

DOWNCAST: MINING, MEN AND THE CAMERA IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1890 – 1930*

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Introduction

The genre of mining photography in Zimbabwe can be located within the broader genealogy of photography that emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century. Besides its uses as societal representations in the European context, photography was also annexed in the colonial definition and categorisation of the 'other', namely the non-European races in Africa and other parts of the world. The beginnings of colonial-controlled mining activities took place at a time when the medium of photography had been well advanced in Europe, at a time when photographic images were still celebrated as innocent and implicitly self-evident.¹

Thus the reading of the mining photographs referred to in this paper not only present us with fragments of European perceptions of modernity and progress, but also insights into the discourse of colonial power in the construction of 'otherness' in the encountered landscape in Africa. These processes also came about with the desire to map out a newly envisaged social order, and photography played a major role in fixing images that seemed to celebrate each stage of capital advancement and the proletarianization of the peasantry. Documentary photography in these early years of colonial industrial enterprises, and indeed any serialization of notions of capital advancement, was packaged for the gaze of European audiences. The images that were coming out of this colonial space from the 1890s seemed to generalise the incomprehensible, and package in a kind of postcard sequence those local places and peoples that were typically viewed as barbaric, bizarre, primitive or simply picturesque.²

This paper seeks to explore a number of issues in relation to a series of photographs taken of colonial Zimbabwean mines by white colonial officials in the 1890s and 1900s. A number of these are now housed in the National

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1. I will deal with this point extensively later in the text, deriving from my discussion of Liz Wells' chapter 'Surveyors and Surveyed' in her book *Photography: A critical introduction* (London, 1997).

2. Wells, *Photography*, 58.

Archives of Zimbabwe.³ Images of the arrival of industrial capital were not only meant to showcase the evolution of this capital in a land of ‘savages,’ but also to emphasise the vulnerability of the perceived ‘savages’ as capital labour. In analysing these photographs, we are being called upon, as Harris puts it, to navigate the interaction between photographic images and colonial discourse.⁴ He argues that reading into these images leads to the realisation that “...photographs are never evidence of history, they are themselves historical, requiring analysis, interpretation, historicism and interrogation.”⁵

This article attempts to historicise these official photographs and looks at how these images were sites of fixing, conceptualisation and presentation of the colonized ‘other’. It attempts to situate the photographs by locating their moments of production within the broader context of the emergence of colonial power within the newly envisaged mining landscape both socially and physically. It examines the multiplicity of meanings that confront us in our engagement with these images, not only foregrounding the systematic emasculation of the African male through the compound system, the attempted naturalization of the perceived emptiness of the landscape, and the transcription of the African subject into a spectacle. It also interrogates what I feel have been the inclusions and exclusions in the construction of the capitalist gaze through the photograph as the local labour was slowly but surely being “...sucked into the vortex of despair and disillusionment...”⁶

Mine Labour history and ‘Book-Cover’ Photography

In their publication *Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe*, Phimister and van Onselen provide insights into the history of African mine labour in Zimbabwe. Phimister has also published the *Wangi Kolia – Coal, Capital and Labour*, which studies the interaction of labour and industrial capital at one particular mine, Wankie Colliery, and makes reference to a selected number of mine sites in colonial Zimbabwe. In his book *Chibaro*, van Onselen argues that the period 1903 – 1912 was a period of output maximisation and cost minimisation.⁷ He further contends that the advancement of capital in colonial Zimbabwe was characterised by concerted efforts towards the proletarianization of the peas-

3. The National Archive photographic collection, according to the Director of the Institution, is categorised under ‘Illustrations Collections’ and whilst seen as an integral part of the historical collections generally, it also complements official papers in the Public Archives, and the private papers in the Historical Manuscripts. Whilst the director encourages wider engagement with these photographs there has been very little that has been done to drive the discussions towards this goal. Instead, the photographs have largely remained as illustrations to major historical publications and official papers. Most photographs that I refer to in this article are undated and do not carry the identities of the photographer or the photographed. I have therefore made use of both oral testimonies and written or published material in contextualising these images. The images can be read in a variety of ways. In this article, the interpretations and meanings attached to the photographs used here are strictly my own.

4. Brent Harris, ‘Photography in colonial discourse: the making of “the other” in southern Africa, c. 1850-1950’ in Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds) *The Colonising Camera. Photographs in the making of Namibian History* (Cape Town, Windhoek and Athens, 1998), 21.

5. Harris, ‘Photography in colonial discourse’, 24.

6. Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (Johannesburg, 1980), 164.

7. See Ian Phimister and Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Gwelo, 1978); Ian Phimister, *Wangi Kolia. Coal, Capital and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe 1894-1954* (Harare and Johannesburg, 1994); Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, 91.

antry through *inter alia* the restriction of easy access to land and increase in taxation, in a bid to increase the propensity for additional cash earnings from the white enterprises. *Chibaro* narrates the subjection of African labourers to near-enslavement on the colonial mines in Zimbabwe. It sets out the recruitment methods, the living and working conditions, as well as the coercive methods of labour control and subjugation. In his earlier book *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe 1890 – 1948*, Phimister adds another dimension to Zimbabwean mining labour historiography.⁸ He deals with colonial agency in the accumulation of capital and the ensuing class struggle not only between black and white but also between African men and their women. Women remained in charge in the rural areas as the men were being forced to seek work on the white enterprises. Phimister also uses some illustrative photographs inside this publication.

