‘From Compounded to Fragmented Labour: Mineworkers and the demise of compounds in South Africa’.

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From Compounded to Fragmented Labour:  
Mineworkers and the demise of compounds in South Africa

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Labour and Geographies of Control

During the heydays of the South African gold mining industry, a Chamber of Mines booklet described the role of this body as follows: “One of the Chamber’s early achievements was the establishment of a system of attracting Bantu (African) labourers in the joint interest of the mining companies…” It added, in rather Orwellian fashion, that it had also ensured “cooperation with the companies in evolving a uniformly high standard of treatment of all Bantu workers…” (Chamber of Mines, n.d.: 7). But as we know, the industry’s migrant labour system – including its recruitment arms, TEBA and WNELA, as well as the notorious mine compounds – were key parts of the landscape of labour control. At the heart of the migrant labour system was a spatial strategy that had to ensure a regular supply of cheap black labour to the industry.

The migrant labour system was a cornerstone of the landscape of colonial and apartheid South and southern Africa. This involved African men being forced to leave their families in rural parts of the sub-continent in order to travel to mining centres where they were housed in single-sex compounds while they worked in the mines. Their movements to and from the mines were tightly controlled by the pass system. As such, apartheid was most probably one of the most extreme examples of spatial engineering in human history. This spatial strategy hinged on the creation of a spectrum of institutions and infrastructure linking together two nodes. Control was exercised at both ends.

The first node, various “labour sending areas”, was controlled through what Mamdani (1996) terms indirect rule in the form of traditional leadership structures overseen by the various incarnations of the Department of Native Administration. These leaders, and governments in the case of other African countries, were paid commissions and a part of the wages of mine migrants. The second node was the institution of the mining compound at the mines themselves. Control in the compounds linked back to various rural villages with forms of
indirect rule often transplanted into the infrastructure of control so central to these places. The logic of control in mining compounds was reinforced by strictly enforced urban segregation in places where mines were located (Abrahams 1963). While a lot of attention has been paid to these two nodes, the articulation between them and the mutually reinforcing forms of control have been neglected. Mining compounds would not have been possible without villages as counterpoints, as well as the local urban and peri-urban geography of apartheid.

But, as we know, it is not only state institutions and major corporations that shape landscapes of control. In this paper, we argue that those on the receiving end of spatial strategies of control are not merely passive pawns moved around in a game of chess. They are active agents who continually contest the rules of the game. To be sure, they are protagonists in what Bauman (1998) calls the “space wars”. Indeed, “space can be used by both capital and labour – and by different segments within these two categories – to further political and economic agendas,” argues Herod (2001: 257). Structuralist approaches to labour geography fail to see workers as “active geographical agents” (p. 256), he argues. In order to see workers and their organisations as active geographical agents, there is a need “to understand how various groups of workers went about constructing spatial fixes in pursuit of their varied political and economic objectives” (Herod 2001: xiii; see also Herod & Wright 2002; Harvey 2006).

In this paper we examine the way in which the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) captured the compound system in South Africa. The NUM is the largest affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and one of the most powerful unions in the country. It is a spectacular illustration of how workers’ agency shapes and re-shapes landscapes. Compounds were more than a convenient housing solution to the mining industry. The institution served as a mechanism of control. Nevertheless, this NUM was able to capture this space and turn the logic of control on its head, a strategy that explains the union’s success in organising the industry. Where manufacturing unions had to organize on a small scale – factory by factory – the NUM used the economies of scale of mines to their advantage and was able to grow worker organization at a rapid pace. Once the NUM captured the compounds, workers were able to shape the labour geography of the mining industry.

There is a rich body of scholarship on the mining labour process, migrant labour, and the nature of compounds in southern and South Africa (e.g. Van Onselen 1976; Gordon 1978; Callinicos 1980. Murray 1981, Crush, Jeeves & Yudelman 1991; Moodie 1994; see also Allen 1992, 2003a & 2003b). Particularly useful for our purposes in writing this paper was a special edition of Labour, Capital and Society (25, 1) which reported on a research project on the changing nature of mine migrancy and accommodation patterns (guest edited by Crush, James & Jeeves 1992). Several of the trends we discuss in this paper appear in this literature in a piecemeal fashion, since the changes were still tentative. We see our contribution as building on this scholarship, but taking it forward to consider more recent changes, such as the shift from gold to platinum, and the consolidation of post-apartheid social and geographical configurations.

