

'MINES, MIGRANTS AND WOMEN: STRIKE ACTION AND LABOUR UNREST ON
THE WITBANK COLLIERIES FROM 1940-1950.'

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INTRODUCTION

Firstly, the coal industry is increasingly ignored in that of gold and the growing importance of low gold mining industry attention.

A study of collective worker action on the mines in South Africa during the Second World War is not unique. There is a plethora of books and articles concerned with an analysis of labour activity on the gold mines during this period. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, a separate study of resistance on the coal mines during the same period is distinctly absent from this corpus of work. The realm of coal mining has been extensively investigated only from an engineering or geological point of view with the result that the intensity of industrial conflict on the Witbank coalfields during the 1940s has largely gone unnoticed. This oversight becomes even more surprising when one considers that the frequency of strike action on the coalfields was far higher than strikes occurring in gold mining or secondary industry in the same period. The unexplored nature of this avenue of historical study is a serious omission which this dissertation attempts to address.

The dominance of the gold mining industry in South African literature can partially be explained by the fact that gold occupied a central position in the evolution of the modern South African social and economic structure. This primary industry was the mainspring of secondary industrialisation and laid the foundation for the modern economy. Although coal mining cannot be said to have had the same overtly transformative impact its neglect is nonetheless surprising for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the coal industry is integrally linked to that of gold and the growing requirements of the gold mining directly affected the coal industry. By 1926, the soaring demand for electric power on the gold mines, coupled with the needs of a growing structure of municipal bodies across the Rand, resulted in a phenomenal increase in coal consumption for the generation of electricity. Gold mining operations expanded to such an extent that by 1950 collieries established what were referred to as "Pithead Power Stations". This term identifies the process whereby coal is delivered on a conveyor belt system directly from the colliery to the power station bunkers supplying the gold mines. Between 1913 and 1961 the production of coal rose from about 7.5 million tons with a total pitsmouth value of nearly four million Rand, to 44,5 million tons, with a pitsmouth value of 56 million Rand. (1) Thus since the beginning of industrial growth predicated on the expansion of gold, coal has played a major part in the development of the economic structure of this country.

Secondly, the greatest proportion of coal on the continent is found in the Republic of South Africa. In 1979, South Africa produced 104 million metric tons of coal from its deposits. The Witbank-Ermelo-Standerton coalfield is the major coal producing district, with about 70 per cent of the coal in South Africa being mined in this area (2). The coal mined in this district is used for metallurgical purposes, power generation, steam locomotives, chemical and plastics manufacture, oil from coal, general industry and domestic purposes as well as for export.

There are few nations on the surface of the earth that are as dependent on coal as South Africa. The Department of Mineral and Energy Affairs estimated that coal provided South Africa with 82,9 per cent of her primary energy requirements (3). Only the Republic of China displays the same degree of dependence on coal. Escom is the largest consumer of this coal supply leaving the remainder to industry, households and other uses.

More generally, the fuel crisis of 1974 contributed dramatically to a universal renewal of interest in coal as a source of energy. Since then there has been an increasing establishment of plants in South Africa for the manufacture of oil from coal which in turn has led to increased interest in the nation's coal reserves. The Petrick Commission on South African coal reserves stimulated much discussion on the rate of depletion of the coal fields and the rate of production targeted for overseas export. The question of the optimal dispensation of South African coal is an important issue in the broader scenario of exhaustible resource policy.

Since 1976, when South Africa signed the low ash coal contract with Japan she has become the third largest exporter of coal in the world. Thirty million tons of coal was exported in 1983. These exports amount to over one billion rand per year making coal second to gold as a source of foreign exchange. The rapid expansion of the coal mining industry has made it a major employer on the South African labour market. The Chamber of Mines estimates that over 66 000 blacks were employed on the coal

fields in 1982. The importance of coal mining in the South African economy underscores the belief that 'coal is the fuel that feeds the nation's development. 'Without it , South Africa would be far more vulnerable to international pressure and more prone to balance of payment difficulties'. (4)

That the coal mining industry cannot simply be ignored in South African historiography seems evident from the information pointing to the importance of coal in the South African economy . The area of research covered by this dissertation is significant not only as result of the particular subject under investigation, namely coal, but also because of the particular period which it covers. The 1940s represent an hiatus in the study of South African history. These years were highly significant in the development and consolidation of this country's social and economic formation. It is relevant therefore to attempt a schematic outline of the far-reaching changes and developments that occurred during the decade of the 1940s.

From 1939 to 1945, the South African economy was catapulted in a new direction by the war effort. There was a remarkable growth of industry as a result of both wartime production and the decreased competition from overseas markets. By mid-1940 manufacturing had outstripped the mining sector in terms of its gross national product. This rapid industrialisation contributed to radical changes in the structure of the South African economy and the labour market.

The increasing labour requirements of new industries partially explains the massive haemorrhaging of people from the Reserves and the Protectorates into the cities. The rapid urbanisation of the black population, particularly the acceleration in the rate of female migrancy, created the turbulent atmosphere of urban life during the 1940s.

The unprecedented surge of urbanisation and the concomitant housing shortage led to an eruption of squatter movements across the Rand. The squatting communities presented local authorities with formidable political and administrative problems.

The more urbanised and permanent character of the black working class made it increasingly amenable to the influence of trade union ideology. Trade unions flourished during this period. By 1945, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), comprised 119 unions embracing 40 per cent of the workers employed in commerce and industry. Strike action was a common feature in industry and on the mines throughout the 1940s. In the mining sector, the most noticeable development was the rise of the African Mineworkers Union. Class conflict reached its zenith with the 1946 gold miners strike.

The prevailing conditions in the 1940s also spawned a new radicalism in political thinking and this began to have an impact on the ANC which for the most part had been moribund during the 1930's. World War II provided Africans with a new opportunity to press for the reorientation of Native Policy according to the

spirit of democratic freedom that countries were fighting for during the war. In the later half of the 1940s, the old African leadership of the ANC was replaced by a new African intelligentsia which had a new sense of political possibilities.

These broad political and socio-economic shifts provide a framework in which the study of the coalfields in Witbank must be located. It is only with a consideration of these major developments that one can gain a systematic understanding of the socio-economic and political aspects of the collieries during the 1940s. What becomes apparent is that the collieries display characteristics which both echo and are coterminous with the broader trends in the 1940s. The trends are briefly outlined below.

The expansion of production on the Witbank coalfields and the increasing importance of coal in the South African economy during the war years was a reflection of the boom in industrial development. The resultant influx of workers on the collieries changed the composition of the workforce as well as intensifying the struggle over jobs and resources. Both these factors affected the nature of the resistance that occurred on the mines.

Witbank was not immune to the increasing rate of urbanisation in towns on the Rand. By the 1940s, the Witbank Municipal location was overcrowded and the planned scheme to extend the location was delayed because of the war effort. The lack of accommodation in production relations. At the same time underground mining methods the location led to the development of squatting communities in

an around the municipal area. Many of these communities were located on the farms surrounding the collieries. The concern that developed over squatting in Witbank mirrored the more general concern over squatting communities on the Rand.

Strike action on the Witbank collieries not only reflected the general upsurge in industrial conflict that rocked the South African economy during the 1940s but also surpassed it in terms of the frequency of the labour disputes from 1940 to 1950. The number of strikes on the Witbank coalfields was unprecedented both in comparison with previous decades and in comparison with other sectors of the economy. Despite the phenomenal number of strikes there were no indications that trade unions became a force on the collieries. The African Mineworkers Union did not organise on the coal mines nor were there signs of any political involvements amongst the colliers. The ANC had a branch in Witbank but its concerns were focused on the Location rather than the mines.

There are few discernible shifts from the early to the later years of the decade. The war years intensified the grievances experienced by the workers on the collieries rather than creating new ones. The end of this study in 1950 does not signal a change in labour relations on the mines at that time. The next major shift occurred in the 1960's when open cast mining was introduced on the collieries, a method of mining which transformed Witbank (KTS). Moreover, the documents of the Government Native production relations. At the same time underground mining methods were undergoing radical transformation as new instruments of

labour were introduced. By the Chamber of Mines during the 1940s included the Coal Commission reports, some of which brought Historical research is sometimes susceptible to categorical and generalised definitions as opposed to substantial and atomised descriptions. Histories of local areas such as this on the Witbank coalfields are extremely rich precisely because they avoid the tendency of any vague abstraction. They elucidate general characteristics while also examining specific areas that are unique and often overlooked in more sweeping accounts.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This study uses a set of new sources found in the Central Archive Depot, Pretoria, as well as limited interview material to develop the major arguments that are presented. In the archives, the Witbank Native Commissioner's reports entitled "Native Politics, Unrest and Disturbances in the Witbank district", were an invaluable source of information on strike action on the collieries. They also shed light on broader issues pertaining to the Witbank district. Information in these reports was supplemented by the reports of the Secretary of Native Affairs in articles on the gold mines provided helpful guides as to the Witbank (NTS). Moreover, the documents of the Government Native Labour Bureau (GNLB) were useful in gaining an understanding of events in Witbank in the earlier decades prior to the 1940s. The

Annual Reports published by the Chamber of Mines during the 1940s included the Coal Committee reports, sections of which brought into focus issues relating to labour on the collieries. It appears that the annual reports of the individual collieries, which would have been of great assistance to this study, have been destroyed.

The particular bias of the government and other official reports that were available placed severe limitations on the possibility of gaining an in depth understanding of the dynamics of collective resistance. It was especially difficult to ascertain from these reports the consciousness and attitudes of the workers themselves. However, interviews with black miners who are permanently resident in the Witbank Location and who worked on the collieries during the 1940s, provided useful insights into the perspectives of the black workforce. More personal insights into the lives of the colliers were also obtained through interviews with Mine and Compound Managers who worked on the collieries in the 1950s and 1960s. More extensive interviewing will undoubtedly open up further areas of research.

With the exception of Edgecombe's study on the token system on the Natal collieries, the secondary sources used to inform this study did not directly relate to coal mining. However, several articles on the gold mines provided helpful guides as to the direction that this dissertation should take. Moodie's article entitled 'The Moral Economy of Black Miners Strike of 1946', was particularly enlightening and the concept of the moral economy

was a springboard for this analysis. At the same time the shortcomings of the concept pointed to the need for other areas of investigation to be taken into account when studying resistance on the mines. The particular consciousness that migrant workers brought to the mines and the interactions they were involved in outside of the confines of compound life were vital issues influencing the nature of their resistance.

In this regard, studies on ethnicity, black urbanisation and women, raised critical matters pertaining to migrant consciousness and the issue of women squatting in and around the collieries. Beinart and Delius offer insight into the diverse nature of migrant sub-culture shaped by the urban environment in their articles, 'Worker consciousness, ethnic particularism and nationalism', and 'Sebatokgomo: Migrant Organisation, the A.N.C and the Sekhukuneland Revolt'. Vail's book on the creation of tribalism highlights and explores important controversies surrounding the question of ethnic identities. The chapter on the impact of women squatters on the lives of the colliers draws heavily on Bonner's paper on the migration of Sotho women to the Rand and Bradford's paper on women's beer protests in Natal.

Certain areas were impossible to explore within an exercise of this kind. A detailed notion of the consciousness of the participants in strike action, especially in relationship to their places of origin, is absent. Moreover, circumstances within the Witbank Municipality made it impossible to obtain access to

material concerning the Municipal Location. As a result it was difficult to integrate a study of the location within the broader analysis. There are also inescapable problems in reconstructing the history of women in the Witbank area. Primary sources dealing with women do not include information on the women's lives; rather they deal with women in terms of their effects (usually negative) that they had on the area. The information about women gleaned from the interviews is solely from male perspectives on the issues concerned.

Despite these shortcomings, it was possible to construct a argument from the various primary, secondary and oral sources available. The main thrust of this argument is that collective resistance on the collieries cannot be analysed solely within the context of the mine itself. Without a consideration of the broader factors which impinged on and directly influenced the actions of the workforce, an interpretation of collective resistance is a mere skeleton of the forces at play. The dissertation attempts to capture the layered and multifaceted nature of determinate factors that influenced the mode and course of resistance.

The first chapter explores the structures of domination in the collieries and the ways in which the workers experienced and responded to that domination. The central proposition is that although the mine owners attempted to control the totality of the

miners' lives through the compound system and tight managerial control, there was no direct correlation between the "administrative formula of domination" (5) and the de facto system that operated on the mines. The workers adapted and developed their own ways of life and forms of consciousness so as to adjust to the system of rule on the mines. These adapted ways formed the kernel of resistance to managerial control and strike action in the 1940s led to the emasculation of rigid managerial autocracy. Although the strikes never developed into large scale confrontations, they nonetheless generated friction and ill-feeling on the collieries; even a one day strike caused a serious disorganisation of production. The striking workers' refusal to return to work unless their demands were met, meant that the implementation of the prescribed regulations was difficult to enforce and management acceded to the workers' demands.

Through their actions, workers managed to exercise a remarkable degree of power and control over their conditions. This power becomes relative, however, when contextualised within the highly oppressive and alienating structures under which they lived and worked. Many of the findings in Chapter 1 parallel similar investigations on the gold mines in the same period.

Chapter 2 asserts that one cannot simply analyse collective action on the mine in terms of structural considerations - whether these be formal or informal structures of power and authority. Since the majority of workers on the mines were migrants, it is argued that it is also important to examine the

workers' prior socialisation and the beliefs that they brought with them onto the mines. This study attempts to correct the tendency of either viewing ethnicity as being created entirely "from above" as part of the mine managements' divide-and-rule tactics or as viewing it arising from "below" as being the unmediated transmission of "innate" rural values brought into the urban environment. While management undoubtedly manipulated ethnic sentiment to divide the workforce and to diffuse working class unity, ethnic associations were also important to the workers who were thrust into an alien and hostile working environment.

The third chapter addresses a dimension that is often overlooked in an examination of worker resistance. The study of labour relations has generally focused on male waged workers ignoring the involvement of families or single women in the lives of the miners. This has led to an underestimation of the part women play in conflict on the mines. On the Witbank coalfields, however, the issue of women is difficult to ignore. There were vast numbers of women squatting on farms around the mine properties. The profound degree of alienation experienced by the migrants both in their work environment and in compounds underpinned the importance of the women on the farms and ensured that the

activities of liquor and prostitution were exciting alternatives to the uninviting world of the mine. Workers could, and often did, leave the mines during their free time. The proposition of this chapter is that, while the presence of women did not directly cause strike action, the tensions and conflicts that

arose in the squatter camps around women impacted on labour relations on the mines. Workers brought their antagonisms back onto the mines and these antagonisms were prone to manifest in increased ethnic divisions and inter-ethnic rivalry. The mine management often sought ways to gain greater control over their employees' social interactions away from the workplace. An analysis of women reveals a complex and subtle system of alliances and contradictions between men and women, the mineowners and the miners, the farmers and the squatters and the different departments of state.

Structural relationships on the mines together with ethnic considerations and the activities and role of women on the farms, were woven together in complex and conflicting ways to produce the weft and warp of worker resistance which is the fabric of this dissertation.

NOTES

A/INTRODUCTION

1. Coulter, T 'Cabbages and Kings', in SA Mining World 1989
2. Hilsenrath, P 'Economic Theory and optimal Depletion of Coal Reserves in South Africa', Pamphlet 385, Rand Mines Library
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. A term used by Sitas, A in 'Moral Formations and Struggles amongst Migrants on the East Rand', in Labour, Capital and Society .

THE WORLD OF THE MINE : A DELICATE BALANCE OF AUTHORITY

A) INTRODUCTION

During the 1920's there were sporadic outbreaks of strike action on the Witbank coalfields. In 1926, a suggestion made by the Director of Native Labour to the Mine Manager of the Minaar Colliery advised him that he should

'Call together the Mine Management of (his) area to discuss general labour matters and the apparent wave of unrest that is going through the Witbank district. Apart from specific complaints...there are old causes of complaint on the coalfields that must be put a stop to.' (1)

The "wave of unrest" referred to the occurrence of six strikes at various collieries within a two month period. All in all, there were approximately ten recorded strikes during the 1920's. The strikes on the collieries did not in any way reflect the development of a working class or trade union consciousness. The grievances were strictly localised and workers' grievances never transcended the direct causes of strike action nor were they perceived in the context of the broader working class struggle.

In contrast to the 1920's, the 1930's was a decade of relative "industrial peace" throughout South Africa. This period of "economic take-off" was facilitated by heavy-handed state repression of political organisations and trade union movements. This period of dormancy was reflected on the coalfields in Witbank where there is virtually no record of industrial disputes. It was the 1940's however that marked a significant change in the pattern of industrial conflict. In stark

comparison to both the 20's and the 30's, the 1940's were years of industrial upheaval. The number of workers on strike in South Africa in any given year increased from 730 in 1940 to 84 035 in 1946 (2). The Witbank Collieries were no exception to this trend of increased industrial disputes and well over 33 strikes were recorded as occurring on the collieries between 1940 and 1950.

While strike action intensified on the collieries, the form that the strikes took did not differ much from their predecessors. As was the case in the 1920's, the strikes tended to focus narrowly on immediate issues pertaining to specific conditions on a particular mine. The strikes were shortlived, seldom lasting more than one or two days. The number of workers involved in the strike action varied depending on the size of the mine. Despite the shortlived and local character of these strikes, they disrupted production schedules and were important enough to receive the attention of the police force and Native Affairs Inspectors in Witbank. Testimony of this are the reports written by these people and filed in the Native Affairs Department (3). Furthermore, although the strike issues pertained to specific conditions on particular mines, they must be seen in terms of a wider context of industrial action on the collieries. During this period, expressions of worker dissatisfaction and strike action on the various collieries reveal certain common characteristics and recurrent patterns.

B) THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE MINES

During the the 1940's there were still no formal contracts mediating labour relations or prescribing the boundaries of managerial domination over the black workforce. Although the rise of the African Mineworkers Union had begun to influence labour relations on the gold mines in this period, union issues did not penetrate the coal mines in any distinguishable way. However, the fact that there were a clear set of common issues - leitmotifs - which served as catalysts for the disturbances across all mines, suggests that some type of informal contract had been established between workers and management, particularly circumscribing the actions of the latter. Dunbar Moodie employed the concept of a "moral economy" to refer to this informal contract that was established on the mines, a contract which was both elusive and stood outside formal structures of control. While Moodie used the concept of the moral economy as an analytical tool to specifically describe the nature of resistance on the goldmines in the 40's, the concept can be extrapolated from that context and can be likewise seen as a relevant and appropriate tool of analysis for resistance on the coal mines during the same period.

In Moodie's words, the notion of a moral economy is 'a means of capturing the essential features of resistance and accommodation'(4) amongst the industrial workforce on the mines. The mechanisms of social

control underpinning the mine hierarchy and the compound system were explicit and manifest; they imposed a framework of control on the workforce that unequivocally circumscribed potential areas of worker action. Compounds, typologised by Foucault as "carceral and disciplinary" institutions, or by Sitas as a "formula for domination", (5) administered the workers lives during work and rest hours. However, alongside this explicitly repressive form of control "from above", there existed an informal and implicit contract between workers and mine management. Moodie perceives the nature of this contract as a moral one. He sees it as encapsulating certain minimum expectations that black mine workers held of the official managerial hierarchy - that tight-knit coordinate of Indunas, police boys and white compound and underground staff.

The notion of a moral economy suggests that the workers exercised a degree of leverage in influencing certain conditions on the mines, both within the spheres of production and reproduction. Moodie draws a useful distinction between the concepts of power and authority in an attempt to understand the nature and impact of the workers' influence on the mines. Authority implies that rules imposed by certain actors... will be obeyed by... themselves or others. Authority is exercised whether or not those who are dominated consent to the domination. (6) Power, on the other hand, is never institutionalised but operates on a personal level. Power is exercised when in a situation of uncertainty, a person has the ability to impose his decision.

Within the boundaries of the moral economy, black mine workers possessed power rather than authority. During the 1940's, black miners undoubtedly established informal power structures on a number of levels, that interacted with the formal mechanisms of control on the collieries. This chapter shows that through these informal structures, the workforce exercised a fair degree of influence in determining their conditions of existence. It is tempting to over-estimate the extent of this power when one looks at the number of times that management acceded to workers' demands during strikes. Ultimately however, any power that the workers exercised remained subsumed under the dominance and control of the mine management and compound structure. In Moodie's words, the "moral economy" of a mine defined mutually "acceptable" elements within a system of political domination and economic appropriation' (7). It served as a framework, defining the rules of conflict for both the dominant and subordinate groups.