Rich and detailed as these social histories are, however, they are still firmly textual. In a review of one of Phimister's books, Terri Barnes urged "...for a section or two including some of the interesting historical photographs in the collection of the National Archives of Zimbabwe."⁹ Indeed historical narratives have largely been drawn from oral and written archival material, "recapitulating the experiences of ordinary men and women" in the mining landscape.¹⁰ They have therefore been written from sources that ignore the use of photographic images as historical documents.

Both van Onselen and Phimister use photographs on the front pages of their publications. Such front cover photographic images can of course be read in a variety of ways. Some of these could be celebratory images, probably tracing the evolutionary penetration of capital in what was seen as 'savage land', whilst others become purely illustrative, demonstrating the state of labour or machinery and consolidating a point made in the text. The dejected face that Phimister uses on the front page of his book *Wangi Kolia – Coal, Capital and Labour* for example remains merely illustrative and elicits no textual analysis. But actually looking at it, set against a glowing red background, one could say that the face manifests great anxiety. Captured with a head bandage and a visibly swollen face, the photograph suggests a long period of possible exploitation and suffering. The man holds with both hands the 'stones that burn (coal)' and his unsmiling expression seems to suggest that this natural resource is now '*so close and yet so far away*'.¹¹ The glowing red background may perhaps be interpreted as symbolic of the violence that ensued in the process of exploiting what lay in the African landscape.

Once these cover images start to be problematised, however, it becomes apparent that the glorification of the evolutionary advancement of capital from the 'early days' might well be in contradiction with the content of the books. Van

8. Ian Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe 1890-1948: Capital accumulation and class struggle* (London, 1988).

9. Terri Barnes, 'Review of the book *An economic history of Zimbabwe, 1890 – 1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle*', *Southern African Review of Books*, Issue 7, February/March 1989, 41.

10. Phimister, *Economic and Social History*.

11. This expression is quoted here as suggestive of the inner feelings of the labourer who is made to participate in a visual economy in which he has no control.

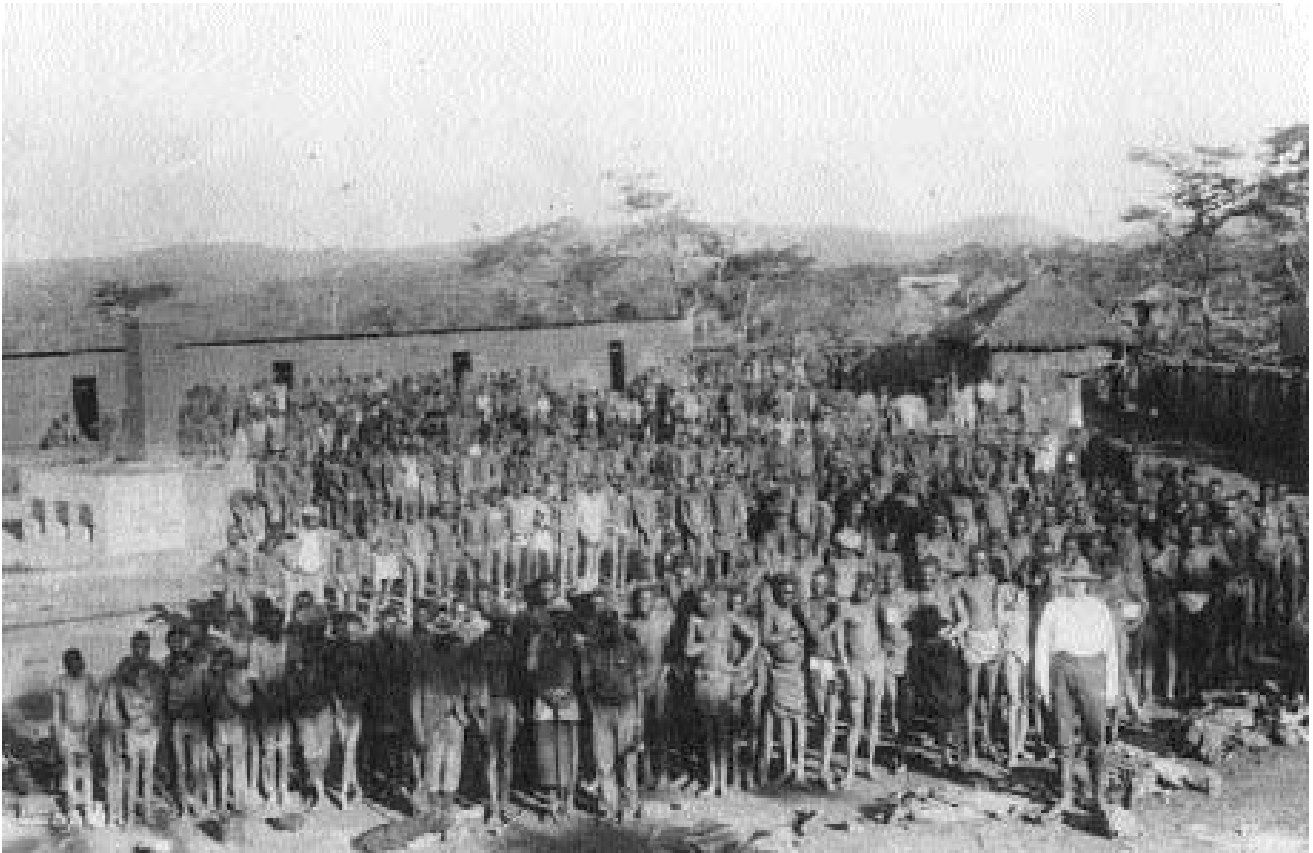


Figure 1. The cover of Charles van Onselen's book *Chibaro*.
'Workers at Waudever Mine, Shurugwi, 1898.'