At the risk of unfair generalisation, it could also be argued that the agency of mineworkers and as individuals, and as a collective, has been underplayed in most of this literature. Shifts in migration are often portrayed as the outcome of broad structural changes involving the state and capital. The fact that our research focus was the NUM gave us unprecedented access to the world of mineworkers, and the interplay between worker struggles and corporate and state policy. However, we are aware of the fact that in attempting to point to agency as a counter to
the cynical determinism of structuralist analysis there is a real danger of falling prey to naïve voluntarism.

The NUM’s campaigns against migrant labour and the compound system paid off, and with democracy mineworkers increasingly tend to live in spaces outside these compounds. Ironically, this change in the landscape of mining is now presenting the NUM with a challenge. The union has to adapt to the new spatial order to which workers themselves contributed. It challenges the union’s notions of what constitutes a branch, how union meetings are called, and how union democracy is structured. As the spatial order is reconfigured, old divisions of ethnicity and nationality come back to haunt the NUM, as well as newer fissures around gender (see also Buhlungu & Bezuidenhout 2008). In this paper we attempt to make sense of this seeming paradox.4

We identify and discuss three historical periods, namely the colonial and apartheid moment (up to 1982), the moment of resistance (1982 to 1987), and the moment of liberation (1987 to the present). We use 1982 as a turning point, because it is the year when the NUM is formed. This is also the time when what is called ‘flexible migration’ shifts to ‘inflexible migration’, implying more permanence and stability of migrant worker contracts. The phase of contraction in gold mining also starts in this period (Crush 1992; Crush & Jeeves 1992). The year 1987 is another turning point because of the historic strike that took place in this year and the NUM’s mineworkers take control-campaign launched in that year. Realising that the NUM had successfully captured the compounds, and responding to a wave of violence in 1986, the mining firms formally abandon their preference for hostel accommodation (James 1992; Hunter 1992; Laburn-Peart 1992).

During each period, we focus on four forms of control, namely spatial control, reproductive control, associational control, and political control. By spatial control we mean regulating and restricting the actual movements of individuals or groups of individuals. In this case, this refers to the movement of people between the two nodes we referred to, as well as their movements in and around compounds. By reproductive control we mean interventions into people’s actual reproductive functions (including sexual intercourse), their intake of food and beverages, issues such as personal hygiene, and even how they spend their leisure time. By associational control we mean the regulation and restriction voluntary interaction among workers, including forms of worker self-organisation such as union activities, sport, religion, and leisure. By political control we mean the policing functions that constitute what Burawoy (1985) calls the company-state, specifically when company officials incorporate elements of force and coercion into their activities. These various forms of control add up to a normative-corporal order based on various sanctions, which shift over time. It is a normative order because it contains an element of ideological legitimisation, and corporal because regimes of control essentially add up to the regulation of actual bodies.

The Colonial and Apartheid Moment (up to 1982)

Spatial control during this period was already embedded in the way in which workers were recruited into the mining industry. Colonial land policies were introduced to disrupt rural economies in order to create a labour market. Workers in the Eastern Cape used the word ukujoyina, which means to join, to describe this. Joining the industry meant that workers were leaving that which was familiar and joined a system that made decisions on their behalf. Even decisions over who joined the industry were not completely up to individuals themselves. The
local TEBA (or WNELA) office was a nerve centre for recruitment, regulation and enforcement.

Workers were issued with bus or train tickets to and from the mines where they were employed. The road and rail infrastructure supported the movements of mineworkers and ore. Stations at Lourenco Marques, De Aar, Queenstown and Kokstad were key points along the railway line, with busses linking more remote rural areas into the network. A WNELA fleet of aeroplanes were used to transport workers from Malawi. Workers did not choose their destinations or mode of transport. They did not have choice where they worked. Mineworkers called the hospital where they were processed and allocated from KwaMzilikazi. These institutions of spatial control meant that there was no real market for labour in the industry in the sense where workers can choose which jobs to apply for and which employers to work for. To resign from a contract was a criminal offense. Back home, TEBA offices facilitated investigations into workers who broke their contracts.

