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Simon Gush

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Masters of Art by Reasearch

Sociology

Supervisors

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DECLARATION

I, Simon Gush, am submitting this research report to fulfill the requirements for Masters of Arts in Sociology, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
I declare that this research is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other University.

Signature …… Date ……..

the limits of work

Salem films:

Chapter 1

Land is in the Air

https://vimeo.com/270107162

Chapter 2

Stanley is in the Tree

https://vimeo.com/290428682

Chapter 3

Working the Land

https://vimeo.com/295605954

Passwords:

WorkWorkWork


PRODUCTIVE
LABOUR
WORK ETHICS
REPRODUCTIVE

introduction

The Limits of Work

When I started this masters project a number of people gave me the advice that I assume most postgraduate students get, that the project I want to do will ultimately change when I start the process of working. That new ideas and directions will come with the research. This has been the defining experience over the last two years for me. While I believe that I have been able to make significant progress on my some of my initial ideas, the project has grown, shifted and ultimately escaped far beyond what I thought it would be. It is a project that I believe will take longer and require more work to come to resolution. What I am presenting here is a beginning. It reflects the progress I have made but also the new questions I would still like to explore. By bringing together this collection of artworks and essays at this point I will hopefully be able to pause and reflect upon the work that I have done so far before continuing to push my research and work into the gaps and questions that have come in view.

I have been working as a practicing artist for a number of years prior to beginning this degree. I did an undergraduate degree at the University of the Witwatersrand in Fine Art. A few years after graduating I completed a postgraduate degree at the Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten (Higher Institute for Fine Arts), in Ghent, Belgium, a practical studio based program without classes or exams, that is essentially time and space to develop one's artwork. After returning to South Africa I continued to practice as an artist, while at the same time sustaining myself financially through freelance work within the artworld, installing exhibitions and other related jobs. This has allowed me some flexibility in finding time for my work and research, but this has always been limited.

Beginning this degree offered me the opportunity for sustained, focussed and in depth research that I felt was necessary for my work to continue to develop. By locating myself in the context of the sociology department I would also be forced to think and work outside of my comfort zone. Artistic research, especially independent research outside of an institution, can be haphazard and random. On occasion a good recommendation or a lucky google search has helped me to find the

right text that shifted my thinking but, at least in my case, gaps and holes abounded.

I have since my return to South Africa in 2010 after my studies in Belgium, focused my thinking around the issue of work. While work as a topic had been present in my artwork before, it was arriving back in South Africa during a massive municipal strike that triggered this body of work that I still engage with now. It was somehow in the act of trying to readjust my headspace to being back in South Africa that the strike emerged as the key for me to try to understand the local context again.

I began by researching the history of trade unions in South Africa as a way to try to think about their role in contemporary South Africa, especially in relation to their role in the government through the tripartite alliance.[1] While I was in Belgium I had begun to read more contemporary theorists and my interests were influenced particularly by Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Ranciére. This helped me to start to understand the context and shifting pressures of neoliberalism in a more general sense. It was however Sakhela Buhlungu's book, *A Paradox of Victory,* that gave me much greater insight into how the labour movements in South Africa were being affected by the changes from apartheid, their role in resistance and the context of a market closed by sanctions, to the their new role post-apartheid, as part of the government and in the context of increasing neoliberal reforms. While I began to understand some of the challenges that were facing the contemporary labour movements, my thinking at that point still was within the context of work rather than on the subject of work itself.

Reading Max Weber's *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* had a huge impact on thinking about how work as an idea is constructed and naturalised. I began to think around the relationship between Afrikaner Calvinism and the way apartheid related to work. How work

1 The Tripartite Alliance is the alliance between the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Congress of Trade Unions South Africa (Cosatu). Cosatu is the largest trade union federation within South Africa and through the alliance is part of the ruling party.

ethic could be racialised and and mobilised as a form of control and discipline.

