Conclusion

Introduction

This study has demonstrated that taking a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the history of Copperbelt society reveals a much wider set of experiences than have generally been reflected in the otherwise rich historical and social scientific analysis of the region. Bringing the experience of the majority of residents who were not mineworkers into historical view not only adds those experiences to the record, but also necessitates reconsideration of the central assumptions of the Copperbelt meta-narrative, with its emphasis on the transformative effects of capital investment, formal employment and the wider panoply of modernisations associated with the cash economy, the nuclear family and the paternalistic corporate provision of housing and social services. The reality of Copperbelt society during its supposed golden age of growth and development was that most of its residents – including the families of most mineworkers – lived precarious lives in which their livelihoods involved a mix of employment, entrepreneurship and farming, much of which was informal or illegal. Company provision of housing, seen as central to shaping the Copperbelt's urban landscape, did not contain the complex reality of most Copperbelt 'families', which in their diverse forms straddled company houses, informal settlements and continually reconstituted rural and peri-urban areas.

These and other such misperceptions certainly resulted from the everyday limitations of research that often relied on and/or took at face value the documentary evidence of official bodies and the claims of elites regarding the transformative effects of urban modernisation. More significantly, however, they reflected the broad modernist outlook about social change in Africa shared by political and intellectual elites for much of this period. As identified by Moore and Vaughan, and elaborated by Ferguson, the assumption that a binary transformation was underway in the Central African Copperbelt from (an idealised version of) rural traditional order to an (equally idealised) urbanised modern society powerfully shaped the foci, methods and findings of research communities and institutions from the late 1940s until the early 1960s.[1] This did not always result in inaccurate findings per se, but it certainly skewed research towards certain subjects and contributed to a distorted understanding of both the form and extent of social change then underway.

As this book has argued, drawing on Schumaker and others, this characterisation would not have taken the form it did were it not for the active participation of African research assistants and Copperbelt residents as they sought to articulate and represent their own ideas about their societies in interactions with Western officials and researchers.[2] In historicising these processes, this study has shown that sections of African societies reached distinctive understandings of the changes they experienced as a result of urban migration and settlement, which both reflected their experience and their attempts to give meaning to it. These understandings informed their participation in the knowledge production activities undertaken by academics and authorities, not because they wilfully sought to distort reality, but because they understood that the knowledge produced by these powerful elites had real-world consequences for the policy context that partly determined their social and economic reality.

This study has, however, demonstrated that this was not a unique moment in which late colonial modernism's influence on academic and policy research distorted underlying societal realities. It rather set the scene for an enduring pattern of unequal engagement between elite knowledge production about the Copperbelt, and the partial participation of some Copperbelt residents in that production process, over the next seventy years. These research dynamics, shaped by intellectual innovation and changing political ideas – encompassing, among other themes, gender equality, neo-liberalism and environmental awareness – generated insightful findings about many aspects of Copperbelt society, while simultaneously imposing specific ways of understanding that mirrored some aspects of modernist characterisations of the region (and about urban Africa more generally) even as they rejected others.

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[1] Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*; Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*.

[2] Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*.

Meanwhile, Copperbelt communities themselves sought to express their diverse ideas about life in town in varied forms: in public political speeches and the private discussions of the *cercles*, in trade union negotiations and ethnic associational activity, in divorce cases, letters to newspaper editors and the lyrics of popular songs, among others. Although only some of these expressions were regarded as significant by Western and/or elite observers, most such local discourses drew on or engaged with (but were not determined by) the dominant modernist ideas about Copperbelt society that more directly influenced company and state policies and declarations by which their lives were governed. In these forums, as well as in undocumented everyday conversations in workplaces, markets, streets and homes, an underlying theme was how to navigate Copperbelt society's challenges, take advantage of its opportunities and find how best to live well in town. If there was general agreement that urban life was in many ways different to that in the village, the ways in which this new reality was perceived and found expression itself reflected the variegated experiences of these diverse and unequal communities.

Cross-Border Commonalities and Comparisons

In order to identify common and disparate themes in the ongoing interaction between social history and knowledge production, while understanding the latter as an inherent component of the former, this study has sought to identify commonalities and differences through its historical analysis, both holistic and comparative, of the Copperbelt's two parts. While these areas of Zambia and the DRC have much in common and have been characterised in similar (though not identical) ways, considerable variations in their historical development reflect both differences in (among other things) their geology, the policies of their respective mining companies and colonial states, the social organisation of their respective migrant societies and – as importantly – how these differences came to be understood and articulated as germane to social identities and organisation by their respective societies and the intellectuals who analysed them.