Hence, ukujoyina meant being sucked into a pipeline which took you to an unknown destination where you would be spewed out in a highly regimented residential space called a compound. As Callinicos writes, such a mineworker “found himself a virtual prisoner in the compound; for the compound system imposed almost total control on him while he was at the mine” (1980: 43). Permission to leave the compound for reasons other than work had to be sought. This was further enforced by the local geography of apartheid, which required all Africans to carry evidence of employment in the form of a pass. In addition, compounds were created as male-only spaces. Women who visited from rural areas were only allowed to see their husbands in a building called the skomplaas, which was located near the compound, but usually fenced off. The skomplaas could only accommodate a limited number of visiting women and their miner husbands for very limited periods of time and under very stringent conditions.

It is important not to underestimate the extent to which workers were able to resist the logic of control. The major form this resistance took during this period was for workers to withdraw their labour as individuals and by refusing to take contracts. Workers often stayed away from mines for years, and would return only when they were forced by drought and the increased impoverishment of rural ‘reserves’. When there was drought, the mining industry rejoiced, because they knew that their problems of labour shortages would be addressed temporarily. To be sure, the Chamber of Mines was continually looking for new recruits, a condition called flexible migration (Crush 1992).

This brings us to reproductive control under colonialism and apartheid. As we can see from the institution of the skomplaas, mining companies even regulated the conditions under which husbands and wives were allowed to interact. The fact that the system was based on single-sex compounds and men who had to migrate as individuals, unaccompanied by their families, implies a stark intervention into reproduction. The social disruption caused by this throughout southern Africa has been well documented (see e.g. Wilson 1972; Callinicos 1980; Moodie 1994). Because of gendered nature of compound-life, sexual activities and a pseudo-household division of labour found other outlets, particularly the phenomenon of “mine-wives” where younger men performed sexual and household services for older men in return for money and other favours (Moodie 1994). There were rare cases where mineworkers were able to evade controls and moved to townships where they started relationships with local women (Abrahams 1963). Mining companies also controlled the intake of food, ran beer halls at the hostels, as well as mine stores.
Control over food included the kind of food workers had to eat. Workers did not have choice in this. Food was often of a very low quality and led to protests. The following table puts the money the industry spent on food for compound workers into perspective. If one considers that the gold mining industry employed roughly 380,000 workers in 1964, the Chamber’s figure of R18m spent on “food given free to non-White workers” adds up to R47-37 per worker for the year, or R3-95 per month.

Table 1: Mining production, costs, wages and dividends, 1964

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOLD PRODUCTION</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Output in 1964 (by weight)</td>
<td>29,136,542 oz.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value of output in 1964</td>
<td>R731,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<th>WORKING COSTS</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Excluding primary producers of uranium)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 1964</td>
<td>R411,335,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per day in 1964</td>
<td>R1,318,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per ounce produced in 1964</td>
<td>R14-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per ton milled in 1964</td>
<td>R5-49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAGES AND FOOD</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(All gold and uranium mines)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total wages and allowances paid (1964)</td>
<td>R193,798,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of food given free to non-White workers (annual)</td>
<td>R18,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<th>DIVIDENDS</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total (1964)</td>
<td>R121,763,890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the movements of mineworkers were restricted, mining companies had a captive market and were able to control consumption. Mine stores, known as kwamashonisa, basically ran a monopoly of foodstuffs and consumer goods such as clothes, radios, and bicycles. Beer halls were also controlled by the companies and were located in compounds, which increased the ability to control the leisure activities of mineworkers (see also Van Onselen 2001).

But a focus on reproductive control in the compounds should not obscure the importance of the fact that migrant labour meant that the bulk of the burden of social reproduction was carried in rural areas, where families remained in reserves and neighbouring countries. Here, they had to eke out a living based on remittances and subsistence agriculture, which was disrupted by forced removals and “betterment” policies. But the flow of cash from the mines was also taken advantage of by local white traders, who were protected from competition by discriminatory laws. The spatial control through the compound system was further bolstered by these traders through their role as granters of credit to families, their acting as postal agents, and finally as recruiters of labour.

**Associational control** was based on the broader racial order that structured South African society. Up until 1979, those who were classified as “pass-bearing Natives” were excluded from the industrial relations dispensation and collective industrial action was criminalised. Attempts by black workers to form unions in the mining industry were violently crushed by companies and the state. In addition to measures preventing workers from organising, the industry actively encouraged association on the basis of “ethnicity”. This was done through the allocation of jobs, as well as the allocation of rooms in the compounds. Mines also encouraged sport, religion, self-help societies. These activities are examples of conscious attempts at establishing the proverbial “opiate of the masses”; diversions to take attention
away from collective self-organisation that challenges authority and the system as a whole. However, the intention did not always determine the outcome. Workers were able to use some of these activities to further goals of subversive organisation. In the early period they used leisure activities to cope with their hard living conditions and dangerous work. But consciousness evolved over time, as forms of organisation created collective bonds among workers. At crucial times, these became the bedrock for collective organisation when the indignity of having to cope led to action (Van Onselen 1976; Gordon 1978; Cohen 1980).