Onselen has used probably one of the best-known photographs in the labour history of Zimbabwe on the front cover of his book *Chibaro*. Here too, there is no contextualisation or firm analysis of what this meant but instead, again, the image is seemingly meant to speak for itself.

This 1898 image, which appears on the front cover of *Chibaro*, represents the extent of colonial control over African space. It demonstrates power in its ability to organize and control labour in a manner that was not purely physically punitive. Coming after the 1893 and 1896-1897 wars of resistance by different Shona and Ndebele groups and their subsequent defeat by the British occupying force, these images in the aftermath of violent interaction were seemingly showcasing the level of submission of the conquered. The regimentation of bodies against the dormitory block in the background is reminiscent of the requirements of discipline and order of the army columns. This resonance with the military is not surprising, especially after the wars of resistance and the intended continuation of subjection in the newly perceived social order that also sought the total extermination of the spirit of resistance amongst the dominated indigenous people.

Closer examination reveals clothes strewn onto the ground and a large group of people is presented as naked. The acts of 'undressing' the African and

propagating such images are suggestive of ethnographic representations through what could be called the *capitalist gaze*. Through such images, the African landscape was being re-constructed and re-constituted in a manner that was meant to conform to the nineteenth century perceptions of the disciplining and training of bodies for the advancement of capitalist ideals.¹² The act of unclothing was also a propagation of the tribalisation process, showcasing how settler miners wanted to visualize the ‘other.’

The compound system that took root in the mining enterprises of colonial Zimbabwe adopted a military style of management. The select group of four black men in the foreground reveal such a pattern. Settler miners engaged some of the African labourers to enforce rules and regulations devised to maintain order amongst the rest of the labour force. Besides some kind of uniform that distinguishes them as well-clothed, the four men who were referred to as the ‘compound police’ are equipped with the ‘tools of their trade’ in the forms of sticks, knobkerries, and axes. The ‘compound police boy’ holding two sticks in his left hand also has his right hand in his pocket, a sign of relaxation and authority, a newly found comfort in his participation on the side of colonial power that seemingly overwhelms his undressed and tribalised compatriots.

The disciplinary paraphernalia was used in the adjudication of ‘justice’ with whippings being conducted either under instructions from the compound manager or by the manager himself. Van Onselen observed that failure to meet piecework targets for three consecutive days in a month was punishable with twenty-five lashes, carried out in the middle of the compound, naked and in full view of others as a deterrent.¹³ In the photograph there seems to be some form of activity, probably one of the lashing sessions taking place in the background during the photograph-taking ceremony. A group of people encircle the entrance of a hut in the far right hand corner of the photograph, suggestive perhaps that they are witnessing a beating within the premise.

The noticeable distance between the ‘police boys’ and the white mine manager highlights the mistrust that existed between these two forces of compound administration. Yet the two camps needed each other. The manager is unarmed, with no gun or any form of defence. The knobkerrie lies innocently on the ground as the labourers obediently presents themselves before the camera, in a suggestive state of capitulation and docility. The image fixes and propagates a new social order through purposefully organized space and gives an insight into understanding how power “...manifests not in its ability to inflict pain (alone) but by its ability to organize and coordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order.”¹⁴ The mine compound became the place for the ordering and disciplining of bodies not only through the use of the sjambok but also through photography. This was space,

12. This is an application of Tony Bennett’s argument concerning the ‘exhibitionary complex’, which propounds that the manifestation of power lies not in its ability to inflict pain but to control in a manner that the body of the worker is subjected to minimal physical force. See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics* (London, 1995), Chapter 2.

13. Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, 144.

14. Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 67.

away from women, where capitalist ideals of control and new realisms were enunciated mainly through the emasculation of the African male. This was an abstraction of reality that confined males to the mine compound where no females both black and white were allowed for the greater part of colonial invasion from 1890 to 1900.

Up to five labourers with white markers dangling from around their necks and onto their chests can be identified in the photograph. These were forms of identification not by actual name but by 'mine number' and first name. The first names were like Sixpence, Shilling (corrupted to Shereni in the vernacular), Tiriboyi (for three boys) or Boyi (for boy). The naming and re-naming was a process that was indicative of the infantilisation of the African man, meant for subjection and belittling. The name identified the individual more with the mine and work or mine compound situation than one's traditional birthrights. In the mine therefore new forms of identity were adopted that did not recognise the family identities of many of the workers that came to the mine. Some were even known by the names of their supervisors, whilst others got their names from the type of machines or mine tools they were using.¹⁵

It is precisely this concentration of power signals in the photograph that we are able to read in such documents that are invariably used by historians on the front cover of their publications. The fixation and propagation of these power relations between the settler miners and the local labour was made visible through photography. Loaded with meaning as has been demonstrated, there can never be a justification for the relegation of such documents to the front cover, as decorators or beautifiers of major publications. Indeed this image, save for being acknowledged as having been obtained from the National Archives of Zimbabwe, is not explained at all and is neither is it referred to in the whole publication.

