

Coal Mining and its Recent Pasts in Comparative Perspective

By IAN PHIMISTER

University of Sheffield and University of Pretoria

While coal mining's vigorously contested pasts have attracted the attention of historians and other scholars for much of the last century, this paper takes as its historiographical base line the Second International Mining History Congress held at Bochum in 1989. A conference remarkable for the number and range of contributions, it acknowledged the problems of writing comparative history even as it set out a research agenda for the future. Prominent amongst the suggestions made then were the importance of disaggregating notions of miners' communities, organisations and strikes; the need to explore further the role of the state, especially its repressive dimension; and questions of ethnicity and gender.¹

In the sections that follow, the extent to which each of these areas has been explored over the course of the last fifteen years is identified. Section one notes recent studies that have focused on mining communities, strikes, ethnicity and gender, while section two, in the absence of any explicitly comparative works, draws attention to three coal mining histories of Australia and Southern Africa. Patterns and processes over time of state intervention, community and conflict, and of class, race and gender are all closely examined. The third and final section takes up Tenfelde's observation that coal mining history had achieved its greatest sophistication at precisely the same moment that the industry itself had lost importance in Western Europe, before pointing to the likely methodological direction in which African, Asian and Australian studies of coal mining will go.

Communities and conflicts

So far as the social history of coal mining is concerned, it is the first theme that has received most attention in the course of the last decade or so. Notable monographs have been those by Cohen, by Campbell, and by Church and Outram. Published in 1993, Cohen's *When Strikes Make Sense – and Why*² analyses coal miners' strikes in France between 1890 and 1935. His key finding was that 'in all periods, the greatest advantages came to workers who generated long strings of losses'. In other words, while militant workers lost a higher percentage of strikes because their demands were more radical

than those of conservative workmates, ultimately they profited from ‘unacknowledged preemptive offers of higher wages made by employers who hoped to limit future striking’. It is an emphasis which underscores the importance of studying trade union ideology – ‘since only a union with a certain ideology would repeatedly launch strikes which appeared to leaders and the rank-and-file as losing ventures’ - as well as the key role played by the state. In the period before the First World War, ‘the Third Republic, suspicious of the conservative ownership of mining firms and influenced by the strong support given the republic by deputies elected from mining districts, was much more strike-averse than the coal companies’. It followed an ‘accommodationist’ policy of ‘intervening to end strikes by pressuring firms to make concessions’. However, with the 1922 split of the national mine workers union into a majority of reformist *confederes* and the minority communist *unitaires*, successive governments ‘steered’ benefits to strike-averse *confedere* coal-producing areas [*departments*] as a way of undercutting the strike-prone *unitaires*’ appeal.³

Although Cohen’s ‘exceptionally interesting and provocative’ study has been widely reviewed and praised, not least in Charles Tilley’s generous foreword to the book itself, its wider applicability remains open to question. In part this reflects Cohen’s failure to devote much attention to the cultural and sociological contexts in which strikes occur. More paradoxically perhaps, it is a consequence of not acknowledging the role played by the local dynamics of struggle. Both dimensions, by contrast, are exhaustively explored in Campbell’s outstanding two-volume history of the Scottish coalfields.⁴ Dismissive of post-modernism ‘linguistic determinism’, *Scottish Miners* carefully retains a materialist focus on the dialectic between structure and agency. Volume one in particular pays close attention to the specificities of place and social structure. Chapters devoted successively to the independent collier; mechanisation; localities; housing, women’s work and gender relations; authority and social order; and ethnic and religious identities, demonstrate significant variations between the four regions, themselves capable of further sub-division into ten localities, which together constituted the principal Scottish coalfields in the period under consideration. Paternalism and accommodation in some villages is contrasted with the frequent resort to violent protest in other mining settlements elsewhere in the Lanarkshire and Fife coalfields. In circumstances of such complexity, collective action, as the author emphasises, ‘cannot be regarded as the unproblematic expression of a homogenous class consciousness’, especially where the construction of ethnic identities was

characterised by deep fissures of religious sectarianism. As a number of reviews have been quick to point out, prominent amongst the strengths of this subtle and sophisticated study is its treatment over time of the cross-cutting and frequently contradictory worlds of work and community.⁵

