

## Perspectives

### **The Place of Regions in Transnational Connections: Cumberland Miners in Northern England and the Witwatersrand, 1880s-1920s**

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## **Regional Histories**

I have been interested in long-distance labour migration and the mining industry for a long time. Over a decade ago, when I began my doctoral work about Zambia's Copperbelt, I met with a South African historian who kindly agreed to offer some advice, having done similar research. They asked me why I was interested in the topic and I responded with what is now a well-worn explanation: I had grown up in Cumberland, a former mining region in northern England. The remains of this industrial past have fascinated me my whole life. 'Well, why not study that?' came the reply.

This was not an unreasonable suggestion. Studying a topic about a place you already know well has many advantages. You have an understanding of details and nuances that others might miss; may have knowledge of sources that others lack, and easier access to these sources, or you could draw upon family histories. Some of the hard work has already been done.

My response to this not unreasonable suggestion about my proposed subject of study was that people don't stay in one place. Migration on a mass scale became increasingly common during the nineteenth century.

This is what led to the moment of unexpected recognition that prompted this present research: a snippet in an article about the South African mining town of Kimberley with a reference to the newspaper *The Whitehaven News*. This newspaper was very familiar to me and not because it had been research material. *The Whitehaven News* is a newspaper published and distributed near where I grew up in Cumberland. It was not a publication I expected to come across some years later and in what seemed like a very different context. Further research established that the newspaper was sold in Kimberley and in Johannesburg and had regular South African

correspondents.<sup>1</sup> There were occasional reports from Kimberley but what amazed me was the volume of reports from the new gold mines springing up along the Witwatersrand, now more usually referred to as the Rand.

These kinds of unexpected connections are not uncommon among British historians of the British Empire. In her book *Civilising Subjects*, Catherine Hall relates her interest in the history of the Caribbean and empire to her surprise at finding a town named Kettering in Jamaica when she visited the island for the first time. She was born in Kettering in England and discovering that the Jamaican town was named after her English birthplace began her process of unravelling the connections between the two places.<sup>2</sup>

Imperial connections were not uniform though. Some places became closely connected and not others. The aim of this article is to examine why certain places became connected – in this case, mining towns – and what consequences this had. I argue that we should look at connections between specific regions and move beyond the ‘national’ in transnational histories.

Historians of empire are often encouraged to move beyond a framework of ‘metropole’ and ‘colony’ as the natural units of analysis and look at empire as a single unit of analysis.<sup>3</sup> Empire and imperial connections mattered much more in some places than others, though. Some places across empire were closely connected, and others were not. The connections I describe in this article were not between ‘nations’ or between ‘metropole’ and ‘colony’ but between very specific parts of the metropole and colony. There was an important regional dimension to transnational connections and connections between specific regions were often more important than national-level connections. Getting at the specificity is difficult, but produces better and more accurate historical analysis.

The other related aim of this article is to be more specific about migration patterns. Migration statistics that developed from the mid-nineteenth century showed national-level migration, movement between nations (or, more often, colonies). This is still how migration statistics are presented. National-level statistics, however, can be misleading. International migration was, more often than not,

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1. ‘Business Addresses’, *The Whitehaven News*, 27 April 1899.

2. C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 – 1867* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 1-5.

3. A.L. Stoler and F. Cooper, ‘Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda’, in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-56.

between specific regions within nations, or tied to specific occupations.<sup>4</sup> Demand for particular labour and skills in Southern Africa gave rise to what I term very long distance labour migration, a term I use in this case to mean labour migration from outside Southern Africa.

What I want to emphasise in the case I present here is how uneven and specific these imperial connections and migration routes were. Imperial connections were concentrated geographically and occupationally. The connections made by these migrants caused changes in a very localised manner. Other places, even those that were very close geographically, did not experience these changes. While what I present here is a small case study, I suspect that the same argument applies to other times and places.

### **Mining Booms and Migration**

The connection between Cumberland and the Rand was created and sustained by two sequential mining booms. The end of this mining boom also explains why the connection came to an end. The first boom was iron ore in Cumberland. Iron ore deposits there had particular properties that made it useful for producing steel, and production boomed from the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

This was a highly concentrated mining region. Iron ore deposits are mostly located in an area seven miles long and a mile wide beneath and between the towns of Frizington, Cleator Moor and Egremont, with another deposit in the south of the county in Millom. These towns consequently boomed. Cleator Moor, at the centre of the district, had a mere 763 residents in 1841 and 10,420 residents in 1881.<sup>6</sup>

The 1880s proved to be the peak of the iron ore industry, and thereafter it went into a slow and ultimately terminal decline.<sup>7</sup> This was precisely the period when gold was first discovered on South Africa's Witwatersrand. The mining boom on the Rand is well-known to readers of this journal. Suffice to say that it was on a different scale to the iron ore boom in mid-nineteenth century Cumberland. People from across the world migrated to Johannesburg and the Rand became the centre of the world's gold industry.

This was migration beyond the boundaries of the British Empire, though with an important caveat. The Witwatersrand was located in the Transvaal Republic, an

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4. A good example of this is Clive Glaser's history of migration from Madeira to South Africa. C. Glaser, 'White but Illegal: Undocumented Madeiran Immigration to South Africa, 1920s–1970s', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 31, 1 (2012), 74–98.
  5. Cumberland's iron deposits did not contain phosphorus, so were easier to process. T.H. Bainbridge, 'Iron Ore Mining in Cumbria', *Geography*, 19, 4 (1934), 277.
  6. *Ibid.*, 284.
  7. By 1901, Cleator Moor had lost 20% of its population.

independent republic that was under British 'suzerainty' as established by the 1884 London Convention.<sup>8</sup> Article XIV of this convention stipulated that anyone (other than Africans) would be allowed to enter and settle in the Transvaal Republic and engage in economic activities on the same basis as citizens of the republic. After 1886, tens of thousands of hopeful miners did just that.

Among this migrant wave were people with specific skills in deep-level underground mining. The two sequential mining booms are linked through supply and demand. The first boom created a supply of people with a very specific skills: miners with experience in underground metal mining. The second boom on the Rand created a huge demand for people with these mining skills. These skills were in short supply in South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Similarities in extraction methods facilitated labour migration. The Rand's gold-bearing reef that was visible on the surface sank deeply into the earth and, unlike previous nineteenth century gold rushes, there was no place for people with a pick and shovel. Deep-level mining became necessary. Similarly, ore deposits in Cumberland were located far beneath the surface and the hardness of the ore meant it had to be extracted using explosives and rock-drilling.<sup>10</sup> From the 1890s, the Rand gold mines needed miners with experience of deep-level mining and these miners could be found in Cumberland, where demand for their skills was in decline.

Miners from Cumberland engaged in very long-distance labour migration. Thousands made their way to the Rand, assisted by improvements in steamship and rail transport and international postal services and local newspapers that provided information to would-be migrants. Although the exact number remains unclear, there are regular reports in the local press about groups leaving Cumberland for South Africa for almost 30 years. By 1905, one paper noted 'a strong current of feeling among the young men... to go to South Africa... Each week sees large numbers going out.' The article goes on to list 15 people who had left Frizington that week, a town of only 5,000 residents.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Britain had control over the external relations of the Transvaal Republic. On suzerainty and the London Convention, see D. Schreuder, *Gladstone and Kruger: Liberal Government & Colonial 'Home Rule', 1880-85* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), chapter 7.

