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The Worlds of Labor in Ghana's Gold Mining Industry, c. 1895–1957

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Abstract

The global turn has contributed to a revitalization of labor history. Historians have become increasingly attentive to the varied forms of labor commodification that existed under capitalism. Many historians have welcomed this approach which challenges the universalism of “free” wage labor. Critics, however, have warned that global labor history risks re-inscribing the power of capital at the expense of local specificities, particularly in terms of the plurality of labor’s worlds and its (dis)connections with capital. This is not a new debate within African studies. Since the 1980s, historians of Africa have questioned the privileging of wage labor at the expense of other forms of labor and the focus on (post)colonial workplace relations to the exclusion of other relational power structures which shaped the behavior of African men and women. This article takes up these debates by focusing on different forms of labor connected to the gold mining industry in colonial Ghana. The article argues that African men and women involved in the mining sector, including mineworkers, petty traders, and sex workers, responded to their experience of commodification in ways that were about more than just their status as abstract sellers of labor power. What emerges from this analysis is a more nuanced understanding of the strategies and aspirations of African labor which was connected to the mining sector. That is to say, where colonial officials saw working patterns that were purportedly symptomatic of the “lazy” and “ill-disciplined” character of African labor, this article demonstrates otherwise. The behavior of African labor associated with the mining sector was indicative of choices that were made in accordance with individual and collective needs connected to issues of class, gender, and generation, which, in turn, were “entangled” with capitalist market imperatives but not necessarily determined by them.

Keywords: the Gold Coast; gold mining; global labour history; labour commodification; mineworkers; market traders; sex workers

Introduction

The global turn has contributed to the revitalization of labor history. Over the past decade or so, historians have become increasingly attentive to the diverse forms of “free” and “unfree” labor that co-existed under capitalism and facilitated its

development within and across different historical spaces.¹ Such interventions have been welcomed because they have encouraged historians to de-privilege free wage labor in favor of the diverse array of labor that capital has commodified across time and space. Critics, however, have argued that such approaches overestimate the power capital in past contexts because they assume that all labor was either commodified, or was in the process of being commodified.² Others have argued that an exclusive focus on the power of capital to commodify labor risks making the assumption that workers' productive status determined their individual and collective behaviors and identities.³ After all, as numerous studies have demonstrated, even for those categories of workers considered to be archetypally proletarian, it is not possible to reduce their subjectivities and experiences to a single aspect of their "worlds of labor."⁴

This article engages with these critiques of global labor history by exploring aspects of the worlds of African labor connected to the gold mining industry of colonial Ghana (the Gold Coast) in the period c. 1897–1957. Recent histories of gold mining in colonial Ghana have taken inspiration from global labor history. In doing so, these works have documented the continuum of labor relations that facilitated the development of the gold mining industry at turn of the twentieth century.⁵ For all this insight, however, there remains scope to draw on perspectives and approaches pioneered by an earlier generation of social historians of Africa.⁶ To realise this potential, the article focuses on male migrants who traveled back and forth between the Northern Territories and the mining towns of the south, where they worked as underground mineworkers. The article argues that oscillatory migration was not only a product of mining capital's attempts to reduce the cost of reproducing labor. The system of migrant labor was also an outcome of migrants' desire to combine paid employment with other economic strategies which would enable them to fulfill gendered and generational roles that were "entangled" with but not wholly determined by the logic of the wage labor market.⁷ Similar considerations were observable with regard to a second group of migrants in the form of Nigerian women who traveled to the mining towns of the Gold Coast where they engaged in "prostitution."⁸ These women traversed the productive–reproductive boundary. On the one hand, they were productive agents who sought to accrue capital to become traders, and whose relationships with mineworkers appear to have defied colonial understandings of commodified sexual labor.⁹ On the other, these women did reproduce a proportion of the workforce through their domestic and sexual labor and they were imbedded in kinship networks where the expectation was that individual desires were either of secondary importance, or they were simply irrelevant to collective needs and goals. In other words, both male and female migrants connected to the gold mining industry responded to the experience of remunerated work in ways that were not just about their status as sellers of commodified labor power.¹⁰

By focusing on these worlds of labor, the article aims to analyze migrants' complex responses to the experience of wage labor in the gold mining areas of colonial Ghana. First, it addresses changing structures of labor during the first decades of the twentieth century in the context of colonial economic strategies and the advent of large-scale migration to the mines. Second, it argues that economic and cultural patterns apparent in the 1920s and 1930s continued to be influential after 1945, when demands for higher wages and work-related entitlements were as much about household relations and divisions of labor, as they were about mineworkers' shared experience of exploitation by

capital. The article contends that an exploration of these dynamics takes us back to questions that social historians of Africa posed during the 1980s and 1990s in response to liberal and Marxist understandings of class development in the continent. How did Africans respond to attempts by capital and colonial states to commodify their labor? And, to what extent was this response determined by factors that were “entangled” with material conditions, rather than being determined by the process of commodification?¹¹ By investigating these questions historians can go beyond a singular focus on “archetypal” proletarians in favor of more relational approaches that consider the micro politics of the workplace, the neighborhood, and the household for the making, remaking, and unmaking of working-class formations.¹²

Commodifying labor in the Northern Territories

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, Wassa, which was located in the southwest region of the Gold Coast colony, and the neighboring territory of Asante, experienced two gold rushes.¹³ The first, which occurred between 1877 and 1885, was a story of struggle, rather than success.¹⁴ The second rush of 1900 to 1902–1903 was more productive and this laid the foundations for the development of the gold mining industry and the subsequent growth of mining towns such as Obuasi, Tarkwa, Prestea, and later Konongo.¹⁵ For all this rapid progress, however, mining company representatives and colonial officials acknowledged that recurrent labor shortages were impeding further development of the sector.¹⁶ Mining capital and the colonial state clashed frequently when it came to the “labor question,” but both agreed that the acquisition of the Northern Territories, which became a protectorate of the Gold Coast colony in 1901, offered a potential solution.¹⁷ In 1905, the Northern Territories’ annual report predicted a future where the region’s “enormous population” of “young men” would become “a new source of labor for the mines at Tarkwa and Ashanti.”¹⁸ In return, the annual report anticipated that migration to mines would promote the region’s material advancement and teach the peoples of the Northern Territories the moral value of wage labor.¹⁹ Consequently, for the next two decades, the mining industry alternated between recruiting independently in the north through its own agents, which included both European and African recruiters, and working in partnership with government departments, local district commissioners and northern chiefs.²⁰ Over time, these recruits, who signed 3- to 12-month contracts to work underground, were supplemented by an increasing number of migrants from the Northern Territories and surrounding French colonies, who made the journey southward independently of the agents operating on behalf of the mining industry and the government.²¹

