

23. Ethical Section:

23.1 The Third in the Series of Peter Oakley's Articles: Industrial Mining and Anti-Mining Campaigns

Multinational Mining

Industrial scale precious metal mining is currently dominated by a limited number of multinational companies. Most have head offices in the US, UK or former colonies with large gold deposits: Canada, South Africa and Australia. The multinationals operate mines across the world, with an increasing percentage of their activity being in developing countries. Less high profile are 'juniors', smaller mining companies that concentrate on exploration and the initial preparation of concessions, but which anticipate selling these on to the larger companies for the capital-intensive activities of mining and processing.

Most of the multinationals do not restrict themselves to just mining precious metal deposits, but operate different concessions that each produce one or more of all the commercially used metals. In addition, today most



large scale deposits are combinations of metal compounds or complexes of metals as most single metal ore deposits have been exhausted by earlier mining activity. For example, a significant percentage of gold is mined as tellurides (gold-iron complexes) that require specialist processing. Though mines are generally described in terms of their primary product, they may also produce secondary (or by-products) in significant amounts. Most newly-mined silver comes from copper or lead mines, and platinum is found in combination with other precious metals. Frequently gold is mined along with copper, with their combined value making the mine viable. The large mining corporations are able to apply their accumulated technical experience of working a wide range of ores, and the commercial viability of using different processes in specific situations. They also gain economies of scale in terms of leveraging finance, large project management, operating mining and processing plants, developing relationships with specialist equipment suppliers and negotiating with national governments and regional administrations.

The complexity of multinationals' activities and of the products coming from individual mines has consequences for the jewellery industry. Large multinational mining companies are less affected by changes in the type or level of use of one metal and less dependant on any one manufacturing sector than the material supplier in a hypothetical simple supply chain. For example, for an industrial mining company making a primary profit from processing copper ores at one of its concessions, the expectations and needs of those using a by-product such as silver is not paramount in terms of viability in terms of running the mine, and even less so terms of the company's overall balance sheet.

Multinationals' perspectives on their actions are determined through a need to create profit (to keep them in existence as companies) and a requirement to adhere to national laws and regulations. Though they may make

reference to social or environmental responsibilities in their descriptions of practice, these are generally an ongoing response to changing social pressures. Most mining companies were incorporated during a period when very different social values applied, both in respect to the environment and the people living on and from it. Businesses owned predominantly by one individual or a family may be able to adopt new socially or environmentally focussed policies relatively quickly if their owners personally feel this to be desirable or necessary (e.g. Walmart's new environmental stance). But the dispersed nature of responsibility in most multinationals (across directors, managers and major shareholders) makes change a more reactive and incremental process.

It is in relation to this situation that campaigns in relation to specific events and more general practice have been initiated. Such campaigns aim to change the practice of mining companies either directly by influencing shareholder actions, more robust implementation of existing laws and regulations and the refusal or removal of licenses, leases or concessions; or indirectly, through changes in legislation, the criteria for the granting of permissions to explore or mine and public perceptions of industrial mining, specific mining companies and their activities.

Anti-Mining Campaigns

Anti-mining campaigns are mostly built on the underlying position that a specific mining development should not go ahead. Either the project under scrutiny should not be undertaken at all or that a current project should be halted or not extended. This makes such campaigns fundamentally different from those advocating fairer conditions for miners or better mining practices. The anti-mining position is fundamentally antagonistic to the mining industry's existence and leads to polarized positions and a series of legal and social confrontations. In contrast demands to improve standards of safety or environmental control, which can be accommodated by the mining corporations, is relatively more sympathetically received.

As anti-mining campaigns focus specifically on an individual mining site they attack only the company or companies proposing the development, rather than a wider perspective. This can be understood as an immediate response to events 'on the ground', and does have the merit of offering focus to the campaign and a measure of the level of achievement. But in the longer term the accumulation of contested sites begs the question: where will be an acceptable location to mine? If ongoing adversarial contests remains the norm, the most likely outcome, though also the least satisfactory, will be that the potential locations which have exhibited the least resistance will become the 'acceptable' sites by default, whatever their real merits for protection.

