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*A Double Bind? Considering the Experience of Indigenous Women in the Australian Minerals Industry*

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**A double bind? Considering the experience of Indigenous women in the Australian minerals industry**

**Abstract**

*The global minerals industry is increasingly recognising the need to consider its impact on Indigenous peoples. There is also increasing agreement on the need to address the gender bias against women in the distribution of risks and benefits from mining development. As part of their 'gender action plan', the World Bank has proposed guidelines for extractive industries to ensure that women's concerns and needs are included in project design and preparation. In the realm of employment, greater participation of Indigenous women provides a specific opportunity for individuals and families to benefit from mineral development, yet the experience of Indigenous women working in the mining industry remains largely unexamined in the empirical literature, particularly in Australia. This article begins to fill this knowledge gap, by presenting recent research conducted at a northern Australian mine. It argues that Indigenous women are in a 'double bind' that risks the Australian mining industry rendering the needs of this group invisible, and that understanding the experience of mining employment for Indigenous women is crucial in creating long-term positive outcomes for Indigenous communities.*

## Introduction

Around the world, research has shown that the introduction of large scale mining affects women in Indigenous communities more adversely than men (Bhanumathi 2003; Bose 2004; Tauli corpus 1997). A major factor that has contributed to adverse impacts experienced by women is the fact that they have largely been excluded from negotiations about benefits from mineral development, including employment (Gibson and Kemp 2008). In response to the disadvantage experienced by women from mineral development, organisations such as the World Bank and Oxfam now include gender aspects in impact assessments, promoting gender equality as smart economics. There is now a substantial body of empirical evidence to demonstrate that the social and economic empowerment of women contributes to economic growth, poverty reduction, effective governance and more sustainable development in local communities (World Bank, 2001:1).

Not all impacts of mining on women are considered adverse. There is some evidence of positive outcomes for women, such as increased access to education and travel (Robinson 2002:43) and infrastructure such as roads and transport providing accessibility to new markets (Byford 2002). Another way women might experience beneficial impacts from mining is through employment.

Around the world, despite a long history of working in mining, sometimes doing harder or more work than their male counterparts (Amutabi and Lutta Mukebi 2001), women miners have been 'hidden from history' (Burke 2006). There is a growing body of literature on the experiences of Indigenous women working in small scale and artisanal mining in developing countries, (Lahiri-Dutt and Macintyre 2006) but only few sources detail the experiences of Indigenous women in large-scale mines. Research from Papua New Guinea's Lihir Gold Mine (Macintyre 2006) has shown that while women's experience working at the mine was generally positive, their work remained undervalued. To date, there has been very limited published information on the experiences of Indigenous women in the Australian mining industry. Although there have now been a few studies about female employment in the mining industry in Australia (Kemp and Pattenden 2007; Pattenden 1998) these tend to focus on the experience of non-Indigenous women, who make up the majority of female employees.

This paper begins to bring visibility to Indigenous women in Australian mining industry, by drawing on research conducted with Indigenous female employees at Century Mine in northwest Queensland. Where relevant, reference is also made to data collected by government agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Bureau of Resource Economics (ABARE). This paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the experience of Indigenous female employees in mining in Australia as there is still limited data available. The paper is in three sections: the first part discusses the theoretical background, the second part presents an overview of participation in the Australian Mining industry, and the third part provides a case study of Indigenous women at Century Mine. The paper concludes by arguing that understanding the experience of Indigenous women is important in contributing to long term positive outcomes for Indigenous communities.

