

**WOMEN AND MINeworkERS' STRUGGLES ON THE ZAMBIAN
COPPERBELT, 1926 - 1964**

BY

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Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in History**

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DECLARATION

I, Bbole Dandule, declare that this dissertation:

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ABSTRACT

This study on women's involvement in mineworkers struggles on the Copperbelt of Zambia during the colonial period was pursued in order to illuminate the contribution of women towards the struggle for better working and living conditions in the mine compounds. To achieve this, the study focused on the working and living conditions in the mine compounds, women's economic supplements, the meaning of the presence of women in the mine compounds to the struggle and their participation in collective action.

The findings show that women contributed greatly towards the struggle for better living and working conditions in the mine compounds. This was because they were affected by the poor working and living conditions provided by mining companies for miners' families. The study found that women's coping strategies like sex selling and beer brewing hardened their character against the mining companies and that their mere presence in the mine compounds increased the miners' demands from the mining companies. Most of all, the findings revealed that women did not only participate in protest movements through co-operation, vigilance, boycotts and violence, but were also more aggressive than their husbands during collective action especially in 1952, 1954 and during the rolling strikes of 1955 and 1956.

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DEDICATION

To my husband Lackson Malambo the scholar and our children Buumba the bookworm, Bulongo the mechanic and Bulimo the miscellaneous.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NAZ:	National Archives of Zambia
NORCOM:	Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines
ZCCM:	Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Copper mining in Zambia commenced in 1926.¹ At first, the mining companies, Anglo American Corporation (AAC) and Rhodesian Selection Trust (RST), reluctantly encouraged married African labour; they resented the cost of housing and feeding women and children². However the percentage of married stabilized workers increased steadily as management realised that married labour was more efficient, healthier, more contented and remained at the mine longer than the single workers. Management also realized that the presence of women in the mine compounds discouraged gambling, fights and general disorder.³

At Roan mine, for instance, the proportion of married workers was 20 percent in 1927. In 1931, married miners stayed, on the average, twice as long as single workers. The proportion of married workers grew to 37.3 percent in 1932. Labour turnover fell from 24.09 percent in 1927 to 7.5 percent in 1933. By 1936, married labour had reached 65.11 percent.⁴

In 1940 the Labour Commissioner observed that the skill gained by a stable African worker, unlike the migrant worker, was worth more than the extra cost of looking after his family.⁵ As at 3rd September 1940, according to the Labour Commissioner, the proportions of married African workers at different mines were 40 percent at Nkana, 58 percent at Roan, 44.5 percent at Nchanga and 55 percent at Mufulira.⁶

Although the real cost of married African workers against single men was difficult to obtain with absolute accuracy, since it included items such as amortizing of buildings, proportionate cost of compound services in relation to the number and age of the children,

medical services and others, an estimate figure could be arrived at. In 1944 one compound manager showed that this was at 5.07 pence and not exceeding six pence per day.⁷

Therefore in 1944, the Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines officially adopted the employment of married African workers as a policy.⁸ By 1946, all compound managers were of the opinion that the employment of married African workers was in the interest of the mining companies.⁹ On average, over the years, the ratio of African mine employees living with their families rose from 30 percent in 1930 to 81 percent in 1961. The African labour turnover equally fell from 60 percent in 1930 to 8.3 percent in 1964.¹⁰

Besides the officially authorized wives, there were also single women who migrated from rural areas to Copperbelt on their own. These lived with relatives or single miners and managed to stay for long periods in the mine compounds through temporary marriages.¹¹ Although not legally allowed in the mine compounds, these single women were tolerated by company authorities because they served the companies the same way the wives did in the stabilization of labour.¹²

Worker consciousness existed as early as work commenced on the Copperbelt of Zambia. However, mineworkers' struggles for better working and living conditions intensified with the coming of women to the mine compounds. Meebelo demonstrated that during the period under study, the Copperbelt became a centre of struggle between African mine workers and mining companies.¹³ This entailed, therefore, that there was a relationship between the presence of women in the mine compounds and the struggle for better working and living conditions. Women encouraged and supported industrial action against poor conditions of work in the mine compounds.

This study, therefore, examines the critical input of women in the mineworkers' struggles on the Copperbelt of Zambia by focusing on their experiences in the mine compounds, their coping strategies, the influence of their mere presence in the mine compounds on the struggle and their physical participation in collective action.

Rationale

The role of women in the mineworkers' struggles on the Copperbelt of Zambia has not seriously been researched by scholars. Women are mentioned in most of the studies to underline their subservient role in labour stabilization through the family concept. There is a gender deficiency in the historiography of labour struggles in Zambia. This study bridges the gap. It demonstrates the critical role of women in the mineworkers' struggles on the Zambian copper mines.

Literature Review

There is a fair amount of literature on the experiences and struggles for better working and living conditions by African mineworkers on the Zambian Copperbelt. The literature provided glimpses into the issues of women in the mine compounds. These insights were used as landmarks in investigating the relationship between women and African mine workers' struggles. The literature provided clues on four aspects of women's issues that brought them into the struggle for better working and living conditions for African families in the mine compounds.

One aspect was that of African women's well-being and experiences in the mine compounds. Barnes, whose work was on mine workers in colonial Zimbabwe, suggested

that in order to illuminate the experiences of women one could trace the trail of married miners, acknowledging that the term “married” meant that the worker had a wife with whom he shared his experiences.¹⁴ Barnes also emphasized the importance of primary sources for the study as it barely had literature deliberately written for reference.¹⁵ Primary sources therefore became the pillar for this research and yielded vital information for the study.

Chauncey described the exploitation of African miners’ wives on the Zambian Copperbelt through their duty of ensuring daily reproduction of labour by supplementing the meager resources provided by the mining companies.¹⁶ This provided an avenue for research into exploitation as a potential reason for women’s involvement in the struggle for better working and living conditions in the mine compounds.

Kalusa’s work gave the study insights on how the working and living conditions provided by the mining company at Roan mine affected the African families in the mine compounds. The poor working and living conditions at Roan Antelope mine led to prevalence of diseases and death especially among children in the mine compounds.¹⁷ Naturally, mothers were more affected by illnesses and deaths among their children than men. Hence, given an opportunity to pressure for better living conditions, women in the mine compounds would not hesitate to participate for their children’ sake.

In her work on the role of women in stabilization of labour at Mufulira mine, Sakala echoed the poor living conditions in the mine compounds. Like Chauncey, she was of the opinion that working and living conditions offered by the mining companies failed to stabilize African labour because they were not worth staying for. It was the exploitation of women through their supplements that made stabilization of labour possible. Women provided relishes to supplement rations supplied to African miners’ families by the mining

companies.¹⁸ Sakala further pointed out that women were vocal in miners' demands for better working and living conditions since they were at the centre of the distribution of the meagre resources.¹⁹ This encouraged the research to explore the possibility of women involvement in the physical struggle for better working and living conditions in the mine compounds.

Coulter and Heisler brought out another women's issue in the mine compounds on the Zambian Copperbelt; their desperate coping strategies in the midst of poor wages and rations. These were gathering, gardening,²⁰ beer brewing and sex selling.²¹ Sex selling among miners' wives was equally cited by Van Onslen in his work on mine workers in Southern Rhodesia.²² Mapetla and Machai also cited beer brewing among women in urban Lesotho as a last resort for economic survival.²³ Mayer gave the research ideas on the difficulties that women faced while carrying out their economic activities which transformed them into tough women. He commented that urban women brewers in South Africa needed a strong personality in order to cope with drunken customers, competitors and the police.²⁴ The research was, therefore, prompted to examine change of character among African women on the Copperbelt during the period in question. Women were compelled to supplement their husbands' poor wages and family rations, sometimes using dehumanizing means. This made them potential initiators and supporters of the struggle for better working and living conditions in the mine compounds.

Another aspect revealed by the literature was the influence that the mere presence of women in the mine compounds had on the African miners' struggle for better working and living conditions. Mulenga, in his examination of development of worker consciousness among African railway workers in Northern Rhodesia, observed that the need for higher

wages was accentuated by the requirements of a wife and children.²⁵ Barnes, in her analysis of the Southern Rhodesian situation, asserted that family responsibilities encouraged the struggle for better working and living conditions. The workers' understanding of how prevailing economic system affected their families contributed to the willingness to strike.²⁶

The literature also explored the physical participation of women in protest movements against poor working and living conditions. Meebelo, while looking at the growth of worker consciousness on the Zambian Copperbelt, mentioned a protest by miners' wives at Bwana Mkubwa mine in 1927.²⁷ Parpart also mentioned women participation in the 1935 strike.²⁸ Both Perrings and Parpart asserted that the 1940 Copperbelt strikes were triggered by a woman who confronted a compound assistant at Nchanga, querying him over underweight rations.²⁹ Mwendapole also highlighted women co-operation in the 1952 strike, women vigilance in the 1954 strike³⁰ and women involvement in the rolling strikes of 1955 and 1956.³¹ Apart from the literature by Parpart, these insights were not gender intended. However they assured the research that there was information on participation by women in mine workers' collective action against poor working and living conditions in the mine compounds.

Other literature also highlighted the part women played in times of protests through the power of the tongue. Gossip on labour matters was a women's hobby in the mine compounds of the Zambian Copperbelt as illustrated by Powdermaker.³² They shared seditious information on industrial situation in the mines and made it easier for the union leaders to communicate their strategies to the inhabitants of the mine compounds. Beinart and Bundy, in their description of protests against the exploitative migrant labour regime in the South African gold mines observed women involvement. The women spoke of the

protest movement in a mocking manner to encourage their men to put more energy in the struggle. They even challenged them to take off their pairs of trousers and wear frocks because they were cowards who feared fellow men.³³ This trait in women was pursued by the research on the Copperbelt and found that it was the African mineworkers union's most treasured weapon especially during the rolling strikes.

In her biography of Julia Chikamoneka, Nyawa gave a clue on another way through which women registered displeasure against mistreatment of African workers in colonial Zambia; stripping naked in public.³⁴ This helped the research to look out for such extreme actions in the mine workers' struggles in the primary data that was used.

