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## Gendering women's livelihoods in artisanal and small-scale mining: an introduction

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### ABSTRACT

Until recently, women were largely invisible as miners within the array of initiatives, laws and policies seeking to regulate mining in sub-Saharan Africa. This invisibility is beginning to change as gender and women are increasingly referenced in mining reform initiatives. In this paper, we provide an overview of extant research on gender and women's livelihoods in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), mostly of precious or high-value minerals, and some of the gaps that the papers assembled in this special issue address. This introductory paper also seeks to frame the special issue by questioning the forms of visibility of "women in mining" in policy and scholarly work. Knowledge claims about women and their mining work need to be emplaced within wider presumptions, power relations and political economies at various scales. Gender, we argue, provides an important analytical and methodological lens to critically consider the materialization of "women" in relation to ASM.

### RÉSUMÉ

Jusqu'à récemment, les femmes étaient largement invisibles en tant que mineuses dans l'ensemble des initiatives, lois et politiques visant à réglementer l'exploitation minière en Afrique subsaharienne. Cette invisibilité commence à changer, à mesure que le genre et les femmes sont de plus en plus mentionnés dans les initiatives de réforme minière. Dans cet article, nous offrons un aperçu des recherches existantes sur le genre et les moyens d'existence des femmes dans l'exploitation minière artisanale et à petite échelle (EMAPE), principalement des minéraux précieux ou de grande valeur, et certaines des lacunes traitées par les articles réunis dans ce numéro spécial. Ce document introductif cherche également à encadrer ce numéro spécial en mettant en question les formes de visibilité des « femmes dans le secteur minier » dans les politiques et les travaux académiques. Les connaissances sur les femmes et leur travail dans le secteur minier doivent s'inscrire dans le cadre de présomptions plus larges, de relations de pouvoir et d'économies politiques à différentes échelles. Selon nous, le genre offre un important prisme analytique et méthodologique pour examiner, de façon critique, la matérialisation des « femmes », relativement à l'EMAPE.

### KEYWORDS

Gender; women; mining; sub-Saharan Africa; ASM

### MOTS-CLÉS

Genre; femmes; secteur minier; Afrique subsaharienne; EMAPE

In a 2018 meeting in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on the topic of “Women’s Artisanal and Small-Scale Livelihoods,” an exchange took place between Congolese participants about the value (or lack thereof) of women’s work in the country’s gold, tin and tungsten artisanal mines. The meeting, organized by the Canadian non-governmental organization (NGO) IMPACT (then known as Partnership Africa Canada), included reports based on a three-year study of women’s livelihoods in three mining areas in South Kivu and Ituri provinces,<sup>1</sup> together with videos featuring women miners discussing the importance of their work,<sup>2</sup> and presentations by women miners and researchers about the research and the findings.

One of the recommendations emerging from the research and community discussions was that a ministerial order banning pregnant women from mining (Bashwira, Cuvelier, and Hilhorst 2014, 112) should be revised or repealed. The women miners explained at the Kinshasa meeting that the order was harming them. Its enforcement was preventing them from earning a livelihood at the time they needed it most (when expecting a new baby), and was unnecessary as they were not using mercury or other dangerous chemicals while mining (not all minerals and not all types of mining require mercury); or if they were in a mine that did use mercury, the women could do other jobs that did not involve mercury, such as crushing stones. Further, they said, mining labour was often easier on them when pregnant than agricultural work.

Many of the Kinshasa-based participants – government and civil society leaders – responded furiously that pregnant women should not mine; indeed, women should not mine at all. Research showed, they said, that children in the mining areas were deformed (by mercury or other chemical poisoning) because women were bringing their children to the mine sites. When asked which studies they were referring to, the Kinshasa-based participants said that there were “many” and they all showed the same thing. The Congolese researchers explained they knew of very few such studies. The Kinshasa participants were unmoved, and provincial political representatives present at the meeting back-tracked on their earlier endorsement of the pregnancy-ban repeal.