A closer examination of the notion of the moral economy reveals that it operated primarily within the context of the daily lives of the black workers, both above and underground. Van Onselen found this to be the case when he commented on worker resistance on the mines at the turn of the century. He stated that although workers were

'constrained by the restrictive and coercive environment of compounds, they (the migrant workers) were never-the-less able to resist in the nooks and crannies of the day-to-day situation...(Although) not unionised...they could organise or participate in strike action in a wide variety of situations'.
(8)

On the collieries, the minimum expectations demanded of the daily life and inscribed in this unwritten contract of the moral economy were,

- food of a certain standard
- wages that were in keeping with other mines
- limits on the amount of personal assault underground
- fairness in personal disputes which were adjudicated by the Compound Manager and sometimes the Induna
- equal treatment of the different "tribal" groups by the compound manager and other mine officials
- accommodation of worker's private lives in terms of issues such as homosexuality, beerbrewing, friends and other overtly "forbidden" practices.

The extent to which the actions of the workforce were prescribed by the informal codes of conduct inscribed in the moral economy becomes manifest through an investigation of the causal factors of strike action on these mines. For the most part, the causes of the strikes can be attributed to the workers' perceptions that management had clearly broken the minimum expectations contained in their unwritten contract with the workforce. A noticeable trend was that war time conditions caused a definite degeneration of the standard on living on the mines, (as was the case throughout South Africa). This upset the delicate balance of the terms of the moral economy and intensified worker dissatisfaction. A more in depth study in the following section of the grievances expressed by the workers during strike action clearly illustrates this view.

An additional point to be made was that much of the strike action appeared to be extemporaneous; in reports on strike action there is frequent reference to the fact that the management were caught unaware

by the "natives" actions. The oft repeated accounts are that 'Native labourers had come out unexpectedly on strike' or that 'the compound manager who visited the compound at various times during the day had no suspicion that the workers were discontented in any way or had contemplated striking'(9). The extemporaneous nature of the strikes intimates that the terms of the moral economy were deeply internalised within the consciousness of the workforce.

C) CAUSES OF STRIKE ACTION

What follows is a schematic outline of the major grievances expressed by workers during strike action. The information has been gathered from the Native Commission and the Commissioner of Police reports on the strikes on the collieries. There is no analysis of these grievances at this point in the study.

The most frequent grievance of workers during strike action was directed against the Compound Manager of the mine. The central allegation was that the Compound Manager did not investigate the workers' complaints and he was thereby held responsible for the continuation of the existent problems experienced by the workers. Grievances against the Compound Manager were often but not necessarily accompanied by complaints made against the Induna. He was likewise accused of not giving the workers a sympathetic hearing.

The issue of working hours featured as the second most frequent cause of strike action. Working hours underground were exceptionally long and 'during winter months miners and underground officials seldom saw any sunshine except on Sundays' (10). Although the working week was 48 hours, there was a great deal of overtime. This was especially true during the war years when the demand for coal rocketed with the burgeoning of wartime industry. In 1943, in order to aid production, the collieries were exempted from the Mines and Works Regulation No. 344 which had previously limited the hours of work underground on the collieries (11). Workers often accused the management of not paying them overtime and organised holiday leave was an unknown.

On Abor Colliery a worker's statement during a strike at the beginning of the war revealed the incredibly long working hours that were demanded of workers:

'I am employed by the above company on machines underground. We went on strike against the manner in which the management was treating us. Last month there was a change in the turning out of shifts. Usually the shifts turns out (sic) 4.30 am and knocked off at 4.30pm except boys required to do overtime which they were paid for. Now the shifts turned out at 3am and returned at 8pm without any overtime being paid. The manager was approached about these complaints of starting early and returning late' (12).

A shift from 6am to 3.30pm was accepted by the workers but most shifts were over 12 hours long. Even the White Mine Workers Union took up the issue of working hours. In 1946, the Union addressed the Collieries Committee of the Chamber of Mines. The Report stated that

The Committee undertook to investigate the hours of work on the individual collieries with the view to establishing, where possible, a greater uniformity in such hours'. (13)

Ironically, the investigation resulted only in the extension of the exemption granted under Regulation 344, which meant the coal owners continued to have a free hand in determining the hours of work underground.

Over and above the lengthy working hours, workers were morally outraged at the wages paid on the collieries. Disputes over wages differed from mine to mine. Generally, wages were not uniform but were determined by the worker's age, apparent physical ability and the amount of work that a labourer did. The Native Labour Regulation Act made it illegal for the Mining Industry to employ "Natives" below the age of 18 for light surface work. This regulation was largely disregarded by the colliery management and there were considerable numbers of youth, mere boys, doing surface work. Problems often arose over the payment of these under age workers as Management was intent on treating each juvenile worker's case individually. The differential treatment of these young workers created tensions and jealousies amongst them.

The management justified the incredibly low wages on the mines by the free food and medical services they provided. Each black interviewee remembered explicitly the wage scale on the mines during the 1940's; management paid black underground workers 2 shillings a shift, while surface workers were paid 1 shilling 10 pence a day. An underground

manager, working on the collieries in the 40's, expressed horror at the type of wages that he was paying his black miners at the time (14).

A frequent issue concerning wages was that the workers were not properly paid for overtime work. This was particularly serious during the war when workers were forced to work almost double shifts. On investigation it was usually found that the marking of overtime tickets was done in a haphazard way and no proper records were kept. The amount of overtime earned by workers was seldom properly explained and the Native Commissioner stressed how important it was for the labourers to know what they were earning otherwise great confusion arose.

In 1944, the Chamber of Mines announced that all mines affiliated to it had agreed to a 5d increase per shift for underground workers and a 4d increase for surface workers. This fixed the minimum wages on the mines belonging to the Chamber at 2s/5d and 2s/1d per shift respectively. In 1943, the Chamber of Mines recommended that 'the minimum rates of pay to underground and surface workers on the gold mines should also be applied to colliery Natives' (15). Many of the collieries in Witbank however, were not affiliated to the Chamber in the 40's and their wages remained below this fixed rate. The unaffiliated collieries' wage policies were most likely a factor in spawning the series of strikes that occurred around the issue of wages after 1944.

A further issue that formed an essential aspect of the moral economy of the mine was that of food, and increasingly during the 1940's food became a pivotal factor causing strike action. Complaints around food

ranged from the dissatisfaction with the size of the rations, to the quality of the food and the fact that it was only available at specific times of the day. A valuable illustration of the way that these complaints manifested themselves, and an indication of the general importance of food on the mines, was the demands laid before the Native Commissioner of Witbank during a strike at the Transvaal and Delagoa Bay Colliery in 1945. The Commissioner expressed the workers' demands as follows:

- The occupants of a room demanded that each person receive their rations individually instead of the occupants of the room being supplied jointly.
- The labourers wanted porridge in the morning in addition to the usual rations of bread, maheu, and coffee, claiming that the latter three foodstuffs were insufficient nourishment for the day's work ahead of them.
- On Saturdays these labourers prefer rations of raw meat instead of cooked meat in their stew.
- Their meat rations contain mainly off-fall (sic) instead of a better class of meat.
- The married labourers are not allowed to take their food rations to their huts in the compound in order to share some with their families.
- Natives employed on surface work are being fed twice per day instead of three times per day (16).

These demands recurred frequently in a similar fashion to those cited above. The issue of food prompting strike action, particularly in relation to the size of rations, was exacerbated by the general shortage of food in South Africa during the war. Albert Simelane recounted how in 1939 when 'the war of Hitler started, the miners were not getting meat - they were getting tined beef - what the meat was made of I don't know - perhaps donkeys, horses... They told the people that meat was going to

the soldiers. The people were very tired of this beef business' (17). The food crisis did not stop when the war ended. In 1945, the Department of Native Affairs issued a notice 'to all Natives employed on the mines', informing them that:

'...owing to the recent very severe drought and the consequent acute shortage of slaughter stock, it is not possible for butchers...to obtain sufficient supplies of meat for their customers. This affects the mines as well, and the usual weekly meat ration issued to Native mine workers will be slightly reduced...The Government wishes to be clearly understood that the reduction is...in no way due to the fault of the mines...and knows that it can rely on you, as in the past, not to complain but to accept the position as being unavoidable'. (18)

In July 1946, another Government notice was issued instructing the mining groups to further reduce their fresh meat rations because shortages in supplies of fresh meat had not improved. The notices applied only to "Native mine workers". The food shortages referred to continued well into the late 40's. The "Natives" did not "accept the position as being unavoidable" and food continued to be an ongoing catalyst of strike action. As late as 1950, the food crisis had not been resolved. The following letter was written anonymously in Sesuto from a worker at Greenside Colliery to the Native Commissioner of Witbank:

'Kindly receive my letter in which I beg to inform you that here at Greenside, we are starving, although we get rations but half, particularly porridge. I wish to appeal to you as you will soon say that we are not doing the proper thing. Furthermore, I wish to advise you Sir, to send someone from your office for general investigation of such respect. Finally I would like to draw your attention to the fact that people will soon go on strike against him...'. (19)

The Chamber of Mines seemed largely unaware of the disturbances that arose around food. In the 1945 Annual Report they stated that:

'Considering the difficulties that have arisen during the year through shortages on certain items of food, collieries have been free from unrest among the Native employees'. (20)

Speaking on the food situation on the mines in the 1940's an observer commented that 'feeding arrangements were primitive and balanced diets quite unknown' (21).

The last grievance that arose with great frequency was that of assaults. The workers complained that they were receiving unfair treatment underground. An anecdote told by Albert Simelane demonstrates the hostility that assaults underground could generate. He recalls how a white miner poked a certain worker who was part of his underground team. As a consequence of the miner's action, the worker picked up a pick handle and starting chasing him through the mine. 'Then the miner had to run for his dear life, otherwise he was dead'. The miner never returned to his job underground (22). In every Native Commissioner's report on the mines and in each interview situation, assaults arose as a primary issue of concern.

The grievances around compound managers, food, wages, assaults and working hours, were the primary triggers for strike action on the collieries. Within the framework of the moral economy, the workers cohered around a set of minimum expectations that they held in

relationship to these issues.

D) MANAGERIAL AUTOCRACY ON THE COLLIERIES.

It is not enough, however, simply to state the recurring grievances cited as causes of the strike action and to understand these issues as being an integral part of the moral economy on the mines. It is imperative also to investigate the reasons that these particular areas, rather than others, featured as sources of tension for miners. Food and wages were obvious catalysts in strike action. Food is of course the basic means of survival and especially important in the context of hard labour conditions. Further, in most cases, the mine management did not pay sufficiently high wages to support a family. To understand the worker's animosity towards the Compound Managers, Indunas, and other senior officials on the mines is a more complex issue and needs to be contextualised within the overall nature and structure of managerial control. This section will focus specifically on the aspect of managerial autocracy on the collieries.

A highly autocratic and repressive managerial structure and form of control was a central feature of the South African mining industry throughout the 40's and has continued to be an issue on the mines until the present. There were however, several factors unique to the

collieries during the 1940's which contributed to the intensification of this managerial autocracy. One such factor can be located in the particular class of people who formed the core of the management system on the coal as opposed to gold mines.

Initially the majority of mine personnel on the collieries came from the British Isles. These Welsh and Scottish miners were attracted by the higher rates of pay and the reputedly better working conditions on South African mines. The number of miners of British descent did not decrease, as virtually every male offspring joined the colliery. In the 40's, many of the miners were third generation. They formed the core of the management structure in that they occupied most of the official senior positions on the mines. They fashioned the mines along the lines of the British system with which they were familiar. Labour relations however, differed vastly from anything that they were accustomed to on mines in their home country and these "foreigners" were quick to adopt the racist practices and discriminatory attitudes of their South African counterparts. They became increasingly protective over their positions of authority. It should be remembered that it was these overseas miners who were the first to initiate the white mining union which sought to protect the privileged positions of white miners in the labour hierarchy. During the 1940's there were several registered and recognised "European" Trade Unions on the coal mines, the most important of which was the Mine Workers Union.

There were also many Afrikaners on the mines from the turn of the century but they seldom occupied positions of authority in the 1920's and the 1930's. The reason for this was that the vast majority were farmers who had either bought farms which they were paying off, or they were saving in order to buy a farm. They perceived their involvement in mining as a part-time activity which would enable them to acquire the financial resources to become full-time farmers. Their mining involvement was therefore short term and motivated by economic

imperatives. Initially therefore they came onto the mines at the lowest level in the white labour hierarchy, occupying positions of handymen and miners while all the senior positions were occupied by English speaking second or third generation foreign miners. This remained the status quo up until the Second World War:

'Because the mines were generally small, the chances of promotion were few and far between. You stayed in your job, certainly as an official. You would only change if you were a good miner and got bought up by a large company who offered a large salary and a free house'. (23)

The war created conditions which forced a change in the structure of white labour relations on the mines. The majority of the English-speaking mining community supported the war effort and the young and able-bodied miners enlisted in the army. This was in contrast to the majority of the Afrikaners on the mines who were opposed to South Africa's participation in the war. At the end of 1940, 134 men were on

full-time military service, that is approximately 10 per cent of the European personnel on the collieries (24). This figure increased as the war progressed and the Chamber of Mines Annual Reports frequently alluded to the shortage of skilled "European" miners. In 1943, the Chamber applied for the release of coal miners from full-time military service to 'overcome the difficulties experienced by the Coal Mining Industry in meeting the increased demand for coal with depleted European staffs and in order to ensure that in the event of a National emergency, the production of coal would not be interrupted' (25).

The departure of many of the English-speaking senior management officials during the war created new opportunities on the collieries and there was an influx of untrained and unskilled Afrikaners into the workforce. This class of raw farmers were now able to fill those managerial positions that had previously been blocked the English speaking miners. They had had little experience however, particularly in the development of systems and procedures of labour control and this in part explains the highly autocratic management structure that evolved and functioned on the collieries during the years under investigation. The increasingly untrained nature of the "European" workforce was obviously a problem for the coal industry. In 1943 the Chamber of Mines appointed a Special Sub-Committee with a 'view to overcoming the shortage of technically trained personnel for the appointment to executive positions on the collieries...' (26). The unskilled nature of the miners occupying senior positions during the war obviously had an

impact upon the black workforce which had to toil under the their rigid supervision.

The specific nature and requirements of the coal mining industry was a further factor in contributing to managerial autocracy and the attitude of white miners more generally. The coal mining industry was referred to as the "Orphan Annie" of mining. It attracted substantially less attention than gold mining, this factor being reflected in the scant attention paid to coal in the Chamber of Mines Annual Reports (27). Part of the reason for this is that coal mining was, and still is, a less complex process than that of gold mining. It relies on less technologically sophisticated methods to extract the coal. In the early years, University degrees catered for the skills required on the gold mines while coal mining was hardly taught to mine engineers. White coal miners simply needed a blasting certificate to work underground. This resulted in people with formal mining skills rarely being attracted to the coal mines. It was only in 1946 that the University of the Witwatersrand undertook to establish a course for the degree of Bachelor of Science in the Branch of Coal Mining. In 1947 the first Technical College was established in Witbank for 'official learners employed on the collieries in those areas' (28). However, the marked increase of trained personnel on the coal mines did not take place until the late 60's. The turning point was the advent of open cast mining which was more technically orientated and where greater skills were required to operate the collieries. The Anglo American Coal division (Amcoal) and Rand Mines began transferring their trained staff from the gold to the coal mines.

The "lower status" of coal mining was compounded by the rigid price controls imposed on the coal industry by the central government. This

was the result of the government's efforts to subsidise industrial development by limiting the profit potential of the coal mines.

'The expansion of the gold mining industry and the development of secondary industries after South Africa departed from the Gold Standard in 1932 caused a large increase in the demand for coal... Coal was an important resource in industrial development as it was used to generate power'. (29)

The Coal Industry's growth alongside that of secondary industrialisation in South Africa was not reflected in economic terms. As a result of the government's price controls, the coal mines were never able to match the huge profits generated by the gold mines. In conventional parlance, the coal trade was referred to as a 'struggle'. A Mine Manager's memories of the coal industry in the early years highlighted an intense awareness of the precariousness nature of the coal industry:

'Coal mining certainly wasn't profitable in the 40's, 50's and 60's. The coal price was maintained at an almost unchanging level and collieries cut each others' throats in trying to get markets. We worked on a shoestring and there were no big profits made until the takeoff of the industry in the 70's because of the oil crisis...'. (30)

The imperatives of capital accumulation dictated all facets of mining policy, from labour issues to the choice of mining method. The general lack of prosperity necessitated that the conditions of employment, the

living conditions and wage standards on the coal mines were vastly inferior to those on the gold mines. Notwithstanding minor improvements, the relatively primitive and often appalling conditions on the coal mines extended from the early years of the coal mining industry well into the 40's. The White colliers did not have the advantage of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines Employment Provident Fund until 1940. Few collieries enjoyed ample supplies of potable water and water-carriers were employed on the collieries for this purpose. Sanitation facilities were completely inadequate. On many properties there were no bathrooms in the "European" houses and water-borne sewerage was non-existent. Looking back into the past fifty years of the coal mining industry, Coulter of the Anglo American Corporation spoke emphatically about the poor conditions of both "European and Non-European" employees:

'Colliery companies were not very interested in the comfort and well-being of their employees. Most employees on coming off shift had to wash in a tub at home as washing houses were seldom provided and the position of men living in single quarters was quite pathetic. Native compound accommodation, hospital facilities, housing for married Natives... was crude in the extreme...With the passing years living conditions greatly improved, but it was a slow business for colliery companies were just a little loathe to depart from the old standards which they thought were good enough' (31).

Given the skill requirements, the lower profit margins of the coal industry and the crude and unsatisfactory living conditions on the coal mines, an educated class of miners with formal management skills were seldom attracted to the mines. Moreover, in the 1930's, the decline of agricultural production led to the forced proletarianisation of sectors

of the white agrarian community. This resulted in a new class of "poor whites" entering the industrial arena, many of whom entered jobs on the coal mines. As a consequence of their vulnerable positions in the labour market, the black workforce was targeted as the specific site of poor white hostility. The particular attitudes of this new urban class - which often expressed itself in a blatant racism - played into the prevalent patterns of managerial autocracy.

E) THE STRUCTURE AND HIERARCHY OF CONTROL ON THE COLLIERIES.

The picture that has been painted thus far is a broad sweeping one of the nature of management in operation during the 1940's. It suggests that from the start of the Second World War, the people occupying the positions of Compound Managers, Shift Bosses, Underground Managers etc., generally belonged to a lower income group and had little or no formal training in any aspect of coal mining. Many of the people had only short-term, economic motives for working on the mines. These factors go some way in explaining the crude and often unsophisticated form that labour relations assumed on the coal mines. This schematic and generalised explanation however leaves aspects of labour relations on the mines unexplored. A more accurate picture of existent dynamics can

only be sketched if one looks at the formal structure and hierarchy of control that operated above and below ground. Such an exploration will elucidate the all important issue of the manifestation of tensions underground between black and white miners, the high incidence of assaults and the role the Compound Manager played in the expression of worker grievances. First, however, it is pertinent to have a cursory understanding of the underground methods of the coal mining industry in the 40's.

In the 40's the method of coal mining was known as "room and pillar" or "bord and pillar" mining. The method chosen was largely governed by economic factors. The "bord and pillar" method is far cheaper than open cast mining as it requires less technological expertise. It is still commonly used in South Africa today. It is used particularly where the coal seams are thick and close to the surface as is the case with the Witbank coalfields. The coal seams in Witbank are horizontal and can be likened to the meat in a sandwich. In the 40's they were approximately 50 feet beneath the surface.

The "bord and pillar" method involves developing bords or roadways at right angles and parallel to each other by blasting out the coal in such a way so as to leave square pillars of solid coal to support the roof (see diagram). This method results in the extraction of 75% of the coal in the working area.

Each working section which had at least twelve working faces, required the following labour. Firstly, a team of four people to cut the coal. This was semi-skilled work as it involved the operation of a coal-cutting machine to cut a slot into the coal to allow space for the coal to break into when blasted. Secondly, two "drill boys" were required to drill holes into the coal face parallel to the cut which were then charged with explosives to blast the coal. This was semi-skilled work but it was fairly arduous as the drill boys usually had to hold the electric drill above their heads in order to place it correctly in the coal seam. Next, blasting took place. Only white miners were able to obtain blasting certificates although quite often you would find blacks doing the job. Finally, after the coal was blasted and the ventilation current had carried away the fumes and dust from the blasted coal, loading would commence. Loading was totally unskilled work but required great strength and stamina. From every blast, approximately 50 tons of coal had to be loaded.

Conditions underground in the coal mines, while reputedly more "pleasant" than those of gold mines, hardly constituted a favourable working environment. Generally speaking, there was relatively poor ventilation, a situation worsened by the huge amount of black dust generated by the cutting and blasting of the

coal. During the 40's, there were no water supplies underground to settle the dust and keep the place "damped down". The following account given by a Mine Manger affords one a descriptive view of the prevailing underground conditions:

'It was like a fog underground during coal cutting. It was very difficult to see anyone around you as there was a great deal of coal dust. You came out of the mine black - the only part that was white was around the mouth. People who came out of the coal mines were pitch, pitch black'. (32)

On certain mines, in addition to the problem of coal dust, conditions below ground were extremely hazardous resulting in a high fatality and accident rate. Underground deaths and injuries were most often caused by methane gas, which when released during the coal blasting process caused fire-damp or methane explosions. Moreover, coal has a tendency towards spontaneous combustion thus causing many underground fires. This made life extremely difficult for underground officials and workers. Although present day techniques have become more sophisticated, coal mining remains hazardous for those working underground.