Haut-Katanga's pre–World War Two mining industry built on the region's pre-colonial mineral wealth. The rapid stabilisation of its mixed migrant urban population was enabled by the adoption of open cast mining and a sustained programme of housing and social provision for its mineworkers, shaped in part by Belgium's distinct approach to colonial welfare. By the 1940s, therefore, a relatively coherent system of authoritarian paternalism had been established in Haut-Katanga's mining towns. Residence and belonging in non-mine areas (CECs) was also highly regulated; the *cercles* created by colonial elites and missionaries in particular provided a clear if narrow basis for membership of an indigenous elite, but there was no serious consideration of the concession of authority to this elite until shortly before Congo's chaotic decolonisation in 1960.

In Northern Rhodesia, 'being urban' on the Copperbelt meant, for many of its African residents, overcoming and/or evading the official controls imposed by mine companies and the state. These companies provided housing and social services only after pressure from labour unions (established following metropolitan imperial intervention) that provided a strikingly independent voice for African mineworkers and, indirectly, their families. By the late 1950s, both Copperbelt regions possessed considerable urban infrastructure for their growing and increasingly permanent populations. Researchers on both sides of the border emphasised that these were 'towns-in-the-making', but reached contrasting conclusions regarding the extent to which their populations were themselves becoming 'modern'. The attitudes of their residents to these ideas also varied substantially. Many Northern Rhodesians saw late colonial social and political reforms as belated and inadequate steps to urban citizenship, which could only be fully realised by political independence. The region was, politically and economically, at the centre of Zambian anti-colonialism, even as tensions arose between labour and nationalist leaders that pre-figured post-independence conflicts over the distribution of power and wealth and the appropriate relationship between the new nation's rural and urban areas. Haut-Katanga's equal importance for the Congolese and Belgian economies shaped attempts to isolate its mines and their workers from 'dangerous' political ideas. Reflecting Belgium's late colonial attempt to ensure Congo's economic development while denying meaningful political reform, it reinforced the ideational separation of mine 'camps' from non-mine *cités* and Haut-Katanga's own separation from the rest of Congo, fuelling the fragmentation of political identities and aspirations that shaped the country's ill-starred independence.

As has been emphasised, the conscious downplaying of 'ethnicity' as a primary form of collective identity on the Zambian Copperbelt does not mean that ethnic difference has not often informed political competition or social distinctions, but 'tribalism' was considered illegitimate or incompatible with Zambian Copperbelt cosmopolitanism. This latter identity was then a powerful myth that shaped societal reality, for example severely limiting the influence of ethnic associations on political expression and instead emphasising a broad anti-elitist moral economy perspective that criticised the exploitative consumption of Copperbelt wealth by foreign companies and unaccountable political elites alike. The enduring importance of ethnic association and identity to Katangese social advancement and political representation can, by comparison with its Zambian neighbour, be shown to be not at all the inevitable consequence of ethnic mixing in poor urban communities, but rather the result of (dis)incentives towards alternative forms of political organisation and identity that themselves reflected the gathering and dissemination of knowledge about new urban African societies and their supposed relationship to rural areas of origin.

As Chapter 6 explains, the Copperbelt region's centrality to the assertion of national identity and the goal of economic development in both countries was experienced in very different ways. Haut-Katanga's strategic significance led to its secession and made effective control over it vital to the authorities in Kinshasa. While Congolese nationalism and UMHK's corporate model initially competed for control over the region's mineral wealth and workforce, *Gécamines* ultimately enabled a distinctly Zairian form of corporate paternalism that ensured the flow of that wealth directly to the country's self-identified patron, President Mobutu. Collective political expression, certainly of a pan-Katangese form, was ruthlessly suppressed, but the tacit integration of ethnic associational activity into state and corporate structures ensured that it commonly provided the most practical form of protection and support in what was, for most, a precarious social and economic environment. In Zambia, by contrast, antagonism towards the continued exploitation of the productive Copperbelt by a Lusaka-based UNIP elite and its allies in both foreign mining companies and regional liberation movements was articulated by union activists and expressed in oppositional political activity that took a range of forms which consistently emphasised combination and community-based organisation and protest.