Another huge influence on my thinking was Kathi Weeks' book *The Problem of Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries.* Although Weeks deals with the context of the U.S.A. I found that much of her insight was useful to begin to think about South Africa. I began to ask questions about the construction of work, especially through forms of work ethic, its internal contradictions, historical development and contemporary manifestations. It was my first real exposure to the ideas of antiwork and postwork that became hugely influential on my thinking. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy,* was further helpful in thinking about the shifts in the way work has changed as a result of technological changes and the affects these have had on the self. However Berardi's book left me somewhat unsatisfied, it seemed to present a very Eurocentric view of the problem of work. It seemed to not quite account for the way in which these changes are not even and how technology has multiple circulations and varied effects that are, amongst other forms of difference, often geographically articulated.

I felt that it was important to understand the history of work here in order to better understand the contemporary articulations. Through Keletso Atkins I was able to start to think about the local South African context in a more complex way. Atkins' important work recovering the work ethic of the Northern Nguni people by piecing together archival fragments to construct an understanding of the ways in which local work ethics worked but also the key part they played in indigenous societies. The discovery of her work was important for me to begin to think about this project. It allowed me to start to think about how work as an idea has been produced but importantly how the imposition of colonial forms of work were part of the historical dispossession of work ethics and understandings of time within the local context. Atkins further makes clear the ongoing forms of resistance and refusal against the dispossession. How these refusals forced the settler colonial authorities to adapt. In many ways, despite the dispossession of local work cultures, they shaped the colonial subject as much as the colonial powers shaped their subjects.

My original plan had been to think around the colonial production of work ethic and the dispossession of local work ethics. From this point I had begun to research my own family's arrival in South Africa for a new film. I was interested in the fact that my ancestors had arrived in the country and built a church before he had built his family a home. It seemed a way to claim a space for himself through this act of extreme religious obedience but also work ethic. I was interested in the way that could also be used to think about how ideas of work are naturalised through the family environment through to my own experience.

However, the fact that the land and the church were subject to a land claim working its way through the South African courts at the time of beginning the project significantly complicated the issue. I started to explore the relationship between land, work and belonging.

Two colleagues helped me a great deal with this problem. Vivian Ziherl and Ahmed Veriava were instrumental in introducing me to the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation as a way to articulate the relation of land dispossession and work. Their influence further gave me access to how these ideas might be useful not only as a historical reference point but also a way of understanding contemporary forms of dispossession. Through Ziherl and Veriava I was able to read and understand in a much more nuanced way the work of Silvia Federici and David Harvey.

Federici's pamphlet *Wages Against Housework* is a powerful text. Her work gave me a depth of understanding regarding the importance of the gender division of labour to capitalist economics and the importance of reproduction in any critique of work. I was able to further see new depths in Weeks' work that possibly had escaped me in my narrow focus on work ethic. Harvey was key to understanding the role of the 'other' or the 'outside' of capitalism, although I feel I am only beginning to understand the complexities here.

Prior to reading Harvey, it was the work by Prishani Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava that really aided me in changing the way I approached the subject of work. Their work on the subject of 'the poor' and neoliberal dispossession made me realise that in order to talk about work I had to think

about not just the systemic problem of work but from the position of what is excluded. This was important to give a sense of urgency and relevance to thinking against work. It is further through Naidoo's guidance that I began to tackle the subject of political subjectivity, a latent theme in this project.

Starting this degree was a major shift for me in that working through Sociology (in conjunction with Fine Art) I would be forced to engage with different disciplinary modes of thinking, writing and researching. I hope that I have through this project I have been able to draw what is useful from the different disciplines in a way that has been generative. I worked on a structure that I have used successfully in art exhibitions where each part should be able to function independently but should also be able to accumulate into something greater, rather than a cohesive whole.

I had a clear plan for my project. It would have three parts, each made up of a film and some text. I didn't get anywhere new approaching the three themes I had set out. The writing took one direction and the films another. I tried to let each part of the project follow the course it needed to take. But as it is inevitable even as I tried to focus on the concepts they began to sprawl and I felt that I increasingly understood my set of problematics less and less the further I went.