Besides the direct physical hazards of coal mining, there was the constant threat of miners' contracting pneumoconiosis from the inhalation of mineral dust. The Miners' Phthisis Commission in 1942 claimed that there were very few cases of this disease on the collieries in the Transvaal, (33) but it is very likely that the number of cases recorded was far fewer than the real number of miners who contracted silicosis.

Under these difficult and often tense working conditions, the disciplined organisation of the underground labour force was essential if production targets and profits were to be realised. Discipline was enforced by an underground labour hierarchy headed by the Mine Captain, the overseer of underground production. His direct subordinate, the Shift Boss, was in charge of the functioning and efficacy of two or three working sections. He was also custodian of the safety regulations promulgated under the Mine and Works Act were met. At each working place there was a miner, who was, by legal fiat of the Mine and Works Act, a white man. He saw that tunnels or bords being blasted were straight. His direct subordinate was the "Boss Boy" - that figure of popular mythology and ubiquitous critique, today politely referred to as the "Team Leader" - in charge of the coal cutters, drill operators and loaders.

Essentially it was the miner and his Boss Boy who were responsible for disciplining the workers and were accountable to the shift boss if production schedules were not met. An interview with an underground manager revealed that conversations amongst boss boys would often revolve around techniques by which they were able to ensure the best production results (34). The miner and boss boy seldom had genuine supervisory skills but wielded a great deal of influence underground; they were in charge of recommendations for promotion and of the metering out of punishment. However, they often tended to ignore formal regulatory channels and took the law into their own hands by assaulting the workers underground.

These assaults generated a great deal of tension at the point of production. In the opinion of one worker, if a mine is to avoid strikes then

'The Mine Manager, his assistants, the Compound Manager, etc., all these big shots, they must be brave enough and they must never let any miner or Mine Captain to assault or get out of control. Once that person is out of control, that mine is having a strike. These people must be brave enough to control each and every worker'. (35)

This type of control was seldom in operation on the mines and the high level of assaults remained a constant source of trouble. The assaults have often been explained as stemming from poor communication systems on the mines. Considering the communication difficulties inherent in an linguistically heterogeneous workforce this explanation is highly credible. Further, ethnic differences gave rise to varying perceptions and expectations thus creating a potentially explosive climate above and below ground. Fanagalo, an informal language developed by mine management, was an attempt to transcend the heterogeneity of this melting pot. Fanagalo was functional yet remained inadequate in overcoming the complexities and bridging the divides among the mining workforce. It was structured simply for the purpose of giving commands, a typical example of which was the phrase, 'hamba faku lo broom', which was the equivalent of 'go fetch the broom'. Fanagalo's bias towards imperative and instructional language meant that it lacked the complexities and nuances of a formal, communicative medium. In one miner's opinion, 'Fanagalo makes people stupid', (36) a comment which is a biting indication of the baseness of the language.

By virtue of his skin colour, the Boss Boy was a central figure to the white miner in the communication network underground. In situations where the miner spoke neither African language or Fanagalo, the Boss Boy acted as a conduit between miner and worker. In such cases, it would seem that the white miner exercised very little real authority as the communication barriers meant that his authority had been transferred to his subordinate, the Boss Boy. Inherent in his position as mediator and "interpreter" was a high level of frustration. This resulted in the Boss Boy's form of control being highly autocratic and there was a general tendency to resolve disagreements arising out of communication difficulties through violent means. Consequently, the Boss Boy was often the appropriate target of worker hostility. The actions of the miner and Boss Boy were often founded on the assumption that their authority in the workplace was indisputable. This assumption earned them the reputation of being the 'strong men' on the mines.

The following quotations explicitly suggest that communication difficulties were a determinate factor in the existent conflictual relationships underground:

'A man who spoke the language of the employee generally didn't have a hassle - he explained what he wanted and would get it. A good example was Piet de Wet, who was Afrikaans-speaking and had a Boss Boy called Fifteen. He didn't really speak any of the Bantu (sic) languages but he and his Boss boy could communicate perfectly. They had their own lingo and the job was always 100 percent - the tonnage came up'.
(37)

On the other hand a man

'who spoke very little of the employee's language and spoke Fanagalo, didn't communicate correctly. Invariably the thing wasn't done as he intended it and then he would lose his temper and ZAP! He was always thrashing someone and the boss boy would work in exactly the same manner. He would follow the example of his boss' (38).

The particular communicative relationship established between the miner and boss-boy thus affected the form of control underground.

The incident of assaults however, cannot be solely attributed to communication difficulties. Rather, conflict was an expression of a nexus of factors. 'The white miner's insistence on respect due to his white skin and his demand that blacks jump unquestioningly to his every command' increased the tensions underground (39).

The following statements are testimony to the fact that the assaults also arose as a result of this assertion of white domination and a racist mentality in the workplace. An additional point to be made is that the assaults by Boss Boys on fellow black workers was usually a gauge of the level of frustration borne out of the conditions of underground work:

'Assaults were quite common because whites wouldn't accept black cheek and this led to clouting. It was difficult to get blacks to do the jobs conscientiously which caused a lot of frustration and this also led to the tendency of clouting. There was a high level of frustration underground especially under difficult conditions or when things went wrong. Black on black assaults arose through this frustration. The Boss Boy is a valued job. If his labour doesn't do the work properly he also gets worried'. (40)

Another example of this attitude is reflected in the following statement:

'The refusal to work which led to a fine or jail sentence

didn't affect him (the black worker). The most effective way to deal with his refusal to work was to clout him. If he deserved a clout he would usually accept it. Unfair assaults would be reported and it would be left to the compound manager to deal with it'. (41)

A certain Mine Captain on Tweefontein Colliery gave the following testimony in court after assaulting an underground worker for not doing the job that he was instructed to do. His statement clearly bears out the point that the assaults were related to the racial stereotyping of black workers as inferior:

'His (the worker's) method of putting his questions to me was very provoking in view of trouble that I have had with him over a period of more than one month. When he spoke to me in the way he did I lost my temper and gave him a smack in the face...I told him to get out of the mine immediately which he did'. (42)

The workers' experience of assaults did not always give rise to active resistance. A certain level of violence exerted by the authorities was expected and accepted as part of "the given order of things". This can be understood as illustrative of the efficacy of the dominant ideology operating both within the workplace and within the broader social context. The nature of the ideological hegemony was such that, to an extent, the inequitable relations of subordination and domination were experienced as "natural" by the black workforce. This explains why a certain level of violence was experienced by the black workforce as legitimate and remained uncontested.

How then does one explain the worker's expression of resistance against the assaults? It is at this point that the notion of a moral economy can be seen as an operative force negotiating the terms of the management-labour relationship on the mines. The concept of the moral economy represents the existence of countervailing force challenging the assertion of total hegemonic control by the Mine Management. Thus, when the level of assaults exercised by miner and Boss Boy were perceived as overstepping the bounds of their authority, the workers felt that they had suffered an injustice. The terms of the moral economy had been breached and the workers took action. The worker was entitled to lay a charge against his assailant who had to pay a fine if found guilty. Although the mine management officially frowned on assaults underground, they were tolerated in the interests of "getting the job done".

There is no evidence that the Boss Boys were drawn from any particular ethnic grouping but very often East Coasters filled the position, one explanation being that 'they appeared more intelligent' (43). It is likely that nepotism operated underground with the Boss Boy favouring members of his own group. 'Put a Basotho in charge of a Basotho gang because they'd accept their own type better' (44). This probably served to increase the ethnic tensions that characterised life on the mines which will be explored later.

There is very little evidence of spontaneous collective action underground, partially because the conditions underground made it difficult for workers to vent grievances during working hours. It

was once the workers were back on the surface that their discontent with underground working conditions and the frequency of assaults found their outlet. The usual scenario was that the miner/s concerned would lay a complaint with the Indunas and Compound Manager, who were then expected to deal with the issue.

There are important parallels between the relationship of the Compound Manager to the Induna and that of the Miner to the Boss Boy underground. The relationship between the Compound Manager and Induna affected their style of control over labour in the same way as that of the Miner and Boss Boy. The Induna was basically the mouthpiece of the Compound Manager and acted as the interpreter and mediator in the context of compound life. Both the Boss-Boy and Induna were selected by mine management rather than the workers and they were answerable to their white superiors. There were also significant differences however. Firstly, the Compound Manager and Induna carried more authority and status within the managerial hierarchy. The Induna was the most senior black employee on the colliery. This was indicated by the Coal Committees suggestion in 1947 that the Induna be paid on a monthly basis and that he should be granted fourteen consecutive days annual leave (45

The Miner and Boss Boy reported on conditions underground to the Induna who then reported them to the Compound Manager. Secondly, whereas the Boss Boy was usually the focus of worker hostility underground, it was the Compound Manager and not the Induna who was usually labelled the oppressor above ground.

The centrality of the Compound Manager from the black workers' perspective can be explained more broadly in terms of the workers' conditions on the mines. By law they were compelled to live in the compound and spent the majority of their off-duty hours there. According to Goffman who wrote on total institutions, the workers were forced

'to lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life, and the man who controls this "round of life" is the Compound Manager' (46).

The workers regarded the Compound Manager as the most high profile person in the world of the compound, the person who had the power to intervene if a crisis situation arose. In most examples of worker dissatisfaction, grievances were vented against the Compound Manager and he was held personally responsible for not improving the conditions of the workers. A Compound Manager expressed this point very clearly;

'The Natives never go to the miner to rectify (their grievances) but take it for granted that they were done in ...by me'. (47)

Several of the Native Commissioner's reports stated that:

'As the Natives largely blame the Compound Manager for their alleged ill-treatment they demand his discharge by the mine authorities'. 48

The workers' perspective of the role of the Compound Manager was not wholly out of line with the government's definition of his job. By virtue of Proclamations 3 of 1917 and 26 of 1925, the Compound Manager had to be licensed annually by the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner. The issue of the licence was on a discretionary basis. According to this proclamation, the Compound Manager had to "supervise and control" the migrants and see to the conditions and sanitation of the compound. He was the only person who could give permission to visitors to enter the compound. Under the Proclamation, he was legally obliged to investigate the workers' complaints. The Proclamation ultimately gave the Compound Manager the power to ensure that the compound was physically and symbolically separated from the outside world.

In practice, the Compound Manager's authority was exercised in an arbitrary and discretionary fashion. Because he had no formal qualifications, he relied on his "experience" in dealing with the workers. According to the Chief Induna on Greenside Colliery, 'as long as you treat people nicely they'll like you. They will never hate you'. This was a simple maxim of success. In mining circles a Compound Manager was judged by the amount of labour that was attracted to the mines. A colliery in Natal had an almost voluntary labour force and this was attributed entirely to the Compound Manager's skills in dealing with the labour force (49). On mines where worker disturbances were more frequent, it was difficult for the Compound Manager simply to explain them away as minor incidents of worker discontent.

Beside the centrality of the Compound Manager in the compound, there was another reason why he featured more prominently as a grievance amongst workers than the Induna. This was related to the way in which the Induna usually carried out his duties. The Induna was appointed to maintain order in the compound and to prevent drinking, dagga-smoking and homosexuality. The Chief Induna of Greenside Colliery that was mentioned above suggested that in general, the "formally forbidden practices" were ignored by the Indunas so long as they did not disrupt the order of the compound. Thus there was a compound mteto, "unwritten tacitly agreed upon laws", that was established between the compound dwellers and the Indunas. This mteto served to undercut the Induna's authority in the eyes of the workers.

It is now clearer why the figure of the Compound Manager and and, in fewer instances, the Induna, was the focus of grievances during strike action. The most frequent accusation made against the Compound Manager was that he did not give the workers an audience. At a strike at the Navigation Colliery in 1941, the workers complained that, 'when they are assaulted underground the Compound Manager did not go into their complaints' (50). In the words of a worker on the Colliery:

'We complained to the manager but he did not listen to us and he is a violent master and mostly feared by the boys. We decided to go on strike. Further what caused a strike is his indiscriminate assault of the boys'. (51)

The Chief Induna stated that it was an important requisite for the Compound Manager to take immediate action when an assault was reported:

'If the worker brings the report to the Compound Manager about the Mine Captain, the Compound Manager must not favour the Mine Captain and not listen to this report...He must go straight and warn the Mine Captain, no matter how friendly he is with this person, that " This thing is no good, you better stop it now!" If it goes on and the Mine Captain doesn't do it, then a strike will go on'. (52)

In the light of the serious consequences that could arise from a Compound Manager ignoring a worker's complaints, it is surprising how many times this actually occurred. When questioned by the Native Commissioner, the Compound Managers often stated that they did not listen to the complaints as 'most of them were of a trivial nature' (53). This attitude placed the Compound Manager's relationship with his workers in serious jeopardy. On Tweefontein Colliery the accusation that the Compound Manager 'failed to hold a proper investigation and take appropriate action on receiving the complaint', (54) erupted into a major fracas. The Compound Manager, in an attempt to defend his position, offered the following explanation to the Native Commissioner:

'When I received the complaint, I got in touch with the Mine Captain who told me that he had hit the complainant one blow in the face with his open hand because the latter, King George who was a machine boy, had not carried out his instructions to go on cutting the coal and with his gang had remained idle for five hours, and had been insolent when remonstrated with'. 55

It appears from this that the Compound manager simply accepted the Mine Captain's version and made no attempt to find out King George's. The Compound Manager abrogated any responsibility for the Mine Captain's actions and impressed upon King George to return to work:

'As the Native was in the wrong in the first instance, I then ordered him to return to work. This the Native refused to do...I told him " You are an old boss boy and know better. You know that you are contracted for any kind of work underground. I am not responsible for the allocation of work underground. What the Mine Captain tells instructs you to do you're to do." Only when threatened with criminal procedures...(did) King George agree to return to the Waterman Shaft'. (56)

The Compound Manager's dismissal of King George's complaint and King George's ultimate agreement to return to work was not the end of the incident. The following day, the Mine Captain concerned reported that 'the Natives had adopted a sullen and provocative attitude underground and threats against other mine officials had been overheard...Rumours were received that the Natives had made threats of personal injury to the chief Compound Manager, Mr. de Kock' (57).

The next day, the workers went on strike. As a result of the 'attitude of the Natives', and what Mr. de Kock considered to be the 'ill feeling engendered among the European miners and residents of Tweefontein', he signalled the alarm for 'concerted action to be taken by the white male 'population who were prepared to resort to firearms, if necessary' (58).

He suggested that a force of armed police be called to arrest the known ringleaders and others suspected of inciting strike action. The General Manager of the mine later explained to the District Commandant from Middleburg that the 'feelings among Europeans was high...and that if there was any further trouble there was a possibility of the European miners taking the law into their own hands' (59).

Mr. de Kock was unable to disclose any definite breaches of the law on the part of the "Natives" except for the alleged threats and rumours made by the workers. The incident demonstrates not only a paranoia and fear of action by the "Natives", but also the serious situation that could arise out of what black workers perceived as unfair treatment by the Compound Manager. The events that occurred on the mine were completely out of proportion with the cause of the disturbance. The results of this particular case was that the Mine Captain was suspended, in his words 'for my own personal safety', (60) and the Compound Manager was dismissed.

The dismissal of the Compound Manager was a frequent outcome of a disturbance. In most instances where allegations arose around the Compound Manager, the workers would accept nothing less than the dismissal or transferral of the Compound Manager or any other mine official concerned. The reply of the workers to the Native Commissioner during the strike on Tweefontein colliery in 1944 was that:

'they would not start work unless they received the assurance that the Mine Captain, Mr. Wilson, who had assaulted one of their men, and the chief Compound Manager, Mr. de Kock, who had failed to take up the worker's

complaint, were instantly dismissed'. (61)

During the strike at the Landau Colliery in 1944 where the workers demanded the dismissal of the induna, alleging that he was not impartial and showed favouritism to his relatives and friends, the power of the workers was clearly demonstrated. The Native Commissioner told the workers that it was not their place or right to select their own compound manager and induna and that their appointment rested entirely with Mine Management:

'But as this statement was received with such hostility and as the Natives were worked up into such a state of antagonism, I feared a general riot and I suggested to the General Manager that it would be advisable in the circumstances to accede to their request and replace the present Induna.' (62)

The Compound Manager acquiesced in this action. In other examples when workers simply refused to continue working unless the Compound Manager was dismissed, this was almost always agreed to.

In many instances, the Native Commissioner also cited the cause of strike action as the 'tactlessness of the compound manager' (63). In several interviews with Compound Managers, the Native Commissioner concluded he did not always give the workers a sympathetic hearing and it was often apparent that to the Commissioner that he did not carry out his duties in the manner prescribed in regard to alleged assaults. Instead of reporting the alleged assaults in writing to the Manager and the Police, he investigated the assaults without satisfying the workers. On one mine, the Commissioner went so far as to say that 'the Natives

have no confidence in the Compound Manager and that he has himself to blame for this' (64). In cases where the workers cited several reasons for going on strike, the Compound Manager usually appeared to be the main reason.

A unilateral declaration of the Compound Manager as the "guilty party" is a simplistic characterisation of the dynamics of the labour relations on the collieries. Although clearly the Compound Manager often exacerbated the situation by his treatment of the workers, there are several factors that can be seen as vindicating his actions. Especially in the case of assaults, the situation was often more complex than the workers' perception that the Compound Manager was to blame when assaults were not dealt with. When an assault charge was brought before the Compound Manager, he would have to get the facts completely verified so that the Mine Manager would not side step the issue and so that he could ensure that some form of discipline was exerted against the offender. But it was often very difficult to get witnesses to testify against the miner or Boss Boy as they were afraid of victimisation. There was a strong tendency on the part of Mine Captains or white miners to bribe the witnesses. Albert Simalane, a Chief Induna at Greenside Colliery, recounted the following possible course of events if a worker had been hit by the miner or Mine Captain:

'If the white miner or Mine Captain hits another man and perhaps the piccanins are standing nearby... because these picannins are working for him down the mine, he'll persuade them not to be witnesses. That's how the strike came out. When the Compound Manager questions these witnesses, they won't talk now because they are scared of the Mine Captain. If he tells the Compound Manager that he has witnessed the Mine Captain assaulting that boy, and does not stand by him

(the Mine Captain), (the piccanin) will get bad work underground. this is what makes people cross - they are not getting a fair deal underground'. (65)

In virtually every case study where a Compound Manager was the focus of strike action and the workers demanded his dismissal, the Compound Manager was newly appointed on the colliery. A likely explanation for this pattern was that a new Compound Manager introduced systems of control that were alien to the workers. The new methods used disrupted the fragile modus operandi that had been constructed between workers and management within the moral economy of mining life. During the strike on Navigation Colliery in 1941, the Native Commissioner's report clearly reflected this point:

'The Compound Manager, Mr. McMaster, is a newcomer and a very good man, but the natives find him very strict after the slack regime of the last man who was there for 33 years. This man was dismissed at the end of last year by the new general manager.' (66)

Again during a strike at the New Sarie Marais Colliery in 1946, the Commissioner of the South African Police wrote that,

'The whole trouble is that the Mine is now under new management and the old method of slackness under which the mine operated previously is no longer tolerated by the Manager and his staff, hence the request of the Natives that the Manager and Underground Manager be dismissed before they will resume work'. (67)

And further, at a threatened strike at South Witbank Coal Mines, the Native Commissioner reported:

'The impression I received about the whole trouble is that the ex - Compound Manager has relaxed to a very great extent and that they could do as they like, hence their demand. It may be that when the new Compound Manager takes over he will find matters difficult in the beginning'. (68)

The old compound manager was perceived as being more relaxed than his replacement. This points to the likelihood that a dynamic process of negotiation was set up between workers and the Compound Manager when he entered into his position of authority. Over time, the Compound Manager conceded in a piecemeal fashion to the workers' demands and there was an imperceptible slackening of his rule. The continuing process of change and renegotiation allowed the workers to assert influence over, and become accustomed to, the Compound Manager's particular style of control.