9. The initial discovery of gold 'attracted all sorts of men who were neither physically suited to nor technically trained for the kind of skilled mining techniques which these mines later required'. E. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1976), 14.

10. In other parts of Britain, iron ore was located near the surface and extracted through open-cast workings. See Bainbridge, 'Iron Ore Mining', 284.

11. 'More Frizingtonians for South Africa', *Whitehaven News*, 7 September 1905. This seems to have been a consistent figure. The next month, a press report lists 30 people

Cumberland miners were far from the only ones to make this journey of course. Jon Hyslop has observed that migration was a fundamental feature of early Johannesburg: ‘... almost the whole population, black and white, came from outside the borders of the Transvaal.’<sup>12</sup> The obvious parallel is Cornwall. Cornish miners too had experience of deep-level metal mining and tens of thousands left Cornwall to seek ‘similar employment through filial connections and closely-tied communities in grim mining districts across the world.’<sup>13</sup> The terminal decline of metal mining in Cornwall and comparatively high wages on the Rand brought thousands, although ‘microregions within the county saw significant differences in employment opportunities.’<sup>14</sup>

The other relatively well-known example of very long-distance labour migration to the Rand are the Chinese workers recruited in the 1900s. This too had a very strong regional dimension. As many as 98 per cent of mineworkers were recruited from northern China, where the labour market had been disrupted by the Russo-Japanese War, and the first two cohorts of workers were recruited almost entirely from the northern industrial port of Tianjin.<sup>15</sup> This migration too, was almost exclusively male migration. Although Chinese miners were entitled to bring their wives and children with them, very few did.<sup>16</sup>

The information above hints at other examples of specific regions that became connected. In these cases too, imperial and international connections were uneven in terms of geography and occupation. The changes generated by these connections were accordingly localised. Other places, even those geographically very close, did not experience these changes.

Cumberland’s economy was heavily industrial in the late nineteenth century. North of the iron ore towns there were coal mines and blast furnaces; to the south,

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who left Frizington for South Africa over a two-week period, see ‘The Emigration Tide’, *Maryport Advertiser*, 21 October 1905.

12. J. Hyslop, ‘The British and Australian Leaders of the South African Labour Movement, 1902-1914: A Group Biography’, in *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures*, eds F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007), 92.
13. R. Burt and S. Kippen, ‘Rational Choice and a Lifetime in Metal Mining: Employment Decisions by Nineteenth-Century Cornish Miners’, *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), 46. On Cornish miners on the Rand, see P. Payton, *The Cornish Overseas: The Epic Story of the ‘Great Migration’* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2015), 348-377.
14. *Ibid.*, 73.
15. M. Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* (New York: W.M. Norton & Co., 2021), 208-209. On Chinese migration to the Rand, see M.L. Yap and D.L. Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 103-135; and K.L. Harris, ‘Sugar and Gold: Indentured Indian and Chinese Labour in South Africa’, *Journal of Social Sciences*, 25, 1-3 (2010), 147-158.
16. Ngai, *Chinese Question*, 224.

ship-building, and elsewhere pastoral farming. People from such areas did not migrate in significant numbers to the Rand. Accordingly, these places were not shaped by an imperial connection to the Rand. The iron ore towns became distinct places because of this connection. In the section below, I highlight four ways that connection brought changes: work, household formation, politics and disease.

### **Connected Regions**

The boundaries of the two connected regions were shaped by work, specifically metal mining. Miners from the handful of towns and villages that comprised Cumberland's iron ore district had opportunities for work overseas; people living in neighbouring towns did not. The places they could go to on the Rand to find work were also specific; one contemporary observer identified three 'Cumberland districts', each in close proximity to gold mines: Jeppestown, Fordsburg and Germiston.<sup>17</sup>

Cumberland miners travelled to places where there was a demand for deep-level mining on the Rand and at diamond mines in Kimberley. 'There is no opening for the private digger', explained one newspaper correspondent in 1894, but 'an experienced miner, who is a good hand with the rock drill... can work seven days a week if he likes.'<sup>18</sup> Specifically, there were work opportunities for people with experience in metal mining. There were many coal mines in Cumberland, but few colliers emigrated because they did not possess the required skills. The Cumberland press occasionally printed cautionary tales of those who had tried, such as a coal miner who returned home so bedraggled and poverty-stricken in 1895 that his own family didn't recognise him.<sup>19</sup>

The most obvious way that the imperial connection shaped Cumberland was access to work and higher wages when work at local mines dwindled. In this sense, iron ore miners in Cumberland had a material stake in empire. Prospective migrants back in Cumberland could access extensive information about wages, housing, likelihood of employment and leisure options on the Rand through letters and reports sent to newspapers.<sup>20</sup> Private letters were a regular source of information and the local press reported when 'incoming South African mails' could be expected to arrive, based on the progress of mail ships.<sup>21</sup>

Wages flowed back to Cumberland, along with information. Men working in South Africa sent back substantial amounts of money as remittances, much more

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17. Letter from 'Marra', *Maryport Advertiser*, 29 April 1907.

18. 'New El Dorado', *West Cumberland Times*, 3 February 1894.

19. 'A Return from South Africa', *Maryport Advertiser*, 28 April 1895.

20. Chinese residents of Johannesburg also wrote articles for newspapers in Guangzhou and Hong Kong with information and wage levels and conditions of work, though this was done to discourage would-be migrants. Ngai, *Chinese Question*, 206-207.

21. 'South African Mails', *Whitehaven News*, 18 May 1899.

than from other colonies. In 1905-9, almost 50 per cent of total remittances from settler colonies to Britain came from South Africa.<sup>22</sup> This alone is one small indication of major historical change: today remittances flow from Britain to African countries.

Migration from Cumberland to the Rand was predominately male migration, as was the case more broadly in Johannesburg. In 1897 only 12 per cent of white mine employees on the Rand had families resident with them and Johannesburg had a huge gender imbalance.<sup>23</sup> In Cumberland's iron ore towns, female-headed households became commonplace and, unusually for mining towns, by 1911 there were more women than men in these towns. Andrew Leeson left for South Africa only a few days after marrying Ada Benson in 1905, and he was still there 8 years later when he was killed in a mining accident.<sup>24</sup> This was not an unusual case. Men were often absent working overseas for several years, and some never returned at all.

As mining declined in Cumberland, wages from gold mines in South Africa supported households there. Remitted wages allowed women to establish boarding houses and some miners accumulated enough to buy small businesses on their return.<sup>25</sup> Others accumulated enough to change the fortunes of their families. Although William Thwaites was an iron ore miner before he left for South Africa, and an iron ore miner when he returned, the money he made there allowed his children to establish shops and local businesses in Cleator Moor, and some still survive today run by his descendants. William Thwaites spent his life as a miner. His eldest son Joseph became a newsagent and tobacconist.<sup>26</sup>

It was not only money that flowed from these connections. Political ideas did too. Cumberland became a stronghold of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) so it's perhaps unsurprising that some Transvaal ILP candidates spoke 'with a touch of Cumberland vernacular'.<sup>27</sup> Cumberland's iron ore mines were unionised from the early 1870s and miners from Cumberland played a prominent role in the formation of the Transvaal Miners Union. The first general secretary, Tom Mather, was from Cumberland, as was another early leader, Jimmy Coward, who was later mayor of the

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22. Remittance flows increased markedly after the discovery of gold. G. Magee and A. Thompson, "'Lines of credit, debts of obligation': Migrant Remittances to Britain, c.1875-1913', *Economic History Review*, LIX, 3 (2006), 545-555.