## Theoretical Background

Feminism is a complex subject that has not only redefined itself throughout history but continues to be debated (Freedman 2002). The commonality between all the different forms of feminism – and there are several – is that they have all arisen out of conditions of patriarchy. Therefore, for women who do not perceive their society to be patriarchal, or do not experience oppression from a patriarchal society, feminism is considered irrelevant (Green, 2007). This is the case for some Indigenous women, who argue that male domination is not universal (Monture-Angus, 1995; Turpel, 1993). Further, as Monture-Angus (1995) attests, accepting the western idea of 'equality' would mean accepting a lower position than what is accorded to women in her culture historically. Some Australian Indigenous women have expressed similar views towards the women's movement (Huggins, 1994; Moreton Robinson, 2000). In 1994, Huggins suggested there was no support for the women's movement from Indigenous circles. Ten years later, Fredericks (2004) wrote "*We stand and watch non-Indigenous women argue for something which we had and which they assisted in disempowering us of*". When western women were addressing their sexual oppression by men via the feminist movement, Indigenous women (and men), were addressing many forms of oppression by the dominant western society. Therefore, Indigenous women are coming from a very different place than western women, who currently dominate the feminist discourse.

Whether or not Indigenous women have experienced patriarchal oppression within their own culture and communities, arguably many were, and still are, subjected to the patriarchal and colonial oppression within the dominant western society (Green 2007:22). The relationship between gender inequality and other complex inequalities is an important and unresolved debate in both the feminist theory and gender mainstreaming<sup>1</sup> practice (Walby 2005:463). There is now a small body of literature emerging on Indigenous feminism, as evidenced by Green's (2008) *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. Some Indigenous scholars who once rejected feminism are now acknowledging its importance and identifying themselves as Indigenous feminists (St Denis 2007; Bear 2007). Indigenous feminists raise issues of colonialism, racism and sexism, and the unpleasant synergy between these violations of human rights (Green, 2007:20). In the case of mining, this synergy is likely to be enhanced for Indigenous female employees given that the Australian mining industry is western, masculine, and heavily dominated by non-Indigenous male workers. For a long time, mining has been considered a very masculine industry by virtue of its heavily male dominated workforce and physicality of work. Women who do gain employment at the mine are often treated with 'condescending chivalry' or treated as a novelty (Miller, 2004:49). Further, the sexist views faced by women entering the mining workforce often limit career advancement (Gibson and Scoble 2004; Tallichet 2000).

Although increasing the participation of women is high on the agenda of the Australian minerals industry, this agenda is being run separately from another

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<sup>1</sup> Gender mainstreaming is a new form of gendered political and policy practice that was developed by feminist development practitioners in the 1970s and launched at the UN conference on women in Beijing in 1995 (Walby 2005). It is an organisational strategy to bring a gender perspective to all aspects of an institution's policy and activities, through building gender capacity and accountability (Reeves and Baden 2000).

agenda to increase the participation of Indigenous people (Parmenter and Kemp 2007). Because Indigenous women represent the overlapping intersection of these two agendas, the needs of Indigenous women are at risk of going unseen. Indigenous women are in a 'double bind'; they are simultaneously Indigenous and female. There is little evidence that the agenda to increase the employment of Indigenous people includes a gender dimension, and little evidence that the agenda to increase the participation of women includes an Indigenous component. At a site level, there is some evidence of consideration for Indigenous cultural issues, such as allowing leave for funerals and compulsory cultural awareness training for all employees, but these are not gender specific. In this sense, the Australian mining industry has, not unlike the western feminist theory, failed to consider the intersection between race and gender. A dilemma exists here, between abstracting and naming disadvantaged categories, thus positioning them as victims and denying agency, or of integrating with a consequent loss of visibility and focus (Walby, 2005:463).

I now discuss the participation of Indigenous women in the Australian Minerals industry, before discussing a case study of Century Mine.

### **Participation in the Australian Mining Industry**

Indigenous women have worked in the mining industry in Australia since at least the 1940s (Wilson, 1961, 1980 cited in Holcombe, 2004). There has been a steady increase of Indigenous female participation in the Australian minerals industry over time, but more sharply in recent years. One explanation for this is that Australia has experienced a resources boom, and another is the recent efforts of some mining companies to diversify the workforce (Brereton and Parmenter 2008). The data presented below provides some general insight into the participation of Indigenous women currently working in the Australian minerals industry.