The above examples of action taken against the Compound Manager, and the frequency of his dismissal, suggest that the Compound Manager's basis of authority was extremely fragile. They point to certain vital features for the Compound Manager to possess if he was to maintain control over his fiefdom. The qualities that were stressed as being important to the Compound Manager's popularity were "uprightness and impartiality". It was important for the workers to perceive him as a "fair" man who would mete out justice. Besides these personal attributes, the Compound Manager needed to establish informal networks amongst the workers which would facilitate his keeping in touch with the pulse of life in the compound. Without these networks it was almost impossible for the Compound Manager to gauge the feelings and

attitudes of the workers. As has already been pointed out, the Induna functioned as the mediator and interpreter for the Compound and was a central figure in helping the Compound Manager establish a rapport with the workers. Besides the Induna, the Compound Manager relied on other channels for keeping in touch with the workers. The "police boys" were also important sources of information. Several interviews revealed that informers were a common feature of compound life and played a very important role in assisting mine management. These informers did not resemble the notorious informers that we know today; they were generally not paid nor were they formally instructed to spy on the workers. They often volunteered information to the Compound Manager in an attempt to prevent problems in a particular area. In the words of a Mine Manager:

'These informers would "pick up vibes" and feel that they had to speak to someone in authority to "drop a whisper" so that management could investigate and take the correct action before anything major happened'. (69)

This section has revealed the complexities of control on the collieries. The rigid system of control over the workforce did not amount to total domination. The authority of both the Compound Manager and the Induna was circumscribed in very real ways; if they embarked upon an unfavourable course of action in the compound, they would be rejected by the workers. A dynamic process of interaction between the formal conditions of existence and the needs and perceptions of the workforce, was the status quo.

D) THE COURSE OF STRIKE ACTION

Strike action on the collieries has possibly been underplayed in South Africa historical writings, because of the short nature of the strikes. There was no equivalent of the 1946 Gold Miners Strike on the collieries. None-the-less workers aptly pointed out that:

'You see a strike is not a thing of just one day that it starts. If a mine strikes you must know that there are certain things that have been going along and those people concerned did not attend to them and people become very, very cross. Then they say they're not going to work until those things are sorted out. They don't just sit in one room and shout, "Today we are not going to work",...They talk it over where they are working down the mine, they'll talk it over in the changehouse, where they are going to get their food'. (70).

There were several trajectories that strike action would follow. On an ordinary day on the mines, the the bell for the morning shift would go at about 4.30 a.m. Their miners would get dressed and take their dishes to the kitchen to get food. At 5.30a.m., the bell would ring again to signal the start of work underground in half an hour. On the day that there was a strike however:

'The bell will ring at 4.30 and no one will come out. They just get up and get dressed and stay in their rooms. No one is going to the kitchen to get food. (The reason for this is that) they want to be very, very cross. When a person is hungry, he becomes very cross - he's hungry and he's worried and he does not need that food until he gets a better treatment...They've got a big worry to be sorted out. If they don't go and get their food, you must know that it is

hell to play'.(71)

In virtually every report on strike action, the native Commissioner or Commissioner of Police would comment on the workers refusal to eat the food prepared for them and thus the strikes were often referred to as "hunger strikes";

'The native mine labourers of the (Greenside) Colliery went on hunger strike and refused to eat their food before going down the mine on that morning'. (72)

Beside the reasons given by the interviewee, the workers probably also refused their food in the knowledge that the Mine Manager would not allow them to go underground without having eaten. The managers pointed out that without food the workers 'would otherwise be in danger to themselves and the mine', (73 as they would have no strength for their laborious tasks. The costs that the mine would have to bear if accidents occurred discouraged management from sending workers underground.

After refusing to eat or go underground, the workers would gather outside the compound. The Mine Police or Induna would then phone the Compound Manager to tell him, 'Hey'! Today it's not good'. (74) On receiving the news of a strike, there was a marked reluctance on the part of the Compound Manager concerned to approach the striking workers and to discover their grievances. When asked the reason for this, the interviewee pointed to the vulnerable position that the Compound Manager and other mine officials were in at this stage:

'It's not easy. Any official won't go straight to the striking workers - never. They are too scared...On the mines there are thousands of people - now they are all together. Then the Compound Manager will be scared to go there. Perhaps he'll try and find out from the Induna or take the Induna and Mine Police and go there. The interpreter says, "The boss wants to know what's wrong today." They'll say, "Go to hell. Tell the Compound Manager to go to hell." They tell him straight away that they want the Native Commissioner here'. (75)

At the point when the workers had decided to go on strike, the Compound Manager had lost all authority in their eyes. He had failed to rectify the complaints brought before him in the preceding days or weeks and the workers were no longer interested in negotiating with him. 'They'll say to the Compound Manager, "You're too weak to carry out our complaints" or "Shut up! We often give you complaints and you don't take care of it." They wanted the "big boss".' (76) The strikers were sometimes too impatient to wait for the "big boss" to arrive, and they simply set off on a march to Witbank to find, and lodge their complaints with either the Native Commissioner or in the case of the Portuguese workers, with the Portuguese Inspector at the WNLA Compound.

The above points explain why the Native Commissioner of Witbank was a ubiquitous figure during strike action and why he was always called onto the scene of a strike. His role is an interesting and complex one. On the one hand, he was regarded by the workers as the only person who could grant their demands. From management's perspective on the other hand, he was the only

one who would placate the workforce and restore order on the mine. It is remarkable that the mine management itself did not have the machinery to solve their own problems. They had to rely on outside help in a time of crisis, a state of affairs which suggests the workers' potential power.

Once on the mine, the Native Commissioner functioned as a kind of "mediator" between management and the strikers, attempting to investigate the workers' complaints while ensuring that they returned to work as soon as possible. He cannot be portrayed as a figure who "sided with the workers" in their decision to strike. Several recurrent themes are discernible in the addresses made by the Native Commissioner to striking workers marking his disapproval of their actions.

On legal grounds, he warned the "natives" that they were contravening the law by refusing to go to work and that they were liable to be prosecuted. On moral grounds, the Native Commissioner reprimanded the workers for what he considered to be their 'high handed action of going on strike without first appointing a deputation to lay their grievances before the mine management or failing satisfaction from their management then to their inspector' (77). This statement was made during a strike at Clydesdale Colliery. A further example which reiterates both these themes was the Native Commissioner's address to a meeting during a strike at Landau Colliery in 1944:

'I pointed out to the Natives the wrongful and unlawful action taken by them in ceasing work and going on strike, and warned them of the very grave consequences to them if such conduct was repeated. They were also informed that if

they had any complaints or grievances, their proper course was to appoint a delegation to interview me on such matters which would then receive official investigation'. (78)

One may ascertain from these examples that, from the management's perspective, strike action was the first resort for the black miners. The previous sections would seem to invalidate this claim; workers more often than not felt that formal channels for airing grievances, such as through the Compound Manager, did not prove efficacious. The workers were unmoved by the Native Commissioner's threats of prosecution.

It should be noted that the emergency regulations during the war provided the punishment of a fine of 900 pounds or three years imprisonment with hard labour for persons striking work on the mines. During the first half of the 40's the Native Commissioner regularly reminded the workers of the 'crime being committed by their going on strike during war time and also of the severe penalty for such a crime and therefore advised them to go back to work and to appoint one or more of themselves as delegates to discuss the matter with the mine management.' (79) These war-time regulations appeared to have little impact on the action of the workers, however. The Native Commissioner on Tweefontein Colliery reminded the workers of this regulation but,

'This still had no apparent effect as the Natives refused to resume work unless their demands regarding the Chief Compound Manager and Mine Captain to which the General Manager was not prepared to accede to were complied with. and the meeting was terminated in order to give the Natives a further opportunity of coming to a favourable decision...'. (80)

Although the stoppages of work were illegal, the Native Commissioner often recommended that no action be taken in the matter. This was indicative of the Native Commissioner's attempts to win over the striking workers. Thus, despite his warnings, the Native Commissioner gave the workers a sympathetic hearing and treated their complaints with an apparent fairness and neutrality. Albert Simelane explained this such a way that the unnerving power of a group of strikers was well demonstrated:

'The Native Commissioner will talk to them nicely - he promises to talk to the Mine Manager to attend to their complaints... (He'll say) "I'm asking you politely, tomorrow you must go to work". he'll never shout. When people are many and when they are cross, when there's a strike, they can kill you. It's no use getting cheeky...'. (81)

There are very few occasions when he did not suggest that the management accede to worker's demands. Upon investigation he often found the workers complaints to be valid as was shown in the case of several complaints lodged against Compound Managers. On one occasion, he went so far as to cite the conditions in the compounds as the cause of the disturbances:

'Conditions are not as they should be in the compound...the rooms are not free of vermin and although I am assured that DIT is being used extensively, I have had occasion to complain about the vermin on more than one occasion. A close watch is being kept in this connection. These facts are mentioned in the report because I am of the opinion that (they) contribute to the discontent of the natives in the compound. The labourers, it would appear are called on to work hard, and, if they are not fully content in the compound, the slightest matter will upset them'. (82)

The Native Commissioner's acquiescence to the workers can be read as a genuine response to the situation at hand. It can also be read as simply a pragmatic response, the only one which would resolve the strike. The workers were seldom satisfied or prepared to return to work unless their demands were met and they did not respond well to threats from management. Moreover, it was in the Commissioner's interests to restore the peace.

In many instances it was reported that 'the Natives behaved in an orderly manner and no untoward incidents occurred' (83).

However, not all strikes were peaceful and some resulted in violent action on the part of both workers and police. An example of such a trajectory was the course that strike action took at Schoongezicht Colliery in 1945:

'About 5.30pm on the 2nd instant the Natives of Rooms Nos. 13, 14 and 15 rushed out prevented the boys who were going on night shift from having their food rations and threatened to kill them if they attempted to take their rations. The workers coming off day shift boys were also stopped from taking their food. All these Natives then joined in a crowd. They smashed up the Compound Manager's office, the quarters of the Mine Police, as well as the trading store adjoining the compound. Without giving any reason for their behaviour the crowd of natives then marched onto the WNLA Compound, Witbank. En route they stoned a car causing serious damage. The police went out to meet them. They seemed very hostile and in order to stem their activities the police fired 4-5 shots wounding one native in the hand and the other in the leg. Another party of police arrived and managed to subdue the natives...Police investigations are geared towards charging the natives with public violence. 1 243 Natives out of a total of 1 620 workers were involved'. (84)

In this example, the damage to property amounted to 770 pounds which was a fairly substantial amount in the 1940's. Ninety four workers were arrested, 82 of whom were convicted. During confrontations with the police, 33 strikers were injured - 3 by shooting and the others by batons and bayonets.

Often, the management would cite a particular individual or group of individuals as the cause of strike action and they were then discharged. In some cases it was intimidation that drove workers to strike:

'I am employed by the Abor Collieries...I am on the tipping tubs. I have been employed by the company only two weeks ago. I had not known much about it. I went on strike because of the threat of assault of the strikers if I did not go on strike as well'. (85)

The Native Commissioner's words on the role of the police during disturbances at Dogies Colliery are demonstrative of the general attitude of the management to The South African Police in these matters. They were generally called upon 'just in case' and offered the management of sense a security whilst dealing with the strikers:

'Needless to say, the Police were always kept on the spot, although they remained in the background during the various addresses delivered to the strikers'. (86)

Thus the police would often proceed to a mine but no action was taken by them.

The numbers involved in strike action varied greatly. The largest number of striking workers in this period was approximately 1 720 during a strike at Transvaal and Delagoa Bay Colliery in 1945. The total labour force on that mine was 1 732 which meant that virtually every worker was on strike. In 1941 on Navigation Colliery 1 000 out of roughly 1 500 workers went on strike and in 1944 1 200 went on strike on the same mine. The figures of striking workers on Schoongezicht in 1945 were also very high. 1 243 workers out of 1 620 did not go underground. In the same year 75 out of some 500 workers at Douglas Colliery went on strike. (87). These figures demonstrate that in certain instances the majority of the workforce was mobilised around strike activity.

F) SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The fact that there were a number of consistent features during collective action on the mines points to the existence of some type of system of rules, informal or otherwise, that was operating between workers and management on the mines. Moodie has used the term "moral economy" to encapsulate this system.

Within the moral economy, workers were able to wield a significant amount of power over mine management as witnessed in their frequent success in getting a Compound Manager or Induna retrenched or re-installed. So pervasive and powerful were the features that caused discontent among migrants, that the managements' most frequent nostrum was to accede to workers' demands. The type of power that was asserted here by the workers obviously had severe limitations, but it did succeed in forcing management to comply with their wishes which in turn served to cushion the effects of the harsh world that the miners inhabited.

Often a specific issue, such as the quality of food, would be the direct cause of the strike but it would in turn give rise to complaints over a series of issues which might otherwise have remained unexposed. There was thus a kind of "snow-ball" effect during these disturbances as accumulated grievances came to the fore.

There is very little evidence of broader aims being fought for during collective action. The moral economy gave rise to defensive actions that were restricted in both time and place. Demands were almost always practical in nature and could be dealt with effectively in a short space of time. There was no formal organisation during strike action. The rise of the African Mine Workers Union, which was launched in 1941 under the leadership of J.B. Marks and which was to become the major force behind the 1946 black miners strike on the gold mines, had little impact on the coal mines in the period under investigation.

There are divisions among sociologists and historians as to whether the workers' strike action on the collieries could or could not be said to reflect a worker consciousness. The one school of thought is represented by Melvyn Goldberg. He asserts that, despite the fact that the workers demonstrated an awareness of and antagonism to their subordination by challenging the discriminatory practices of white officialdom and displaying little hesitation in refusing to go underground, their actions did not reflect a worker consciousness. According to this definition the fact that there was no sense of workers' rights over and above indigenous moral outrage makes it difficult to describe their actions as displaying "worker consciousness". Moreover the lack of formal organisational structures with a recognised leadership to guide the actions of the workers during a strike would also militate against describing their protests in such terms.

The second school of thought has a much more diffuse definition of worker consciousness. According to Phimister and van Onselen formal organisation should not be considered the sign post of a worker consciousness. A variety of forms of worker protest ranging from machine breaking to desertions, can be described as demonstrations of worker consciousness. Within this framework the strike action on the collieries would undoubtedly be an expression of worker consciousness.

It is impossible to investigate the issue of worker consciousness in any detail. However, evidence would seem to suggest that the consciousness of the workers was still largely rooted in the countryside and that their protests were not economic responses to exploitation within an industrial setting but moral outcries against conditions which affected the day-to-day life of the miners. The following section will explore these issues in greater depth.

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CHAPTER TWO: MIGRANTS AND ETHNICITY

The notion of the moral economy on the mines provides a useful framework in which the informal power relationships operating on the mines can be understood. The concept allows for a more flexible interpretation of managerial control, as it shows that the workers possess limited, but none-the-less important, means of negotiating the terms of their existence. It has been shown in Chapter 1 that while on the whole the workers acquiesced to supervisory demands because they saw no real alternatives, there were certain areas in which the workers exercised real power. Despite the elucidatory value of the concept, it has, however, several short comings. The concept of the moral economy tends towards reification in that it foregrounds the structural aspects of mining life. It attempts to understand the specific pattern of the workers' organisation, through an investigation of the relationship set up between the workers and the Compound Manager, Induna etc. This analysis of the internal structure of the relationships on the mine and in the compound fails to consider the importance that a group of migrants' particular background had in influencing their actions. The miners were not mere tabula rasa onto which the moral economy was inscribed. They did not leave behind the countryside when they journeyed to the mines; their rural consciousness was deeply internalised and was not automatically negated by their presence on the mines. Thus the migrants brought with them their own set of cultural assumptions,

practices and forms of associations. The strong rural orientation of the migrant workforce functioned as an important pillar for the workers on the collieries. Their responses to their new situation was partially determined by this deeply ingrained set of values and expectations.

Thus, while the notion of a moral economy adequately captures certain aspects of the nature and causes of collective action, it fails to incorporate others. One of the "missing elements" within the concept can be understood as pertaining to mining culture or the "ethnic dimension" of resistance on the collieries. Jeff Guy, in his study on shaft sinking on the gold mines, points to the importance of this dimension of study by attempting to link 'the intensely personal perception of labour on the mines and the impersonal forces that shape the work experience' (1). Workers on the mines were not an homogeneous group. As already mentioned, the coal mining industry in the Transvaal was almost entirely dependent on migrant labour. This phenomenon was spawned by a government policy which aimed at prohibiting the establishment of permanent places for black workers in urban or industrial centres. The workers came from a number of different areas both inside and outside the borders of South Africa. Their ethnic identities remained integral to their lives on the mines; a worker's ethnic identity determined the job he occupied, the room he lived in, how and with whom he spent his leisure time. There were few activities that were not underpinned by these ethnic divisions.

Evidence also strongly suggests that during strikes worker participation was sectional in nature. In other words, action occurred amongst a specific group of workers. There is little evidence to show that, on an overt level, the division of workers occurred along lines other than that of ethnicity - workers were seldom united by their specific job categories or common grievances. Rather, reports on strike action on collieries are littered with ethnic references and a particular "tribe" was often cited as the cause of a strike. Moreover, in every interview situation, ethnicity featured as a primary concern in discussions dealing with labour relations. The primary divisions and tensions undoubtedly arose between the East Coast and the Basotho workers. Ethnicity appears to have been a key organising principle on the mines. It is pertinent to inquire therefore into the different ways in which the ethnic composition of the workforce was reflected in the general context of mining life and in the specific area of strike action. For the purposes of this chapter, ethnic divisions and tensions will be explored in three distinct areas. Firstly, the ways in which ethnic divisions were manifest on a day-to-day level. Secondly, how a marked feature during protest action was ethnic mobilisation. Lastly, how ethnic tensions had the potential to flare up into faction fights amongst workers on the collieries. As a preliminary however, ethnicity as a concept will be briefly explored.

A) ETHNICITY AS A FORCE ON THE MINES

Any discussion on ethnicity needs to be framed within the particular context in which it is evident. What becomes apparent within the context of mining life is the need to disaggregate the concept and to understand ethnicity as a multi-faceted and complex tool of analysis. It arises out of a multiple set of determinations. On the one hand, one must take into account ethnicity's material basis, that is, its roots in the particular social formation from where the migrant came. The workers clearly displayed an ethnic consciousness on arriving on the mines and their ethnic identity cannot therefore be seen as simply the "creation" of mine management. On the other hand, management placed migrants in contexts which magnified the extent to which they experienced their own ethnic identities. They were housed in compounds where all resources were allocated on an ethnic basis and where the persistence of ethnic divisions was encouraged at all times. The worker's own sense of ethnic identity and the management's manipulation of this identity was the crucial combination in fuelling the flames of ethnic conflict.

In hostels where there were no prescribed ethnic divisions, there is virtually no evidence of faction fights occurring during the same period of study. Within the mining world, the management

ignored their culpability in spawning ethnic conflict. They propagated a jejune theory of ethnicity - they simply regarded ethnicity and conflict as close relatives. In reality, they are often distant cousins. It needs to be stressed therefore that an ethnic consciousness is not necessarily the springboard for inter-ethnic rivalry or faction fights. It has greater potential to become such a springboard however, if it is overlaid by a structure of control that itself entrenches ethnic barriers. The compound was the quintessential example of such a structure of control.

Changing patterns of recruitment were an additional factor in fuelling ethnic conflict. A change in the ethnic composition of the workforce affected the balance of power in the compounds as well as exacerbating the constant jostling for positions amongst the workforce and competing for access to scarce resources. It will be shown that during the 1930's and 1940's, there were substantial changes in the composition of the workforce on the collieries and this in part underpinned the increase in ethnic tensions and faction fights during the decade of the 1940's. Some of the findings in relation to recruitment are speculative as there were not always detailed figures to back up what appears to have been noticeable trends in patterns of recruitment.

The labour requirements on the coal mines were relatively modest in comparison to those on the gold mines. In 1936, the average number of "Natives" employed by the Witwatersrand Native labour

Association (WNLA) during 1936 was 291 213 on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines while the coal mines in the same period employed only 14 804 workers. By 1942, the numbers employed had increased to 353 086 and 21103 respectively (2). Labour requirements on the collieries however mushroomed with the significant increase in the demand for coal from 1939 onwards. 'Owing to the war the importance of the Coal Mining Industry , in relation to the National economy, has increased and the Industry has been called upon not only to maintain but to increase production'(3). During the year 1940 the coal produced in the Union amounted to 18933 000 tons, an increase of 767 000 tons over the 1939 production (4). In 1942, the Native Labour association arranged for the additional supply of Native labour to be sent to the Transvaal Collieries and by 1944 the coal output in the Transvaal alone amounted, to 16 740 009' (5).

The development of the coal industry outstripped the growth of labour available and often acute labour shortages were experienced by the collieries. Even before the boom in coal, the Government Mining Engineer warned that 'the shortage of native labour is very serious today, that it threatens to become more serious in the future and that it will undoubtedly affect the development of the mineral industry adversely unless immediate steps are taken to improve the situation' (6).

