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Valuable or devalued? An ethnography of mine work in crisis

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Abstract

Research in the mining community of Carletonville focused on how individuals negotiate and contest different value orientations in trying to construct a workable moral economy. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews and observations of respondents from lower and higher wage classes, the report deconstructs the elements of differential value sets that are redefining and sometimes destabilizing the moral economy and underlining views of inequality. Wage disputes are seen not only as mine workers' expressions of economic injustice but perhaps more crucially as a form of control and protection of their craft and status. The dominance of global economic governance and decision-making is leading to more acute internal divergences but can also be a starting point for a discussion about the impact of conflicts in social values.