The Australian 2006 National Census identified 395 Indigenous women working in mining, representing 0.4% of the total mining workforce. This figure represented 16% of the Indigenous mining workforce, compared with a 15% representation of non-Indigenous women. There has been an increase when compared to the 2001 Census, which identified 156 Indigenous females working in mining, representing 0.2% of the total workforce, and 11.2% of the minerals industry's Indigenous workforce. When viewed by commodity, the coal sector has by far the lowest overall Indigenous employment rate, at only 0.3% of the sector workforce (Tedesco et. al 2003). The coal sector also has the lowest representation of all women, at only 4% of the sector workforce (Kemp and Pattenden 2007). These figures are likely to under represent the true amount due to the reluctance of some Indigenous people to self-identify, and the ongoing issue of variable levels of Indigenous participation in the National Census (Taylor and Bell 2004).

A recent study on Indigenous employment in the Australian minerals industry, conducted by Tiplady and Barclay in 2006, identified 243 Indigenous women representing 2.2% of the total workforce across 12 participating sites<sup>2</sup>. Women

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<sup>2</sup> These sites were selected primarily on the basis that the operation and/or parent company had shown a commitment to increasing Indigenous employment and would, therefore, be more likely to have higher participation rates than other sites in Australia. The largest number of case study sites were in Western Australia (seven) followed by Queensland (three) and the Northern Territory (two) (Tiplady and Barclay 2006).

accounted for 20% of the total Indigenous workforce, although there was considerable variation across sites, with female representation ranging from 8 to 33% of the total Indigenous workforce. The majority of male and female Indigenous employees in the Indigenous Employment Study worked in semi- skilled positions (57%) (Figure 1). A similar situation is seen throughout history and in other areas of the world. In India, the *adivasis* of the collieries were concentrated in low positions, and in South Africa, professional women in mining are more likely to be white, while unskilled women in mining more likely to be black (Ranchod 2001, 6). Excluding the Indigenous women in semi-skilled positions (e.g. truck drivers), jobs were aligned with those usually associated with women<sup>3</sup>. There were significantly fewer Indigenous female apprentices, tradespersons, supervisors and technical, and significantly more women in administration roles. A similar pattern is seen in the female mining workforce more broadly (Kemp and Pattenden 2007).

Table 1 Occupations of Indigenous employees in the Indigenous Employment Study (Adapted from Tiplady and Barclay 2006)

	Men	Women	Total	% of total Indigenous workforce
<b>Semi Skilled</b>	578	89	667	<b>56.6</b>
<b>Administration</b>	4	73	77	<b>6.5</b>
<b>Professional</b>	7	7	14	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Trade</b>	82	3	85	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Supervisor</b>	31	2	33	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Technical</b>	19	2	21	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Superintendent</b>	8	0	8	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Specialist</b>	5	2	7	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Manager</b>	5	0	5	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Graduate</b>	1	1	2	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Executive Manager</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Traineeship</b>	100	60	160	<b>13.6</b>
<b>Apprentice</b>	96	4	100	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>243</b>		<b>1179</b>

The lack of participation of Indigenous women in the Australian mining industry has been contributed to several factors, some of which are not unique to Indigenous women. Indigenous women are more likely to bear children at a younger age than non-Indigenous women, and are often responsible for caring for larger numbers of dependents or others than non-Indigenous women (ABS 2008). A young family may be a constraint in terms of starting a career; however Indigenous women often have

<sup>3</sup> 'Female' roles are those work roles usually associated with women, including administration, catering/cleaning and professional support roles such as HR, public relations, community relations. Roles usually associated with men, are mine engineers, metallurgists and operational roles, such as truck driving.

a close extended family that may care for the children while they work. Dominant values in some Indigenous communities regarding women’s involvement in waged employment may also influence individuals’ desire to participate (O’Faircheallaigh 1998). Other cultural factors attributed to lack of participation of Indigenous Australians include the availability of hunting and gathering activities and whether a person speaks an Indigenous language (Hunter and Gray 1999).