Visualizing the Mining Landscape

The background to colonial mining in Zimbabwe starts with the activities of the British South Africa Company under Cecil John Rhodes. Through the Rudd Concession of 1888, all mining rights in the Mashonaland were purportedly ceded to the BSA Co. By signing this concession, King Lobengula of the Ndebele was duped into granting Rhodes and his company exclusive charge "...over all metals and minerals situated in my kingdoms..." including all areas under Ndebele influence and control. Lobengula later tried to repudiate the contract but to no avail as Queen Victoria and her British Government actually used the concession as justification in granting the BSA Co. its Charter for the occu-

15. This comes from interviews with some of the downcast mine labourers which revealed a pattern of these naming processes. Even the mine identity documents seemed to fix new forms of identification that comprised the mine number and the first or any other given name. Van Onselen observed that mine owners were able to do this because they were also at liberty to issue passes that enabled one to move from one location to another. This system also made it possible for one to assume various names depending on which suited the occasion and sometimes to hide previous identity that might have been associated with a bad record at one particular mine.

pation of Mashonaland and later Matabeleland.¹⁶ The Pioneer Corps marked their final march and occupation of Mashonaland by hoisting the Union Jack at Fort Salisbury (now Harare) under the watchful eyes of the locals. On the 1st October 1890, that is one day after the disbandment of the Pioneer Corps, individuals and small search parties of the settler force spread out in various directions in their bid to claim the promised mineral wealth of Mashonaland. Because the locals were resisting these manoeuvres on the part of the settler miners, colonial mining in Zimbabwe took place at a time of high political and social tension.



Figure 2. 'The first Peg in the country'. ce 1890

The desire to express the unfolding historical process in the newly acquired territory was demonstrated through the imaging of 'the first peg' on a mining claim by agents of the BSA Co. in Hartley (now Chegutu). Read within the context of the colonial process in this landscape, the land in the background had been framed to suggest richness and human emptiness. "The white man has taken over the landscape and all traces of the African must be obliterated."¹⁷ The colonial mapping of the land and mining sites required the deployment of technologies of vision, producing images that demonstrated the extent of the perceived emptiness of the landscape. Besides the pegs, various other claim markers were imprinted onto the African landscape and in most cases were followed by taking of photographs of these claimed spaces. As shown in the above photograph, instruments of demarcation like the measuring wheel and other survey equipment encroached on the African understanding of both the physical and conceptual notions of land, as will be discussed below. There are no roads or any form of human habitation in the frame. Richness, human emptiness and primitivism were characteristics that were meant to lure more settlers and this image of the first peg seems to be articulating these falsehoods.

Framed out of this photograph however are the pre-colonial mining sites, of which they were estimated to be over 4 000 in Zimbabwe prior to

16. The full version of the Rudd Concession can be found in the National Archives of Zimbabwe publication entitled *The Zimbabwe Epic* (Harare, 1982), 45.

the arrival of industrial capital in 1890. Summers contends that almost all major mines were founded on pre-colonial mining sites.¹⁸ Some of the exclusions therefore revolve around the obliteration of the historical landscapes of the indigenous peoples with measuring instruments that purported to bring order. The images therefore presented a space that required occupation and re-organization.

The claims to land and mineral wealth as advanced through the process of colonialism were contrary to the indigenous understanding of mineral production in the African context. The location of the mining sites, for example, was associated with secrecy and certain taboos that kept the rest of the population away from mining. In fact the sites were ‘women-reincarnate,’ associating the furnaces with reproduction. So many such ‘women’ were located in various centres that there existed a network of ‘known’ ‘productive women’ or the iron working sites. Except in isolated cases, smiths worked in their own localities with their own assistants or aides. “...These arts are not practised by all Bantu tribes, ...ancestral worship and devotion to the spirits of the dead master-smelters formed an integral part of the metallurgist’s religion...”¹⁹ Locations of furnaces therefore were mapped out through a network of smiths or specialists invariably known as ‘productive women.’ This semi-religious network also marked out the traditional value system of each locality.

The classic example of the VaNjanja in the Hwedza Mountains in Zimbabwe emphasises this point. Mostly the VaNjanja people worked these iron deposits almost exclusively but in a socially defined networking system of beliefs. Mining and mineral production invoked certain meanings and beliefs that were particularised to concerned communities. It meant therefore that mining was not randomly practised or enacted on what could be called commercial lines.²⁰ Mining and smelting of minerals in pre-colonial Zimbabwe was an activity done during the off-agricultural season and was an occupation that required expertise. “...Gold was considered as a luxury. The gold mining and other metallurgical activities had to be fitted into the normal cycle of the agricultural activity...”²¹ Macmillan also found that the religious pedigree with regards the iron or copper working “...seems ludicrous and absurd in our commercial age...”²²

From their arrival, settler miners were confronted with a number of complex and unknown forms of rituals and customs. Taking photographs and revealing what otherwise was taboo in the visited locality made these rituals, customs and taboos more approachable, less fearsome and therefore more controllable.

17. Patricia Hayes, ‘Northern Exposures: the photography of C.H.L. Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland 1915-1946’ in Hartmann et al (eds), *Colonising Camera*, 180.

18. Roger Summers, ‘Ancient Mining In Rhodesia’, *Museum Memoir No 3* (National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe) 1969, 107.

19. Allister Macmillan, *The Golden City*, (Johannesburg, 1934), 37. With thanks to Marijke du Toit for this reference.

20. See David Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe 900 – 1850* (Gweru, 1980), 81.

21. Robert S. Burrett, ‘Gold Mining in Colonial Zimbabwe’, *Heritage of Zimbabwe* Volume 15, 1995, 59 – 60.

22. Macmillan, ‘The Golden City’, 36.

The camera made these processes look and appear ordinary, perhaps quantifiable, and therefore little different from the known in the settler miners' places of origin. Through photography, the souls and the spiritual attachments between the iron-smiths and their 'women' were denigrated and made powerless, a reality that saw most of these sites being alienated from the communities to which they had been so much attached.

