Introduction

Where Life is in the Pits (and Elsewhere) and Gendered¹

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The ‘pit’?

*Pit:* 1. a hole, shaft or cavity in the ground; 2. mine; 3. a. a scooped out place used for burning something as charcoal, b. an area often sunken or depressed below the adjacent floor area; 4. hell – used with the ‘s’ - a place or situation of futility, misery or degradation. 

*Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002*

Mining literature yields much more than the sense of depth implied in the dictionary definition. Social scientists – economic and labour historians, human geographers, anthropologists and development experts – do see more than just depth; they see people busy in various jobs in the mine pits. However, people in the ‘pit’ are almost always seen as being ‘pit men’, as though pits are, and always have been, inhabited by men. Words associated with pit men are also masculine, such as ‘labouring men’, creating a ‘proletarian solidarity’², ‘a man from the picks’, and above all ‘the working class’. The plunge down the shaft and the darkness at the end led trade union leaders (Dange, 1945) to use the expression ‘death pits of our land’. This is rendered heroic, as writers laud ‘the nonchalance with which our diggers daily face death itself’ (Coleman, 1945). Carter Goodrich (1925) defined the miner as ‘an isolated piece worker on a rough sort of work, who

¹ By gender, we imply an asymmetrical social relationship between women and men based on perceived social differences, and an ideology regarding their roles, rights, and values as workers, owners, citizens, and parents. We understand it as a process and a structure and use it to draw attention to the gendered nature of mine production (Lahiri-Dutt, 2006).

² This solidarity is expressed not only in strong traditions of unionism, but a ‘marraship’ or mateship among co-workers, identification with a particular seam, and cavilling or grouping.
sees his boss less often than once a day. People in the pits of that era were seen as men undertaking dangerous, dirty, risky and hazardous work and were characterized by masculinity suitable for independent heroes (see Harrison, 1978). Robinson (1996: 137) comments:

...mining provides us with powerful visual and metaphorical images; it is gargantuan, dangerous, heroic and mysterious, involving destruction and penetration of the earth’s surface ... Images of mining as human endeavour incorporates the imperatives of physical strength, endurance and filth, all characteristics of masculinised work.

In the pits, according to Connell (1987: 85) the physicality is ‘one of the main ways in which the power of men becomes “naturalized”, i.e. seen as part of the order of nature’. Thus, pit life was perceived as a uniquely male world where the sharing of risks contributed to the formation of a particular form of male solidarity, endowing their manual labour with attributes of masculinity (Garside, 1971).

Women in pit communities, therefore, were seen as the quintessential ‘other’ of pit men, and are commonly seen as miners’ wives, staying at home and supporting their working class men, who endanger their lives by going down the mines to earn the bread for their families (Carr, 2003). Gibson-Graham (1994: 207) dissects this position:

...miners’ wives are still constituted within a discourse that brings to the foreground the functional overlap of capitalist exploitation and patriarchal oppression. Working class first and women second, miners’ wives are subsumed within the fictional identity ‘working class’ and relegated to the status of Other within this totalizing conception.

Women in mining communities are not seen as active participants in the economy; they are represented as working class women shouldering the burden of domestic responsibilities in deplorable living conditions, and the dangerous, dirty and irregular work of their husbands, fathers and brothers. Once this perception becomes established and entrenched, processes of change, especially those imposed by the State, the agencies and companies from above begin to use gender-neutral lenses in dealing with ‘the community’.

When this perception of women as only miners’ wives, as part of ‘the community’, is held by the heads of community development experts, the consequences become potentially dangerous. For instance, this fact is immediately

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3 ‘One of the redeeming features of pit work, and one that miners will fight to maintain, is that of independent job control...’ (Douglass, 1972: 2). Thus we see the pits becoming also the ‘frontier of control’ (Goodrich, 1920) that miners resist (Parkinson, 1920: 20).

4 We even have ‘Pit yacker’ (Hitchin, 1962) but that’s not the subject of our interest here.

5 Rothermund’s (1994) report on the relationship between the degree of political awareness and levels of income amongst working women of the coalfields of Dhanbad, India, showed little positive relationship with the concentration of economic development.
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apparent with a casual reading of development planning instruments that are currently being offered to the mining industry. In its 125 pages or so of the Community Development Toolkit of the International Council on Mining and Metals/World Bank (2005), gender does not merit great mention. The Toolkit does not assume the community to be an undifferentiated mass: there are checklists of possible stakeholders and instructions on their identification (pp. 18-20), but takes for granted that the benefits would automatically reach women. Even in locations where women have not been part of the workforce, Hipwell et al. (2002: 11) suggests that the impacts of mining operations are gender differentiated. As mining companies move in developing countries in the contemporary context offering only a few jobs and many ills, changing gender roles and robbing women of their rights of participating in determining the benefits, one must search for ways of making the developments more inclusive and beneficial for both women and men, so that pits are not seen as a masculine domain of work and women are placed at home.