23. D. Carmack, *The Rand at War, 1899-1902: The Witwatersrand and the Anglo-Boer War* (London: James Currey, 1990), 4.

24. Ada Benson's brother was also killed in South Africa in 1910. See 'Fatal Accident to a Whitehaven Man in South Africa', *Whitehaven News*, 14 August 1913.

25. For instance, the secretary of the Transvaal Cumberland & Westmorland Society returned to Cumberland in 1908 with enough money to purchase a pub, 'Punch Bowl Inn', *Maryport Advertiser*, 11 December 1897.

26. S. Close and F. McCrickard, 'Hannah Routledge, 56 High Street', *St Mary's Parish Magazine*, Spring 2023.

27. 'Election Campaign', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 February 1907.

‘Cumberland district’ Germiston, and James Nicholson, the union’s member of the Mining Regulations Committee.<sup>28</sup> This was a whites-only organisation that championed racial segregation and Mather made his views clear at the union’s inaugural meeting: ‘My opinion... is that any man is not worthy of his name if he will accept the position and remuneration that have always been secured to the n\*\*\*er.’<sup>29</sup>

This kind of racial politics mobilised people in Cumberland, particularly the employment of Chinese miners in the 1900s. Here, Cumberland was brought into the global politics of anti-Asian exclusion through the connection with the Rand. Packed meetings in the iron ore towns demanded the expulsion of ‘the scum of China’ from the gold mines and it became a key election issue locally at the 1906 general election.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, if it could happen in South Africa, trade unionists in Cumberland publicly warned, ‘why should not Chinese be brought to labour in the mines of Cumberland?’<sup>31</sup> People in Cumberland were defending their own employment opportunities. Jobs at mines thousands of miles away should be kept for people like themselves.

Afrikaners were included in this public scorn. ‘Boers’ were lambasted at public meetings in Cumberland and in the press prior to the South African War. There was a particular local dimension to this. In December 1898, an unemployed miner, Tom Edgar, was shot and killed by a police officer in Johannesburg and the ‘Edgar Affair’ briefly became a cause celebre for British critics of the Transvaal Republic who were agitating for war.<sup>32</sup> Edgar was from Cleator Moor, as was made clear in press reports in Cumberland. Subsequent events, including a protest meeting over the shooting that escalated into running battles with police and a petition claiming British subjects were subject to ‘petty tyranny’ in the Republic, were reported too, a modest contribution to pro-war sentiments.<sup>33</sup>

The final change I want to highlight is disease. South Africa’s gold mines were deadly and people working underground frequently developed a terminal lung disease

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28. R. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers’ Leader* (Cape Town: Stewart Print Co., 1944), 79. ‘The Late Mr Jas. Nicholson’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 April 1908.

29. D. Ticktin, ‘White Labour’s Attitude, 1902-1904, towards the Importation of Indentured Chinese Labourers by the Transvaal Chamber of Mines’, in Centre of African Studies, *Africa Seminar: Collected Papers Vol 1* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, 1978), 68.

30. ‘Liberal Meeting at Frizington’, *West Cumberland Times*, 11 March 1905.

31. ‘Chinese Labour in South Africa. The Position of the Whitehaven Miners’, *West Cumberland Times*, 23 March 1904. Speakers at this meeting were from the Cumberland Iron Ore Miners’ Association.

32. D. Cammack, ‘The Politics of Discontent: The Grievances of the Uitlander Refugees, 1899-1902’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8, 2 (1982), 243-270.

33. ‘General News up to Date’, *Maryport Advertiser*, 31 December 1898.

called silicosis.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, Cumberland's imperial connection was visible epidemiologically. Miners who worked on the Rand often fell sick and died of diseases that their counterparts back home in Cumberland did not get. Already in 1891, press reports appeared of miners who had 'succumbed to an attack of inflammation of the lungs.'<sup>35</sup> By the 1900s, the number dying from the 'gold miners' disease' in South Africa left noticeable numbers of women and children in Cumberland destitute.<sup>36</sup>

The numbers dying and tenacious struggles by white miners' themselves led to the passing of the Miners' Phthisis Act (1911) and the beginning of a formal system of compensation.<sup>37</sup> The Phthisis Board required recipients of compensation to be examined periodically and in Cumberland, local doctors were engaged by the Board for this purpose until at least the 1960s. Their files make for grim reading. Among them is a handwritten note from an ailing ex-miner explaining to his doctor that he was too sick to be examined, and the page is splattered with blood coughed up as he wrote it.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, Cumberland miners were entitled to compensation after 1911 and many of them received it. Small consolation, perhaps, but African mineworkers were entitled to none. Money was regularly sent thousands of miles to men suffering from silicosis, covering subsistence payments, children's education, support for widows, and funeral expenses.<sup>39</sup> Migrant African workers from neighbouring territories were effectively sent back to die, travelling on trains with barred windows, with no compensation.<sup>40</sup> In this way too, the racial structure of South Africa's mining industry shaped events in Cumberland.

It may be worth noting, however, that many of the features described above for Cumberland miners also applied to African miners: gendered migration; the use of remittances by male miners to sustain households in regions of origin; female-headed households in labour-sending regions, and the impact of industrial diseases. The

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34. This was explored with respect to Cornish miners, see G. Burke and P. Richardson, 'The Profits of Death: A Comparative Study of Miners' Phthisis in Cornwall and the Transvaal, 1876-1918', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4, 2 (1978), 147-171.

35. 'Death of a Cleator Moor Emigrant in South Africa', *West Cumberland Times*, 23 September 1891. There were other dangers too. The deceased man's brother had died in a fire at a mine in Kimberley.

36. 'Increase in Bootle Pauperism', *West Cumberland Times*, 12 September 1906.

37. Phthisis was the contemporary term for silicosis. A. Mushai, 'The Long Road to Compensation for Silicosis Sufferers in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46, 6 (2020), 1130-1131.

38. Cumbria Archives, Barrow, BTHOS 3/5. I am unable to supply a more precise reference as these are medical records and the archive access rules prohibit the use of names of patients.

39. See the letters on file at Cumbria Archives, Whitehaven, SPUW/6/14.

40. C. van Onselen, *The Night Trains: Moving Mozambican Miners to and from the Witwatersrand Mines, 1902-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 114-32.

pervasive racial segregation that developed in South Africa has obscured the similarities that many of the groups who migrated to the Rand had.<sup>41</sup> These are groups of people whose lives and experiences became different, although initially they had much in common.

### Problems and Pitfalls

There are obvious difficulties with writing regionally connected histories. It requires a good grasp of the historical context of two different places and engagement historiographies that have developed around different concerns and frames of reference. As Catherine Hall warned:

The levels of work that are necessary if different localities, regions, and colonial/national cultures are to be adequately understood for any piece of historical investigation pose serious challenges. There are good reasons for the development of specialisms.<sup>42</sup>

There are practical challenges too. The costs of archival research, in both time and money, effectively double. This helps to explain why there are relatively few comparative works about the Rand or Johannesburg.<sup>43</sup> Other comparative histories rely heavily on secondary sources for regions outside the author's own area of specialism, as is the case for T. Dunbar Moodie's history of mining on the Rand and India's Kolar goldfields.<sup>44</sup> I am aware too of deficiencies in my knowledge of British history as I am primarily a historian of Southern Africa.

