

Subsidising Extraction: Care at work in Zambia’s copper mines

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Abstract: This article explores the ambivalence of care and its role in sustaining capitalist extraction in Zambia’s copper mines. Based on ethnographic research within mines and their encompassing communities, the article documents the caring practices of mineworkers and attempts of trade unionists and managerial staff to counsel and support mineworkers as they navigate exploitative employment conditions. These acts of care are often unacknowledged or trivialised by corporate discourses and top company management. Yet, they are pivotal in maintaining and repairing fragile labour relations and, thereby, production. The article explores the way acts of care support workers but, at the same time, reassert the power of the company and the inevitability of exploitation. Following the deconstruction of paternalist welfare systems in the mining sector, neoliberal investments are buttressed by these caring practices and the wider set of relationships they mobilise within the labour force and the broader community. These acts of care thus subsidise the extraction of Zambia’s mineral resources.

Keywords: Care, Extraction, Mining, Labour, Social Reproduction, Capitalism

Introduction

"This dismissal is unfair" complained Ezra¹, an underground miner dismissed for concealing the loss of a finger on his right hand while working underground. When the accident happened, Ezra and his team managed to hide the injury, but searched without success for the missing finger. The following morning safety officers found the finger and traced it to Ezra. He was dismissed without benefits according to company rules and banned from working in the mines for three years. His friends Mofya, Collins, and Mwelwa were given a final warning for aiding the concealment of a serious injury. "I was doing all this work so that production continued," Ezra complained, "Because when there is an accident, production is halted. This means we lose production and bonus," referring to the financial reward for meeting monthly production targets. Ezra argued that the company should have considered the fact that he was risking his life for their sake: "It is not like I am stealing. I am actually helping the company to go forward. But all I get is a dismissal." Ezra understood his dismissal as a violation of the moral economy of the mine. Supervisors know workers hide injuries in order to avoid penalties and receive production and 'no lost time' bonuses, which reflect enhanced profits for their employer. Workers know they will be blamed for almost all injuries but expect to be subtly rewarded by their supervisor for concealing their own and others' pain.

At first reading, this episode from a mine tunnel manifests the lack of care for the human characterising the organisation of difficult, dangerous and dirty work underground. Miners, working under financial and managerial pressure, hid and exacerbated a serious injury to try and meet production targets and protect their income. When they were found out, the injured miner lost his job and his colleagues' position became more precarious. However, the story also highlights how, amid oppressive circumstances, miners recognised their interdependence and acted to help and support each other: they cared for each other.

Recent scholarship on the entangling of care and extractivism encourages a closer examination of care as "a central piece in the puzzle of the capture of value" (Berman et al 2020: 1594). In the case of Ezra's accident, production was sustained as miners cared for their co-worker without alerting mine authorities. Then, during the investigation that followed, Ezra reported neither his teammates nor supervisor for conspiring to hide the injury, protecting their employment. Untangling the motives for hiding the injury (and Ezra's choice to obscure the effort that had gone into hiding it) reveals how miners deploy care within relationships of interdependence as they live through a wider condition of exploitation. Moreover, it shows how caring practices were subtly encouraged and reciprocated by those higher in company hierarchies, even if this reciprocation was later denied. Though formally discouraged by mining companies, miners' caring practices enable and maintain production, constituting a critical resource for value production in contemporary capitalism and subsidising extraction.

In this article we trace how unacknowledged care practices enable Zambian mining capitalism, as companies provide ever less to workers. Drawing from social reproduction theory (SRT) we show how caring practices form part of a "piecemeal and sprawling geography" of social reproduction that enables extractive multinationals to minimise their investment in labour (Katz 2001: 718; Bhattacharya 2017: 18). By examining relations of interdependence amongst workers, unionists and managers in the mine, we argue care plays a crucial role in sustaining production and capitalist accumulation. In doing this, we build on SRT, literature on repair and

¹ All research participants have been given pseudonyms.

maintenance, and scholarship on affective and emotional labour at work. We detail the differing ways caring relationships among and between miners, unionists and HR staff help production continue despite fragmentation of the workforce and unsafe working conditions. These relationships subsidise wages below the cost of social reproduction, diffusing the costs of mining through the bodies of workers, the workforce and the wider community.

Social reproduction theory has long illuminated the role of care work in the home and community in the production of value and sustenance of capitalism. This article pivots back to the workplace, building in two ways upon literature focused primarily on female caregivers supporting mainly male workers. First, we focus on relationships forged within the workplace and mainly, though not completely, relations between men. Secondly, we take insights explaining how care work is relational, and therefore shaped and constituted by power, and apply them to intra-workplace hierarchies. Linking back to SRT, we focus on the mutual reproduction of economic exploitation and social oppression.

Through our analysis, we consider how a devaluing of company support for social reproduction affects understandings and practices of care at work. We trace how care is articulated and silenced in the work roles and professional subjectivities of miners, unionists and human resource (HR) managers. We note how most of the unacknowledged care work and affective labour that maintains production is performed by those at the bottom of intra- and international mining company hierarchies. Combining these insights, we trace how discourses and practices of care maintain and repair fragile labour relations, enabling extraction and, through this, the transnational transfer of resources from a poorer, indebted country to richer countries.

