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A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

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Title: Tin Mining in the Valley of Heaven.

by: Jonathan Crush

No. 205

> I remember the beauties of the Valley of Heaven as though it were yesterday, still the difficulties that befell us there made me at that time regard it as the Valley of Hell."
>
> O. O'Neil, 1921.

Immediately to the south of the Swaziland capital of Mbabane lie the Malegwane Hill and, at its feet, the Ezulwini Valley, geographical heartland of the powerful nineteenth century Swazi state under the military kings Sobhuza I and Mswati (Bonner, 1983). The sacred places of Swazi lore and the royal villages of successive Swazi kings and queens dot the valley and the flanking granite outcrops of the Mdimba Hills to the east. It was to one of these villages, Embekelweni, that two Scots mining prospectors came in 1874 and acquired the first of over fifty mineral concessions eventually granted by the Swazi king Mbandeni. The concessions covered the entire country but only a handful were ever profitably worked. Several of these were in the Ezulwini Valley itself. Today the Valley is cluttered with the debris of a century of capitalist penetration; canneries, casinos, campgrounds, cotton fields and much more besides jostle one another for space on the increasingly crowded valley floor. Possibly the most unsightly landscape markers of all are the bright red slashes of gully erosion which punctuate the base of the Lupohlo and Mantenga Hills on the west side of the valley. These scars stand as silent testimony to an all but forgotten phase in the life of the area and to a vibrant history of struggle on the valley floor. Here (and in several localities around the town of Mbabane itself) cassiterite tin was regularly mined between 1894 and 1948.

This paper is part of a larger effort to recover the shrouded history of the Swaziland mining industry locked up in relict landscapes, archival records and the memories of Swazi workers and peasants. The bigger project will encompass the better-known, though equally unresearched, mining of asbestos at Havelock and iron ore at Ngwenya (which like the tin industry before it, is now defunct). To date my attention has focussed on documentary sources for the period before 1920 and the light which their study can bring to the veiled history of tin mining in the Valley of Heaven.

Recent studies of mining and migrancy in southern Africa have tended to focus upon large-scale, labour-intensive gold, copper and diamond production in the core industrial areas of the sub-continent; in particular the Witwatersrand, Kimberley and the Zambian copperbelt (Johnstone, 1976; Perrings, 1979; Lacey, 1981; Levy, 1982; Parpart, 1985; Jeeves, 1985). Much less attention has been paid to the nature and impact of local mining operations in the rural periphery (although see Van Onselen, 1976; Shapiro, 1985). This situation is regrettable since the history of such operations shows up some of the essential weaknesses of capitalism in colonial Africa and the particular difficulties facing colonial capitalist enterprise plunged into an agrarian setting. Despite its proximity to a potentially voluminous labour supply, peripheral mining faced continuous problems in securing

sufficient labour, and in holding and controlling the labour which it did acquire. The absence of any marked spatial separation between centres of capitalist production and the rural homesteads of the mine workforce, so characteristic of migrant labour systems in general, therefore impinged directly on the production and profitability of peripheral mining. Thus even when capital went to labour (rather than the more pervasive opposite scenario) its problems with worker control were far from resolved. Indeed, the juxtaposition of capitalist enterprise and peasant economy tended, if anything, to intensify the conflict between labour and capital on the mines, particularly over the use and disposition of time.

In colonial southern Africa, the dependence of many rural homesteads on migrant labour and peasant production meant that conflicts over the issue of capitalist time-thrift were particularly enduring and intense. Indeed, some recent studies have demonstrated that such conflicts tended to intensify over time despite the erosion of the rural productive base (Beinart, 1982; Crush, 1987). In order to capture the time-space paths of a migrant working class still rooted in peasant economy, capital and the colonial state resorted to a battery of coercive controls (Cooper, 1984). These included rigorous enforcement of work-discipline at the point of production; a battery of extra-economic and legal constraints on migrant behaviour; attempts to manipulate social and economic conditions in the rural supplier areas; and the use of various incentives to alter the periodicity and timing of migrancy (Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman, forthcoming).

As this paper suggests, however, all of these methods were much less successful when there was no substantial distancing of capitalist workplace and rural homestead. In 1937, an irate petition from settlers in Swaziland complained that "when the native is on the (Johannesburg) mines he cannot leave whenever it suits him" but in Swaziland itself "the native is near his home and is continually absenting himself to attend to his own affairs, crops, illness at his kraal, beer drinks, or anything else that turns up. He is working off a dead horse and is inclined to spin out the time as much as he can."[1] This sort of pattern was not unusual in peripheral mining operations in the region at large. What made the Swazi case distinctive was the perpetuation of strong links between Swazi commoners and the Swazi ruling class in the countryside. In Swaziland, in addition to recurrent homestead obligations, miners remained enmeshed in a web of demands by local figures of authority which impinged directly upon their labour market behaviour. Attempts by the mines to resolve these problems by relying on labour from further afield were not without their contradictions either.

Cassiterite tin was first located in Swaziland in the early 1890s. The tin was largely concentrated in an eighty-mile long belt of alluvial gravels which stretched from Oshoek on the Transvaal border in a south-easterly direction to the Mhlatuzane River, where it disappeared beneath the Karoo sediments (Hall, 1913; Scott, 1950). Accessible deposits of tin occurred throughout this zone and in the later years of the industry tin was mined as far south as Kabuta. The bulk of the payable deposits were located around Mbabane and to the west side of the Ezulwini Valley where the over-burden was sufficiently penetrable and the water resources were abundant enough to allow access to the tin-rich gravels

below. To the north-west of Mbabane tin lodes did occur in situ in pegmatite veins but it was only at Forbes Reef, and that for a very brief period, that anything other than alluvial mining occurred in Swaziland.

