

***Inside Mining Capitalism: The micropolitics of work on the Congolese and Zambian Copperbelts*, by Benjamin Rubbers (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2021).**

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Soaring demand for minerals in the 2000s produced huge inflows of foreign direct investment into resource-rich countries in Africa and much has been written about what this means for economic development, poverty reduction, China in Africa, etc. Much less attention has been paid to what it means for the people who dig the stuff out of the ground. This book on work and the workplace is therefore an opportune intervention and one that advances arguments with wide relevance for extractive sites.

The focus of the book is the Central African Copperbelt, one of the world's main copper producers over the last century and the site of a recent mining boom. Modern societies require ever-greater quantities of copper, and we rely on it constantly, though often unknowingly. As Benjamin Rubbers aptly notes at the opening, 'As you read these lines, you are probably using copper in one way or another' (p. 1).

This slim and readable volume is the outcome of the project WORKinMINING and based upon extensive research by project members, who conducted some 600 interviews with people in and around the mining industry along with participant observation. The main chapters are co-authored by members of the project, and each chapter is explicitly comparative, dealing with both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. Sustaining this comparative perspective throughout the book is impressive and yields many insights into the contemporary mining industry.

Strong similarities between Congo and Zambia beyond the presence of copper deposits make this comparison work. In both Congo and Zambia, the surge in metal prices was accompanied by new investment opportunities, as the mining industry was privatised in both countries shortly before this mining boom. Previously, the mining industry across the Copperbelt was highly paternalistic, under both state and private ownership.

The book convincingly establishes that this history of corporate paternalism strongly influences the present. Despite their wealth and power, and their own claims that they have broken with past, new mining companies cannot simply impose their will but instead have to negotiate and accommodate themselves to the demands of other actors. In an evocative turn of phrase, the present-day labour management practices 'are built from the ruins of twentieth-century paternalism' (p. 4).

Some things have changed. Mining workforces are now smaller and more fragmented, and these characteristics are common to 'most mining projects in the Global South' (p. 149). The central analytical focus of the book is the 'labour regime': the power relations between different actors in the labour process and the contributors examine this across several domains.

The first chapter by Rubbers and Emma Lochery provides the background on the emergence of industrial paternalism in the twentieth century and the developments in labour practices after privatisation (though this account begins after the initial period of Union Minière's operations when its workforce died in large numbers). The second chapter by James Musonda and Francesca Pugliese is a critical examination of safety culture and how mineworkers interact with it, which is relayed through illustrative vignettes such as the miner who was not allowed underground because he had the wrong colour helmet. The third chapter by the same authors looks at the strategies of women working in new mining projects and how these women manage tensions arising from gendered expectations in the household.

The fourth and fifth chapters by Kristien Geenen and Thomas McNamara examine the development of a kind of pragmatic trade unionism and industrial relations in a Chinese company. Industrial relations on the Copperbelt have been studied extensively but usually as a classic case of labour vs. capital. The once commonplace large-scale industrial confrontations are today absent though strikes still occur as discussed in Chapter 5. They highlight the emergence of practices of co-operation and restraint among trade unionists and the role of state authorities in selectively supporting industrial militancy.

Chapter 6 by Lochery and Rubbers is on the often overlooked work of human resource (HR) managers and they make the novel argument that these managers have played a key, though increasingly restrained, role in the development of new mining projects. This is an astutely chosen window into management, as HR manager positions have to be filled by a Congolese or Zambian national, not an expatriate.

The concluding chapter by Rubbers brings together the arguments about the neoliberal labour regime and offers thoughtful reflections on the tension of doing academic research in a context where many people believe that socio-economic conditions demand some kind of action. 'I can't believe that all this research will not lead to any recommendation', one trade unionist declared (p. 156).

Much of this book covers everyday life in the mining industry though there are several important aspects of this I felt were missing. How many hours a day or days a week people work, what exactly people do at work, and how much they are paid for this work are alluded to but not discussed explicitly (though wages are briefly mentioned on p. 112).

This book is an excellent contribution to our understanding of the extractive industry, and this short review cannot fully encompass the richness of the text. Gratifyingly, it is available Open Access, so is freely available for any interested readers.