In this key respect, Campbell's *Scottish Miners* provides important independent support for several of the most significant conclusions of Church and Outram's *Strikes and Solidarity*.⁶ But although these latter two books appeared within five to seven years of the publication of Cohen's work, they neither refer to it nor to each other. This is a pity, not least because Campbell's empirical richness might usefully have engaged with the somewhat abstract theoretical insistence of Church and Outram, even as it tempered the starkness of their formulations. These are certainly all-encompassing. On the basis of meticulously assembled data concerning strike activity by British coal miners between 1889 and 1966, *Strikes and Solidarity* attempts to explain the causes of strikes, regional and inter-colliery differences in strike propensity, and the relation between strikes and social solidarity in the history of colliery communities. In doing so, Church and Outram overturn much of the subject's conventional wisdom. While conceding that large-scale strikes extending across regions or the entire country were an especially important feature of the British coal industry from the mid-19th century onwards, they argue that by concentrating on such episodes, historians have lost sight of the 'far more typical domestic and local strike'. The first of their conclusions is that a large proportion of such strikes occurred at a relatively small number of collieries and places. The typical British colliery, they observe, 'was free from recorded domestic strikes in any given year before the 1950s'.

It follows from this that the persistent characterisation of coalminers as archetypal, militant artisans or proletarian workers, programmed by working experience and isolation in occupational communities to strike hard and often, is without historical foundation. But if coalminers can no longer be seen as uniformly and consistently militant, did they not possess an exceptional capacity for solidaristic action, the other attribute commonly associated with miners' militancy? Here the findings of *Strikes and Solidarity* are ambiguous: 'the answer is yes and no'. Church and Outram's close inspection of the coal mining industry's structures and organization uncovered 'fracturing divisions derived from differences in pay, working practices, colliery ownership, regional location and local economic and social history'. Any one or more of these factors, they discovered, 'was as likely to result in a conflict of codes and to

conflicts of interest among the mining population as to co-operation and solidarity'. The 'isolated mass' hypothesis, at least in its strongest form, has seemingly not stood up to its first 'rigorous empirical testing based on a quantitative analysis'.⁷ What survives, though, is a connection of sorts, 'a residual truth ... that while solidarity was not an inevitable consequence of isolated massness a link did appear to exist between massness and strike propensity'. Having established that it was not only the degree of occupational density but also colliery size which was an important part of the strike-generating process, Church and Outram argue that the key to understanding the 'size effect' on colliery strikes is the fact that larger collieries had about the same number of strikes per thousand workers as did smaller collieries, but that larger mines lost far more working days per thousand workers from strikes than did smaller collieries. This suggests 'bigger collieries did not generate proportionately more grievances ... [but that] strikes at larger collieries sometimes managed to secure the active support of other work groups in the colliery and in this way large colliery scale led to large-scale losses of working days'.

The crucial variables on which almost everything depended were local. Although trade unions and coal owners' associations played a role, particularly in Scotland and Wales, in turning grievances into strikes, 'the competence and personalities of local managers and the strength and character of organised labour in the locality were critical'. At the heart of it all lay the local pit culture: 'the outcome of interaction between working miners, unionized or not, and colliery officials and managers, particularly those directly responsible for managing work and setting the tone of labour relations underground'. And here the role of management was decisive. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Church and Outram insist that the principal, if not exclusive, originator of industrial action was not 'the militant miner', but management failure. 'Our evidence', they write,

suggested that indifference to labour management at boardroom level, a lack of managerial control over the conduct of supervisory officials underground or ineptness on their part, should be seen as potentially strike-precipitating factors down the pit because such circumstances were more likely to create and exacerbate grievances and to encourage their resolution by resort to strike action.

Overall, strikes were more likely, in the pre-nationalisation period at least,⁸ in collieries which were family-owned and remotely managed. More specifically, highly strike-

prone mines were those in which there was a high turnover of underground mine managers, as it was managers who played a major role in creating 'a climate of conflict or harmony underground where most disputes originated'. Additionally, pits where miners belonged to an independent trade union organising a higher proportion of the workforce than others, were more likely to experience a period when they were highly strike-prone. Relatively high union density (exceeding one-third) at local level combined with low union density at district level was also an important factor 'likely to culminate in industrial action'.