During its sixty year existence the tin mining industry experienced rapid and dramatic changes in fortune. The quantity of tin dressed and the revenue derived from its export fluctuated sharply from year to year (Figure 2.) Foreign capitalists and investors had a continual love-hate relationship with the Swazi tin fields, never being prepared to subscribe sufficient capital yet always the first to complain when profits failed to meet expectations. As early as 1892 the Witwatersrand magnate Lionel Phillips recorded his penchant for Swazi tin on the grounds that "it won't involve a big outlay and may be very profitable".[2] He was proved right on the first score but not on the second. As a result, companies and syndicates were constantly being floated, liquidated and resuscitated.

In the 1890s little or no profitable tin mining took place. Concessions over tin-bearing land were held by a number of small syndicates who extracted the metal in a desultory, wasteful and haphazard manner, using tribute miners. The most important of the companies was the Ryan Tin Syndicate which raised approximately 500 tons of dressed tin in the 1890s. In 1892 the Swazi Resident Advisor, Offy Shepstone, persuaded a reluctant group of Rand mining capitalists that tin was "the best and only chance of making something out of Swaziland."[3] Capital was subscribed and the Ryan Syndicate acquired title to seven concessions covering an area of 50 000 acres in the Mbabane and Ezulwini areas.[4] The Ryan Syndicate staggered along for six years, alternating between tribute mining and direct production. The success of the tributors was mixed. Most obtained sizable advances from the company and eventually left the country heavily in debt. Only one, an Australian named Foy with previous experience in tin, made a living. In 1899 the Syndicate was forced to liquidate its assets, a victim of high transport costs, inexperienced management, labour and capital shortages, and political uncertainty. The plant that remained was smashed and looted during the South African War.[5] Between 1899 and 1905 there was no mining whatever (Fawns, 1905). In 1906 world tin prices rose above £200 a ton and Swaziland tin became a viable proposition. By 1911 five tin properties were being worked. Between 1905 and 1920 cassiterite tin constituted over 50% of Swaziland's exports by value. The success of the industry was consequently a major item on the agenda of the impoverished British colonial administration in the country. In the partition of land between Swazi and foreign interests in 1908, for example, great pains were taken to excise the tin mines from the reserves. In 1911, colonial officials colluded in a cover-up with mine management over an investigation into unsafe working conditions at one of the major mines. Before the 1920s the main tin producer was Swaziland Tin Limited (with 70-90% of total output in the 1910s) which went into production in 1905 after a takeover by the Rand mining house, H. Eckstein & Company.[6] Other mining houses acquired interests in Swazi tin but these properties showed much less promise and were worked on a tribute basis by individual white miners or small syndicates such as Polongeni Tins, Usutu Tin and McCreedy Tins.

The best years for the industry were between 1910 and 1920 when high prices of over £300 a ton stimulated the production of several thousand tons of dressed tin with a market value of over £200.[7] Thereafter the industry went into slow decline discouraged by the 1920s crash, high costs and the gradual exhaustion of payable reserves. In the mid-1920s and again in the mid-1930s there was fleeting respite. In the late 1920s, South African capitalists withdrew their support and most of the companies were sold off to local white settlers. Small-scale operations, employing between 500 - 1 000 workers at any one time, continued into the late 1940s.

The profitability of the tin mines was continually compromised by four factors: high transportation costs; the labour-intensive nature of tin mining; the cost of reproducing the workforce; and the work behaviour of the miners themselves. Before the 1920s the bulk of the tin ore was exported via the port of Lourenco Marques in neighbouring Mozambique. Without the benefit of a direct rail link all transport to the nearest railhead had to be undertaken in ox-drawn wagons; a costly, difficult and time-consuming venture.[8] Some sense of the problem can be gleaned from a contemporary description of this mode of transportation in Swaziland:

> Next morning we started down the steep slopes of the valley. This was a very dangerous descent for the wagons, so that it was after mid-day before we reached the floor of the valley ... our energy was sapped, the animals were worn out, and our boys were lazy beyond all use. The trail ahead consisted of low hills cut by little streams. Many of the inclines were steep and I estimated that we would by lucky if we made five or six miles a day ... we did most of our travelling by dark. This helped a little, but we failed to make more than a mile every two hours, even when the going was good.
>
> (O'Neil, 1921 : 262-3)

The lack of rail transport kept the coal mines of Swaziland out of production completely. The Swazi Coal Mines Limited, whose major shareholder was H. Eckstein & Company, had mined over 2 000 tons of coal at their lowveld property east of Bremersdorp in the 1890s. The coal sat at the pithead for many years after the South African War,[9] and was gradually sold off to Swazi homesteads for domestic use. Eckstein's advanced enough money for the upkeep of the property but not enough to put the mine into production, because transport facilities were so rudimentary. The tin (and local gold) producers were more successful in overcoming the transport constraint, because of the high tin prices and the relative proximity of the northern gold mines to a railhead. Nevertheless, transport costs bit deeply into potential profits and kept wages low. This was true for individual tributors and small syndicates with limited capital as well as major Rand mining houses who did not want to lose money on peripheral properties. In 1928, the South African Railways established a bus freight service linking the tin mines with the eastern Transvaal railhead of Breyten but by then most of the profit

bearing tin had already been mined. In the 1930s and 1940s Swazi tin was sold on a depressed South African market.