This exchange<sup>3</sup> reveals, on one level, the enduring convictions about the appropriateness and value of women’s work in mining areas. Despite evidence by researchers (Omeiyaka and Kebongobongo, this issue; Stewart, Kibombo, and Rankin, this issue; Buss et al. 2017; Rutherford and Buss 2019) and by women miners that their mining work provided them livelihoods far better than did the alternatives, the strong moralizing conviction that women *should* not mine remained. Also striking were the contentions around knowledge; who has the privileged expertise, and what is known (and presumed to be known) about women who work in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).

Writing in 2011, Jennifer Hinton referred to a “visibility crisis” in ASM, by which she meant the reluctance by state governments, but also donor agencies, researchers and others, to see ASM as a viable sector in its own right. This visibility crisis, Hinton wrote, is even more “acute” for women’s work, at “the mine site, the household, and in communities,” which has been largely overlooked, and remains invisible not just to policymakers, but sometimes “even to miners themselves” (Hinton 2011, 15). Here too, convictions about value and worth operate; the value of ASM compared to presumptively royalty-rich large-scale mining means that it is often dismissed or, worse, actively opposed by those defining the agenda for “national development,” while the value of women’s labour both within and outside mining is also overlooked as not “real” mining and/or devalued

on the assumption that it is “simply” part-time or offers only minor contributions to the family unit.

The Kinshasa meeting exchange described above suggests there may be another dimension to the “visibility crisis” as more attention by policymakers, NGOs and researchers is now being directed at both ASM and women’s inclusion in mining policy. Rachel Perks (2013, 4), for one, has drawn attention to the growing demands to include ASM as a “policy response to rural poverty alleviation, particularly in developing countries,” a trend which she says got under way in the 1990s, and which led to the inclusion of ASM within national mining laws and policies. Reforms to those legislative frameworks have continued into the first and second decades of the 2000s (Ambe-Uva 2017). Adding references to gender and women’s participation into resource mandates has more recently become a feature of these reform initiatives. The African Mining Vision (AMV; see AU 2009, 32), which outlines a continental vision for strengthening state management and control over resources (Ambe-Uva 2017, 11), calls for more progress on gender equality including the “empowerment of women through integrating gender equity in mining policies, laws, regulations, standards and codes.” The African Minerals Development Centre, currently housed at the African Union Commission, is leading efforts to coordinate country plans to “domesticate” the AMV (AMDC 2014), and gender mainstreaming is now included as an objective in some national mining policies (such as in Kenya; see Buss et al., this issue). Donor governments and agencies, meanwhile, are including references to gender as part of resource governance programs and funding envelopes. Intergovernmental and multilateral agencies, such as UN Women and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, have also conducted research and held events to raise the profile of women in mining, including ASM (UN Women 2016; AMDC 2015), while the World Bank has, among other things, published a toolkit for conducting rapid assessments of ASM’s “gender dimensions” (Eftimie et al. 2012).

In this broad array of initiatives to include (sometimes only referentially) women and gender mainstreaming in mining laws and policies, enduring convictions about the proper places of women’s labour, and the mobilization of knowledge and data about women in mining, take on additional valence. The Kinshasa exchange is one example of the contestation of women in ASM, underscoring the importance of conceptual understandings of gender, power and mining to better grasp the varied vulnerabilities, inequalities and power relations shaping different livelihood possibilities for women in ASM.

Research on women’s ASM livelihoods is thus increasingly salient while unfolding in a context where claims to “facts” about women and mining abound. A reflexive stance to research on gender and ASM is critical, for as we detail below there are inherent risks in assuming that the perspectives of powerful agencies seeking to “do good” are necessarily helpful to those who are being targeted by them. As poststructuralist-inflected feminist approaches and other critical scholars of international development have argued, international development programs and policies and advocacy campaigns need to be situated in fields of power to better understand how they generate the ability, if not the legitimate claim, of some actors and institutions to intervene in the lives, social conditions and environments of others (see e.g. Mohanty 1984; Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995 for founding examples of this literature). As Tania Li (2007, 5) succinctly puts it in her Foucauldian approach to these questions, “the claim to expertise in optimizing the lives of others is a claim to power, one that merits careful scrutiny.” Further, Li and others show that such interventions made by states, NGOs, social movements and donors never

operate as smoothly as their experts claim, but rather become intermingled in a range of authority relations and political economic conditions (e.g. Crewe and Harrison 1998; Rutherford 2004; Mosse 2004; Tsing 2005; Li 2007). Such interventions can have varied consequences, often quite different from the intentions and objectives of those promoting them, so it is important to be cautious in prescribing clear-cut plans of action without recognizing these complicated dimensions of power.