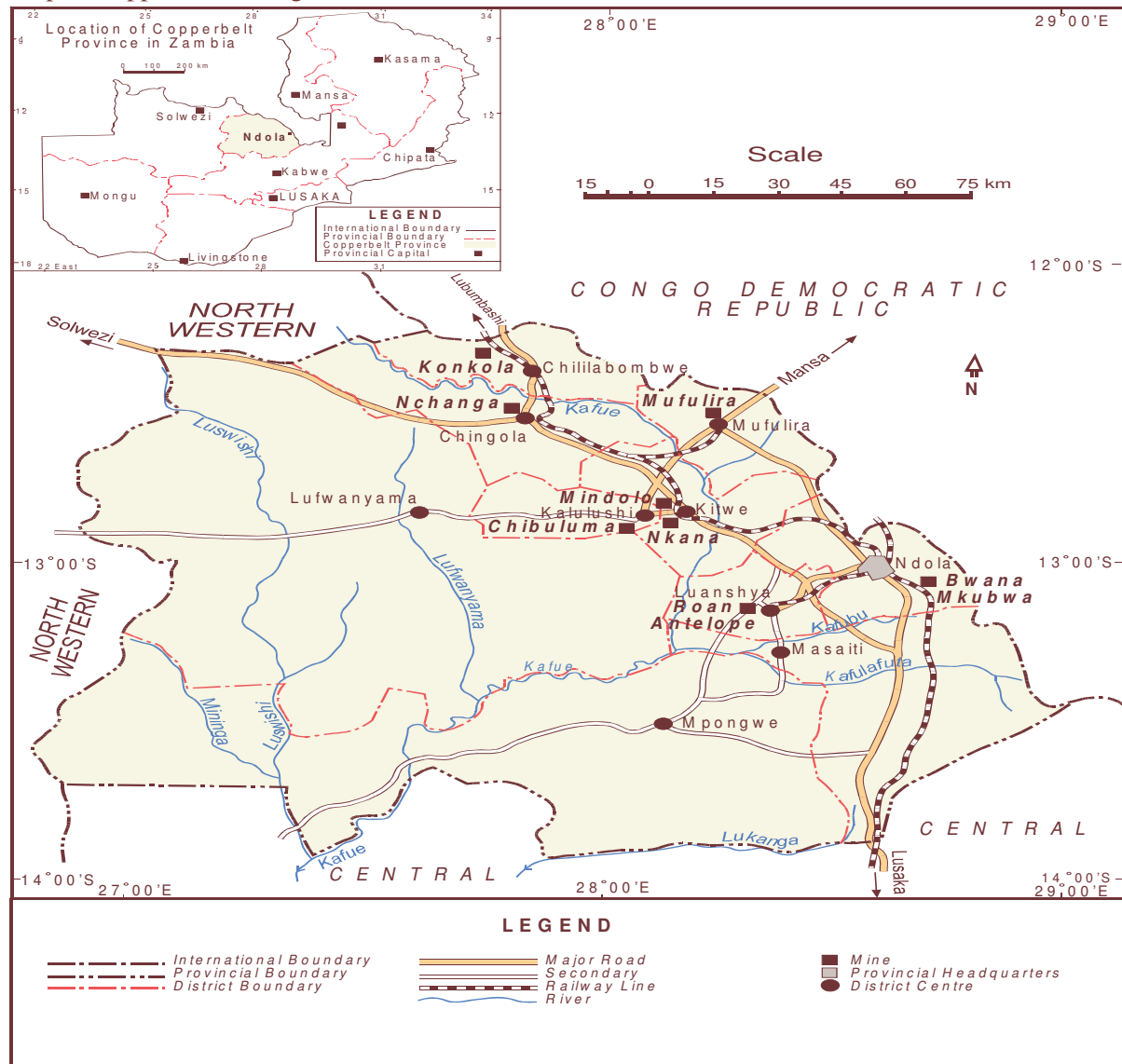
Research Methodology

The University of Zambia library was consulted for books, journals, dissertations and theses. These provided secondary information that guided the direction of our research. The Hansards in the Special Collections section provided primary data on women involvement in industrial politics from Legislative Council discussions on unrest in the mining towns. The National Archives of Zambia (NAZ) in Lusaka and the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) Holdings Investment Archives in Ndola provided primary information on wages, rations and general industrial situation in the Copperbelt districts through reports of the commissions of inquiry into various aspects of the mining community. Correspondence by managers and compound managers also furnished this research with valuable information on the state of affairs in the mine compounds. Oral interviews carried out in Mufulira, Ndola, Luanshya, Chingola, Kitwe and Chililabombwe yielded information on women's economic activities in the mine compounds and their participation in the rolling strikes.

Area of Study

The Copperbelt of Zambia is situated more or less on the boundary between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. This whole area is endowed with copper deposits, and copper mining has been the major economic activity since colonial times.³⁵ The mining towns are Mufulira, Kitwe, Chililabombwe, Luanshya, Ndola, Chingola and Kalulushi. See Map 1.

Map 1: Copperbelt Mining Districts



Source: ZCCM Archives

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and historical background, purpose of the study, literature review, research methodology, area of study and organization of the study. Chapter two examines women's experiences in the mine compounds on the Copperbelt of colonial Zambia while chapter three discusses women's coping strategies to counter their challenges in the mine compounds. In chapter four, the influence of the presence of women in the mine compounds on the struggle for better working and living conditions is illustrated. Chapter five discusses women's physical participation in collective action. The last chapter is a consolidation of the findings of the study in the conclusion.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 George Chauncey. Jr, 'The Locus of Reproduction: Womens Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 2, (April 1981): 146. See also ZCCM, 16.16A, NORCOM, Confidential for Circulation to Members only. Memorandum on Native Labour, Kitwe, September 1944: 17.
- 3 Charles. W. Coulter, 'The Sociological Problem' in Merle Davis, *Modern Industry and the African: An Inquiry into the Effects of Copper Mines of Central Africa upon Native Society and the Work of Christian Missions*. (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1967): 61.
- 4 C. F. Spearpoint, "The African Native and Rhodesian Coppermine", *Supplement to the Royal African Society*, 36 144, (July 1937): 34.
- 5 ZCCM, 16. 1. 6A/1, NORCOM, Memorandum in Native Labour, September 1944: 17. See also Chauncey, 'The Locus of Reproduction': 37.
- 6 NAZ, SEC 1/1370/20, Labour Commission to Honourable Chief Secretary, 3rd September, 1940.
- 7 ZCCM, 16.16A, NORCOM, Confidential for Circulation to Members only. Memorandum on Native Labour. Kitwe, September 1944: 18.
- 8 Parpart, 'The Household and the Mineshaft': 38. Situations at all the mine compounds on the Copperbelt of Zambia during the period under study were similar due to the co- operation that existed among the mining companies through the Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines (NORCOM) which formulated their policies.
- 9 ZCCM, 16.16A, NORCOM, Confidential for Circulation to Members only. Memorandum on Native Labour, Kitwe, September 1944: 17.
- 10 Parpart, 'The Household and the Mineshaft': 40.
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- 12 Parpart, 'The Household and the Mineshaft' :40.

- 13 Henry. S. Meebelo, *African Proletarians and Colonial Capitalism: The Origins, Growth and Struggles of the Zambia Labour Movement to 1964*. Lusaka: Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, 1986: 174-182.
- 14 Theresa Barnes, 'So that a Labourer could Live with his Family: Overlooked Factors in Social and Economic Strife in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe, 1945-1952', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 1, (1995): 95.
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- 24 Philip Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Urbansation in a Divided Society*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1963): 248.
- 25 Friday Mulenga, 'The Development of Worker Consciousness Among the African Railway Workers in Zambia, 1953- 1972', MA Dissertation, University of Zambia, 1987: 77.
- 26 Barnes,'So that a Labourer could live with his Family': 97.
- 27 Meebelo, *African Proletarians*: 62.
- 28 Parpart, 'The Household and the Mineshaft': 41.

- 29 Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa*. (London: Heinemann, 1979): 218. See also Jane Parpart, *Labour and Capital on the African Copperbelt*. (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1983): 83.
- 30 M. R. Mwendapole, 'A History of Trade Union Movement in Zambia up to 1968.' *University of Zambia: Institute for African Studies*, Communication Number 13, 1977:14 and 21.
- 31 Mwendapole, 'A History of Trade Union Movement': 28.
- 32 Hortense Powdermaker, *Coppertown: Changing Africa, the Human Situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963): 129.
- 33 William Beinart and Collin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*. (London: James Currey, 1987): 247.
- 34 Rosemary Nyawa, 'Julia Chikamoneka: The "Fearless Mad" African Girl in Mbuyu Nalumango and Monde Sifuniso (eds) *Women Power in Politics*. (Lusaka:National Women's Lobby Group and Zambian Women Writers Association, 1998): 26.
- 35 ZCCM, 4.5.9, Appendix to Report, Northern Rhodesia Mines.

CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN IN THE MINE COMPOUNDS

Introduction

This chapter examined the characteristics of mine compounds on the Copperbelt of Zambia and the experiences of women once they arrived in the mine compounds from the rural areas. In this chapter the research argued that women were the end users of the conditions and services provided by the mining companies in the mine compounds. They were at the centre of the distribution of resources. The chapter also demonstrated the extent to which women were affected indirectly and directly by the working and living conditions provided by the companies which justified their involvement in their husbands' struggles for better conditions.

The Mine Compound

In order to appreciate the role played by women in shaping conditions in the rapidly developing mine compounds of the Copperbelt, it is important to have a clear picture of the mine compound environment in which these women lived. This entails a candid description of the conditions and experiences of the women in the mine compounds within the framework of mining companies' policy and, to some extent, the role of the colonial government. Such conditions and experiences should further be understood within the context of the mine compound environment which was constantly developing, changing and reshaping the experiences of its dwellers.

Epstein defined the Zambian Copperbelt mine compounds as:

Self contained industrial, residential and administrative unit. Every employee is housed by the mine, and no African who is employed by the mine can live off the mine premises. Moreover every African is fed by the company through rations from the company's feeding store. Butchery and a number of

other stores enable those who wish to supplement their rations to do so without making a trip to town or second class trading area. It is the mine which provides the hospital and employs the doctors and nurses who care for the sick and it is the mine again which provides recreational needs of its employees. The African writes his letters at the mine welfare centre, he drinks with his friends of the sub-beer hall on the mine, and he sends his children to school on the mine... In short the mine impinges on his life at every point.¹

And so it did on his wife's life. This was not different in its essentials from the compound systems of other mining companies in Southern Africa.² Phimister and Onslens described the mine compounds in Southern Rhodesia as:

Places where workers could be more readily controlled and disciplined on individual mines through the use of barrack like accommodation, surrounded in some cases by barbed wire fences, a quasi-military system of labour discipline operated.³

Moreover, the British crown government did not encourage African permanent urban population in Northern Rhodesia and therefore discouraged the provision of decent social services in the mine compounds.⁴ The relationship between the mining companies and the crown government was mutual. The crown government had overall responsibility, but the mining companies enjoyed local discretion and for industrial matters, the government found it convenient to respect the rights of mining companies.⁵ This gave the mining companies freedom not to provide standard social amenities to the inhabitants of the mine compounds. These were the policies that created the environment in which the miner's wife was to exist while in the mine compound.