In linking the caring relations and subjectivities of miners, unionists and managers, the article draws on a collective and collaborative ethnographic project into the micropolitics of labour in Zambia's copper mines following privatisation of the mining sector, conducted in Zambia's Copperbelt and North-Western Provinces between 2016 and 2020.² Our research predominantly focused on underground mines in Kitwe and nearby Copperbelt towns, but interviews were conducted with employees of major mines in North-Western during short trips. As authors, the three of us each carried out a sub-project, respectively focusing on managerial practices, trade union dynamics, and the everyday life of workers in the mines. Lochery's research focused on managers and HR practitioners working in major mining houses and smaller contracting companies. She interviewed HR staff at different levels of company hierarchies at and outside work while attending professional events and training workshops of the Zambian Institute of HR Management (ZIHRM). McNamara lived with a union branch official and was based at the head office of the largest trade union in the mining sector; he interviewed unionists in each of Zambia's five mining unions and surveyed subcontracted miners. For his ethnography, Musonda completed a three-month training program, required of all new hires of one Copperbelt mining company, before working for nine months as an underground helper with teams on two of that company's mine sites. Born on the Copperbelt and having lived there for the majority of his life, Musonda extended his social network in a

² The authors' research in Zambia formed part of the wider WORKinMINING project (<http://www.workinmining.ulg.ac.be/>), which explored the micropolitics of work and employment in copper mining projects in Congo and Zambia after the privatisation of the mining sector in the two countries (see Rubbers 2021). The project, based at the University of Liège, Belgium, was led by Principal Investigator Benjamin Rubbers and received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 646802). The ideas developed in this article reflect only the authors' view. The ERC is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

manner that allowed him to carry out participant observation with miners in their homes and community. Over three years, he watched and engaged with practices of cooking, bill-paying, intra-family socialisation and the tensions and reconciliations associated with this.³

As project colleagues, we mainly carried out our research individually but met regularly to review methodologies and findings. While focusing on a single geographic location, we attempted to respond to Rofel and Yanagisako's (2019:5) critique of the lone ethnographer who 'focuses primarily on one of the parties in an encounter, thus overlooking (or even misconstruing) the goals, commitments and legacies of the other parties.' Inevitably our research networks overlapped; at times we interviewed the same people from different perspectives, reflecting our different positionalities and research foci. These overlaps allowed us to triangulate our data and explore social relationships cutting across employers and company hierarchies (Rubbers 2021).

The article proceeds by introducing social reproduction theory before discussing how neoliberalism has led to a drastic reduction in capital's investment in social reproduction in Zambia's mining sector. Three ethnographic sections follow, focusing on caring practices of miners, trade unionists and HR managers. The article concludes with a reflection on what caring practices in Zambia's mines reveal about the tensions of care and the relationship between intra-community care and global capitalist extraction.

Social Reproduction and Care at Work

Social reproduction theory builds upon Marxist approaches mapping 'hidden abodes' of extraction and exploitation that enable capitalist market exchange. Marx directed our attention from the marketplace to the workplace, where workers are exploited and inadequately compensated for their labour—and then, to explain the compulsion to labour, to the processes of dispossession and exploitation that create labourers without means of subsistence (Marx 2013, Fraser 2017). Feminist scholars in the 1970s built upon Marx's insights by exploring the social reproduction of the workforce. These SRT authors highlighted the home and community as 'hidden abodes' of exploitation and unpaid work, emphasising caregiving and provisioning principally performed by women (Fraser 2017; Federici 2019). They underlined how capitalism depends on biological and social "processes of generation and regeneration... of the worker and commodity labour power" (Mezzadri 2019: 34). Their insights remain crucial for understanding the productive value of processes—including care—that create and sustain capitalism's human subjects (Mezzadri 2021; Fraser 2017).

We draw on SRT for two additional reasons. First, SRT scholarship urges a focus on process rather than "visible facts", as Bhattacharya (2017: 2) argues: analysis should not accept "what seems like a visible, finished entity" like the worker at the factory gates but interrogate "the complex network of social processes and human relations that produces the conditions of existence for that entity." Secondly, SRT demonstrates how capitalism both depends on and undermines the work of social reproduction (Fraser 2017: 157). Crucially for our argument, SRT draws attention to the changing contours of capitalist investment over time and space in the reproduction of labour through company paternalism, state welfare systems and other social services that seek to control and care for workers (Katz 2001: 711). A key change associated with neoliberalism has been the privatisation and withdrawal of state services, the

³ For more of Musonda's ethnography of Copperbelt domestic life, see Musonda (2021a, 2021b, 2022).

deconstruction of corporate paternalism, and the growth of personal and political ideologies privileging individuation over care and community (Shever 2012). These ideologies obfuscate the caregiving and provisioning performed by family and community members that makes this workforce of ‘individuals’ possible.

We adopt Tronto’s (1993:103) broad but powerful definition of care: “everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible.” While SRT has powerfully illuminated labours of care in the home and the complex relations involved, there has been less attention to labours of care in the hidden abode of capitalist production. A wealth of literature has traced how, in these neoliberal times, companies, most especially through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, have invested in presenting a caring face to their ‘stakeholders’, including workers and local communities (Rajak 2011; Welker 2014). However, companies’ programs for staff and communities are usually based on ‘abstract commitments’ to values like sustainability or human dignity, rooted in the ‘lofty’, ‘uncluttered perspective’ (Jackall 1988: 131, 133) of those at the top of corporate bureaucracies, and operationalised through metrics designed to measure progress on the level of populations (Welker 2014: 62-63). Meanwhile, especially following neoliberal deconstructions of corporate welfare systems, the actual physical and emotional labour of care at work is often obscured, “literally and symbolically” (Winders and Ellen Smith: 881) or denigrated as unprofessional.

Through our ethnography, we explore practices of care that enable production but are de-emphasised within formal discourses on management, productivity, and individual responsibility. Considering hidden and occasionally subversive caring practices at work avoids presenting a specific capitalist project or corporate entity as totalising or all powerful. Rather, we foreground the fragility of capitalist extraction caused by companies reducing the support they provide to labour (Bear et al 2015). We trace the unpaid and sometimes expensive work of caregiving that counters this fragility and vulnerability, building on literature on labour, unions and management in southern Africa and beyond.