Although the films forced me to write scripts I am not particularly comfortable as writer. However, it has been a very useful process to think about what writing could offer my work. What I would like to deal with through writing and what would be more interesting as content for my films and artworks. This separation of content resulted in the two forms taking slightly different directions. Some of the ideas that the films have raised I would like to explore further in writing as the project as a whole progresses.

I began this degree thinking that I would avoid writing about art completely. I wanted to focus on the historical material. I thought I could use my artworks that came out of the project as a way to suggest how I use images and how they function in relation to the subject. But I quickly

realised that thinking about images of work was useful for me as an artist but it also was helpful for me to think through the concepts and ideas I encountered through images. I found that I could understand the abstract material better through the symmetries to image production.

This process has been very useful for me to question my own production, although some of the questions of how work might be adequately represented remain unresolved in my mind. Particularly how to think about a form of representation that speaks to some of the ideas that the second essay raises around the idea of what is excluded by work.

I wanted to work on individual essays that could accumulate different ideas and approach the subject from different directions as a way to work within the modes of working and thinking that I had developed within my artistic practice, particularly my *Work Essays,* (2013 - 2017). The Salem films that form part of this project follow this format with each short film trying to look at the problem from a different angle.

How I approach my filmmaking was a big influence on how I wanted to write. I wanted to use in particular the idea of separate scenes and montage as a form in my writing, rather than a strict linear progression. Using the form of the essay film which allows for what Timothy Corrigan describes as "... activity of personal expression, public experience, and the process of thinking, "[2] could be alternatively understood as an intersection of the personal, political and historical, and self reflexive method.

There are a few artists whose writing has been helpful to me in experimenting with a style that I could use. Two in particular, Allan Sekula and Harun Farocki, whose work on labour has been influential on my thinking, wrote in ways that have had a large impact on how I wanted to approach the exercise. Allan Sekula's writing masterfully moves from the personal to complex

2 Timothy Corrigan,. *The Essay Film, From Montaigne, After Marker.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), loc 212, Kindle.

theory to images in ways that remain poetic and accessible. I especially found his book *Fish Story*, a collection of essays and photographs around the shipping industry, especially useful in thinking about tone and style.

Farocki's use of self reflective filmmaking and image analysis in his films allow me to really think about how images could provide a way into the concepts I was trying to address. The first essay, *A Visible Problem (I),* takes its inspiration from Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995), and tries to think about what would happen if I would start to look at the images of work from the local context. His method of describing what is actually happening in the frame as a way of understanding the way in which tropes find expression.

Farocki's method provided me with a format for using the archival images. There are of course numerous other methods but I found looking for repeated expressions and extrapolating on the meaning of this repetition a productive method. This was especially useful in trying to think around the problem of dealing with anonymous and undated images in a way that could be congruent with the images for which I had authors, dates, biographical and contextual information.

The first essay is an attempt to think about what has been made visible in the image production around work in South Africa. How this has almost always coincided with the way in which work has been constructed and naturalised within our society. How these images, even when critical of aspects of work most often of the conditions, seem to be expressions of work ethic, in the sense that they do not disrupt the place of work within an established system of value.

In the second essay I tried to think about how this mode of the framing of work creates an invisibility. I wanted to point to a gap I believe exists within the dominant way of thinking about work and symmetrically within the visual language of its representation. That through the history of dispossession, colonial, apartheid and contemporary, in South Africa there is the situation that too many people are outside of work for work to hold its place within a system of value. That a

different language of representation is needed, a language of postwork.

The third essay starts from the idea that images can sometimes unintentionally reveal more than they seem to intend. That they cannot overdetermine the subjectivity of those that they represent. Again I wanted to use the problem of visibility and representation as symmetrical to the ideological construction of work. That work produces a range of subjectivities of workers but that these fail to find closure. That by constructing a promise of inclusion that cannot be fulfilled that a gap exists where subjectivities can still be contested. I found that by using the language of territorial dispossession, of the frontier in particular, I was able to find a framework for thinking about this idea, that the worksite is a frontier territory, a space of contested subjectivity.