While this special issue aims to contribute to the importance of “making visible” women’s differential participation in ASM in sub-Saharan Africa, we are also keen to examine the different forms of visibility of “women in mining” that materialize in some policy and scholarly work. This is not to discredit the newfound interest in the topic but rather to make clear that knowledge is not innocent of power, and the mobilization of “women’s best interests” in relation to various socioeconomic projects should always be examined closely. “Gender issues,” Caglar, Prügl and Zwingel note (2013, 11), have “been recognized in different areas of international governance, yet, mostly at the expense of the intrinsic value of gender equality.”

The papers in this special issue provide research on and analysis of gender and women’s livelihoods in ASM, mostly of precious or high-value minerals (gold, tin, tungsten) in various sub-Saharan African countries, including DRC, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda. To the best of our knowledge, this special issue represents the first such collection of peer-reviewed research specifically focused on women, gender and ASM.

In this introduction we situate this research first in a discussion of the terms through which we have framed this special issue – ASM, gender and gendering – before briefly situating the articles collected here.

## I. Why ASM; why gender; why gendering?

In this issue, we use the term “artisanal and small-scale mining” (ASM) to refer to a form of mining that generally uses minimal technology, requires large amounts of physically demanding, even dangerous labour, and is routinely undertaken at the margins of formal economies and formal legal sanction. ASM has been historically ignored or disparaged by policymakers, even local communities, media and researchers, as a form of mining (for discussion, see Huggins, Buss, and Rutherford 2017). Current approaches to formal regulation of ASM have tended to favour licences and similar requirements that distinguish “artisanal” from “small-scale” mining in terms of allowable technology, ore yields and sometimes permissible areas for mining.<sup>4</sup> “ASM” is the term in wide circulation in these regulatory efforts, and in the wave of new policy discussions and the sizable body of new research in this area. Hence, we use “ASM” while recognizing that as a term it merges different forms of mining – artisanal and small-scale – at a time when they arguably should be differentiated.

The second important term anchoring the papers in this special issue is gender, and more specifically *gendering*. Here, we are intentionally gesturing to feminist research on ASM and women’s mining-related livelihoods. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (2015, 533, 2012), for one, has argued for the importance of nuanced gender analysis drawing from “postcolonial feminist perspectives that critically reflect on power relations; intersectionality; feminist political ecology and gender and development (GAD) theory.” We agree with Lahiri-Dutt’s commitment to a feminist theory of gender and mining based in an understanding

of gender as a structuring social relation, intersecting with other social inequalities, but that “can also be read off from the configurations different societies take” (Cooper 2004, 41). That is, gender operates often foundationally to shape (most often hierarchically) social relations in mining communities and sites, and can be a lens through which to read the operation of power and inequality not just in extractive processes and relations, but also in the projects, discourses and practices of what Li (2007) would call “improvement schemes.”

In so doing, this special issue follows in the footsteps of the important feminist debates concerning gender and international development, which still are resonant, articulated and contested today. They have placed questions of gendered power front and centre in analyses of sociocultural, institutional, economic and political relationships, practices and arrangements that tend to adversely affect life opportunities, scope of action and livelihoods for many women (e.g. Kabeer 1994, 2005; Jackson and Pearson 1998; Parpart, Rai, and Staudt 2002). Among the important insights generated in this research is recognition of the representational work that constructs of women’s labour do in some development practitioner and policy frameworks to condense claims about the empowerment and economic promise of women’s livelihoods (see e.g. Calkin 2015, 298 for a discussion; Cornwall 2018). Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison and Ann Whitehead (2007, 3), for example, argue that stock characterizations of women in gender and development pervade policy narratives. “Women,” they write, “often appear in narratives of gender and development policy as both heroines and victims; heroic in their capacities for struggle, in the steadfastness with which they carry the burdens of gender disadvantage and in their exercise of autonomy; victims as those with curtailed choices, a triple work burden and on the receiving end of male oppression and violence.” These stock characters, the authors note, can be “very far from the complexity of women’s and men’s lives.”