**Political control** included the notorious mine police, essentially a private police force that maintained “order” on the mines. At the most advanced level, these forces had had uniforms and military vehicles. At the most basic level, it involved mine constables armed with batons and knobkerries who enforced basic transgressions of regulations such as being drunk and disorderly in public or not obeying instructions. The mine police had the power to detain mineworkers and had detention rooms for this purpose. In spite of this, mine constables were the eyes and ears of hostel superintendents, and their authority was derived from this, not respect by mineworkers.

In compounds themselves, a strict hierarchy of control was maintained. At the apex was the white superintendent, who took overall responsibility. Workers were subdivided into ethnic groups and the principles of indirect rule applied as “traditional leaders”, or izinduna, were put in charge. Their authority was reinforced by the presence of the mine police. Finally, within each dormitory the induna delegated authority to the so-called sibonda, who was essentially in charge of policing issues such as noise levels, cleanliness, and personal hygiene. A further important element of the compound as an institution of political control was the presence of public address systems, which could be used to make announcements and orders.

The political apparatuses of control were the key to the shape the apartheid workplace regime (see Von Holdt 2003) took at the mines – a company state with access to mechanisms of violence and coercion. This was one aspect of the apartheid workplace regime, since similar sanctions were applied by supervisors underground.

The **normative-corporal order** under apartheid constituted an attack on the dignity of workers and their households. The order intervened in the most private spheres of human existence, from cooking food to making love. It was also characterised by contending racialised masculinities. Harsh sanctions were applied to those who dared to resist the order, sanctions including physical assault or imprisonment. The contract system also meant that resisting the system could lead to being ejected from the mining labour market. Trouble makers were marked by TEBA and WNELA and were often not hired again.

It is the attack on the dignity of mineworkers and their families that led some of the fiercest resistance. Often such resistance was crushed by the industry and the state, such as the mineworkers strike in 1946. The labour historian E.P. Thompson (1963) has shown how workers mobilise notions of dignity in order to assert their agency. This is also the case in the context of the South African mining industry, where it was common to call grown men “boys”, who in turn had to call their white supervisors “baas”. Tellingly, the current president of the NUM, Senzeni Zokwana, recently linked the compound system to indignity: “Dehumanising living conditions are one of the issues that have stripped the dignity of mineworkers, the core producers of our mineral wealth that anchors our economy.”
Hodson (2001) attempted to develop a theory of dignity in the workplace. He identified four sources of the denial of dignity: mismanagement and abuse, overwork, constraints to worker autonomy, and contradictions of employee involvement in decisions. All these were clearly present in the mining industry. Hodson argues that these essentially managerial transgressions can be countered by worker resistance to attacks, organizational citizenship, independent meaning systems, and group relations (Hodson 2001: 17). Hodson’s sources of indignity are clearly appropriate here. However, his narrow focus on the workplace leaves the landscapes of control so salient in the case of the South African mining industry unexamined. We now turn to an examination of the moment of resistance, which started with the formation of the NUM in 1982.

**Moment of Resistance (1982-1987)**

The various forms that labour control took under apartheid and colonialism, spatial control, reproductive control, associational control and political control, led to various forms of resistance from mineworkers.

The main contours of apartheid **spatial control** remained intact during the resistance period. The access of visitors to mining hostels was still tightly controlled. This did not mean that these boundaries were impenetrable. NUM organisers told us of how they were able to get hold of identification wrist tags and were able to hide Umkhonto we Sizwe cadres in some of the hostels. But there were signs that some elements in the mining industry were starting to rethink the virtues of the migrant labour system. In 1977 the Riekert Commission was appointed to consider urban unrest and new policies on urbanisation – particularly the creation of a stable urban working class. A sense of urban crisis led to major corporations forming the Urban Foundation, with Anglo-American taking a lead. To be sure, waves of violence on the mines from 1974 to 1976 led to the exploration of alternatives to the compound system. The mining industry recognised that squalor in the compounds led to the violence (McNamara 1988; Steinberg & Seidman 1995: 25).