Pit women

However, once we are in the pit, and our eyes are accustomed to the darkness, we begin to see them as gendered places. We start to see figures of women working alongside men. These are our ‘pit women’ who are at the centre of this book. These near invisible pit women – ‘pit brow lasses’ (John, 1980) or kamins or dulangs or palliris – are crucial to building a gendered understanding of mining. Whatever the name, women’s work in the mines has remained obscure and hidden, forgotten and devalued. Thus mine pits have come to be the playing fields of men, the work either excluding women altogether or attributing a lower place to women. Yet, it would be a folly to construct a homogeneous and universal category of ‘women in mining’ or ‘mining women’, partly because the countries we are dealing with have experienced mining in different ways and also because of the multitude of identities of women in developing countries.

Mining has played an important role in the modernization process in the developed world; although mining has a long artisanal history, in developing countries recently it is taking increasingly diverse and complicated forms. Mining is now a truly global enterprise with ramifications from the local to national to

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6 The Third World, less developed countries or the global South.
7 Koczberski (1998: 404) notes her reservations about treating women as a separate socio-economic category: ‘by compartmentalising women the (gender analysis) framework renders irrelevant the linkages between women’s various work roles, kinship relationships and the social, cultural and political systems of which they are a part. Women’s work activities, their access to resources and their needs are not isolated fragments, rather they are intricately embedded within communities in which they live. To ignore these linkages predispose simplistic and unrealistic analyses and constructs images far removed from reality.’
global. In several parts of the developing world, women have worked in the past and continue to work as miners, either independently, as part of a family unit of labour, or as employees of others. As more and more mining ‘breaks ground’ in the developing countries (MMSD, 2002), these roles become important, raising some questions. Do we see women as victims of the ill-effects of mining on the community and suffering without agency, at best fit for soft servicing jobs as ‘secretaries and office clerks’, or do we see them as equal and productive partners in an empowering process of development? There is not yet enough literature that illuminates how gendered identities and inequalities are constructed and sustained in mines in developing countries. This book intends to begin filling that gap, with a view to engendering the mining related development processes, and put forth an interdisciplinary approach in examining women in the mine pits and quarries of the past and the present.

Mining and gendered constructions

Poor working conditions in the pits of the past gave rise to a strong sense of occupational identity, which often extended to entire mining communities, but nevertheless rendered women and their work in the mines invisible. The heavy manual character of the work, the dirt and risk tend to be emphasized and tend to make the male miner the typical labourer, and to protect their interests over those of women workers (see Eveline, 1995; Metcalfe, 1987). The frontier nature of mining, according to Burke (1995), has been seen as creating a situation in which ‘the ideal cultural goal was a hard-nosed style of doing things in management, supervisors and men’ which is ‘unashamedly sexist’ (Williams, 1981: 50). The masculine work culture arouses masculinist analysis such as this (Allen, 1981: 4):

…mining evokes popular images of hard unrefined men, distinct and separate from other workers, hewing in mysterious dungeons of coal: dirty, strange men, in some ways frightening and for this reason repellent, yet attractive because they are masculine and sensuous…

The miner occupies a special place in western popular culture, rising almost to the status of an icon. Orwell’s (1937) words resound of the cruelty and hellish romance of the coal miner’s occupation, which builds an aura of sentiment: ‘all of us owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel’. According to Campbell (1984):

Miners are men’s love object. They bring together all the necessary elements of romance… It is the nature of the work that produces a tendency among men to see it as essential and elemental, all those images of men down in the abdomen of earth, raiding

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8 See Lahiri-Dutt, 2000b; 2001.
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its womb for the fuel that makes the world go round. The intestinal metaphors foster the cult of this work as dark and dangerous, an exotic oppression … it constructs the miner as earth-man and earth-man is true man. And it completed the equation between some idea of elemental work and essential masculinity. This romance is duly mirrored in working class politics – miners are the Clark Gables, the Reds of class struggle.

The masculinity that emerges from the images of the miner as a man is revealed both in the industry and in the politics of socialism in which miners have historically played a central part. John (1980) believed that the root of this masculinism lies in the circumstances surrounding the exclusion of women from underground work in the name of protecting them from the risky and hard mining jobs. In some British collieries in the eighteenth century, women actually stood or doubled, often in knee-deep water, in deep and thin shafts. Rev. Eddy (1854: 296-7) gave a vivid description:

…females submit to labour in places which no man, or even lad could be got to labour in; they work in bad roads, up to their knees in water, in a position nearly double; they are below till the last hour of pregnancy; their limbs and ankles swell, and they are prematurely brought to the grave, or what is worse, a lingering existence.

A sixteen-year-old girl working as windlass woman is quoted by Rev. Eddy as saying: ‘We wind up 800 loads (a day). Men do not like the winding. It is too hard work for them’. Yet, the masculinity of mining continued to be represented. For us, such representations are important because they initiated protective interventions around women’s work in the mines. For example, a self-congratulatory public outcry in Britain resulted in the exclusion of women from the mines. Similar legislation followed in several European countries who exported this legal protectionism into their colonies. As is well known, protectionism is notorious for causing double hardship for women. For example, in the case of Britain, after the submission of petitions that women may be restored to the ‘privilege’ of working in the mines that they might not starve, they were permitted to work in the mines again. The result was that working conditions for women were not improved and they re-entered the mines subdued and at the mercy of the owners. More complicated examples can be cited from the contemporary situation in developing countries. Menstruation leave, for example, provided by the Indonesian state as a gender right to all working women (but not commonly utilized), has recently posed intricately complex issues and dilemmas for women workers in the mine pits in Indonesian collieries (Lahiri-Dutt and Robinson, 2006).