The papers in this special issue endeavour to provide a nuanced account of women’s livelihood strategies in ASM in ways that challenge images of women as (simply) heroines and/or victims. But they also build on feminist research on “gender and development” (a term used for ease of reference) in other respects. The physical or representational presence (and sometimes absence) of women in ASM sites is a linking theme. Most of the papers are attentive to the implications of the research findings about women’s ASM livelihoods in light of the increased law and policy efforts to reform state regulation of the sector, even while the papers are not, themselves, policy studies. Tracing how “women” materialize and are seen and unseen in economic, re/productive and caring roles offers one way in which to reveal the operation of power and inequality in the organizing of ASM economies and the related claims made about and on behalf of women. Men’s ASM livelihoods are also structured by gender (see e.g. De Boeck 1998; Walsh 2003; Cuvelier 2017; Bryceson and Fisher 2014; Lahiri-Dutt 2013), and just as the invocations of “women” (and the need to protect them, for example) are easily hinged to particular policy interventions, the same is true for the materialization of male bodies. Precisely because ASM has been historically vilified by policymakers among others (see Huggins, Buss, and Rutherford 2017), the discursive rendering of male and female mining bodies always needs to be examined carefully.

But focusing on the inclusions and invisibilities of *women*, we suggest, offers a necessary methodological move that is all the more important in light of the “invisibility problems” Hinton (2011) flags. While there has been a small body of research on women’s

ASM livelihoods since the mid-late 1990s (see e.g. Labonne 1996; Heemskerk 2003; Hinton, Veiga, and Beinhoff 2003), there is still a lot that is not known. This gap in knowledge has become all the more important in light of the “inclusion” of women and gender in resource governance frameworks, as discussed above. As Gavin Hilson and his co-authors declare in their recent paper examining women and ASM in sub-Saharan Africa in the context of policy interventions regarding “formalization” of ASM, “any effort to reach these women [in international development interventions] must ... take stock of their livelihoods and experiences, or they could have an adverse impact on their livelihoods” (Hilson et al. 2018, 332).

Peer-reviewed research on women and ASM to date, while nascent, has largely examined first the extent and nature of women’s involvement in ASM, and second, some of the gender dynamics structuring how, and with what limitations, women navigate ASM livelihood options. Maurice Amutabi and Mary Lutta-Mukhebi’s (2001) study of women in gold ASM in Kenya provides a useful encapsulation of an analytical approach to the gendered terrain of women’s ASM livelihoods. These authors describe their study as not examining “women’s issues” per se, but rather focusing “on roles, responsibility, constraints and opportunities ... reciprocity rather than conflict” between women and men (2001, 5). In this distinction and in their analysis, Amutabi and Lutta-Mukhebi explore gendered and other power asymmetries that operate to hierarchically order women and men’s ASM work, while also offering an account that reveals spaces of agency and forms of subjectivity.

While Katy Jenkins (2014) and others (see Danielsen and Hinton, this issue) argue there is a need for more research on gender and ASM, research on women’s ASM livelihoods to date has examined a cluster of key themes linked to gender and based in feminist analytical traditions: the functional division of labour in mining sites between roles generally reserved for men and those for women (Labonne 1996; Heemskerk 2003; Hinton 2011; Hinton, Veiga, and Beinhoff 2003; Bashwira, Cuvelier, and Hilhorst 2014; Buss et al. 2017); the importance of the household and intimate relations in structuring (and constraining) women’s ASM work (Bryceson, Jønsson, and Verbrugge 2014; Panella 2005; Hinton 2011; Lahiri-Dutt 2013; Dessertine 2016; Buss et al. 2017); the role of gender beliefs, norms and expectations in hierarchically ordering women and men’s ASM livelihoods (Labonne 1996; Heemskerk 2003; Fisher 2007; Hinton 2011; Pijpers 2011; Hinton, Veiga, and Beinhoff 2003; Lahiri-Dutt 2013; Cuvelier 2011; Buss et al. 2017); and the importance – financial and social – of women’s ASM work, particularly in light of the growing commoditization of life and the decline of other income-generating activities for women and men (Panella 2005, 2007; Maconachie and Hilson 2011; Hinton 2011; Werthmann 2009; Hayes and Perks 2012; Buss et al. 2017). The complex terrain of sexual expression, sexual exchange and sexual violence (Cohen 2014; Kelly, King-Close, and Perks 2014; Werthmann 2009; Mahy 2011), together with representations of sexual im/morality in official discourses of ASM (Buss et al. 2020), has also been touched on by some of the research focusing on women’s ASM livelihoods. Finally the relationship between women’s ASM-related livelihoods and armed conflict in eastern DRC has been the focus of some research, investigating the ways in which analytical and policy approaches to security, for example, fail to capture the multiple ways women understand and navigate security in ASM contexts (Bashwira 2017; Buss 2018; Maclin et al. 2017; Bashwira, Cuvelier, and Hilhorst 2014; Kelly 2014; Kelly, King-Close, and Perks 2014).