There are many complex issues about systemic societal disadvantage experienced by Indigenous communities, not least of which relates to lack of education, which directly affects employment prospects for Indigenous people. Indigenous Australians are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to suffer from asthma, diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and are also more likely to report health risk factors such as smoking and excessive drinking (Tiplady and Barclay 2006). However, according to Census data, Indigenous women are less likely than Indigenous men to engage in drug and alcohol abuse (a significant safety issue within the mining industry) and are also more educated than Indigenous men (ABS 2006).

Two or three individual mines in Australia have been able to achieve Indigenous representation in the workforce of up to 20% of the total workforce. One of these mines is Century Mine, where the data for this paper was collected. The next section provides an overview of Century Mine, and presents results from recent interviews with Indigenous women working there.

**Century Mine and Indigenous female employees**

OZ Minerals Century Mine is a large open-cut zinc mine located in the lower Gulf of the Carpentaria region of North West Queensland (see map below, Figure 1). The mine operates on a Fly in/Fly out (FIFO) basis, drawing its workforce from Townsville, Mt Isa and Cairns, as well as the Gulf communities. The main communities in the region are Gununa on Mornington Island, Doomadgee, Burketown, Normanton and Karumba (Figure 1). The Indigenous population are more concentrated in Doomadgee (94%), Mornington Island (92%) and Normanton (66%).

Figure 1. Map of Century Mine and surrounding Gulf communities



The relationship between the OZ Minerals Century Mine and adjacent communities in the Gulf of Carpentaria is mediated generally by the Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA). This is a right-to-negotiate (RTN) agreement made between Pasmaico Century Mine Limited,<sup>4</sup> (now OZ Minerals), the Queensland Government and representatives from the Waanyi, Mingginda, Gkuthaarn and Kukatj native title groups, signed under the provisions of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1997. Increasing Indigenous employment is a cornerstone of this agreement, however, it does not include gender aspects.

It has now been 11 years since this agreement was signed, and Century Mine currently employs approximately 1130 employees, of which 207 (18%) are Indigenous. These participation rates for both Indigenous people and Indigenous women are relatively higher than most other mine sites in Australia. This can in part, be attributed to fact that the mine is located in a region where there are high populations of Indigenous people, and also because the Gulf communities agreement includes provisions to employ Indigenous people locally.

According to the GCA database, in September 2008, there were 48 Indigenous female employees working at Century Mine, representing 4.2% of the total workforce and 23% of the total Indigenous workforce. Like Indigenous men, the majority of these positions are semi-skilled (truck drivers). Jobs are aligned with those usually associated with women, with all administration positions occupied by Indigenous women and all trades and apprenticeships occupied by Indigenous men. There were few Indigenous men and no Indigenous women in supervisory or management roles.

Table 2 Indigenous positions at Century Mine September 2008

	Male	Female	Total
<b>Semi Skilled</b>	109	28	137
<b>Trade</b>	16	0	16
<b>Administration</b>	0	5	5
<b>Manager</b>	1	0	5
<b>Supervisor</b>	4	0	4
<b>Technical</b>	1	2	3
<b>Superintendent</b>	1	0	1
<b>Specialist</b>	0	0	0
<b>Professional</b>	0	0	0
<b>Apprentice</b>	12	0	12
<b>Traineeship</b>	7	8	15
<b>Un- identified</b>	8	5	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>207</b>

<sup>4</sup> In September 1997 Pasmaico purchased the Century Mine project from Rio Tinto and in March 2004 Pasmaico was relaunched on the stock exchange as Zinifex. In 2008 Zinifex merged with Oxiana and relaunched on the stock exchange as OZ Minerals.

Indigenous female employees at Century mine live in varied communities and towns in northern Queensland. Some live more locally in the Gulf communities and some fly in from the larger towns of Mt Isa and Townsville. Based on my interviews, women from the Gulf communities, particularly Doomadgee and Mornington, find coming to work at Century more challenging than Indigenous women from the other towns, who have more exposure to mainstream employment and lifestyles. The Indigenous population represents over 90% of the total population in Doomadgee and Mornington and both are disadvantaged socio-economically. For many of these women, it is not only their first experience in mainstream employment, but also their first experience in such a non-Indigenous, and male dominated environment. Indigenous women from the local Gulf communities make up 44% of the total Indigenous female workforce. The remaining 56% live in the larger towns of Mount Isa and Townsville.