If mines are seen as masculine work areas, then the use of machines has differential impacts on women and men’s work. The increased use of technology in Indian mines has been largely responsible for the exclusion of women mineworkers (Lahiri-Dutt, 2000). Exclusion of women from the mines was supported sometimes by superstitions, but also by the protective laws that restrict women from working in the mines. Such laws are not uncommon in other Asian
countries as well. However, in some of the large mines owned by multinational companies, technological advances have transformed jobs that were formerly considered to be ‘heavy’ for women and enable women to work in areas such as plant operation. Indeed, in a Thai mine, women were preferred as vehicle drivers because of their better safety record. In Papua New Guinea women work in geological exploration, plant operations and other fields that were in the past male domains (see Macintyre, this volume). The hypocrisy of patriarchal social values and fixed notions about a woman’s place reinforce the delineation and distinction of male and female roles in mines. In prohibiting their participation in wage labour, they effectively confine women to domestic and marginal economic roles.

Mining, as a range of practices, has gendered orientations that in this book we put under a lens – scrutinizing intersections of space, place, race, ethnicity and class. Looking through this lens, we also reflect upon the gendered nature of mines as a special place, attributing a specific place to women in its economic organization. Through this lens, the mine-pits emerge as gendered places and the ‘miners’ become visible as gendered subjects defying conventional geographies and histories of space and industrial work. Traditionally, the history of exclusion of women from the pits has been represented as a masculine victory, protecting the gentler sex from the rigours of dangerous and heavy work. The differential positions of women and men in the spheres of industrial production reflect the social relations of gender and are perpetuated by gender ideologies that infantilize women; economic differences among women result from the inequalities of class and ethnicity, structured by the mode of production. The social organization of mining imposes unequal economic and social relationships on women and men, helping to subordinate the position of women both within the industry and outside it, in the community, directly as well as indirectly.

**Pit women as social subjects**

In the large literature on the social and cultural attributes of mining communities, pit men are represented as a certain kind of subject – independent, free-willed and rational. How do we then place pit women? Metcalfe (1988) examined the drunkenness, gambling, assault and rioting stereotypes of male miners. The coal miner is seen as a ‘pit horse’, a ‘big hewer’ and these physical characteristics lead to the glorification of his masculinity. Moore, in his 1974 book, *Pit Men, Preachers and Politics*, tried to negate the macho image and show that pit men were actually god-fearing religious people. He stated that ‘miners were traditionally conservative and resisted traditional proletarian social imagery’ (p. 17). The early work of Kerr and Siegel (1954) suggested that the isolation of miners from the wider community (both in their work and their lives outside the

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9 Examples that come to mind are Japan, China, India and Indonesia — all major coal/mineral producers now or in the past.
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mine) made them a particularly cohesive group who tended to be characterized as the ‘other’ of the ‘normal’ society.

One theorization of mining and gender has come from the early conceptualizations of mineral wealth being equated with the ‘natural endowment’, the basis of wealth accumulation. Minerals are, however, found hidden from humans, needing searching for them and prying open the ‘womb’ or the belly of the earth in a manner of violating the mother earth, penetrating her secrets, raping her of her prized wealth. This powerful organismic metaphoric view, put together with the fact of mining being associated with the expansion of imperialism and capitalism, challenges the ‘moral framework of organic unity, of an animated natural world, and allowed values to be turned upside down’, so that the commercial exploitation became equivalent to rape of the earth (see Robinson, 1996: 138-9; Burke, this volume, for elaboration of this view). Within this cultural framework, women are positioned outside productive labour and those who engage in mining work are perceived as masculinized and ‘denatured’.

There have been other theorizations of gender in mining. In her assessment of the place of women in mines in Zambia during the colonial period, Parpart (1983: 1) used an economic analysis of class (although women as the exploited class rings throughout), affirming the gender inequalities:

Women spent most of their day ensuring the daily reproduction of labour. As with their husbands, capital-labour relations defined much of their lives. Thus on the surface, the African women in copper mining areas seemed truly working class wives, while willing to engage in class struggle against capital, these women also struggled against their male ‘protectors’.

This is not unusual, as Gibson noted (1992: 29):

…unlike the miner, whose class position defines for him a seemingly clear role in capitalist class struggles, the miner’s wife’s class position appears to involve a problematic relationship to working class politics.

She argues that this ambivalence robs women of their agency and fails to see their productive roles (p. 30):

The construction of women as unknowable or unpredictable political subjects is a politically debilitating result of theoretically locating women only in relationship to capitalist class processes (which in effect places them as spectators or, at best, reserve players in a game in which their husbands are actively involved.