Women and Housing

Accommodation was one of the worst experiences of the miners' wives. Mine compound accommodation at Roan Antelope mine in the early days, for instance, consisted

of single rooms and barrack-like huts made of mud and without windows,⁶ (See figure 1). Even up to 1935, accommodation was still rudimentary with endemic congestion. This did not allow any privacy required by married mineworkers.⁷ The lack of shade in the compounds was also distasteful to women who spent most of their time home and could have used shade for resting since the houses were small.⁸

In 1937, at Nkana mine, housing was still unsuitable for the African miners and their families. When married miners complained about the lack of privacy, management advised them to partition their houses with curtains for privacy between parents and children.⁹ Even the addition of a kitchen to the houses in the 1940s did not help. Parents made arrangements amongst themselves so that adolescents of the same gender could share a kitchen as sleeping quarters. Apart from the discomfort of smoke, heat, smell and dampness, mothers always worried of the morality of their children, especially the girl-child who was at risk of being defiled while sleeping away from home in the congested compound.¹⁰ Their cry was for decent accommodation which would allow privacy for families. At different meetings, African miners complained to the unheeding management for the lack of housing and privacy. Saffrey wrote:

It is against tribal custom to allow adolescent boys and girls to sleep in the same house as their parents. In a two roomed house, there is one exit and a person in the inner room must pass through the second if he wishes to go out in the night. When asked why it is that an adolescent child does not sleep in the same house with parents although there are two rooms the answer always is, 'it might bring shame on us. For an African man will not risk being seen by his daughter without clothes and woman being seen by her son. This is a risk, as Africans sleep without clothes'.¹¹

The privacy of parents from adolescent children was a concern in the mine compounds. At a Compound Managers' Committee meeting in 1945, it was agreed that dormitories for

children in the mine compounds were desirable and in conformity with African customs, but it was considered that the suggestion involved a large expenditure of money which was not warranted at the time.¹²

Women complained also of the houses without kitchens. Saffrey reported that women disliked cooking in their houses for it was entirely against their custom. Kitchens in the African sense were a small hut outside the house.¹³

Sanitation was another challenge that women were confronted with in the mine compounds. When Sir Malcolm Watson, the Health Inspector, visited Roan mine in 1930, he observed that sanitation at the mine was by no means fully developed.¹⁴ Luchembe observed that up to 1935, mining companies on the Copperbelt engaged labour gangs equipped with buckets to remove night soil.¹⁵ He further commented that during this period the Copperbelt was notorious for its squalor.¹⁶ When ablutions were built, they were of low standard, congested and remained communal. At Roan mine, women complained of sharing latrines with men contrary to African customs. For the Africans it was a taboo for men and women to use the same latrine.¹⁷ Moreover these ablutions were placed some hundred metres from the houses. This inconvenienced the mine compound residents especially when it rained.¹⁸ Women were more disadvantaged because they had to carry warm water for their husbands across hundred meters to the bathrooms. They also had to shuttle children across the same distance to the bathrooms.

Housing and sanitation problems for mine workers and their families continued throughout the colonial period. The state of accommodation and sanitation at different mines in 1964 was vividly illustrated in the article written to *Mwabombeni* newspaper by a Chibuluma mine critic on 17th January, 1964. The following is an excerpt from the article:

HOUSING PROJECTS MUST BE SPEEDED UP

While we appreciate the attitude which is being taken by the mining companies on the Copperbelt towards African housing in particular, one cannot run away from the fact that it has been overdue. I am in particular going to talk about those old houses at Mindolo, Wusikili and Chibuluma mines which do not deserve to be called houses at all. They look like a badly designed military barracks, if not like small (and repeat small) mushrooms in the Kalahari Desert. These slums have no kitchens, no dining room, and no bathroom. Boys and girls sleep in the same room with their parents, whether the companies think that this is 1914, no one can tell, but I am reminding them that this is 1964. The huts are 4 yards apart, they are ovens in the hot season and ice boxes during winter. How can one call it a house when it has no verandah and no windows? Lavatories used by 200 people are expected to be kept clean. They are built 100 yards away which cause great inconvenience when it is raining. For sure these old slums must be demolished and soon.¹⁹

Figure 1: New type Kator Hut



Source: ZCCM Archives.

Women and Mineworkers' Wages

Sakala observed that 'the copper mining companies were quick to realize that women, more than wages, were a big force in stabilizing labour. As a result of this realisation mining companies neglected improvement of wages as a means of attracting workers to stay longer at the mines. Low wages for African workers appeared to be the policy through out the copper mining industry.'²⁰

As at 1929, the average monthly wage for an African miner at the copper mines was 18 shillings. By 1930, the average wage at Roan had only increased to 21 shillings per month for surface African workers and 33 shillings for underground workers.²¹ In 1932, the average monthly wage at Nkana was only 25 shillings for surface workers and 32 shillings for underground workers.²² The Russel Commission reported in 1935 that one of the major causes of the 1935 Copperbelt strike were the meagre wages.²³ Government opinion over African miners' wages was that they were too low to support a wife and a family and a suggestion was made in 1939 that the number of African miners living with their wives be limited.²⁴ The Forster Commission in its report on the 1940 Copperbelt strike drew attention to the fact that the basic wage was low at 12/6d as it had been in the period of the depression and that this was a starvation wage for a married African miner.²⁵ In 1948, the Labour Commission was greatly shocked by the comparatively low wages paid in Northern Rhodesia.²⁶

During his research in the 1950s, Epstein observed sample families and reported that 'in almost all the households, expenditure actually exceeded income from wages.'²⁷ This was compounded by the psychological effect of the gap between European and African wages which was stressed in Saffrey's report on African labour.²⁸

The inadequacy of the cash wage was evident in the quarrels over money between husbands and wives. Some husbands gave most of their pay to their wives. However many women complained that they did not know how much their husbands earned.²⁹ From his observations Powdermaker recorded an incident that supported this feminine complaint:

One man was seen sitting outside the compound office on pay day counting the money he had received. He separated the money into two piles and put one in his shoes. When asked why, he said 'ah I cannot show my wife all the money I have received; I must hide some for my own use.'³⁰

The problem of low wages continued through out the colonial period. On 31st January 1964, the Northern Rhodesia African Mine Workers Trade Union newspaper, *Mwabombeni* reported that a committee of three was still busy working on a case to present to the mining companies for a substantial wage increase for all ticket to ticket employees.³¹

Rations

While recognizing the role women continued to play in stabilization of labour, the mining companies maintained that a married worker should shoulder some of the responsibility of feeding his family.³² They however designed a formula for women's rations.³³ Mufulira mine for instance, began issuing food rations to African miners' wives in about 1930. They received 4lbs of maize meal and 2lbs of maize grain per week. In 1935, the rations for women increased to 6lbs of mealie-meal while children received 2lbs of maize grain. Women's rations were reduced to 7lbs in 1939 due to the Second World War. In 1940, the women received 11lbs of maize meal and 3lbs of cassava while the children's rations remained the same.³⁴

The rations issued to women and children were far less than those issued to miners as illustrated by Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1: Official rations at Mufulira, 1940

No	Rations	Rations per week
Men		
1	Mealie Meal	14 lbs
2	Beans	28 oz
3	Nuts	12 oz
4	Fruit	1 lb
5	Vegetables	1 lb
6	Rice	1 lb
7	Meat	4 lbs
8	Dripping	¼ lb
9	Salt	¼ lb
10	Sweetened Cocoa	7 pints
11	Bread	42 oz
Women		
1	Mealie Meal	11 lbs
2	Cassava	3 lbs
3	Salt	¼ lbs
Children		
1	Mealies	2 lbs

Table 2: Official rations at Roan, 1940.

No	Rations	Rations / Per week
Men		
1	Beans	4 oz per day
2	Fish	½ lb per week
3	Nuts	7 oz per week
4	Vegetables	5 oz per day
5	Fat	4 oz per week
6	Fruit	As when available
7	Salt	½ oz per day
8	Bread	6 oz on way to work
9	Cocoa	10 oz on way to work
10	Muhau (gruel)	1 pint 2 times a week
Women		
1	Mealies	7 lbs per week
Children		
1	Mealies	3 lbs per week

Source: SEC 1/1370 vol. 1/113, Correspondence from Provincial Commissioner to Hounorable Chief Secretary, 5th April 1940: 2.

The disparity between rations issued to workers and those issued to women and children at Mufulira and Roan mines in 1940 was quite marked. After all, as far as the mining companies were concerned,

there was no cause for issuing to women and children a full scale mine ration. The family was not doing hard manual labour and therefore did not require such high standard feeding as the miner. The women could collect relishes to supplement their rations.³⁵

The mining companies only fed the women because if they were not, they would simply live off their husbands' food and deprive the miners of the much needed energy to do the hard work.³⁶ The compound manager at Mufulira plainly wrote to the mine manager in 1942:

The company goes further and feeds the women and children, not because they are women and children and are hungry, but because if they did not, the women would eat the rations issued to their husbands and thus lower the standards of feeding to the employees which in turn would reduce the labourers' value and also cause dissatisfaction.³⁷

Towards the end of the war, in 1944, women's rations were still at 11lbs. The children's rations only increased to 3lbs of maize grain per week.³⁸

This demonstrated that the mining companies cared little about women and children, especially when their rations were compared to those issued to their husbands. See Tables 1 and 2. Women's presence in the mine compounds was recognized by the mining companies merely for convenience; for labour stabilization. It also explained women's continued agitation for adequate food rations and higher wages for their husbands.

Besides the inadequacy of the rations, the conditions under which the women collected the rations were inhuman. The time for collecting the rations was awkward. In 1940, the Provincial Commissioner, Western Province made this observation:

The contention that it is either necessary or desirable for married women to turn out at three o'clock in the morning to draw rations or that they appreciate this

arrangement will be exceedingly hard to justify and it is obvious that a better scheme must be drawn up.³⁹

At the feeding house, women passed before a series of windows from which their rations were issued. They received mealie meal at the first window and beans at the second one. The last ration, a piece of meat was issued through a blind hole.⁴⁰ This was rather dehumanizing although it was meant to avoid allegations of favoritism on the part of the person issuing it.

Thus the ration system had disadvantages. However, the mining companies were reluctant to change their system of payment to include a ration allowance instead of providing the actual rations because that would have been more expensive. Their propaganda was that Africans were irresponsible and would spend all the money on beer and cause malnutrition to their families.⁴¹ Therefore, when the ration allowance was finally introduced in 1950s it was based on the employee, his wife and only two children despite miners having more than two children.⁴² This meant that miners' wives had to strive harder to supplement food for their families.

Disease in the Mine Compound

Due to the appalling sanitary conditions in the mine compounds, diseases were prevalent. In 1930, Sir Malcom Watson visited Roan Mine and examined some children in the mine compound. On the whole the results did not impress him. Most children had enlarged spleen, a sign of illness.⁴³ His comment was:

The ultimate biological function of a woman is to reproduce and rear children. A woman however ignorant and superstitious learns quickly where her children thrive best and don't die, where they die, she wishes to leave and leaves. Child mortality is one of the most disturbing elements in the labour force. When a woman lives surrounded by healthy children she tends to settle and make a

permanent home. These simple facts, the elements of human nature are not always realized.⁴⁴

The physician thus lamented the fate of African children in the mine compounds and expressed exactly what mothers in the compounds felt about their children's fate. The women understood that the conditions provided by the mining companies were responsible for their children's deaths. They looked forward to expressing their displeasure through any means possible.

One disease that killed children in the mine compounds was tuberculosis. Unlike silicosis which was known as a disease of the miners, tuberculosis was not confined to the workers. In the absence of prophylactic measures against the disease such as nourishing diet, properly ventilated housing and avoidance of overcrowding, all which were absent in the mine compounds, the disease rapidly spread to miners' children and wives. Children and infants whose immunity was naturally lower suffered most from the disease.⁴⁵

Another common disease among the miners' children was malnutrition. There was rampant kwashiorkor among children in the mine compounds especially those aged nine months to two years.⁴⁶ In later years, companies tried to blame malnutrition on the inclusive wage; alleging that much of the miners' wages were being spent on beer with a resultant decrease of expenditure on essential family requirements.⁴⁷ In 1957, however, the mine secretary at Rhokana refuted this opinion and affirmed that malnutrition in African children was extremely common even prior to the introduction of the scheme due to poor rations.⁴⁸ This poor health state of affairs in the mine compounds was burdensome to the women who had the responsibility of looking after the sick in the household. The lack of proper medical services for Africans also made the burden heavier for the women.