Labour from Portuguese East Africa was vitally important to both the gold and coal mines. This was especially true of the coal mines where the majority of workers, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, were Shanganes, East Coasters, from Portuguese East

Africa. This source of labour was not simply "available" to the mines. The number of labourers entering South Africa from Mozambique was formally controlled by the Mozambique Convention of 1928 which limited the number of workers that could be recruited in Portuguese East Africa. The Convention stated that,

'The maximum number of Portuguese Natives that may be employed on the mines is fixed at 80000. (7)

There was a provision in the Convention however, for an increase in the maximum if the Native labour available in Mozambique exceeded the 'number necessary for the requirements of the Province' (8). This provision was acted upon in 1936 when the Portuguese Government extended the maximum number of labourers that could be recruited to 90 000 saying that 'the large number of Portuguese Natives making their way to other parts of the Union...would appear to indicate that there is still a surplus of Native labour in Mozambique which could be made available to the mines' (9). This was supposedly reflected in the high number of clandestine emigrations of Mozambique labourers to the Union. The Convention further stipulated that no labourer shall 'be engaged in the first instance for a period longer than one year, but at the end of the first period he may be re-engaged for a further period or periods, but so that such period or periods do not... exceed two years' (10). Thereafter, they would be regarded as "prohibited immigrants". The Portuguese East African worker who returned from the mines was required by the Convention to stay at

home for six months. The Portuguese Curator in Witbank had the task of attempting to ensure that these various clauses were carried out. In practice however, it is unlikely that the workers obeyed the letter of the law. They had often entered the union illegally and the one Shangane worker interviewed for this study never returned to Mozambique (11). Most of the labourers on the coal mines from Portuguese East Africa stayed on the mines for a minimum of one year. As a result of this usually lengthy period of employment, their practices on the mines were prone to differ from groups of labourers who were on the mines for a couple of months at a time.

In 1938, the Portuguese Government withdrew its permission for the Union to recruit up to 90 000 workers. This reduction in the size of Portuguese labour force affected both the gold mines and the collieries. To compensate for the reduction in Portuguese East Africans, the mines had to look to the (possibility of obtaining the additional Natives from Union and Protectorate sources...or from areas north of the 22'S latitude' (12).

The Chamber of Mines referred to workers that were recruited from inside South Africa as "British South African Natives", and the Mining Industry was not restricted to any maximum numbers which it could draw from the Union and the Protectorates. However, the reports reflect that the "British South African Natives" were not that easy to "obtain" as 'they were not so favourably inclined towards mining employment as others' (13). The migrancy of groups like the Pedi was largely "voluntary" in nature (14). In order to

attract "South African Natives" to the mines, the Chamber embarked on a propaganda programme, one prong of which was a propaganda film used for recruiting purposes. The advent of the war made the Chamber's task more difficult. The mines suffered because of the 'heavy demand for Native labour for military purposes' (15). From the Magisterial district of Sekhukuneland alone '1622 (Pedi) men enlisted and considerable numbers were recruited from adjoining areas, in the first few months of the war effort' (16).

The availability of "British South African Natives" on the labour market was also governed by the factors internal to a particular society. Agricultural factors played a significant role in influencing the numbers of people who sought jobs on the mines. When there were no droughts and harvests were successful, labour was generally not forthcoming.

A combination of factors in the 30's forced Basotho workers from Basotholand and Pedi workers from the Northern Transvaal to enter the labour force on the collieries in greater numbers. Reports on the strikes indicate that the management tended to lump these two groupings of workers together under the appellation Sotho (17). Prior to the 1930's, the majority of Pedi migrants worked on the Premier diamond mines. During the depression in the early 1930's, these diamond fields were forced to shut down. There was a tendency for Pedi youth to seek alternative

employment on the collieries. Despite the poor conditions on the collieries, they were very close to Sekhukuneland and were thus very convenient places of employment for the Pedi worker. The younger men were within striking distance of their homes. Reports indicate that there were large clusters of Pedi workers on specific collieries by the 1940's. The Anglo-French, Oogies and Greenside Collieries all had high percentages of Pedi workers. In 1945, a report on strike action at the Transvaal and Delagoa Bay Colliery revealed that 670 out of 1732 workers were Pedi workers (18). The Chamber's recruitment drive in the late 30's, the increased coal output, and a series of droughts that ravished the country in 1938 and 1939 also ensured that this grouping of workers were more amenable to the mines for labour purposes.

It seems likely that the movement of Basotho onto the collieries can also be linked to the closing of the diamond mines during the depression. This does not however explain their large and increasing presence towards the end of the 1930's. They were predominant on certain mines by the 1940's, for example, on Navigation Colliery which was the largest in the Witbank district.

A far smaller percentage of the workforce on the collieries was made up of Xhosa speakers from the Cape, Zulu speakers from Natal and Swazi speakers from Swaziland. Recruitment drives in those areas were geared towards attracting labour to the gold mines.

Most of the Xhosa, Zulu and Swazi labour were "voluntary" in the sense that they were not channeled through recruiting organisations. Interview material also indicates that some of the workers arriving on the collieries in the 1940's had been transferred there from the gold or other mines. Elijah Shangwe was an example of this phenomenon. He had been transferred there from the Black Diamond Mine in Breyten.

From the beginnings of the migrant labour system, it is possible to detect a pattern being established among migrants entering into jobs on the mines on the Rand - the majority of workers on a particular gold mine or colliery would belong to a particular ethnic group. There was a proclivity for workers from a specific region to seek work and congregate in a particular workplace or area of employment. Local gossip served to familiarise potential workers with the conditions and opportunities on a particular mine. A system that developed among East Coasters was that they would contact fellow workers in their home town just before their own contracts expired (19). These workers would then arrive at the mine in time to take over the jobs that were being vacated. In this way jobs rotated through a group of people who were connected to each other by their place of origin. Delius recorded that the Pedi migrants from Sekhukuneland 'stuck together both en route to work and where possible at their places of employment'. Recent South African historiography has focused on the 'importance and tenacity of these "ethnic" patterns of migration' (20). These writings have challenged the tendency in South

African literature to see ethnicity as the product of manipulation by mine managers or as the result of the government's apartheid policies, which then ignored the internal dynamics of ethnic association. Ethnically based networks on the mines had very important functions and were part of the survival tactics developed by migrant workers. They helped migrant workers retain their contact with home and they offered migrants support and protection whilst they were living far from home in a harsh working and living environment. Such networks also facilitated defensive actions by workers in the workplace and were thus important in patterns both of control and protest inside and outside the compound. These factors partially explain why ethnicity played an important part in shaping a migrant's consciousness. They reinforce the opinion expressed above, namely that ethnicity has to be viewed from two distinct vantage points. The first vantage point shows that ethnicity was not necessarily an artificial imposition of the management structure on the mines but was integral in the lives of the workers. The second vantage point suggests that the migrants' ethnic consciousness was further reinforced and capitalised on by management. Ethnic tensions were unscrupulously manipulated to management's advantages, especially in attempting to preclude the potential of united working class action.

B) ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN THE DAILY LIFE OF THE WORKERS.

Interviews revealed that ethnic stereotyping was a ubiquitous feature of life on the mines. In the minds of management and workers alike, the workforce was divided and categorised through an elaborate system of ethnic labelling. Each label had a distinct image and moral content attached to it. Although stereotypes, like all commonsense maxims, contain elements of truth, they are to be treated circumspectly as they cannot be taken at face value. They are not anchored in any systematic empirical reality and serve to produce a trite mythology of a group's particular characteristics. Often a stereotype will arise out of a specific set of conditions at a particular juncture, but will continue even though that "reality" has changed. On the mines, the stereotypes that were historically relevant persisted over time through a process of consolidation.

On the mines the stereotyping occurred within a very particular context and can be seen as partially arising out of the nature and structure of the mine world. The white person's stereotype of black miners can be located within what Gordon in Mines, Masters and Management refers to as a "supervisory ideology". What became known as Verwoerdian separatist ideology was already well entrenched on the mines in the 1940's. Whites could not form any close relationships with black workers without the threat of

being called a "kaffir boetie". There was no overlap in leisure activities between black and white miners and virtually the only contact between these groupings was in the workplace. Although this does not necessarily invalidate the white miner's perceptions of ethnic differences and divisions, it does point to their superficial nature. Moreover, it should be understood that management used and manipulated stereotypes as a way of motivating the workforce. The stereotype of a particular group of workers being the "best labourers" not only instilled a sense of pride and sometimes superiority amongst that grouping, but also facilitated a competitive spirit amongst workers which in turn, facilitated increased production. In this way, ethnicity was "functional" to capital and the advantages of organising the workforce around perceptions of ethnicity outweighed the disadvantages of potential ethnic conflict.

The black miners' stereotyping was formulated in a world in which, as already indicated, divisions were partially preordained by the fact that the workers arrived on the mines from many different parts of the country. The different backgrounds of the workers opened the way for stereotyping to take place. Moreover, the encouragement of ethnic divisions by the structural factors of the compound enhanced the probability of stereotyping. Guy presents a useful explanation of why stereotyping took place amongst Basotho migrant workers on the gold mines.

'It would appear that, in a situation of tremendous labour oppression and the suppression of the more formal types of worker organisation, then the propagation of ethnic stereotypes by workers themselves, and the mobilisation of

Basotho (and other groupings) around them, was a means of protection, a qualified form of work satisfaction, and above all, a means of securing a greater income'. 21

Workers who worked long contracts and who formed distinct communities on the mines were also more prone to ethnic stereotyping. Management's stereotyping of the workforce was often corroborated by the workers and the stereotypes came to be internalised and subjectively experienced.

It is interesting to note that with the rise of the trade union movement and management's attempts to rationalise the labour process, overt ethnic stereotyping was no longer as prominent a feature on mines. Management dismissed perceptions of ethnicity as "irrational". 'The attempt to create a more rational labour structure has left little room for these biased notions' (22). Moreover, the union leadership is not ethnically based and the union practices encourage a shift away from specific cultural forms of organisation.

In the 1940's, ethnic stereotyping was reflected in both character assessments and the suitability of an ethnic group for a particular job. Commenting on the ethnic tensions on the mines, a Compound Manager spoke of the differences between East Coasters and Basotho labourers. The East Coast workers

'tended to lean to the more skilled work and had a general mechanical aptitude and an ability to learn quickly. The East Coast labourers filled "semi-skilled" positions such as pipe fitters, track layers, coal cutters and ventilation pipe installers. As "aliens" or foreigners who were in particularly vulnerable positions on the mines, they were far more amenable to the autocratic structure of the

management and were prepared to put up with it to a greater extent than the Basuto'. (23)

These perceptions on the nature of the Shanganes workforce, particularly in relationship to their amenability to the management structure, were reinforced in an interview with a Mine Manager from Kromdraai-Coronation Colliery:

'Shanganes as a people are extremely industrious. They were referred to as the "black Jews" of the collieries because they were able to get themselves organised in the community... They sorted out how to get the best jobs and positions on the collieries and adapted very easily in the same way as the Jewish community did when they came to South Africa. The net result was that they were more pliable, more amenable to discipline. They took the trouble to learn to understand the employer. They were in tune with working with whites and therefore wound up in the most senior positions... (mostly) as the boss boys.' (24)

It is simplistic to suppose that the Shanganes were, by nature, "more pliable" and "amenable to discipline". A Swazi worker's comments on the Shanganes affords one a deeper understanding as to why this grouping appeared more pliable and why they were the ones occupying the more skilled positions. The Shanganes were initially the majority and the "big people on the mines"

'...because they came here (to the collieries) on contract, what they call "join". Where they came from in Portuguese East Africa, they had labour offices that sent them to the mines. Since they came here on contract, there was nothing they could do...they could not choose jobs for themselves. They were told that they had to work underground. They just go underground whether he's afraid or not...If you don't go down, you have to turn back...Workers from South Africa were not on join and couldn't be forced (to go underground).'

(25)

The "join" system also partially explained why the Shanganes occupied the more skilled positions.

'It is true they had skills because they were oppressed in the job...When they came on contract, there was no surface job for them...The only job they could do was underground - that is why they obtained more skills than the people from South Africa. They worked under pressure and it was easier for them to acquire skills'. (26)

Elijah Shangwe echoed the Manager's theme that the Shanganes were industrious workers but again saw this as a result of their position as foreigners. In his opinion the Shanganes

' were very important on the mines. They had the mine at their fingertips. If on a mine there were no Shanganes, then that mine would close. If there were a lot of Shanganes, they'll get very good production work...They were brought to the mines because there was no work where they came from in Portuguese East Africa. That is why they worked very hard on the mines'. (27)

For the Shanganes, the contract system literally 'shackled them to servitude' (28). Elijah Shangwe continued by emphasising the fact that they were not a "troublesome nation". Although there were several different groupings from Portuguese East Africa - the Shanganes, the Machopis, the Macoca - they behaved as "one unit".

The prototypical characterisation of the Basotho among managers and workers alike was that they were far more adversarial and confrontational personalities. In comparison with the Shanganes,

the Basotho appeared less flexible in their approach to mine life. Their later entrance onto the mines was probably a factor contributing to their more bellicose approach. Commenting on this group of workers, a Mine Manager spoke of the Basotho in the 40's as people who,

'refused to try and learn Fanagalo or English and Afrikaans - they spoke Basotho...They tended to be more aggressive but probably it was the fact that they were not amenable to speaking anything other than Sesuto'. (29)

The aggressive spirit of the Basotho was equally the perception amongst the workers. The quote points directly to the distinction made between Transvaal Sotho, the Pedi, and Basotho from Basotholand:

'The Basothos are the ones who like to fight. Basothos are very aggressive. The Shanganes can stay (in a room with) the Bapedi - there's no problem. But they cannot stay... with the Basotho. Sothos like to swear, jo ! Just pick a small thing and they make it a big fight; that's their culture'. (30)

Or,

'The Basotho were seen as being far more self assertive in terms of their self-perception and perception of their manhood that is entrenched in their tribal structure.' (31)

On a practical level, the Basotho were distinguished from other groupings by their physical prowess. As a result of their strength, the Basotho were prone to do the more arduous work on the mines, at which they excelled. They were "the loaders" which as already indicated, involved loading ore manually with a shovel

into tramping cars or "ngolovane" as they were referred to by the workers. A loading team, which consisted of two people, was expected to load 50 tons of coal per day. Once the tubs were loaded, the team would push them along the tracks to the central overhaulage system to be taken to the surface. A loaded tub weighed about a ton and a half and these tubs were often pushed up adverse gradients. The Basotho loaders jealously guarded their jobs not only because loading was proof of their manhood, physical capability and superiority, but also because it was the most lucrative job on the mines. Workers would get paid extra for each "ngolovane" that exceeded the 50 ton quota. Besides trying to load as many tons of coal as possible, the loaders also strove to complete the task in the shortest time possible as they would then be free for the rest of the day. The Basotho easily surpassed the required daily quota and who were often the first to return to the surface. Management heralded the Basotho as the strongest workers on the mines. Although it is easier for management to 'romanticise hard physical work'(32), oral testimony confirmed management's perceptions. A worker recalled that

'When the Basotho came on the mine, they didn't want any other job - only that loading job. The Shanganes, they liked loading but they used to be very weak. They used to load one ngolovane for the Basutos 'two'. (33)

The stereotype of the Basotho as workers with great physical strength was definitely not confined to the coal mines. On the gold mines, the Basotho were the shaft sinkers, a very strenuous job.

'The Basotho are very strong people at work...When they sink a shaft you'll not find any other people there - you'll always find that the only people there are Basotho...'. (34)

In instances where East Coast labourers were employed in positions of loaders, they were often not given the same wages as the Basotho. This featured as a grievance during a strike on Clydesdale Colliery when the East Coasters articulated their discontent over the fact that 'the Portuguese boys are paid a flat rate of 2pounds 15shillings per ticket whereas the Basuto and other robust races ...earn up to 6pounds per ticket.' The management pointed out to them that

'the Basotho is acclimatised and is physically strong enough to do at least twice the volume of manual labour that the Portuguese Native can do. That if the management was satisfied that any particular Portuguese labourer was capable of rendering the same service as the other races, the differentiation would be eliminated'. (35)

In general however, there appeared to be little fighting underground over the loading job. It was recognised that the Basotho were superior in that line of work and as a worker at the time said, 'the one who loads and pushes the most, is the one who keeps the job' (36).

The mine management often regarded the Basotho as the

'clever experienced natives who have worked in other mines and industries and who will fight for their rights and do not mind embarrassing their employee.' (37)

Ethnic differentiation in the labour force extended far beyond the confines of underground and surface work and the social life on the mines was strongly determined by ethnic divisions. Social gatherings on Sundays always took place according to ethnic categorisations. "Moshongolo" or dancing was the most popular leisure time activity which occurred along strict ethnic divides. Joseph Mathda described how the "moshongolo" were arranged;

'The Shanganes are doing their tribal dances. There is a Shangane dance and they do it differently. ... The Bacas specialised in that gumboot dance. The Zulus used to do their own tribal dancing'. (38)

When there were dancing competitions between the mines, the different ethnic groups competed with their own ethnic complement on another mine. The Machopi were recognised as the finest dancers while the Swazis, for example, 'were never seen as doing this moshongolo because they were very few' (39).

One miner had recollections of the Pedi miners 'loving to box' (40). It is likely that he was referring here to the Malaita groups, one of a variety of associations made up of Pedi speakers, in this case mainly Pedi youths. The form of organisation of the Malaita groups 'showed strong affinities with mosoboros organisation and culture in the countryside' (41). The patterns of organisation were then reshaped by the specific conditions on the mines and which determined the nature of the Malaita activities on Sundays. The most visible characteristic of the Malaita on the collieries was that they gathered on Sundays

for boxing contests.

Ethnically based patterns of association did not only affect leisure time activities. They were also manifest on a loosely structured organisational level. When asked about the more formal associations on the mines, Joseph Mathda spoke of the impossibility of overcoming ethnic divisions to form a united organisation, in this case a burial society:

'It was very difficult. There was no ways of the different nations coming together. Even if one Shangane worker is late (dead), the Shangane workers would come together excluding other nations. There was no platform where we could come together as one'. (42)

He went on to describe how there were sometimes separate "come-togethers" of the different groupings:

'...they would go to a hall in big numbers to discuss home and all those things. Each and every nation was allowed to do that you know. Even if they were trying to throw something like a party for themselves, they used to do that - just to try and keep up the spirit. They would also discuss the problems concerning the mine'. (43)

These "come-togethers" cannot be described as associations. From the discussion it was difficult to ascertain if there were formal structural positions held by certain miners in these gatherings. The leaders appear to have been the various *isibondas*, or room leaders, from the rooms.

Speaking of ethnic associations on the mines, a miner who worked on Minaar Colliery in the 1940's remembered the definite presence of the "Marashea" or "Russians" on his mine as well as on the surrounding mines of Tweefontein, Greenside and Waterpan. For this miner's perspective, the Basotho people were clearly demarcated from the rest of the miners by their association or participation in the activities of the Marashea. He spoke of the Marashea as a group who organised clandestinely and the predominant memory was that the Marashea were people who generally instilled fear amongst the rest of the miners:

'There were many things that they used to do but you didn't know when they met. It was secret...You used to see them all over in blankets. They were the most feared nation with sticks. The burning issue was that they didn't want any nation to come near their womenfolk. Because of that they were feared. They used to fight but not so much because of the fear that they instilled in people. Even in the compound they were given their own sections. If you could say "Russia", they knew to whom you were referring'. (44)

Interview material reveals the operation of ethnic associations and organisations on the mines during the 1940's. The extent of these organisations is difficult to ascertain but it is likely that these organisations encompassed the majority of workers who arrived on the mine from a particular region. There is no evidence that this organisations had an overt political role to play. They did however play an important role in unifying certain groups of workers during strike action on the mines as is shown in the following section.

C) THE EFFECT OF ETHNIC DIVISIONS DURING STRIKE ACTION

Strikes on the mines did not create cohesion across ethnic divides. Ethnicity proved a powerful force in mobilising workers, often serving to obscure the commonality of their interests. Thus the effects of ethnicity were antithetical to the formation of a more general working class consciousness developing among the workers. Reports on strikes make frequent reference to the fact that it was the Basotho who were striking and preventing the East Coast workers from returning to work or vice versa. The dominant trend was that the ethnic group that was in the majority on a particular mine were usually the initiators or participants in strike action. The following extracts from reports by the police and Native Commissioners of Witbank point to this tendency. During the strike at Navigation Colliery in 1941, where 700 of the 1000 workers were Transvaal Basothos, it was

'the Basuto who prevented the willing East Coast Natives from entering the compound. The East Coast Natives entered eventually under police protection. The Basuto scattered into the veld and returned by nightfall'. (45)

And during a strike at the same colliery in 1944, the report revealed the ethnic divisions that split the workforce during strike action:

'The Basutos having heard of the youths' plight in the cells waited in a body for the compound lights to be put out at 10 p.m. when they rushed to the compound cell and forced it open to release their youth. Their tempers having got the better of them they started a wholesale destruction of the compound office windows and also the kitchen windows. Then all the office furniture and records were committed to a fire at the entrance of the compound and burnt.' (46)

East Coasters (EC) initiated strike action on mines where they were in the majority. This was the case with Schoongezicht Colliery (1325 EC out of 1620 workers), Douglas Colliery, (320 EC out of 500 workers), Transvaal and Delagoa Bay Collieries, (1004 EC out of 1720 workers), and Tweefontein . The following quote demonstrate the leading role taken by East Coasters on these mines:

'The two hundred Union and Swaziland Natives employed on this (Tweefontein) Colliery were not concerned in the strike. They were willing to go on shift but were unable to do so through fear of reprisals by the East Coast Natives, who are in the large majority at this colliery.' (47)

Mobilisation during strike action was clearly underpinned by ethnic patterns of recruitment. The group that had the stronghold on a mine were able to assert their power while the other groups were reluctant to participate in strike action.