The companies used two methods of raising tin. The first was the tribute (or colloquially styled "cheaper-than-chinaman") system where white tributors recruited and employed their own gangs of 10 to 20 black workers on each creek. The tributors were paid £33 per ton of dressed tin in 1907 but this method was abandoned soon thereafter since productivity was low, methods inefficient and labour recalcitrant. Under the second, and favoured method, the companies engaged gangs of 20-40 labourers themselves to remove the over-burden and sluice the rich tin-bearing gravels at the bottom of creeks. Each gang had its own black nduna and a white overseer was put in charge of several gangs. Suggestions to do away with the overseers and to concentrate larger labour gangs do not appear to have been followed through. Proposals to use Swazi families as tribute miners were not implemented either.[10] The alluvial nature of the tin deposits and the sluicing method of recovering tin ore called for a labour intensive operation. A network of drainage furrows, some up to 20 kms in length, had to be dug in order to tap and channel the headwaters of the area's drainage systems. Then the overburden had to be broken up (which varied in thickness from 2 to 20 metres), the gravel shovelled into sluice boxes, and the cassiterite removed after sluicing. In 1911 the companies made an important technological innovation when hydraulic monitors were introduced from Malaysia to break up the overburden. Labour demand slackened, productivity and output increased and the cost of recovering cassiterite fell by 40 per cent.

During the early years of the industry, the tin mines were regularly short-staffed. Swazi participation in wage employment of any kind was desultory and sporadic before the second decade of this century. For those Swazi homesteads who did release labour, the low wages and poor conditions on the local mines were unattractive. Wages were far below those on offer at various South African centres and living conditions were particularly squalid. Rations were meagre and unattractive. One reason for this was that the mines were unable to secure a regular and sufficient quality of maize from local producers. White farmers were having their own difficulties with labour and proved unable to sell maize at a competitive price. Few Swazi homesteads were willing or able to supply maize to the mines. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, Swazi agriculture was in deep crisis during the first two decades of the century and many homesteads were themselves becoming dependent on imported maize. The local mines were forced to import from trading firms in the eastern Transvaal who were never averse to a little price-gouging.[12] To compensate for the high costs, and to recapture a portion of the mine wage, the companies established small stores on the mine properties where miners could supplement their poor diet with meat, sugar and vegetables.[13] Local mine managers spoke repeatedly of the difficulties and gloomy prospects for the industry:

> We have had frequent experience of the scarcity of unskilled labour available even for the modest requirements of the present ... It seems very curious but it's a fact and if tomorrow we required 1 000 or even 500 unskilled labourers we

> would be at a loss to find them - locally at any rate ... The authorities are entirely sympathetic but unfortunately under present conditions they, like the employers, are helpless for the remedy lies with the Swazi himself.[14]

Even when one of the local mines raised its wages, the impact was minimal; in 1906, one mine was unable to increase its labour complement from 250 to 550 by temporarily doubling wages.[15] Although mine managers appealed to the local administration for assistance in meeting their labour needs, the state had limited powers in directing labour their way.

In late 1906, the mine managers presented a strong case to the High Commissioner that without firmer state assistance the industry would collapse. Selborne immediately declared open support for the local mines although he did not abandon the state's overarching commitment to the South African labour market. In an address to the Swazi people in Mbabane he urged that:

> All those men who can work ought to go and work for it is necessary for their prosperity and that of the country that they should do so. Particularly do I wish the Paramount Chief and the chiefs to see that of those young men who seek work, a sufficient number should seek work in the mines and industries of Swaziland. It is well for Swaziland that many Swazis should go and seek work in the Transvaal, but it is bad for Swaziland that so few should seek work in Swaziland itself.[16]

Selborne wanted the local mines to prosper, because the colonial state gained revenue through taxation on mining profits, and he wanted local labour in the mines, because capital was being drained from the country through foreign migrants' wages. Given the inability of the state to move Swazi labour to the Rand it seemed logical that they should work locally and buttress the revenue-starved administration.

Unable to secure sufficient labour locally, the mines were forced to rely on imported Mozambican labour, thus reinforcing a pattern which had emerged in the late 1890s. At that time the majority of workers in a small mine labour force of under 2 000 were Mozambicans. The footpaths of Swaziland were worn smooth by these migrants who transformed the mines of the country into "a halting if not a kindergarten for boys travelling Randwards" by stopping no longer than a month or two.[17] On their return journey many more Mozambicans made a detour through Swaziland to buy cattle. The country acquired a reputation as the "stockyard" of southern Africa in the years before rinderpest as Swazis disposed of large numbers of cattle to white and black buyers: "several thousands must be expended annually by Tonga and Portuguese natives, who, returning from the goldfields, elect to invest their money in Swazi stock and pay good prices too, for their acquisitiveness".[18] The investment of mine wages in Swazi cattle by miners was probably one way of circumventing the restrictive conditions governing marriage

transactions in southern Mozambique, of which Patrick Harries has written.