This mode of thinking I find useful for my process, analogy and symmetry. It is how I often am able to explain to myself the concepts I am trying to think through. Another way of doing this emerged out of the process of writing and that was to draw myself diagrams through which I could map the concepts and use them as a writing tool. I have included a number of these diagrams in the text, some related directly to writing while others come from ideas for the films.

The *Joined Land* photographs came out of the process of experimenting around the aesthetic for the films. I felt that the new project should have a different feel to my previous work.. A ket aeths I was interested in using the split screen as a way to work with a different kind of montage to explore the idea of the return of and the sharing of land.

I began with the idea of working towards one film with a single narrative. But I increasingly found that I had to break up the ideas into chapters, which became a series of discrete films. I found the analogy of picking up the problem and looking at it from a different angle each time useful to think about the structure. There are overlaps and repetitions that I think become interesting in this process. Although I have made them in a particular order this is not fixed.

Working on the films I start from a process of research. In this I began by researching the history

of Richard Gush for which there are a number of sources. Although a minor figure in the narratives around the 1820 settlers there are a number of books in which he appears, as well as a play written by Guy Butler, *Richard Gush of Salem*.[3]

The land restitution case I was able to follow by reading the judgements and attending the hearing and the judgement at the Constitutional Court. However the finding of the claimants proved a lot harder. I had no luck contacting the lawyers and advocates for the community. I was eventually able to track them down with the help of Niren Tolsi, an experienced freelance journalist, who assisted greatly in the filming process. Meeting the community and speaking to them changed my perspective on the case greatly and added a new dimension to the historical narrative as well. The conversation with Mr Mongezi Mandinda was particularly important in this regard.

When filming I am always looking for the small events or anecdotes, key points for the narrative, that can help to explain or visualize the ideas I am trying to convey, rather than a complete picture of the subject. This changes the way I approach the subject, as my key concern is that I can make the films watchable and accessible. The tone and aesthetic I have tried to use were inspired by reading Marx again. I was struck by his ability to shift from factual to poetic to humourous seamlessly.

In the first film I wanted to establish the context of land restitution in South Africa, provide basic details about this specific case and importantly establish the question of the relationship of community to workers. This distinction is made in the South African Constitution in relation to the restitution of land. This question was a way to begin the process of thinking about dispossession and restitution. The first film uses a more exploratory documentary mode.

3 I was never able to track down the film that was made of the play. I only found one reference to it in a journal but no further information.

For the second film I wanted to explore my family in relation to the history of dispossession in the 19th century. This is a history that is not acknowledged in restitution due to the 1913 cut off date for land claims. For this film I switched to a more personal essayistic mode. The third film which looks at difficulties facing emerging black farmers, especially on restituted land, moves back into a more documentary mode.

The way I work means that my project often takes a number of years to come to a final presentation. By working through the project new questions have arisen. Showing the rough cuts to a number of people, the question that keeps coming up is that of the commons. It is an issue that is embedded in the history of the land as a commonage and will be present in how the community begins to approach the land that it will still receive. This question points to where this project might still have to go to before I will be finished with the series but also the direction which my new work will take.

Further Notes on the style of writing and referencing.

I felt very strongly that I wanted to explore a form of writing that diverges from the academic format. I wanted to produce texts that could be easily usable in different contexts, particularly such as art exhibitions or catalogues. I personally find academic texts can be very alienating both in style and tone. They often require a large amount of discipline specific knowledge and vocabulary. I think that this means that their circulation is often limited outside of the academic context.

I appreciate the value of historicising and contextualising one's work by actictivily situating the argumentation within the larger body thought. However, I feel this is often the point at which one loses the interest of the reader. I have tried to reference or quote where possible the specific texts that have directly impacted the direction of my writing and thinking. A more general list of texts that have influenced this work are listed in the bibliography. I have further tried to avoid arguments against lines of thinking that I disagree with, rather I have focused on what I have

found to constitutive to my own development.

