States during the Great Depression, in which manpower was substituted for machinery to create jobs for the nation’s unemployed (Rifkin, 1995). In this sense, we argue, superfluous jobs are part of wider efforts at redistribution.

We also examine what these superfluous jobs mean for those who are being employed. In doing so we connect to discussions around post-work, and in particular the notion of ‘bullshit jobs’, that David Graeber so candidly introduced in 2013. Writing about the rise of made-up jobs in western societies – jobs that are seen as pointless, even by those who do them – Graeber intends to make a point about how capitalism narrows down acceptable livelihood strategies, leading people to pantomime remunerable wage-work. In this article we want to take up the thread of Graeber’s argument and weave it into a different context: one in which even made-up jobs may be relevant or simply necessary to keep people alive.

As attractive as alternative distributive politics and ideas about the post-work society may be, the reality is that many people desire wage-work and actively seek incorporation into capitalist economic relations as a way to improve their lot. Progressive academics and activists cannot simply ask those living in abject poverty to wait until ‘we’ have come up with a workable alternative to capitalism that will enable ‘them’ to enjoy the same material comforts. Glaser is correct to advocate for blue-sky thinking that would enable us to ‘disentangle [capital’s] needs and desires from our own’, for instance by introducing 30 hour work weeks or exploring the possibility of basic incomes (Glaser, 2014: 92). Yet such a colossal course-change cannot take place soon enough for too many of the world’s poor, and are not without attendant problems. Liberation from employment without adequate social safety-nets does not produce autonomously productive individuals, but a mass unemployment crisis marked by inequality and social fragmentation (Ferguson, 2013). Moreover, the psycho-social impact of having a job (in terms of dignity, self-affirmation

and the desire to 'make a difference') should not be underestimated (see Jäger's critique on Graeber, 2019).

3. Methods

These ideas about job creation in the extractive industries were explored over a period of 8 years, during field research in three gold mining concessions in the DRC: 1) the Twangiza concession operated by Twangiza Mining (a subsidiary of Banro Corporation) in South Kivu province (data collected in 2011-2016 and in April 2017), 2) the Namoya concession operated by Namoya Mining (also a subsidiary of Banro) in Maniema province (data collected in 2015-2016 and in April 2018), and 3) the Kibali concession operated by Barrick Gold and AngloGold Ashanti, in Haut Uélé province (data collected in June 2019). While the data collected in the 2011-2016 period focus on company-community relations and help to anchor the present article in a longer history of extraction and dispossession; the more recent data collected in 2017-2019 focus on employment in subcontracting firms working for gold mining multinationals. Combined with insights from the second author's study in the extractive industries in Mozambique, this data further shaped the authors' understanding of superfluous jobs.

Together with the first author, a team of Congolese researchers collected three main types of data (see table 1): 1) structured interviews with workers and managers of subcontracting companies, 2) open-ended interviews with key stakeholders in the community and the companies, and 3) focus group discussions, about half with subcontracted workers, and about half with community members. The structured interviews, programmed in Qualtrics, have two components: closed questions on work experience, working hours, wages, health and safety, and so on; and open-ended questions on access to jobs, job satisfaction and valuation, and personal experiences. The former have not been included in the present article. The latter have been transcribed in full and analysed using NVivo software. As table 1 shows, this has resulted in 362 structured interviews with workers in three different concessionsⁱⁱⁱ. The open-ended

interviews and focus group discussions have been audio recorded and fully transcribed as well. Interviewees and focus group participants have been sampled on the basis of their particular experience with the issue of employment around the mines. These data have been complemented with observations, pictures and documents.

[TABLE 1 here]

Here, this data are filtered to enrich theoretical ideas about superfluous jobs, but they have also provided insights into the politics and practice of local content policies (Geenen, 2019), precarious jobs and inequality, and informalization (Verbrugge and Geenen, 2020).