The resuscitation of the Swaziland mines in the first decade of British rule again drew Mozambican migrants going to the Witwatersrand, though not now on the return journey. Swazi herds were decimated by rinderpest and East Coast Fever between 1898 and 1905 and few homesteads were able or willing to part with stock. It is not clear exactly how many Mozambicans passed through Swaziland, but several hundred (663 in 1908-9 and 462 in 1909-10) took out travelling passes every year. It is likely that this was to legitimise a rather longer stay than the two or three days it took to cross the country on foot, or to acquire an advance from labour agents recruiting in Swaziland for the Rand gold mines.[19]

Given the prevailing Swazi attitude towards local minework, the mine companies were aware that despite the advantages of location, they would have to battle to secure a share of the small migrant labour force. This was a major contradiction for Rand mining houses considering investment in peripheral mines. By obtaining migrants for their major mines there was always the chance that the labour supply of their peripheral operations would suffer. Local mine managers were often left with the uphill task of securing and stabilising their own labour supply. With the Swazi who would not work and with those who left the country independently of recruiters, very little could be done. But when the labour supply was challenged directly by recruiters, the response was swift and forthright. In mid-1906 a band of labour touts entered Swaziland in search of labour for construction of the Carolina-Ermelo railway extension and attempted to recruit on the Swaziland Tin property. The offer of £3 per month had the predictable effect of "unsettling the Company's boys" when compared with their own wages of less than 30 shillings per month. The company responded by temporarily raising the wages of their longer-serving employees and "arranging much information to be circulated to the detriment of the Railway works".[20]

In pursuit of Swazi labour, the mines hired recruiters, who then had considerable difficulty finding recruits. Swaziland Tin appointed four white recruiters and a number of black runners under one Albert Mabaso in 1906. The white recruiters managed to obtain only 29 recruits in the eighteen-month period from July 1906 to December 1907. The most successful black runner, Kaptain, recruited 51 labourers in the same period but the other runners - Miner, Longone, Solomon, Skakaza, Majack, Sixpence and Carriage - only managed 51 between them.[21] The lack of success of the recruiters and runners led the mine manager, Sydney Ryan, to try to work through the Swazi rulers, in the belief that this was the only sure way to obtain the required labour. Ryan went directly to the Swazi capital where he was permitted to address a general meeting of the Swazi council of chiefs on the labour needs of the company. Later he met privately with the Queen Regent and Prince Malunge and "interested them, by means of presents and promises of a capitation fee, in getting the young men of the Nation to work at the mines".[22] Ryan was confident that the labour problems of the company were at an end when he concluded an agreement with Prince Malunge in September 1906 for the supply of 500 labourers at a capitation fee of ten shillings each.

Malunge also agreed "not to divert or supply labour to other companies or individuals without first submitting such labour to the Swaziland Tin Company".[23] His confidence that he could get the labour was short-lived. In the following months he supplied a mere 30 workers (most probably from his own personal following)[24] for which he received a modest payment of £20.

Ryan was certainly not the first or the last recruiter to try and mobilise Swazi labour by working through members of the Swazi aristocracy. There is evidence of at least six such contracts with different recruiters between 1899 and 1910. In 1899, for example, with the collusion of the local Republican state, Bunu signed an extensive agreement with a Boer trader and recruiter from Ermelo, Thuys Grobler, who was later somewhat improbably titled "the White King of Swaziland" by Owen O'Neil.[25] The contract gave Grobler the exclusive right to recruit labour in Swaziland while Bunu undertook to supply on demand "within fourteen days as many sound, healthy Swazis apparently between the ages of 17 and 45 years as possible (in no case less than 50 on each demand) in exchange for a fee of 10 shillings per head".[26] In 1903, WNLA struck up an agreement with the Swazi Queen Regent in which she was to "teach" Swazi men the value of signing on with the organisation. For a brief period she became a salaried employee of WNLA who paid her £30 per month for her services.[27] In 1907, a year after Ryan's deal with Prince Malunge, two advisers of the Swazi Queen Regent, Josiah Vilikazi and Albert Bremer, concluded a secretive agreement with the Labour Department of the Robinson Group to supply 500 Swazis for the mines.[28] And in 1910, a trading firm, the South African Merchants Corporation Limited, who had acquired the Bunu-Grobler contract of 1899, informed the Swaziland Resident Commissioner that "no-one but this Corporation can recuirt labour in Swaziland for work in as much as we claim that all other recruiting is illegal. It is our intention to put the necessary legal machinery into motion to stop that recruiting".[29] It was at that point, following a decade of indecision, that the colonial administration implemented legislation barring agreements between chiefs and recruiters in the country.

In late 1908 an extraordinary contract was signed by Queen Regent Labotsibeni and a recruiter from the York Mine in Krugersdorp, Bonnar Armstrong, earlier sacked by the colonial service in Matabeleland. There is considerable surviving information about this agreement and I have considered its ramifications in detail elsewhere (Crush, 1987). In short, however, it serves to tie together all the various recruiting deals since it reveals much about the underlying motivations of the various parties involved, and provides a strong indication of why they failed. At Armstrong's instigation the Queen Regent called together several regimental groups and dispatched them to Krugersdorp very much as if they were proceeding to war. These groups of soldiers were instructed to "spy out the Rand as a workshop for the Nation", as a precursor to a massive mobilisation of Swazi regimental labour for the wage labour market under centralised aristocratic control, (see appendix). The agreement with Armstrong, together with the various other contracts, are consistent with what was known at the time as the "one gate" policy of the Queen Regent; an attempt by the Dlamini rulers to exercise control over migrant labout and the fruits of wage labour. In addition, any uncontrolled migrant movement threatened the existence of the centralising institutions of Swazi society such as the regimental

(emabutfo) system. It was this particular institution, so central to Dlamini dominance in the nineteenth century, which the aristocracy struggled to retain, manipulate, and adapt in the twentieth. Plans to legitimise wage labour in the industrial army of the region as a suitable regimental activity and to exercise central control over the migrant labour flow, were furthered by a frustrated band of recruiters who had calculated that their path to the labour resources of the country lay in the regiments.[30]