Nowhere perhaps is the path-breaking nature of *Strikes and Solidarity* more apparent than when it comes to international comparisons. These can be no more than tentative precisely because no comparable statistical basis of other mining strikes has been assembled. In summary, Church and Outram's conclusion is that the distinction which Rimlinger drew between the highly strike-prone Anglo-Saxon countries, that is, Britain and the United States of America, and the relatively peaceful coalfields of France and Germany remains valid. They remind us that important themes in the literature have been the significant role of migrants, 'particularly peasants holding religious or other ideological convictions antithetical to industrial militancy', as well as the influence exerted by mine owners vigorously pursuing policies of 'repressive paternalism coupled with anti-unionism'. Compared to Britain, continental employers were more successful in imposing proscriptive policies on workers, even as trade unions at local level failed to reach a critical mass of support. They note too the further possibility that given 'the greater political element characteristic of union activity on the Continent, which was not directly related to the advance of coalminers' sectional interests', urban centers rather than the mines themselves became the principal focal points around which workers' actions were concentrated.

Nor are generalisations less problematic when American coalminers are examined. If anything the picture is still more complicated. Church and Outram observe that exactly the same factors put forward to account for relative quiescence on the continental European coalfields – 'culturally determined attitudes of employers and workers, repressive and authoritarian paternalism, extensive migrant labour, inter-union rivalry' – are the ones used to explain labour militancy in the American coal mining industry. This paradox, they bluntly conclude, underscores the fact that until historians can present detailed statistics of coalmining strikes at regional and local levels international comparisons of colliery conflict will continue to be, at best, general and

inconclusive: ‘without ... [such data], none of the questions to which we have supplied answers (however provisional some of them may be) in respect of the British coal industry can be explored ... within an international framework’.

The sensitivity displayed by *Strikes and Solidarity* to what Tilley has termed ‘locally contingent processes’⁹ is also a key feature of David Gilbert’s work. In *Class, Community and Collective Action. Social Change in Two British Coalfields* and in a recent article,¹⁰ he has consistently sought to ‘unpack’ the various meanings and contexts of ‘community’. But while broadly sympathetic towards those scholars impatient with notions of community which are little more than a ‘retrospective imagining encouraged by uncritical socialist intellectuals, and fostered in autobiographies and oral histories [in which] social relations are often recalled through a golden haze’,¹¹ Gilbert argues against any suggestion that social historians of mining should abandon the idea of community. Instead, what has to be recognized is the diversity of settings in which miners lived. Historians, then, need to produce ‘decentred or re-centred histories of mining communities’. For Gilbert, an obvious route towards this goal is through feminist scholarship. One important dimension of this kind of history, he notes, ‘has been an emphasis on communities not only as a set of social relations rooted in a particular place, but also as a set of exclusions and absences’. Yet all too often this has not amounted to much more than the ‘writing in’ of women into coal mining history. Typical of such an approach is Liddington’s study published a few years ago in *History Workshop Journal* of the female colliery owner, Anne Lister.¹² Lister, who inherited the Shibden Colliery in Yorkshire in 1826, exploited her coal mines with a single-minded ruthlessness, but little of this is of much interest to Liddington. Although conceding that ‘young boys (and possibly girls) were employed underground [in Lister’s collieries], her main concern is to establish the degree of entrepreneurial success enjoyed by Lister ‘in heavy male-dominated economic activity’. The point that class appears to have trumped gender is ignored. By contrast, one of the many strengths of Caroline Brown’s history of Nigeria’s Enugu Colliery complex is the way in which gender and the organisation of the labour process are integrated at every stage of her analysis. The roles that men played in their village communities were as important as the world of underground work in shaping their consciousness.¹³

Where ‘re-centred’ histories of coal mining communities and workers’ struggles have tended to cluster in recent years, however, has been less around gender than around ethnicity and culture. While this has never been a major concern of mainstream

British mining historiography, some historians have argued that the strike-prone history of coalfields in Scotland and South Wales has a cultural dimension. The view has been expressed that the ‘important cultural and historical differences which those coalfields shared contrasted with conditions, attitudes and actions in English coalfields, and that the influence of distinctive Celtic cultural traits helps to explain the ‘highly solidaristic behaviour and the especially high strike propensity exhibited by Scots and Welsh miners compared with their English counterparts’. It is not an interpretation which has won much support, though, partly because even in Scottish and Welsh mines (and many of them remained free of recorded domestic strikes) extreme strike frequency was a transient experience, and partly because of the emergence after 1940 of a more militant Yorkshire.¹⁴ By contrast, these issues have continued to attract historical investigation in Germany where the relationship between Polish-speaking labour migrants and German miners’ unions in the Ruhr coalfields has been seen as a triumph of nationalism over class solidarity.¹⁵