Practical challenges are less formidable than they used to be though. A decade ago, Lara Putnam noted that 'the transnational turn is accelerating simultaneously with the digital turn' as the proliferation of digitised sources allows historians to

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41. Elaine Katz observed that similarities existed in these years, but did not develop the point: 'There are strong parallels between British migrant miners on the Witwatersrand and the African migrant labour force.' E. Katz, *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886-1910* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1994), 67.

42. T. Sasson, J. Vernon, M. Ogborn, P. Satia and C. Hall, 'Britain and the World: A New Field?', *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), 706.

43. One of the few is B. Kennedy, *A Tale of Two Mining Cities: Johannesburg and Broken Hill, 1885-1925* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1984). See also K.L. Harris, 'Early Trade Unionism on the Gold Mines in South Africa and Australia: A Comparison', *Historia*, 35, 2 (1990), 76-97.

44. T. Dunbar Moodie's expertise is on South Africa and he notes '...for my account of the Kolar gold fields, I have relied on secondary sources'. See T. Dunbar Moodie, 'A Comparative Account of Deep-level Gold Mining in India and South Africa: Implications for Workers' Lives', in *Making Sense of Mining History: Themes and Agenda*, eds S. Berger and P. Alexander (London: Routledge, 2021), 104.

access material remotely and to locate archival material.<sup>45</sup> Some of the uncertainty around archival research has been reduced. I could be reasonably confident of finding material on South Africa in archives in Cumberland before I visited because the catalogues are online and searchable

However, digitised sources are uneven. One part of a comparison often has more sources than the other. This is also the case for comparisons between places where sources are in the same language.<sup>46</sup> My research was made substantially easier because local newspapers in Cumberland have been digitised and these newspapers routinely include articles about South Africa.<sup>47</sup> Two Cumberland men established a newspaper in Kimberley in 1897 and doubtless this would contain much useful material on migration patterns and everyday life.<sup>48</sup> There is little prospect of this publication being digitised in the foreseeable future.

Written sources also privilege certain kinds of connections. Missing from my account here are people who did not want to be found or actively avoided leaving documentary traces of their activities. Many people migrated to the Rand in search of illicit opportunities and in Johannesburg a powerful criminal underworld nourished and embedded in transnational migration developed with the gold boom.<sup>49</sup> Many people came to the Rand who had no intention of mining, but these people are more difficult to find.

## End

The connection between Cumberland and the Rand lasted only about thirty years and it dissipated after the First World War. In 1932, one Cumberland doctor reported that he still occasionally had miners returning from South Africa coming to him for a scan that they could present to the Phthisis Board, but requests were much less frequent than in previous years.<sup>50</sup>

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45. L. Putnam, 'The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitised Sources and the Shadows they Cast', *The American Historical Review*, 121, 2 (2016), 377-402.

46. I have argued at greater length about the potential problems of uneven digitisation for transnational history elsewhere: D. Money "'Ain't I a bastard, well I received my training in Aussie': The Life of Frank Maybank, an Australian Trade Unionist in Central Africa", *Labour History*, 122, 1 (2022), 131-154.

47. The same is true of other parts of the UK with strong localised imperial connections. For instance, 'Local Dundee newspapers regularly reported the state of the monsoon and the prospective jute harvest.' J. Tomlinson, *Dundee and the Empire: 'Juteopolis' 1850-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3.

48. 'Local and General Items', *Whitehaven Gazette*, 3 June 1897.

49. C. van Onselen, *Showdown at the Red Lion: The Life and Time of Jack McLoughlin* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015).

50. Cumbria Archives, Barrow, BTHOS 3/1, Report from Dr Edward Constable, 24 July 1932.

One thing this shows is that these imperial connections were uneven in time and in space. In the 1850s, few people in Cumberland knew much about the place that would become South Africa beyond the seafarers who rounded the Cape. The same was true in the 1950s, aside from in the memories of older residents. This was not true of the 1900s, however, when many thousands sought to escape economic recession by seeking work in South Africa's gold industry.

For around 30 years, a small corner of Cumberland developed and maintained close connections with the Rand in ways that changed people's movements, wealth and health in direct ways. The racial politics of a place thousands of miles away became directly relevant for people's employment opportunities and access to welfare. These changes were very localised. Other nearby towns did not experience them.

Why this long-distance labour migration began is clear enough, but why did it end? Existing accounts of migration to South Africa tend to focus on the political context.<sup>51</sup> There is another important context: supply and demand. The labour requirements of South Africa's mining industry changed as the mining companies changed the organisation of underground work from the late 1900s. The result was that the Rand mines needed fewer underground miners with specialist 'all round' skills at different aspects of underground work.<sup>52</sup> Already in 1907, one white miner complained to a government commission that white miners were no longer 'the actual worker' as they increasingly supervised African workers.<sup>53</sup>

The mines instead recruited white labour locally. In 1907, only 17 per cent of white mineworkers working on the Rand mines were born in South Africa. This figure had risen to slightly over 50 per cent by the end of the First World War, and almost two-thirds of the white mining workforce were South African-born by 1930.<sup>54</sup> The supply of labour also changed. The long slump in Cumberland's iron ore industry meant there were fewer men with the skills and experience in deep-level metal mining. To put it simply, there were few miners in Cumberland and less demand for them on the Rand.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, the imperial connection between these two regions dissipated.

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51. M. Harper and S. Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133. For a criticism of this approach, see J. Smith, *Settlers at the End of Empire: Race and the Politics of Migration in South Africa, Rhodesia and the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

52. Katz, *Trade Union Aristocracy*, 72-75.

53. *Report of the Mining Industry Commission 1907-08* (Pretoria: Government Printing and Stationary Office, 1908), 30.

54. D. Yudelman, *Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital, and the Incorporation of Organized Labor on the South African Goldfields, 1902-1939* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1982), 132.

55. There was some demand elsewhere though. In 1930, one mining company offered terms of employment to white workers at new copper mines in Zambia 'similar to

I retain vivid memories of going underground at the last remaining iron ore mine in Cumberland as a child.<sup>56</sup> In fact, it is that image of a vast subterranean world beneath our feet that sparked a lifelong interest in the mining industry. Yet although I was from there and later worked in South Africa as a historian researching mining, I was still surprised when I found out about the connection between the two. A testament to how even deep connections in the past can be quickly forgotten and to the difficulties of uncovering them again.



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Cumberland miners.' D. Money, *White Mineworkers on Zambia's Copperbelt: In a Class of Their Own* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 48.

56. This was Florence Mine in Egremont. It closed in 2007.

## **Local and Regional Ties in Imperial Labour Migration**

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Duncan Money examines the transnational labour migration that linked iron ore miners from Cumberland with Witwatersrand goldfields in South Africa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his article, he challenges historians to rethink how localised economic, occupational, and social ties were shaped by broader imperial dynamics by foregrounding regional specificity over a national or imperial lens. He shows the asymmetric nature of imperial ties, the ideological and material aftermaths of labour migration, and the links between regional identities and global capitalism.