Swaziland Tin's Sydney Ryan failed to gain a great deal from his agreement with the aristocracy; but nor did any of the other contracts provide evidence of any ability on the part of the aristocracy to mobilise regimental labour for wage work. Armstrong's York Mine regiments either returned early, deserted before leaving Swaziland, or in one case, waited until they got to Johannesburg before heading off to work on different mines. As The Times of Swaziland commented, not without a hint of irony, "the peaceful conquest of the Transvaal by Swazi impis is indefinitely delayed". In part the Regent's whole strategy failed because it was actively contested by regional chiefs in outlying districts, but its failure can also be laid at the door of resistance by migrants to central directives concerning the conditions and locations of employment, as the testimony of one worker makes clear:

> When I left the Chief's kraal about two weeks ago a messenger from the Queen Regent was there, having come to call out a gang of forced labour by the Queen's order. A large number of natives were assembled, and the messenger said: "The Queen requires all the members of the 'Halaza', 'Gavu', 'Ngulube' and 'Mgadhlela' regiments to go to her kraal to be sent ... for mining work, as the others who were sent are about to finish their Time." The messenger questioned the Chief as to the reason why he had not sent natives when previously ordered by the Queen, and the Chief replied that he had no men to send. The old men spoke, stating that if the Queen was going to imprison them and their chief, the young men had better go to work ... the young men then said to the chief - "As you are arrested on our account we will go in compliance with the Queen's order" ... the natives belonging to my tribe are most unwilling to go ... and will only comply out of fear that their Chief will be punished or killed by the Queen.[31]

With tension mounting in the countryside, the colonial state was forced to intervene to defuse the situation. Colonial legislation constituted the final blow, not only to the recruiters' bid for regimental labour, but to the Swazi aristocracy's policy of control.

Between 1907 and 1910, the Swaziland tin mines had fleeting respite as local labour became more abundant.

The coercive methods adopted by the colonial state in mid-1907 to smash general Swazi aversion to wage employment, and the mobilisation of labour by local chiefs later the same year, heralded a brief change in fortune for the local mines (Crush, 1985). In the President's address to the Swaziland Chamber in August 1907, a new note of optimism was sounded: "the main handicap during the year was lack of native labour but the past three months have shown a marked improvement in this respect and the forces which have operated to bring about a change not the least of which is the sympathetic attitude of the Administration and the amenability of the native to tactful control. One mining company that could barely keep 400 natives as the standard of its labour role has now 1 000 native employees on its books".[32] Numerous Swazi men in the centre and north of the country began to turn up for work on the local mines. The "sympathetic attitude" of the administration, to which the President made reference, included a decision not to prosecute tax defaulters at work on the mines. Mine managers later began to advance tax money to defaulters as a means of procuring their services.[33]

The improvement in the labour situation at the local mines is graphically illustrated by the case of Swaziland Tin which was able to dispense with its recruiting operations altogether (Table 1). The monthly average of black workers on the local mines jumped from under 600 in 1906 to 1 087 in 1907-8, and continued to rise steadily to 1 563 in 1908-9, 2 017 in 1909-10 and 2 897 in 1911-12.

Table 1: Workers Engaged by Swaziland Tin Limited, Monthly, 1906-8

	1906		1907		1908	
Month	Number	Recruits	Number	Recruits	Number	Recruits
January			71	5	128	-
February			57	-	166	-
March			101	10	245	-
April			150	14	224	-
May			162	-	-	-
June			182	8	-	-
July	53	1	210	12	-	-
August	32	-	166	6	-	-
September	48	1	195	9	-	-
October	124	14	206	11	-	-
November	116	26	237	3	-	-
December	123	34	187	5	-	-

Sources: SA, RCS 100|15, Heard to Swaziland Tin Limited, 24 September 1914; and Mine Officer to Head Office, 23 January 1915.

Competition with South African employers over Swazi labour intensified again after 1910. In 1911, in an uncanny echo of the period before 1907, the mining industry reported that its most serious handicap was

the shortage of labour. The causes were now somewhat different. Earlier, Swazi aversion to local mine conditions had led to labour shortages; in 1911, however, a "battalion of labour recruiters invaded and disorganised the local supply".[35] Appeals for colonial assistance were again sympathetically received. The colonial state was committed to the view that "it is only just that persons exploiting minerals in the country should have first claim on the adjacent labour available", and legislation was passed[36] to bar recruiters and their Swazi runners from the mining properties. Nevertheless, the local mines were forced to resurrect their recruiting operations.

While recurrent labour shortages provided a continual challenge for tin mining capital, the "quality" of the labour they did obtain was far below expectations. The major problem was an extremely high labour turnover. In 1912, for example, the tin mines were forced to engage over 9 000 men to sustain an average annual workforce of less than 2 400.[37] One reason for this rapid turnover was the Mozambican miner. These migrants stayed no longer than a few weeks in Swaziland on their way to the Rand. Swazi workers forced into the workplace simply to acquire money for food purchases or to make tax payments also avoided extended periods in wage employment. Swazi workers on three or four month oral contracts usually spread the contract over a longer period,[38] working sporadically and "returning when they feel inclined to".

Periods away from work were highly seasonal as workers responded to the call of their homesteads to work in the fields. The mines consequently experienced particularly acute labour shortages at times of ploughing, planting and harvest. At such periods tin miners would only work for two or three days in the month leaving[39] mine production "at the mercy of their labourers".