Mining all over the world is an industry with strong working class traditions. This male miner, as a more or less powerful or conscious agent of the working class, is also a psychologically, emotionally and politically powerful agent of patriarchy. Feminist geographers explain this solidarity as arising out of a sexual division of
labour grounded in ‘place’, that is, in a spatial division of labour. They speculated (Massey and McDowell, 1984: 129):

…danger and drudgery: male solidarity and female oppression – this sums up life …
Here the separation of men and women’s lives was virtually total: men were the breadwinners, women the domestic labourers, though hardly the ‘angels of the house’ that featured so large in the middle class Victorian’s idealization of women.

This separation, they noted, was caused by the notion that women’s place is at ‘home’: ‘For miners’ wives almost without exception, and for many of their daughters, unpaid work in the home was the only and time-consuming option’. Many scholars saw women as being unproductive and isolated, unable to resist domestic oppression; they saw women staying at home caring and cleaning for husbands and sons who often worked different shifts and came home dirty. Using Mitchell’s (1975) expression about the wives of radical labour movement, Gibson (1992) described this phenomenon as women turning into domesticated ‘hewers of cake and drawers of tea’. Men on the other hand, were seen as gathering together in union halls or local pubs and sharing a sense of community (Library of Congress, 2001).

However, seeing women miners as social subjects in developing countries renders these views problematic, although both form important backgrounds. For developing countries, one must look at mining in its entirety, both as large and small, as oppressive and emancipating, as highly capitalized as well as a livelihood activity for women. In other words, one must look at the complexity of mining and gendered roles therein. Large scale mining does challenge the ‘normative values’ of indigenous and poor peoples and the figure of the earth as a nurturing mother is often presented as a contrary image to that of mining. Robinson quotes a mine manager (1996: 141):

I asked the Canadian personnel manager at PT INCO why the workforce was all male (except for a small number of women employed in service activities). He looked surprised at my question – as an INCO man, the ‘naturalness’ of the male workforce was unremarkable. ‘It’s government legislation,’ he said. Indeed, Indonesian labour legislation (inherited from the Dutch) does prohibit the employment of women in mines.
This serves to underscore my point about the discursive framing of mining as a masculine activity, as man’s work … Mining is so naturally ‘masculine’, its gender effects are invisible.

From the perspective of development, seeing women as equal and productive partners in mining in developing countries is a positive and affirmative step. This is achieved in the book by an engendering of the mines of developing countries, through looking at the intersections of gender with class, race, caste and ethnicity, and by reasserting the multiple identities of these pit women and their counterparts on the surfaces of quarries and elsewhere.
And others

The ‘other’ usually plays a role in our conceptualizations of the self. However, in this volume, we talk about ‘and others’ and not ‘the other’, pointing to the fact that as mining as a work area is diverse, so is its workforce. Just as both women and men have worked in mining jobs, mining too has not always been concentrated only in pits, and is not necessarily a large scale operation. Throughout most of human history, mining has been a rather small, scattered, low production and low technology affair. Early humans were able to obtain certain minerals through what we now call ‘artisanal’ or ‘small scale mining’. It was combined with agricultural and pastoral subsistence activities and the human endeavours and technological inventions successively giving rise to bronze and iron ‘ages’. Many of the mining jobs, especially in mineral-rich tracts of the developing world, still work this way, within the context of similar subsistence-based, small and informal economic activities, providing a livelihood often for communities (Labonne and Gilman, 1999). According to Jennings (1999), approximately 15-20 per cent of the world’s non-fuel mineral production comes from such mines, employing around 13 million people. The range of mining practices are lumped together as ‘artisanal and small scale mining’ (ASM) and are often seen as in dire need of ‘regulation’ and formalization’, and as disruptive of the purity of the environment of their areas of operation. The scale of environmental damage caused by artisanal mining varies – but is usually commensurate with the scale of the activity itself. The health risks and dangers often reflecting the poverty of those who quarry, pan and smelt using primitive technologies. As the studies of artisanal mining, particularly the work by Hinton illustrates, people do expose themselves to dangerous chemicals and safety standards are low – but the reasons for this are not those that apply in large scale mining. Low levels of education mean that the dangers of chemical substances (especially mercury which is used to extract gold) are often not appreciated; lack of capital prevents artisanal pit miners from erecting and maintaining safe worksites; poverty drives people to labour without attention to long-term consequences. Engineers differentiate between the various processes of tunnelling, digging, quarrying, washing, panning and mining, with accompanied differences in labour, technology and areal spread, often related to the occurrence of the mineral itself. As a result, we are initiated into a learning that sees a dichotomy in mining practices – large and small – although there is a continuum between these two extremes as evidenced by recent reports (for example, see Hentschel et al., 2002).

Poverty-driven and generating low levels of capital, ASM can be traditional, such as in the case of the Philippines or Bolivia, or it can be a cash-income, need-induced recent phenomenon as in many African countries. It can be seasonal, or encouraged by economic recession as in the case of Brazil. Regardless of the specific nature, women play important roles in such mining practices, whether in Africa, Latin America, or in the Asia-Pacific region. Of these enormous numbers of miners, as many as 30-50 per cent are women in certain countries and this
percentage is actually growing (Noestaller et al., 2004; Hinton et al., 2003; Heemskerke, 2000). Jennings noted (1999: 30):

…the impact of structural adjustment programs, low commodity prices, or drought on private and public sector employment, trading, farming and inflation has led many people, especially women who relied on subsistence agriculture, to seek new, alternative or additional paid employment for a better quality of life, more usually, just to survive.