An interesting figure emerged during strikes in which the majority of the participants were Shanganes. In a discussion on strike action during the 40's, Joseph Mathda revealed that 'there was a someone, a sort of chief who was controlling all the Shanganes' (48). His name was Mputukezi and he came from

Mozambique. He was not working on the mines but had a shop in the old Location. That he was venerated as the Shangane people's leader and taken as their chief, is evident in Joseph's comparison of Mputukezi and Buthelezi. He compared them because Buthelezi is the man who 'controls all the Zulus' (49). It is also evident that he assumed a significantly high profile in the community - 'all the Shanganes were buying from his shop...and he was very popular. The Whites, everyone loved him' (50). A great deal of Mputukezi's power was derived from the fact that he was considered a person with qualifications by his fellow Shanganes - he could speak English and Afrikaans and could read and write. It was believed that 'what comes from his mouth is not wrong' (51). It also appears that his power was derived from the part he played in directing workers who had arrived from Mozambique onto the mines:

'Before you can get a job on any mine you must via him first. He will tell you that you must go to such a mine, they're looking for two or three people...He referred them to the different mines where there were vacancies...He was having enough support and followers...because he was getting jobs for them'. (52)

It appears that Mputukezi's stature in the community led to him playing an important role during strike action. He was called in by management to mediate in a dispute. According to Joseph, on all the mines where there were many Shangane workers, the management were

'quite aware that there (was) someone who's got enough influence. If there was a problem on the mines, bosses came

to him with the help of township management... (They wanted him) to address the meeting, why there was a strike'. (53)

According to Joseph, he was not however in cahoots with Mine Management.

'If he can say you're all dismissed...then you're all dismissed. They were all afraid of him. That's why when he says go back to work, then they all go back to work. They had enough confidence in him. He's not working for the Compound Manager'. (54)

The existence of this chief-like figure is testimony to the workers' tendency to recreate home-based forms of association and organisation once they arrived on the mines. Mputukezi fulfilled an important function in the lives of Mozambiquan workers. He played out a chiefly role and thus held authority and power over workers from Mozambique. He is symbolic of the importance of ethnic loyalties and their persistence in the context of collective resistance on the mines.

Strikes did not only display ethnic patterns of mobilisation. They also directly arose over ethnic issues. A worker's account of the strike at Landau Colliery in 1944 demonstrates precisely how ethnic perceptions could lead to strike action:

' Shangane miner didn't wake up in his room. He was not having any relatives. They (the Management) told the Bapedi to bury that particular someone. That's how it started. Why must they choose the Bapedi to bury a Shangana ? They started hunting for the Compound Manager and Induna who had buried instructed them to go and bury the body. ..The Induna managed to run away. They went to his room, burnt all the clothes and the bed. The hunt was then on for the Compound Manager. He also ran away. They decided not to go to work. The angerness was still with them...They burnt the Manager's office - the desk and furniture were destroyed and all that...'. (55)

When asked why the Shanganes did not participate in this action, the worker replied that it was difficult for the Shanganes to 'be part of it as they did not have enough information, they didn't know why they, (the Bapedi) were on strike, or they weren't consulted' (56).

The particular nationality of an Induna also proved to be a catalyst causing workers to strike. The workers' demand for an Induna of their own nationality may be located partially in the authority that Indunas carried within the structure of the compound where Indunas were pivotal figures in maintaining control. It was thus important for workers entering into the alien environment of the compound, and seeking to gain access to the structure of authority, to be able to relate to the Induna. An Induna from the workers home area, who understood the customs and expectations of the workers and who spoke their language, was likely to be more accommodating and more approachable for the workers. Indunas would likewise favour workers belonging to their own ethnic group. Joseph Mathda described how "dizis" or bribes became part of the interaction with an Induna belonging to a

different ethnic group from that of the worker concerned:

'The Induna is the one who has control of the people. If you want something, you must give him something also...If you were a Shangana and the Induna was a Shangana it was easier to get things. But if you are of a different nation, it led to dizi'. (57)

From the authority's point of view, an Induna was expected to act in lieu of the tribal village headman to his subordinates. In the words of a Mine Manager, 'the Induna was selected from those who came in line with the chiefs because they carried the tribal authority from the homeland or territory into the compound. They would be the leaders of the clan or tribe or ethnic group' (58).

Thus dissatisfaction with a particular Induna was not simply related to the moral economy of the compound. It was not simply a case of the Induna not deciding cases impartially or being blamed for not reporting back on the workers' complaints. The grievances surrounding a particular Induna were underpinned by ethnic variables. At mines where a particular ethnic grouping was in the majority, they usually had the power to insist on an Induna belonging to the same grouping. The changing composition of the workforce in the 1940's was partially reflected in the increase of disputes over Indunas of a particular "nationality". In 1944, at Navigation Colliery where the Basotho comprised the majority of the workforce,

'The Basuto... were the ones demanding the appointment of an Induna of their own nationality. They had no complaints against the Induna but only stated that they wanted an Induna of their own race' (59).

Or at Landau where the Basotho were likewise the majority,

'The trouble in regard to the Induna appears to have been caused by the Basuto section who rejected the appointment over them of an East Coast Native of which tribe the present Induna is a member' (60).

While in the case of Douglas Colliery, where 320 out of 397 workers were East Coasters,

'The Portuguese natives demanded an Ihambane Native to be appointed as Chief Induna of the compound... At the same time the Msutu Induna employed in the Kitchen was to be discharged' (61)

The strikers usually refused to return to work unless the Induna in question was discharged and thus in most cases the Managers were forced to acquiesce to this demand.

D) FACTION FIGHTS

Faction fights have been the prism through which conventional writings have analysed the history of African workers on the mines. These writings have tended to interpret faction fights as

'the "traditional tribal animosity" that has spilled over into mine compounds' (62). More radical interpretations, such as those of van Onselen and Phiminister, have viewed faction fights as an 'important index of working class frustration and despair' (63). They see faction fights as the expression of competition amongst workers over limited resources and job opportunities. These exigencies undoubtedly created the climate in which faction fights could arise on the collieries. At the same time, the faction fights were an expression of the ethnic ideology and sentiment that has been reflected in the previous sections as part and parcel of the migrants' consciousness. Ultimately, the faction fights were another severe impediment to the development of worker consciousness on the mines, as they created rifts amongst ethnically defined groups of workers.

There are scattered reports of faction fights occurring amongst the different ethnic groupings on the collieries. Again the main protagonists were the Shangane and Basotho. The faction fights ranged from minor incidences of provocation between workers to fully-fledged "battles". The most serious of these was the faction fight that occurred between the Shanganes and Basothos on Oogies Navigation Colliery in 1945 in which three Basothos were killed. This fight was a clear example of the extent to which ethnic tensions could divide the workforce and could even result in instances of extreme physical violence.

A coherent version of the affray can be extracted from the court case which investigated the outbreak of the factional violence. The testimony of a Shangaane woman, sworn in front of the magistrate, described the circumstances of the fight;

'The Sunday night of the fight I was at home in the mine location. The first thing I saw was two Shangaans pushing each other as though they were fighting... It was not anything of a serious matter...Then two Basutos appeared on the scene. (They) did not stop but were passing and as they did so one of the Shangaans bumped into one of the Basuto...The Msutu who was bumped into became angry and inquired why do you bump into me ? The Msutu did not become aggressive and start this fight. He was assaulted by No.2 accused, who had bumped against him...By the time they came to blows a crowd had not collected. I was in my house for a very short time and when I came out a crowd had gathered and there was a general fight. The crowd was made up of two functions (sic), Basutos and Shangaans... Shangaans were the majority and the Basutos were running away.' (64)

The cause of the faction fight has been quoted at length to demonstrate how a seemingly incidental and spontaneous 'happening' generated the series of atrocities that followed. This points to how the slightest provocations played into latent tensions and underlying hostilities among the various ethnic factions. The apparent slightness of the provocation needed to generate a faction fight is a recurrent feature in all the reports on the topic. (65) In this particular fight, the Shanganes withdrew to the compound (where most of them lived) to get reinforcements and on returning to the location they began to break down the huts in the married quarter's. An Induna on the mine arrived on the scene and ordered the Basotho, who at this point had withdrawn from the fighting, to return to the compound.

The Shanganes moved towards the compound from another direction. A member of room No.3 in the compound described how the subsequent events unfolded;

'The room was full of Basothos...some had been drinking but not I. I was asleep and awakened by others in the room. I found the room was being attacked with stones. The Shangaans were outside the door. (They) started breaking the door down...Some of the inmates escaped through the window, but I never attempted to get away...I saw accused No.1 enter the room...he was armed with a chopper. I watched him until he struck me...Caswell was lying in the room apparently dead.' (66).

It should be noted that the rooms were occupied by workers of a particular grouping, in this case of Basotho workers. The induna who entered room No.3 after the this event gave a descriptive account of the aftermath of the clash in the compound.

'I found one native male lying face downwards...There was a pool of blood in front of his face. In the corner of the room I found another native. He was sitting on the floor and his head was terribly battered and covered in blood. This native was still alive.' (67)

When the Induna left the room, he was confronted by a crowd consisting of Shanganes. His attempts to restore order were thwarted by the announcement that the Basothos had gone to the native married quarters and the whole crowd moved off in that direction. The upheaval only ended once the police had arrived. With their help the induna was able to convince the Shanganes to return to the compound. They refused to go to their rooms

however, saying that the Basotho would attack them. Later that night Police re-inforcements arrived and the dead and wounded

were removed to hospital.

In this case, the workers themselves indirectly expressed the fact that ethnicity was an important part of a worker's consciousness on the mines. The Basothos at Oogies Compound wrote to the Resident Commissioner of Basotholand requesting his assistance in the matter. They articulated the source of the problem in ethnic terms and clearly indicated a sense of belonging to a particular group;

'We, Sons of Basutoland, greet you...We are facing a tragedy here on account of your people who died in this compound having been killed by Shangaans "E.C.". Now chief, we are asking you to help us by sending one of the chiefs here in connection with this incident... 38 Shangaans are arrested and none of us are under arrest except for those of us who died. This disturbance Chief is caused by an Induna from Zululand who hates Basuto very much. ' (68)

It is not quite clear as to why the Basotho perceived the Zulu Induna as the cause of the conflict between the Basotho and the Shanganes but it none-the-less demonstrates the workers' concern with matters pertaining to ethnicity.

The Shanganes also demonstrated this concern. They however alleged that it was the Basothos that were the cause of the trouble as it was the Basotho that had attacked them. In court, a

Shangane reported that 'the Basuto call us women' (69). This alludes to the derogatory image that various groups held of each other. In this instance the Basothos' characterisation was

founded on the 'Shanganes' uninhibited homosexual practices in the compounds.

The court found the evidence connecting the accused with the offence with which they were charged so conflicting that it was impossible to say that their identification as participants had been clearly established. The accused were therefore found not guilty and discharged by the magistrate.

Faction fights did not only occur between the Shanganes and the Basotho. On Witbank Colliery in 1950, a fight broke out between Bapedi and Baca labourers. The Compound Manager at the mine explained to the Native Commissioner that

'In the afternoon ...five Baca labourers forelaid a number of Bapedi labourers outside the compound, and they attempted to assault them by throwing stones at them. The Bapedi soon made this known in the Compound and all the Bapedi were up in arms against the Baca. Stones were thrown about and a couple of windows of the Baca rooms were shattered. The Compound Police boys did everything they could to stop the riot... ' (70)

In this instance the Compound manager was able to ease the tensions and the disturbance, which could have ended in bloodshed, was contained. The Bapedi did not want to lay a charge against the Baca as none of them had been injured. It was impossible to ascertain what had been the reason for the Baca

attacking the Bapedi. Again this points to the potential for superficial catalysts of factional violence.

While the outcome of the faction fight on Oogies Navigation

Colliery resulted in fatalities and thus may appear as exceptional, it is none-the-less illustrative of certain aspects of life on a mine. Conflict on the mines cannot be portrayed as the consequence of antagonisms between management, its agents and the general workforce mediated by the existence of a moral economy. This analysis is both crude and reductionist. It fails to take into account the dynamics of the social configuration of the workforce and the way that these internal dynamics were played out. The structural divisions within the workplace which led to conflictual situations, for example between the boss-boy and worker underground, were underpinned and complicated by conflicting ethnic identities which further served to divide the workforce on the mines.

Ethnic identities were rooted both in the material realities of the home life of a particular group of workers, as well as in the insistence of management in the allocation of resources along ethnic lines. It has been shown that on the one hand, ethnicity functioned as an important mechanism of support and solidarity for the workers. Ethnically based associations were important structures in assisting the workers to adapt to the harsh environment of the mines. On the other hand, the existent ethnic differences were exploited and fostered by management as can be

seen by the allocation of rooms in the compounds according to 'tribal' groups. Ethnicity served the interests of management as it entrenched divisions amongst workers and prevented united action against the prevailing conditions on the mines. It is the crucial combination and interaction of these two dimensions

of ethnicity that elucidates the patterns of ethnic mobilisation during strike action and faction fights on the mines. The concept of an ethnically divided workforce is a vital component in the explanation of collective action on the collieries. Without its inclusion, the moral economy remains a useful but analytically incomplete tool of analysis.

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CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN IN WITBANK: THE IMPACT OF PROSTITUTES AND
BEER-BREWING ON THE COLLIERIES.

This paper has attempted to show that although Moodie's notion of the moral economy is a particularly useful one, the areas that it fails to encompass limits the efficacy of the concept as an analytical tool when considering worker resistance. Without incorporating the ethnic dimension of life on the mines and the workers' prior socialisation, the concept of the moral economy is shorn to the most basic structural level and therefore lacks sufficient resonance and complexity. The incorporation of ethnic variables and personal considerations, however, does not necessarily overcome the structuralist bias of the concept. Although the mine undoubtedly constituted a total environment in which the miners were housed and fed, an analysis of resistance cannot remain locked within these confines. It is also of particular importance to take into account the relationship between the mine's social microcosm and the broader nexus of social relations which, although they operate outside the mine property, have an impact upon the lives of the workers.

The failure to penetrate aspects of the broader social setting and the total isolation of workers within the context of the mine world they inhabited, is a flaw common to studies of workers' resistance and disturbances on the mines. Causal explanations of strike action and the concomitant breakdown of the mechanisms of social control seldom include variables outside the mine. The central hypothesis of this chapter, however, is that the moral

economy of the mines and the strike action that took place during the period under investigation, was integrally related to the presence and activities of women who entered the Witbank District from the early 1920s and who established brothels and shebeens around the mining properties.

The importance of the activities of these women can only be fully appreciated if one takes into account the day-to-day social milieu of the miner's world. Contract labour and mechanisms of social control on the mines - single-sex hostels, and the rigid regulation of working hours and leisure-time activities, amongst other things, actively destroyed the possibility of "normal" sexual relations occurring between men and women. Moreover, traditional familial networks were difficult to maintain considering the fact that the majority of workers were migrants. The warped social fabric of mine life facilitated and ensured that prostitutes and liquor were common outlets for miners' frustrations. Unless these components of mine life are recognised, the nature of an entire mining sub-culture remains veiled and resistance on the mines can only be partially understood.

This chapter looks at the broader social nexus that composed a miner's life and points to the relationships between women, and the breakdown of social control on the mines. The decades of the 1920s and 1930s provide a necessary backdrop for an understanding of the origins and social composition of the irregular

settlements that sprang up on the farms surrounding the Witbank collieries. The first section of this chapter, therefore, deals with the arrival of women in the district of Witbank during the 1920s and 1930s. This is followed by a close investigation of the role played by women during the decade of the 1940s. Finally the responses of government authorities and mine management to these irregular settlements are examined.

There are three points to be borne in mind when reading this chapter. Firstly, while there is extensive evidence of beer-brewing and prostitution in the Witbank Municipal Location, the location did not appear to have a significant impact on the lives of the miners. The history and activities of women in the location is therefore not included in this study. The focus of this study is rather the nature of the interaction between the miners and the women on the farms surrounding the mine property. These farms were either privately owned or they belonged to the mines themselves.

Secondly, it should be remembered throughout that women cannot be treated as an undifferentiated or homogeneous grouping. During the twenties, the most obvious factor differentiating the women in Witbank was that the majority belonged to a distinct ethnic category. In the 1930s and 1940s however, the precise origins and social backgrounds of the women become more blurred and are difficult to ascertain from official sources or interviews. This has led to shortcomings in the present analysis, which could probably be rectified through more extensive oral research.

Thirdly, hard statistical data on the precise number of women in the Witbank area was difficult to obtain. It was none-the-less possible to infer, from the type of references made to these women and from the few figures available in the records, information regarding their presence in Witbank and their impact on the mines.

A) THE ARRIVAL OF WOMEN IN THE WITBANK DISTRICT

Official sources reveal that in the 1920s the presence of a large number of women, predominantly from Mozambique, was a pressing concern for the government. The presence and activities of these women were documented in a file entitled "The problem of undesirable Native Females from the Portuguese Territory" (1) Geographic variables necessitated that women coming to the Rand from Portuguese Territories passed through the Witbank and Breyten Districts. It appears that many of the women decided to stay in these areas with the result that Witbank and Breyten became the largest centres of Portuguese women in the Union. The nominal borders that existed between Mozambique and South Africa meant that large numbers of women were successful in entering the Union. People simply crossed over from one country to the other.

There is also evidence that an informal organisation developed in Delagoa Bay, with the explicit intention of aiding women to cross

over from the Portuguese Territory to the Transvaal. A certain Longone and his accomplices undertook to bring women to the Transvaal if they paid him three pounds. He was mentioned repeatedly in South African Police testimonies of prohibited immigrants who had entered the Union surreptitiously (2).

In the eyes of the officials these women were a source of moral turpitude; they came 'to take up with native men on the mines or on the farms where there were a number of natives employed, with the object of prostitution and the brewing and selling of Kaffir beer and other liquor' (3). The women who participated in these "unlawful and immoral practices" were further characterised in highly pejorative terms. They were seen as being "of the lowest type", the "worst characters" (4) and were later labelled in the press as the "Skokiaan Queens" (5). The Portuguese Curator's account of these women indicates just how serious a problem the women were considered to be:

'In spite of the fact that my Government having always refused permission to any women to proceed to the Union, hundreds of them are found in the Transvaal living publicly on the proceeds of prostitution among the natives working on the mines'. (6)

The Curator saw the results of this as the

'...alarming spread of venereal disease among the Portuguese natives on the Rand to such an extent that it is actually threatening the whole population of the Mozambique territory'. (7)

The official, crude, vilification of these women as "low and immoral" was typical of a government which refused to see the social implications of its own policies. Recent South African

historiography has emphasised (8) that the arrival of women on the Rand was partially the result of the migrant labour system which divided up families for months on end and created untold insecurities for those left behind by the migrant. Many married women arrived in Witbank in the hope of recreating a settled family life. The testimony of an illegal male immigrant from Mozambique confirms this view. He stated that the women he had travelled with to the Union had informed him that 'they were coming to their men who were working in the Transvaal' (9). Esther Muyanga's own testimony of why she entered the Union, clearly demonstrates that women did not necessarily enter the Union with the intention of becoming prostitutes or beer brewers:

'I had come into the Transvaal in search of my late husband's people as I had married a Baca native at Witbank...he died there, after which I had gone to my Portuguese home territory on a visit'. (10)

There were a host of other reasons why women may have entered the Witbank district. A significant number of women were propelled to Witbank because of the conditions in their homes. Rural pauperisation forced women off the land and they came to Witbank in the hope of finding alternative sources of income. Another category of women included those who were attempting to escape the demands of rural households or who had been widowed or deserted by their husbands.

Irrespective of their reasons for coming to Witbank, the women that arrived there were both destitute and desperate for

employment and were forced into a bitter struggle for survival. That women carved out beer-selling and prostitution as their own economic domains was a poignant indication of their plight. These occupations guaranteed an income in an alien working environment where "legal" jobs were hard to come by. A miner's reply as to why he thought the women were engaged in the occupations of beer-brewing and prostitution vindicated the economic imperatives of these occupations:

'It was a money making system at the time. Others were married, others were single, but the majority were single and needed money...'. (11)

Elaborating on the choice of beer-brewing as an occupation precipitated by economic imperatives amongst women in the Natal region in the 1930s, Bradford asserted that:

'Illegal though it was, beer-selling was one of the few domains in which unskilled females pouring into the towns could earn a living. It...allowed them to combine domestic duties and home industry and to escape oppressive, poorly paid work for whites'. (12)

Bonner echoes this point in reference to women in Durban and on most of the Rand:

'...since virtually every avenue of wage labour...was closed off to black women, the brewing of beer was one of the few alternative income generating strategies that they could employ'. (13)

For the lucky ones, beer-brewing became more than simply a means of survival as it proved a highly lucrative occupation and provided the basis for these women's economic autonomy. In the main, however, it simply enabled women to eke out a living.