An important change was also that the union was able to get access to compounds. This started out in Anglo-American compounds, where the company withdrew some of its more despotic practises in order for the union to emerge. Due to increased militancy and instability in the industry, Anglo-American executives saw the need for worker interests to be represented in a more systematic way. Also, new compounds were constructed along less militaristic plans, and there was a move to house the higher echelons of black mineworkers in stable township homes, such as Wedela Township in Carletonville (Laburn-Peart 1992: 106).

Nevertheless, the local geography of apartheid remained intact, but the emergence of the minibus taxi industry as an alternative to trains and company buses started to unravel the spatial order at its seams. This means that mineworkers have more flexibility in travelling between urban and rural nodes, as well as around mining communities themselves and to the urban townships. Mineworkers are not longer housed in enclosed spaces and were exposed to repertoires of resistance in factories and townships. During this time the pass system also became unworkable, and “influx control” gives way to attempts to locate new industry in rural areas, known as “industrial decentralisation” policies. Obviously, this attempt at a spatial fix to rising urban wages and assertiveness could not be applied to mines.

In this period **reproductive control** was still shaped by the migrant labour system, but more interaction between mineworkers and township dwellers led to increased contact between
mineworkers and sex workers. The practice of taking on mine wives receded, and some mineworkers struck up relationships with women in urban areas. Unions campaigns started to pay off and the quality of food improved. Increased worker influence in how hostels were run also depoliticised canteens. Since workers were increasingly able to travel to town, mine stores began to disappear, and informal trade mushroomed outside compounds. The NUM appropriated leisure activities which had previously been sponsored and dominated by managerial interests.

**Associational control** remains race-based, but ethnicity is actively incorporated by the NUM. During the 1980s there is a decline in the number of “faction fights”, in part due to the fact the NUM gains in strength. The union also captures sport stadiums as a space for rallies and meetings. Since these stadiums are technically on private land, the police find it increasingly hard to prevent and control such gatherings of workers. Leisure activities designed to discourage workers from joining unions are now captured by the NUM, and these activities now tend to reinforce union organisation.

In terms of **political control**, the role of the mine police shifts from micro labour control to a macro securocratic function. Increasingly mining companies are drawn into the state’s attempts to fight the liberation struggle. Nevertheless, the NUM succeeds in subverting the hostel hierarchy. The power of the izinduna is broken and taken over by elected committees. The union also takes of the dreaded public address systems and uses them to call its own meetings and to communicate with workers. The NUM is increasingly confident and assertive, contests everything, and puts an alternative political infrastructure in place.

Normative-corporal order during resistance phase implies that workers are able to assert their dignity at a micro level. The NUM constructs resistance based on African masculinity. The ability of companies to use arbitrary sanctions is limited to some extent. Mineworkers who are organised in a militant union limit the assaults. Disciplinary procedures are put in place and the union is able to end the contract system.

**Liberation (1987-present) “Mineworkers take control…”**

In the liberation period the migrant labour system has by no means come to an end. But increasingly workers have a choice to settle in and around mining communities. Key elements of the **spatial control** of the past break down, but some elements are reconstituted. At the compounds we visited there are now diverse logics of access. At a compound in Carletonville (now called a residence), we were able to walk in and out without being accosted by a security official. The fact that one of us stood out in terms of skin colour meant that we were noticed, but after enquiries we were not prevented from entering. At the Nr 1 Contractors Hostel in Rustenburg things were different though. Here access is still tightly controlled and we had to rely on the negotiation skills of a union official from the regional office to get inside. In this hostel, contract workers are housed. Roughly a third of workers in platinum mining are employed through labour contractors. Where the majority of mineworkers now have indefinite contracts of employment, the old insecurity of contract is reintroduced for this segment of the mining labour market.

Access control has a further interesting dynamic. Since workers now run and control compounds, they tend to see these as spaces that are safe from crime, with the union acting as a gatekeeper. Hostel dwellers are also now visitors to communities, and increasingly members of communities around mines. They can choose from a range of transport options for
travelling to and from mines to home villages, as well as local travel, including buses, taxis, and trains. The proximity of informal settlements to mines means that many can walk to and from work. Many workers also have their own cars now, with a seeming propensity to acquire “bakkies”, or pickup trucks. These can be used to transport goods and passengers to and from villages.

The local geography has been transformed in profound ways. In Figure 1 we provide a representation of local geography of mining communities under apartheid.