In early 1910 the mine managers attempted to tackle the problem by bringing the Masters and Servants Law to bear on a Swazi worker in a test case. Despite Resident Commissioner Coryndon's firm support for the move, it was rejected in court. Swazi workers quickly heard of the decision and there was an immediate upsurge in desertions. The companies appealed to the colonial state for less ambiguous legislation. While colonial officials were very sympathetic, and even drafted anti-desertion legislation, they realised that the signing and registration of contracts was a necessary prerequisite for the enforcement of any law.[40] Local mine managers were aware that any attempts to enforce written contracts on Swazi workers would be totally counterproductive and took the line of least resistance, preferring a labour force prone to "continual desertion" over none at all.[41]

The leverage of tin workers, together with the ever-present cost contraint, prevented the tin mines from using more rigorous institutions of worker control which worked so well in Kimberley and on the Rand (Moodie, 1983; Mabin, 1986). In contrast to the regimented, barrack-like compounds in those centres, Swazi tin workers were simply housed in camps of ramshackle, corrugated-iron huts with minimal service and sanitation, thrown hastily together on the mine properties. As Kuper later observed:

> "Native tin mine workers are regarded as temporary and unskilled. They are paid weekly at the rate of 8d to 2s per day, plus rations. The 'compounds' consist of crude huts built by the men, and each hut is shared by two to six workers. There are no proper sanitary arrangements: periodically, however, the huts are shifted. Supervision of living conditions is almost non-existent.
>
> (Kuper, 1947 : 12)

Mine managers did what they could to raise worker productivity. In 1908, the new manager of Swaziland Tin, W. Knight, was commended by his superiors as someone who could "teach a good deal to our Managers on the Rand as to the organisation of coloured labour."[42] Knight segregated the workforce on ethnic lines and appointed ndunas who were of the same ethnic background as their gangs. Wherever possible ndunas were also the sons of chiefs. Knight later went to Potgietersrus to advise on the labour problems of the tin mines there.[43] The various alluvial creeks of the tin properties were spread over a large area which made continuous supervision of workers difficult. The companies consequently depended heavily on their ndunas to enforce work discipline, a risky enterprise. As Allister Miller cuttingly observed of the work behaviour of tin miners: "the native in no sense performs a day's duty".

The lack of compound facilities inhibited the mechanisms of social control needed to manipulate an essentially undisciplined work force. The use of alcohol as a strategy of control in southern Africa has been well documented (Van Onselen, 1982; Baker, 1987). Initially, in Swaziland, mine workers tended to purchase beer from Swazi brewers since "all the large Kraals around cater for (the miners) on Sunday, making pots of beer and having dances".[44] The Transvaal Liquor Licensing Ordinance, in force in Swaziland, prohibited the manufacture of sorghum beer for sale and its implementation tended to push Swazi brewers farther away from the mines where arrest and prosecution were less likely. Yet these actions had a negative effect on work discipline since "bodies of natives working on Mines go great distances to obtain kaffir beer and they are, at the beginning of the week, through excessive drinking and fatigue, unable to work in a proper manner".[45] Finally, in 1913, after repeated appeals from the mining companies the colonial state gave them permission to brew beer and distribute it to employees at the end of a shift.[46] One mine manager later recalled the results:

> Some years ago I brewed beer in my compound and gave it to the boys once a week; but I found instead of coming back on the Monday morning, they finished my beer and went off to their women-folk miles away and did not return until the Wednesday.[47]

The administration was largely unsuccessful in its campaign to outlaw the sale of beer. As early as September 1906, Selborne warned that he was displeased to hear that because of excessive drinking miners were sometimes unable to work for several days in the week and that if they failed to "cure the evil for themselves" he would legislate against the drinkers.[48]

Kuper's description of the situation in the 1930s suggests that colonial threats remained just that:

> Every week, especially on Monday mornings, a number of workers are absent as a result of excessive drinking; fights, usually over women, are frequent. Women from the neighbourhood do a profitable business in the sale of beer to mine workers, and the compounds are recognised as centres of drunkeness and immorality. Some of the workers, who have their homes and gardens close by, do not stay in the "compound". Because the mines are either in or near to Native Areas the labourers participate to a certain extent in the traditional culture - they perform occasional tribute for neighbouring chiefs and take part in local discussions and ceremonies.

This sort of pattern was not unusual in peripheral mining operations. What made the Swazi case distinctive was the resiliency of chief-commoner relations in the countryside. The mines were close to the royal villages and the homesteads of several important chiefs. (Figure 3.) That miners remained tied by a web of obligations to local figures of authority impinged directly upon the degree and timing of their participation in wage labour. There was little problem where an agreement existed between the chief and commoners that the commoners would migrate for employment, but when the chiefs demanded tribute labour, the working period was constrained or interrupted. The chiefs regularly called their followers to Umemo (tribute labour) or to organised hunts, particularly on weekends. Indeed, it seems likely that the demands on local miners actually increased with so many of their confreres out of the country working. Mining operations were continually disrupted by such demands. At the conclusion of these activities there was usually a beer party, so that the workers returned to the mines in a rather different state than that demanded by capitalist enterprise.[50]

Tension between the local mines and the chiefs was exacerbated by the proximity of the royal villages. The Queen Regent even advised workers on labour relations. In July 1908, in order to facilitate collections for the campaign against colonial land policy, she ordered mine workers to strike for higher wages.[51] More typically, Swazi miners were called upon to perform agricultural and other tasks at the royal villages. In 1907, for example, workers on the tin mines in the Ezulwini Valley and at the gold mines at Forbes Reef were ordered to Zombode to assist in building cattle byres on Sundays for the Queen Regent.[52] The mine managers responded to these weekend calls by introducing a system of

Sunday labour to raise ailing productivity and to thwart the demands of the chiefs and aristocracy. In 1912, the administration declared that Sunday minework would not be permitted, but proceeded to turn a blind eye to a practice which continued unabated.[53] In 1916, disgruntled mineworkers informed proselytizing missionaries to "go and preach to the white men and tell them not to make us work on a Sunday".[54]