Boundaries and physical pegs of demarcation were not only put on these almost sacred places, they were also circulated through the photograph firstly as primitive spaces that beckoned occupation and later as landmarks in the beginnings of progress and modernisation. The physical peg as fixed both on the ground and through the photograph meant the arrival of capitalism, one that encouraged personal enrichment and exploitation of the latecomer. It meant the deprivation of the weak and the weakening of the indigenous social philosophy of wealth and community.²³



Figure 3. Coal Drilling at Tuli, ca 1894-1900.

In this photograph, the towering exploration technology is juxtaposed with labour. Through the camera lens, the men seated in the background are able to visualize the operation of power whilst at the same time being subjected to the surveillance of power. The 'native-nature' homology in European perceptions of Africa might possibly be at odds with the foregrounding of African labour 'in touch' with technology here. But the nakedness of the African bodies, as fixed through photography, presents a number of paradigms into what the colonization process sought to naturalise and perpetuate in the framing of what was perceived as the 'raw native.' It is this which resonates with the associated mining process in the image presented above. Diamond drilling was a

23. See also Dag Henrichsen, 'Claiming Space and Power in Pre-colonial Central Namibia: The Relevance of Herero Praise Songs' (unpublished seminar paper, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998). He argues that whilst there was a stampede by the German colonial officials to expropriate land from the local Namibians between 1904 and 1907, the definition of a map as given by the Germans was totally opposed to the local Herero belief system that identified such place names through praise songs and oral tradition.

process of exploration in untouched or virgin ground of which the extracted cores of minerals or rock samples would then be analysed in a scientific laboratory and the results used to determine the viability of the explored area. It is the juxtaposition of the perceived naturalness of both labour and the virginity of the unexplored territory that appear to preoccupy the photographer in this instance.

Liz Wells argues that acts of looking and recording can never be neutral, disinterested or innocent, but are conscious processes that contain and express relations of power and control.²⁴ Trachtenberg further suggests that: “The photographic image does not belong to the natural world. It is a product of human labour, a cultural object whose being ...cannot be dissociated from its historical meaning ...”²⁵ The man on the right pulls back his shirt and the one on the left could have been under instruction to be semi-naked. The ‘raw native’ had to be ‘processed’ into a useful subject within the framework of capitalism, expressed here through the juxtaposition with the perceived technology of progress. The white man on the left, half-framed out, is identified as Mr. Schon and the two men on the machine, together with their colleagues in the background sink into oblivion, consumed by the intended ethnographies of tribalisation.

As a way of seeking maximum participation of local labour, van Onselen points out that there was a system of forced labour on the colonial mines in Zimbabwe and every adult was under some obligation to serve a certain period on the mines for free. Children were also encouraged to assist their parents in fulfilling such contracts. Jonathan Crary argues that visibility coincided with methods of administering large populations of workers and other groups and that this process required definite relations of power in the pursuit of production through the coerced assistance and subdued cooperation of this labour. “Modernization consists (of the) production of manageable subjects through...a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering a group of men docile and useful... This policy...called for a technique of overlapping subjection and subjugation...”²⁶

The despair that engulfed the African communities on colonial mines emanated from the expansionist urgency of imperial forces in the territory, which sought the creation and naturalization of the proletarianisation of the peasantry. Whereas the pre-colonial communities had established their own way of survival, with their economies sustained through agriculture and some trading on the east coast, the settler economy created conditions that forced these local people onto the colonial enterprises like the mines. A hut tax, for example, was enacted to apply to every able-bodied adult whilst there was also a deliberate attempt to restrict indigenous people’s access to land, which provided alternative

24. Wells, *Photography*, 58.

25. Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs* (New York, 1989), 5.

26. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge MA, 1995), 15.

potential sources of income.²⁷ Forced to seek employment on the colonial enterprises, the indigenous peoples were thus driven to despair and disillusion, stuck within a system of exploitation that offered no hope and no chance for withdrawal. Cut off from any sources of income under heavy taxation, African families developed unending propensities for cash, which could be found only on white enterprises. A great number of these labourers were soon accommodated in the mine compounds, which in most cases were described by the compound inspectors during the late 1800s and early 1900s as uninhabitable.



Figure 4. Digging and blasting foundations for the battery.

It is the role of the ‘boss-boy’ or the ‘gang-leader,’ which is brought into focus in this photograph of Rezende mine site near Mutare in eastern Zimbabwe. The caption of this photograph reads “Digging and blasting foundations for the battery.” Whilst the issue of labour disenfranchisement was discussed elsewhere in this paper, it is the combination of the envisioned ‘progress’ with a backdrop of the suggestively ‘primitive’ people and what the caption intended to propagate to the viewer that we may interrogate here. This is an undated photograph but it can be inferred that it dates from the period of capital penetration in Zimbabwe. This was a time when early settler miners seemed to be in competition with each other in the production of images that ‘captured’ the achievements in the perceived land of ‘savages.’

The ‘boss-boy’ proudly stands in front of the rest of the naked figures that look on bemused in the background. The long sjambok that he holds is a clear manifestation of the authority that has perhaps been invested in him by the white boss who sits at ease with a pet dog on his lap. The ‘boss-boy’ is unusually well clothed with a hat, a nice pair of trousers and a waistcoat. To cap it all, he has the privilege of possessing a smoking pipe, perhaps given to him by his boss as a token of appreciation for maintaining discipline amongst the labour force. The man stands in apparent authority, a signification of the status he had gained within the colonial structure. The white miner relaxes in the foreground with his back to the perceived ‘savages’, who are appropriately undressed for the photographic ceremony. All those in the background stand at attention.

27. Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, 91.



Figure 5. 'Globe and Phoenix Settlement' ca 1908 - 1912.

The neatly laid out huts at Globe and Phoenix mine, as depicted in this photograph, represented efforts to convince the state that something was being done to look after the mine's labour force. This could have passed indeed as a true representation of the improvements, as the focus seems to be on the neatly white-washed huts. But it is the failure to notice visual detail that at times facilitates the subordination of photographs to texts. Tucked away in the left hand corner is a block that was constructed in 1901 for the accommodation for the workers. This was a major source of outcry, upheavals and even strikes in the labour history of this mine. The rooms in the building were fitted with wooden bunks in tiers of three, each room measuring 36 metres by 4.5 metres, and could accommodate 160 men when full. Furthermore, the general state of the compound premises was not conducive to the health of workers. In a letter to R. J. Allright, the mine manager at Globe and Phoenix at the time, the Inspector wrote that "...I must notify you that unless refuse and old cattle kraal are taken away and the premises are kept in sanitary condition, in future you will be prosecuted in terms of section 112 and 113 of the Mines and Minerals Ordinance..."²⁸ In fact, from its inception around roughly 1895, the mine compound at Globe and Phoenix mine was condemned as "...the most disgraceful of all compounds..."²⁹ Photographs of this time framed out this compound reality and conveniently hides this menace from view. Images and other archival material reveal a systematic documentation by the compound inspectors who intended to either hide or obliterate the obnoxious treatment of black labour in the compounds.

Before demolition, the huts in the Globe and Phoenix Compound were of wood and iron construction. This made them unbearably hot during the day and extremely cold at night. Of consequence in the provision of such accommodation was the level of insensitivity on the part of the employer. Besides the hard labour in the mine and little food, the uncomfortable living quarters extorted the last threads of dignity that was being heavily eroded through slavery (chibharo). In justifying the living conditions at Globe and Phoenix mine, and in reference to the concrete bunks in the dormitory, the inspector of compounds retorted "...at least beds of some sort were available at a time when Mine Managers loathed to incur extra costs on proper accommodation."³⁰

28. National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), File 6/1/16.

29. NAZ File NB 6/4/16.

30. NAZ File NB 6/1/13.



Figure 6. 'Steam-cooking pots' ca 1910 - 1915

After much pressure from some quarters of the state administration, steam-cooking pots were installed on certain mines as a way of minimising hunger that was quite common amongst mineworkers on these mines up to about the 1930s. This photograph of steam-cooking pots was taken at the Lonely Mine site near Bulawayo in the south-western region of Zimbabwe. The neatly arranged huts of the compounds hoodwinked the exploitative nature of mining of this time and it is the transition to betterment characterised by such provisions that obliterated the social histories of the compound system. Prior to these efforts towards proper accommodation and living conditions in general, the Inspectors of Compounds to some mines in colonial Zimbabwe reported that "...the examination of the excreta of mine native workers in the habit of cooking their own meals will show that a large portion of the meal is almost unaltered after passing through the body ..."³¹ This observation was quite accurate taking into account that workers were to do long hours underground, up to 15 hours with extensions if one had not completed his task.

Centrally prepared food had its advantages, but disadvantaged those who could not partake because of their religious orientations. There were those like the VaMwenyi of the Islamic religion who would not eat meat from a cow or any animal, which they did not slaughter in the proper fashion. Although not meant for them, such images sent signals of hope to the workers and enhanced labour participation in the exploitation of the mineral resources. However, if combined with the credit system at the mine store and the arbitrary imposition of fines for 'offences' and other taxes demanded, the labourer was left with no disposable income.

These conditions constructed a dependent worker, who had to be clothed, fed and directed in daily activities both in the compound and underground, a systematic process of infantilisation of African men. Images of cooking in the compound and the white men's living quarters show males functioning as cooks. However, the African social system recognized the sharing of duties between men and women. Because there were no women in this mining environment, other men took up some of the roles of women back home. This arrangement meant a complete change in the social landscape that extended to the workers' places of origin.³²

31. NAZ File A3/18/30/4, vol. 2.

32. Whilst in the village, women took control of things around the home, including male chores.

The dependency that the system created was remarked upon by some mine managers who complained that they had to do everything for the African who "...displayed no great skill, ...their chief objective being to earn sufficient money for the hut tax ...and return to the kraal at the slightest of opportunities where they lead a life of extreme indolence..."³³ Read against this background, the images of cooking pots could have been attempts to represent this infantilism of African space and its people. What created indifference amongst the indigenous peoples against white enterprises was precisely this riotous attitude of 'othering' that was also instrumental in the cutting off of any black aspiration and egotism.

Men, machines and ethnography

Tony Bennett argues that an 'exhibitionary complex' emerged in the nineteenth century, "...with expositions that highlighted the ideology of organizing, transforming displays of machinery and industrial processes ...into material signifiers of progress."³⁴ The compound system that I have analysed in this text became such 'a site of sight' where labour was made visible not only to itself but also to the controlling vision of power. The images of technology in the perceived uninhabited African spaces or land of 'savages' was a propagation of the colonial notions of progress and modernization of these primitive spaces.