Women were equally at the mercy of the poor medical care. In 1951, a Bemba Tribal Representative at Nchanga mine complained to the African personnel manager about the treatment of an African woman patient in the African mine hospital. The medical officer diagnosed epilepsy, discharged the woman from hospital and sent her to the clinic for normal treatment. Shortly afterwards the woman died from hemorrhage in the abdomen as a result of an abnormal pregnancy.⁴⁹

There were also frequent underground and surface mine accidents. Some of the mining technology at the mine was not sophisticated enough to prevent accidents. However, most of them were due to negligence on the part of the mining companies.⁵⁰ Through these accidents, wives lost their husbands. It is therefore clear that women bore whatever pain took place in the mine compound. That was the more reason why in 1964, Mpatamatu housewives pressured the company until they were taken on a conducted tour of the mines underground at Irwin shaft, Roan Antelope mine.⁵¹ (See Figure 2). Assault of miners by their supervisors, a phenomenon common also at the mines in Southern Rhodesia, added to the wives' responsibility of looking after the sick in the households.⁵²

Another scourge that women suffered in the mine compounds was violence at the hands of authority. One humiliating incident was narrated to the Commission of Inquiry by one eye witness at Nchanga in 1940 as follows:

Now we saw that the feed store capitao was beating a woman and took her to the compound manager's office, the capitao then made a statement to the European who listened to him. The woman was never asked to make a statement, but she was handcuffed. The husband came and was instantly handcuffed. The compound Manager (Changa Changa) started beating them with sjambok without reasons. He made both the husband and wife lie down. This made us very angry; because he said come here you all see what we are doing to your friends.⁵³

The above incident was quite humiliating to the woman and other residents. After all the only offence she had committed was to complain of underweight rations.⁵⁴

Violence against women in the mine compounds was also inflicted by both government and mine police who made regular sweeps through the compounds. Women deemed single were fined and repatriated to their villages.⁵⁵ Up to 1949; government was still bent on repatriating unmarried women from the mine compounds.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The experiences of women in the mine compounds on the Zambian Copperbelt put them into a relationship with the mine workers' struggles. The mine compound arrangement impinged on every aspect of life of all its dwellers. In this chapter, we have seen that although women were not the workers, the low wages and poor rations given to their husbands affected them directly. They lived in the discomfort of poor and congested accommodation. They bore the burden of rampant illnesses caused by the poor living conditions provided by the mining companies. It was therefore logical that these women in mine compounds agitated for and supported any movement that pressured for better working and living conditions.

Figure 2: Roan wives go underground

January 31st 1964



TRAINING COLLEGE FOR LUSAKA

cornerstone ceremonies at Northern Rhodesia's new staff training college were held here recently.

The college which will form the nucleus of the new African Civil Service, will provide full residential accommodation for 80 students initially and an equal number later. It is estimated the first accommodations will be ready by June, 1964.

Six-week to six-month courses providing administrative, legal, executive, and local government training will be taught by eight full-time and a number of part-time teachers.

In other news, Northern Rhodesia's College of Further Education was opened here recently.

Among the subjects studied by the 418 students currently enrolled are journalism, photography, sound engineering, library studies, art, home economics, and physical education.

Four faculty members from the California State Polytechnic College are on the College staff.

NEWS BRIEFS

THE British Railways Board has also told the two unions that it wants to cut down double-manning on locomotives. It says a second man should only be employed 'where essential'.

LONDON TRANSPORT, presented with a pay claim for 35,000 busmen

Roan wives go underground

CURIOUS ABOUT their husband's working places, Mpatamatu house-wives at Roan Antelope recently toured underground workings at Irwin Shaft. Their tour was organised by the Local Branch of the Northern Rhodesia African Mineworkers' Trade Union. Seen here before their departure to tour the Mine are: (from left to right): Mr K. Milambo — (Chairman); Mr Silomba — (Clerk), Mrs P. Jimu, Mrs S. Machamo, Mrs M. Nakamba, Mrs T. Nyembele, Mr C. Kayama, (Personnel Officer), Mrs E. William, Mrs J. Antonio, Mr Lister (Shift Boss), and Mr H.G. Banda Personnel Officer.

While underground the visitors were much impressed that they could not understand how the workings could accommodate so much machinery.

Here they are seen inspecting one of the underground machinery.

(From left) Mrs S. Machamo, Mr K. Milambo, Mrs J. Antonio, Mr Lister, and the ganger at 880 level, Mr Silomba, above right. Mrs M. Nakamba, Mrs P. Jimu, Mrs T. Nyembele, Mrs E. Williams, and Mr Kayama Personnel officer.



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CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN'S SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN THE MINE COMPOUNDS

Introduction

This chapter examined economic strategies or activities that women undertook to mitigate the insufficient resources provided by the mining companies. The study argued that women were proactive in their dealing with life in the mine compounds. They were compelled to engage in survival economic activities not because they had too much time and little to do as some company officials argued,¹ but because it was necessary for them to do so. It was a manifestation of a desperate struggle for survival without which many would have succumbed to nutrition related diseases. The women understood quite well that had the mining companies paid their workers well, they would not have had to take up these activities most of which were tough, risky and sometimes dehumanizing.

Mining companies and sometimes government authorities begrudged the profits made by women in the mine compounds. They thus worked towards frustrating the spirit of entrepreneurship among compound women through their respective company and government policies. This created friction between the women and mining company authorities. The conflict provided a special dimension to the women's place in the mine workers' struggles on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia; they were directly affected by corporate policies.

Sex Selling

By law the employment of women and children was prohibited by the British crown government.² Further, the Employment of Women Youths and Children Ordinance of 1933

prohibited the employment of women in industry.³ This meant that the women living in the mine compounds could not sell the most handy commodity, labour. The next readily available commodity in the compounds was sex. Sex as a commodity in the mine compounds was confirmed by Epstein in the following excerpt:

It would be difficult to determine the incidence of prostitution in a town like Ndola. The difficulty arises not only from the lack of any system of registration or other mode of surveillance; it is very much a conceptual one. Prostitution in the sense of providing a sexual service undoubtedly existed. The term used in this context is ***Thule***, a Copperbelt expression that seems to have derived from the Afrikaans, hoer, a whore.⁴

There were two types of sex sellers in the mine compounds. “***Thule***” (prostitute) was one for instant cash.⁵ The sex seller in this category was a girl or a woman who had sex with a man strictly for cash and no relationship developed between the two except for business in future.⁶ This category encompassed both single and married women. One correspondent in Kitwe testified that ***amahule*** (plural for ***Thule***) were also married women who had family responsibilities and did sex selling simply to make ends meet and not to jeopardize their marriages.⁷ This was called ***ubucende***, or illicit sex.⁸ The prevalence of adultery was also encouraged by the permissive environment as observed by Epstein:

The individual is away from tribal restraints and close kinship supervision. Husbands are working varying eighth hour shifts, and under such circumstances it would be surprising to find no marital infidelity.⁹

This was not infidelity for mere pleasure but for money to boost their family income. Some wives committed adultery because their husbands were stingy with money. A respondent in Mufulira testified that when a husband refused to give his wife money on pay day, she did not hesitate to catch up with the money in circulation by going out with another man immediately. The respondent added that ***Akaume bwamba*** (a man only because he was

generous with his manhood but stingy with his money) was no big problem. He could be left for a new marriage or the wife could just commit adultery with his knowledge. Wives committed adultery even in their matrimonial homes during the day or at night; depending on their husbands' work shifts at the mine.¹⁰ Another respondent raised in Mindolo mine compound in Kitwe gave more evidence on adultery in the mine compounds:

Adultery was so common that even as children we were aware of those arrangements especially when it was done within the matrimonial home. Mothers' tricks included giving us money for sweets to create chance for the activity. But we all knew that we had to keep those secrets for our mothers. We even knew it was for money.¹¹

Meanwhile stingy husbands also suffered sanctions. They had to buy sex from their own wives or would stay without sex until they reformed or opted to buy sex from other women. It was such a vicious cycle.¹²

Married women sometimes advertised themselves to intending customers or clients by displaying their skill in "sexual dancing". They were called *ba-champion* because they performed better than other women in copulation.¹³ Those who "danced" better had more clients and made more money. Some husbands recognized adultery as a source of income. They encouraged their wives into acts of adultery so that they could reap the profit from the claim of damages.¹⁴

The second category of sex sellers was *ba-kapenta*. These were young women of loose morals who hang around in beer halls in search of pleasure, excitement and money with painted lips.¹⁵ They were the ones Epstein called "flowers of the country".¹⁶ *Ba-kapenta* were sophisticated women with airs of personal independence. They were too busy with social life to prepare proper meals and mostly fed on tiny "sprat like fish" which was easy to prepare. The fish itself eventually got its name *Kapenta* from these women.¹⁷

The *Kapenta* often cohabited with a man, cooked for him, washed his clothes and cleaned his house. In return the man was expected to provide her with gifts of money and clothes.¹⁸ Some married women also compromised their morals for money. They found excuses to go to other towns and cohabited with some single men for money. They went back to their matrimonial homes after reaping from their clients.¹⁹

Unmarried sex sellers had no respect for their clients' wives. One respondent in Mufulira testified that wives were scared of confronting sex sellers even when they had evidence that their husbands were buying sex from them. If at all they did they were told 'to tie their dogs to the door posts if they did not want them to flirt around.'²⁰

In order to protect their husbands' wages from loose women in their absence, wives gave charms to their husbands before going to the village to visit. The charms made men incapable if they tried to make love to other women.²¹ Similarly, some husbands used a custom of "bewitching" wives so that they became a danger to other men who had sex with them. Husbands made their wives pass or jump over some concoction hidden under the soil in the door way.²² This bewitching was mostly used by "stingy" husbands who were aware that their wives could be sleeping around for money.²³

Sex selling had its own problems. In the early days of congested accommodation, there was no privacy to sell sex from. One had to be brave enough to make love in a single quarters divided by a blanket with six or more other occupants around.²⁴ Sometimes clients refused to pay for sex. It was difficult to report such mistreatment anywhere. Hence women had to be tough to deal with such men.²⁵ Women used charms to make men give them money. They used charms to "wash away bad luck". This consisted of bathing from a concoction and smoking some of it for good luck. They also ate some other concoctions for

what they called “sweetness”. It was believed that “sweet” women easily got money from clients, even more than the price. Tattoos were also used for good luck.²⁶ In Mufulira, there were also women from the Belgian Congo who were feared because they were believed to have charms to “keep” a client’s manhood hanging in the roof if he defaulted until he paid. These got their payment without a struggle.²⁷ Another aspect that made sex selling so repugnant was its association with sexually transmitted diseases, like syphilis and gonorrhea.²⁸