Money connects with the literature that deconstructs the nation-state focusing on empire and labour migration studies, highlighting the importance of regional connections. His focused examination of Cumberland and the Rand resonates with Frederick Cooper's insights on colonialism and empire, where he urges scholars to view the empire as a lumpy space marked by uneven distributions of power and resources.<sup>1</sup> Money illustrates this by revealing the diversity of imperial economies, comprised of localised industries and labour pools, and shows how Cumberland's mining towns evolved into key nodes in a global labour network. His findings align with Sharron Schwartz's research on Cornish miners, which emphasises that regional expertise, like deep-level mining, not only required global labour circulation but also reinforced local identities.<sup>2</sup>

While Money's focus on regional connections is insightful, it raises questions about scalability. He acknowledges that Cumberland's case is 'small' yet suggests its relevance to other contexts. However, this narrow approach invites further comparative analysis. For example, how did Cumberland's experience contrast with Cornwall, where migration to the Rand was also significant but shaped by distinct cultural networks, such as the 'Cousin Jack' connections among Cornishmen? Additionally, the brief mention of Chinese labour migration was a different dynamic, governed by coercive indentured systems rather than voluntary movement. Further research can reveal whether regional specificity leads to divergent migration patterns or if structural factors, such as racial hierarchies and labour policies, take precedence over local specificities.

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1. F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2005.
  2. S. Schwartz, "‘Though Not an Irishman’: Cornish Identity in the East Rand Gold Mining Industry, South Africa, 1886–1922", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), 599–616.

Money looks adeptly at how migration transformed gender dynamics in Cumberland, noting the prevalence of female-headed households and dependence on remittances. However, his treatment of race and gender feels somewhat isolated. While the article acknowledges racialised labour hierarchies in South Africa, for example, the exclusion of African miners from compensation for silicosis, further research could integrate intersectional analysis. For example, how did Cumberland miners' racial identities as 'white' workers in a colonial context intersect with their class positions? Laura Ann Stoler's work on the 'tense and tender ties' of empire illustrates how racial anxieties and labour competition reinforced colonial hierarchies.<sup>3</sup> Cumberland miners' resistance to Chinese labour, framed as a defence of 'jobs for people like themselves', exemplifies what Anne McClintock describes as 'imperial masculinity', a gendered and racialised identity constructed through exclusion.<sup>4</sup> Broadening this perspective could uncover how Cumberland's labour migrants both navigated and reinforced colonial racial regimes or, conversely, how they challenged them.

While Money highlights the prevalence of male migration, the experiences of women left behind merit deeper exploration in future research. Did female-headed households in Cumberland cultivate unique forms of solidarity or economic resilience, akin to Deborah Bryceson's findings on African migrant labour?<sup>5</sup> Conversely, how did the absence of men influence local politics or social norms? The article's rich anecdotes, such as Ada Benson's story, suggest fertile ground for exploring these questions further.

The article's strength lies in its detailed account of how migration transformed Cumberland materially through remittances, silicosis and ideologically through labour politics, anti-Chinese sentiment. Money convincingly argues that wages from the Rand sustained households during Cumberland's industrial decline, illustrating what Marcel van der Linden terms 'global labour history' to explain the interplay between local livelihoods and transnational capital.<sup>6</sup> His discussion of silicosis compensation highlights the racialised biopolitics of empire, wherein white miners' bodies were 'deemed more worthy of protection than African workers'. This aligns with Jock

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3. A.L. Stoler, 'Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in (Post) Colonial Studies', *Itinerario*, 27 (2011), 263-284.
  4. A. Mc Clintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
  5. D. Bryceson, 'De-agrarianisation and Rural Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sectoral Perspective', in *Disappearing Peasantries? Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, eds D. Bryceson, C. Kay, and J. Mooij (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 2000), 97-111.
  6. M. van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

McCulloch's research on occupational disease in Southern Africa, which exposes how racial capitalism dictated access to healthcare.<sup>7</sup>

However, the ideological flows between Cumberland and the Rand could be further contextualised. Money notes that Cumberland's unionised miners influenced the Transvaal Miners' Union's racially exclusionary policies. This parallels Jonathan Hyslop's argument that British labour activists exported 'white labourism' to South Africa, merging class solidarity with racial exclusion.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the article does not explore how these ideologies circulated beyond formal institutions. Did letters or newspapers also transmit racialised narratives? How did migrants' on-the-ground experiences in South Africa reshape their views of empire? Incorporating scholarship on the 'imperial press' or migrant correspondence, such as Tony Ballantyne's work on colonial networks, could enrich this analysis.<sup>9</sup> Money candidly addresses the difficulties of writing regionally connected histories, particularly uneven archives and linguistic barriers. His reliance on digitised Cumberland newspapers is innovative, yet it raises questions about representation. As he acknowledges, sources privilege certain voices, particularly literate, male, and invested in formal labour structures. Illicit migrants or African perspectives remain elusive, a common issue in labour histories reliant on colonial archives. This limitation underscores Ann Laura Stoler's warning that archives are 'corrals of the knowable', shaped by power structures.<sup>10</sup> Future research might triangulate sources for example, oral histories, court records, or African newspapers to recover marginalised narratives.

The article's focus on the period from the 1880s to the 1920s invites further examination. While it effectively highlights the height and subsequent decline of the Cumberland-Rand connections, it may overlook the longer-lasting impacts. For instance, how did the silicosis compensation system change after 1930? Did remittances or diasporic identities continue to influence life in Cumberland? A broader temporal approach, as suggested by David Lambert and Alan Lester, could reveal how these imperial ties echoed beyond their peak years.<sup>11</sup> Money's regional focus advances theoretical debates about empire. He rejects the metropole-colony binary by aligning with Antoinette Burton's call to 'provincialise' imperial histories,

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7. J. McCulloch, *South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012).
  8. J. Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself "White": White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa before the First World War', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12, 4 (1999), 398–421.
  9. T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
  10. A.L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
  11. D. Lambert and A. Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerings in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

revealing how global processes were rooted in local contingencies.<sup>12</sup> His assertion that ‘imperial connections mattered more in some places than others’ critiques the tendency to oversimplify narratives of empire, much like Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson’s focus on a ‘networked’ Britishness.<sup>13</sup> This perspective reveals the diverse and localised impacts of imperial relationships rather than presenting a one-size-fits-all view.

However, the article’s focus on regionalism may overlook the larger structural forces of imperialism at play. Although Cumberland’s connections to the Rand were distinctive, they were part of a wider British imperial economy that supported labour mobility through steamship routes and postal services. As Antony Hopkins points out, globalisation and empire shaped each other; the regional ties were made possible by the very infrastructures of empire.<sup>14</sup> Combining regional specificity with structural analysis could offer a clearer picture of how local agency and imperial systems influenced each other over time. In his conclusion, Money highlights the fading of Cumberland’s connections to the Rand, serving as a powerful reminder of how quickly history can slip from our collective memory. This resonates with Paul Gilroy’s concept of the ‘Black Atlantic’, wherein diasporic connections are often obscured by national narratives.<sup>15</sup> The article’s recovery of these links is a vital corrective, yet it also invites reflection on why such histories are forgotten. Was it the decline of mining, the erosion of regional identities, or the sanitisation of imperial pasts? Further research into memory and commemoration could illuminate how communities reckon with transnational legacies.