4. Superfluous jobs in the DRC

Surplus populations and dispossession

The story of gold mining in Eastern DRC follows the trace of the country's tragic history: from a coercive colonial model of industrial gold mining and labour exploitation, over a booming artisanal mining sector in the wake of structural adjustment, taking a violent turn during the decade of the Congolese wars between 1996 and 2003, to the current tense relations between (returning) multinationals and artisanal miners. At the time of the research, two multinationals were operating three gold mining concessions in the region: Banro Corporation was operating the Twangiza concession (since 2018 taken over by its Chinese creditor Baiyin International Investments) in South Kivu province and the Namoya concession (suspended since 2019 while Banro is looking for a buyer) in Maniema province; Barrick Gold was operating the Kibali concession in Haut Uélé province. In all three cases, thousands of artisanal miners were forcefully displaced about a decade ago, to make way for open-pit mines and processing plants.

In Luhwindja chiefdom in the Twangiza concession, an estimated 6.000 miners and 850 households were displaced. In Namoya a roughly equal number of miners and 195 households were relocated (Geenen and Verweijen, 2017). In Kibali, more than 10.000 miners and 4.216 households were forcefully displaced (Pax, 2015: 22). While ordering the departure of all artisanal miners from the main sites, the MoU in Luhwindja chiefdom (signed in 2010) also provided for two alternative livelihood programmes. Almost 400 former miners took part in various professional training programmes offered by local NGOs under the supervision of the Banro Foundation, a development-oriented charity funded largely by Banro itself. Another 850 former miners were hired through local labour hire firms for a period of 12 to 15 months. They were used as manual labour to help build the processing plant and related infrastructure. When commercial production started in 2012 they were gradually made redundant. In Namoya, two cooperatives were created with Banro's support: one artisanal miners' cooperative that received a permit to exploit in Matete, a newly created artisanal mining zone; and one agricultural cooperative that received some initial financial support and a couple of tractors. Yet the miners' cooperative quickly fell apart because of internal struggles and disappointing production, while the agricultural cooperative faced financial and market access problems, and did not manage to convince former artisanal miners to convert to farming (int.20180430, int.20180417). In Kibali, few former miners were hired as day labourers. While during the construction phase 9.233 unskilled jobs had been created (2013 data), by 2019 this number had dropped to 2.865 (Pax, 2015: 43; Kibali, 2020).

In all three cases there have been protests and marches - some of which turned violent -, reoccupation of some previously closed artisanal mining sites, as well as fierce repression by the companies' and state's security forces. After a financial restructuring in 2017 Twangiza Mining was finally taken over by its Chinese creditor in 2018, and production in Namoya was suspended in 2019. One of the first acts of the new

Chinese CEO was to send around a letter to all staff members, trying to convince them to voluntarily resign.

In the course of 2020 all workers – direct and subcontracted – were sent on technical leave.

What happened in all three concessions is unfortunately an all too familiar story (see Frederiksen and Himley, 2020; Geenen, 2014 and 2015; Lesutis, 2019; Vélez-Torres, 2016 and many others): the artisanal miners (as well as service providers, transporters, processors, etc.) were dispossessed of their livelihoods, with only a fraction of them able to participate in corporate-driven alternatives, including low-paid wage work on a day contract basis; the resettled households, previously dependent on artisanal mining and farming, received some monetary compensation and a new house, but no farmland and no job in the resettlement site; and the company workers faced job insecurity due to the unpredictability and temporality of the mining project. The following quote by one respondent illustrated Li's argument about the disconnect between dispossession and the capitalist project, while also reflecting on what counts as a job:

'Before starting operations here, Banro has taken the people's land away. Agriculture was their occupation, it was their job. They worked their land to meet the family needs. So after taking that land away from them, the company should have employed them all. That has not been the case. Many used to live from artisanal mining, but that has been banned' (int.12).

As previous research has demonstrated, artisanal mining is not only an important source of revenue; it also nourishes the formation of an occupational identity, a certain work pride and social status (Bryceson and Geenen, 2016). While enjoying, expecting or hoping for a high production of gold, miners portrayed themselves as self-made, independent and free men, in contrast to wage workers:

'We were doing fine. I was working in Kadumwa [artisanal mine]. Banro could be looking for workers and having difficulties finding them, because we were all satisfied with the artisanal

mining production. With Banro, you have to shovel all day long, and in the end the machine will come to take all the gold away' (int.26).

This was an expression of artisanal miners' feeling of ownership over the gold, in contrast to large-scale mining, where you may 'shovel all day long' but end up being alienated from the commodity you produce.