The growing influx of recruits from the Northern Territories and neighboring French colonies did not resolve the labor question, however.²² At the turn of the 1920s, the mines suffered from high turnover, owing to the arduous work, poor sanitary conditions in the mining towns, and the availability of alternative employment in public works and the booming cocoa sector.²³ The labor shortages became even more acute following the imperial government’s decision to suspend recruitment in the Northern Territories in 1924 pending the outcome of an investigation into high death rates among mineworkers from the region.²⁴ Recruitment resumed in 1925, but mining companies abandoned contract recruitment by the 1930s owing to regulatory costs and

tensions with colonial authorities over the persistence of poor sanitary conditions in the towns.²⁵ Henceforth, labor migration continued in large numbers from the north, but the majority of migrants traveled south independently.

Colonial officials' faith that wage labor would "uplift" the region's people and promote economic development coexisted with equally powerful concerns about the potentially destabilizing effects of increased marketization and capitalist development, particularly in terms of migrant laborers' exposure to urban living in the south. One report complained that migrants had returned to the Northern Territories with "bad" habits and vices.²⁶ These anxieties about the potentially negative consequences of socioeconomic change contributed to a belief that economic development in the Northern Territories should be managed and regulated in order to maintain the area's status as a rural periphery.²⁷ To achieve this, the colonial government sought to promote incremental forms of economic development in the Northern Territories which would protect the integrity of traditional community structures as defined and constituted by the colonial authorities. This conception of development went through a series of different iterations over the course of the early decades of the twentieth century.²⁸ By the mid-1930s, the colonial authorities in the Northern Territories were pursuing a strategy to establish collective farms that combined mixed-farming and improved animal husbandry.²⁹ The aim was to transform the Northern Territories into a supplier of local foodstuffs and animal products to the south and to prevent the rapid development of agrarian capitalism. In doing so, the colonial authorities hoped to avoid the attendant problems of uncontrolled marketization and private accumulation, which had been identified as key causes of the sociopolitical unrest in the cocoa growing regions of the south during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁰

One problem with these plans was that officials overlooked the extent to which northern households' subsistence needs had already been commodified by the mid-1930s.³¹ A combination of factors accounted for households' increased market dependence. The influx of British officials and locally recruited salaried clerks and soldiers after 1901 had contributed to a significant increase in monetarized forms of trade and exchange in the region.³² The colonial administration assisted with this process by encouraging the replacement of cowries with coinage and by privileging particular markets at the expense of other commercial centres.³³ The aim, as colonial reports put it, was to foster a sense of "money consciousness" by stimulating trade in imported goods, promoting cash-crop production, and facilitating government revenue collection via taxes and fines.³⁴ Persistent shortages in supply, however, particularly for the popular lower value coins, meant that colonial coins coexisted with cowries for many decades after the advent of colonial rule. The result was a pluralistic currency system where cowries proved resilient because of their interdependent economic and cultural value.³⁵ In spite of such challenges, however, by introducing coins and by concentrating economic activities in specific commercial centers, the nascent colonial state in the Northern Territories could at least attempt to regulate trade and promote specific norms with regard to economic conduct.³⁶ In other words, the colonial authorities' creation of markets and the regulation of related commercial activity were less about maximizing revenue, and more to do with state-territorialization and the fostering of particular economic behaviours.³⁷

The colonial authorities' promotion of migration for the purposes of wage labor in the south was integral to this state-building project in the Northern Territories.

Migrants' earnings and remittances further stimulated the money supply and created demand for consumer goods, which were developments that attracted positive comment in colonial reports.³⁸ At the same time, district commissioners and chiefs complained that outward labor migration resulted in an insufficient number of young men to farm the land to meet households' subsistence needs.³⁹ In a context where ecological conditions, in combination with colonial underinvestment, regularly produced famine or near-famine conditions, the shortage of agricultural labor entrenched households' reliance on local markets for the supply of foodstuffs.⁴⁰ The reimposition of direct taxation in the mid-1930s also increased households' monetary requirements, even if the principal objective behind the reintroduction of direct taxation was to provide sufficient resources to finance the shift to a codified system of indirect rule, rather than stimulate outward migration for the purposes of wage labor.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of all these changes—wrought in large part by contradictions within the colonial enterprise—was a surge in migration from the mid-1920s onward, as 10,000s of male migrants made the annual journey southward to accumulate savings which could be remitted to support their households' various material needs.⁴² Significantly, the economic changes that compelled men to seek out work in the south also contributed to the increased commodification of women's domestic labor. The absence of male agricultural labor for months at a time meant that women were required to cultivate cash-crops which could be sold at market to generate the income required to purchase food staples.⁴³ The 1935-36 annual report for Mamprusi district, for example, recorded that groundnut production for market was being undertaken by women and children in their "spare time", thus implying that such labor was performed in addition to their other household duties.⁴⁴

Migration, gender, and generation

For all the relative power of the colonial state and mining capital to commodify labor in the Northern Territories, the strategies of individual migrants and their respective households were also shaped by established customs, needs and aspirations which were connected to but not determined by the colonial encounter. Of these concerns, intersecting ideas pertaining to gender and generation were critical. For many young men from the Northern Territories, migration to the south became an important rite of passage which served as a mechanism for the transition to adult status.⁴⁵ Colonial reports stated that the initial impulse to migrate was often driven by a desire to obtain specific material items which conferred status on their owner. These items included guns, bicycles, and, above all else, cloth.⁴⁶ In a report by the colony's first labor commissioner, Major J.R. Dickinson, one laborer stated: "I will buy clothing with part of my savings so that people will see that I have been to Kumasi [a generic term for the south] like other men."⁴⁷ The status that could be derived from travelling south was evident in other aspects of testimony recorded by colonial officials. Migration was portrayed as an adventure and an opportunity to acquire experience of the wider world.⁴⁸ Such ambitions were captured in the later work of anthropologists, whose informants recalled that a combination of material desires and a wish for adventure were key motivating factors.⁴⁹