Sex sellers also had to put up with authorities. Officials cracked down on sex selling.²⁹ However in 1935, a study reported that detection of sex sellers was difficult. Despite vigilance by authorities, sex selling flourished since it was a major source of income for both married and single women. Women were constantly introduced as sisters or sisters-in-law and permitted to remain as visitors. In some cases as many as five to eight single women would be living as visitors in one miner’s house. These contributed towards the household income through sex selling.³⁰

Beer Brewing

In the rural villages women were traditionally beer brewers for hospitality, rituals and payment for work. In the mine compounds, beer brewing was a survival strategy. A considerable number of women earned money by brewing and selling beer in their homes. This was illicit, but it was done more frequently and in larger quantities than in the villages.³¹

Beer brewing was quite profitable. Apart from food, alcohol was the next important commodity to go into circulation on the mine compound market.³² A regular brewer would

earn more than her husband's wages. In the 1930's women earned from £1 to £2 per brew after expenses while most African miners earned 12s/6d to 30s per month.³³ Beer was closely and directly related to the popularity of a mine as regards its supply of labour.³⁴ Therefore government realized that the sale of beer was a profitable venture, worth monopolizing at the expense of the women brewers. Their opportunity came when miners' wives started competing for customers. In order to attract more customers some women made their beer stronger and their customers became irregular at work.³⁵ To regulate the potency of the beer a permit system was designed by the mining companies so that sections of the compound were allowed to brew beer on rotational basis.³⁶

Eventually beer brewing was shifted from the women's homes to central brewing places where it was supervised by company officials.³⁷ Finally, the government completely took over the brewing and selling of beer through beer-halls run by the local councils. The beer hall system was introduced at Roan in 1929 and at Nkana in 1933.³⁸ This meant that miners' wives and other women in the mine compounds were deprived of a source of income. This created friction between mining companies and compound women. This loss of income led to the targeting of the beer-halls at Roan in the 1935 strike.³⁹

By 1944, Africans were required to buy only brewery beer in all the compounds except at Chilabombwe where a bit of native brewing was allowed because the council was unable to meet the demand.⁴⁰ However, native beer brewing in the mine compounds continued illicitly because the beer hall system did not meet the needs of African workers. A mine manager at Mufulira observed:

The existing system of a central beer hall serving a large area is unsatisfactory. It is not a native institution and allows no scope for the natives to fulfill their social or tribal obligations.⁴¹

Hence the illicit women brewers continued to cater for those who sought the more congenial atmosphere of a house where one could relax with tribesmen and converse in one's mother tongue or sing tribal songs.⁴² Apart from the environment, the women brewers also took advantage of the poor quality of beers brewed by municipal councils. This was evident from the observation made in 1956 by Sokota, an African representative in the Legislative Council (Legco):

Sir a number of cases which have caused the police to be unpopular among the Africans are the beer raids in the compounds and so on. No one of course would support lawless people, but it is a question of the government responsibility that the beer brewed by the municipal councils is not as palatable as the beer brewed by the Africans themselves and I am sure they will continue this illegal brewing.⁴³

The illicit women brewers served those who were eager to get drunk quickly and sought more potent brews than what the beer halls provided. Coulter described the African brew thus: 'Native beer is manufactured from millet and maize and while the alcoholic content is small, the drink is quite heady.'⁴⁴

This was the characteristic of the African brew that made it sell better than beer hall brew and helped the women brewers to continue surviving on selling beer illicitly. It is also cardinal to recognize that the women brewers were quick to study the market trends and did not allow the authorities to frustrate them. They continued illicit beer brewing to meet varied needs of their customers. From the profits, they were able to supplement their husbands' low wages.

Native beer brewing as a coping strategy in the mine compounds was a challenge. When it was declared illegal, women caught brewing and selling beer were fined £20 per illegal

two and a half drums of beer.⁴⁵ They also had their accessories confiscated or destroyed.⁴⁶ Sometimes they spent most of their profits on bribing the section policemen.⁴⁷

Apart from issues to do with authorities, even at personal and family level, beer brewing in the mine compounds had many problems. One respondent whose mother had been a brewer at Roan put it this way:

We hardly had a home. Our house was a public place, smelling of urine. Our house lost its house number and was only referred to as “the house where they brew beer”. It was noisy with drunken people. Sometimes violence occurred. Most of the time we stayed with neighbours, I wonder if at all we had a home.⁴⁸

This was confirmed by Epstein who concluded that a house where beer brewing was carried out was not ideal for raising children.⁴⁹ Women brewers risked verbal and sexual harassment by drinkers.⁵⁰ Harassment by husbands was also common. These normally wanted free beer for their friends, in order to show off. Husbands were also jealous when their wives served customers, especially when they were drunk. They made trouble for the wives once the customers left.⁵¹

It is clear that, though a lucrative enterprise, beer brewing in the mine compounds meant a great deal of sacrifice, women who resorted to it did so chiefly because it provided them with an opportunity to earn money.

Gardening and the Plot System

It was observed in the previous chapter that the rations provided to miners’ families were inadequate. One of Coulter’s observations on life in the mine compounds read:

The wife and children augment the food issue by the purchase of small quantities of dried fish, the collection of snared birds, mice, frogs, flying ants, locusts, the leaves of pumpkins, sweet potatoes, certain varieties of spinach and grasses. These were cooked into stew called munane or ndiwo.⁵²

Miners' wives bought and collected relishes to make ends meet. But, on a larger scale women and children's food was produced through gardening, another economic activity women in the mine compounds adopted to meet their family food requirements. This food supplement was necessary even for the miner whose ration had flaws in terms of nutrients. Small five acre plots were demarcated on mine land for this purpose. The initiative was born at Broken Hill Mine for the ultimate purpose of attracting workers to stay longer at the mine.⁵³ Other mines quickly adopted the scheme. By early 1930s, Roan Antelope mine had established a promising innovation. African employees could obtain on request an acre of land near the compound to be used for gardening.⁵⁴ If the family had a surplus of vegetables and cereals they sold it to the mine at working market price.⁵⁵ Through this system women were able to supplement the family income.

The garden plot system, like beer brewing, suffered a set back in the 1940s because it became so successful that it attracted the attention of government and the Chamber of Mines. The Chamber of Mines begrudged the extra money women made from selling their agricultural produce. Sentiments against the plot system became common. A memorandum on Native labour released in 1944 for circulation in Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines read:

There is no reason for garden plots to be of a size greater than that necessary for growing vegetables for personal consumption. There seems to be no sound reason why a mine employee should be permitted to be also a market gardener on mine property.⁵⁶

There were also suggestions that, if permitted, garden plots would be systematically laid out with reference to forest and erosion problems.⁵⁷ Conclusions from the Chamber of Mines were that gardens outside the compounds were to be stopped or discouraged.⁵⁸ Other

excuses given were that gardens would have all the trees cut down and would render the land valueless.⁵⁹ The Chamber of Mines was not happy that the miners were using company land without paying levy.⁶⁰ The sentiments were also typically colonial, condemning any activity that brought Africans extra income. Although the Chamber of Mines did not succeed in banning the garden plot system, their sentiments left a dent on the relationship between the company authorities and the miners' wives who were the custodians of the garden plots.

Despite the discouragements, the plot system continued because it was vital to the women. For example, though not by official allocation, in Mufulira, the garden plots were flourishing in the 1950s in Mupambe or Njili and Luansobe (mine lands before they were degazetted after independence when they were declared void of copper).⁶¹ In his observations in 1956, Epstein quoted one respondent (whom he concluded spoke for many) as saying that if it were not for the fact that she was strong enough to prepare gardens for their own subsistence as well as selling some of the produce, they would have been dying from hunger.⁶²

Collection of Fire Wood

Unlike Wankie Colliery that supplied free coal to its workers,⁶³ the Copperbelt mining companies did not give African miners fuel or energy ration. In order to cook food, women collected firewood for use and also for sale to make ends meet. Women even made charcoal for sale.⁶⁴

Although company authorities knew too well that the women needed firewood for preparation of meals, they attached conditions to collection of firewood from mine forests which were nearer the mine compounds. By 1940, a license for cutting firewood was at

2/6d.⁶⁵ This disadvantaged the women who could not afford the license charge. The business was then hijacked by some business men who were able to pay the license charges. Women in the mine compounds instead had to buy firewood from these businessmen. The firewood charge was one of the grievances presented during the 1940 strikes, at least at Nkana.⁶⁶

Other means of survival included borrowing and lending of money made possible by the varying pay dates depending on when one completed his 26 day ticket.⁶⁷ The *Chilimba system* also developed. This consisted of handing over one to another (or others) whole or part of one's wages for one pay period and receiving it back together with one's partner's share the following pay time. This was a common practice among women using ration money given to them by their husbands.⁶⁸ The *Chilimba* money was used for purchase of items that could not be afforded from one wage. Women also did marketeering. They mostly sold products from their gardens⁶⁹ and also herbs, love portions and sex concoctions.⁷⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that women played a major role in sustaining the process of daily reproduction of labour in the mine compounds of the Copperbelt by supplementing their husbands' meager wages. The nature of their supplementary economic activities transformed them into tough women consisting of sex sellers, beer brewers, firewood hewers and gardeners. This prepared them for physical confrontation with mining company authorities whenever they had the opportunity. Women had their own extended grievances. For example beer brewing, sex selling gardening and firewood collection were frustrated by the authorities. Their anger beyond that of their husbands was justified.

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CHAPTER FOUR: WOMEN'S INFLUENCE ON THE MINE WORKERS' STRUGGLES

Introduction

This chapter examined the extent to which the mere presence of women in the mine compounds cast a spell on the magnitude and direction of the struggle. The study argued that the presence of women in the mine compounds influenced the actions of the mine workers. The study also argued that although men were capable of formulating direction and strength for their struggle against poor working and living conditions, the presence of women in the mine compounds was one of the most pressing catalysts. Worker consciousness on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia grew with labour stabilization which was achieved through the family concept; the incorporation of women into the mine compound society.¹ Barnes suggested that 'it was the presence of women that made African miners conscious of their poor working conditions. The behaviour of men was influenced by either the absence or presence of women.'²

Women's Influence on Wages

Parpart observed that 'while there was little evidence of women participation in the 1935 strikes, their influence was clear in the strikers' demands. Miners, especially married miners, complained bitterly to the Strike Commission of 1935 about inadequate food.'³ The married workers insisted that the newly announced tax would further reduce their wages and make it even harder for them to feed and cloth their wives and children.⁴

During the 1940 strikes family problems featured prominently in the strike leaders' rhetoric, both to encourage worker solidarity during the strike and to pressure for better working and living conditions from the mining companies. It was insisted that 12/d a month was not enough if a worker was married with children.⁵ While giving evidence to the Forster Commission Chief Nkonge of the Bemba testified that:

The workers complained of food supplied to married men. It was said that a married man received only one cup of maize for his wife and for each child which was not adequate. The sum expended on providing food for women and children varied from 4/ a week to 15/ or 20/ a month which the miners did not have.⁶

A government statement on the report of the Copperbelt Commission released in 1941 stated:

It is clear from the report that while there were other issues, the major complaints were poor wages, rations and accommodation for married workers. All which had to do with the presence of women in the mine compounds.⁷

The prominence of the inadequacy of women and children's rations in the report of the Copperbelt Commission prompted the Chamber of Mines to hold meetings to discuss African living conditions. In 1942, mine managers were instructed by the Chamber of Mines to increase the rations for women. They were advised that if they could not afford that expenditure, they could even transfer part of the men's rations to women's or at least do so in their reports.⁸

Parpart suggested that 'the pressures and costs of married life appeared to have been a significant factor pushing miners in the Copperbelt towards unionization.'⁹ Being the mouth piece for the workers' grievances the union was formed to pressurize for conditions that would make life easier for women and children as well. Hence the predominance of married workers in the union against single workers by percentage.¹⁰

Issues of rations for women and children persisted even after the unionization of the mine workers. The union spoke more or less for women. In the submissions by the union to the tribunal over the 1952 strike it was stated that:

At the time, companies provided what could be termed below the line income in the form of food shelter and water. The emphasis was that while the rations supplied could have been adequate for single men, they were certainly insufficient for a married man with one or more children.¹¹

This was because for a single man, his full ration was all for himself while a married man shared it with his children and wife for whom the company only provided a cup of maize grain each. To affirm his support for the 1954 strike, the mine workers union leader Katilungu reiterated that some days Africans had to starve because of lack of money for food; 4/4d was too small for a husband, a wife and three children. Hence the demand for 6/d.¹² The miners' cry was therefore a decent living wage, one that could support a miner and his family.