**Figure 1: Local Geography under Apartheid**

Legislation such as the Group Areas Act, coupled with “influx control”, led to a regimented approach to urban zoning. This geography is rapidly changing, as represented in Figure 2.

Apart from the compounds of old, townships, and limited married quarters, workers now live in various configurations of compounds at various stages of conversion, RDP houses, their own houses in new suburbs, township houses, informal settlements, villages near mines, flats rented from companies, backrooms in old white suburbs, houses or backrooms in old white working class suburbs, and backrooms in managerial estates.

Where the nature of spatial control was based on the logic of incarceration and the compound, the fact that the NUM turned this logic on its head meant that management soon realised that the policy of divide and rule (*induna* system) had to be changed to one where the segmentation of workers operated in different ways. Rather than drawing on notions of ethnicity, seniority became the fulcrum of this strategy, and residential patters followed suit. The higher echelons of the labour market moved into family housing – often decent new suburbs – whereas those at the bottom of the chain (contractors) still remain in locked into the
logic of compounds and migrant labour. Within compounds themselves, there is also differentiation, with older workers living in single rooms, and younger ones in dormitories.

The company-state makes way for the market to become the key mechanism of control. The logic of coercion fades, and the logic of choice intersects with class. This shift is embedded in a local geography, where workers can map their mobility on the landscape. Indeed, space can be used to compound, but also to fragment. Whereas in the colonial and apartheid period spatial control took the form of containing people within designated spaces, from the liberation period onwards, spatial control took the form of differentiation and segmentation – driven by the market.

### Figure 2: Local Geography in Post-apartheid Era

The unravelling of the apartheid spatial order also means that approaches to reproductive control have changed. Citizenship has become a major fault line, with foreign migrants subjected to being divided from their families. Nevertheless, the number of South African migrants is still high. There is a disjuncture between the NUM’s call for the termination of the migrant labour system and the interests of many of their members, who would rather build their homesteads in rural areas, which they see as safer and an appropriate place for a dignified old age. This is continuity with the migrant labour system of the past. But there are also reconstituted families living in the various formations mentioned above.

Sex work is still a major feature in and around mining communities. Indeed, choice leads to risk, and mines and mine compounds are filled with bill boards and posters advertising the dangers of promiscuity and unprotected sex.

The food and alcohol trade is now thoroughly privatised, with the language of BEE and SMME’s used to praise the virtues of this approach. In the hostels there are various kiosks,
dry cleaning services, entrepreneurs who offer driving lessons, banks, cigarette vendors and transport and travel companies. Compounds are now hubs of economic activities that are no longer controlled by mining houses. Also, kitchens, security, gardens, and canteens are all outsourced to suppliers – with BEE companies (including those of the NUM’s former general secretary Cyril Ramaphosa) taking their fair share of this.

The nature of associational control has also been transformed. Mineworkers can now choose which union to join, with some of NUM’s former members who join the ranks of supervision and management now becoming members of UASA. There is also a trend towards the privatisation of representation, with legal insurance companies such as Scorpions and LegalWise who have offices in and around compounds. In some cases, union officials and office bearers act as their representatives. Religion plays a major role, possibly due to higher levels of insecurity among workers. Workers can also now choose from a variety of sports clubs, which management seems to have handed over to the state.

Political control in the liberation period has shifted significantly. The functions of the mine police are now outsourced to private security agencies. There are rules and procedures that govern their behaviour, and some demilitarisation has taken place. Women often work as security guards, frequently at the gates of compounds. In terms of compound governance structure, there is dual power, with worker-based structures on the one hand, and company structures on the other. The managing and maintenance of compounds are often outsourced to BEE companies. Because there are fewer workers in hostels, the PA system has become less central, with the union increasingly moving meetings from the compounds to times when workers come back from their underground shifts.

Normative-corporal order after liberation implies that dignity has been asserted at the macro-level. Mineworkers even run the ANC. Of course, this can not be said for foreign workers, with new cleavages emerging between South African and foreign workers. In addition, new forms of indignity emerge at the micro-level, as the shift from the state to the market through contracting introduces new forms of insecurity. Also, the establishment of a non-racial masculine solidarity means that women now bear the brunt of indignity. The nature of sanctions has changed. The NUM still provides considerable protection from the arbitrary exercise of coercion. There have been numerous legislative improvements, but the benefits do not reach all mineworkers. Contracting reintroduces the whip of the market.