Colonial officials understood these demands for consumer goods in simplistic terms. Throughout colonial Africa, Europeans assumed the stimulation of desire for

particular goods would complement the “civilizing” effects of wage labor, religion and education. In practice, although colonial agents believed the advent of colonial rule and higher demand for particular commodities were coterminous, the two rarely coincided as colonialists believed.⁵⁰ In the case of the Northern Territories, its annexation did lead to the increased circulation of European-style clothes among its inhabitants. Even so, as Jean Allman and John Parker have documented, the availability of “Mossi cloth” —a term for cloth woven and traded by Mossi peoples—had long been a trade staple in the Northern Territories where the region’s inhabitants adopted forms of bodily adornment that combined imported commodities with vernacular cultural practices.⁵¹ Simply put, patterns of commerce and consumption were determined as much by the interests of Africans, as by external actors. Indeed, as numerous historians have made clear, Africans often reimagined the meaning of commodities—both old and new—as part of an ongoing dialogue with imported and indigenous conceptions of personhood and identity relating to gender, religion, ethnicity, and generation.⁵² In the Northern Territories, the bicycle came to replace the bow and arrow as a symbol of male virility, in part, because it served as a sign that a man had been to work in the south.⁵³ Practical and material concerns were important too. A bike, for example, enabled its owner to travel more freely within the north, and thus enlarged the amount of potential farmland and, by extension, wealth that was within his reach.⁵⁴

Migrants’ desire to accumulate wealth sufficient to establish or expand their own households contributed to intergenerational tensions in a context where social customs and rituals had emerged to manage such potential conflicts.⁵⁵ This was by no means unique to the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. In many African contexts, migration for the purposes of wage labor was a symptom and cause of generational conflicts, as young men sought to escape the control and influence of their fathers and other senior household members.⁵⁶ In the Northern Territories, colonial reports, which have been corroborated by contemporary anthropologists and later historians, indicate that many young men left for the south without the knowledge or consent of male household heads.⁵⁷ However, the threat of unsanctioned migration could also produce accommodations. According to Meyer Fortes, a Talensi man, who was considered a jural minor, could not leave his natal home to establish his own household until it was considered morally and socially acceptable to do so.⁵⁸ For Talensi communities, therefore, migration to the south could serve as a “safety valve” which allowed a young man to oscillate between north and south until such a time as he was permitted to establish his own household.⁵⁹

These compromises made it possible to integrate migration to the south into established patterns of mobility within the north. This was certainly true for the Dagara-speaking peoples, who constituted a significant proportion of the mining industry’s recruits from the Northern Territories by the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁰ Among Dagara peoples, it was common for sons, particularly those with no expectations when it came to inheritance, to leave the family compound and establish a new household at the earliest opportunity. Such a move was not regarded as a rupture or sign of tension, but an inevitable part of life. Migration to the south needs to be understood in this context.⁶¹ Contemporary reports refer to sons returning to the north for the first time with gifts, such as cloth, for their fathers. It was also recorded that sons would remit cash that could be invested in order to enlarge their fathers’ livestock holdings. In return, a father

would help a son find a suitable wife.⁶² All of this underscores the complexity of the push factors which drove migration and its impact on household and wider social relations in the north where established gendered and generational relations were adapted in response to the changes wrought by colonialism.⁶³

Change was by no means limited to the Northern Territories. In the mining towns of the south, northern migrants lived in specific neighborhoods, where residents provided accommodation and other forms of assistance to newcomers.⁶⁴ To access this support, as Carola Lentz has detailed, migrants would invoke membership of a shared or closely linked patrician, typically by citing common ancestry, mutual cultural and religious practices, or similar dialects. This had the effect of bringing an imagined sense of ethnic solidarity into reality by drawing on flexible ties of belonging.⁶⁵ These inclusive understandings of ethnicity intersected with a sharpening sense of class-consciousness among northern mineworkers living and working in the mining towns of the south.⁶⁶ By the mid-1930s, over 20,000 African mineworkers were employed in the gold mining industry.⁶⁷ This included a cohort of underground mineworkers who had at least a decade's employment experience in a sector of the industry where the valorization of attributes linked to physical strength and skill were reinforced by the dangerous working conditions they encountered below surface level.⁶⁸ Mineworkers' emerging sense of class-based corporate identity was reflected in demands presented by their representatives. In 1938, in an oft-quoted statement, mineworkers declared that: "We are the working classes. We suffer but there are no rewards. We demand justice and equality. We do not find any justification why we should not be paid the same as our Brother Miners in England or the United States of America. We are the same as they."⁶⁹ The presentation of such demands was not an isolated incident. The 1930s witnessed a number of general strikes at individual mines, as underground workers struck for higher pay and better working conditions.⁷⁰ This is not to suggest, however, that class-based forms of identity were beginning to displace ethnic and regional bonds. Several strikes during this period involved workers with shared occupational and ethnic ties. This included, for example, an 11-day strike in 1935 at Ashanti Goldfield Corporation's (AGC) Obuasi mine by "Kado boys."⁷¹ In other words, the reimagining of ethnicity and its interaction with class-based forms of belonging connected to the mining industry's work-a-day rhythms reveals how mineworkers created "new life-worlds out of the fragments of the old."⁷²

Invisible workers

Underground mineworkers from the Northern Territories were not alone in seeking out new life-worlds in the mining towns. By the mid-1930s, the majority of mineworkers lived in villages that surrounded the mining towns of Obuasi, Tarkwa, Prestea, and Konongo. In these settlements, mineworkers coexisted with landlords, money lenders, traders, craftsmen, farmers, sex workers, and the under-unemployed.⁷³ Colonial officials spoke in highly disparaging terms about these inhabitants of the mining villages, often characterizing them as vectors of criminality and disease. However, rather than being "parasitic," as the Colonial Office's labor advisor claimed, the sex workers, market traders, and street hawkers who resided in the mining villages constituted a class of "invisible workers."⁷⁴ This class of invisible workers provided amenities and

services that sustained the mining industry's workforce in a setting where the boundary between wage work and other forms of labor was porous, with many individuals moving between different occupations according to circumstance and need.⁷⁵