The following discussion of Indigenous women's experience working at Century mine is taken from field work conducted in September 2008. Nine women were interviewed one-on-one, 3 focus groups and two group interviews were undertaken. Interviews were semi-structured. Thirty-six Indigenous women participated in total, representing 75% of the Indigenous women currently working at Century. Age ranged from 19 to 51 and their period of employment ranged from 5 weeks to 9 years. The women interviewed worked in varied roles and areas across site, including cleaners and kitchen hands in the village (accommodation area) and operators in the pit. Some pre-vocational trainees were also interviewed. Previous studies conducted in 2006 and 2007 that involved the participation of Indigenous women at Century Mine also informs the discussion. The previous fieldwork was conducted during 3 visits to the mine site and surrounding communities at different times over the last 3 years. One study focused on community perspectives, one on the implications of closure for Gulf communities, and one on the experiences of women in mining. Multiple methods were used, including a quantitative survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Some of the same Indigenous female employees participated in more than one study.

### **Issues shared**

Some of the experiences of the Indigenous women interviewed are not unique to Indigenous women, such as the pressures of family responsibilities and issues associated with working in such a male dominated environment (Kemp and Pattenden 2007). However, these issues can be compounded for Indigenous women, who often have extra cultural or extended family responsibilities, and are more likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged communities than non-Indigenous women. Further, Indigenous women may experience the additional burden of the 'double bind', dealing with sexism as well as racism.

Many women at Century spoke of the extra burden of having family responsibilities and the need to 'prove yourself' at a mine site. One woman said: "*the most annoying thing is that women work hard and they are still the mothers, they still got to do all the work at home and come up here and have to do more work than men because they have to prove themselves, its even harder for an Indigenous woman, feel like your being monitored more*". The Indigenous women who worked in the pit

felt more pressure from their male counterparts, and acknowledged the 'need' to be more masculine. One woman said *"Can't be weak, can't take everything to heart, have to be able to relate to men....they shit- stir you, try to make you break, try to make you leave...that's their idea of having a good time"*. Another woman said that if women showed any form of 'weakness' they were reminded of their femaleness. For example, a group of women agreed that whenever there was a circumstance when they had to leave their shift due to illness, responses from men included: *"your going home early because you are a woman, if you were a man you'd stay"*, whereas nobody said anything to male workers in the same situation. Many of the women thought it was harder to get promoted for women than men, and even harder for Indigenous women. One woman said *"Mining has always been a men's thing. We are the cleaners, we never get anywhere else, men can always get in before a woman because it's mining"*.

A few women who had some experience in a temporary supervisory role, said that the men they supervised were unwilling to take orders. One woman said *"men don't like taking orders from a woman, if a bloke tells them they go out and do it straight away, but if we do they don't"*. Another woman told a story of how she dealt with this: *"I wrote instructions for the day on the board, rather than tell them directly, if I did have to speak to them, I'd start with – would you mind doing me a favour?"* Other cultural issues associated with supervision are referred to later.

While all women may share similar experiences of working in mining, some are compounded for Indigenous women. I now focus on the issues that are unique to Indigenous women.

### **Bottom of the hierarchy**

The great majority of Indigenous women perceived themselves as occupying the bottom position of the mine site 'hierarchy', where non-Indigenous men are at the top, followed by non-Indigenous women, Indigenous men and then them. The women are simultaneously Indigenous and female, a double minority resulting in the bottom position.