In conclusion, Money’s article represents a noteworthy advancement in the fields of labour, imperial, and regional history. By shedding light on the intricate realities of empire, he challenges historians to embrace more nuanced frameworks that prioritise regional specificity, thereby paving the way for future scholarship. Building on his insights, researchers can integrate intersectional analyses, expand comparative perspectives, and link regional dynamics with broader structural forces. As Money’s own journey, from Cumberland to South Africa demonstrates, the overlooked past connections remain essential to understanding our present.

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12. A. Burton, ‘Provincialising Empire: The Challenge of the Local in Global History’, in *Empire and the Making of the Modern World*, eds G. Magee and A. Thompson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 200–220.

13. G.B. Magee and A.S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

14. A.G. Hopkins, ed. *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002).

15. P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

## Reflections on D. Money's piece on Cumberland Miners and the Rand

Jeremy Krikler

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We are all familiar with the method of comparative history, pioneered for South Africa by scholars such as George Fredrickson, John Cell and Stanley Greenburg, and which has been much developed since then.<sup>1</sup> But, as Shula Marks emphasised many years ago at an international conference on race and class in Oxford, we should be alive not just to comparison but to connection.<sup>2</sup> Duncan Money's piece reminds us of the importance of Marks's point. For his study illuminates, not by comparing mining on the Rand and in Kimberley with that in Cumberland, but by demonstrating how and why these areas were linked – and intensely so – for a time. And his detailed tracing of the connections unearths the contrasting economic histories of the regions that were central to forging the connection. In effect, the decline of iron mining in Cumberland – which deprived miners there of livelihoods – was coincident with the rise of the giant mining industry on the Rand which drew these iron miners, with their crucial skills, from the north of England to the Witwatersrand.

We are all familiar with the famous connection of Cornish tin miners to the Rand. Until Money's piece, very few of us – Charles van Onselen is one of the exceptions – knew that there was a connection to the iron mining towns of Cumberland as well.<sup>3</sup> What remains striking about Money's project is that it was initiated so serendipitously: he encountered in a piece about Kimberley a stray reference to a Cumberland newspaper, a publication produced not far from where he grew up; this piqued his interest and led to the discovery that the newspaper was actually sold at one time in the principal South African mining towns. Following the links then opened up a lost world. How many other lost worlds of this kind are there,

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1. G. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); J. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); S. Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development: South Africa in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press and Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980). More recent comparative analyses include, for example, the set of articles comparing aspects of South African and US history in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 1 (2004) and I. Evans, *Cultures of Violence. Lynching and Racial Killing in South Africa and the American South* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
  2. Shula Marks made the point at a 'Racializing Class; Classifying Race: A Conference on Labour and Difference in Africa, the United States and Britain', held at St Antony's College, Oxford, in 1997.
  3. Charles van Onselen notes Cumberland as a source of immigrants to the Rand in his classic *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2001), first published in two volumes by Longman and Ravan in 1982.

awaiting historians whose biographies alert them to incidental references others would pass over? No doubt as more of these lost worlds become known and are tracked in the kind of detail Money provides, our sense of the web of connections with the Rand in its heyday will become ever denser and more complex. It will help us to understand why crises on the Rand – notably in the run-up to the South African War and after it – had the ability to resonate with an international public: they could reach into small mining towns in a place like Cumberland, precisely because of their connections to these international migrant workers. Indeed, Jon Hyslop has emphasised that the famous Shakespearean scholar A.L. Rowse, born to a working-class family in Cornwall, noted that what was happening in South Africa in the early twentieth century was in some sense more immediate to the Cornish folk he grew up amongst than developments in England.<sup>4</sup>

Money's evocation also alerts us to the astonishing fact that remittances from South Africa to Britain – some of which found their way to Cumberland – were by far the greatest single source of remittances to Britain from the settler colonies in at least one period of the early-twentieth century. And his demonstration of how these remittances helped families in Cumberland tide themselves over – in some cases by establishing businesses of some kind – while they adapted to the decline of iron mining reminds us of a crucial fact: mining on the Rand left its legacy in places such as Cumberland and Cornwall not merely in the graves of silicosis victims but in successful strategies of socio-economic survival and, even, transformation. It is a commonplace that the Rand was linked to the wealth of shareholders abroad; we are much less alert to how it was connected to the economic lives in Britain itself of the families of the international migrants. Here lies a potentially important source of the popularity of imperialism amongst the British working class: it was not merely that imperialism was ideologically a fount of patriotism and pride, or that the Empire provided opportunities abroad for those who were economically-straitened; it was also a means by which families in depressed areas such as the iron towns of Cumberland, could benefit from steady financial infusions.

If, in these ways, Money's micro-historical analysis intrigues and illuminates, it might be remarked that it leaves unexplored the fate of the migrants who chose not to return to Cumberland but who remained on the Rand itself. The late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as William Beinart has reminded us, was a period in which the level of white migration to South Africa was great enough to alter permanently the demographic weight of the white population in South Africa as a

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4. Note the reference to Rowse in J. Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself White: White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa before the First World War', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12, 4 (1999).

whole.<sup>5</sup> And, as Charles van Onselen has demonstrated, the early twentieth century was also the period on the Rand that saw something of a shift in the nature of white working class accommodation – from boarding establishments to residential homes – which reflected the growing number of family-based households amongst the white working class.<sup>6</sup> In other words, increasing numbers of migrants were committing themselves to a life in South Africa. Money is largely silent about the lives of the Cumberland men who chose to stay in South Africa, or of those who may have brought family members out to join them. As such, the framework of his microhistory of regional connection – and what caused its breaks – remains incomplete.

Finally, while the issue of the introduction of the Chinese indentured workers to the Transvaal is shown to have agitated the Cumberland electorate, there is no exploration of other key events that affected white miners and how these were received by their families in Britain. The bitter strikes of 1907 and 1913, for example, strikes that saw repressive force deployed against white mineworkers in the Transvaal, remain unremarked in the paper. And even on the issue of the Chinese indentured workers, one feels that more needs to be done in order to convey just how complex the issue was. After all, the way it was cast and received in England was not quite how it ultimately came to be approached in South Africa. For, as Dagmar Engelken has shown, substantial numbers of white mineworkers on the Rand – in contrast to some of the union leaders – came to acquiesce in, or even to support, the temporary introduction of the Chinese. In the context of the severe African labour shortages of the time, it was feared that – without the Chinese – mining operations would be constrained, thereby reducing the employment opportunities of the white workers.<sup>7</sup>

If some of the points above suggest just how difficult it is to write the history of far-flung but connected regions – tracking the lives of Cumberland workers who remained in South Africa will be no easy task – they also point to just how fruitful the angles thrown up by such a project are. We can only hope that Duncan Money, having tantalised us with his insights and revelation of a little-known connection, will commit himself to a more detailed recovery of the Cumberland-Rand nexus.



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5. W. Beinart *South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74.
  6. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh*, 214-15.
  7. See D. Engelken, 'A White Man's Country? The Chinese Labor Controversy in the Transvaal', in *Wages of Whiteness and Racist Symbolic Capital* eds W. Hund, J. Krikler and D. Roediger (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010).