Several studies of African workforces note how precarious neoliberal labour relations are subsidised by caring relationships among workers and between workers and encompassing communities. In South Africa, Kenny (2018) details how the identity ‘worker’, associated with apartheid paternalism is increasingly unavailable to post-apartheid casual labourers, who instead create and financially support their identities through extra-workplace activities. Similarly, Dolan and Rajak (2016) detail how Kenyan and South African sellers are encouraged to self-conceptualise as entrepreneurs but make sales on behalf of international corporations almost solely to those with kinship obligations towards them. Rizzo (2017) meanwhile describes contests over the status of workers in Tanzania, where precarious workers claim to be transport professionals. He notes that competition among workers is entwined with care, both personal and professional mentoring, and transfers of wealth that sustain the unskilled.

Unions similarly repair relations and maintain capitalist production. Despite narratives of militancy, unions in neoliberal Africa have often served a consolatory role, mediating between management and an ever more disempowered workforce (Beresford 2012). Through selling services on credit and marshalling workers’ tangible solidarities, they subsidise wages below the cost of reproduction (McNamara 2021b). In Zambia—and seemingly other African nations (Werbner 2014), junior union leaders take on moral responsibility for this system, deploying relations of care and promises of eventual improvement to maintain workers’ subjectivities and relationships with and within the mining company (McNamara 2021a).

Finally, in the broader literature on management, while authors like Cross (2011) argue that managers typically stress their detachment from networks of support and care, others note how hidden emotional labour is crucial to managerial work, especially in HR departments (O'Brien & Linehan 2018, 2014). Performances and practices of detachment versus attachment depend on managers' position in company hierarchies and wider social contexts (Jackall 1988: 132-133; Welker 2014: 63). Bolt's (2016) description of management on a South African white-owned farm depicts the fragility of a black personnel manager's 'managerial distance' in a context where labour force cohesion depends on hierarchical paternalist relations. Shever (2012) details how familial networks maintain small enterprises that emerged out of privatisation of state-owned enterprises in Argentina, discouraging economically rational calculations that would result in lay-offs or closures. The desire to help relatives in management disciplines waged workers while care for family members encourages free labour from management.

This article builds upon SRT thinking; it depicts workers, mining unionists and managers maintaining a fragile extractive system. At the same time, it foregrounds that this undervalued work of maintenance, by principally Zambian actors, facilitates extraction of the nation's copper and capture of its value by powerful multinationals. Our work thus builds on other ethnographies that show how industrial mining capital functions for the benefit of the (primarily foreign) few because local labour provides "an under-appreciated and exploited subsidy to capital" (Corwin and Gidwani 2021:2). Nash (1993) famously recounts this relationship as the miners and their community eating the mines' payments, while the mines ate their labour and health.

Miners' caring practices and the relations they involve reveal how care has a "double-sidedness" to it, undergirding human existence and revealing our interdependence, but "perpetuating problematic relationships of exploitation" (Corwin and Gidwani 2021: 3). This double-sidedness has long played out in Zambian miners' relationships with their mines, and through this with the multinational corporations and subcontracting companies profiting from them. Mineworkers care for and maintain the mine, repairing their workplace and community they live in so they can 'live in it as well as possible', thereby also perpetuating an unequal interdependence that enables the extraction of wealth.

Care and Social Reproduction in Zambia's Copper Mines

The social reproduction of the workforce has long been a site of struggles in Zambia's mining sector, established at an industrial scale from the 1920s. As they competed for migrant labour and faced protests from African workers and their nascent trade unions in the mid-twentieth century, mining companies reluctantly provided more infrastructure in an effort to stabilise their workforces. A system of industrial paternalism implied more stable employment and social benefits including food rations, housing, healthcare, and recreation facilities for miners and their immediate family (Powdermaker 1962; Henderson 1972; Parpart 1983). Companies imposed upon workers the ideal of a nuclear, monogamous Christian family in which men were family breadwinners and women caring housewives (Parpart 1986).

Following Zambia's independence, and partial nationalisation of the mines in the late 1960s, mining companies expanded paternalistic relations through stable employment and service provisioning. The nationalised mines, merged in 1982 to form Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), provided a 'cradle-to-grave' welfare system; miners received free education

for their children, water, electricity, and local transport (Fraser 2010, 9). By the late 1970s, the mines employed over 60,000 workers on permanent conditions of employment, with pension and insurance in case of injury or death (Fraser and Lungu 2007). Labour subcontracting constituted less than 10 percent of the ZCCM workforce, mainly in drilling, exploration and expansion (ZCCM 1997). Given the industry-wide collective bargaining and one-union-one-industry principle that prevailed during this period, contract and direct employees enjoyed standardised conditions.

Zambia's economy declined steadily from the 1970s through the 1990s, and workers' wages were eroded by rising inflation. Despite emphasis on the male breadwinner and minimal employment of women in the mines, many families increasingly depended on additional income provided by miners' wives engaged in small-scale agriculture and other activities (Ferguson 1999; Larmer 2017; Pugliese and Musonda 2021). Nevertheless, the era of state paternalism is fondly remembered by many Copperbelt residents as a 'golden' era, not because of the absence of difficulties, but because it constituted a slow and progressive economic decline during which mineworkers' jobs (but not wages) and access to services were relatively protected (Mususa 2021b; Musonda 2021). Between the peak of employment in 1976 and 1991, employment in the mines declined by only nine per cent—a figure including retirements, deaths and terminations on medical grounds (Muchimba 2010; Fraser and Lungu 2007).