While gender is often a key analytical lens in this work, Jenkins (2014) and Lahiri-Dutt (2012, 2015) have urged more attention to the operation and variability of gender in ASM and in resource extraction more specifically. Lahiri-Dutt (2018) argues there have been some important global shifts that have increased the size and importance of “informal mining,” a term she prefers over “ASM,”<sup>5</sup> with attendant gendered consequences. “Factors responsible for rapid expansion of informal mining in the contemporary world,” she writes, “include stagnating rural economies that offer only poor returns from agriculture, authoritative resource governance by states that deny the existence of mining traditions by favouring large corporations, poor environmental care by these operators and rising commodity prices – all indicating the pressing need for an expansive analytical framework such as that offered by extractive peasants” (Lahiri-Dutt 2018, 3). Against the backdrop of these changes she urges further research to provide, among other things, a better “understanding of gender roles and relations within peasant mining communities” that considers changes resulting when mining livelihoods become the “alternative to agriculture (or forestry)” (Lahiri-Dutt 2012, 202); a more nuanced gender analysis that resists easy tropes of mining as masculine and victimization (of people or environments) as feminine (Lahiri-Dutt 2018, 529); a more thorough account of the varied and uneven operation of gender to see how masculinity and femininity take on different meanings in varied mining contexts; and, finally, exploration of differences among women to more effectively account for how “gender selectively creates advantages and disadvantages” (Lahiri-Dutt 2018, 533).

The papers in this special issue contribute to this call for more research on gender and ASM by scholars like Lahiri-Dutt. Further, we have called this special issue “The Gendering of ASM” to capture the active processes by which gendered meanings are produced in and ascribed to women and ASM by those working within mining sites as well as in policy spaces like the Kinshasa meeting described above. *Gendering*, with a nod to Gramscian conceptions of hegemony and identity, thus also signals attention to the structures (or assemblages) of institutions, practices, discourses and experts, through which gendered norms, meanings and identities are made available, delimited, contested and/or mobilized (Chunn and Lacombe 2000, 9–12; Li 2007, 22–27; Rutherford and Buss 2019).

## II. Gendering ASM in sub-Saharan Africa

The papers collected here constitute a compilation of data and analyses that challenges easy conclusions and assumptions about both women’s livelihoods and the operation of gender norms and structures in ASM sites. While the paper themes and country contexts on which they draw are diverse, for the purposes of this introduction, we organize their main contributions to the existing research gaps in three key areas: deepening understanding of the practices and norms that actively constitute, inscribe and transgress gendered divisions of labour in ASM sites; revealing variability in both the operation of gendered meanings and the positioning of women within ASM livelihoods and economic and social hierarchies; and, finally, providing more attention to gendered forms of governance and authority structures that women navigate in their mining livelihoods, a topic that has been largely overlooked in the extant literature.