There was also increased pressure on wages as Africans acquired a growing taste for European goods in the 1950s. The development was confirmed by company officials and the union leader Katilungu in the 1952 and 1954 strike findings.¹³ Sugar, bread, tea and clothes were no longer luxuries but necessities.¹⁴ Competition in acquiring European household goods and food was rampant among women.¹⁵ Wives put pressure on their husbands for money to purchase these items. They wanted furniture in the house, good clothes and European food. Epstein observed that one of the complaints that women mostly took before the urban court was that their husbands were not clothing them adequately by the standards that should have prevailed in town.¹⁶ One respondent observed that during the fifties these well urbanised women with a bit of education and air of modernity became a

menace to their husbands. They called their lowly paid husbands names and termed them cowards if they did not strike for more money to buy good clothes. The respondent suggested that the 1950's saw a lot of strikes on the Copperbelt because of too many urbanized women. These were eloquent and conversant with mine compound life. They had no fear for a white man.¹⁷

In a nutshell, higher wages and better rations were demanded in part because they were needed by women and children. What was an adequate wage was one that could enable a man feed his family and educate his children. The presence of women therefore increased pressure on the resources available for the miners in the mine compound.

Women's Influence on Accommodation

Housing was a thorny issue in the mine compounds. Everyone wanted privacy. However, only married workers could acquire accommodation with some degree of privacy. Though no definite policy was reached on the matter, it was generally agreed among compound managers that a man was not to retain his married quarters when his wife was away for more than few months if such action resulted in another married man (with a wife present in the compound) being deprived of married quarters.¹⁸ A man's stay in the married quarters, therefore, depended not only on his marital status but also on the physical presence of his wife in the mine compound. In other words, the housing policy in the mine compounds was influenced by the presence of women.

It is not surprising therefore that as institutional and material privileges such as housing began to be provided to married workers in the 1940s, more and more men and women in a variety of domestic sex arrangements were seeking to secure the label "married" for

themselves.¹⁹ Some of these were just for convenience. Chauncey confirmed that a housing shortage in the 1940s created a powerful incentive for workers to have certified “wives” rather than just lovers as a way of holding on to housing.²⁰ The demand for married quarters was influenced by the presence of women in the mine compounds. Parpart suggested that the desire by women for better housing and proper rooms so that their children could sleep home separate from parents and where girls could be separated from boys, fueled the 1940 strike.²¹

The colonial government was against the establishment of a stable urbanized population, hence the lack of interest in the issues of miners’ welfare such as accommodation. However, due to pressure exerted on it by the findings of the Forster Commission it was forced to bend its stance. Part of the statement made by the government resulting from the Forster report in 1941 reads:

Adequate married housing will be provided by the companies in the mine compounds. But the acceptance of the commissions’ recommendation on this point does not commit government to the policy of establishing a permanent industrialised native population on the Copperbelt.²²

All this was because of the presence of women in the mine compounds. Throughout the 1950s the union remained concerned about daily reproduction of labour and demanded better compound conditions especially bigger houses for married workers.²³

Women and Health

The demand for a healthy environment in the mine compounds was equally enhanced by the promotion of family life. Once wives and children came to the mine compounds there was pronounced pressure to improve all elements that amounted to a healthy environment.

In a conversation with the Secretary for Native Affairs, one compound elder at Nkana in 1940 stated that one of the complaints forwarded by the strikers was that the huts were not good enough and that many children died in them. Others also indicated that the barrack arrangement of huts encouraged the spread of diseases.²⁴ The relationship between the presence of women and children in the mine compounds and the demand for a healthy environment was analysed by Coulter thus:

The health, comfort and contentment of the married workers were affected also by the health and happiness of their wives and children. The mining policy was oblivious of this that the contentment, regularity and efficiency of the native worker depends largely on the health welfare and happiness of his wife and children.’²⁵

As long as the environment in the mine compound continued to cause death for his children, the worker was not satisfied and demands to improve the situation would not end.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that women were the major reason why men became conscious of their situation. The presence of women in the mine compounds put pressure on the meagre wages, rations and housing provided by the mining companies. Women’s needs amplified mineworkers’ demands from their employers. In a nutshell, the presence of women in the mine compounds encouraged the mineworkers to struggle for better working and living conditions

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CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN STRIKES ON THE MINES ON THE COPPERBELT

Introduction

This chapter examined the physical presence or participation of women in protest action such as strikes, boycotts and riots. It argued that women were not mere inactive contributors to collective action, they were also a physical force against mining companies' policies, sometimes even more vicious than their husbands.¹ This chapter covered the pre-union, union and union versus staff association periods.

Women in the Pre-Union Period

It is important to note that there is a record of women protest at Bwana Mkubwa mine compound as early as 1927. Due to its role in this discussion, the report on this event by F.L. Brown, Native Commissioner for Ndola then, deserves to be quoted in full:

At Bwana Mkubwa it has been the custom for a number of years that women and native employees living in the mine compound should sweep and clean the whole compound. Recently there was a redistribution of huts: the married folk being collected in one part of the compound and the single in another. The women were told that they must still sweep the whole compound. They refused and many of them said they would in future only sweep round their own huts. They were told by the compound manager that if they did not wish to carry on as they always had done, they could hand in their identification wristlets (numbers corresponding to their husbands) and would no longer be authorized to reside in the compound. A large number of the women did so and left. Next morning some 230 men (all married) went to General Offices and made a demonstration. They insisted on being paid off. The obvious ringleaders (23) were then arrested and taken to the compound office and subsequently discharged.²

The incident demonstrates that right from the early days of mining, women were a force to reckon with. The women at Bwana Mkubwa protested for what they realized to be

exploitation; to clean the whole mine compound for no pay. They realized that the mining company was maximizing its profits by minimizing costs through their free labour.

Another essential point to note is that these women were able to decide what to do about the situation without their husbands. It is clear from this report that women led this particular protest; their husbands came in to support and strengthen it. They respected the decision made by the women folk. Thus from the onset of mining on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia collective action was a family affair, with women taking an active role. The protest by the women became the first of a series of strikes by African mine workers in the following years.

In 1935, a strike erupted. The disturbances began at Mufulira. The commission set up to inquire into the causes of the disturbances revealed that the mineworkers' strike was due to the abrupt and incomplete announcement throughout the compounds that African poll tax had been increased.³ Soon the strike spread to Kitwe (Nkana Mine). The most serious incident took place in Luanshya (Roan Antelope Mine) where six Africans were killed and 22 were injured by the police.⁴

Parpart asserted that there was little evidence of women participation in the 1935 strike. However, there is evidence that even the instigators or organizers of the 1935 strikes acknowledged the solidarity of women in collective action. They were regarded as potential co-protesters. On 4th April, 1935, a notice was posted up at Nkana calling miners to strike against poor conditions. Written in Chibemba it summed up an accumulation of grievances and invited men and women to take part in the strike. It read:

B.M.R. AMERICAS

Listen to this all you who live in the country. Think well how they treat us and to ask for a land. Do we live in good treatment, no....We wish on the day of 29th April every person not to go for work....Hear well if it is right let us do so that... we are all of Nkana Africans men and women. I am glad.

G. Lowey.⁶

The designer of the poster was well aware that women were partners in the intended collective action. It was an invitation to women to take part in the strike action as well. It should be borne in mind that by 1935 there were no women miners. The only women available in the mine compounds at the time were wives, daughters and relatives. Therefore the message was directed at the women residing in mine compounds.

Women played a big role in the organization of the 1935 strikes through the Mbeni dance teams. The possibility that popular dance forms could play an active role in the socio-economic and political developments on the Copperbelt was first considered during the 1935 strikes. During these strikes the Mbeni attracted official interest. The Russel Commission concluded that some leaders of the Mbeni society were involved in instigating and fueling the disturbances but that the society itself was not dangerous. However the Governor in his dispatch to the Secretary of State on the report made an observation that while he accepted the commission's conclusion, the activities of the society were to be carefully watched.⁷ The Watchtower Society also blamed the commission for failing to discern that the Mbeni dance team was subversive as far as industrial peace was concerned.⁸ Eye witnesses, testified to the commission that there was much underground communication at the Mbeni dances during the strike.⁹

With much blame falling on the Mbeni for fuelling the disturbances, it becomes apparent that women were able to participate in the disturbances because they also performed in the tribal dances.¹⁰ Matongo confirmed that wives of dancers became

automatic members of the dance-teams and that female dancers were actively involved in composing of songs. He also explained that the language used in the songs was sophisticated, meant to send a message to the African workers while deceiving the whites. It was the duty of women members to compose these songs through which seditious messages were communicated.¹¹ The Russel Commission failed to fully blame the Mbeni society for the disturbances because the language used was not easy to interpret, for those not familiar with the dance.