The privatisation of the mines in 2000 involved a chaotic dismantling of ZCCM, embedded in a broader program of economic liberalisation ushered in during the 1990s. ZCCM's workforce decreased from over 50,000 permanent pensionable miners in 1991 to under 20,000 by 2001 (Fraser and Lungu 2007: 21; Muchimba 2010). While employment subsequently increased—to 74,000 by 2018—mining companies have repeatedly used labour retrenchment as their first response to global market fluctuations. In place of permanent employment, precarious subcontracting (and sub-subcontracting) has proliferated, rising to over 60 percent of the total workforce in 2015 (Musonda 2021b:32, 32; Lee 2017). Moreover, with the liberalisation of state-union relations, proliferation of unions, continuing mechanisation of production and casualisation of labour, once powerful unions have been weakened in terms of membership, finances, and ability to defend workers' interests (Fraser 2010; Mulenga 2017; Uzar 2017). The insufficiency of what capital provides to labour is clear in mineworkers' wages and terms of employment. In early 2017, gross monthly wages (before tax and including housing allowances) for directly employed workers in one of the largest mines varied from ZMW4720 (\$476) to ZMW8121 (\$820) at a time when the minimum basic needs and nutrition basket (which excludes school fees, transport, or healthcare) for a family of five living in Kitwe was calculated at ZMW4,034 (\$407). Most contract workers earned far below this, with the lowest paid receiving monthly wages of ZMW600 to 800 (US\$60-80).⁴

New investors, attracted by favourable fiscal incentives and soon benefiting from high copper prices, shed ZCCM's paternalistic commitments. They 'refocused on mines as sites of mineral extraction' (Straube 2021: 2), seeking to disembed themselves from local and national

⁴ The JCTR Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) is calculated by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (<https://www.jctr.org.zm/bnnb>); the data for the January 2017 basket referred to here is downloadable at <https://www.jctr.org.zm/bnnb-folders.html>. The salaries for direct employees are drawn from the collective agreement made between one of the largest mines and the mining unions for 2017. The data on subcontractor salaries is from a survey conducted by McNamara and Limbisanu Tembo in 2017. The USD/ZMW exchange rate on January 31, 2017 was ZMW9.91 = USD1.00 (www.oanda.com/currency-converter).

commitments. Western, Chinese and Indian mining companies employed primarily foreign senior managers on expatriate conditions, undoing ZCCM's 'Zambianisation' of senior positions in a *de facto* recreation of the colonial-era colour bar in the mines' (Lochery and Rubbers 2021: 137; Burawoy 2014, 1972). Town services were handed over to local government or privatised; companies convert remaining benefits such as housing allowances or educational support for registered dependents into cash payments that are often insufficient. Mines dissolved projects relating to family planning, education and budgeting. They closed infrastructure including mine clubs and sporting teams and reduced the role of mine stores in providing food and controlling miners' expenditures. Local individuals and institutions took over these social reproductive roles, dispersing their costs through the community. Unions run mine stores, churches increasingly run rotating credit associations, and community organisations provide health and education services (Haynes 2017; McNamara 2021b).

Inside the mines, a paternalistic welfare system overseen by a large, centralised bureaucracy was replaced by a management structure which, to ensure continued production, emphasised safety procedures and the need for miners to be responsible, at work and at home (Musonda and Pugliese 2021). In one large mining operation, a business plan 'the Mopani Way' mapped the mine's path towards becoming 'world class' through discipline, individual responsibility and accountability, and flexibility—the latter operationalised through retrenchments and subcontracting. In a dramatisation explaining the Mopani Way to workers, the spectre of lay-offs was likened to fleeing a lion, with the more successful worker explaining to his peer that 'I only have to run faster than you' to maintain his position. However, as we explain below, the Mopani Way, Copperbelt sociality and the cheap extraction of Zambia's copper were all made possible not through miners outcompeting each other but through (often hierarchical) relations of care, obfuscated through discourses of individual professionalism.

Workers: Unacknowledged care in the hidden abode

Given the persistent retrenchments and proliferation of subcontracting, miners relied on and encouraged a variety of caring practices at work and in the community to maintain their jobs and meet the costs of living on their low wages. Where historically miners maintained remittances to rural kin to secure their post-employment future (Ferguson 1999), today few workers retire to their home village. As our ethnography showed (see especially Musonda 2021b), miners maintain rural ties, but the geography of social reproduction reveals the importance of social networks among interdependent peers and colleagues in town (Haynes 2017). At least in part because of company-provided transport, workers are clustered in neighbourhoods near mine sites, prominent examples being Wusakile in Kitwe and Kankoyo in Mufulira. Networks that both shape moral personhood and provide material resources are embedded in these neighbourhoods (Haynes 2017). Employees working at particular mining sites often send their children to the same schools. Their families often buy from the same markets, bars, and groceries; congregate at neighbourhood churches; support the same football teams; and adopt similar economic survival strategies, running small-scale businesses such as groceries, barbershops, or bottle stores from their houses (Lee 2017). Miners invest in intra-network relations, offering each other food and beers, monetary support, accommodation, moral support, and loans as a way of managing economic vulnerability arising from loss of employment, indebtedness or family bereavements. They share information about possible jobs, loans, investment or business opportunities, and discuss how to juggle debts to survive until the next monthly payday. Manifesting the double-sidedness of care, these support networks are essential to sustaining a precarious workforce, creating a reserve labour pool, and subsidising wages below the cost of living (McNamara 2021b, 2153).

Relations of care and support constitute crucial material and physiological resources for miners, particularly for lower-paid subcontractors. Miners' caring practices reveal social hierarchies that impact and are impacted by access to employment and other income-generating activities. They also manifest interdependence across these hierarchies, shaped by rather fragile differentiations in wealth based on temporary jobs or access to costly credit. While miners claim to be individuals seeking to 'move' up social 'levels', they do so through relations of care, unpaid communal labour, intra-community resource transfers, and debt (Musonda 2021a; McNamara 2021b; Haynes 2017). In the words of one miner, 'we feel each other's heartbeat' and hence the obligation to care for their co-workers and community members. Workers did not only protect each other's employment because they understood the suffering unemployment caused in Kitwe, but also because they might need support if they themselves lost their jobs. Miners explained: "If I lose a job, it is better my neighbour has a job." This felt experience of care and interdependence, an economically necessary response to precarity, shaped workers' workplace practices and their investment in maintaining production.