It is not surprising, given the overwhelmingly male workforce on the collieries, that prostitution was a further "profession" which allowed these women to earn an income. 'Chronically destitute women who had fled to these areas..., who were blocked off from the labour market, and whose menfolk were denied family wages, were understandably tempted to turn their own bodies and time into commodities' (14). The growth of prostitution as a "profession" was not unique to the Witbank district. A "veritable sexual revolution" occurred in towns across the Rand from the 1920s onward. In Witbank as elsewhere, the "flesh markets" (15) expanded with the increasing rate of proletarianisation of single males. The concentration of a large number of migrant colliers living in compounds on the mines provided a ready-made and profitable market for these prostitutes. Thus women in Esther's position, namely as widowed or single females, entered into occupations of prostitution and liquor-brewing as a means of survival.

The women arriving in Witbank congregated inside the compounds of the mines as well as on the farms surrounding the mines. Although no definite figures were given, reports indicated groups of up to 60 women congregating on the property of an individual colliery (16). A small percentage of these women who were the wives of miners and obtained resident permits authorising them to live in

mine married quarters. The Native Labour Act of 1915 (the first Act was passed in 1908) restricted the maximum number of the black labour force that could be housed in the married quarters on any mine to four per cent of the total labour force on that mine, or a hundred labourers, whichever was the lower. The Act arose out of the government's conventional wisdom that the cheapest form of labour was the single migrant who returned home after his contract was completed. The development of a permanently proletarianised workforce was to be avoided at all costs. As Verwoerd would later explain, its intention was 'to avoid the formation of black spots at Mines and Works'.¹⁷ The Act thus ensured that it was a very small group of people who created a settled, stable and "conventional" family life on the mines. In almost all cases it was the more skilled, non-contractual workers who were accommodated in the married quarters. These included the indunas, certain of the boss boys, clerks, ambulance drivers and hospital staff. The majority of miners were thus housed in single sex hostels.

The Act ultimately proved counterproductive. While supposedly curtailing the problem of the development of a permanent black workforce, it created a second problem, that of uncontrolled women living in or near the mine locations. The Act meant that the greatest proportion of women arriving in Witbank were

formally precluded from obtaining official sanction of mining officials for living on their property. This resulted in the legitimate wives of miners who were not allowed to live in the married quarters squatting on property adjacent to the mines so

as to remain in close proximity to their husbands. They were joined by a great many women who did not have husbands on the mines. Miners often preferred to live with their wives, under highly insalubrious conditions, than in the mine compounds. The Director of Native Labour recognised the double-edged nature of the Act. In his opinion, while the application of the regulation prevented a family life from developing on the mines it also resulted in:

'...numbers of loose women squatting in various parts of the District under no control and who were ordinarily engaged in liquor selling and other immoral practices. The great majority of these women are from Portuguese East Africa'.
(18)

According to all other official reports, the areas where the women gathered became notorious centres of beer-brewing and prostitution. On Sundays, black colliers would descend on farms adjacent to the collieries in search of beer and women. Matyleng, an unauthorised Location, developed on the farm Blesboklaagte and was frequented by temporarily wifeless or unmarried male labourers. In the opinion of a worker on Landau Colliery in the 1940s, women that were staying on the nearby farms were there to sell liquor "as well as everything":

'They (the colliers) would go there with money - you tell them what you're looking for and that's what you get. Whatever you want was available'. (19)

Perhaps inevitably, these areas became the natural setting for crime and internecine fighting amongst the workers, often

resulting in stabbings and even deaths. The machismo culture that operated, together with the practices of prostitution and beer-brewing, led to the areas being characterised as "hotbeds of vice". Police attempts to intervene in the situation were often unsuccessful. During raids at the collieries, the women would relocate on the farms and vice versa. When the police visited Matyleng, on the farm Blesboklaagte, to collect twenty five Portuguese women, they found the place deserted and were told that the women had gone to the Douglas Colliery Location. Their subsequent arrival at Douglas Colliery and their arrest of the women led to a strike at the colliery. They refused to return to work without their women. In general, police raids generated enormous resentment by black miners. They were opposed to the police's invasion of privacy and the harassment of their women.

These supposedly "reprobate" women were clearly a source of major consternation for the Union Government, the Government of the Province of Mozambique and the mine owners in the 1920s. Their anxiety was expressed in a number of different ways. The Native Commissioner saw the problem as one in which 'our own natives take up with these women and squander their earnings on them, and thus fall into arrears with their taxes and neglect to provide for their own families' (20). Mine owners saw the women as

converting labourers into idle classes. The more general contentions of white capitalists applied equally to Witbank. In their eyes, 'unrestricted access to alcoholic concoctions and promiscuous women decreased the intensity and productivity of black labour' (21). Management stated that the workers would

often return to the compounds in inebriated states and this would result in fighting or casualties in the workplace (22). From the perspective of the Witbank police, the women increased the work of the force, as disturbances, assaults and traffic in illicit liquor trade increased tenfold. (23)

Although the different official groupings agreed that women and the related problems of beer-brewing and prostitution were inimical to their interests, tensions arose amongst the principal actors as to what was to be done with these women. Rather than arresting and deporting those who had been convicted of illicit liquor selling or immoral practices, the Secretary for the Interior, for example, proposed the indiscriminate arrest of all Portuguese "Native" women in Witbank. According to the Secretary, these "Portuguese Native females" were in all cases "illegal and prohibited" and he saw not the least difficulty in deporting the entire group. The Native Sub-Commissioner, speaking of the women living at the collieries, likewise saw it as desirable to deport as many of the women as possible in one group. 'If these women are not dealt with at one and the same time', he argued, 'it will mean that those who are left out will scatter all over the district and be most difficult to collect again' (24). The

Portuguese Curator was equally anxious to summarily arrest the women and declare them 'prohibited immigrants in one batch' (25). However, the Principal Immigration Officer believed in a more discriminating policy, suggesting that cases be submitted to him for consideration with a report showing why deportation was desirable. He suggested that 'in a matter like this we should

proceed cautiously and deport these people in small batches - the worst characters to be dealt with first'. He believed that the Portuguese Government were trying to use his Department to force the women to return so that their territory was not steadily denuded of its population. The real fear appeared to be that the wholesale repatriation of women would evoke a public scandal.

The Town Clerk and Town Engineer of Witbank likewise expressed their disapproval of the Government's suggested policy of the wholesale deportation of the Portuguese Native females from the Witbank area. Albeit through a racist rationality, they expressed the opinion that women should be given the opportunity of staying with their partners in Witbank:

'...unless the Portuguese male native working on the mines in the district were allowed to have their women here there was a danger of the black peril cases arising. These natives did not, as a rule, for tribal and other reasons, associate with the Transvaal women and the opinion was expressed that it would be better if they could have a natural outlet for their sexual desires'. (26)

As a measure of control, they advocated that those women who remained in Witbank be compelled to live under proper supervision and that they should be subjected to medical examinations and carry permits. In cases where this did not happen, it was suggested that these women be deported.

Outside official circles there was another grouping of people who were anxious to secure the removal of the women back to the Portuguese Territory. This grouping was "The Native Cooperative Society of East Africa", comprised of Mozambiquen migrants to the Rand. As early as 1921, they were complaining of 'the continued presence of 2 000 Mozambiquen women at Barberton, Breyton, Witbank, the Witwatersrand, Klerksdorp and Bloemshof' 27 They pushed for the forced repatriation of these women. It is important at this point to make a short excursus to investigate why it was in the men's interests for their women to be returned to Mozambique. This discussion takes the form of a more general look at migrant workers' relationship to women.

The influx of women to the urban areas caused the steady erosion of the customary institutions that had previously governed the relations between the sexes. In terms of the balance of power these customary institutions were almost always more advantageous to men. In traditional society, women were systematically subordinated under male domination through a series of "laws" and practices. It was difficult for men, however, to exercise the same degree of control over women once the women had left their

traditional homesteads and had entered the urban areas.

This loss of control by men over their womenfolk was clearly experienced by the migrants living on the collieries. In most cases the women lived separately on properties adjacent to the collieries. Moreover, these women were engaged in occupations over which men had little or no control. Women had access to

forms of power that had previously been denied to them. Ethnicity therefore appealed strongly to African men

'because it aided them in bringing a measure of control to the difficult situations in which they found themselves in their day-to-day life...It was the element of control embedded in tribal ideologies that especially appealed to migrant workers, removed from their land and families and working in far distant places'. 28

The migrants' complaints of the "breach of tradition" by their womenfolk indicated their desire to reassert their dominance over these women. Their neo-traditionalist ideology was an elaborate mask for the men's paternalistic ethic.

Thus the Mozambiquen men's appeal to the authorities to repatriate the women to Mozambique, was essentially an appeal to the government to assist them in restoring women to their "customary" positions. The migrants' overture to the government was not an atypical gesture. Ranger, in an article on tradition in colonial Africa, refers to this practice as the "use of 'tradition' by men against women" (29) and he cites several

examples throughout Africa of men appealing to the colonial authority to enforce "custom" upon women (30).

There were also economic imperatives underpinning the men's appeal for women to be restored to their former statuses. The absence of most men in the countryside due to migrant labour meant that women played an increasingly important role in the day-to-day survival of the rural areas. The exodus of women to

Witbank and other areas of the Rand signalled a breakdown in rural production. Ethnicity strongly appealed to men because it provided them with the means of control through which they could lessen their anxieties about events at home. Ethnicity's appeal to men may thus be interpreted as a 'form of popular male resistance to the forces that were reshaping African lives...It was for this reason that the appeal of ethnic ideologies was strongest amongst those who were migrant labourers' 31.

This interpretation explains why the Mozambiquen men's interests concerning women coincided with the interests of the local authorities and why both groupings, albeit for different reasons, fought for their repatriation. We will now return to the government's attempts to deal with the large presence of these women in the Witbank district.

The authorities ultimately agreed on a piecemeal system of repatriation, with twenty five being the accepted number of women to be repatriated weekly. 'The material from which the batches

of...Portuguese women were to be drawn...in order of selection' was set out as follows:

1. Women convicted under the liquor laws
2. Unattached women.
3. Women of known loose character.
4. Women living with labourers known to be discharged.
5. Women who are known to have transferred their allegiances to other men than their former reputed husbands.
6. Women found in the mine locations without permits. (32)

The Portuguese Government undertook to bear the expense of the railway tickets of the women repatriated and the Union Government undertook to provide the necessary escorts to Ressano Garcia. The scheme was ultimately approved by the Departments of Justice, Interior, Native Affairs and Commissioner of Police. The language used by officials in referring to the repatriation scheme is revealing of the way that they perceived the women. The "batches" of "surplus" or "loose" women were to be "collected" or "disposed of" in order to "clean up" the district. The authorities were intent on "relieving" the Urban Areas of the "undesirable element".

The scheme was initiated in the Witbank district in 1926. The details of the procedure to be followed required a huge pool of human resources; first the women had to be identified in terms of the categories outlined above. This involved a complex bureaucratic procedure, with the Immigration Officer having the final say as to whether they were prohibited immigrants.

The women then had to be rounded up and their fingerprints had to be taken. They were kept overnight in the police station, and finally they were personally escorted into the Portuguese territories so as to ensure that they did not escape. By September 1927, the Commissioner of Police reported that 160 women had been repatriated. Rather myopically, they perceived it as a victory:

'...160 native females have been repatriated from the District with excellent results, inasmuch as it has not only

removed a number of loose women, but has resulted as a deterrent to the immigration of others and has admitted of greatly improved control being exercised in respect of locations and other places where these women habitually resided'. (33)

No formal protests by women were registered in the Witbank area nor were there any orchestrated campaigns against their removal. There was a short reference to the involvement of ICU officials who were seen communicating with the women to be repatriated, but the women were duly removed and the ICU's efforts did not evolve into any formal resistance.

These forays into the problem of women in Witbank were held up by the Principal Immigration Officer as a case study of success and it was suggested that similar arrangements be extended to all districts on the East Rand. However, the authorities appear to have overestimated the success of their campaign. In the first place, 160 does not appear to have been a significant proportion of the female population. Nine months later, the Director of

Native Labour, referring to the repatriation scheme on the far East Rand, expressed his disappointment at the 'smallness of the number repatriated' (34). He had contemplated that 'several hundred women from Portuguese Territory' would be returned from the area through this method, 'thus relieving the Urban Areas of this undesirable element' (35). In January 1929 the Portuguese Curator regretted that he had again to call the Director of Native Labour's 'special attention to the repatriation of the native women of the Colony of Mozambique' (36). According to his report, one of the main difficulties encountered by the Union

Authorities in sending back the women was that the majority of them claimed that they were married and that their husbands worked in the Witbank labour district. He denied that this was a legitimate reason for the women to stay in the area:

'The fact of a woman of Mozambique being attached to a man for the time being cannot be an obstacle of her repatriation ... If that were the case then we would never succeed to enforce the repatriation of another woman as it would be an easy matter for them to find husbands whenever the police arrived in the location'. (37)

Article XXV of the Mozambique Convention of 1928 (38) endorsed the Portuguese Curator's opinion.

Despite attempts to tighten up the repatriation scheme, the problem of these illegal immigrants persisted. However, the reports on the presence of Mozambiquan women in the Witbank district became scattered during the 1930s. In one of the few

references to women, the report on Native Affairs for 1936 stated that there were:

'numbers of Native employees absenting themselves from work or being unfit for duty particularly on Mondays as a result of visits to neighbouring farms, where extensive brewing of liquor and prostitution appear to be rife, notwithstanding repeated raids in the respect of the former by the police'. (39)

In the light of this report as well as in the light of broader trends in the Union, it is likely that far from disappearing, the "problem" of women in the district became steadily worse. In fact Bonner cites the mid-30s as the beginning of a 'sustained surge

of black immigration to the towns which would carry on for another two decades' (40). From the mid-30s, women arrived in areas on the East Rand at an explosive rate with their numbers rapidly approaching those of men. The most conspicuous grouping amongst these new immigrants were the Basotho women. A possible explanation therefore, for the abrupt halt of reports concerning specifically Mozambiquan women, was that this grouping became absorbed in the broader issue of the upsurge of women on the Rand. Bonner suggests that this was the case:

'By the late twenties they (Mozambiquan women),... were being eclipsed if not supplanted on the Rand by other groups of women migrants...These were single women from another adjacent territory to South Africa - that tiny land-locked British colony of Basutoland'. (41)

The Basotho women attained the same labels as their Mozambiquan counterparts. They were identified as the 'principle source of a variety of social malaises, centering around the illicit brewing of beer and widespread prostitution' (42). Although Benoni and Nancefield were the centres where the Basuto women congregated, these new immigrants to the towns almost certainly filtered into the Witbank district. Thus the decade closed and the authorities had yet to find a successful way of curbing the problem of women on the Rand. The problem was to intensify during the war years and the collieries faced the issue of women on renewed, and more serious terms than ever before.

B) THE DECADE OF THE 1940's

The influx of women on the Rand steadily increased with the quickening pace of black urbanisation during the 1940s and early 1950s. Interviews confirm that there was large presence of women in Witbank by the early 1940s . Black miners who were employed on mines in the 1940s all greeted the question of women in the area in such an affirmative manner that there seems little question of their presence and fundamental impact on the collieries.

Renewed concern about "the problem of women" becomes evident in the Native Commissioner's reports on disturbances in the Witbank district in the 1940s. These documents point to certain shifts in the nature of the "problem" since its origins in the 1920's. The old terminology of the "problem of undesirable women from Portuguese East Africa" was now replaced by the more general reference to the "problem of Native Squatters on farms". This shift in terminology demonstrates two points. Firstly the introduction of the term "squatting" was probably a reflection of the proliferation of squatter movements in the 1930s and the fact that squatting had become a burning concern for the government by

the 1940s. Secondly, the application of a new term indicates a change in the composition of the people concerned. Portuguese women were no longer the sole focus of the problem as they were joined by large numbers of women belonging to other ethnic groups as well as men who took to squatting with their womenfolk. During the 1940s, the Department of Native Affairs began to identify the 'classes of natives who constitute the squatters in question (more generally as):

1. Natives in employment on the mines.
2. Natives in employment in the urban areas.
3. Natives in bona fida farm employment.
4. Natives who form a parasite class, which battens on the legitimate labourers on mines and in urban areas'. (43)

In their opinion it was the last class which 'caused the most trouble and which is creating the difficulties of the mining authorities' (44) In terms of Section 6 of the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923, the following classes of Native males did not require the written approval of the Minister for them to reside on the farm:

1. Bona fide employees of owner, lessee or occupier.
2. Heads of kraals whose inhabitants are bona fide employees of (1) above.
3. Labour tenants.

The wife, minor child, unmarried daughter or bona fide dependent of any Native requires the Secretary for Native Affairs' permit, 'unless such Native is exclusively employed by the owner, lessee or occupier of the land...' (45). This law was largely ignored by landowners in the Witbank district who allowed large numbers of "natives" who did fall within the above categories to congregate

on their land. Of major concern were the farms Blesboklaagte, Uitspan, Zeekoewater, Klipfontein, Groenfontein and Blaaukrans. On inspection of these farms in 1947, the Native Commissioner discovered the extent of the problem; 'owners of certain portions of the farm Blaaukrans, which is within 5 miles of the Municipal boundary and in close proximity to certain mine compounds, have permitted Natives - some 400 families - to reside on the farm on payment of rental. The Natives are not in bona fide employ of the owners but have established brothels and Shebeens' (46).

In Mrs.de Wet's application for permission to establish a location on her farm Groenfontein in 1940, she stated reasons why people were seeking to live on the surrounding farms. She said that she was continually being approached by people who wanted to settle on her ground. It appeared that they were,

'...local married natives working either on the collieries or in the Municipal area of Witbank, but who were either unable to obtain accommodation in the mine married quarters or are unwilling to reside in the Municipal Location and... are also unwilling to reside under labour tenant conditions, are seeking to obtain sites for hire on the farms adjoining the mines and Municipal boundary'. (47)

The collieries believed that there was no shortage of accommodation and permission was duly refused. The situation worsened as the decade progressed. On Groenfontein in 1948, the Native Commissioner noted that there was a 'continuous row of wattle and daub huts in close proximity to each other. The total number of huts is 117'. Only 10 of these huts were occupied by bona fide employees. The Commissioner calculated that a total of

608 people - 107 men, 129 women and 372 children - were living illegally on the farm. 46 of the men were employed on the Collieries (48).

An investigation by the Native Commissioner on housing on the collieries highlighted the large number of workers who were squatting on the farms surrounding the collieries rather than living in the compounds. These figures do not include workers who were living in uncontrolled locations and were also therefore outside of the mine management's control. 49

NUMBER OF WORKERS ON THE COLLIERY	NUMBER OF WORKERS LIVING ON FARMS
Alpha - 270	201
Tweefontein - 2423	96
Greenside - 1218	81
Navigation - 1500	168
Coronation - 893	160
Oogies - 700	80
Kendall - 395	35

These figures demonstrate that during the 1940s the farms played an important role in the life of miners and women remained a major node of attraction away from the uninviting world of the mine compounds where unhygienic and comfortless conditions prevailed. The integral connection between life on the mines and the world of the squatters in the 1940s is emphasised in a variety of sources. The most telling of these are the words of the miners themselves. In interviews, the initial response to the question of women was an archetypal, 'Oh ja, there were plenty', or 'Women, jo, too many' (50).

Albert Simelane, remarked with gusto that the farms surrounding the collieries were a source of great pleasure for the miners:

'Oh! They enjoyed themselves on these farms - women there, beer there, lovers there. That place used to help the people from the mine'. (51)

During the faction fight at Oogies Navigation Colliery in 1945, the testimonies of the accused Shanganes demonstrated how the farms were a major meeting place for the miners during their free time. Julio Mafuna testified that he remembered:

'...the day of the trouble at the Oogies navigation colliery, I was lying drunk in my room No. 10 from 3 p.m. I went out at 10. a.m. and returned at 3 p.m. drunk and then lay down. I went to the farms in the morning. When I lay down at 3 p.m. no one was in the rooms. All the others were out visiting and drinking'. (52)

Julio's witness was Arnesto Koza who 'lives on the surrounding farms and when he comes on duty he changes in my room' (53).

Moseta Zungusu told the court that,

'On the Sunday of the disturbance, I went to the farms at about midday. I came back late at night after everyone had gone to bed'. 54

Shikwenta Martin and others of the accused repeatedly stated that they were on the farms on the Sunday in question. It is unlikely that they used their visits to the farms as a convenient alibi.