We see a close relationship between poverty and women’s need to maintain subsistence for families; as Hentschel et al., (2002: 22) observe: ‘increasing numbers of women are entering (the) ASM sector as an alternative to subsistence agriculture, and it has been found that women are more likely to spend their income on family maintenance compared to men who may be tempted to spend their income on prostitution, gambling and alcohol. Empowering women in these communities could lead to substantial alleviation of poverty.’ Yet, neither are the women owners of mines in most cases, nor are they able to access credit from external sources to invest in their small mines due to their inability to provide collateral for bank loans.

Our understanding of mining as a gendered and contemporary ‘work’ in this segment of mining in countries remains limited. The relations between the lack of ownership of land by women and their consequent subordination in economies that flourish on the resources offered by the land, also need further investigation. In the absence of legal rights over land, continued work burdens at home and protective laws that disempower those involved, engendering the ASM sector might be an uphill task. For example, several features such as the entry of machines limiting women’s work in the mines generally remain valid in ASM too; but our understanding of women’s roles in the supply of food, drink, tools and equipment, and as traders of gold and gemstones, remains incomplete (although some recent work such as that by Amutabi and Lutta-Mekhebi, 2001, provides a wealth of information). Also incomplete is our knowledge of the control of women over the incomes earned through their participation in ASM (see Lahiri-Dutt, 2003). Women’s work remains invisible, as is evident in a comprehensive report on the Ninja gold miners of Mongolia (MBDA, 2003: 206-7):

A sharp division of labour exists between male and female ninjas … Men undertaking most of the arduous tasks such as digging, sledge hammering and hoisting, whereas women predominate in assisting from the surface, preparing bags of ore for transport, panning and in provision of ger-based services (cooking, washing, trading, etc) … the division of labour is rational, based on physical strength and stamina…

Noestaller et al. (2004: 15) note: ‘Significant numbers of women and children are involved in ASM activities, mainly in mineral processing, as well as in peripheral service activities such as providing food and water. Estimates on women participation range from 25 per cent (Tanzania, 1996) to 50 per cent (Ghana, 2001; Zimbabwe, 2001).’
But then goes on to observe:

Women placer ninjas commonly work underground in Zaaamar Soum and Sharii Gol Soum as tunnellers when the placer is thin, as women’s bodies are more flexible, smaller and more compact, rendering them quicker at tunnelling and more maneuverable at bagging and turning … The main job for women placer ninjas is as panners. This is a tedious backbreaking work, especially difficult while panning for long hours using cold water.

Clearly, there is a great need to begin comprehending the entire range of practices within the broad field of ‘mining and quarrying’ as a gendered field and throwing light on the range of work that women artisanal miners perform would enable us to see these ‘others’ of pit women working on quarries in developing countries. Our definitions of ‘mines’, ‘mine pits’, and ‘mining’ are changing. They are indeed no longer centred upon Europe and North America, and the hegemonic notions of masculinity are no longer useful. Yet, new approaches are yet to emerge. In this volume, the authors are attempting to recover gendered histories but are also trying to re-position women in the mines and engendering the vision of the present situation within the mines. Pit women and others, in the developing countries, past or present, encourage us to examine the specificities of contexts and explore the possibilities of drawing temporal and spatial parallels of gender as socially embedded practice in the mines. The essays in this volume reveal the need for further research into particular cultural, political and economic contexts for the gendered nature of work in mines and critical analysis of the way the work in the mines is represented. A gendered approach entails a reexamination of what is commonly meant by labour militancy and uncovering the rights and resistances of women miners, and the consideration of the gendered results of global capitalism and/or technology on the mining industry in all its variants.

**Mining in developing countries**

The ways in which women have experienced and are experiencing mining and related socio-economic changes in the developing countries may be different from the ways in which women have related to mining in other parts of the world. Many of the countries that are experiencing varying types of economic change were colonies of European countries in the past. They are now facing the challenges of providing better standards of living to increasingly large populations with more subtle but equally hegemonic forms of foreign economic domination in the form of globalization. Exploitation of minerals plays a significant role in their participation in the process whereby they are linked to the economies of Europe, the United States and other industrialized capitalist nations (see Connell and Howitt, 1991). Mineral extraction plays a significant role in developing economies, giving rise to numerous questions the answers to which are yet to be settled upon. What are the socio-cultural impacts of mining in developing countries? How does an indigenous
society rooted in landed traditions react when capital-intensive resource extraction descends upon it? How do the social and economic processes triggered by mining change gender roles? Experiences from some Pacific countries can give contextual answers to these questions, but the variations and specificities are only now becoming the focus of research (see Ballard and Banks, 2003).