As the region experienced a profound and dislocating economic and social decline from the late 1970s onwards, these shared and contrasting social histories and understandings of societal identity influenced the diverse responses of Zambian and Congolese Copperbelt residents to its effects. Most families were already used to 'getting by' via a precarious combination of low-paid wage labour, trading and agriculture, but the drastic reduction in the local circulation of mineral wealth prompted many to resort to new survival strategies and to respond, collectively and individually, to the imposition of increasingly severe austerity measures.[3] In Zambia, this took the form of anti-liberalisation protests and then coalesced into a pro-democracy movement that, once in power, itself imposed radical economic liberalisation that had a devastating effect on collective organisation and living standards. If these actions were ultimately unable to prevent the region's further decline, its protest movement was not, as in Haut-Katanga, derailed by incumbent politicians who, building on the region's history of autochthonous and secessionist politics, successfully scapegoated ethnic 'outsiders' for the drastic decline in living standards caused by the fall in international mineral prices and political mismanagement and corruption.

While these generalisations about each Copperbelt region clearly do not hold true for all their residents at all times, they certainly reflected and informed the collective self-identities of Zambia and Katangese Copperbelt communities as they sought to articulate and project their own sense of what it meant to be 'urban' and 'modern' throughout this period. They shaped and were shaped by the unfolding of social history and its interpretation by local and elite producers of knowledge about that history, as well as their assertions about the relationship between the region's past and present.

Understanding the Self-Conscious Copperbelt

During a research visit to the Zambian Copperbelt town of Kitwe in July 2019, a former mineworker and footballer showed me the ruins of the former ZCCM sporting facilities in Wusakile township that he and friends were trying to rehabilitate. During our conversation, he mentioned in passing that he had once met and worked with another Western researcher, Robert Bates. When I asked him what exactly he did in his work with Bates, he replied, somewhat uninterestedly, ‘Ah, the same as with you’. Western researchers and, today, African ones, are an enduring and familiar part of the Copperbelt landscape: hundreds of social scientists and historians have visited the region over the past seventy years in order to capture what has always been regarded as a society of special significance – firstly as an unusually urbanised space in a continent stereotyped as rural and agrarian; as an early indicator of modernising processes thought to be sweeping sub-Saharan Africa; and later as a place of crisis or decline, in need of understanding and/or intervention. African research assistants and interviewees have participated in and shaped this research, seeing in it an opportunity to advance their own standing and/or careers as well as to highlight their perceptions or concerns about their society.

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[3] Mususa, 'Getting By'.

The resulting presuppositions about Copperbelt society were, this book has argued, at best a partial reflection of reality and at worst a major distortion of it. Researchers – many employed or funded by states, companies or international financial institutions – focussed unduly on specific sections of that society and/or tended to assess it in relation to a normative characterisation of ‘Western’ modernisation and urbanisation, sometimes to demonstrate that it was following that Western path and sometimes to show it was deviating from it. Yet this characterisation of the Copperbelt’s distinctive urban nature was not simply imposed upon it from without by Western researchers. From the 1940s, many Africans saw the new mining towns as places distinct from rural society and themselves sought to describe and explain those differences to each other.

It was always thought to be necessary to initiate new arrivals into Copperbelt society, and to establish associations through which to do this, because its rules and conventions were understood to be different from those of the communities from which migrants had come. Many residents enthusiastically engaged with innovative organisational forms – labour unions or intellectual *cercles*, for example – introduced and/or promoted by Western authorities, because they provided opportunities for advancement but also for the expression of new forms of identity that appeared to be of specific relevance in these new urban spaces. Correspondents with company newspapers, and the composers of popular songs, sought to explore or capture both the links and the differences between village and town society, marriage, family and life, celebrating the possibilities and promise of urban life while equally expressing their concerns or fears over what was being lost or destroyed in what they agreed was a tumultuous process of social change. Among the markers of this distinctiveness were the dominance of formal sector employment, housing and services linked to jobs, the dominance of the cash economy, multi-cultural and linguistic mixing and new 'modern' forms of authority, belief and organisation. Interviewees, respondents and participants in generations of social scientific research drew upon the notion that Copperbelt society was distinct and different, both from what had existed in the past and from rural African societal norms. Like the Western researchers with whom they interacted, they often conflated contemporary African rurality with their understanding of the pre-colonial past.