Miners worked to protect each other from the dangers of underground and from loss of income or employment in various ways—often, as we explained in the article's opening paragraphs, by hiding accidents or other impediments from superiors, while seeking to care for their fellow workers. For instance, when Isaac, a drill operator, reported for work under the influence of alcohol (after bribing the security officers at the mine entrance), his colleagues noted that in his drunken state, he could not work properly and risked causing an accident. "He was too drunk to work...he was very vulnerable to accidents because he could not hold the drill machine properly," explained Bishop, his colleague: "So we just gave him a place to rest and ... plenty of water as work proceeded without him." For Isaac, this protection was crucial; he already had a final warning for similar misconduct. Reporting his drunkenness would have led to instant dismissal, an outcome which would not just have impacted his own wellbeing but, given his specific skills, his team's ability to meet their production targets.

Miners' caring practices in the abode of production took place in an environment structured by companies seeking to surveil and discipline miners in order to minimise production time lost to injuries or deaths. Evidencing "the crude economic rationale behind safety", companies displayed "lost-time injuries and deaths" at mine entrances, in safety meetings and in annual reports (Musonda & Pugliese 2021: 61). However, there are contradictions between safety procedures designed to protect miners and the pressure on miners to maintain production. In narratives like 'The Mopani Way', safety rules hold workers responsible for safety, blaming them for lapses. Mining is inherently dangerous, however, and accidents can be caused by the overall environment and pressures it puts on workers. Moreover, miners can find themselves penalised for following safety procedures or demanding repairs that require a pause in production. Workers often worked to find ways around procedures so they could care for injured colleagues but continue to access the benefits they needed to support their families. These informal practices and rules, as traced in other ethnographies of mineworkers (Phakathi 2018; Gordon 1977; Moodie 1994), sustained production in difficult conditions, undergirding continued extraction and profit-making.

The effectiveness of miners' strategies of care depended on their tacit knowledge of the dangers of mine work—knowledge built through many years of experience. In one case, when Mulenga, a boilermaker, accidentally cut his finger, his team agreed not to report the accident because it would have entailed the suspension of production and reduced the points they had accumulated towards production targets. His team performed first aid and supported Mulenga

who hid the wound until he left the gate. Later that night, Mulenga reported the accident at the company hospital as if it had happened at home, receiving the necessary care and sick leave without jeopardising the team's production bonus. However, when miner Justin developed a head injury two months earlier, his team reported the matter instantly. His supervisor and colleague explained: "We could not hide that case because with head injuries a person can look alright, but can die later."

Nevertheless, sometimes things did go wrong, revealing the high cost of subversion on miners, the wider workforce and their families. John, a rock driller, suffered a head injury when a rock fell on him while drilling. Instead of stopping work and have John attended to by the medical staff, his team assessed the injury to be minor. In the words of his colleague, "It was a small rock and caused no bleeding and no open wound", so they simply gave him a painkiller and continued with their work. At the end of the shift, the team had achieved their target. The following morning, John reported for work and finished his duties for the day. The day after that, however, he was unconscious; his wife took him to hospital where the doctor made a diagnosis of head injury due to rockfall. John spent two weeks recovering. Once discharged, he was lucky to be given a final warning for concealing an injury as he claimed it had happened at home. The risks commonly taken by workers endangered their own health, job, and future employment prospects. They also passed the costs of their dangerous work onto those who cared for them in the workplace and at home.

Trade unionists: An intercalary of obfuscated care

Zambian mining unions built onto, and were a resource within, miners' networks of care, filling gaps in the workers' caring practices. Unionists play an intercalary role, supporting miners' fabric of relations with and within their community and working to maintain and repair relations between miners and company HR staff. They perform this work despite their relative weakness and fragmented membership base. Economic liberalisation and privatisation of the mines ended the one union, one industry policy which had guaranteed the Mineworkers' Union of Zambia (MUZ) its membership and role in negotiations at the sectoral level. Liberalisation and privatisation instead heralded an age of inter-union competition and bargaining between individual employers and their employees. Unions have little ability to secure wage increases, and disciplinary procedures leave HR managers almost complete discretion in disciplining workers (McNamara 2021a).

Despite their weakness, however, unions are still important social actors in Copperbelt life. At older, underground mines, unionisation levels have remained high among direct employees. Uzar (2017:301) found that in 2014, 77.5% of workers at Mopani Copper Mines who held ongoing contracts were unionised—although this rate dropped to 35% once subcontracted workers were included. In order to fund themselves in spite of lower membership numbers and members' diminishing salaries, unions offer financial services and sell daily essentials, often on credit, to miners' families. They linked miners to pay-day lenders and insurance providers, using their bulk buying power to reduce prices, but also adopting the caring labour of negotiating repayments. As well as facilitating these financial flows, unions pool miners' wealth through membership fees and distribute it to those who need care. Branch executives aided miners directly, frequently finding money for emergency essentials ranging from school fees to funerals. Responding to company attempts to disembed the mine from the community and wider circuits of social reproduction, workplace-based union volunteers assisted miners in meeting their material needs and maintaining their dignity in the workplace and their wider

lives. Unionists adopted the emotional and financial costs of this care, or diffused them through the union.