The commission appointed to enquire into the disturbances also indicated that most inhabitants of the mine compound at Roan were drawn into the many mass meetings. Women were among the crowd that was shot at during the strike at Roan.¹² Some of the wounded indicated in their statements to the commission that there were women and children among the protestors.¹³

More evidence of women involvement in the 1935 disturbances can be deduced from the reaction by authorities towards women after the disturbances. Heisler observed that following the enquiry into the 1935 riots, the movement of women from the villages to the mine compounds was regulated.¹⁴ From 1935, mining companies supported the work of missionaries in women's programmes in the hope that they would keep them busy and away from industrial mischief while teaching them how to be economical with the meager resources provided by the companies.¹⁵

On 28th March, 1940, African mine workers declared a strike demanding 25/6d per shift.¹⁶ This strike was sparked by the incident earlier referred to, the *sjamboking* of a woman by a mine compound assistant at the Nchanga feeding store. Eventually the strike culminated into a tragedy where four Europeans, seven Africans members of the Northern

Rhodesia Police were injured and 13 of the strikers were killed while 17 were wounded of which 4 died later.¹⁷

During this strike women participated physically and through co-operation. At the beginning of the strike at Nchanga, the District Commissioner in his notes taken during the course of the strikes stated that he was molested by women on his way from the compound where he had gone to try and peacefully discuss the matter with the miners after physically seeing the woman who had been *sjamboked*.¹⁸

At Nkana, the strikers set pickets on all roads and huts in the compounds. In order to make picketing easier, they ordered every African, women inclusive, to sleep *en masse* out in the open on the football pitch.¹⁹ Three weeks into the strike period, Williams the District Commissioner recorded:

At Nkana, I went to the compound early before day break and the compound was unnaturally quiet. When dawn broke, a large compact crowd could be seen on the football field. The mob which by now lived on the football ground seemed to be completely hypnotized.²⁰

At Mufulira the control of the strikers was such that no African dared sleep in his hut at night, if he did so he was removed from there by the strikers. Emissaries went round the compound during the night to those miners who wanted to work. These were told that if they did so they would be killed. At four in the morning, stronger pickets were put in the compound to prevent anybody leaving including women who wanted to go to the market.²¹

Moore also observed that ‘during the 1940 strike every man, woman and child knew all the arguments by heart. Men and women discussed the common grievances; pay for the workers, more food and better houses. They also compared European and African taxation.’²² Hence women in the mine compounds understood and participated fully in driving their case home.

The above testimonies from eye witnesses are evidence that women were part to the collective action of 1940. At the end of the strike, the Forster Commission confirmed the participation of women in the 1940 strikes.²³ This matter was even discussed in the House of Commons where government officials missed the point and alleged that miners' wives joined in the strike action with riotous behaviour because they were idle. It was then suggested that they be given garden allotments to keep them busy.²⁴ The reason for their prominence in the strike, however, was that women understood that a higher wage for their husbands would relieve them of the burden of supplementing food rations for their families.

Furthermore, the involvement of women in strike action was deliberate and strategic. Barnes observed that by the time of the 1940 strikes, 'encouraging the participation of compound women and children in collective action had become a conscious strategy by strike leaders.'²⁵ The same strategy was employed by union leaders in Southern Rhodesia. 'The Rhodesia Allied Workers Union Secretary is quoted as having confirmed in the 1940's that "such matters as the improvement of accommodation and other allied matters could better be fought with women in the forefront."²⁶ Women were also aware of this power in them. As a matter of fact, as a result of the confrontation the Nchanga woman staged against the dishonest compound assistant, improvements were effected by the mine authorities. A European was put in charge of the food store, the meal ration increased and a new cocoa kitchen was built in a better position.²⁷

Women and the Establishment of the Union

In 1946, the colonial government took the lead in encouraging African workers to form trade unions on a non-political model that it desired.²⁸ The Northern Rhodesia African

Mineworkers Union popularly known as “the union” was formed in 1949. Union officials immediately became important people in the mine compounds. Mining companies tried to challenge union dominance in the compounds by increasing the powers and prestige of the Tribal Representatives. Women helped to undermine the Tribal Representatives by presenting their problems to the union.²⁹ Eventually the Tribal Representatives became dysfunctional because their clientele, the women (with their marital problems) did not take cases to them.³⁰ In 1951, the Tribal Representatives were terminated at the request of the union.³¹

Further, the companies tried to circumvent the union by establishing Township Advisory Boards. These were proposed by the African Personnel Managers Committee in view of the fact that the African union had taken up some and were likely to take up all matters affecting township management.³² Even this did not work because union members and their wives did not support them.³³ Women, more than men, were at the centre of mine compound matters in as far as daily reproduction of labour was concerned. Therefore, any organisation that failed to win the favor of women as a reliable representation for all the inhabitants of the mine compound could not stand or gain popularity and authority.

Women and Union Collective Action

In 1952, following the Annual Conference, the Union presented demands for a general increase of 2s/d per shift. During the negotiations that followed, the mining companies made a number of counter offers which were rejected by the union. On October 20, the union called for a strike.³⁴ The general strike began, as scheduled, on 21 October 1952 at all centers; Nkana, Roan, Mufulira, Nchanga and Chibuluma.³⁵ To avoid tragedy, the union

called for order.³⁶ During this strike women participated through co-operation. An excerpt from the report by F. M. N. Heath, the District Commissioner for Luanshya, on the first day of the strike cited by Mwendapole read:

The strike began on Monday...There were no passers-by to attract attention as you drove past the rows of huts where the strikers lived; there was hardly a sign of life. Not even children who normally would be playing in the yards and along the road sides were to be seen....It was incredible that 30,000 people who should have been so much in evidence the day before and that twelve hours later there should be only a deserted town. Through out the day the atmosphere remained unchanged, as if human activity had ceased...Only a few seemed interested in buying food through the government ticket system. No one seemed interested in the mine lying silent across the valley³⁷

However, the District Commissioner observed that when union leaders called public meetings to brief the strikers and their families:

Vast crowds in their thousands assembled as if from nowhere and the mine township sprung into life. But as soon as the business of the meeting was ended the crowds dispersed in good order and the stillness returned.³⁸

This proved to the study that the cooperation exhibited by women was invaluable. They gave a deeper meaning to the strike than mere demands for a wage increase. Their participation through co-operation brought concern to the authorities as illustrated above. The women got instructions straight from the union leaders. The union counted on their co-operation. Union leaders had realized the power of women and decided to officially take them on board through direct communication to them in order to avoid tragedy, lest they pushed their husbands into violence. The study concluded that at that point the strike had become a family matter.

During the strike the mining companies announced that the men who were not at work would not be fed.³⁹ Yet, throughout the strike no one complained openly of hunger and the demand for food through the ticket system remained small. Epstein, an eye witness stated:

Each day the strikers and their women folk would go *en mass* to cultivate their gardens or to reap the crops they had already sown.⁴⁰

Since the strikers received neither wages nor food during the strike, women's gardening skills underpinned the strike's success. They had been warned by the union to extend their gardens and stock up on food months before the strike. This, they did effectively. The strike was a communal effort, and women were essential to its success. The strike only ended after the union had forced management into arbitration and ordered the strikers back to work.⁴¹

Although the demand of 2/d a shift increase was not achieved, the Guillebaud award that came out of it amounted to approximately 80 percent increase in basic pay for the lowest paid group and some 15 percent for the highest paid group.⁴² The 1952 strike and the Guillebaud award were clearly the highest water mark that the union achieved since its formation in March 1949. Through their co-operation and material support to the strike women helped to keep the collective action in the right direction and to maintain its strength and deeper meaning up to the end.

More women's contribution towards collective action was expressed during the 1954 strike. On 29th September, 1954, the African Mineworkers Union handed the mining companies the following claims: a wage increase of 10/d a day for all African miners, a weekly payment of wages and a new wage structure to affect union members only.⁴³ The mining companies were not willing to meet the demands and the union called its members to a strike which only started on 2nd January 1955. During the eight week strike, the union encouraged miners' wives to ensure their husbands' loyalty to the union. This effective control of husbands by wives was carefully manipulated by the union throughout the

strike.⁴⁴ Towards the end of January 1955, companies threatened to dismiss all the strikers. At Nchanga and Konkola pamphlets were issued to each house occupied by strikers, threatening that the house would be needed for employees of the company and warning the men of possible eviction.⁴⁵ This led to much vigilance amongst miners and their families. They urged each other to ignore the mines' ultimatum.⁴⁶

On 29th January 1955, 'thousands of miners and their families at Roan formed processions in the streets carrying branches of trees, waving cloths and singing. They marched through the streets and converged at a public meeting where union leaders addressed them.'⁴⁷ Thus during the 1954 strike women did not just cooperate but also physically participated in physical protest action.

Save the Union Strike

In a bid to weaken the union, the mining companies recognized the Mines African Staff Association (MASA) in December, 1955. The MASA had started spontaneously in 1952.⁴⁸ This was an association of African mine workers in higher jobs. These were to receive their salaries at the end of the month and not by the weekly ticket system. In order to strengthen MASA, the mining companies gave special treatment to MASA members' wives and provided small courses to enlighten them so they could fit into their new status.⁴⁹

The mineworkers' union leaders realized that the MASA was directed at dividing the African workforce. They worked hard to kill the MASA once and for all. They organized endless strikes against the MASA. Between August 1955 and 1956, 17 strikes were staged by the union, 12 of which were against the transfer of workers from ticket to ticket payments to monthly contracts.⁵⁰ The "Rolling Strikes" as they came to be known became a concern

of discussion in the Legislative Council (Legco) where it was agreed that they were caused by the formation of the MASA.⁵¹

Another method employed to kill the MASA was ridicule. An article carried in the Northern News on 5th October 1956 read:

‘You *makobo*, cheap tasteless fish.’ This has been the war cry in the wrangle between African Mine Workers Union and advanced Africans...*makobo* is the name with which the advanced Africans have been branded by union members on the instruction of the union... ‘We are going to smash this staff association flat to the ground’, Mr Mathew Nkoloma told them. Union members were told not to pass greetings with MASA men. Members of the MASA were told that they would be shunned by their families.⁵²

From the onset of the conflict between the mineworkers union and MASA, the union depended on wives to force MASA members to come back to the union. ‘At a meeting at Nchanga mine in July 1955, union leader, Nkoloma announced that MASA members would suffer because their own wives would make trouble for them.’⁵³ This strategy of wives controlling husbands was exploited by the union during the rolling strikes.

The hostility between senior African staff and ordinary miners spilled over to their families. Union members’ wives and their families supported the long bitter conflict through ridicule. W.J. Scrivener, the Group African Affairs Adviser for Rhodesian Anglo American Ltd made this observation:

There has been organized ridicule of MASA members and their wives and families in public. This ridicule has been directed not only by union members but also by their wives and families. They are referred to as “informers”, *makobo*... Thus when a wife of a MASA member visits a store or any other place where she has to be attended to, the practice is for union wives to withdraw in an exaggerated manner and say, ‘There comes the white woman; make way for the *makobo*... All this of course is done and said in a sarcastic manner which has a very profound effect on the women concerned.’⁵⁴

Even union members' children were involved in this collective action. P.G. Lendun, the African Personnel Manager for Rhokana observed that they jeered at senior staff workers as they came off shift: 'It is a common sight to see processions of children following and jeering at the monthly paid employees. I have seen this myself.'⁵⁵

They composed and sung songs like this one to tease MASA member's children at school and in the township.

SONG OF HATE

Bana bamakobo, bakaya sambilila ku town
Pantu bawishibo balifwatika kumatako
Nabakaye sambilila kubasungu banabo
Ifwe tulelwila icalo cesu

The children of bamakobo will go and learn school in town.
Because their fathers have printed their buttocks.
They shall go and learn school with their fellow Europeans.
We are fighting for our country.'⁵⁶

Other names given to senior staff miners were "Capricorn", "traitor" and "*katenga malilo*" (a hearse or vehicle for carrying a coffin at a funeral) .⁵⁷ Thus the MASA members were equated to bad news.