Danielsen and Hinton, to begin, contribute directly to what they see as the need for a more systematic account of gender as a social relation structuring women’s ASM livelihoods. The authors draw from a breadth and depth of research on women in tin



and tungsten mining in the Great Lakes Region of central Africa, to examine the “interplay between multiple factors that jointly produce gender outcomes.” To that end, the authors provide a framework based on four dimensions of gender relations: division of labour, access to and control over resources and benefits, decision-making, and gender norms. Most of the papers in this special issue pursue a gender analysis that includes consideration of some or all these four components, but with the gendered division of labour a recurring area of focus.

### ***Gendered division of labour***

Many of the papers included here reveal a division of labour operating in the studied mine sites and which structures women’s ASM livelihoods. The operation of a division of labour between, broadly, digging roles (normally reserved for men) and processing activities and “ancillary” businesses (where women tend to be found) is not a new discovery (as discussed above), but the nuanced analyses presented here provide the sort of granular reading needed to see how divisions of labour and gender inequality are continually reproduced and navigated. While there is a growing recognition that women’s mining roles are constrained by gender norms that prevent their access to other, often better remunerated roles, this recognition can sometimes slide easily into a presumption of timelessness, even a tacit naturalization of this distinction (Lahiri-Dutt 2013). Beatrice Labonne’s formative work on women and ASM is an example of this tendency; she writes that “women have a certain advantage over men for more delicate tasks such as ‘panning,’ which requires agility and care. In Africa particularly this crucial step in the extraction process is a women’s [*sic*] specialty” (1996, 120). In this description, Labonne appears to collapse the observed pattern of women’s ASM labour into its normalization as particularly suited to women’s “agility and care.” In the process, she neglects the differential gendered agency of women – and men – for as Cecile Jackson (1999, 97) has argued, “[g]ender divisions of labour need to be seen as ‘made’ by actors as well as ‘given’ by society.” Exploring the different ways in which the division of labour is actively produced while also ready-made is essential in revealing the gendered organization of the mine site while holding onto its constructed (and hence changeable) essence.

Several of the papers here map the gendered organization of ASM that excludes women from certain mining roles such as digging for ore, as was the case in the Matanda site in Kenya (Buss et al.), the Tonkolili sites in Sierra Leone (Ibrahim, Rutherford and Buss) or the gold sites in Ituri (Omeyaka and Kebongobongo). The survey of women and men miners in Uganda, DRC and Rwanda, as analysed by Stewart, Kibombo and Rankin, clearly shows that men are dominant in excavation jobs while women engage in a diverse set of economic practices. With insight drawn from surveying 878 respondents from seven mine sites, these authors provide rich information on gendered differences in the type and length of work for the different mine sites as well as specific differences between the surveyed mine sites. Other research sites, meanwhile, such as in Manica, Mozambique (Rutherford and Chemane), exclude women from some localities altogether. In their close study of these sites, these papers reveal how injunctions against women in certain mining spaces and roles reinforce social and economic inequalities. These injunctions can be forcefully expressed and enforced, yet at other times are negotiable, contested or even ignored. Rutherford and Chemane, for example, note

that while a rule prohibiting women from entering a mine site was said by the local chief to have existed for “several decades,” women contest that prohibition and do enter mining sites nearby. Similarly, Buss et al. note that while many women and men miners said women could not go into mine shafts to dig (because they were not strong enough or they would drive away the gold), women did in fact dig in the shafts and there was even one team of women diggers.

These apparent contradictions or inconsistencies should not be read as meaning that gender norms are not powerful or entrenched. The papers by Omeyaka and Kebongobongo and Nsanzimana, Nkundibiza, and Mwambarangwe, for example, explore the operation of gender norms constraining women’s ASM livelihood options in DRC and Rwanda, respectively, with implications for the kinds of roles women can access, the experience they acquire, and the consequent limitations in their ability to improve their mining livelihoods. But these examples also demonstrate the constructed nature of the norms governing divisions of labour and the necessity that these are constantly made and remade in daily encounters.

### ***The productive and uneven effects of gender***

Just as the gendered division of labour can vary from site to site and within the same site over time, gender norms and structures also have different effects. As Joan Scott observed, “what ‘gender’ (the article) actually does is posit ‘women’ and ‘men’ as conceptual categories. It refuses the idea that these two words transparently describe enduring objects (or bodies) and instead asks how those bodies are thought” (Scott 1986, 1426). Recognizing that gendered meanings, readings and enactments can vary opens up the possibility of change and agency. As several articles in this special issue note, gendered meanings ascribed to particular roles in ASM are variable within countries, sometimes within the same mine site (see e.g. Rutherford and Chemane; Ibrahim, Rutherford and Buss; and Hinton and Danielsen). These gendered norms are also navigated and contested by women and men (see e.g. Buss et al. 2017).