I have chosen to not include a specific section on methodology. By carefully narrating the process by which I have moved through the literature, images and materials I believe I have made my methods visible to the reader. I hope that this filmic and narrative structure makes for an easy and enjoyable read that still makes space for the complexities and contradictions to emerge.



Joined Land

the limits of work

a visible problem (I)

Looking at labour

I was in Munich, in a break between the work of setting up an exhibition and the work of attending its opening. My trip coincided with the exhibition, *Harun Farocki: Counter Music*[1] and I was excited that I would finally get to see Farocki's film *Arbeiter Verlassen die Fabrik*,[2] (1995). By chance, less than a week prior I had been engaged in a conversation with a South African film curator about this piece. The curator had screened it in Johannesburg a few years prior, a screening I had somehow missed, and had insisted that I needed to watch it. I agreed with him but I was nervous, given the proximity of the subject matter to my own research. As a result I watched the film with an intense combative concentration.

Arbeiter Verlassen die Fabrik opens with the Lumière Brothers' film, *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon,*[3] 1895. The Lumière Brothers' forty-six second film, as Farocki's voice over puts it, was, "the first film ever brought to the screen"[4]. It is an important piece within the history of filmmaking. For Farouki, it was also the first entry into his "cinematic thesaurus."[5]

The scene of the workers leaving the factory becomes a cinematic expression that he traces as it is repeated again and again through the 20th century, (and continues to be used to this day). The

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1 The exhibition was held at Haus Der Kunst, 10/03 - 28/05/2017 (http://www.hausder-kunst.de/en/exhibitions/detail/harun-farocki-counter-music/)

2 Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory* (video, 37 minutes, b/w and color, 1995). The film traces eleven decades of scenes of workers leaving leaving the factory in cinema through it use in fourteen different films.

3 *Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory in Lyo*n, also known as *Workers Leaving the Factory* or *Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory,* directed by Lumière Brothers

4 What is considered the first film ever made is disputed.

5 Harun Farocki. "Ein Kino Thesaurus/A Cinematic Thesaurus 2004." in *Harun Farocki, Another Kind of Empathy,* ed. by Carles Guerra and Antje Ehmann, (Barcelona: Fundacio Antoni Tapies, 2016) 70
The "cinematic thesaurus" or "archive of filmic expressions" was a concept that Farocki had developed that would trace chronologically the use of certain scene or shot that had been repeated over time. A kind of etymology for film. Farocki made three contributions to his "imaginary archive," *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik,* being the first, followed by *Der Ausdruck der Hände / The expression of Hands,* (1997) and *Gefängisbilder / Prison Images* (2000).

Lumière's iteration is filmed with a locked off camera. The image animated by the workers as they exit the gates of the Lumière family's factory. Showing to a public for the first time the ability of this new medium of film to capture movement. The voice over in this first scene of Farocki's film describes this movement of the workers in the images as they exit the cinematic frame "to the right and left". However, the direction of movement that encapsulates this cinematic expression is of moving away. Leaving the site of work.

As Farocki's film continues he finds this expression repeated within the mainstream cinema of Europe and the U.S.A., again and again. Again and again workers leave the factory. They walk and sometimes run. As they leave they are often compressed by the gates of exit into the visual appearance of a workforce and dispersed into individuals in the streets outside the factory complex. Work is not the subject of these images, rather it is the backdrop against which the subject can emerge. The gates of the factory are the space where the drama can begin precisely because work has ended.[6]

Deliberately unseen in Farocki's piece, the occasional appearance of (industrial) labour in film is generally used as a signifier of the lead character's social status and subjectivity. Placing them within the everyday world of workers and the working class. The iconic images of Charlie Chaplin pulled through the cogs of the machines on the production line have become a defining moment of cinema. Yet it largely remains an exception. Work in film serves an unexceptional backdrop. Dimly lit to allow the spotlight to shine on the lead character. Allowing their individuality to emerge. The symbolic function of work is thus of ordinariness or mundane life. An uninteresting ubiquity.