The ridicule method was effective. MASA members' wives were reduced to a state where they implored their husbands to have nothing to do with the MASA. Lendun, confirmed that 'MASA members' wives directly approached company authorities to change their husbands' occupation back to union category jobs as they were ridiculed and threatened by other women in the compounds.'⁵⁸ Some MASA members returned to the union because their wives were always quarrelling with them. The agitation of women over MASA can be illustrated further by Mwendapole's observation:

At Nchanga, the members of MASA used to go to work by disguising themselves as charcoal burners. One man took boots and leggings and steel helmet and tied them on his bicycle covered by a few sacks used for carrying

charcoal. He had not put his foot on his pedal before the trick was discovered by his wife. She took the axe and cut into several pieces working boots and destroyed the steel helmet. After burning the underground jacket, she tied the whole lot into a cloth and brought the same to the local NRAMWU office.⁵⁹

Some MASA members' wives denied their husbands sex as punishment for joining the association. This forced such MASA members to go back to the union.⁶⁰

Due to the ridicule, Africans in senior jobs stopped volunteering to transfer to the monthly salary system. The mining companies, therefore, used forceful measures to strengthen MASA. R.G. Gabbitas, the African Personnel Manager at Nchanga narrated this story:

As a result of the July 1956 automatic transfer of ticket pay men into monthly pay category jobs, pronounced opposition ensued. A certain underground boss boy (N.C. 3286) committed an act likely to cause a breach of peace at the underground office of the African Personnel Department. He removed his clothing and displayed his buttocks and private parts to the European personnel in the office as a gesture of disgust.⁶¹

Mwamba, a respondent in Chingola explained that 'transferring the man to MASA entailed insults on him from women so there was no need to hide his private parts anymore because women (union members' wives) would be stripping him naked everyday through insults.'⁶²

The above incidents show how much pressure women put on the MASA members. "Union wives" realized that the MASA was recognized by the mining companies in order to weaken the union which they had helped to build. Their effort through ridicule proved the most useful against the MASA. Women trained even their children to be hostile towards the association. They simply made it a regrettable thing to be a MASA member.

Tensions ran high and some women were caught up in the sporadic violence that erupted in the compounds in a bid to crush the MASA. One union member, his wife and sister in law assaulted two MASA members on their way home from work. The man was

sentenced to two months imprisonment with hard labour. His wife and sister-in-law were fined. Another man was imprisoned in Mufulira for six weeks with hard labour while his wife was fined five pounds for threatening violence against a MASA member.⁶³

Women participated in the rolling strikes also through boycotts. The Mufulira boycott of White and Indian owned shops caused lengthy debate in the Legislative Council in 1956 due to its seriousness.⁶⁴ It should be borne in mind that most shopping was done by women. Miners' wives, therefore, gave strength to the boycott. While giving highlights on the happenings of the period in question, the Branigan Commission reported that at the same time that rolling strikes were being staged, the union organized a boycott of the welfare services and children's feeding centres at some of the mines. There was also a partial boycott of medical centres.⁶⁵ For example at Wusakili women's welfare centre on the first day of the first strike four women turned up out of approximately 200 due to attend home craft classes. By the third day, no women were present.⁶⁶ On the first day only 30 children went for soup and eventually there was a complete boycott of feeding centres.⁶⁷ These centres were boycotted because they were run by MASA members.⁶⁸ The boycott was therefore directed at the MASA and not the welfare centres. Women therefore, used this weapon of boycott effectively.

In September 1956, a state of emergency was declared.⁶⁹ A notice was posted in Luanshya by the District Commissioner on 12th September 1956, it read:

NOTICE: Many African workers have been behaving badly due to bad orders and advice from many of the present leaders of the African Mine Workers Union. Every man and woman must behave sensibly and obey laws. I warn you that if anyone breaks the law, will be severely punished.⁷⁰

There were very few women employed by the mines during the period under discussion. The District Commissioner for Luanshya was, however, aware of the rapport between the

union and miners' wives and other women in the mine compounds. He was also observant of the agitated behaviour of the compound women during the rolling strikes. The message was hence directed towards these women.

Women involvement in the disturbances on the Copperbelt was observed even in the Legislative Council. On 29th November, 1956, W.F. Rendal, member for Ndola electoral area commented:

Now Sir I might touch on the troubles on the Copperbelt towards which there has been a contribution by female elements in our locations. A lot of the troubles are egged on by women. I am talking about African women who have not been educated. The majority of these Sir during the last few years have come from native reserves.⁷¹

The member blamed women and wives in the mine compounds for the rolling strikes. His observation was correct. By the time of the rolling strike women had become more vocal than men in industrial matters. They actually took the struggle to heights that the union leaders had not anticipated.

In the years following the strikes, after 1957, women in the mine compounds also displayed a remarkable commitment to political action. Miners' wives were free to join the political movement. The women linked their demands for better conditions in the urban mine compounds to the dissolution of colonial rule. In that way they proved more radical than their husbands who refrained from large scale involvement with the nationalist struggle, for fear of dismissal, until the last year or two before independence.⁷²

Women had realized the importance of combining industrial and political struggle. After all, the line between labour matters and politics had grown grey. Hence the reasoning by the Labour Commissioner in 1957 that;

if strikes were made illegal in Northern Rhodesia and proceedings instituted against the leaders of a strike action, it is not unlikely that the union members

or the mass of supporters would strike in protest against government action and whereas the dispute started over an industrial matter, it might now become a dispute in protest against government action.⁷³

Women understood that if the nationalist movement achieved its goal of independence, the problems of the mine workers would be solved with ease. It had become clear to them that poor conditions for African workers were the sum total of colonial rule and corporate regime. The commissioner understood that labour issues affected the whole community including women. This was what made them political.

There is evidence that up to the eve of independence colonial government officials feared reaction by women in industrial matters as can be observed from this extract from a Legco debate in 1961. Mulonda, member for Barotse constituency made a contribution as follows:

I thought it would be advisable and probably quite good to make a provision for our African women who are gainfully employed to pay poll tax. If men do pay poll tax and other taxes, I do not see any reason why a woman who is gainfully getting as much as a man is to be let off scot-free.’⁷⁴

The illustration of the fear of women reaction is in the reply given by two other members, E. W. Sargent (member for Lusaka East) and S. R. Malcomson (member for Luanshya constituency) respectively.

You wait till they get hold of you.
You are asking for trouble.⁷⁵

Tax was one of the grievances of miners in Northern Rhodesia but women survived it up to 1961 because they were known to be more aggressive than men.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that as far as industrial collective action was concerned women were active partners. The women were able to organize even their own protests in the mine compounds of Northern Rhodesia. The mineworkers' protests were heavily supported by women. In strikes and boycotts, women featured prominently. It is not an exaggeration to say that at certain times women fought harder than their husbands. The struggle for better working and living conditions in the mine compounds largely depended on their support and co-operation. Sometimes women in the mine compounds allowed no one, not even their own husbands to stand in their way.

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CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study has established a relationship between women and the struggle for better working and living conditions in the mine compounds of the Copperbelt of Zambia from 1926 to 1964. One of the findings of the study was that stabilization of mineworkers on the Copperbelt of Zambia which was achieved through the family concept which brought women and children to the mine compounds. The coming of women to the mine compounds brought them into contact with mining companies' policies and conditions offered to the miners. Their experiences with poor working and living conditions in the mine compounds made women partners in the struggle for better conditions. This led to the involvement of women in the mineworkers' struggles on the Copperbelt directly and indirectly. The mine compound system contributed a lot to the cementing of the relationship between the mineworkers' struggles and women. The mine compound system made women part and parcel of the mineworker. The fact that the mining companies provided not only the cash wage but also rations, accommodation, health care services, education for miners' children and other social services made them a target for complaints by miners' wives.

The study has also revealed that poor wages, rations and social services provided by the mining companies to the workers and their families compelled miners' wives to engage in economic activities such as sex selling, beer brewing and gardening as supplements. Their economic activities transformed them into tough women, with a rebellious character. This was the attribute that prepared them for physical participation in collective action.

The study also revealed that the mere presence of women in the mine compounds prompted the miners to realize their family responsibilities. It compelled miners to demand

for better working and living conditions which could make them and their families comfortable.

The study has also demonstrated that women put up resistance to have some issues corrected. The Bwana Mkubwa protest by women as early as 1927, demonstrated that women were capable of rising on their own against injustices practiced by the mining companies. Their participation in collective action in 1935, 1940, 1952 and 1954 through co-operation, boycotts and demonstrations took the struggle to higher heights. The union depended on the women during critical moments. At times men were a let down on the struggle. Women acted as checks and balances by disciplining their husbands. Essentially, women made the struggle stronger. Therefore, women involvement into the mine workers' struggles on the Copperbelt of Zambia cannot be overemphasized. Their contribution was invaluable.

However, this does not mean that women could have challenged the mining companies without reinforcement from the miners. Men and women complemented each other's efforts in their quest for better living and working conditions. Their combined efforts forced the mining companies give in to their demands such as the Guilebaud Award at the end of the 1952 strike. The involvement of women therefore should not be looked at from a female chauvinist point of view but as a phenomenon of solidarity of men, women and children. Children's involvement in the mineworkers' struggles was more notable during the rolling strikes of 1955 to 1956.

This has testified that even other issues of women in the mine compounds of the Copperbelt such as women and the evolution of mine compound accommodation could be investigated by tracing the trail of married workers' experiences and struggles. Most mine

compound issues were influenced by the presence of women, which aspect has not been easily noticed by scholars.

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SN	NAME	DATE OF BIRTH	DETAILS	DATE AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1	Chibale, Christina	1946	Marketeer	20 th October 2009, C29 Kawama East, Mufulira.
2	Kabala, Mercy	1933	Herbalist	16 th December 2009, Kalala, Luanshya.
3	Kaluisha, Loveness	1942	Herbalist	9 th November 2009, Malela Market, Mufulira.
4	Luando, Marina	1936	Herbalist	9 th November 2009, Malela Market, Mufulira.
5	Mambwe, Lastone	1932	Cobra- Son of former miner	28 th August 2009, Luansobe Settlement, Mufulira.
6	Michelo, Labison	1940	Former miner	28 th August 2009, Luansobe Settlement, Mufulira.
7	Mulenga, Chance	1936	Former miner	29 th August 2009, Kaniki, Ndola.
8	Mwamba, Bornwell	1932	Former Mines African Staff	8 th August 2009, Chibwempala, Chingola.
9	Mwansa, Audrey	1938	Former miner's wife	11 th October 2009, B.16 Kawama West, Mufulira.
10	Mwenya, Edward	1937	Former miner	5 th October 2009, Zimba Village, Mufulira.
11	Mwakwa, Ida	1940	Former miner's wife	20 th November 2009, Chimfunshi, Chililabomwe.

12	Ndlovu, Magaret	1942	Daughter of former miner	17 th October 2009, Salamano Settlement, Mufulira.
13	Samfya, Mambwe	1940	Son of former miner	11 th January 2010, Wusakile, Kitwe.