One specific group of invisible workers were the female migrants who traveled to the Gold Coast's mining towns to earn a living through prostitution.⁷⁶ The expansion of the colonial economy—in terms of increased rates of urbanization and the growth of male-dominated waged labor forces—meant that prostitution became an avenue for socioeconomic advancement for many women.⁷⁷ A 1953 social survey of Obuasi recorded that a woman engaged in prostitution could earn up to 15 shillings per day at time when the average male mineworker was earning £6.15 per month.⁷⁸ The majority of women involved in prostitution were female migrants from the Calabar region of Nigeria.⁷⁹ Many of these women would have been pawned directly to brokers by their families, or families would have raised a loan to pay for a woman's travel expenses in anticipation that she would remit her earnings to her sponsors in Calabar.⁸⁰ In spite of this expectation, however, there is evidence to suggest that Nigerian women involved in prostitution attempted to reconcile their collective obligations with their own individual aspirations. The report compiled by the labor commissioner, Major Dickinson, revealed that women's individual interests centred on the acquisition of material goods and the accumulation of capital which could be invested in other economic activities, such as trading and property.⁸¹ One new arrival to the mining town of Konongo reportedly told Dickinson: "If I get plenty money [*sic*] and buy plenty fine things, my sisters in my country will follow me to do the same job. Here we get plenty more money than in Calabar."⁸² The potential rewards which could be generated through prostitution became a source of anxiety for colonial officials and conservative African elites who regarded female economic autonomy as a contravention of social norms, namely the expectation that women would generate wealth for their household through unpaid labor in their roles as wives, nieces, and daughters.⁸³

If there was some debate regarding these women's agency and motivations, it was equally uncertain how they—or their clients—made sense of their sexual encounters and relationships. Dickinson's report documented how three male mineworkers understood their relationships with women involved in prostitution. One stated that he was one of a number of men who visited an individual woman. Describing her as his "lover," the miner visited the woman three times a month, for which he paid £5. A second stated that he had no wife, but he would "get a woman occasionally," while the third miner implied he had a more reciprocal relationship with a prostitute that involved working on his "lover's farm." Another report stated that upon arrival in a mining town, mineworkers formed semipermanent unions with women who provided accommodation, food, and, the report inferred, sexual services in exchange for a fee.⁸⁴ The limited and fragmentary evidence, which was recorded and filtered by British colonial officialdom, means that it is impossible to draw any substantive conclusions about how the women who were engaged in prostitution understood these forms of intimate labor, or the connexion to their sexual and gendered selves.⁸⁵

Such ambiguities underscore a critical point: the nomenclature associated with commodified forms of prostitution fails to capture the complexity of the roles performed by women involved in the trade in the mining towns of the Gold Coast. These women were positioned across an ill-defined boundary between productive and

reproductive labor, working as they did in multiple capacities, not only in prostitution but also as traders, landlords, cooks, and farmers, often forming relationships with miners that existed along a spectrum that appears to have encompassed everything from the transactional and temporary to perhaps even the permanent and affective.⁸⁶ After all, as Dickinson's report indicates, mineworkers appear to have considered women engaged in prostitution as potential long-term partners, even wives in some cases. Indeed, although prostitution was associated with specific urban quarters, such as the Ntusa neighborhood in Obuasi, evidence suggests that the women who lived and worked here were not isolated from the rest of the town's population in a setting where there was ample opportunity for interaction in bars and other social venues.⁸⁷

Female migrants from Calabar were not the only women to seek out opportunities in the mining towns of the Gold Coast. The growth of cocoa farming and wage labor during the early twentieth century provided opportunities for Asante women in trades, such as the sale and distribution of wholesale goods, which had once been dominated by men. The result was that in urban centers, most notably Kumasi but also in the mining centers of Tarkwa and Obuasi, women had emerged as influential market traders.⁸⁸ In Obuasi, the 1953 social survey recorded that a number of the female traders were credit customers of a subsidiary firm of the United Africa Company (UAC).⁸⁹ Credit customers of the European commercial firms, as Bianca Murillo has documented, were responsible for distributing goods in areas where the companies had no presence. These credit customers, the majority of whom were female traders, received goods from the European commercial firms on a monthly basis, during which time they sold their goods to individual customers and other traders and retailers, before settling their account with the wholesale supplier.⁹⁰ Such arrangements enabled credit customers to emerge as patrons because their privileged access to imported goods supplied by firms such as the UAC meant they could develop client networks comprised of other traders who depended on their patronage.⁹¹

The development of patron–client networks meant that market women had the ability to operate as a powerful bloc, even if the majority of female traders lived precarious and often poverty stricken lives.⁹² Examples of market women exerting their influence included circumventing government price controls; applying pressure to customers in order to get them to purchase goods from preferred market sellers; and imposing boycotts on suppliers to lower the purchasing prices charged by import agents.⁹³ During the 1930s, for example, a coalition of chiefs, farmers, female traders and mineworkers cooperated to prevent the sale of imported goods at control prices. Representatives of the mining industry attributed the success of the boycott to the pressure that traders were able to exert on mineworkers who bought their food supplies on credit and were indebted to market women.⁹⁴

Claim making amidst “permanent precarity”⁹⁵

Attentiveness to the heterogeneous character of the working-class populations that resided in and around the mining towns has implications for understandings of strike movements and episodes of industrial action. Against a backdrop of rising anti-colonial and nationalist sentiment in the colony, the Gold Coast experienced significant urban and rural unrest after 1945.⁹⁶ This unrest included a wave of strike action in various

industries and sectors.⁹⁷ In the gold mining industry, short-lived strikes at individual mines in 1945 and 1946 were followed by the first sector-wide general strike in 1947 which involved over 30,000 mineworkers who struck for 35 days.⁹⁸ Historians have explained the significance of the 1947 general strike in terms of mineworkers' class-consciousness which had first manifested itself during the protests of the mid-to-late 1930s. True, the strike was remarkable for its duration, the efforts of the recently formed Mine Employee's Union (MEU) to mobilize tens of thousands of workers across occupational and ethnic divides, and the issuing of speeches and petitions which referenced the relationship between employment conditions in the sector, class struggle, anti-colonialism, and mineworkers' rights and entitlements.⁹⁹ What these accounts have explored insufficiently, however, is the relationship between the 1947 general strike and mineworkers' prior boycott of company-run canteens.¹⁰⁰

Shortly before the general strike, female market traders had encouraged mineworkers to boycott the company-owned canteens which had been introduced by the mining industry in 1946.¹⁰¹ The market women, who included not only local Asante women but also an increasing number of female migrants from the Northern Territories, had good reasons for encouraging the 1946 boycott and presumably lending their support to the subsequent general strike in 1947.¹⁰² Wartime price controls had eroded their profits, and they were opposed to the mining companies' decision to introduce canteens, which threatened their economic interests further.¹⁰³ Moreover, if the 1947 general strike was a success, any wage increase awarded to mineworkers would increase the purchasing power of market traders' principal customers. For female market traders, therefore, the boycott and general strike were as much about increasing their own earning potential, as they were about the MEU's demands for work-related rights and entitlements.¹⁰⁴