Many respondents stressed that in the early phases of Banro's and Kibali's presence, when artisanal mining activities were still tolerated, the companies had difficulties recruiting local labourers. Artisanal miners were not prepared to give up their job for a position at the mining company. However, as more and more sites were closed and artisanal mining became increasingly restricted, frustrations grew because mass dispossession was not followed by inclusion in the companies' projects. One respondent in Namoya said that whereas five years ago he never would have agreed to work for 200 USD a month, 'now that they have closed down our sites and arrest and torture all artisanal miners trespassing in the concession, I would accept any job, even if I have to clean the boss' shoes' (int.20180430). Of the 362 workers surveyed, only 56 had previous experience in artisanal mining.

Superfluous jobs: useful for corporate capital?

A common process in the advancement of capitalist production, and hence in the transition from artisanal to small-scale and industrial mining, is the substitution of manual by mechanized labour. While until recently most of Congo's gold was produced by pure manual labour, capital investment and technological innovations in small-scale mining introduced new techniques, such as ball mills, electrical drilling and cyanidation. In mining support services too, machines were replacing manual labour:

'When trucks came in they used to be unloaded by hand. They would call people from the community and pay them to do the job, based on the volumes they could handle. But now they don't do that anymore. It is being done by machines' (int.03).

One respondent expressed his amazement at the fact that the road contractors have ‘a machine to mix sand’ (int.20170415). But was the reverse also happening? It seemed as if some jobs that could (more efficiently) be done by machines, were given to manual labourers.

Before making this argument let us first go back to David Graeber’s notion of bullshit jobs: those countless jobs in administration, human resources, services, public relations and corporate law, which have flourished in post-industrial societies in the Global North but which are not producing anything concrete. Acknowledging that there can be no objective measure of what is valuable and necessary, Graeber’s benchmark seems to be the fact that the employees themselves consider their job to be meaningless. The jobs he is referring to, are white collar bullshit jobs. Graeber adds that the real perversity of the system is that ‘real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited’. This idea was also expressed by one of the respondents:

‘They [administrative staff at Banro] don’t work like we do. They sit in offices, drink tea, eat well. They spend a whole day typing on a computer. We are in the field. Almost all the work is done by us’ (int.08).

The idea explored in this article though is the existence of another category: blue collar bullshit jobs. Contrary to white collar bullshit jobs they are not well paid and of very low status, but similar to white collar bullshit jobs, they seem to serve no other purpose than to create wage work.

In 2011, when Banro had not yet moved into commercial production and was still struggling with the idea of having to displace thousands of artisanal miners, hundreds of them were hired by labour contractors to help building the roads, bridges, offices, generators, dump site and plant needed to launch production. On a tour from the main offices to the plant site, and further up to Cinjira resettlement village – under construction at the time – it struck the first author that in every bend of the very steep and winding road up the mountain, flag wavers holding red and green flags were on the lookout for trucks and pickups. As

circulation was not intense (the company was the only user of the road), most of the time they just sat down on a rock and looked out over the mountainous landscape. When asking an accompanying Banro staff member about it, the latter answered this was 'just creating jobs'.

A couple of years later Banro initiated the project of constructing a new - and less steep - road up to the resettlement site. As part of their CSR, the Cinjira road project served multiple purposes: not only did it respond to requests by the Cinjira community for better access, it also allowed to give contracts to newly established labour hire companies (and hence to please community leaders) and to hire manual labour. Two subcontractors were created: Assodec by leaders of the resettled Cinjira community; and Utralu by Luhwindja's chief. The former would start tracing the road down from the mountaintop, while the latter would start in the valley and move up. All construction and maintenance was to be done manually. At the time of the field visit in April 2017, Assodec had 52 workers, Utralu 156. While road construction was progressing extremely slowly, this was of no concern for Banro: they did not need this road, the small contracts handed to community leaders placated local elites, and the temporary jobs created allowed them to boast in their Sustainability Report (Banro, 2017). Focus group participants, however, showed their indignation about the low wages and bad working conditions Utralu workers faced:

'I would think they show some respect for the chief and give him a more significant sum to pay his workers. But this is peanuts! Go and see how they are working. It is deplorable, the way they are suffering' (int.20170414). 'They do everything with their hands, they don't use machines' (int.20170416).