Another feature of specific campaigns is their timing. They generally gather pace once the site is in the process of being licensed for extraction, after the corporations have gained exploration licences, committed further resources to prospecting and are able to estimate the expected return from a mine. This is possibly the worst time for a project to be curtailed, as the corporation will have previously received a positive response from authorities (who granted the original exploration lease) and the mine's potential will have been factored into long-term potential profit forecasts. Part of the animosity of such confrontations is due to this prior level of commitment on the part of the mining corporation and the feeling of alienation towards the authorities held by local inhabitants.

Bristol Bay

The current Bristol Bay anti-mining campaign provides a good illustration. The land near the headwaters of Bristol Bay, in South West Alaska, is made up of alluvial sediments containing commercially viable copper and gold deposits. Northern Dynasty and Anglo American have submitted proposals for 'Pebble Mine', which, if created, will be the largest open cast mine in the US. The mine is being opposed by local residents who have formed the Bristol Bay Alliance.

Alaska's extensive mineral resources have been the cause of a sequence of such contestations. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries extraction industries: gold, coal, copper and oil have dominated the Alaskan settler economy. The Alaskan Legislature and local administrations are perceived locally, nationally and internationally as overly supportive of mining at the expense of other livelihoods and the environment. During the last Presidential elections, a distinctly pro-mining and oil-drilling stance, combined with a dismissive attitude towards ecological and environmental perspectives, characterised speeches and comments made by the then Alaskan Governor and Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin.

But this is not the whole story. Whilst the mining industry has strong advocates within the State of Alaska, successive US presidents have intervened, using either a broad interpretation of the 1906 Antiquities Act, or the

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National Parks Act, to declare areas of the State National Monuments or National Parks (restricting current and future mining operations). In particular, the Wrangell-St.Elias region was the focus of competing interests for a large part of the 20th century, and Jimmy Carter's creation of a new extensive National Park covering a large part of the region in 1978 was achieved in the face of concerted opposition by mining interests.

In the case of Bristol Bay the environmental aspect is not just a philanthropic approach to ecological biodiversity or the preservation of currently unexploited wilderness. The Bay's river system is the largest and most productive sockeye salmon run on the North West Coast, supporting over 33% of the total value of Alaska's salmon fisheries, as well as the livelihoods of indigenous communities. For many local inhabitants the possibility of toxic waste obliterating fish stocks is the overwhelming concern. But even the consequences of the planned activities are decried as unsustainable in terms of the region's ecosystem. As the proposed mine will require 35 billion gallons of water the salmon spawning streams across the Bristol Bay drainage basin have been identified as under threat.

Members of the coalition campaigning against the mine have developed some novel strategies to publicise their cause and attack Northern Dynasty and Anglo American. Endorsements for the campaign were sought from professional anglers and angling journalists, leading to active support from hunters and anglers associations across the US and abroad. Concurrently high profile jewellery retailers were pressurized to state their support for the permanent protection of the fishery reserve from large-scale metals mining. Celebrity chefs from cities along the West Coast were invited to Bristol Bay to see the fisheries and promote Sockeye salmon and the Alliance's cause. Subsequent interviews on local and national television stations with media-savvy personalities describing the value of US produced fish and the need for its protection had a wide ranging and direct impact. This range of campaigning activities has had a cumulative effect, crossing traditional political divides and socially isolating the companies and their associates on a number of fronts. The Bristol Bay Alliance campaign is focussed on making it more difficult for the mining companies involved to conduct business (including raise finance, attract partners or gain wider political support) by affecting public opinion and the political appetite for supporting mining ventures.

The effectiveness of the Bristol Bay Alliance is in part due to the location of the site – within one of the most industrialised and democratic nations – and the networks, status and resources of the local campaigners. The Alliance has cannily used media networks, including television, radio and the internet, to publicise its campaign. Activists have been very astute in identifying opportunities to relate the campaign to the outlook and interests of a wide range of US citizens and to make politicians aware of the results. Websites and individual campaigners emphasise the foreign registration – Canadian and British - of the mining companies involved (a morally ambiguous action considering the overseas activities of US corporations in general and US led mining companies in particular). But this appears to strike a chord with many listeners, possibly more than some of the more rational arguments against the project.