The alliance involving MEU members and female market traders underscores the difficulty of disaggregating macro-level concerns relating to anti-colonial and nationalist sentiment from quotidian struggles connected to wages, trading arrangements, and household, workplace, and neighborhood relations.¹⁰⁵ This is especially true when market women only appeared in colonial reportage in brief and often negative terms, namely with regard to the adverse effects associated with urbanization: detribalization, capitalist individualism, and moral corruption.¹⁰⁶ Evidence for the market women's concerns can only be found via the testimony of mineworkers who gave evidence to the commission of inquiry which was appointed to investigate the 1947 general strike and make recommendations to resolve the dispute. Tellingly, MEU members of the commission asked all the mineworkers who gave evidence for their thoughts on the food provided by the company-run canteens. Without exception, the response from witnesses, some of whom referred to the trading activities of their wives, was negative, thus revealing the influence and agency of market women even when they were absent from the official record.¹⁰⁷ That said, in spite of the union's line of questioning during the inquiry, the MEU's leadership also contributed to the erasure of market women in the official record by presenting its demands for higher wages on the basis of men's responsibility for maintaining a household, thereby marginalizing the economic contributions of mineworkers' wives in their capacity as traders.¹⁰⁸ The MEU argued that the provision of subsidized food through the canteens was an attempt by the mining industry to drive down wages. The union also framed its wage demands in terms of

mineworkers' inability to provide food, housing, and education for their children.¹⁰⁹ In the short-term, these demands, in combination with the efficacy of the industrial action, contributed to the strike's qualified success. Employers were forced to abandon their plans for canteens, at least temporarily, and mineworkers were awarded wage increases.¹¹⁰ In the longer-term, however, neither the mining industry, nor colonial officials explicitly recognized the MEU's demands for higher wages and work-related entitlements on the basis of mineworkers' status as "breadwinners."¹¹¹ Instead, the mining industry sought to link wage increases and bonus payments to productivity targets. This strategy was accompanied by measures that subjected mineworkers to various forms of workplace surveillance to combat gold theft and address behaviors that employers perceived of as malingering and ill-discipline.¹¹²

Employers' prioritization of productivity and workplace discipline did not mean that the mining industry was unconcerned with mineworkers' working and living conditions. During the 1940s, individual mine managers and senior company officials had begun to accept that the solution to the high turnover of labor and industrial unrest was to provide improved social services and to ensure that regular employment was available.¹¹³ It was argued that such measures, which were supported by colonial officials, would resolve the social problems associated with casual labor and contribute to increased productivity.¹¹⁴ Consequently, the mining industry began investing in improved housing, medical facilities, sanitation infrastructure and social amenities with a view to attracting and retaining mineworkers.¹¹⁵ The mining industry's emphasis on productivity and stability provided the MEU with a rhetoric to make demands. In one typical case, the union presented its demand for higher wages by highlighting its members' work ethos. The MEU argued that since the increased productivity of its members had contributed to higher output and more lucrative dividends paid to shareholders, they too should benefit financially.¹¹⁶ The union also campaigned for comprehensive forms of social insurance, including pensions and better protection against work-related sickness and injury, as well as equality of treatment in the workplace, with a particular emphasis on the advancement of African mineworkers into supervisory positions and an end to racial discrimination.¹¹⁷

The Chamber of Mines, the industry's representative body for employers, was indifferent to these complaints.¹¹⁸ Employers' indifference contributed to an increased incidence of strike action during the period of self-government under the Convention People's Party (1951–1957), which included a general strike in 1955–1956.¹¹⁹ This instability, in combination with concerns about the implications of independence among expatriate mining companies such as AGC, meant that many companies focused on maximizing ore extraction in the short term at the expense of long-term investment.¹²⁰ The result was that mineworkers continued to exist in a state of "permanent precarity" in a context where employment remained insecure, wages were inadequate, and work-related social insurance offered minimal protections.¹²¹ Mineworkers had little or no choice but to pursue alternative economic strategies, and many continued to supplement their earnings from wage labor with trading, farming, and illegal activities, including gold theft.¹²² In fact, although the MEU and its members frequently deployed the language of stabilization to press claims for greater work-related entitlements, there is little to suggest that mineworkers—even those who could be classed as "permanent"—envisaged proletarianization as a desirable

objective.¹²³ Mineworkers retained strong connections with rural areas. In the 1930s, for example, although many young men left without notice, it was reportedly unusual for parents of migrants to be unaware of sons' whereabouts in the south, with returnees bringing news and remittances to the north and this remained the case after 1945.¹²⁴

These strategies were about more than mere survival. As early migrants to the mining zones had done, mineworkers in the 1950s and beyond hoped to save sufficient money to invest in farming and cattle back in the north, or to acquire capital for small business ventures, thereby avoiding a long-term commitment to underground work in the mining industry.¹²⁵ In short, as was observable in other mining contexts in colonial Africa, there was no simple transition from temporary rural-to-urban migration to the creation of a permanent class of urbanized mineworkers and their dependents.¹²⁶ Migrants to the Gold Coast's mining towns—including male mineworkers and female market traders—had always been more closely integrated into urban networks than the authorities' complaints regarding "casual" labor and the informal sector implied.¹²⁷ At the same time, many residents also maintained strong rural connections owing to a combination of factors, including affective ties and obligations to family; modified forms of ethnic belonging which mitigated the vicissitudes of wage labor; and aims that prioritized subsistence cultivation and the fulfillment of gendered generational roles within the household.¹²⁸ In the context of the mining towns, these strategies were just as likely to produce conflicts, as they were accommodations. The 1955–1956 general strike was marked by interethnic tensions and disagreements regarding the desirability of prolonged industrial action, both of which contributed to instances of violence involving strikers and strike-breakers. AGC representatives also reported that Obuasi's market women, who were presumably fearful about the financial implications of a lengthy work stoppage and were perhaps conscious that since the 1947 strike the MEU had prioritized work-related entitlements, were reluctant to extend credit to striking workers.¹²⁹ Such tensions underscore the contingency of class-based alliances, as the same socioeconomic relations which had brought mineworkers and traders together in the late 1940s contributed to tensions which undermined strike action in the mid-1950s.