Conclusion

The outcomes of the configuration of space depend on a dynamic interaction between attempts at labour control and resistance form workers. In each of the moments we discuss, we see different permutations of space, depending on regimes of control that capital puts in place the resulting resistance. Attempts at control by management are driven by the search for profitability, as well as state policy that seeks to maintain social order, usually as defined by dominant interests in society. Changing regimes of accumulation clearly impact on how labour is incorporated, allocated, controlled and reproduced (see Peck 1996). The introduction of the compound system, as well as the modifications to this at different times, was no doubt shaped by imperatives of capital accumulation. Nevertheless, the major shifts in spatial control resulted from worker actions. In labour process terms worker resistance is a response to exploitation, leading to struggles around the wage-effort bargain. This approach does not recognise the importance of struggles around dignity, and the fact that this is often a powerful impetus for collective action. Our research on servicing in the NUM showed that
mineworkers were equally members of the union because it “fights racism” as the union’s track record in negotiating better wages (Bezuidenhout, Kenny, Masha & Tshikalange 1998; Bezuidenhout, Buhlungu, Hlela, Modisha & Sikwebu 2005).

During colonialism and apartheid, the mining industry did not just exploit African workers in an economic sense, it also attacked the dignity of mineworkers and their families, at the micro, as well as the macro level. At the heart of this was a denial of choice including in such areas as the most intimate aspects of human existence. Associated with the attack on dignity was the denial of an assertion of identity and the use of sanctions to regulate the behaviour of mineworkers. As workers resisted these attacks on their dignity, the crudeness of the indignities, the denial of the assertion of identity and the use of sanctions shifted for the better. A narrow focus on exploitation only, will fail to appreciate this. The hegemony of the market in new forms of control in the liberation phase is not merely a cynical shift to a new regime of exploitation. The fact that workers are able to assert their dignity, that they often can make choices in areas where they were previously denied this, is a momentous advance. Mentioning the importance of choice and individual freedom does not necessarily imply a celebration of the market, as the new contours of class clearly illustrate (for a summary see Table 2 below).

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<th>Table 2: Shifts in the normative-corporal order</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colonialism and apartheid</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dignity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
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The introduction of choice for black mineworkers has its own contradictions. Where labour was compounded in the past, and used this to organise solidarity, the fragmentation of labour in the liberation phase leads to new cleavages, which undermine old solidarities; men vs women, permanent vs contract, South Africans vs foreigners, and this overlaps with ethnicity, and finally, hostel dwellers vs those who reside outside the hostels. In short, the demise of the logic of compounding results in a logic of fragmentation. This clearly presents the NUM with a challenge. Our survey of members found that 70% of those who live in single-sex hostels always attend mass meetings, 67% of those who live in hostels with family units always attend, 64% of those who live in family homes always attend, and 60% of those who live in informal settlements always attend (Bezuidenhout et al 2005). The implications are clear. New residential patterns are leading to a decline in union participation.

Whereas there is a substantial fragmentation of residential patterns, the migrant labour system seems to be resilient. The resulting cleavages among workers are a threat to solidarity and existing ways of organizing. This does not mean that compounds have become redundant. It is ironic that contract workers were organized at their hostel, which implies that changes in the industry and patterns of accommodation are highly uneven. Clearly, for the NUM there is a need to rethink the organising model based only on full-time employed workers, who live in compounds only. New forms of solidarity will have to be forged that involve families,
communities, and local government. The stakes for individuals to lose their jobs are much higher when entire families are settled near a mine.
Bibliography


Bezuidenhout, Andries, Bridget Kenny, George Masha & Humbulani Tshikalange. 1998. ‘A Strong Branch is a Strong Union: Servicing the National Union of Mineworkers.’ Johannesburg: Sociology of Work Unit and National Union of Mineworkers.


Notes

1 Draft paper – comments welcome to sbuhlungu@uj.ac.za and/or Andries.Bezuidenhout@wits.ac.za. For now we would like to thank those who attended our presentation of the findings at a SWOP breakfast seminar on April 18th this year for comments and suggestions, in particular Sithethi Mxhasu from the NUM regional office in Rustenburg, and Dinga Sikwebu who sent written comments. We would also like to thank Desmond from the NUM in Rustenburg, who facilitated access to compounds there, as well as Sepetla Molapo from Wits, who accompanied us to hostels and communities in Carletonville, where he is conducting research on mineworkers and HIV/Aids.

2 “The Employment Bureau of Africa” and “The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association”.