Gender norms often structure inequalities in which women, by and large, are negatively impacted. But gender norms also create possibilities. Rutherford and Chemane, for example, note that while gender norms exclude women from mining roles in some sites, perceptions that women are more trustworthy than men meant that women were preferred as gold buyers and as food vendors. But as Danielsen and Hinton note, these gendered assumptions tend not to have the same organizational force as, for example, beliefs that women are “not courageous” or “not strong enough.” Further, the research by Omeyaka and Kebongobongo, together with that of Buss et al. and Danielsen and Hinton, highlights the importance of socioeconomic differentiation among women. Women family members of customary chiefs or mine owners in DRC, for example, are not limited by the same gender norms as other women. In western Kenya, Buss et al. explore how gender norms are also mediated by age, with older women facing increased challenges in gaining access to ore precisely because they are older. Similar to what Hilson et al. (2018, 335–336) point out when noting that elite women in the gemstone mining sector in Zambia became the unofficial representatives of all artisanal women miners when interacting with development and government interlocutors, some of the papers in this special issue point to the

importance of looking at not only differentiation among women miners but also who ends up speaking in their name (Sebina-Zziwa and Kibombo).

Tracking differences between women and in the operation of gender is empirically important, revealing ASM sites as more complex and socially stratified than is generally recognized (Fisher 2009). But the recognition of variation in the operation and effect of gender norms and meanings is also important for revealing forms of agency and subjectivity that operate and can become visible when gendered effects and performances are not reduced to an effect of power (Cooper 2004, 47). This is perhaps best explored in the paper by Gemma van der Haar and Marie Rose Bashwira in which the authors explore the circumstances and motivations governing women's migration to mining areas in South Kivu and Tanganyika, DRC. In an analysis that goes beyond the usual binaries deployed when characterizing women's actions in conflict-affected areas (necessity/choice) and migration (push/pull), the authors argue that women's decisions to move to mining sites can be seen in terms of "social navigation." The authors demonstrate that women's migration decisions result from a mix of factors including risk calculus, strategic adaption and also constrained options. "Women miners are not a homogeneous group," Bashwira and van der Haar conclude, and they differ in circumstances and the decisions deployed to navigate their mining livelihoods.

### ***Gendered relations and authority structures***

Focusing on change and agency can suggest a more open template of gendered possibilities and subjectivity than may in fact be the experience for many women and men working and living in ASM economies. The papers in this special issue, in their careful attention to the structures and relations that women navigate in their ASM livelihoods, reveal overlapping inequalities and gendered authority relations at play in ASM sites, and their particular effects on women. Abby Sebina-Zziwa and Richard Kibombo, for example, track the importance of property ownership and land rights in the organization of a gold ASM site in Uganda. Their analysis points to gaps and contention in overlapping governance and legal regimes, in a context where women are not well represented as land owners. Sebina-Zziwa and Kibombo suggest that structural inequalities women face in relation to land ownership and control have multiple knock-on effects for both women's agricultural and mining work.

The paper by Nsanzimana, Nkundibiza and Mwambarangwe highlights the limitations of law reform as a main vehicle for gender mainstreaming. Rwanda's promising statistics on gender equality (particularly for political inclusion) are often noted, yet, as these authors explore, women are not well represented in the mining labour force. While tracing some important developments in the country towards the goal of strengthening gender mainstreaming in the mining sector, the authors identify some obstacles, such as weak implementation of policies, and the impact of structural forms of inequality and gender norms and taboos.