The presence and attention of those social scientists reinforced their sense that there was something special about Copperbelt society that needed to be explained. This does not mean that there was a unified characterisation of this distinctiveness, nor that African characterisations were necessarily more reflective of its underlying realities than those provided by Western academics – for they also tended to privilege the experiences of formally employed men and those with sufficient education to express themselves in written European languages and to be of use as research assistants or participants. As elsewhere in late colonial Africa, aspirant elites asserted their readiness for full citizenship and political freedom in ways that tacitly accepted the superiority of aspects of Western 'civilisation' and/or sought to articulate a universal and/or Africanist version of it. On a more quotidian level, the forms and discourses in which urban society was explained and portrayed were themselves perceived as new and either Western in form or as a Westernised form of something African. Copperbelt societies did, however, in seeking to make sense of the lived experience of themselves, their families and their communities, articulate a more diverse and open-ended sense of the possibilities of urban social change than did the modernist frameworks that constrained the thinking of most social scientists.

While all this might have been expected to change with decolonisation, the reification of an idealised African rural society by nationalist leaders tended to reinforce the notion that the form of urbanism to be found on the Copperbelt was variously exceptional, problematic, out of place and certainly in need of explanation. The fact that African societies had always changed and innovated, had constantly come into contact with different cultures with which they engaged in conflictual and co-operative ways, was often lost or downplayed in this process. This fed a hegemonic belief that inaccurately counterposed dynamic urban society to a rural Africa that, despite its experience of massive social, economic and cultural changes across the twentieth century, continued to be invoked as an unchanging, authentic control group against which to test the modernist experiment of the Copperbelt.

Yet this does not mean that these ideas should be understood as reflecting a passive internalisation of a well-established or singular Western view. Africans certainly engaged with and drew on Western ways of seeing and understanding the Copperbelt, but from the start they invested in and articulated their own understandings of what the region meant to them. While some migrants engaged compliantly with wage labour and time discipline, others sought to advance their position and that of their families by evading company controls and the characterisations of a good urban life that underwrote them. Among African residents, diverse views emerged of the right way to live in town, perspectives that rested, explicitly or implicitly, on reflections of their own experience and/or memories of a rural African past. These viewpoints then influenced the thinking of those Western actors who regarded Africans as useful sources of information about this new urban society, drawing on their assertions as influences on their latest iteration of official and/or academic knowledge of the Copperbelt, a process of exchange and knowledge production that has continued to this day. Over time, any distinction between 'Western' and 'African' forms of knowledge about the region has become ever less helpful. Just as nation-states sponsored and asserted their own ideological interpretations of societal change and of their relationship to their history, so African intellectuals and elites came to play increasingly prominent roles in international organisations such as the IMF and World Bank that, implicitly or explicitly, shaped the Copperbelt's future by producing knowledge about it.

This study does nevertheless identify an ongoing distinction between 'elite' or 'official' forms of knowledge production and the popular discourses that generally inform Copperbelt residents about their societies. The extent to which there was an active and mutually informative exchange between these two frameworks of knowledge production varied considerably, depending on the actors and subjects concerned. Everyone, for example, thought the copper mining industry needed to be productive and profitable for the region to thrive, even if they disagreed about the optimal distribution of mining wealth between mineworkers, their communities, the wider Copperbelt, the national economy and the global mining industry. There was likewise significant agreement that the region was a place of opportunity, advancement and modernity, though the particular ways in which this was pursued varied greatly. Indeed, the ways that most residents sought their share of the Copperbelt's wealth were generally viewed by elite observers as antithetical to the 'modern' industrial mining complex that was central to its identity.

The gendered nature of these activities represents the greatest area of dissonance between the region's social history and its elite and popular representation. While women always farmed and worked, they were constantly 'discovered' to be working and farming for the first time, a disjuncture that was reinforced by the popular perception that women 'had always been' housewives, held by most men and indeed many women who themselves worked. Likewise, the belief that in the recent 'past' – a past that has inevitably moved over time but which is generally understood to be within the living memory of older Copperbelt residents – society was more ordered and stable, with shared generational norms and parental authority resting on an 'authentic' culture, is belied by evidence of chaotic change in exactly that past, a past during which residents equally believed their earlier past had in turn been one of order and stability. It is, however, noteworthy that the specific content of this nostalgia has changed over time: a belief in and (sometimes) a yearning for a mythic fixed rural order, which was common among many Copperbelt residents in the 1950s and 1960s, had been replaced by the 1980s and 1990s with a nostalgia for an early post-colonial urban order that was, as explained, experienced by many as an era of disruption and precarity but which was now remembered as one of stability and paternalism. While Thompson once found an English working-class nostalgic 'for the pattern of work and leisure which obtained before the outer and inner disciplines of industrialism settled upon the working man', there is today nostalgia for the certainties of the disciplines of industrialisation that were, we must remind ourselves, the reality for only a minority of Copperbelt residents.[4]