Conclusion

The colonial administration in the Northern Territories pursued contradictory policies which sought to promote the growth of a capitalist market economy through trade and wage labor, while also aiming to protect "native" institutions and social structures from the effects such developments. The development of the migrant labor system was also shaped by the actions and aspirations of mineworkers from the Northern Territories. Young men from the Northern Territories may have been compelled to work in the mines, with the result that they came to see a connection between their material experience of wage labor and their class status. However, this did not preclude them from pursuing alternative aims and aspirations which were "entangled," but not determined, by their lives as mineworkers. Many northern migrants to the mining towns viewed wage labor as a temporary stage in their lives which would enable them to acquire the capital to fulfill customary roles expected of them with regard to gender, generation, and the demands of agricultural living back in the north. The same was true

for those Nigerian women who journeyed to the mining towns of the Gold Coast to work in prostitution. For these women, established trade networks and systems of debt bondage facilitated their journey to the Gold Coast, where they attempted to reconcile familial obligations with their own desires and ambitions. In this respect, migration for wage labor was as much about continuities, as it was discontinuities, and it highlights the ways in which mining capital harnessed the power of indigenous customs and institutions in order to reproduce itself.

None of this is not to imply that a region such as the Northern Territories was an egalitarian rural idyll. Migration produced gendered and generational conflicts within households, as fathers and sons, as well as husbands and wives, struggled to reconcile their individual experiences and ambitions with customary roles and collective needs.¹³⁰ These tensions played out within the mining towns of the south too. The expansion of the colonial economy created opportunities for individual accumulation, but beneficiaries were vulnerable to accusations of morally transgressive behavior. This was especially true of local female Asante traders and female migrants from Nigeria, whose relative economic independence and pursuit of individual material advancement defied customary norms regarding gendered roles. At particular moments, these divisions could be put to one side, as was the case during the 1946 boycott and the 1947 industry-wide general strike. But, as the MEU's subsequent claims for work-related entitlements indicate: privileging men's economic roles at the expense of women's meant that the household division of labor was just as likely to be a source of conflict, as it was cooperation. Moreover, such demands, although framed in terms that were intelligible to employers and colonial officials, masked the complexity of mineworkers' lives and their aspirations which, for many, remained incompatible with the industry's hopes of creating a stable and productive workforce. All of this underscores a critical point, and one that was made a generation or so ago, historians must concern themselves with the plurality of labor and the multiplicity of its worlds, and not just its direct relationship to capital and the process of commodification through proletarianization.

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Notes

1. Marcel van der Linden, "The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2012): 57–76.
2. Ralph Callebert and Raji Singh Soni, "Claims of Labor in Globalization: Africa, Citizenship, and the Integral State," *Socialism and Democracy* 32, no. 2 (2018): 88–9.
3. Franco Barchiesi, "How Far from Africa's Shore? A Response to Marcel van der Linden's Map for Global Labor History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2012): 77–84, especially 82.
4. See, for example, Ralph Callebert's *On Durban's Docks: Zulu Workers, Rural Households, Global Labor* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2017).
5. See, for example, Cassandra Mark-Thiesen's excellent *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital: Mechanized Gold Mining in the Gold Coast Colony, 1879–1909* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018).
6. The works published in Heinemann's Social History of Africa series are the exemplar of such approaches.

7. Tariq Omar, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 10.
8. I avoid categorizing the Nigerian women who engaged in prostitution as “prostitutes” because of its pejorative connotations. However, “prostitution” has been retained in order to distinguish the forms of commercialized sex work which colonialism generated from pre-colonial precedents. For a general discussion of the ethical issues associated with the nomenclature of prostitution, see: Magaly Rodríguez García, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Lex Heerma van Voss, “Selling Sex in World Cities, 1600s–2000s: An Introduction,” in *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s*, eds. Magaly Rodríguez García, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Lex Heerma van Voss (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1–22.
9. For a helpful discussion of the challenges confronting historians seeking to make sense of these issues in eastern and southern African contexts, see: Diana Jeater, “African Women in Colonial Settler Towns in East and Southern Africa,” *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History*, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-665>.
10. Frederick Cooper, “Work, Class and Empire: An African Historian’s Retrospective on E. P. Thompson,” *Social History* 20, no. 2 (1995): 235–41, especially 239–41.
11. *Ibid.*, 239.
12. See, for example, Hanan Hammad’s *Industrial Sexuality: Gender, Urbanisation, and Social Transformation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).
13. On the pre-colonial history of gold mining see Raymond Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa: The Gold-Mining Frontier, African Labor, Colonial Capitalism in the Gold Coast, 1875–1900* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1998), chapters two and three.
14. Mark-Thiesen, *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital*, 26–32; Jim Silver, “The Failure of European Mining Communities in the Nineteenth-Century Gold Coast,” *Journal of African History* 22, no. 4 (1981): 511–29.
15. Raymond Dumett, *Imperialism, Economic Development and Social Change in West Africa* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2013), chapter five.
16. *Report on the Mining Industry for the Year in 1905* (London: Waterlow and Sons Limited, 1906), 6.
17. Martin Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), chapter three; Jeff Crisp, *The Story of An African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners’ Struggles, 1870–1980* (London: Zed Books, 1984), 25–31.
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19. *Ibid.*, 8.
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21. *Annual Report on the Northern Territories for the Year 1918* (London: HMSO, 1918), 4.
22. Crisp, *The Story of An African Working Class*, 42.
23. *Report on the Mining Department for the Year 1920* (Accra: Government Printer, 1922), 3–4.
24. Raymond Dumett, “Disease and Mortality among Gold Miners of Ghana: Colonial Government and Mining Companies Attitudes and Policies, 1900–1938,” *Social Science Medicine* 37, no. 2 (1993): 213–32, especially 221–2.
25. David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850–1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 43; International Labour Organisation Archives, Geneva, G900/76/2, Report on a Mission to British West African Dependencies, 1934, 34–47.
26. The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), CO 96/486, John Pickersgill Roger, Governor of the Gold Coast, to the Earl of Crewe, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 February 1910.
27. Alice Wiemers, “‘It is All He Can Do to Cope with the Roads in His Own District’: Labor, Community, and Development in Northern Ghana, 1919–1936,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 92 (2017): 91.
28. Jeff Grischow, *Shaping Tradition: Civil Society, Community and Development in Colonial Northern Ghana, 1899–1957* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), chapters two to six, especially chapter five.
29. *Ibid.*, 114–19.
30. *Ibid.*, 110.
31. Brenda Chalfin, *Shea Butter Republic: State Power Global Markets and the Making of an Indigenous Community* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 121–24.