Various papers, echoing the approach of Sebina-Zziwa and Kibombo, also look at different, sometimes overlapping, types of governance structures that operate in ASM sites, and that shape women's livelihoods. Ibrahim, Rutherford and Buss, for example, highlight "dependency" relationships that operate in gold ASM sites in Tonkolili District, Sierra Leone. Like Nsanzimana, Nkundibiza and Mwambarangwe, these authors explore

the state laws and policies that govern both women's equality in the country and the regulation of ASM, tracing how these are enmeshed in social relations and gendered dependencies that condition ASM livelihoods in ways that could have troubling implications for attempts to formalize ASM.

### III. Conclusion

This special issue provides a rich and diverse presentation of research on gender and ASM in sub-Saharan Africa. There are differences in the arguments and analyses among the papers – on questions such as women's empowerment, the kinds of gender norms and relations examined, the methodological tools used, the forms of gendered social inequality considered, or the layers of governance revealed – but all contribute to demonstrating the importance of taking gender seriously in examining ASM. While the newfound interest among some donors, policymakers and others to find ways to assist women in mining is admirable and an important change from obscuring their presence, such visibility does not guarantee that the economic or social situation of women involved in mining will somehow improve. Interventions and research need to be anchored to an examination of gender relations, gendered labour, gendered authority and power relations within mining zones, households, property regimes and wider communities.

Moreover, in terms of the theme of the special issue, these subjects, examined in the following articles, are emplaced within wider presumptions, power relations and political economies at local, national and regional scales. ASM is defined as a “sector” for policy engagement in ways that routinely characterize it as on the disruptive, “informal” side of society, compared to industrial mining or even small-scale agriculture. Numerous ASM scholars have provided nuanced analyses of ASM sites offering accounts that challenge its characterization as informal, chaotic or criminal (see e.g. Geenen 2011, 2012; Fisher 2007; Bryceson et al. 2014; Van Bockstael 2014; Hilson and Maconachie 2016; Spiegel 2012; Werthmann 2009). Yet government and donor priorities remain focused on objectives like formalization that rely on, and require, the constitution of ASM as an informal, chaotic, shadowy sector on behalf of which reform will bring needed improvements.

As illustrated in the 2017 Kinshasa meeting with which we started this Introduction, the different “voices” and other forms of agency enacted by women and men who work in various ASM mining roles will face a plethora of discursive and material constraints in settings defined as focused on policy or development issues, even in those rare opportunities when they are given a (partial) platform. The socioeconomic practices and “voices” of such women are overdetermined by more dominant narratives and predispositions concerning “women and ASM in Africa.” Yet the contributions in this special issue, reflecting varied perspectives and orientations of authors located in different institutional settings in Africa, Europe and Canada, provide substantive insight into the gendering of artisanal and/or small-scale mining in a number of locations in several African countries – contributions, for many of the authors, that are part of numerous initiatives to facilitate more openings to hear, appreciate and open-mindedly engage with women artisanal and small-scale miners in various forms of public and policymaking spaces. We anticipate that bringing these articles together in this special issue should further the dialogue, debate and contestation regarding women and men who work in ASM in Africa.

## Notes

1. Quantitative research was carried out in three sites, but qualitative research focused only on two of these sites.
2. The videos include this one on the IMPACT website: <https://impacttransform.org/fr/voici-josephine-et-zawadi-deux-femmes-minieres-artisanales-de-la-republique-democratique-du-congo/>
3. The account of this meeting came from personal communication with Gisèle Eva Côté, Senior Gender and Social Inclusion Specialist at IMPACT, who coordinated the research undertaken by locally based research teams in South Kivu and Ituri, the community discussions of the research results, the formulation of the recommendations, and the Kinshasa meeting where this exchange took place. The authors were part of the research team for this project – Women in Artisanal and Small Scale mining in Central and East Africa: Empowerment Challenges and Possibilities – funded by the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) initiative, a multi-funder partnership with the UK Government's Department for International Development, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the International Development Research Centre, Canada.
4. The research on, and policy recommendations for, formalizing ASM are sizable and we cannot do them justice here, but for an overview see Mutemeri et al. (2016) and Hilson and McQuilken (2014).
5. Lahiri-Dutt (2018, 1–5) notes that she sees “ASM” and “informal mining” as referring to the same thing, but that “informal mining” gestures to some analytically important direction including the political economy and global politics of resource extraction, while highlighting the often-overlooked varied forms of mining of the poor.

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