Another focus group discussed whether Assodec could be considered as a subcontractor, with some participants arguing that they indeed provided a service (road maintenance), but the workers earned as little as 100 USD per month: 'it is more like keeping the population occupied' (int.20170415). This respondent thus suggested that this is not real, paid work, but rather an occupation in Graeber's sense,

created just to keep people working. The following quote by a worker of Cinamula, another locally owned labour hire company, raises more questions about manual labour persisting in this context:

‘We had to do everything by hand. Imagine, we were 20 to 30 people having to lift some heavy rocks, something that should normally be done by machines. We have become carriers [*wa beba mizigo*] and we cannot refuse’ (DM23).

In one focus group discussion a participant pointed to his colleague, saying that the latter’s job was ‘to clean the teeth of security guards’ dogs’; ‘even though he has studied!’, the participant added with indignation. The ‘cleaner’ himself shook his head: ‘I don’t want to be reminded of that episode!’ (int.20170416). One of the surveyed workers though was quite explicit in suggesting that the manual labour created by the subcontractors was a mere showcase where foreigners could display the good they have done to the community:

‘During exploration many individuals were hired, but as manual labour. They had to shovel all day long. That work is good when you can do it on your own account, for example working in the [artisanal] mines. But you’ll see them wearing helmets, just to give some visibility to the work the white man gave him. But the real workers are those with contracts’ (int.20170416).

Superfluous jobs: useful for workers?

An argument could be made for seeing these superfluous jobs as a way to provide for human needs in ways that disregard profit and efficiency motives. According to the survey, wages in subcontracting companies are on average 205 USD (in domestic subcontracting firms) to 228 USD (in foreign subcontracting firms) per month, yet with extremes as low as 120 USD per month. Nevertheless, one respondent explicitly said that it is a better strategy to employ ‘three workers who earn 200 USD each’,

than to pay 600 USD to only one person as 'it creates more jobs' (int.22). The same respondent added: 'if they were to use machines to trace the road, all those people would be unemployed' (int.22). Surprisingly (or not) many people seemed to be desperate to get a job that earns them 120 USD per month. This was illustrated by stories like this one:

'I know someone who went to stand in the middle of the road, wanting to be hit by a truck, so that he could demand a job. He threw himself in front of the wheels, saying they should kill him if they wouldn't give him a job' (int.23).

It was further exposed by the artisanal miner cited earlier, who said he would be willing to clean the boss' shoes now for 100 USD per month. But here is an important point: the former artisanal miner is willing to accept this only because he has been dispossessed of all alternative possibilities to earn a livelihood. In this sense, one may argue that such jobs primarily serve to keep people alive and complacent in the wake of dispossession. In what follows we elaborate a bit more on how these jobs affect the aspirations, self-affirmation, and dignity of the subcontracted workers.

Almost every single worker complained about not having a fixed contract, relying instead on day contracts, even for periods as long as five or six years. They saw themselves as 'eternal day labourers' (int.20180428). Nevertheless, Congolese law stipulates that as soon as a worker has been employed for 22 days, a company is required to provide a contract. In practice, workers were employed for 21 days, followed by a break in employment, thereby skirting the issue. One worker described his uneasiness as follows: 'We don't have health insurance for our families, we have no protection. If they fire us, a permanent worker will receive his redundancy payment, while we are chased like dogs' (int.13).

In this sense, working for subcontractors was sharply contrasted against working directly for the parent company. While both workers may labour 'shoulder by shoulder' (int.16), doing similar tasks, one had a permanent contract, while the other one worked via day contracts. This also manifested in different forms

of discrimination, such as Banro and Kibali agents being entitled to extra benefits (meals in the canteen, health insurance, transport, redundancy payments) and bonuses (for overtime, weekend and holiday work). In Luhwindja, subcontracted workers found it especially demeaning when they were forced off company buses to make room for those directly employed by Banro:

‘They call us non-essentials (*des non essentiels*). Especially when you want to board their bus. They will tell you that you don’t have a badge’ (int.8).

Many surveyed workers expressed grievances about the low status conferred by subcontracting. They complained that ‘they tell us that we come from the sheep stall (*de la bergerie*)’ (int.13), ‘they treat us like children’ (int.28) or ‘they think we are animals’ (int.20190609). This was often attributed to the lack of a permanent contract, and attendant sense of disposability. One respondent affirmed: ‘A contract, *that is work*’ (int.5). Another one said:

‘According to me, those who are employed at Banro, they work. You cannot say that you are working as long as you haven’t signed a contract. We have been working for four years but nothing links us to our employer. They consider us like animals, which can be used as they like’ (int.10).