Analysing such disparities between social history and perceptions of it is not, in my view, best achieved by counterposing 'historical reality' to a 'nostalgia' or a supposedly 'false consciousness' about it. Consistent with this study's approach to the production of knowledge about society, widely held popular beliefs about the changing social order should be understood as a central part of social reality, informing, among other things, the ways in which demands are placed on mine companies or states to improve or at least stabilise Copperbelt residents' parlous living conditions.[5]

Unifying Knowledge Production and Social History – Lessons and Prospects

This study has sought to analyse the role of knowledge production in social history by treating the production of knowledge about society as an essential part of its history. What are the consequences, methodological and historiographical, of analysing knowledge production and social history within a single analytical framework? Clearly, it is important not to lose sight of the profound inequalities between the different producers and types of knowledge under production. Unsurprisingly, powerful European men were best placed to easily disseminate their (often very limited understanding) of Copperbelt society, while the voices and experiences of its female African residents were ignored by outsiders (and, as our interviews show, by many insiders) for many decades. Policy documents, such as those produced for colonial governors, national leaders and the president of the World Bank, were more influential on official decision-making than letters written by Copperbelt residents to newspapers or the images of popular paintings. This study has tried to identify particularly significant instances of knowledge production, but more generally seeks to understand the Copperbelt as an unequal intellectual milieu in which new, diverse and contested ideas about how to live (and how to live better) circulated unevenly, taking many forms and influencing each other in ways that are often impossible to trace. In this respect, the fact that many interviewees spontaneously recalled the moral lessons taught by Mufwankolo theatre, or the cultural traditions discussed on the *Kabusha* radio programme, indicates that the ideas they expressed were ‘useful’ in helping them understand and explain to others the ways in which they lived and how their society was constituted.

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[4] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), p. 357.

[5] Rubbers, *Le Paternalisme en Question*.

At the same time, this study rejects the counterposing of ‘wrong’ elite knowledge production produced by outsiders to ‘authentic’ insider understanding of the ‘real’ Copperbelt society. This is for a number of reasons:

- Elite producers of knowledge did not usually start from a desire to wilfully distort societal reality. Many such analysts engaged closely with local providers of knowledge and sincerely believed they were producing an accurate view of society within the intellectual and political framework within which they were operating. In doing so, they were often influenced by existing ‘indigenous’ understandings of Copperbelt urbanism.
- Outsider knowledge did not remain ‘outside’: it filtered into indigenous elite and even popular understandings and representations of Copperbelt society in many ways. Taking just one example, the entirely new social order created by company and colonial officials in Haut-Katangese mine communities, encompassing workplaces, housing, healthcare and leisure facilities, had at its heart a self-conscious projection of an idealised urban society, rooted in the extended metaphor of the paternalist corporation, that had never existed anywhere in the world. Despite its evident internal contradictions and limited applicability to the messy realities of the lives of mineworkers and their families, the notion of the UMHK/*Gécamines* ‘family’, associated with comparatively high living standards and ‘generous’ social provision, was taken up by this community and remains both a central part of how interviewees explain their experience and a political strategy through which they seek to defend their living standards, decades after it was abandoned by those who first envisaged it.
- The diversity of Copperbelt society means there is no single ‘insider’ perspective about it. As has been argued here, the focus on formal sector male employees (and belatedly their wives) has created

a tendency to generalise from their experience and views in ways that silenced the ideas of, for example, urban farmers and 'squatters'. Ferguson's distinction between 'cosmopolitan' and 'localist' understandings of Copperbelt urbanism provides a useful starting point for appreciating its inherently double-edged mixture of the opportunities provided and threats posed to residents, but extending analysis to incorporate this much wider population on both sides of the border, and the impact of social change over an extended period of 'boom' and 'bust', results in a far more open-ended characterisation of the diverse ways in which locals understood and articulated their understanding of their complex society.