Beyond Bristol Bay

In comparison with the inhabitants of Bristol Bay, those affected by mining developments in the developing world have less access to the resources needed to construct a robust resistance, or recourse to legislative protection, even where it exists in theory. The social chasm between business and governing elites and local tribal or peasant populations, and their perceptions of what is valuable or desirable can be immense. Whilst suffering the negative ecological and social effects of mining operations they see little or no economic benefit. Even where jobs are created, applicants require a level of schooling and experience with technologies far outside that found amongst the local population. Indigenous communities, whose relationship to the landscape often underpins their social structure and culture, can collapse due to the destruction of sacred or communal sites central to their cohesion. The more prosaic threat of infectious diseases can be as devastating. AIDs epidemics frequently follow the influx of itinerant construction and mine workers to a region.

In the UK CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, advocates on behalf of such communities. Its Unearth Justice campaign, launched in 2006, reports on what it identifies as breaches of responsibility by Mining Corporations. CAFOD aims to improve the environmental and social conditions of communities living near mining sites rather than taking an anti-mining stance. While Unearth Justice covers all mining activity, CAFOD has produced a publication 'Counting the Cost of Gold' focussing on gold mining and its consequences for local populations in Honduras and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since 2006 CAFOD has continued to follow the issues surrounding the San Martin mine run by Goldcorp in Honduras, emphasising the need to take steps to ensure environmental protection from any acid drainage following the mine's closure at the end of 2009.

One of the consistent features of anti-mining campaigns is the perception that the corporations proposing the mine are external to the society that lives at the location. The development is an unwelcome imposition from outside, but difficult to fight due to its high-level political influence. But not all mining activity is conducted by industrial giants. Gold ores are conducive to small scale or 'artisan' mining, and goldfields across the world are worked by millions of artisan miners. The features of this alternative mining industry, and what it means for ethical gold, will be the subject of the next article.

The following websites provide more information on the Bristol Bay Campaign and its impact and Unearth Justice (including PDFs of the Unearth Justice publications and press releases):

www.bristolbayalliance.com

www.ourbristolbay.com/the-bristol-bay-protection-effort.html

www.sportsmansalliance4ak.org/issues/issues_bristol_bay.html

www.fastcompany.com/magazine/130/mine-field.html?page=0%2C2

www.cafod.org.uk/unearthjustice



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Peter Oakley has a background in analytical chemistry, art and design education and practice and regional skills development. He is currently reading for a PhD at University College London. His research is focusing on the influence gold has on the perceptions and activities of professionals working with the material. Preparation for his PhD project included training as a precious metals assayer at the Birmingham Assay Office and field visits to gold mining sites in California and Alaska. Other institutions that have supported his research include the Goldsmiths Company, the London Assay Office, the British Museum, Tate Britain, the Portable Antiquities Scheme, the British Jewellers' Association, Jewellery Connects, the Fairtrade Foundation and CAFOD.

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24. Feature:

24.1 Are You One of Terry's All-Golds? A Call Out to School of Jewellery, Birmingham Ex-Students



In September 2010, Terry Hunt, Deputy Head and BA Course Director at Birmingham's School of Jewellery, will be retiring. During his 39 years of teaching at the School he has worked with many students on City & Guilds, Dip.A.D., HND, BA and MA courses, as well as PhDs.

Excitingly, he is planning a representative alumni exhibition for next year which will celebrate the rich diversity of those graduating from the School over all these years. The exhibition will be held at the School in February / March and already has the working title of 'Terry's All-Golds'.

There will have to be a curatorial aspect to exhibition selection process. At this time it is presumed that selected individuals would be represented by student work and/or current work; others who have pursued careers which may not be represented by jewellery or silver pieces. Such references, even if only textual, can only add to the richness and diversity of the exhibition.

Terry now needs to contact as many of his ex-students as possible. If you were one of his students please get in touch as soon as possible on:
[e] terry.hunt@bcu.ac.uk



benchpeg is pleased to act as his media partner to help spread the word. Further updates will appear here as well as on the School's website www.schoolofjewellery.co.uk and the School of Jewellery Facebook page.