They have also, of course, remained a key area of debate in American labour historiography. For much of the past 30 years the terms of debate were set by Herbert Gutman’s seminal essay on the career of Richard Davis, the black coalminer and United Mine Workers of America union official. As is well known, Gutman urged labour historians to explore the theme of interracial solidarity and unionism.¹⁶ The ensuing ‘class over race’ perspective persisted until the early 1980s, after which point most studies of coal miners, especially those appearing in the last decade, have stressed the ‘complex intertwining of “race and class” ’ consciousness. Prominent examples of this scholarship are Joe Trotter’s, *Coal, Class and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-32*, and most recently Daniel Letwin’s, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921*.¹⁷ This so-called ‘New Labour History’ has begun the long overdue process of breaking down the established polarities of ‘class v. race, solidarity v. fragmentation, white unions v. black workers’, and while it is a little early yet to identify any sort of synthesis, ‘new generalizations are replacing old ones’. These, according to Halpern, include ‘the racial policies of organized labour in the early twentieth century were far from monolithic; black workers were an integral part of the industrial union upsurge of the 1930s; their relationships with their white co-workers were less antagonistic and far more complex than previously assumed; and it was through labour struggles that blacks made the most important progress towards equality in the years before the emergence of the ‘modern’ civil rights movement’.¹⁸

Many of these same issues have been addressed by scholars working in Asia. Simeon's meticulous investigation of *The Politics of Labour Under Late Colonialism: Workers, Unions and the State in Chota Nagpur 1928-1939*, covers more ground than coal mining alone, but nonetheless devotes a substantial part of each chapter to the industry's demographic and structural features.¹⁹ While the historical construction of class solidarity in the workplace was at different times and places frustrated by the politics of ethnic identity, on at least some occasions it was precisely the so-called 'jungly class' who seized the lead from their erstwhile leaders. Far from confirming elemental stereotypes, the history of Chota Nagpur revealed real people 'striving to sustain themselves and to transform the conditions of their lives as best they could'²⁰ Similarly, Erwiza's intriguing analysis of the Ombilin coal mines in West Sumatra points to the shared experiences of exploitation and struggle by the colonised workers of Asia and Africa.²¹ It is a history in which class, ethnicity and violence, especially the institutionalised violence of the colonial state, are recurrent themes. No less striking are the post-independence parallels. During Indonesia's 'New Order' regime (1965-1996), Ombilin's coal miners were forced 'back into the cage of production', and obliged to become members of the ruling Golkar party. 'Under the New Order', explained Erwiza,

violence continued ... but class conflicts were suppressed. The managers and overseers practiced various forms of intimidation on the miners to force them to acquiesce in the discipline of Golkar ... [yet] the politics of resistance continued unabated, and in its characteristics ... resembled the strategies of the colonial period, namely individual and unorganised resistance.²²

Coal mines compared

Church and Outram's *Strikes and Solidarity* aside, none of the books or articles discussed above are explicitly placed in a comparative framework. In part this reflects an entrenched propensity for research to follow national contours, and no doubt the attractions and advantages of focusing on particular coalfields or collieries. Certainly some of the most interesting recent work done on coal mines in the southern hemisphere has taken the form of detailed case studies. The balance of this section compares and contrasts Diane Menghetti's fine-grained social history of Queensland's [Australia] *Blair Athol* with Ruth Edgecombe's detailed examination of *Hlobane* Colliery in Natal [South Africa], and, more briefly, my own economic and social history of Zimbabwe's only coal mine.²³ Menghetti's history of the Blair Athol coal mine and town of the same name covers the period from the discovery of coal in 1864 to the 1990s by which time

the town itself had been swallowed up by open-strip mining. Until the Second World War transformed demand, Blair Athol's output was small. The combined population of the mine and town rarely exceeded c.400 throughout the depressed interwar years. Nor did numbers increase much thereafter. The transition from underground to opencast mining actually reduced the number employed. But despite or seemingly because of this, Blair Athol, on Menghetti's telling, developed a remarkable set of social institutions and sense of community. Successive chapters, based on local newspapers and personal diaries but above all on hundreds of interviews with dozens of former residents and mine workers, describe 'childhood; Depression; Institutions (including schools, hospitals, and churches); Growing up; dreams; realities; and leaving Blair Athol'. Underground mining conditions, wages, and involvement in national strikes are all discussed – the evocative phrase 'miners on the grass' capturing something of the harsh reality of company attempts to starve strikers back to work - but the over-riding impression is one of local conformity, political conservatism and social harmony.