In response to the other problems of labour control, the state was quick to introduce some vigorous legislation. Clause 22 of the Native Labour Regulation (Swaziland) Proclamation of 1913 noted that "any native labourer in Swaziland who (a) neglects to perform any work which it is his duty to perform; (b) unfits himself for the proper performance of his work by having become or being intoxicated during working hours; (c) refuses to obey any lawful command of his employer or any person lawfully placed in authority over him; (d) uses any insulting or abusive language to his employer or any person lawfully placed in authority over him; or (e) commits any breach of any rules prescribed for good order and discipline or health on any mine or works" would be liable on conviction for a fine of not more than 40 shillings (at least two months wages).[55] The workers, with the weapon of desertion at their disposal, paid limited heed and the legislation became almost impossible to enforce.

In Swaziland, the difficulties of labour control in a small scale, undercapitalised and labour-intensive industry were thus compounded by the essentially agrarian setting in which production was taking place. The most striking feature of the tin mines was their recurrent difficulty with labour mobilisation and time control. Attempts by the mining commpanies to secure a share of the Swazi migrant labour force, and to discipline and control workers at the place of work, were constantly undone by the nature of the labour process on the mines, the growing domination of the Witwatersrand in the regional labour market and the demands of the Swazi ruling class on local mineworkers. While these relationships were under continuous assault from local settlers, the colonial state and the corrosive effects of participation in labour migrancy the struggles by chiefs and aristocracy to buttress their position tended, if anything, to intensify the conflict between labour and capital on the mines themselves. One possible solution, the use of imported labour not subject to the same time constraints, was theoretically quite attractive. In practice such labour was no more reliable as the pull of the Rand drew labour inexorably from peripheral to core mining operations.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Swaziland Archives (SA), RCS 564/37, Memorandum from Stegi Farmers Association.

2. Barlow Rand Archives (BRA) HE 277, Phillips to Wernher, 31 December 1892.

3. BRA, HE 277, Shepstone to Taylor, 28 August 1892.

4. Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCL) Miller papers, MS 547a, Report on Mineral Prospects and Concessions in Swaziland, 1910, 65-9.

5. BRA, HE 9, Ryan To Eckstein & Co., August 1902; Evans to Miller, 19 July 1909.

6. "Swaziland Tin Company", South African Mines, Commerce and Industry (SAMCI), 11 February 1905; "Our Tin Mining Prospects", ibid., 13 October 1906.

7. Freund (1981 : 30, 111).

8. BRA, HE 9, Swaziland Tin Concessions File, S. Ryan to Managing Director (Eckstein & Co.), August 1902; Swaziland Chamber, Swaziland : The California of South Africa (Mbabane, 1910), 44. Another early difficulty was inexperienced and incompetent management, which the profit-hungry Randlord found inexcusable: BRA, HE 277/36/202, Oats to Wernher, November 1906; HE 277/202/41, Oats to Phillips, 17 January 1907.

9. KCL, Miller papers, MS547a, Report; BRA, HE 277/202/98, Evans to Werner, 13 July 1908.

10. BRA,HE 277/2155/16, Wallers to Swaziland Tin Limited, 14 August 1906; HE 9, Swaziland Tin Concessions File, Ryan to Managing Director (Eckstein & Co.), August 1902.

11. KCL, Miller papers, MS547a, Report, pp. 14-18; BRA, HE 277/2155/33, Jennings to Swaziland Tin Ltd, 18 December 1906; HE 277/202/42, Rouillard to Jennings, 19 February 1907; "Swaziland Tin Mines" SAMCI 9 May 1908.

12. BRA, HE 277/2155/B3, Jennings to Directors, Swaziland Tin Ltd, 18 December 1906.

13. South African Pioneer, 21 (1908) : 66.

14. "Swaziland Chamber : President's Address" Times of Swaziland, 1 September 1906.

15. SA, J152/06, Handwritten Notes on Meeting between Selborne and various whites, September 1906, statement by Hollow.

16. Transvaal Archives Depot, GOV 200/955/06, statement by Lord Selborne to Swazi Queen and people, 14 September 1906.

17. "The Tin Mines" Times of Swaziland, 23 April 1898; SA S18, Report by Sydney Ryan, 21 March 1892; KCL, KCM 6943, Forbes Reef Letter Book, 20 June 1893, 14 August 1893, November 1893, December 1893, January 1894; E. McCarthy, Further Incidents in the Life of a Mining Engineer (London, 1920), p. 65. The migrants were constantly pillaged by brigands living on the Lubombo mountains. As protection, and also to avoid paying for passes, many employed Swazi guides; Public Record Office, DO 119/75, Justice of the Peace, Lubombo, 2 September 1892.

18. "Editorial" Times of Swaziland, 10 July 1897.

19. SA, DO9/12, Draft Annual Colonial Report, 1908-9, Assistant Commissioner Ubombo; Draft Annual Colonial Report, 1909-10, Assistant Commissioner Ubombo.

20. BRA, HE 277/2155/26, Heard to Secretary, Swaziland Tin Ltd, 2 September 1906.

21. SA, RCS 100/15, Heard to Swaziland Tin Ltd, 24 June 1914.

22. BRA, HE 277/2155/33, Jennings to Chairman, Swaziland Tin Ltd, 18 December 1906; HE 277/2155/26, Ryan to Secretary, Swaziland Tin Ltd, 2 September 1906; SA, RCS 100/15, Ryan to Secretary, Swaziland Tin Ltd, 2 September 1906; Kelly to Boyd, 26 January 1915.