Contrasting with their practices of care and credit, Zambia's mining unions framed their role as technocratic and militant. Union training for MUZ, which remained the largest union, for instance, depicted MUZ as a powerful legalistic organisation, in daily combat with mine management. The Research and Training team often began induction for shop stewards and branch executives by telling them it was 'their first day as lawyers'. The largest branch had 60 shop stewards and a monthly budget of 8200ZKM (820USD); most branches had a fraction of this. Nevertheless, unionists were encouraged to conceptualise themselves as a sprawling bureaucracy, forming small groups like a Financial Committee, a Technical Advisory Committee and a Representative Committee. The purpose of these groups and the lawyerly demeanour encouraged through training was 'Good Representation'. The MUZ Deputy General Secretary explained: "You must be tough and not give in to management...knowing what your members need...even when management says no."

While workplace-based union volunteers interacted with narratives of a powerful militant union, they often assumed responsibility for maintaining fragile and exploitative labour relations. All branch executives ran training for miners on budgeting and indebtedness, allowing them to live off ever-reducing salaries; as well as on subjects like 'Cleanliness' and 'Marital Harmony', which shaped them as both domestic and workplace subjects. One branch ran a quiz on workplace safety for miners' partners, with a generous prize provided by the mine's HR department. The logic was that these partners would only learn the quiz's answers through 'nagging their husbands to follow safety procedure.' Similarly, branch executives responded to minor workplace disturbances by 'counselling' their co-workers on issues including mine procedure, tardiness and sleeping on duty. Unionists' practices reveal again the double-sidedness of care; trade unionists worked to support miners in difficult circumstances, but their counsel also focused on how to sustain what were exploitative employment relations.

Similarly, protecting miners and their jobs at times required lawyerly confrontations with HR staff, but more often it necessitated strong relations with company HR staff and knowledge of wider social and familial networks running through and beyond the mine. When dysentery led to tens of children seeking admission to one company's mine hospital, a branch chairman, aware one of the children was related to a line manager, leveraged this relational knowledge to ensure the admission of those from poorer families who had initially been turned away. Similarly, a shop steward explained that his social relationships with several of his supervisors, formed through frequenting the same bars, enabled him to 'move in quickly' and offer counselling as a solution before a disciplinary infraction was taken to HR. The steward explained that he 'used his intimate relationships' with managers and reminded these managers of their social connections to miners (friendships, kinships, sporting club memberships) to avoid disciplinary action.

If a dispute could not be solved informally, a unionist would represent a member at a disciplinary hearing. This was the most lawyerly part of the role; unionists often described successful hearings when asked about their proudest moment in the union. Most unionists stressed the need to investigate the charge, which on rare occasions, might lead to exoneration. One branch chairman discovered a miner was being falsely charged with sleeping on the job by a supervisor who owed him money. However, more commonly, investigations were used to offer a narrative that could mitigate a charge, so unionists could 'go and beg for members'.

One branch chairman recalled with pride when a member who was being fired for consistent absenteeism confided he had been having issues with his wife. He successfully pled with the HR department for the member to be suspended without pay and offered marital counselling. In another case, in response to the questionable termination of several members employed by a subcontracted drilling company, a branch chairman initially hoped to engage in court action. Eventually, however, he came to believe he would have more success arguing that ‘in the interests of industrial harmony’, the miners should receive a termination benefit.

Crucial to ‘begging for members’ was taking on moral responsibility for a worker, and engaging HR staff emotionally in that worker’s fate. One branch treasurer explained:

I retained two men who were caught with alcohol...I went to the boss and he said, ‘no, me, I’m going to fire them’. Then I started talking to him [I said], ‘Look at it, this man has got children, now are you going to be proud to see his children are suffering because you, you’ve made a decision to fire him’. He said, ‘Look this person he likes coming to work just like this [drunk], so what are you going to do to assure me that next time he won’t come like this’. I said, ‘Give me where I am going to sign and I can assure you that this person won’t do anything’. He said, ‘Ok, I’ll give him a six-months final warning...if he comes to work under the influence of alcohol it will be your own responsibility’... for these six months I was talking to this person every day and that person really changed.

Evidencing the success of her representation, she explained: “That manager... he [now] calls me for counselling sessions, ‘talk to these people...they are latecomers, what, what’, because of that person who really changed.” Rather than legalistically and militantly challenging an extractive economic system, she adopted evermore emotional and practical responsibility for her employer’s output.

Their care work protecting miners and repairing relations between the mine and community had material and emotional costs for unionists and their families. While a minority of branch executives and senior union leaders grew rich out of unionism, the majority—like many miners—paid their bills through holding two jobs, and would lend or offer their families’ money to workers who needed emergency assistance. They also found responsibility for management’s unpopular decisions hoisted upon them. When one mine had an absenteeism problem, its HR manager decided to fire one absenting worker a month as an example. She claimed to work with the branch executives in deciding who to fire. Representation was similarly an extractive experience for unionists’ families. The time and labour demands of unionism meant unionists often contributed little to their households. Further, because some branch executives were proud to lend, but reluctant to borrow money, their partners relied on gifts and loans from their own kin and social networks to maintain their household. A chance meeting between a branch chairman and a HR officer at a restaurant led to the former suggesting their families combine tables for dinner. Building the intimate relationships needed to assist miners, he insisted on paying. As the branch chairman fixed the bill, his wife and her sister discretely put the left-over sausages into a napkin and then their bags, to be used as relish for the rest of the week. Their frugality underlined the costs of the chairman’s investment in relationships with HR.

Managerial care and the ‘bottom-line’

The ‘double-sidedness’ of care and its role in enabling exploitation is especially evident in the work of HR staff in the mines, who sit on the interface between primarily foreign management teams and Zambian workers and their trade unionists. They negotiate between standards, protocols and plans of top management and realities of work in the abode of production on a daily basis. It is government policy that HR positions be filled by Zambians, a position recently backed by legal reforms.⁵ Zambian government and practitioner discourses painted Zambian HR managers as having the requisite legal and cultural expertise to manage the tensions of post-privatisation labour management, emphasising their role not just in maintaining production but enforcing Zambian laws and protecting workers (Lochery & Rubbers 2021).