Map 1: *Blair Athol Colliery, Queensland, Australia*



For all that, Blair Athol's miners usually participated in industry-wide struggles, local disputes were rare. Both management and work-force remained 'relatively small and stable and communication between the two was unusually good'. Moreover, 'it was always clear that the life of the mine was tenuous and the threat of lost coal orders due to interrupted production was as unwelcome to miners as to shareholders'. Almost from the start of the research project, explains Menghetti, oral evidence suggested that 'a search for harmony underlay both social and economic life'. She acknowledges that mining communities have often been interpreted as 'cohesive in the sense that they present a united front against what they perceive as the hostile world of mine and landowners ... [the sort of cohesion that] creates social isolation and radical political and industrial positions which ... lead to ... confrontation'.²⁴ But Menghetti insists that in Blair Athol, mining community cohesion led to harmony rather than confrontation. 'The outside world was not hostile', she notes. 'Mine owners were, for many years, also miners and most local landowners had sons at the coal-face. An enemy, therefore, was hard to identify and the town's quest for harmony did not encourage identification ... [Nor did] the strength of Blair Athol women ... [encourage] friction. The harmony that the women fostered was industrial as well as social; in coal mining communities industrial relations are everybody's business ... when other pits were out, the hat went round on tally day. But at home, if it was possible to negotiate, Blair Athol negotiated'.²⁵

Several of these themes find immediate resonance in Edgecombe's history of Hlobane Colliery, situated some 90 kilometers northeast of the coal-mining center of Dundee, Natal. The period discussed, that is, 1898–1998, is much the same as that covered by Menghetti for Blair Athol. While Hlobane was a very much bigger mine, producing c.140,000 tons of coal per annum by the First World War and c.600,000 tons p.a. in the 1950s, with a labour force of up to 3,000 men at times, fewer than 200 of them were white miners. This latter, small, self-contained community displayed many of the characteristics of its Blair Athol counterpart. 'The 1950s and 1960s were good times', writes Edgecombe, 'when a close community spirit evolved ... it was a time of family dynasties with generations of families working at the mine – the Adams, Bothas, Coetzers, Nels, Cronjes, Groblers and Scheepers'. To some extent, 'the existence of dynasties at Hlobane lay in the deep sense of community that was forged from the late 1940s onwards ... [and] cemented by sport and recreational facilities. In part, also, there was the pride taken by those committed to mining careers, of being able to meet the

challenges of the difficult and arduous conditions of Hlobane as a mine among mines. There were also more prosaic explanations, among which was the central issue of [good pay and job] security'.²⁶

Map 2: *Hlobane Colliery, Natal, South Africa.*



But unlike Blair Athol, this sense of community was based on exclusion not inclusion.²⁷ South Africa's racially segregated political economy was exactly reproduced at Hlobane Colliery. All management posts, skilled occupations and most supervisory positions were reserved for whites. African workers, by contrast, were treated as cheap labour units, with a callous disregard for their health and safety that persisted until well into the 1970s and beyond. Edgecombe's chapter on Hlobane's dreadful safety record, as well as that of the Natal coal mining industry generally, makes salutary reading. Black miners resisted when and where they could, and the ten pages or so of the book detailing these struggles in 1917, 1919, 1921, 1935, 1938, 1945, 1947, and 1954 provides qualified backing for Cohen's findings, albeit in very different