True, many people aspired to work with Banro or Kibali – as they had been cut off their previous livelihoods and there were little to no alternative employment opportunities. But at the same time they were painfully aware of the fact that they did not have access to the ‘real jobs’, which affected their dignity as well as their feeling of marginalization.

Distributive politics and Corporate Social Responsibility

These findings challenge the soaring expectations around the creation of indirect and induced jobs through extractive industries, especially in the wake of dispossession. Banro’s 2015 Sustainability Report, entitled

'Creating jobs and economic opportunities,' exemplified this misplaced optimism and is worth quoting at length:

'Banro has a simple goal – to build a talented and skilled workforce in the DRC that is almost entirely Congolese from top to bottom. We plan eventually to have over 95% of all positions in Banro's DRC operations filled by Congolese nationals. [...] At December 31, 2014, the Company employed a total of 1,540 people directly in the DRC, of whom 1,414 were Congolese citizens. This employment is predominately in skilled, capacity-building roles, including engineers, geologists, metallurgists, environmental specialists, technicians, accountants, human resource specialists, community relations officers and administrators' (Banro, 2015, p. 6).

Similarly, Kibali reported that 94% of its employees in 2019 were Congolese nationals, including 2.865 subcontracted and 1.566 direct employees (Kibali, 2020). Both Banro and Kibali met localization mandates, however 'local' here referred broadly to Congolese nationals, not necessarily people from the adjacent communities. Indeed, local community members frequently complained about 'outsiders' being employed, especially for skilled and permanent jobs. Local community members were typically hired for more precarious positions through subcontracting firms. On subcontracting, Banro's 2015 report stated:

'A number of specialized functions at Banro are best provided by third-party firms. Contract employment falls into two broad categories. In the first are contract firms that provide professional or specialist services, such as engineering and related consulting services, building and road construction, transportation services, catering and camp management, on-site security and so on. The number of jobs created through such contract companies as of December 31, 2014, was 747, of which 719 or 96.3% were held by Congolese. The Company also contracts out to labour hire firms owned by local business people. Labour hire firms played a significant role in the

construction of both the Twangiza and Namoya mines, generating in the case of Namoya construction 674 Congolese jobs during the peak construction period in 2014' (Banro, 2015, p. 8).

Yet the report provided no details about the *nature* and the *quality* of those jobs^{iv}. It also remained strategically silent about the number of jobs that had been eliminated by evicting artisanal miners and farmers from their land. But it did mention that 288.000 USD have been invested in the local labour hire firm Assodec. How to interpret this? Is this a form of compensation (corporate responsibility), a form of charity? In any case, the argument that subcontracting is a way to gain access to cheap and flexible labour does not seem to fit this example. For instance, the Cinjira road project had no (capitalist) utility for the multinational (in contrast to other roads Banro has rehabilitated, which were necessary to ensure its own production). Even for gaining the social license to operate they could have traced the Cinjira road with their own machines, while employing the Assodec workers in other productive activities. As is often the case, these kinds of decisions are not only inspired by economic motivations; they are intrinsically political as well.

Labour hire firms were owned by traditional chiefs and other influential persons and used as a vehicle to consolidate their power position (Geenen 2019). Contracts were highly sought after and the granting and breaking of contracts had far-reaching consequences in terms of local elite struggles. Moreover, the owners of the subcontracting firms were generally believed to pocket a considerable part of workers' wages. As one respondent said: 'We actually cannot know how much they withhold, because we never have the chance to enter in direct contact with the parent company. They are our brokers' (int.21). One source in Banro's management acknowledged that there was a considerable difference between what the parent company paid its subcontractor per worker, and what workers ultimately received (int.20170411). Another manager explained that giving contracts to local elites was a strategy that bought them social license to operate. He also acknowledged the existence of corruption and clientelism: subcontractors employed people from their personal networks rather those who had been dispossessed. To sum up, from

a corporate perspective, redistribution via superfluous jobs was seen as a strategy to gain a social license to operate, co-opt local influential leaders and appease parts of the population.