Mining in some developing countries was part of the colonial experience, developing as enclaves at the periphery serving the primary metropolitan enclaves, while in others it fuelled industrialism, imperialism or global capitalism. Companies’ staff from other nations and workers from the host countries carried gender ideologies that were transcribed on the mining communities – often in ways that were novel, drawing on both and generating new roles for women as workers and as wives, mothers and managers of transformed household economies. While the roles of women in the mining industry have been underplayed, there is little doubt that the intensity of the activity of women in developing countries is of a higher level than that in large-scale mining, and is a subject that needs to be explored. The fact that women took and still take part in a non-traditional occupation such as mining challenges us to review the stereotypes and representatives of ‘third world women’. Were the experiences of women miners in these countries similar to those of Europe and North America during the industrial revolution and nineteenth century when the mining industry was expanding there? If not, can we move from there towards an understanding of gendered mining cultures of the developing countries? The project assumes greater importance given that in many of these countries, mining is seen as the harbinger of modernity, bringing ‘sustainable development’, part of the neo-liberal developmentalism and global capital circulations (for an example of some recent work, see Ericsson and Noras, 2005; Roonwal et al., 2005). These are neither singular nor gender-neutral processes, although the mining establishment would prefer to believe that. Capital-intensive mining is rapidly changing, choosing to use more area extensive mechanized processes making many older mines seem relatively smaller.

Multinational mining companies in countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea are increasingly employing women in administrative jobs that are conventionally seen as feminine but also in non-conventional jobs such as those in technical areas and as equipment operators. The long history of gender discrimination continues to influence employment patterns, but, as minerals are increasingly mined by machines, and women in the developing world gain access to education, so their participation in previously male-dominated areas grows. Again, seeing the mines as a large, capital-intensive and exploitative industry is only one representation of the whole gamut of processes that make up mining, and processes where a large number of the world’s poorest are concentrated in return of a low level subsistence living. As we are aware, this kind of work – heavily manual and unsafe digging, panning, transporting and processing – forms that grey area of informal, artisanal and small scale mining. But mining in these circumstances provides livelihoods not only for families but entire communities in developing countries (Hinton, 2003). We need to remember, whilst we celebrate the past
contribute and recover the histories, that mining continues to be a basis of the livelihood of millions of women and men in their daily struggles for survival.

Queens of coal and gold

However, the question as to why coal and gold feature so prominently in this book needs to be addressed. Coal has been the backbone of modern development, truly the king among all the minerals, and women mineworkers, largely unseen and unsung, were the ‘queens’ of coal whose histories and contributions are celebrated in this book. Gold is another valuable mineral, forming the basis of prosperity, with almost as much symbolic value in certain Asian cultures as coal in modern Europe. It is but natural that these two minerals would appear in several studies in this book, offering different contexts. About coal, Coleman (1945: 16) says: ‘Here is the mineral upon which industrial civilization, East and West, ultimately rests’\textsuperscript{11}. Women miners in these coal mines, whether in Britain, in America, or in the Japanese, Chinese and Indian collieries, and in the gold mines of Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Brazil and Bolivia, thus provide that invisible connecting thread to reinterpret modern labour and post-colonial histories and economies.

The search for mineral wealth inspired and drove imperial expansion. The Spanish sought gold and silver in South America, the Colonial British brought their knowledge of systems of mining and control of mineworkers to Africa, Asia and Australia. In some countries, women were seen by them as more useful labour, easier to put to work at a lower wage. In India, the early coal mines employed women of indigenous families as part of the ‘family labour unit’. Women mineworkers thus played important roles in colonial imperialism and empire-building. In India, the exclusion of women from the collieries took place in a completely different circumstance, primarily through the introduction of shaft-sinking technology, but began as a similar measure of ‘protection’ for women from the harsh working conditions of these mines (Lahiri-Dutt, 2001). In several countries, the ‘protective’ legal frameworks are still in place, although some other countries such as South Africa have revoked such laws. Although women’s labour in many other forms of work remains predominantly manual, hard, time-consuming, tedious and dangerous, it is mining that remains shrouded and protected as a male bastion.

In America, Moore (1996) showed that whereas early women miners used to hand load coal, and work manually, the affirmative action policies and the biggest coal boom in a half-century in the 1970s brought several thousands of women into the high-wage jobs in the coal mines. Old superstitions that the presence of a woman underground could bring disaster were demolished and women miners became role models for American women pioneering in non-traditional fields.

\textsuperscript{11} It’s strange, but true, that coal was called ‘cole’ till the end of 19th century in the Appalachian areas of the United States.
Women emerged as activists in the United Mine Workers of America and their non-profit organization, the Coal Employment Project. In Canada, too, where 94 per cent of coal is produced from large surface operations, women drive specialized earthmoving vehicles, and work on mining machines (Espley, Francis and Castonguay, 2004).