23. SA, RCS 100/15, Agreement between Swaziland Tin Ltd and Prince Malunge, 24 September 1906.

24. In 1915 there was a dispute between Malunge and Swaziland Tin over the question of whther he had had a hand in resolving the company's labour shortages in 1908; see SA, RCS 100/15, Various correspondence.

25. O'Neil, Adventures in Swaziland.

26. SA, 57a; Contract between Bunu and Grobler, 3 May 1899.

27. Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of D. Forbes, para. 2239, 2295, 2309-13.

28. SA, J13/07, Governor's Office to Moony, 19 January 1907; CO 879/106/874, No. 190, Selborne to Elgin, 13 March 1907; No. 197, Elgin to Selborne, 16 March 1907; BRA, HE 254/149/942, Searll to Bremer, 25 July 1907.

29. SA, RCS 23/10, Tatham to Coryndon, 14 January 1910; CO417/487, Kropwitz to Coryndon, 28 June 1909.

30. "Swazi Rising", Rand Daily Mail, 16 October 1908; "Labour Supply", Times of Swaziland, 24 October 1908; "The Swazis and Labour", Times of Swaziland, 12 December 1908.

31. CO417/487, Enclosure in Marwick to Government Secretary, 1 July 1909, Sworn statement by Nduluvula.

32. "Swaziland Chamber : President's Address", Times of Swaziland, 10 August 1907; "Alluvial Gold", Times of Swaziland, 19 January 1907.

33. SA, RCs 100/15, Kelly to Swaziland Tin Ltd, 26 January 1915; Boyd to Ryan, 29 January 1915.

34. Swaziland Annual Colonial Reports, 1907-8 : 25; 1908-9 : 8; 1909-10 : 7.

35. KCL, Miller papers, MS191a, Swaziland Corporation Annual Report, 1911. For details of changing spatial patterns of Swazi migrancy see Crush (1986).

36. CO 417/487, Coryndon to Selborne, 12 January 1910; Selborne to Coryndon, 7 July 1910; High Commissioner's Gazette, Notice No. 66 of 1910.

37. SA, RCS 44/12, Draft Annual Colonial Report, 1911-12.

38. PRO, DO 119/867, Coryndon to Rodwell, 3 December 1910.

39. PRO, DO 119/867, Coryndon to Rodwell, 8 November 1910.

40. PRO, DO 119/867, Honey to Gladstone, 26 July 1910; Gladstone to Rodwell, 29 September 1910; Memorandum by A. Balfour, 14 September 1910; Gladstone to Coryndon, 28 June 1911.

41. A system of optional registration of mine contracts was the best the mines could hope for: CO 417/529, Coryndon to Gladstone, 19 February 1913.

42. BRA, HE 277/202/98, Evans to Wernher, 13 July 1908.

43. BRA, HE 254/137, Eckstein to Wernher, Beit & Co., 26 May 1910.

44. South African Pioneer, 29 (1916) : 7.

45. SA, D09/41, Honey to Selborne, 3 December 1909. In May 1908, police raided three Mbabane homesteads and confiscated "a very large quantity of beer prepared for sale"; D09/41, Assistant Commissioner Mbabane, Monthly Report for May 1908.

46. SA, J152/06, Notes on Meeting between Selborne and Chiefs, September 1906; D09/41, Honey to Selborne, 3 December 1909; RCS 647/09, Coryndon to Secretary, Transvaal Liquor Commission, 30 September 1909; RCS 761/13, Coryndon to Gladstone, 21 November 1913.

47. Minutes of European Advisory Committee Meetings, 1937, statement by J. Reilly.

48. TAD, GOV 200/955/06, Speech by Selborne, 17 September 1906.

49. Kuper, 1947 : 12-13.

50. SA, DO9/41, Honey to Selborne, 3 December 1909.

51. SA, DO9/125, Assistant Commissioner Mbabane, Monthly Report for July 1908.

52. SA, D19/07/1141.

53. SA, RCS 295/17.

54. South African Pioneer, 29 (1916) : 5.

55. High Commissioner's Gazette, Proclamation No. 19 of 1913.

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APPENDIX

CONTRACT SIGNED BETWEEN 50 SWAZIS AND B. ARMSTRONG AT MBABANE, SEPTEMBER 1908

We, the undersigned members of the Ngulube, Masotha, Isaka and Magdhlela regiments of the Swazi people, are proceeding to Johannesburg to work underground as drill boys on the York Mine, Krugersdorp. We are going of our own free will, at the invitation of the Ndhlovukazi, The Chief Regent of the Swazi people and we have been dispatched "in the kraal" as an impi. We are instructed by the Chief Regent to learn rock drilling and to do our utmost to prove to the white people at the mines that the Swazi nation is equal to any other nation at drill work, so that we may win for our nation a good reputation amongst the mines and ensure satisfactory employment and fair treatment in the future. We are proud to be sent on a mission by the Ndhlovukazi. We are going as though we were going to war, and we are resolved to carry out our mission. We are proceeding to the York Mine, Krugersdorp, where we will work for a period of six months as drill boys. We clearly understand that we are not promised any definite wage or rate of pay. We shall be paid according to the manner in which we acquit ourselves. If we do not do the regulation minimum amount of work a shift, we understand that we shall not be paid anything. What the ordinary rates of pay shall be we are willing to wait and learn for ourselves when we get there. We are the scouts of the nation to ascertain how the York Mine will treat us. We ask for no promise.

Source: Rand Daily Mail, 16 October 1908.

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