5. Conclusion

There are several paradoxical ways to be sceptical of the ‘jobs, jobs, jobs’ and ‘decent work’ discourse. First, critical authors such as Phillips (2011) and Meagher et al (2016) have shown it is at odds with structural tendencies in the global capitalist system. In brief, global capital constantly pursues cheap and ultra-flexible labour, which can be mobilized and disposed of, as global capital waxes and wanes. This is certainly true for extractive industries, which rely on subcontractors and casual labour to reduce costs, overcome scarcity and grapple with commodity price fluctuations, while increasingly investing in automation and technological innovation (Verbrugge and Geenen, 2020). Second, authors such as Li (2009) remind us that *not all* cheap labour is useful for capital, and that those who are dispossessed and displaced by capital-intensive projects are often not the ones who are taken on board when it comes to hiring wage labour.

Studying three gold mines in DRC, this article explores the idea of the usefulness/uselessness of cheap extractive labour for global capital, as well as for the people living on the land from where resources are being extracted. From the point of view of corporate capital, the indirect, manual jobs that are created – especially in the construction phase, but also throughout commercial production – indeed serve to cut costs and flexibly respond to the market. However, some of these jobs do not respond to a *productive* need; they rather serve the *socio-political* need to appease populations and leaders, and win social license to operate. CSR practices and co-optation politics thus conceal processes of dispossession^y.

From the perspective of local communities, the popular discourse on ‘jobs, jobs, jobs’ clearly resonates. Many local people expressed their hope to be employed by one of the extractive industries or service

companies. Yet for many, as in the case of those dependent on artisanal mining, this was only after having been cut off from their previous livelihood options. They saw employment as restitution for dispossession, as – indeed – a corporate responsibility to substitute for what they lost. Multinational gold miners in the DRC seemed to adopt the same reasoning by extensively reporting on local job creation in their CSR reports, but they remained silent on the number of people that had been dispossessed as compared to the number of jobs created, as well as on the quality and the sustainability of these jobs. Most of these jobs were temporary and earned low wages. Moreover, inequalities between permanent and casual workers created new forms of discrimination, affecting the dignity and sense of self-worth of casual workers. In conclusion, redistribution via superfluous employment may help certain people to stay alive – in Li’s sense - but it also produces (new) inequalities and (further) marginalization. This is quite far away from the promises to inclusive and sustainable development.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the feedback received during the Interdisciplinary Conference on Extraction and Exclusion at Oxford University (October 2017) where a first draft of this article was presented. During the field research the first author has benefited from assistance of the CEGEMI (Centre d’Expertise en Gestion Minière) and a great research team led by Philippe Dunia and Eustache Kuliumbwa and consisting of Madamu Alyo, André Bahati, Jean Claude Baraka, Augustin Bedidjo, Divin Luc Bikubanya, Kaer Kalegamire, Olivier Malekezi, Delphin Maneno, Alain Mbonza, Bernard Mutupile, Vianney. The quantitative survey data (of which only wages are reported in this article) were analysed by Elie Lunanga. The contributions of all interviewees in Luhwindja, Namoya and Kibali were invaluable, and are hopefully done justice in this article.

Funding information

We acknowledge financial support from the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) under grant 1514117N and G056718N.

ⁱ The Belgian NGO Eight is setting up a project in Eastern DRC: <https://www.eight.world/En/>.

ⁱⁱ There clearly is a recent move back to corporate accountability, towards stricter regulation and liability, but the effects of this on the ground have so far been relatively limited – although one important event was the court case Congolese mining families started against Apple, Google, Dell, Microsoft and Tesla (The Guardian, 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ The sampling has been done in two stages. At the level of the subcontracting companies, we aimed at a stratified sample of small (up to 50 workers), medium (50 to 100) and large (more than 100) companies. 60% of respondents were sampled in the last category based on convenience and snowball sampling (as lists were not available random samples were not possible), 25% was sampled in the medium companies and 15% in the small companies.

^{iv} The first author has gathered data on job quality; these results will be analysed in future publications.

^v Thanks to one of the reviewers for suggesting us to frame it in this way.

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Table

Table 1. Overview of data collected

	Open-ended interviews	Focus group	Structured interviews
Twangiza	10	11 (57 participants)	120
Namoya	18	11 (54 participants)	103
Kibali	21	9 (44 participants)	139