Gold was first mined 6,000 years ago, since which time humans have been obsessed with this beautiful and valuable mineral, leading to ‘Gold Rushes’ and upheavals of society. It is said that objects made of gold survived better than others, making gold artefacts a source of power and a symbol of wealth. That it came to be so loved in so many cultures testifies to the mysterious ways that humans confer value on resources, but it is through the attribution of value to this substance that gold has served as the most important medium of exchange and money standard throughout history. The term ‘gold’ continues to conjure images of the good and the powerful. In modern times, gold has been used in industry, computers, electronic circuits and in aero-space industry. Gold for women, however, is not only as an object of desire for jewellery but mining of the ore has been and still is a means of subsistence. From the forest-clad hills and mountains of Papua New Guinea to the Philippines, from the African continent to Latin America whether it is Bolivia or Brazil, a large number of women today are making a livelihood in gold mining. Many of these women work at low income levels, and live risky and precarious lives. At the same time, large-scale gold mining is a huge and intensely capitalized business, usually granting only marginal or token roles to women. Yet technological advances transform the labour process so that male ‘brawn and muscle’ are no longer required to extract ore – heavy machines with computerized operating systems are far more efficient. Improvements in access to education ensure that women can gain qualifications that equip them to work in all areas of mining operations. In these changing circumstances the ideological nature of female exclusion from industrial mining is exposed as discriminatory. Can gold today be turned into a mineral resource that empowers women and brings prosperity to their communities? Efforts from all sectors are underway, as we noted before, to engender mining. We hope that our book will positively contribute to the process.

The chapters in the book

Placing chapters into sections or parts provides a means of ordering the contributions, but because these come from a wide range of experts with varied experiences of mining and from different methodological backgrounds, these groupings have a measure of subjectivity and are not without overlap – indeed other groupings could have been selected.

Chapters in the first part reconstruct the gendered histories of the mine pits through examples derived from a range of countries. The first of the four chapters begins with an historical overview of women in Asian mining. Gill Burke looks at
women miners in Asia at a general and contextual level during the modern period. She suggests that in the majority of instances women have always participated in small-scale, artisanal mining and, indeed, continue to do so in many countries today. In larger scale operations however, women’s participation apparently occurred only at the early stages of industrialized mining. She examines the reasons for this, and the subsequent development of the masculinist model for mine workers. Although the main focus of the chapter is historical, it links with contemporary practices in developing countries. Sachiko Sone follows the Japanese pit women in the course of technological, political and economic changes that affected the coal industry. Within the patriarchal structure of the Japanese mines, women miners were placed even lower than their male counterparts. In the world under the ground surface, however, these women defied the prevailing cultural norms and laboured alongside men as equals. Though women were legally prohibited from working underground in the late 1920s, Sachiko shows that the demise of the female underground miner in Chikuhō had as much – or more – to do with family labour practices, technology and geology, as it did with legal sanctions. Amarjit Kaur describes the first half of the last century and analyzes race and gender concerns in the tin mines of Malaya. Her focus on Chinese dulang workers or panners provides not only an authentic history but also an important case study of gender at work: the structure of the industry, the occupational categories involved, the division of labour, and spells out why and how gender mattered in colonial Malaya. By reserving a particular job category – a method of recovery in this case – mining industry attributed women a place in its social and economic hierarchy. Amarjit argues that the job enabled and empowered women and provided them economic independence and security that the colonial state failed to provide. Shashank S. Sinha elaborates this theme, revealing the continuities and disjunctures associated with changing economic and political contexts in the Chotanagpur collieries in colonial India.

In the second part, we analyze these ‘gendered’ identities in the mine pits by examining how other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity and caste can produce extremely complex situations. W. Donald Smith shows how the ‘double minority’ of Korean women in prewar Japanese coal mines was shaped by gender and ethnicity. Mining was a traditional occupation for women, who comprised primarily the overwhelming majority of coal haulers until the ban on underground female labour. Among Koreans, however, male coal haulers outnumbered women and women were placed in various low-paid jobs on the surface. Evelyn Caballero throws light on a very old and traditional culture of small scale miners in the Philippines whose subsistence base has predominantly been mining with some shifting cultivation and a few other occupations. The roles of women in these processes are described carefully and in fine detail. Martha Macintyre in her chapter points out how traditional gender role expectations can conflict with the coming of the mines, bringing a whole new set of gender discourses. Mining today encompasses a range of technologies that mean women’s participation in the industry covers the whole range of jobs. As the chapter by Macintyre demonstrates, women workers in large-scale mining are beginning to challenge the image of the miner as they penetrate the bastions of masculinism and take advantage of the
changing technologies that enable them to work in technical fields. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt shows that this may not be the case everywhere; women in the Indian collieries, the kamins working on the field, do not construct their work practices favourably. If this is seen as ‘identity work’, then the women’s active attempt to construct identity through various representations of reality can be seen as a resistance to us forming their identity as against that of the researcher. Clearly, it is not possible to give a single and objective description of life in the mines. Many alternative narratives are constructed on mining as a work for women with available discursive material.