3 We refer here to mining compounds, not the municipal compounds or hostels run by the state. These are discussed at length by, amongst others, Sitas (1983), Ramphele (1993), and Xetetwane (1995).

4 Our analysis is based on a survey of 724 members of NUM, supplemented by 44 focus group interviews, as well as fifteen interviews with regional and national office bearers and officials. At the union’s request, the research was conducted in 2005 in six of the union’s eleven regions. These were the Free State, Natal, North East, Klerksdorp, Rustenburg and Western Cape regions. In terms of our methodology this is a limitation, but also a strength. While our sample does not cover the whole union, the regions included represent the sectoral spread of the union’s activities. The Free State and Klerksdorp are two typical gold mining regions, and some of the union’s oldest and strongest branches are located here. In the past, Natal represented coal mining, but since the closure of many of these mines organising in the region has shifted into the construction sector. The Western Cape is also dominated by organising in construction, but contains a number of diamond mines. Rustenburg and North West represent the recent boom in platinum mining. The union’s less well established branches are located here. Because of the absence of a sampling frame (which ruled out random sampling) a quota sample was used to reflect the proportions of members in the sectors and regions included in the study. The bulk of the interviews were conducted in three large regions; Rustenburg (258 interviews), the Free State (207 interviews), and Klerksdorp (154 interviews). The rest were conducted in North East (58 interviews), Western Cape (31 interviews), and Natal (16 interviews). The sectoral spread of membership was taken into account in each of the regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Actual membership (2004)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>228 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>259807</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the impossibility of probability sampling and the practical problems experienced in operationalizing our quota sample, we triangulated the findings of the survey by drawing on three further methods.

First, branches were selected for focus group interviews based on the findings of the survey – particularly taking into consideration different levels of servicing reported by members. A total of 44 focus group interviews were conducted. We took care to include underrepresented categories of workers, including construction workers and women.

Second, we conducted a number of in-depth interviews with key regional office bearers and officials and national officials. In each of the regions we attempted to interview the regional chairperson, the regional secretary and the regional coordinator. We were mostly successful in this, but were unable to interview all these in Klerksdorp and the Western Cape. At the Head Office we interviewed the national coordinators for gold/coal, platinum, construction and energy (or people acting in their positions) (see Bezuidenhout et al., 2005).

Third, we visited six hostels, former white working class quarters, a managerial estate, and a range of working class suburbs and townships, informal settlements, rural villages, and gated communities for the rich, primarily in Carletonville and Rustenburg in 2008. During these visits we were able to follow-up on some of the themes raised by the findings of the surveys, focus groups and interviews.
We primarily draw on the qualitative data generated by the survey, the focus groups, in-depth interviews, and our visits to mines and compounds. Where we report on quantitative data, we do not suggest that the findings can be inferred to the union as a whole.

5 Some people use the word to refer to married quarters, and in some instances even townships. It is also spelled ‘skomplas’ (Moodie & Ndatshe 1992: 120).


7 The foot soldiers of the mine police were black, including former president Nelson Mandela, see Mandela (1995).

8 ‘Baas’ means ‘boss’, but implies an important element of white supremacy – a more accurate translation might be ‘master’, rather than ‘boss’. According to the Chamber of Mines’ English-Afrikaans-Fanakalo dictionary, ‘baas’ is translated as ‘bas’ in Fanakalo. The Fanakalo ‘bas boy’ is translated to ‘baasjong’ or ‘voorjong’ in Afrikaans. The Afrikaans translation for ‘supervisor’ would be ‘voorman’ – which is already a gendered translation. But Africans are not considered to be ‘men’ here – the word ‘jong’ is used instead, which literally means ‘young’. This is similar to the colonial use of ‘boy’ in English. In the same dictionary, the different versions for what later became a ‘machine operator’ are ‘machine boy’ (English), ‘boorjong’ (Afrikaans) and ‘mtshin boy’ (Fanakalo). The translation for ‘miner’ (in English ‘ganger’ is presented as a synonym) is simply ‘bas’. A ‘fitter’ (‘passer’ in Afrikaans), is translated as ‘bas ka lo fitas’, a ‘shaft timberman’ is a ‘bas ka lo tshaf’. Here we can see how certain jobs implied a certain racial category. A ‘miner’ can only be a ‘bas’. In fact, the two concepts were synonymous. See Chamber of Mines of South Africa. 1969. Miners’ Dictionary – Woordeboek vir Myners.