In a previous CSRM study that involved Indigenous women at Century mine (Kemp and Pattenden 2007), one woman commented on how she thought non-Indigenous supervisors perceived Indigenous female employees *"They don't take you seriously... they're not going to listen to a woman, think a woman can't know any better than they do, especially a black woman."* Indigenous women in the current study confirmed this position. One woman said *"White women get looked after, do they think we are not intelligent enough to move up to these positions? I mean we're not back in the stone age , there are some smart Aboriginals out there"*. Almost all interviewees said they felt they were overlooked for promotions, or less favoured by supervisors (who are almost entirely non-Indigenous males) because they were Indigenous females, and *'especially dumb'*. One woman noted that in reality, Indigenous women were more likely to be more highly educated than Indigenous men in their community. This is confirmed by ABS statistics (ABS 2006).

The majority of Indigenous women interviewed felt strongly about being 'looked down on' by both non-Indigenous men and women, but were much less critical of

Indigenous men, seemingly preferring to 'stick together' as Indigenous people, against what they saw as the more dominant oppressor – white men and women. As Huggins (1987) stated 20 years ago, it is easier for an Indigenous woman to consider herself first a human being, second an Indigenous person and third a member of the female sex, viewing disadvantages of race and class before those of sex. This relates to the Indigenous feminist literature that recognises the intersection of gender, race and colonialism (Green, 2007). The majority of women at Century are identifying with being a member of an oppressed group, before female. This is not to say that Indigenous men are innocent of the same chauvinist attitudes that non-Indigenous women have accused non-Indigenous men of holding (Huggins 1987). A few of the women interviewed said that working at the mine has enabled them to have more independence from their husbands, who they perceived to be too controlling. One woman said *"Before I worked, my husband expected me to stay home with the kids all day while he was at work, and then all night as well while he went to the pub... now we share"*.

Indirectly, Indigenous men were criticised by many of the women through what was termed 'jealousy'. Many women said that jealousy was the main barrier preventing Indigenous women from working at the mine. People in the communities did not want their partners to come and work for the mine, assuming there are too many opportunities for infidelity. Although this jealousy is apparently felt by both genders, clearly it would effect more women given that the mine site is so male dominated. One woman said that this jealousy is such a major factor, that women in her community had previously been forced to choose between their partner and their job. This jealousy also prevented women from attending the wet mess (bar) on site, in order to avoid married men and starting rumours back in the community. Some also thought it was uncomfortable visiting the bar because of the perceptions held by non-Indigenous men, *"they just stare at you, assuming you are on the piss<sup>5</sup> ...you feel preyed upon"*.

All Indigenous women interviewed felt that non-Indigenous women were favoured for career advancement and generally more supported by non-Indigenous male supervisors. One woman commented that unlike new Indigenous female employees, new non-Indigenous female employees in the pit were made to feel welcome. Their names were known within a few days, with supervisors congratulating and flirting with them on the mines communication channel *"it's like... welcome to our group sort of thing"*. The Indigenous women also thought that non-Indigenous women were more aggressive, more likely to complain and therefore more likely to get promoted or secure training opportunities than Indigenous women. They said Indigenous women were less likely to complain and *"just do what they're told"* and therefore more likely to be lumbered with the unpleasant jobs.

### **Cultural implications**

Working in the mining industry may not be considered culturally appropriate for some Indigenous people. Some have argued that mining and its negative environmental effects are in direct opposition to the Indigenous worldview (Trigger 2002) whereby a responsibility exists to care for 'country'. The word 'country' was adopted by English-

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<sup>5</sup> 'on the piss' is an Australian term for drinking alcohol, usually in large amounts.

speaking Aboriginal peoples to describe their reciprocal relationship to homelands. If you are doing the right thing ecologically, the results will be social and spiritual, and vice versa (Rose 2002:49). Some Indigenous people may therefore refrain from working in mining for this valid cultural reason. However, not surprisingly, given their employment at the mine, none of the women interviewed at Century mine compromised by this factor, only noting concern that rehabilitation is undertaken appropriately.