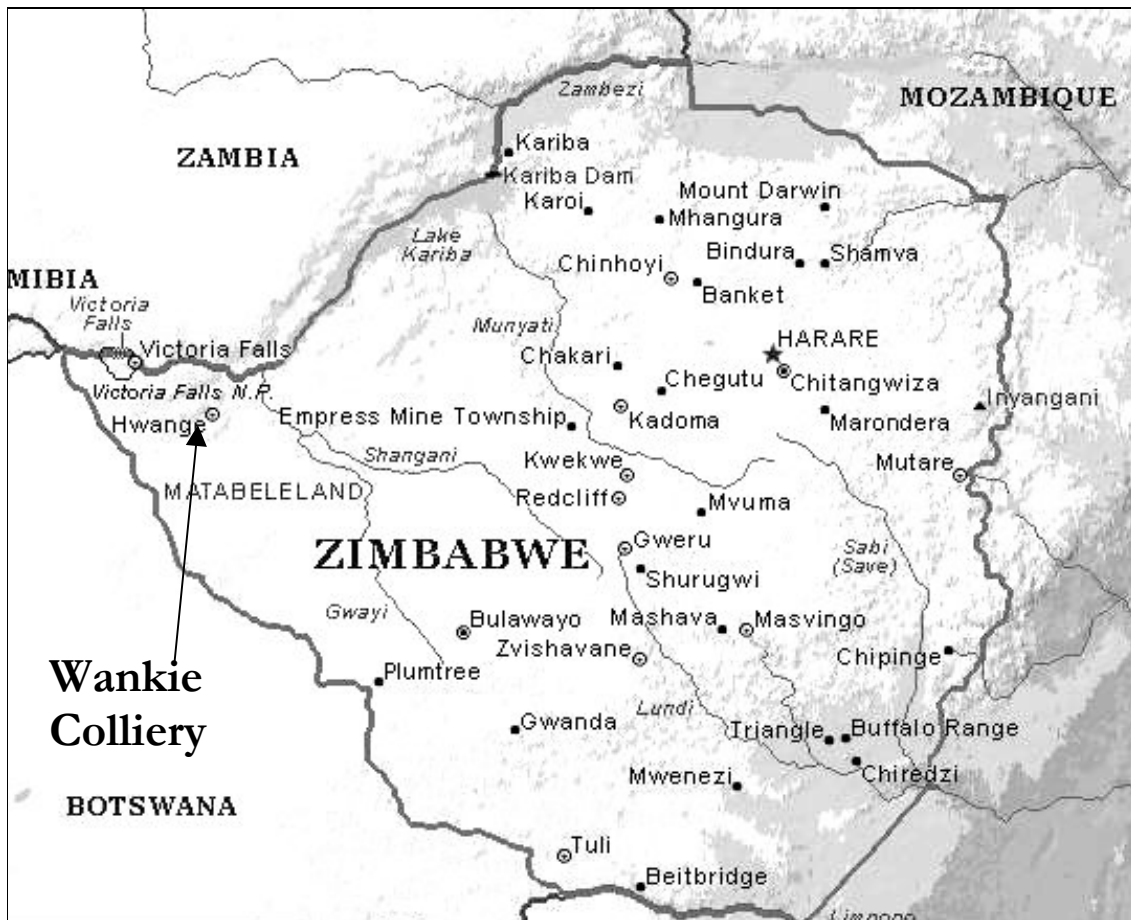
circumstances, that even losing strikes can generate some gains. Strike action and spontaneous outbursts of violence ‘did sometimes secure redress of grievance within the parameters of the [workers’] contracts’, but, and it is a point which cannot be overemphasized, ‘the sole arbiter of the validity of grievances was the Inspector of Native Labour, who invariably negotiated with substantial police backing’. In any event, as African trade unions were not recognized until the emergence of the National Union of Mineworkers in the early 1980s, ‘the usual outcome for instigators of “trouble” was dismissal, or fines, or imprisonment’.²⁸

It is the experiences of African miners which comprise the central theme running through the third and last case study under review in this section, that is, my own history of Zimbabwe’s Wankie Colliery, known to its black labour force as ‘Wangi Kolia’, between 1894 and 1954. Briefly expressed, it is a study that is at once local, regional (it was and is the most important coal mine in Central Africa) and international (in the sense that the pattern and pace of accumulation was driven very largely by the concerns of City of London company promoters and financiers). As in the case of Hlobane, the colliery’s workers comprised several thousand black miners and never more than one hundred whites. Because the very existence of their jobs in many instances was conditional on the overall profitability of a coal mining industry dependent on the contract, pass and compound systems which guaranteed ‘the ultra-exploitability and ultra-cheapness’ of black labourers, white miners basically supported the colonial status quo both as workers and as white settlers. Rooted in the racist ambience of colonial society, and assiduously cultivated by the colliery’s owners, the resulting lack of solidarity between white and black workers fatally undermined every strike in Wankie’s history. When black labourers struck work, white miners willingly mobilized as police reservists on the side of law and order; and when white workers went on strike as they did in the early 1920s, black miners maintained production at near capacity levels.