HR staff in the mines had ambivalent views on the role of care work in their job, reflecting companies’ retreat from investment in social reproduction. For some, care was a core facet of their work but one that was undervalued, unrewarded, and at times degraded and denied. A recently retired senior human resource executive in the Copperbelt compared HR to a nursing career, a profession requiring you to ‘love people’. However, the HR manager continued, since privatisation, the ethos of HR management itself had changed: “In our time, we were driven by passion.” Today, she argued, people do HR because it is what’s available—a qualification that can lead to a job. She highlighted how human resource management had “evolved”, explaining that whereas under ZCCM, many of her colleagues had no qualifications in HR, “today you see an insistence that people have a degree, even a masters”. Skills and an ability to contribute to the “bottom line”, rather than care, were the critical factors.

With the neoliberal turn and deconstruction of corporate paternalism, HR managers are no longer bureaucrats overseeing a welfare infrastructure designed to care for and control workers (Jacoby 2004). They must prove their value through containing labour costs while preventing labour unrest. Embedded in small, relatively weak departments, HR managers in Zambia’s mines are responsible for a range of functions from recruitment, salaries and remuneration to promotion and discipline, industrial relations, and interactions with relevant regulatory bodies. HR staff are expected to train, motivate, and be versatile (Lochery & Rubbers 2021). Legacies do remain, nonetheless, of the HR department’s role managing paternalist welfare infrastructure. Many mines maintain social welfare offices outside the plant to receive complaints from miners’ families about miners not bringing home money, not fulfilling family responsibilities, or drinking and having extramarital affairs. HR managers are positioned as counsellors, at times mediating agreements between husband and wife about household budgets or running seminars on how to build a ‘happy home’. Such practices emphasise the lingering impact of ZCCM’s paternalist labour regime, both in community expectations and public and government discourses about the role of Zambian HR managers in overseeing the welfare of Zambian workers.

However, HR staff are given few tools to meet these expectations; their main resource is their ability to perform emotional labour by counselling, instructing and encouraging. At the bottom of the HR hierarchy in particular, HR officers were regularly confronted with predicaments of indebted miners with little left on their payslips and complaints of struggling families. Junior HR staff earn less than some higher-paid skilled miners and face challenges similar to much of the workforce: the rising cost of living, precarity, and scarcity of employment. They know the

⁵ Section 61(1)(a) of the Employment Code of 2019 restricted employment of expatriates to areas defined as critical skills by a committee appointed by the Ministry of Labour—which does not include HR management. Sections 11(1) and 13(d) of the ZIHRM Act No. 3 of 2022 require, under threat of criminal penalty, any person employed or practicing HR to be registered as a practitioner with ZIHRM and a citizen or resident of Zambia.

“feel of the texture of workers’ lives”; many expressed ‘the gut-level empathy’ (Jackall 1988: 133) engendered by close interaction and overlapping social circles in small mining towns.

The practices and discourses of many more senior Zambian HR managers did reflect an aspiration to detachment. They emphasised their position in company bureaucratic hierarchies as superior to and different from mineworkers who they presented as less educated, stubborn, and less aware of the ‘realities’ of the market and modern capitalism. They underlined the need to convince workers and unionists to keep demands ‘reasonable’, emphasising, as one former head of HR at two large mines put it, at ‘the end of the day we need to have the copper on the table’. They linked workers’ interests to the welfare of the company. Caring about workers meant instructing them, through words and incentives, how to act ‘responsibly’, including accepting low or no pay rises to ensure the company kept producing, stayed open, and provided jobs.

However, even senior Zambian managers’ day-to-day work belied discourses of detachment. Amid the focus on salary administration and performance management, HR managers’ work was inextricably concerned with maintaining and repairing social relations. We’re the ‘cleaners’, the HR manager in charge of one mine site remarked, explaining how maintaining industrial peace involved clearing up miscommunications and misunderstandings across the mine. Managers had to listen and remain conscious of the realities of miners’ lives—the family expectations on their shoulders, transport costs, and details like the cost of withdrawing money—as well as the implications of broader local and national politics. They had to manifest fairness and calm in interactions with workers and unionists.

Successful managers at older mines with stronger union branches emphasised the need to build good relations with union leaders, whose cooperation and support could be essential in calming workers in times of tension. One branch chairman pointed to the divide between Zambian HR staff and the foreign management team, saying he reminded the Zambian HR staff they had an interest in good relations with the union as “their job depends on us”. Ununionised and on fixed term contracts, HR managers were vulnerable if disagreements at mine sites escalated into a wildcat strike or worker protest (Lee 2017). Their position as senior Zambian employees was privileged compared to the vast majority of Zambian mineworkers, but they were generally not part of expatriate social and professional circles. They had to balance between cultivating a detached authoritative personality, gaining the trust of foreign management, and manifesting their understanding of and sympathy for local Zambian realities.

At times, managers worked, often with trade union representatives, to soften the corners of a mine’s disciplinary system, either in individual cases or through general policies. At one smaller mine, the employee relations manager explained how, through consultations with branch union leaders, management resolved to breathalyse workers before they reached the gate. If the test detected traces of alcohol, workers would be sent home and charged with absenteeism, preventing them from being instantly dismissed for coming to work after drinking alcohol. This was framed as a way to help miners ‘reform’, giving them ‘three times to repent’. While this helped some miners maintain their employment, it shows how HR managers’ relations with and ability to put pressure on union leaders were key in mobilising unionists’ caring practices for the benefit of the company. The differential power and interdependence of HR staff and unionists ensured unionist labour devoted to protecting members’ jobs maintained extraction and increased managerial control over the workforce.