For some Indigenous employees, cultural laws around permission to speak to certain individuals may be problematic in the workforce environment. For example, in many areas of Australia, Indigenous men are not permitted to speak directly to their mother-in-law (Elkin 1979). This may be problematic in a workforce situation, whereby these two people may be required to work in the same crew, be on the same flight, or supervise each another. According to Indigenous women at Century, this situation does occur occasionally and management have worked around it. However, this is an informal process, so some incidents may go undetected. It is unknown if these laws have a greater affect on women or men.

There are some cultural factors that create very practical challenges for Indigenous women at Century mine. Amongst some Indigenous groups in northern Australia, red ochre (hematite) is specifically the domain of men (i.e. important in male ceremonial contexts) and it is considered offensive and dangerous for women to touch, or be in close contact with. This clearly makes it very problematic and challenging for Indigenous women to work in an open cut pit, where this material can be uncovered regularly. At the request of Traditional Owners, Century Mine management do not allow women to work with ochre. Women (including non-Indigenous women) are not permitted to haul the material in their trucks, and it has to be 'sheeted'<sup>6</sup> before a woman may drive over it. Although the majority of Indigenous people on site respect this cultural tradition (at least publically), some non-Indigenous women operators have expressed frustration in casual conversations. The Indigenous women on the other hand, did not perceive this as 'unfair', or a barrier in any way. They strongly support the cultural significance of this material and the associated exclusion rules.

At the time of interviews, there was a large amount of ochre in open pit, in an area known as the 'west'. As a result, women were assigned tasks such as painting tyres, or moved over to work in the 'kingdom'<sup>7</sup> area. According to the Indigenous women who work as truck drivers or water cart operators in the pit, working in the kingdom is much harder. It is a slower run, and very difficult for fatigue management. Although there is little evidence to suggest that men are abusing this cultural tradition, either to make women do harder work or exclude them from the pit altogether, this remains an area for further investigation. For example, in Papua New Guinea, men have gone to extraordinary lengths to exclude women from operating the dump trucks. One of the most interesting objections being in terms of the danger of pollution to men who had to sit in the same seat where a menstruating women had sat, to the vehicle that would be infused with dangerous emanations from female bodies, and

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<sup>6</sup> Sheeting refers to the laying down of material on the pit floor, usually limestone or shale.

<sup>7</sup> The kingdom area was so nicknamed due to a popular previous supervisor of the area behaving like this was his space, it was his 'kingdom'. When the area moves, so to does the name, and now generally refers to whatever area has ore mining.

to the motor mechanics who would be exposed to the polluted sump oil that would ultimately be the repository for these emanations (MacIntyre, 2003:5-6). Despite opposition from women, the mine decided not to allow women on dump trucks as it would be 'against custom' (Macintyre, 2003).

It is also unknown if humbugging (Aboriginal English for 'pressuring' or 'annoy') for mining income affects women more or differently than men. At home, women from the communities of Doomadgee and Mornington Island said they felt added pressure to share their money (humbug) since working at the mine. One woman said "*Our money is not our money, we gotta share it... Aboriginal way*". This woman did not mind sharing it, but others said they did. Pressure to share with kin or 'demand sharing' is noted in the literature for both genders (Petersen 1993, Trigger 2005) and is important in the constitution of social relations in egalitarian societies. Currently little is known about how income from mining employment is distributed by Indigenous workers and how many people benefit. Further, as O'Faircheallaigh (1998) pointed out a decade ago, there is a need to determine whether waged employment will sharpen, or reduce inequality between Indigenous men and women.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed key findings from recently conducted research by CSRM that had substantial involvement of Indigenous women at Century Mine. The research at Century has shown how important it is that industry and gender mainstreaming practitioners do not consider gender alone, but the other intersecting identities and factors such as race, class and the local socio-political and cultural context of the women affected. Without recognising the fluid nature of gender, the Australian Mining Industry is at risk of missing the needs of Indigenous women. If mining companies are to attract and retain more Indigenous women, as well as contribute to the long term sustainability of Indigenous communities, it is crucial that they understand the impacts of employment more fully. Although this research provides an insight into some Indigenous women's experiences in mining employment, more dedicated research focusing on Indigenous women in mining is warranted.

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