## **Understanding Historical Connections: Mining Mineral Migrant Movements**

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While Duncan Money's article presents an intriguing account of the connectivity between Cumberland and Johannesburg, it also mirrors other similarities that extend beyond the global North and United Kingdom. It sheds light on a similar situation that played out among other migrants in the shadows of the Witwatersrand mining headgear, having consequences that rebounded far beyond the mineral mecca in South Africa.

As Money indicates, cross continental migration became increasingly common during the nineteenth century. This migration extended outside of the north-south longitudinal United Kingdom-South Africa line, to an east-west latitudinal China-South Africa line as well as across the longitudinal and latitudinal lines of the southern half of the African continent. However, in these latter cases it was not the skilled miners that were migrating with experience in mining, but rather unskilled labour that was vital to the success of the Witwatersrand deep-level gold mining industry. As I have indicated elsewhere, 'black labour' was contemporarily regarded as the cornerstone of the gold mining industry, while 'yellow labour' was seen as the scaffold.<sup>1</sup> Both contracted African and indentured Chinese labour were labelled as 'non-white' and 'ultra-cheap';<sup>2</sup> they were also exploitable and subjected to a plethora of restrictive regulations. Regardless of geographies and occupations, Money's important point that 'connections made by these migrants caused changes in a very localized way' and that the 'same argument applies to other times and places' is pertinent to this response. Money also delineates four ways in which these connections brought such changes: 'work, household formation, politics and disease', and also makes the point, referencing Elaine Katz, that 'the pervasive racial segregation that developed in South Africa has obscured the similarities that many of the groups who migrated to the Rand had'. It is to this latter point regarding similarities across the racial divide and the four change aspects delineated by Money, that this response turns.

### **Work**

The Witwatersrand gold mines represented an opportunity for access to work as well as a potential source of higher wages. This was a pull factor for both the Cumberland

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1. K.L. Thorpe, 'Early Strikes on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines (1886-1907), with Specific Reference to the 1907 Strike' (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 1986), 201.
  2. B. Bozzoli, *The Political Native of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa, 1890-1933* (London: Routledge, 1981), 104.

miners as well as those from Africa and China. African labourers were drawn to this source of money primarily to pay taxes, buy guns and as well as tools,<sup>3</sup> while for the Chinese it was the remittance of monthly allotments to a designated family back in China to pay debts and provide food.<sup>4</sup> Thus, just as in the case of the Cumberland miners who dispatched substantial amounts of money as remittances, so too did the African and Chinese miners. In both cases, the significance and later dependence on the wages, injected the resources of the mining industry into the peasant economies of these far-flung communities in Africa and China,<sup>5</sup> as well as the middle class in Cumberland.

One noteworthy point of contrast was that unlike the skilled miners who emanated from Cumberland, the African and Chinese labourers did not have mining experience nor did they have detailed information about the nature of the work on the Rand. Both recruitment agencies – the Witwatersrand Labour Association (WNLA) and its sister company, the Chamber of Mines Labour Importation Agency (CMLIA) – enlisted labourers who often did not realise that the mining was deep-level,<sup>6</sup> let alone the stringent regulations and unfair conditions they would be subjected to on the mines.

What is however apparent, is that the work opportunities the Witwatersrand gold mines afforded the men from Cumberland, Africa and China, had transformative impacts. Yet while Money is in a position to report in detail on some of these benefits for particular Cumberland individuals given the archival and other records, the same cannot be said for African and Chinese individuals because the record remains relatively silent on their experiences, other than that the labourers persisted in coming to 'Egoli' and 'Kum Saan' for work.

### Household formation

The second change Money highlights that these mining connections brought about was the impact on households. Similar to the Cumberland mining relocation, African and Chinese migration was also male dominated. While Money indicates that Johannesburg witnessed a 'huge gender imbalance', both the African and Chinese on the Witwatersrand were in an overtly male environment and were relegated to all-male compounds.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, the immigration of women was not encouraged nor

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3. L. Callinicos, *Gold and Workers, 1886-1924* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 9.
  4. P. Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* (London: MacMillan Press, 1982), 65.
  5. Ibid., 67.
  6. F. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold* (London: Routledge, 1976), 38-39; Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour*, 74; T. Burt, *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour, White, Black and Yellow* (Newcastle, 1905), 61.
  7. C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*,

accommodated. The impact of this male migration in Cumberland, as well as in Africa and China, was the emergence and later common-place prevalence of female-headed households back home. Due to the lengthy labour contracts ranging from six to eighteen months for African labour and three years for Chinese indenture, men were absent from households and tribal and clan responsibilities for extended periods of time. As Money states in the context of Cumberland, these men were not only absent, but sometimes never returned at all, as was the case in both Africa and China.<sup>8</sup>

Luli Callinicos has depicted this African phenomenon of the absence of men on the Rand gold mines as a 'circle of poverty' that extended their continued return to the mines.<sup>9</sup> The men departed for the mines leaving women in the reserves to cope with the family and the failing crops with the result that they became more reliant on the stores in the reserves – creating a situation that has perpetuated into the twenty-first century.<sup>10</sup> Robert Ross, on the other hand, points to the role of women in maintaining the home and land in the rural village as a place for the man to retire to and therefore the migrant men were obliged to contribute towards the wife's subsistence. Not unlike the Cumberland experience where the miners' remitted wages allowed women to establish boarding houses and men to buy small businesses, there was evidence to support how the African migrant earnings were 'literally ploughed back into the agriculture economy of the reserves'<sup>11</sup> revealing massive increases in cattle ownership and maize production. Here again the archive remains silent as to the exact impact of the Witwatersrand Chinese indenture on the ancestral homes of these Chinese – other than the significant dependence of the household in China on the money remitted home.<sup>12</sup>

## Politics

In the context of political change, Money attests to the stance of Cumberland miners being made apparent in both their local town as well as across the Rand. He uses as an example the anti-Chinese lobby which became a 'key election issue' in the 1906

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1886-1914, 1, *New Babylon* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), 5-6. See also the Masters and Service Act (1880); the Labour Importation Ordinance (1904) and the Mines and Workers Act (1911).

8. K.L. Harris, 'A History of the Chinese in South Africa to 1912' (PhD, thesis, Unisa, 1998), 139; R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 101.

9. Callinicos, *Gold and Workers*, 30.

10. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 100-101.

11. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 100.

12. See K.L. Harris, 'Scattered and Silent Sources: Researching the Overseas Chinese in South Africa', in *Chinese Overseas: Migration, Research and Documentation*, eds C.B. Tan, C. Storey and J. Zimmerman (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2007), 139-166, for details of two letters from and to Chinese labourers which highlight the critical importance of money within the context of indenture.

Cumberland general election. The anti-Chinese sentiment became a rallying point in the Liberal Party's manifesto and was regarded as a main contributor to their ultimate victory.<sup>13</sup> This issue also featured in the elections held in both the Transvaal and Cape Colonies within that same decade. The introduction of Chinese featured in the Cape Colony election of 1903-1904, while the anti-Chinese stance of the Het Volk Party in the 1907 Transvaal election garnered widespread support contributing to their victory.<sup>14</sup> The political stance of the African and Chinese, however, remains relatively silent other than in the form of sporadic resistance and reactions that occurred across the Rand.<sup>15</sup> These political positions remain embedded in alternate archives that are yet to be discovered and probed.