The images that I present below are suggestive of this notion of the transformation of the African landscape through the way the camera was positioned and operated to highlight prominent features selected for inclusion in the frame. The results of labour discipline and control are also made visible through the photographer's ability to coerce mine workers into official photographic ceremonies, which included drilling and blasting activities as well as surface work like wood-cutting and piling.



Figure 7. 'Tailings Wheel, Globe and Phoenix Mine', 1899

This photograph of the 1899 Tailings Wheel at Globe and Phoenix mine in central Zimbabwe manifests what visuality was meant to achieve in the presentation of chosen landscapes. Not only is this image suggestive of the desired transformation of African space through the way the machines have been captured in the frame, but it also assumes the factory as a sign of the desired modernization processes.

33. NAZ File 6/1/16.

34. Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 67.

The obsession with ordering things was extended to nature where, using local labour, wood was piled in neat rows close to the machinery of modernization. This not only served to show good housekeeping, but also signified the amount of discipline expected of the involved labour. The favoured wood type for the boiler fires, which can be seen on the right hand corner of the above image, was the mopani. The wood was very hard, so hard that the axes that were initially being used would snap whilst circular saws warped easily and the users developed terrible blisters on their hands. These blisters were not acceptable to the white supervisor who would take that as signs of laziness and was more-often-than-not punishable through a prescribed number of lashes.³⁵ The ‘wood-eaters’ as the boilers were referred to, resulted in the depletion of indigenous forests around most mines in Zimbabwe together with the once-plentiful wild life, which was driven from these landscapes to increasingly restricted grazing areas.³⁶



Figure 8. ‘Tremain Stamp mill’, ca 1908 - 1914.

Men sit on the amalgam plates, where gold is processed, whilst the visual representation of the technology of progress is clearly framed in this undated image. The archival caption identifies the two Tremain stamp mills in the background and not the people in the foreground. These machines were reported later in one of the Mining Journals that 40 such stamp mills were in operation in colonial Zimbabwe between 1908 and 1920.³⁷ It can therefore be said that the image presents a mechanical assimilation of African labour as an unidentifiable fragment. It is the mechanical equipment that is given context and prominence and not the African mine workers. Thus, such images provided some visual proof of the much-awaited success. The dejection and possibly the resistance can be read on the men’s faces for they seem to be in deep contemplation. The act of bringing the arms together like that of the black man on the right is a metaphoric sign of capitulation, one that can not be in operation without the command of the owner but one that also signifies protection of inner interests of being. The imaging of seriousness is one that marked the mining environment of the colonial epoch and is manifest on all men in this photograph and indeed in all visual signs of this time.

35. This has been cited in a number of publications and is also documented in the colonial sources at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. See also Phimister, *Wangi Kolia*.

36. Rotary Club of Que Que, ‘Olden Que Que’ (unpublished pamphlet, Kwe Kwe, 1982), 28.



Figure 9. 'Working underground, Bindura, 1915'.



Figure 10. 'Drilling at Globe and Phoenix 1899'.

This photograph was taken around 1915 at a mine in Bindura, north-east of Zimbabwe, at a time when missionaries were penetrating the landscape and also taking photographs that portrayed clothed Africans on Mission stations. This image therefore provides another dimension in the colonial economy of power in harnessing photography for the administration and control of colonised subjects in the new territory. Examination of the ore extraction activity will show that these are staged postures, capturing action at the point of impact. Whilst the image of a white supervisor lurks in the background, there is also the pre-occupation on the three-quarter views, the attire and scarifications on the bodies of the mineworkers. These are suggestive of ethnographic representations. The cramped space in which this image was taken suggests not only disorder amongst the objectified labour but also the repressive conditions under which the workers operated.

This photograph (Figure 10) was taken in about 1900 at the Globe and Phoenix mine in central Zimbabwe.³⁸ The machine that the two men are 'operating' is called a jackhammer, nicknamed the 'widow-maker,' because of its potential to cause nervous breakdown or even death with continuous use. The discourse of the human body and machines revolve around the way the mining environment cultivated the notion of emasculation of African men both in the compound and underground. The daily contact with his machine, which sometimes became more-or-less personal, was a means that gave the worker access to daily rations in the compound and eventually his wage at the end of the ticket month.³⁹ This was an association that created near-intimacy between man and machine.

37. *Ibid.*, 41.

38. The caption to this image reads 'Men working underground, Globe and Phoenix mine'.

39. A ticket month was anything between 30 and 45 days depending on when one was considered by his supervisor to have satisfactorily completed his tasks underground. See Van Onselen, *Chibaro*.

I remember when I was working underground at Gath's mine how these machines became so personalized that there was literally fighting if anyone happened to take the other's machine. I also heard how on numerous occasions in various mines some workers had to be recalled from leave when particular machines would not start. The machines became domesticated and 'personal' property which many men saw as reminiscent of the relationship between them and their wives.

This image shows two workers 'married' to one machine, but of course one was the operator and the other his assistant. The assistant was not expected to take over from the operator, thus the machine remained in the emotional ownership of the operator who was expected to look after it, ensuring that it was always in good working order.

One particularly excruciating reality in this type of work situation during this time was the lack of proper treatment if workers sustained injuries or illness. Whilst the photograph was officially commissioned, perhaps parading labour at work, there is also a huge element of risk that can be read from this image (Figure 10). Mine labourers of this period had no protective clothing, thus were exposed to various forms of danger like lacerations, rock falls causing deep head and bodily cuts which led to profuse bleeding and infections.