Another area in which this book attempted to make a contribution lay in its gendered approach to the colliery’s past. In many of colonial Zimbabwe’s larger mines, the Church of the Watch Tower (a Central African variant of the American Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society) established a presence of sorts after the First World War. But whereas previous scholars analysed the Watch Tower movement in terms of its millenarian message carried southwards by preachers from Nyasaland (Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) to mine congregations whose most receptive members

tended to be the educated and semi-skilled elite, my research uncovered the extent to which its appeal was confined to men. The ensuing divisions that this caused in compound society help explain the ease with which the colliery management contained the apparent threat posed by Watch Tower and the speed of its subsequent demise. Similarly, the gendered account put forward in chapter four of *Wangi Kolia* not only cast the role played by women in the major strike of 1954, but arguably more important still, by describing the ambiguity of their behaviour, invited consideration of the form of patriarchy under construction in colonial Zimbabwe's mine compounds and urban areas.

Map 3: *Wankie Colliery, Zimbabwe.*



And finally, it was a study that tried to direct discussion towards the world of work. At the time when *Wangi Kolia* was written, the mining historiography of Central and Southern Africa was curiously truncated in one key respect. Almost without exception, it was confined to the surface. A lot was understood about the historical

sociology of the mine compound, for example, but very little of what happened underground was known. This deficiency has subsequently been somewhat rectified, not least in the excellent chapter on 'Mining Methods and Technology, 1906-1998' in Edgecombe's history of Hlobane, but the broad point remains. Certainly in the case of Wankie Colliery, an historical analysis of underground work practices shed light, if that phrase can be used in such a context, not only on technological change and its consequences (and what it revealed about the lateness of the colliery's mechanization compared to Europe and even South Africa was startling), but also illustrated the extent to which the whole process was contested by workers reluctant to surrender the limited degree of 'self-regulation' wrested from management in the 1940s when labour was in short supply.²⁹

Conclusion

At the close of the Second International Mining History Congress in 1989, Klaus Tenfelde noted the irony that in much the same period that the mining industry, coal in particular, had lost influence in Western Europe, mining history had achieved its greatest breadth and depth. If anything, this apparent paradox has intensified in the course of the last decade. The history of coal mining in Western Europe is far from being an 'exhausted seam'. In Britain it continues to command the attention of scholars partly because of 'its relevance to the study of other worlds of labour', but mainly, as Peter Ackers has stressed, because 'for two crucial centuries our industrial civilization was "founded on coal"... [coal] miners remain central to modern British social, political and industrial relations history'.³⁰ There can be little doubt, as discussed in the first section of this paper, that as far as the conceptualisation of strikes and miners' communities is concerned the most significant advances have come from European labour historiography. While the same cannot be said for the social history of ethnicities, where American and Indonesian historians are currently producing the most nuanced interpretations, more surprising is the relative lack of gendered histories of coal miners which explore issues of masculinity along the lines set out in Dunbar Moodie's study of black South African gold miners or Thomas Klubock's investigation of Chilean copper miners.³¹ By far and away the most important exception to this rule, as previously discussed, is Carolyn Brown's exploration of Nigerian coal miners, but its very exceptionalism serves only to underscore the general point. Nor is there much evidence of anyone, whether in Europe, America or elsewhere, undertaking comparative

social histories of coal mining. In the conclusion to their *Strikes and Solidarity*, Church and Outram lamented historians neglect of ‘conceptual frameworks and detailed quantitative data in forms suitable for effective international comparisons’. No doubt they had very particular coalfields in mind, but perhaps we need to be reminded, that for large areas of the world at least, such statistics simply do not exist. With the centre of gravity of world coal mining now firmly fixed in Asia, Africa and Australia, there may be no alternative to comparative histories characterized by ‘an eclectic explanatory pluralism’.³²

Endnotes

¹ K. Tenfelde (ed.), *Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Munchen 1992, pp. 55-7, 562-4, 834.

² S. Cohen, *When Strikes Make Sense and Why: Lessons from Third Republic French Coal Miners*, New York, 1993.

³ D. Read, review of Cohen, in *Journal of Social History*, vol. 28, 1994, p. 432.

