

*The Anthropology of Mining: A Moral and Methodological Minefield?*

Chair: Marjo de Theije (VU University)

Discussant: Joris van de Sandt (Pax for Peace)

Sabine Luning (Leiden University): *Gold Mining Boom in the Sahel: Contested Terrains of Water and Land in Burkina Faso*

Gijs Cremers (VU University): *Small-scale mining versus environmentalism in the Peruvian Amazon*

Boris Verbrugge (University of Gent): *Field research as a basis for undermining policy rationales in the ASM-sector*

The anthropology of mining is booming, not in the least because mining has recently moved into 'remote' areas that were considered the turf of anthropologists (think e.g. of Papua New Guinea). Many anthropologists have witnessed how members of local communities, with which they have longstanding relationships, have become entrenched in relations with 'global' resource extractors. This has led to debates among anthropologists: should we stick to what has been called our 'grass roots reflex' and side unequivocally with communities, or should we try to understand the complexity of articulations with more academic distance? Anthropologists taking the latter position have stated that we should also describe internal cleavages within communities, as well as attempt to 'study up' by trying to get access to boardrooms of mining companies. This nuanced 'academic' stance has been countered by arguing that mining companies can benefit from knowledge about local cleavages (divide and rule) and that anthropologists risk becoming embedded in boardrooms.

Anthropologists working on mining are aware that their choices need careful reflection: we should spell how we want to proceed in fieldwork, what sort of knowledge we seek and how this may be used by different parties involved. This is particularly relevant since mining companies actively solicit the grass root knowledge of anthropologists to better 'manage' conflicts, NGO's and policy makers consult anthropologists, and local communities ask for help to obtain insights in the future plans of companies as well as knowledge about their rights. The presentations in this panel are concerned with public issues related to mining. It will foreground how anthropologists engage with public debates e.g. on power differences and environmental effects of mining, and how knowledge is produced and put to work in the wider arena of governing mining matters.