Manifesting care for miners' welfare was also deployed as a symbolic act, which did little to relieve the overall hardship and precarity of miners, instead stabilising the low-wage regime. For example, during collective bargaining negotiations, rather than offer a higher wage increase, an HR manager could propose increasing funeral grants available to workers or their families upon their death or that of any dependents registered with the company. Because of the social importance of funerals in Zambia and families' desire to fulfil expectations and feed the many attendees, the funeral grant was important. However, despite the symbolic nature, the cost to the company was much lower than a salary increase. Care was deployed within a wider calculative rationality to ensure continued extraction.

Managers' position in mining company hierarchies, their work counselling and briefing miners, and their efforts to manifest sympathy or understanding made them vulnerable to accusations of betrayal when companies' minimal investment in the social reproduction of labour became evident. Particularly in the context of retrenchment, Zambian HR staff were seen to side with or seek recognition from foreign management in their efforts to cut labour. Miners sometimes advanced the narrative that white expatriate managers wanted to increase wages or improve conditions, but Zambian HR managers frustrated these efforts in an effort to prove their own importance and effectiveness. HR managers were in a complex position. To appear powerful and authoritative, they had to present themselves as part of management. To be effective in their job, they had to manifest understanding of the travails of miners and deploy emotional labour to hold together fraying labour bargains. However, when they then had to implement retrenchments or negotiate no or low salary increases, their claim to power and role as an intermediary and translator made them the target of criticism. Like the unionists described above, at times they bore the costs of companies' actions as they worked to repair relations between the mine and community.

Conclusion: Extracted through care

In this article, we explored how undervalued and often obfuscated labours of care maintain extraction in Zambia's copper mines. Building on insights from social reproduction theory and scholarship on care and repair, we explored care as a relational practice within the workplace and among employees and their families in the wider community. Miners like Ezra protected each other underground, while their families offered emergency cash and emotional assistance to those living pay-check to pay-check. Trade unionists facilitated loans and training, but more importantly repaired personal relations among miners and between miners and HR. HR managers enacted these relations through their discretionary engagement with miners and professionalised them through social welfare departments. In each case these necessary (and costly) relations of care were discursively discouraged. Miners were framed as individuals dedicated to meeting their 'levels', the union as a combative organisation, and mines as sites of individuated responsibility and market relations.

Our analysis of the importance of care in the sustenance of capitalist production and capture of value traces the impact of widespread changes involving the disinvestment of capital in welfare infrastructure for labour. While many multinational companies have invested in demonstrating abstract ideals of care and social responsibility (Rajak 2011, Kirsch 2014), in practice, companies have implemented more austere labour management strategies and extensive subcontracting. Discursively, they emphasise the need for workers to be responsible and reasonable in order to receive rewards for their labour. Such discourses, repeated by unionists and managers under pressure to maintain their own position and dependent on workers to

deliver in order to keep the mine open, frame austerity as a ‘realistic’ form of care for workers in a difficult and unstable global market.

Meanwhile, the bulk of the physical and emotional labour of care that enables workers to cope with austere and exploitative work conditions is by default delegated down employment hierarchies. Zambian mineworkers’ caring practices help them cope with dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs underground, making do and trying to game the system to win bonuses needed to sustain themselves and their families. These caring practices are life-giving or lifesaving in some cases, but at times they increase the physical and emotional toll of minework. They also prolong rather than challenge exploitative circumstances. Care may be an “arena of negotiation and subversion” (Berman-Arévalo and Ojeda, 2020: 1596). However, while miners’ practices of care underground often subvert the rules governing employee conduct, they do not challenge the wider order under which they labour. Indeed, managers higher up the hierarchy at times turn a blind eye to subversive caring practice precisely because they help maintain production. Our analysis underlines how the work of caring in capitalist workplaces is frequently pushed onto people without recognition of or provision for this work (Corwin and Gidwani, 2021)—indeed, some risk being penalised for their labours of care.

Secondly, we have demonstrated how, even as we map the fragmentation of workforces, the multiplicity of class projects, and most fundamentally, the pulling back of corporate capital from investment in social reproduction and welfare infrastructure, it remains important to consider the connective social tissue within and beyond the workplace that enables continued production and capitalist extraction. Many of the caring practices, affective labour, and efforts to support, encourage and help that we have discussed contradict the association of neoliberal work regimes with responsabilisation and individual ‘entrepreneurial’ identities. Our case study outlines the paradox that in an age of fragmentation, social success is born out of navigating and participating in relations of interdependence. Interdependence does not mean equality: we have emphasised how care work as relational labour is shaped by power relations and people’s position in social and company hierarchies. Different categories of actors articulated their caring practices differently, reflecting different professional, social, and political identities, relationship with the company, and position at work and in the wider community.

Indeed, our analysis returns to a problematic at the centre of this issue’s focus on the ‘tensions of care’. While acts of care can represent an ethics of mutual support, resilience, and community solidarity, they also enable hierarchies of power, exploitative capitalist relations, and the extraction of wealth. Focusing on caring practices in the abode of production highlights the troubling ways in which capitalist production is mediated by people’s asymmetric interdependence and their impulses to repair, maintain, and care for themselves, and their friends, colleagues and acquaintances. It is not an accident that all of the actors whose care subsidised production were Zambian; and it is likely that differing relations of care between expatriates, subcontracting company owners and senior mine management justified and enabled their claims on (Zambia’s) mining wealth (see Appel 2019, 79-136). We need to acknowledge how these hidden forms of care in the workplace constitute the ability and effort to live through dispossession, exploitation, and extraction, even as they make this exploitation possible.

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