⁴ A. Campbell, *The Scottish Miners, 1874-1939*, vol. I: *Industry, Work and Community*; vol. II: *Trade Unions and Politics*, Aldershot, 2000.

⁵ For example, K. Gildart in *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 40, 2002, pp. 171-3.

⁶ R. Church and Q. Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966*. Cambridge 1998.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁸ Their discussion of the post-1947 period is less satisfactory. See especially the review by J. Treble in *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 59, 1999, p. 816.

⁹ C. Tilley, review of Church and Outram, in *Journal Modern History*, vol. 71, 1999, p. 946.

¹⁰ D. Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action. Social Change in Two British Coalfields*, Oxford, 1992; and his ‘Imagined communities and mining communities’, *Labour History Review*, 1995, vol. 60, 1995. See also D. Warwick and G. Littlejohn, *Coal, Capital and Culture: A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire*, London 1992.

¹¹ J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960*, London 1994, *passim*.

¹² J. Liddington, ‘Gender, Authority and Mining in an Industrial Landscape: Anne Lister 1791-1840’, *History Workshop Journal*, 1996, p. 42.

¹³ C. Brown, ‘*We Were All Slaves*’. *African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery*, Portsmouth, NH, 2003.

¹⁴ Church and Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity*, pp. 260-1.

¹⁵ J. Kulczycki, ‘Scapegoating the foreign worker: Job turnover, accidents, and disease among Polish coal miners in the German Ruhr, 1871-1914’, in C. Gonzales and C. Strikwerda (eds), *Politics of Immigrant Workers: Labour Activism and Migration in the World Economy since 1830*, New York 1993.

¹⁶ H. Gutman, ‘the Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: the career and letters of Richard L. Davis and something of their meaning’, in J. Jacobson (ed.), *The Negro and the American Labour Movement*, New Jersey, 1968.

¹⁷ J. Trotter, *Coal, Class and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-32*, Champaign, Illinois, 1990; and D. Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878- 1921*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998. See also A. Lichenstein, ‘Racial Conflict and Racial Solidarity in the Alabama Coal Strike of 1894: New Evidence for the Gutman - Hill Debate’; and P. Fishback, ‘An alternative view of violence in labor disputes in the early 1900s: the bituminous coal industry, 1890-1930’, both in *Labour History*, vol. 36, 1995.

¹⁸ R. Halpern, ‘Organised labour, black workers and the twentieth-century South: the emerging revision’, *Social History*, 1994, vol. 19, 1994, p. 382.

¹⁹ D. Simeon, *The Politics of Labour Under Late Colonialism. Workers, Unions and the State in Chota Nagpur 1928-1939*, Manohar, 1995.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

²¹ Erwiza, *Miners, Managers and the State: A Socio-Political History of the Ombilin Coal-Mines, West Sumatra, 1892-1996*, Amsterdam 1999.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²³ D. Menghetti, *Blair Athol. The Life and Death of a Town*, Townsville, 1995; R. Edgecombe, *The Constancy of Change. A History of Hlobane Colliery 1898-1998*, Durban, 1998; and I. Phimister, *Wangi Kolia. Coal, Capital and Labour in colonial Zimbabwe 1894-1954*, Harare and Johannesburg, 1994.

²⁴ Menghetti, *Blair Athol*, p. iii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Edgecombe, *Constancy of Change*, p. 305.

²⁷ See Menghetti's introduction where she observes that the pursuit of 'social cohesion, unity and, indeed, harmony ... is the dream of small groups of Europeans ... [attempting] to make a secure and familiar home for themselves in the bewildering diversity of their non-European environment'.

²⁸ Edgecombe, *Constancy of Change*, p. 360.

²⁹ For a fascinating Indian parallel, see especially D. Simeon, 'Coal and Colonialism: Production Relations in an Indian Coalfield, c.1895-1947', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 41, 1996.

³⁰ P. Ackers, 'Review Essay: Life after Death: Mining History without a Coal Industry', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, vol. 1, 1996, pp. 169-70.

³¹ D. Moodie, *Going for Gold. Men, Mines and Migration*, London, 1994; and T. Klubock, *Contested Communities. Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951*, Durham, 1998.

³² The phrase is David Crew's; see his 'Class and community: local research on working class history in four countries', in K. Tenfelde (ed.), *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung im Vergleich*, Munchen, 1986, p. 308.