The globalization of large scale mining has not resulted in the diminution of ASM as the chapters by Els Van Hoecke, Jennifer J. Hinton, Barbara E. Hinton and Marcello E. Veiga, Geoff Crispin and Jeanette Graulau show. The third part, on the place of gender in mining economies, also includes Linqing Yao’s detailed study of data on women’s participation in the coal mining industry in China. She shows that in spite of the apparent absence of women in official mining figures, they continue to work in the mines in China, albeit in far fewer numbers than those in ASM in Africa reported by Hinton et al., (2003) They show that many women in Africa work part-time at informal mining operations or occupy ‘ancillary roles’, yet their participation is viewed as being less relevant. Women are often associated with transporting and processing materials as opposed to digging, and hence are not always identified as ‘miners’. Els Van Hoecke uses her activist knowledge of the ground in writing about Bolivian women in the mines, a very different perspective from that presented in Nash’s (1979) classic ethnography. Minerva Chaloping-March describes the nature and extent of women’s work in formal and informal mining in the Philippines, and traces the various factors that explain why their participation in the sector expands or contracts. Geoff Crispin describes his experiences in finding women workers during his work on a project on small scale miners in Papua New Guinea.

In the last part, we take our readers through four chapters to show that if the mining industry is becoming globalized with its attendant problems, there are also innumerable and small ways women are using it to their advantage and resisting the oppression that connection to a globalized economy entails. Women’s labour has been crucial in the expansion of capitalism and the reproduction of its modes of production in the mining frontier. Gender hierarchies in developing countries facilitate certain forms of capitalism, capitalism that is intersected by patriarchy. Jeannette Graulau, in her chapter on women’s labour in ‘peasant mining’ of gold in the Brazilian Amazon, describes the structural vulnerabilities of organizing women’s labour in mining communities. In particular she illuminates the gendered aspects of production and technology and their intersection with historical relations of class, colonialism, ethnicity and Westernization. She draws upon debates of feminist political economy and geography to show how women’s work in the Brazilian Amazonia is functionally and spatially connected to the contemporary process of capital accumulation. The essential standpoint nature of Ingrid Macdonald’s chapter is highlighted by her use of the global rights framework that has been put in place by the international agencies in discussing the steps that need to be considered in engendering the mines. This international perspective is again
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contrasted by local resistances such as those by women in Bhowra colliery in Jharia described by Lindsay Barnes in her chapter. Lindsay in her chapter provides examples of women building upon their collective strength to contest the powerful forces formerly beyond their control, and how small resistances can build up in yielding positive results for women. The last chapter is by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt which throws light on yet another aspect of globalization of mining. It explores the attitudes to and perceptions of women truck operators in a large colliery operation in a remote part of East Kalimantan, Indonesia. It shows that the gender impacts of globalized mining cannot be put simply in black and white, seeing women either as victims of agents. It reveals the need to transcend the anti-mining bias of the development literature, an urgent theoretical task if feminists intend to understand the complexities of mineral production in the developing world. Gendering the mines might be the only way to generate the theoretical and policy tools to challenge the neo-liberalist doctrines that favour corporate mining capital and its global expansion.

Gender identities and inequalities are socially and historically constructed, and sustained in the mines in a multitude of ways. To what extent the experiences of workers and particularly women workers in advanced countries can be of relevance when examining pit women and others from the developing countries? Can we talk about an ‘average’ pit woman in all the mining practices in the world? Is there a representative ‘mining woman’? Can we locate pit women’s experiences as those mediated by class as a whole, internationally, or even in individual countries? By scrutinizing the ‘pit women and others’ of countries other than Europe and North America, both in the past and at present, this book not only brings out the roles and contributions of women from a range of countries but connects their histories with the realities of gender in contemporary mining communities. Through the chapters written by a range of experts with diverse experiences, Pit Women and Others as a volume illustrates women’s productive roles as miners and engages with the attitudes and issues that are related to such roles. The chapters reveal those particular cultural, political and economic contexts in which women and men’s work in the mines becomes gendered. They also dislodge the conventional notions of women in developing countries as victims of patriarchy and examine the various ways women express their agency. This book sheds light on the ways that women have participated in mining in the past as well as exploring the continuities into a present, where women, although still labouring against sexism in various forms, engage in a range of jobs in mining. In rendering women miners in developing countries visible, past and present, we hope also to generate questions about the nature of mining development itself. It brings forth the rights of women to be heard and to participate in the processes – beginning from consultations, compensations and jobs, to closure (Macdonald and Rowland, 2002; Macintyre, 2002).

There is a considerable development literature arguing that the introduction of large-scale mining has so far adversely affected women more than men (among others, see Robinson, 1986, 1988; Tauli-Corpuz, 1997; Bhanumathi, 2003a, b; Bose, 2004). Similarly, mine closure pushes women into more vulnerable forms of labour. Again, the gaze tends to be focused upon large-scale rather than small scale mining, without understanding the complexities of mineral production affecting
women’s livelihoods and work. Many of the social, economic, environmental and political ills associated with mining projects could be dramatically reduced if women’s voices were heard and their participation sought (Ranchod, 2001). Historically, women’s participation in the labour force has given them greater economic autonomy and has been the basis for politicization and demands for gender equity. Can participation in mining be empowering for women in developing countries? We hope that this book will stimulate further enquiry into the position of women in mining and create a path for consolidating a Gender and Mining approach in developing countries.

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