Although the mine officials employed male black nursing staff for what was known as the African Hospital, these were reportedly not popular at all with the rest of the labour force. This was not only because they were untrained in medicine, but also that they were mostly under the instruction of white mine officials who knew very little about medicine. Furthermore, due to the mistrust amongst the various groups working together at the mine, many black labour patients were opting for 'traditional' treatment away from the mine. There is still much debate today as to the role of medicinal herbs in African communities. The coming of settler miner ideology put into disarray the use of traditional medicine which was to be associated with witchcraft and barbarism. There are many examples that point to this way of thinking and many communities, not only in Zimbabwe but also in the whole of Africa, found themselves exposed to undesirable labelling because of the use of indigenous medicines and associated practices.

The parade of the 'signifiers of progress' in the unfolding African landscape also carried notions of how settler miners had coerced African labour into submission and how they were seemingly cooperating in the production process. Since they expected dividends, the shareholders of mining concerns sought assurance from what was actually going on in this southern African 'eldorado'. The photographic images I have highlighted in this section appear overwhelmingly to signal the utilization of capital in the new landscape.

The archival caption (Figure 11) reads 'Mashonas Playing Tsoro' taken from the photographer's caption that is written boldly on top of photograph. It is possible that this image was circulated as a postcard, due to the emphasis put on the hairstyles and the engagement in some sport amongst the local 'tribal' groups. Who these 'Mashonas' were is not clear in the photograph. It is that process of non-identification or classification of non-European races into collective identities that we confront in many of the colonial photographs of this era.



Figure 11. 'Mashonas Playing Tsoro'
ca 1900.

Anybody who has played this game would know that it is played by only one person at a time. In this frame there are five hands in play. This is perhaps a framing that borders on stereotyping, associating certain groups of people with confusion and being playful as implied in the photographic title. But perhaps it is this discourse of confusion and submission that the photographer picks on to construct his notion of the 'Mashonas'. What we do not see are other people who would normally constitute the audience to this enjoyable game. This is not a secret game played in the absence of onlookers. The men are crouching on their haunches and playing from a rudimentary set-up.

Alongside these stereotypical framing were the cultural dances, which were encouraged not as a perpetuation of cultural values but as what was called 'savage' entertainment. Pankhurst cites the presentation of wrestling of the Nuba of Sudan during official colonial occasions as one such an example.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as van Onselen argues, these dances were hijacked by the colonial force to display: "...a happy black worker, ...thus (a) visual confirmation of the settler mythology describing contented tribesmen. Workers who danced ...did not provoke questions about forced labour..."⁴¹ As a tool of social control therefore dancing provided harmless self-expression that diverted the mind from exploitation.

Conclusion

This article has sought to analyse and contextualise a series of photographs of early colonial mining in Zimbabwe. There are many questions that remain unanswered in the analysis of these images; further research and understanding of them as historical documents is necessary for these photographs which for too long have featured only as front cover pages of major publications. This article sought not only to demonstrate how the settler miners produced and propagated photographic representations of the encountered landscape and its people, but also how these became sites for the unbalanced power relations between the settler miners and the local labour in Zimbabwe. The images portrayed a labour force that had been subdued both physically through the use of the sjambok and also visually through photography.

40. Hayes, 'Northern Exposures', 177.

41. Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, 188.

The question that needs serious consideration now is a contemporary one, namely the meanings of these images from the colonial visual economy if they were to be presented or exhibited now in a post-independent Zimbabwe. How we utilize these images today rests to a great extent on how we represent the past in relation to present aspirations. There is no doubt, as Hayes argues, that photography has had a huge impact on the African areas falling under what was called the 'metropolitan gaze.' The images from this colonial epoch in Zimbabwe therefore have to be seen as inseparable from the 'ideal conquest' of colonialism. But this conquest is 'ideal', not necessarily 'real' for those concerned – the subjects of the camera - in this photographic-historical study.

This sense of representational conquest is also a product of the processes of archiving in a Zimbabwe under colonial conditions. This research has revealed that not many individual photographs of mine labourers exist either from the National Archives of Zimbabwe or the hereditary mine labour itself. Exhaustive searches at the Archives revealed very little of those relating directly to the mine compound outside officially commissioned images. The mining compounds were well-regulated spaces, with the few non-workers who were let inside being subjected to pass laws and whose movements were restricted within such establishments. Most of the social activities were done under the watchful eye of the compound management and its agents, with any request from outsiders referred immediately to the mine authorities. Thus it can be concluded that since not many individual photographs came out of the mine compound, there were efforts by the management to control the taking of any images. The mine authorities not only retained the grip on the movements of the worker, they also maintained a check on the type of images that would eventually circulate in communities beyond the compound. This was done mainly through maintaining vigilance, and a deliberate surveillance system that isolated whoever was visiting the mine premises and for whatever purpose.

The images from this colonial epoch in Zimbabwe may be inseparable from the 'ideal conquest' of colonialism, but this is not necessarily the end of the possible narratives around them. As Hayes et al argue,

It is obvious that exposure to images can activate powerful mechanisms of remembrance or association. When there is a conjuncture between photographs and stored knowledge (or images) of the past, a process of re-cognition and release takes place, which produces fresh new historical narratives infused with both intellect and emotion.⁴²

Visuality therefore becomes indispensable in the study of public history because of its ability to evoke memory, emotion, and the narration of remembered experience through oral history. Perhaps this is the area of interchange to which the contemporary uses of colonial photographs of mining in Zimbabwe should be directed.

42. Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, 'Photography, history and memory' in Hartmann et al (eds), *Colonising Camera*, 9.