### Disease

The fourth and final change Money refers to in his micro-study of historical connections relates to disease. Much sickness was incurred on the mines primarily as a result of the unhealthy underground conditions, such as silicosis, tuberculosis and pneumonia. The dust caused by the drills of deep-level mining led to the death of many rock-drillers, blasters, trammers and lashers.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, health ailments and death also resulted from the unsafe nature of deep-level mining. It was not only white Cumberland miners who became incapacitated or died, but African and Chinese miners likewise succumbed to these health and safety adversities endemic to the gold mining sector. The difference is the former were generally enumerated, while few of the African and Chinese labourers' injuries and deaths were tallied, particularly as many died once they were home.

This brief overview of the African and Chinese miners aligns well with and corroborates Money's claim that 'pervasive racial segregation' has obscured the similarities between the many groups who migrated to the Rand. It also highlights how this pervasive racial segregation permeates the customary archive with 'written sources' privileging certain kinds of connections. This leaves many still in the shadows of the mining headgear that warrants further research through an alternative archive.



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13. D. Jacobson, *Fifty Golden Years of the Rand, 1886-1936* (London: 1937), 84; J.A. Reeves, 'Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1903-1910' (MA, University of the Witwatersrand, 1954), 239-240.
  14. Harris, 'A History of the Chinese in South Africa to 1912', 143-144.
  15. Thorpe, 'Early Strikes on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines (1886-1907)', chapters 5 and 6.
  16. Callinicos, *Gold and Workers*, 77.

**The Paths Not Taken: Transnational Connections and Migration History in Southern Africa**

*Duncan Money*

Writing about a small geographical area or niche topic always carries the risk that it will lapse into a kind of parochialism and lose sight of the larger picture. I'm therefore both pleased and a little relieved that my article has prompted these responses from George Bishi, Jeremy Krikler and Karen Harris and I'm grateful to them for engaging so carefully and closely with my work.

I'm also pleased that debating a study that is a small one in several dimensions – geography, principal actors and chronology – quickly opens up larger questions around comparison, migration patterns, the role of serendipity in historical research and archival silences.

The core of my argument is a methodological claim that transnational connections were often connections between specific regions. In this sense, the 'national' part of the term 'transnational' can be misleading. Historical linkages between places were often not national-level connections but connections between regions. My particular argument is that there was an intense and close connection that developed between Cumberland and the Rand, and that geographically neighbouring places did not share this connection. I suspect this was true for other times and places too.

There seems to be broad agreement in the three responses about the value of this perspective, although each response raises issues that I had not considered, as well as questions I do not have ready answers to. Different paths that this research has uncovered still remain unexplored.

George Bishi queries the scalability of my case study and asks whether larger structural forces were more important in shaping these connections than regional specificity. The industrial skills of Cumberland miners facilitated their migration but this took place in a broader imperial context that gave them privileged access to the Rand's labour market. There were skilled metal miners in many parts of the world in the 1890s and 1900s. It is this wider imperial history that explains why it was specifically miners from Cumberland who made their way to the Rand in those years and created the close connection.

In the decades that followed, this migration and the connections it created disappeared from collective memory. Bishi pushes for a better explanation about why this happened – beyond my point about the end of a mining boom – pointing to the

decline of mining, the erosion of regional identities and the sanitisation of Britain's imperial past. Certainly, there was no awareness locally in Cumberland about a historic connection with South Africa. I recognised the connection not only because I grew up in Cumberland and later moved to South Africa, but also because I was fascinated with the iron ore mines from a young age. Historians' often idiosyncratic interests and life histories can go a long way to explaining our research.

Jeremy Krikler points to an important change in migration patterns in this period, and one I overlooked. The early twentieth century saw the transformation of Johannesburg's white population from an overwhelmingly male and transient one to a settled urban one with roughly equal numbers of white men and women. Krikler is absolutely correct that my account has little to say about those 'who choose to stay'. People stopped coming to the Rand from Cumberland, but they stopped coming back as well.

There is here an indication of a wider myopia among historians: a focus on people and groups who migrate as being fundamentally more interesting than those who stay put. People who appear out of place attract our attention and command explanation. 'X people in Y place' is a staple of historical research (and one I've contributed to here).

Many Cumberland migrants had no enduring interest in continuing to be migrants or in Cumberland and were rapidly integrated into the broader white population. Connections become harder to trace. Newspaper reports stopped but private correspondence with friends and relatives must have continued to sustain some connection. In the 1970s, during another period of industrial depression in Cumberland, the local council commissioned a history project as part of a development initiative. One outcome of this was a photographic history book that includes photos of people identified as Cumberland residents of Johannesburg, who must have emigrated there decades earlier.<sup>1</sup>

In my original article, I argued that 'pervasive racial segregation' has obscured the many similarities between different groups who migrated to the Rand. While I think this point still stands, Karen Harris draws attention to something I had not appreciated: the asymmetry of information.

The kinds and extent of information available to would-be migrants differed considerably. I emphasised in my article the extent of information that flowed back to Cumberland and how details about everyday life and work on the Rand were

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1. R. Barber, *Iron Ore and After: Boom Time, Depression and Survival in a West Cumbrian Town, Cleator Moor 1840-1960* (Cleator Moor: Cleator Moor Local Studies Group, 1976), 36.

conveyed. Cumberland miners who went to the Rand knew very well what it was like to work underground, the hazards they would face and understood, more or less, what would be expected of them.

African and Chinese workers recruited at the beginning of the twentieth century did not. As Harris points out, many of these men did not know that the mining in South Africa occurred deep underground, and so was quite unlike the goldfields that Chinese migrants were familiar with in previous decades.<sup>2</sup> It does not take a great leap of imagination to conclude that recruitment companies often neglected to mention this. The way that these men were suddenly immersed into the intense and extremely dangerous world of deep-level gold mining was a very different historical experience.

This point about asymmetry is related to the perennial problem of sources, which both Bishi and Harris raise. The kind of sources I utilised in my article do not exist for other groups of migrants. This too is a legacy of racial segregation. Archival records are 'relatively silent' on the experiences of African and Chinese miners as Harris notes, while Bishi concurs that 'African perspectives remain elusive', though he suggests court records and African newspapers as a possible remedy.<sup>3</sup>

I end on an optimistic note with respect to sources: I am confident there remains extensive archival material about the history of the Rand stored in unlikely locations. I suspect, for example, it had never occurred to anyone to look for sources on Johannesburg's social history in the archive of a Poor Law Union in a small town on the north-west coast of England. I think Harris is correct that perspectives of African and Chinese migrants are in 'alternate archives yet to be discovered' and I think they will be discovered. Sheer chance and diligent searching prompted by the peculiarities of individual historians' biographies are now greatly assisted by the spread of online catalogues. It is now easier to identify and locate historical sources, and I hope this will spur more research into the particular and peculiar ways that our world was connected.

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2. Large numbers of Chinese miners migrated to gold rushes in the United States, Australia and New Zealand during the nineteenth century.
  3. The latter is a very under-utilised source. One exception is Tshidiso Maloka's use of Sesotho newspapers. See T. Maloka, 'Basotho and the Experience of Death, Dying, and Mourning in the South African Mine Compounds, 1890-1940', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 38, 149 (1998), 17-40.