The farms were an integral part of the miners' lives and they spent many hours of their free time partaking in the activities on the farms.

In 1947, the Fagan Commission likewise pointed to the link between the mines and the squatting communities. The Commission used the practices of East Coast workers on the collieries as a way of proving that 'the boy with his family is a far more settled boy with a better sense of responsibility to the workforce'. According to the report, the 'East Coast boys have pseudo families in the huts adjoining their compound and when their term of service is over, they hand the women onto their successors' (55). This type of practice probably arose among the East Coasters rather than the Basotho or Pedi workers because the latter groupings lived closer to the mines and could return home more frequently. The need for a "substitute family" was thus not as acute. Delius noted that, 'Pedi men were encouraged by their elders to go home if they could no longer stand compound conditions. Short contracts and the relative proximity of Sekhukuneland to the Rand, also helped the need for homosexual release' (56).

Contradictory tendencies were reflected in the evidence pertaining to the issue of ethnicity within the squatter camps. On the one hand, ethnicity appeared to be less pronounced in the settlements than it was on the collieries. Heterosexual relationships did not occur along strict ethnic lines. In interviews, cross-ethnic liaisons were cited as the norm. In particular, ethnic divisions appeared to be virtually non-

existent amongst the women.

There are several conjectures why this was the case. In the previous section it was shown that ethnicity was an important means through which men could assert their control over women. For women, however, there was less reason to uphold their ethnic identities. The loss of these identities implied a greater freedom and independence from patriarchal control.

Moreover, women did not have to appeal to their ethnicity because of any attachments to the land. Unlike migrant workers who returned home once they completed their contracts, most women had completely ruptured their relationship to the rural world. There were no contracts compelling these women to return home for a specified period of time. For the migrants, however, access to cattle, land and women remained fundamentally important and were the underpinnings of their ethnic consciousness and identity.

'Even rural areas that were little more than unproductive rural slums necessarily remained of central concern for the migrants...It was in the rural areas that the workers' long term interests lay'. (57)

This, however, was not true for women in the urban areas. There was a general sense of the remoteness of or lack of concern with their rural past. Issues such as cattle and land no longer formed an important part of their consciousness. Thus women's severance from their homes weakened the basis of their ethnic identities.

'Ethnicity's appeal was strongest for men, then, and the Tswana

proverb to the effect that "women have no tribe" had a real - if unintended - element of truth in it'. (58)

Unlike on the collieries where ethnic identities were reinforced by institutional divides on the part of the management, as show in Chapter 2, there were no forms of imposed ethnic divisions on the farms. That ethnic identities did not manifest to the same degree amongst women on the farms, bears out the point that it was the crucial combination of the migrants' own sense of ethnic identities and the manipulation of these identities by management that led to ethnic disharmony.

A further conjecture of why there was less ethnic association among women is that on the farms the women lived in smaller groupings and were forced to form cohesive units that transcended ethnic barriers. As marginalised and alienated individuals they had less choice in whom they associated with.

It is interesting to note that in this period there is no evidence that the men attempted to repatriate the women as the Mozambiquens had done in the 1920's.

The lack of ethnic forces operating among women appears to be the general situation in the settlements. There is evidence to the

contrary, however, which suggests that ethnic distinctions were in fact existent among the women. Moreover, despite the apparent lack of concern in the squatter camps over questions of ethnicity in relationships, women were in fact a major source of ethnic tensions and conflict amongst men. An interviewee recalled that

'the Basotho women could always be identified...and there were lots of fights over these women, especially the Basheshwe from Basutoland fighting over these women. The Basuto men became very aggressive ...because they did not want any other tribe or nation to go near their women. Their women were exclusive'. (59)

It seemed that a type of ritual developed among the Marashea when a new woman arrived on a farm. The Marasheas would go and visit the woman. If they found her with another man who was not a Basheshwe, 'they'd escort these women underarms with kirris, (off the farm). If you're the man whose not a Basheshwe,...and you don't run away, then you're dead' (60). There seemed to be a tacit rule operating that if a miner were a Pedi or Shangane, he stayed away from Basotho women unless he were prepared to risk his life. This is example of one type of informal rule operating in the squatting camps which was likely to lead to friction or fighting among the colliers. It seems likely there were a series of such rules which, if they were broken, would trigger off conflict among workers. In general, where ethnic tensions did exist on the farms, as in the above example with the Marashea, they were generally the product of the males' attitude rather than those of the females'.

There is little doubt that the mines were affected by the "goings on" in the squatter camps. A Mine Manager drew a very clear relationship between activities on the farm and life on the mines:

'I still don't really know why the farmers accepted them. Possibly the farmers were getting a kick-back - but that is generally where the problems started...if anything happened in the shebeens it would spill over onto the mines'. 61

Albert Simelane described how this "spilling over" would occur:

'Issues in the squatting camps were brought on the mines. (In the squatter camps), they (the miners) were fighting especially on the weekends - they get drunk then they fight. That man would go for another man's wife and then you would see that man chasing that other man. That matter will come to the compound during the week. You'll see Monday, a certain man will say he saw such and such a man from room number three with his wife. He's making a case. The man is reporting to the Induna and the Induna is taking it to the Compound Manager'. (62)

In general, the response of the Compound Manager was to shrug off responsibility for the occurrence. He would tell the worker to go to the police station and report the incident. The following statement made by a Compound Manager clearly demonstrates this attitude:

'Go to the charge office or the Native Commissioner and the police will come and get this man if there's a case but I'm not dealing with the case'. (63)

Albert Simelane maintained that there were many cases like this. The Compound Manager's refusal to get involved in these cases

resulted in the workers attempting to deal with them in their own ways. It is unlikely that the workers voluntarily went to the police to try and solve the issue. This provides a possible explanation of the link between women in the squatter camps and the ethnic rivalry and faction fights on the collieries. Attempts to resolve the fighting that occurred in the squatters camps between colliers, assumed an ethnic character once the conflict was brought back onto the mines. The involved workers would seek support from members of their own ethnic grouping in order to take revenge on the guilty party. The latent tensions among the different ethnic groups that were spoken about in Chapter 2 possibly had their source in the activities and occurrences amongst workers in the squatter camps.

Far from making a contribution to the growth of a more generalised working class culture, cross-ethnic liaisons or marriages on the farms exacerbated ethnic divisions. The ethnic particularist forces operating in the compounds, which stood in stark contrast to cross-ethnic flavour of the activities on the farms, appeared to be the stronger force in determining miners' identities. They overshadowed and obscured the "ethnic mixing" that occurred on the farms. This makes one wonder however, the extent to which the attitude of management and structural factors of compound life was responsible for the ethnic particularism operating on the mines. The lack of an ethnic consciousness when men fraternised with women, would certainly point to the major impact of institutionalised divisions on ethnic identities.

C) THE RESPONSES OF THE AUTHORITIES TO SQUATTING

The documents suggest that the "squatting issue" became the concern of a broad sector of the Witbank community, ranging from local officialdom to mine owners, to the local farmers.

In 1939, Witbank's Magistrate wrote to the Secretary of Native Affairs, alerting him to the situation:

'Round all the mine properties are congregated collections of native huts, occupied mostly by native women whose only reason for being there, is the brewing of skokiaan and other noxious liquids which they sell to the mine labourers. Constant police raids and sentences seem to be unavailing, as fast as these people are got rid of others take their place'. (64)

These people were considered to be a "constant source of trouble", and "it would be a blessing if these natives could be got rid of". He thereby requested that the Secretary for Native Affairs take some administrative steps to "clean things up" and get rid of the "loafers" who were in 5 mile radius of the Municipal boundary. No such action was forthcoming.

The Secretary for Public Health believed the squatters were a

'serious menace to public health'. Most of the dwellings lacked any provision in respect of sanitation and water supply (65). In 1941, the Senior Health Officer pointed to the absurdity of employers taking precautions against the recent outbreak of smallpox amongst their employees, when the Government allows the 'indiscriminate squatting of Natives outside the boundaries of the industries, with no water supplies, no sanitation and almost uncontrolled beer and liquor selling and prostitution to go unchecked'. He reckoned that approximately 500 families were involved in these activities and that all cases of smallpox were as a result of this type of dwelling. Instead of the situation improving, the Secretary for Public Health noted in 1942, that 'the insanitary conditions in the neighbourhood of the several collieries in the Witbank area have steadily deteriorated with the efflux of time' (66). He pinpointed the reasons for the deterioration, as stemming from the Municipality's insistence that several of the troubled areas lay outside of its boundaries of the municipality and that they were therefore not subject to its jurisdiction. The Town Council urged that the inclusion of Blesboklaagte, Uitspan and Zeekoewater which were outside the five mile urban boundary, be 'held over until the end of the present war' (67). This was a polite way of shirking responsibilities for the appalling conditions that prevailed in these areas.

The Mine Managements were often Janus-faced in their dealings with the issue of liquor, prostitution and the squatting communities on the surrounding properties. Their responses were clearly not governed by any moral imperatives but were rather

governed by the dictates of production schedules and profitability. Within the latter framework they were able to see both the benefits and the perils of a squatter community on the fringes of mining property. On the one hand, liquor and prostitution provided useful outlets for a workforce that were engaged in hard manual labour and that lived under unnatural conditions in single sex hostels for six days a week. On the other hand, the practices of beer-brewing and prostitution were the source of major conflict amongst the miners and tensions spilled over into life on the mines and created disturbances. A Mine Manager in the 40's was predisposed towards believing that the faction fights stemmed from incidents outside of the work situation and were connected directly with the presence of women and beer-brewing in the surrounding areas. He aptly summed up the dual role played by women. He recognised their value in that,

'It was rather difficult when you have a thousand virile males on the collieries and some of them were literally locked up at night so that they were at work on time the next day...but you couldn't lock them up on the weekend...Generally on the fringes (of the collieries) were the Shebeen Queens with their brothels (where these men went)'. (68)

At the same time it was there that 'the problems on the mines started' (69). Certain events on the mines were directly attributed to the presence and activities of women.

On Minaar Colliery, the management were experiencing the adverse effects of their workers visiting the surrounding farms. In an interview, Elijah Shangwe explained that the police would arrest workers from Minaar Colliery when they were raiding the shebeens

and brothels on the surrounding farms. The people were then taken to Oogies police station and their jobs on the collieries were not done. These type of interferences obviously hampered production. Management on Minaar Colliery developed an interesting tactic in an attempt to take control of the activities of beer-brewing and prostitution. Elijah revealed the following actions taken by the management:

'In the married quarters at Minaar Colliery, the Compound Manager gave the rules that during weekends the women they (sic) should brew African beer - "umquomthi" - for the people from the compounds so that they should have strength...That was the regulation. This discouraged miners from going to the farms where they would drink unhealthy liquor. Women from the farms used to sell liquor that is very strong, called "quick mix" - it made people get drunk very quickly. They made a concoction of many things'. (70)

This "regulation" essentially gave workers a license to drink - but it was preferable for management that the workers drank beer brewed on their premises and under their control. The management made a deal with the Oogies police to ensure that brewing could take place in the married quarters without interference;

'Police from Oogies were told not to arrest these women brewing and drinking in the mine married quarters'. (71)

Worker's perceptions of the response of Mine Management to women on the neighbouring farms, was that they generally "turned a blind eye" to their activities. The following metaphor, demonstrates great acumen into the management's attitude towards his workforce;

'He was happy because his cows were able to graze there. There was grass that they could eat rather than sitting in the compound...If your cows are grazing in greener pasture, you don't worry. As long as they were working, he was not against this type of thing. The Compound Manager was not bothered by that type of life'. (72)

Thus it can be assumed that the management were only outspoken in their opposition to the squatters on surrounding farms and against the lawlessness that resulted from the activities, if it resulted in a loss of production. They had no moral qualms against liquor and its concomitant "evils" and were quite happy to allow their workers to go to the surrounding farms.

On mines where production was affected, the Mine Managements endeavoured to ease the squatting problem by extending the provisions that they had made for married quarters on their property, so that married mine employees would return to the mines. They ultimately had their hands tied however, as they were still bound by the Act that restricted the percentage of the labour force that could be housed in the married quarters.

Farmers on the whole were reluctant to evict the squatters.

A possible explanation of their reluctance, was that the squatters worked for the farmer during the harvesting season or paid him rent for their properties and thus were an additional source of income. The Magistrate saw it as a 'known fact that he (the farmer) makes an income out of them by charging them for the privilege of living there'. In 1948, the Native Commissioner ascertained that 'this practice of permitting natives to squat on

farms, on payment of a monthly rental, has been in vogue for a number of years' (73). Speaking about Mrs. de Wet on the farm Groenfontein, he believed that she found the letting of ground to the "natives" so lucrative that she allowed the numbers of squatters to increase considerably. 'The near proximity of the compounds, with the opportunities offered in the way of liquor selling and prostitution, made the situation very attractive to the Natives' (74). Not all farmers supported squatting arrangements however. When Mr. Loubser took over Groenfontein from Mrs. de Wet in 1948, he appealed for the immediate assistance of the police to remove the large squatting community that had developed. For Mr. Loubser, the fact that squatters were stealing his crops, that their cattle were grazing in his pastures, and that there were bad feelings between him and the squatters, outweighed any pecuniary benefits that resulted from allowing the squatters to stay on his farm.

Mr. J.F. Schoombee, owner of the farm Blesboklaagte, ironically spoke out against the practice of farmers allowing squatting, while he was defending himself against the government's accusation that he was illegally harbouring squatters. He told the Commissioner that 'in (sy) geval is die volk almal 'Bona Fide' Woonkaffers, of Plakkers. Dit is egter meer as wat kan gese word vir die mense om die dorp. Ek is die enigste "Boer" in die regte die woord om die dorp (75). This implied that the other farmers were not "real".

The "symbiotic" nature of the relationship that developed between some farmers and the squatter communities, created impediments

for the police in their attempts to remove the squatters. Repeatedly, the Magistrate was informed that prosecutions had failed because the police were unable to secure the necessary evidence against the squatters concerned:

'Any investigations by the Police as to the legality of natives' presence on ground are met by an alleged contract between the farmer and the native head of the family under which the latter acquires the right to live on the farm with his wife and family in return for the services to the landowner of three months each year of a member of the family.' (76)

It was well known that these contracts were not bona fide - the workers paid a monthly rental for the ground, with a probable amount of "goodwill" for the illegal brewing. However, it was a bureaucratic nightmare for the government to prove that squatters on the farms were not in the bona fide employment of the farmer.

'Owing to collusion between the farm owner and the so called tenants, it has been found practically impossible for the police to obtain the proof, (that the family pays rent to the landowner) necessary for successful prosecution'. (77)

The Magistrate later elaborated on the nature of the contract between the landowner and squatter;

' In practice what happens is that an able bodied native with a number of female dependents enters into a collusive contract with a landowner binding himself or his substitute to render farm labour for 90 days, in return for the right to live on the land. A small youth boy then ostensibly performs the 90 days service, leaving the head of the family free to loaf or work elsewhere where he chooses, while the rest of the family take up their abode as near to

the Municipal Location or a mine compound as they can, and there brew liquor to their hearts' content'. (78)

The Magistrate advocated the wholesale eradication of the clusters of squatters around every mine property. An alternative route to prosecution was to charge the farmers in terms of Section 5 of the Native Land Act of 1913.

Ironically, the government was partially responsible for the continued existence of squatting communities. The Magistrate of Witbank made repeated appeals to the government for Chapter 4 of the Native Land and Trust Act of 1936 to be made applicable to the proclaimed labour area of Witbank (79). This Act specifically controlled the number of labour tenants on farm property. According to the Magistrate, the government's refusal to enforce this Act, meant that, 'the existing state of affairs cannot be effectively cured by criminal procedures' (80). This was borne out by the thwarted attempts made by the officials to deal with the problem.

It is most likely that the Government's refusal to enforce this Act was related to its attempt to protect the precarious positions of Local Authorities in the period. The massive influx of people into the municipal areas created an endless housing backlog for the Local Authorities. Speaking on the congregation of "natives" living under insanitary conditions in the Witbank District in 1942, the Secretary for Native Affairs told the Health Inspector that the location was already overcrowded and the local authority was 'doing its best to expedite its housing

scheme'. It would however, embarrass the Local Authority if it was 'at this stage faced with demands for immediate accommodation by natives legitimately entitled to be housed in the location' (81). He was openly encouraging the stalling of eviction of "natives" until such time as the Local Authorities would be able to provide them with accommodation. Improvement of sanitary conditions was considered the necessary step before the removal of the squatters took place.

In 1947, the Fagan Commission's investigation of the "urban native question", bore out the serious nature of the housing problem in Witbank's Municipal Location. The representatives of the Fagan Commission pointed out to the Municipality that 'there were over 500 native families in excess of your housing capacity' (82). Mr. Turnball, the Town Clerk, assured them that his council was busy preparing plans for new location extensions and the establishment of a modern "Native Village".

Thus even in cases where there was no collusion between the farmers and squatters, the authorities found themselves in a difficult position, as the housing crisis in the location created severe obstacles to the easy removal of squatters. All the squatters on the farm Groenfontein had been convicted by the Magistrate in the July of 1947 in terms of Section 15(3) act No. 25 of 1945, which imposed a penalty of fifty pounds on those squatters who refused to move, but more than half of them had failed to move by January the next year. The attorneys Basner and

Jaffe intervened on behalf of the squatters and insisted that the squatters would not move until such time as alternative accommodation had been provided for them. They reminded the Town Clerk that,

'It must be readily appreciated by you that if the squatters are committing an offense by remaining in their present abodes, such an offense is a continuing one and with the most genuine desire in the world to comply with the law which they can only do by moving to some other spot they will once again be trespassers, when the hounding out by the authorities concerned will again be put into operation'.
(83)

Without the government's allocation of lots to the squatters, the court was helpless in insisting that the squatters be moved. Another two years elapsed before Mr. Loubser's request that the squatters be removed from his farm actually came to fruition.

In the minds of the officials, the squatters had no legal rights and they had no ground for appeal against their removals. In the Native Commissioner's mind, the 'natives squatting on the farms did not want to move until they are forced to move for the simple reason that they are living free of rent on the farm - they are not subject to any control and a good number of them are making money in illicit liquor' (84).

The nature of the interaction between colliers and women has revealed the importance of taking broader social issues into account when studying resistance on the mines. Although ethnicity was not always the cause of conflict that arose in the squatter camps, the tensions amongst men would manifest in ethnic terms

once they had returned to the mines. These conflicts exacerbated the existent ethnic divisions that were a feature of mine life. In the 1920s, there is evidence that strikes took place over police interference with the colliers' women. In contrast, women do not appear to have been a direct cause of strike action in the 1940s. However, their presence on the farms surrounding the collieries was a vital feature in the lives of the miners and they undoubtedly affected the relationships and activities on the mines. There was almost a pragmatic recognition on the part of the mine management of the importance of these women in the lives of the colliers. Their acceptance of the presence of these women on the farms, however, was always contingent on the fact that they did not disrupt production. In many cases this appears not to have been the case.

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70. Interview 7 with Elijah Shangwe
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CONCLUSION

The notion of a moral economy on the mines is an important tool of analysis in elucidating the nature of collective resistance. It suggests that the workers possessed a degree of power within the interstices of their tightly controlled world. The informal structures of power interacted with the formal structures of managerial authority. Strike action was a clear expression of the breakdown in the terms of the moral economy. The bellicose overtones of the strikes often forced management to accede to the workers demands. This illustrated the extent to which workers were able to exercise power in the course of collective resistance. It is difficult, however, to classify the protests as articulating a worker consciousness. The strikes did not self-consciously unify workers against a common enemy and there were frequently divisions amongst the striking workers themselves.

It is precisely these divisions that the notion of the moral economy fails to address. It does not explain the prevalent pattern of mobilisation of workers along ethnic lines, nor does it explain inter-ethnic rivalry or faction fighting. The consciousness that migrant workers brought to the mines is not taken into consideration. Ethnic divisions thwarted the potential of a central organising principle developing during resistance. A myriad of factors served to develop and consolidate ethnicity on the collieries. Migrants were enmeshed in networks composed of

people from their home areas. These networks were important mechanisms of support and defensive solidarity in an economically and emotionally insecure environment. The ethnic consciousness of the migrant workforce was manipulated by management in an attempt to diffuse the possibility of a united workforce.

Ethnic considerations afford a greater understanding of labour unrest on the collieries. This understanding is further enhanced by the incorporation of factors operating outside the confines of mine life. The activities of beer-brewing and prostitutes on the farms surrounding the collieries were important attractions for the colliers away from the hostile and alienating world of the compound. The tensions and conflicts that arose amongst men in the squatter camps spilled over to the mines.

This dissertation suggests that there are valuable areas to be explored around the subject of the collieries. There are threads that remain to be woven into the fabric of strike action and labour unrest on the collieries. The complex interaction between structures on the mines, migrant consciousness and the activities of women warrants close historical examination.

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