- Insider knowledge is, like that of academics and external elites, produced to assert a specific characterisation of society: it is neither neutral nor natural, waiting to be picked from the ground by researchers like ripe fruit. Every one of our interviewees, like their thousands of predecessors, conveyed to us not only their memory of 'things that happened in the past' but their understanding of the significance of these social changes for themselves, their families and their wider communities. They engaged with us for their own reasons, sought to teach us lessons about the past, emphasised certain aspects of their experience while downplaying others and not only misremembered but also – as Luise White explained some time ago – distorted the historical record while doing so. This is partly because distorting the 'facts' for external researchers is arguably a central aspect of Copperbelt social scientific experience, but also because people lie about the past – to other members of their own society as well as outsiders, and even to themselves.[6]

It remains to be seen whether the approach utilised and advocated here proves, as is hoped, useful for the practice of social historians more generally. The specificity of Copperbelt urbanisation may mean that some lessons of this study do not apply to long-established African societies, where indigenous views of custom and culture may be more usefully counterposed to their external representation. Yet even here, the impact of political, social, economic and cultural change, both over the *longue durée* and during the period analysed herein, has surely generated new ways of characterising the impact of such changes on, for example, morality, custom and social mores, and new forms of knowledge produced to assess and give expression to those changes.

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[6] Luise White, 'Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History', *History and Theory*, 39, 4 (2000), pp. 11–22.

Lacunae and Limitations: Towards a Provisional History of the Central African Copperbelt

It is evidently impossible to produce a social history of this period and range that is genuinely comprehensive, whether thematically or in terms of its coverage of the Copperbelt's diverse population. This study, while wide-ranging in some respects, only scratches the surface in explaining the everyday experiences and worldview of many of its residents. The importance of spirituality in general, and Christian teaching in particular, in informing views regarding morality and society, would certainly justify a chapter in this study, indeed a full-scale work in itself.[7] Coverage of the role of ethnic factors and associations in informing identity is not as thorough as would be desirable.[8] Despite its attempt to reflect all parts of the Copperbelt community, the historical experiences of its most marginalised members remain less well represented than those with formal education and employment. Any truly comprehensive study of the quintessentially migrant experience of the region would involve analysis of and interviews with the many thousands of former Copperbelt residents who either 'returned' to the rural areas or migrated on to other towns and countries.[9]

The most evident way in which this study remains incomplete is that, in emphasising the ways in which successive waves of knowledge production have sought to explain Copperbelt society, it has highlighted the perennially provisional nature of our understandings of that society. While an earlier generation of academic observers could be confident that this new urban society was one best understood in terms of the colonial and class-based interactions between mine companies and (largely male) African workers, subsequent insights have revealed the centrality of agricultural activities and the (mainly) women who carried them out. Where analysts once 'knew' that an older indigenous African culture was being steadily displaced by a globalised Western set of cultural norms and practices, today it is more widely understood that syncretic cultural practices are not only a normal product of cosmopolitan societies, but also that such cosmopolitan syncretism did not arrive in Africa with colonialism but is rather as old as African human history itself. Whereas mine production was in the past known to be central to 'development' and the raising of living standards, it is now appreciated that it has brought about long-term environmental destruction and endangered the health and quality of life of many if not most Copperbelt residents.

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[7] Among existing studies of Copperbelt religious belief and practice, see Fabian, *Jamaa*; Haynes, *Moving by the Spirit*; and Lämmert, 'Reimagining the Copperbelt as a Religious Space' in Larmer et al., *Across the Copperbelt*, pp. 347–372.

[8] Gobbers, 'Ethnic Associations in Katanga Province'; Kapesa and McNamara, 'We Are Not Just a Union'.

[9] For an exemplary study of such open-ended dynamics, see Zoe R. Groves, *Malawian Migration to Zimbabwe, 1900–1965: Tracing Machona* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

This might optimistically suggest that, even as we increasingly appreciate the constraints that modernist thinking has historically placed on our understanding of lived social reality, we are moving towards a more complex, open-ended and ultimately more sophisticated appreciation of the underlying realities of Copperbelt society. But, if we appreciate that we, the current generation of Copperbelt historians and social scientists, are simply the latest in a long genealogy of researchers to believe this about themselves, then it is logical to assume that in the near future a new generation will, using innovative techniques and interpretations, excavate new layers of historical understanding from beneath the Copperbelt's surface. In doing so they will no doubt render our findings superfluous, faulty and inherently bound up with the distorting lens through which we currently view Copperbelt society. It is a perverse kind of optimism to believe that such a development will indicate the continuing ability of Copperbelt communities and scholars to generate new ways to ask old questions about, among other things, the capacity of mineral wealth to raise living standards, the distribution of that wealth between workers, communities, states and companies, the value of the labour – both direct and indirect – required to produce that wealth, and the nature of the moral and political order of such a society, both in its realities and in its aspirations. But it is exactly this kind of stoical persistent optimism that has always been displayed by the long-term Copperbelt residents who, despite dangers and setbacks, keep trying to create a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.