32. *Ibid.*, 96.
33. *Ibid.*, 98.
34. Natalie Swanpoel, "Small Change: Cowries, Coins, and the Currency Transition in the Northern Territories of Colonial Ghana," in *Materializing Colonial Encounters: Archaeologies of African Experience*, ed. Francois Richard (New York: Springer, 2015), 53–4.
35. Swanpoel, "Small Change," 49–50; Domenico Cristofaro, "'Here There Is No Gold Standard. Cows Are the Standard.' Multiple Currencies, Colonial Taxation and Monetary Transition in Upper Ghana (1896–1936)," in *Monetary Transitions: Currencies, Colonialism and African Societies*, ed. Karin Pallaver (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 31–53.
36. Chalfin, *Shea Butter Republic*, 100.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Annual Report of the Northern Territories for the Year 1923–24* (Accra: Government Printer, 1924), 21.
39. *Northern Territories Report on the Blue Book for 1914* (Accra: Government Printer, N.D.), 8.
40. Holgar Weiss, "Crop Failures, Food Shortages and Colonial Famine Relief Policies in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast," *Ghana Studies* 6 (2003): 5–58.
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42. *Report on the Northern Territories for the Period, 1926–27* (Accra: Government Printer, N.D.), 15–16.
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46. BLEA, EAP54/1/3/74, *Annual Report on Lawra-Tumu District, 1938–39*, 33.
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48. *Ibid.*; BLEA, EAP54/1/3/74, PRAAD-Tamale, NRG, 8/3/78, *Annual Report on Lawra-Tumu District, 1938–39*, 32.
49. Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History*, 146–147.
50. For a discussion of this complex relationship and the relevant scholarship, see Bianca Murillo's *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017), 1–27.
51. Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 11, n. 11; Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana*, chapter 2; Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab: A History of a West African God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 61–2.
52. See, for example, Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
53. Madeleine Père, *Les Lobis: Traditions et Changement*, 2 vols (Paris: Siloë, 1988), 375 cited in Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana*, 63; BLEA, EAP54/1/3/74, PRAAD-Tamale, NRG, 8/3/78, *Annual Report on Lawra-Tumu District, 1938–39*, 33.
54. Abdul-Korah, "'Ka Biε Ba Yor'", 12.
55. Meyer Fortes, "The First Born," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 15 (1974), 81–104.
56. Richard Waller, "Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa," *The Journal of African History* 47, no. 1 (2006): 77–92, especially 79–80.
57. Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 93; Jack Goody, *The Social Organisation of the LoWiili* (London: H.M.S.O., 1956), 10; Meyer Fortes, "Culture Contact as a Dynamic Process. An Investigation in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast," *Africa* 9, no. 1 (1936): 44–5.

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60. Churchill Archives Centre Cambridge (hereafter CAC), Spears Papers, SPRS 3/1/83, J.E. Griffin, Report to Visit to the Northern Territories, 20 to 29 March 1952, 4.
61. Carola Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 33–4.
62. TNA, CO 96/760/16, J. R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Report on Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast, July 1938, 9.
63. For equivalent arguments in the context of Nigeria see Carolyn Brown, "A 'Man' in a Village is a 'Boy' in the Workplace: Colonial Racism, Worker Militance, and Igbo Notions of Masculinity", in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, eds. Stephen F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (Portsmouth: New Hampshire, 2003), 156–74.
64. TNA, CO 98/62, *Report on the Medical Department for the Year 1932-33* (Accra: Government Printer, 1933), 32.
65. Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History*, 150–52.
66. Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, chapter four.
67. *Report on the Mines Department for the Year 1935-36* (Accra: Government Printer, 1936), 9.
68. *The Gold Coast, 1931: A Review of Conditions in the Gold Coast in 1931 as Compared with those of 1921* (Accra: Government Printer, 1931), 246; Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, 62–3.
69. Ghana, National Archives, File P.7/1938, cited in Peter Gutkind, *The Emergent African Proletariat* (Montreal: Centre for Developing Area Studies, 1974), 26.
70. Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, 64–65.
71. Don Robotham, *Militants or Proletarians? The Economic Culture of Underground Gold Miners in Southern Ghana, 1906-1970*. Cambridge African Monographs (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 1989), 38.
72. T. Dunbar Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshe, *Going for Gold*, 42, cited in Mark-Thiesen, "The 'Bargain' of Collaboration", 21.
73. *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast, 1936–37* (London: HMSO, 1938), 22.
74. Claire Robertson, "Invisible Workers: African Women and the Problem of the Self-Employed in Labour History," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (1988): 180–98. For a more recent discussion of informal sector workers as a constituent component of the working class, see Joshua Lew McDermott, "Understanding West Africa's Informal Workers as Working Class," *Review of African Political Economy* 48, no. 170 (2021): 609–29.
75. Robertson, "Invisible Workers", 188.
76. Of course, whilst the labor of female migrants from Nigeria may not have been recognised, by the 1940s and 1950s, their visibility in urban centres such as Obuasi was a source of comment in reports. Hoover Institution Archive, Stanford, (hereafter HIA), David Brokensha Collection, Box 1, Folder "General", *A Social Survey of Obuasi* (November, 1953), 11–12.
77. On pre-colonial forms of prostitution and its changing character during the colonial period, see: Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast, c. 1650–1950," *Past & Present* 156, no. 1 (1997): 144–73.
78. 20 shillings to the West African Pound. HIA, *A Social Survey of Obuasi*, 11–12.
79. Benedict B. B. Naanen, "Itinerant Gold Mines': Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930–1950," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (1991): 57–79; Saheed Aderinto, "Journey to Work: Transnational Prostitution in Colonial British West Africa," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 1 (2015): 99–124.
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81. TNA, CO 96/760/16, J. R. Dickinson, Report on Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast, July 1938, 26.
82. HIA, *A Social Survey of Obuasi*, 12.

83. Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution", 159–60; Penelope Roberts, "The State and the Regulation of Marriage: Sefwi Wiawso (Ghana), 1900–40," in *Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, ed. Halah Ashfer (London: Macmillan, 1987), 48–69.
84. TNA, CO 96/760/16, J. R. Dickinson, Report on Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast, July 1938, 24.
85. Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution", 161.
86. This is a point that has been made in relation to many other African contexts. The classic account remains Luise White's *Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1990).
87. HIA, *A Social Survey of Obuasi*, 12.
88. Gracia Clark, *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 95–116, especially 108–16. See also: Bianca Murillo, 'Female Credit Customers, the United Africa Company and Consumer Markets in Postwar Ghana', in *Consuming Behaviours: Identity, Politics and Pleasure in Twentieth-Century Britain*, eds. Erika Rappaport, Sandra Trudgen Dawson and Mark J. Crowley (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 159–78.
89. HIA, *A Social Survey of Obuasi*, 9.
90. Murillo, *Market Encounters*, chapter two, especially 74–85.
91. *Ibid.*, 61–62, 75.
92. Gracia Clark, "African Market Women, Market Queens, and Merchant Queens", *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, African History*, 1, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.268>.
93. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
94. TNA, CO 96/750/8, Minutes of a Conference Between Government and Members of the Chamber of Mines Held at the Office of the Secretary of Mines on 29 July 1937.
95. Miles Larmer, "Permanent Precarity: Capital and Labour in the Central African Copperbelt," *Labor History* 58, no. 2 (2017): 170–14.
96. Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Ghana: A Social and Political History* (London: Zed Books, 2023), chapters four and five.
97. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in British and French Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 248–57.
98. Crisp, *The Story of An African Working Class*, 76–93.
99. *Ibid.*, 84–89.
100. This is not to suggest that the issue has been disregarded altogether. See, for example, Sarah Stockwell's *The Business of Decolonization: British Business Strategies in the Gold Coast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178.
101. *Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1947-48* (Accra: Government Printer, 1949), 7.
102. The Labour Department report for 1947–1948 recorded that northern migrants were marrying local Asante women and female migrants who migrated southward from the Northern Territories. It was also reported that up to 10 percent of northern migrants sent for their wives once they had secured regular work. *Report, 1947–48*, 8.
103. Clark, *Onions Are My Husband*, 116–17; *Annual Report, 1947–48*, 7.
104. For a discussion of Nigerian female market traders and the reasons behind their support for male trade unionists in Nigeria during the 1945 general strike, see: Lisa Lindsay, "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): 783–812, especially 799–800.
105. Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1516–45, especially 1544.
106. The colony's labor officer, I.G. Jones, referred to the exploitation of mineworkers by unspecified "traders" in one of his reports. Public Records and Archives Administration Department-Accra, CSO 21/8/48, Labour Conditions at Obuasi, Report by I.G. Jones (N.D.).
107. J. Benibengor Blay, *The Gold Coast Mines Employees' Union* (Ilfracombe: A. H. Stockwell, 1950), 179, 183, 186, and 206.
108. For similar demands presented by Nigerian trade unionists, which also emphasised men's familial responsibilities, see Lindsay, "Domesticity and Difference", 802–03.
109. On the demands presented by the MEU, see *In the Matter of the Trades Dispute (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance, 1941 and in the End Matter of a Trade Dispute between the Matter of a Trade Dispute between the*

Gold Coast Mines Employees Union and the Gold Coast Chamber of Mines Award of the Arbitrator (Accra: Government Printer, 1947), 8.

110. Robotham, *Militants or Proletarians?*, 49.

111. *In the Matter of the Trades Dispute*, 44–7.

112. Jeff Crisp, “Productivity and Protest: Scientific Management in the Ghanaian Gold Mines, 1947–1956,” in *Struggle for the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa*, ed. Frederick Cooper (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983), 106–7.

113. Crisp, *The Story of African Working Class*, 71–5.

114. On the stabilization in post-1945 Africa see Cooper’s *Decolonization and African Society*, 324–60.

115. Stockwell, *The Business of Decolonization*, 177–79.

116. *Ibid.*, Appendix Four, Gold Coast Mines Employees Union, 102–3.

117. International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter IISH), ICFTU Papers, Folder 3776, Minutes of a Meeting Between the Gold Coast Chamber of Mines and the Gold Coast Mines Employees Union Held at Tarkwa on 28 December 1954.

118. IISH, Miners’ International Federation Archives (MIF), Folder 277, Replies by the Chamber of Mines to the Points (A) to (U) Put Forward by the Union in Support of an all-round wage increase in meeting no. 3 of the 8th JNC meeting held on 19 October 1954, 2–4, quote on 4.

119. Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, 109 and 115–21.

120. Stockwell, *The Business of Decolonization*, 168–69; Crisp, “Scientific Management”, 123–24.

121. Larmer, “Permanent Precarity”.

122. TNA, CO 554/226, *Report of the Mines Labour Enquiry Committee*, 34; Carola Lentz and Veit Erlman, “A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival among Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana”, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 113 (1989): 78–87.

123. IISH, MIF, JNC Meeting No. 7, Minutes of Meeting between the Gold Coast Chamber of Mines and the Gold Coast Mines Employees Union held at Tarkwa on 20 April 1954, 4.

124. TNA, CO 96/760/16, J. R. Dickinson, Report on Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast, July 1938, 8. For the second half of the twentieth century, see: See Lentz and Erlman, “A Working Class in Formation”, 87–90.

125. London Metropolitan Archives, Ashanti Goldfields Corporation Papers, Inwards Correspondence, MS 141171/47, Report by the Labour Officer, I.G. Jones, March 1945, 2; Lentz and Erlman, “A Working Class in Formation”, 76–82. More generally, Callebert makes a similar point about Durban’s dockworkers in his *On Durban’s Docks*.

126. James Ferguson, “Mobile Workers, Modernist Narratives: A Critique of the Historiography of Transition on the Zambian Copperbelt”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 3 (1990): 385–412 as cited and summarized in Cooper, *Decolonisation and African Society*, 337.

127. Frederick Cooper makes a similar point about the complexities of casual labour in the port of Mombasa in his *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

128. Piet Konings, *The Political Potential of Ghanaian Miners: A Case Study of the AGC Workers at Obuasi* (Leiden: African Studies Studies Centre, 1980), 28–40.

129. CAC, Sir Edward Spears Papers, SPRS 3/1/178, B. Hamilton, Security Department Obuasi, to the General Mines Manager, AGC Intelligence Report No. 416, 14 December 1955; Telegraph from [?] to Major General Sir Edward Spears, 12 December 1955.

130. Sean Hawkins, “‘The Woman in Question’: Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907–1954”, in *Women in Colonial African Histories*, eds. Jeans Allman, Susan Geiger, Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 116–43.