6 The closest that work comes to the centre of the action is in the images of strikes, intrinsically linked to work although located on its edges. A choreographed activity, where clashes between workers and the police or security providing the background against which the hero can distinguish themselves.

Through its ubiquity work occupies substantial amounts of time and energy for those who are fortunate to have employment and, in different ways, even those without. This without even factoring in the travel to and from work and the preparation and recovery our bodies need to cope with its pressures and exhaustion it dishes out. With the time it takes from us it plays an oversized role in how we perceive ourselves and how we are perceived. Yet with a presence so large the absence of the action of work in our images becomes more curious and revealing. After watching the act of leaving repeatedly throughout the film Farocki's seems to ask that we, as he has often done, turn our gaze towards work. That we look at it, make it visible and see what it might reveal.

The sea of images

The photographer (and sometimes) filmmaker Allan Sekula, stands beside Farocki as one of the most interesting artists of the 20th century working and thinking about work. With his knack for images, even within his writing, he begins his essay *Dismal Science: Part 1*,[7] with an evocative image. It is a description of Friedrich Engels' standing aboard the deck of a ship sailing up the Thames.[8] He describes Engels' view as he contemplates the congested river. For Engels the river becomes a flow into the industrialisation of the city, as the beautiful sailing ships slowly compress tighter as the boat nears the dock, eventually the compression of maritime activity breaks it banks and spills into the alleys of the city.

Location is important. London, on the verge of industrialisation. Before steamships will revolutionise mercantile and colonial trade. The location of Engels feet is important, standing upon the deck of the ship upon the river Thames, as they determine what is available to his eyes. So later in the essay when Sekula asks "why would anyone be foolish enough to argue today that

7 Allan Sekula, *Fish Story,* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1995), Loc 166-520, Kindle

8 Sekula, *Fish Story,* 166- 210. This description of Engels is based on the beginning of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

the world economy might be intelligently viewed from the deck of a ship?"[9], the question of what this perspective still might reveal is key.

For Sekula, images of work were of deep concern. He approached the subject of work, already half retreating from view, through the space of the contemporary shipping trade, which he refers to as the "forgotten space."[10] Forgotten as our gaze has shifted to the new technologies and industries that appear to make the physical realities of time and distance collapse, fundamentally altering the conditions and visibility of work.

Coupling this disappearance of the image of work is the seeming disappearance of the physicality of its factories that produce it. But as he points out the factories themselves have not disappeared, despite their slippery mobility.[11] Rather that our consciousness of them is often obscured by the prominence of the discussions of the changing nature of work and the dominance of new forms of labour. But a sleight of hand is at play and the space of technology belies how most of the physical cargo that sustains it still moves and is produced. The containers that hold the computer parts that make all this high speed connectivity possible are still transported aboard ships. Slowly making their path across the oceans, from factories where the labour often resembles more closely mid 20th century conceptions than the new images of abstract labour. The global factory has not fundamentally altered all work but work is rather, through its geographic redistribution, often placed out of sight. A doubling down on obscurity. What we see depends on where we stand.

His exploration of the history of the images of shipping, is a history of misdirection. At the height of maritime painting, the images are full of the unseen. The tradition of seventeenth century Dutch paintings of ships, looking at the industrious trade and marvels of engineering, necessarily excludes that these ships hold the loot of "bloody plunder",[12] The success of the

9 Sekula, *Fish Story,* loc 351
10 Sekula, *Fish Story,* loc 349
11 Sekula, *Fish Story,* loc 355
12 Sekula, *Fish Story,* loc 310

it matters where you stand



Friedrich Engels standing aboard a ship on the River Thames gazing upon London

it matters where you stand



Comandanta Ramona on the hills above San Cristóbal

it matters where you stand



Sol Plaatje standing on the banks of the Vall River.

European industrial project was based on the success of the harnessing of labour and resources from elsewhere.

Following from Sekula, I can't help but think that to have gazed from the bow of a colonial ship would have not just been to view the ports at the center of the capitalisation of these goods, like Amsterdam and London. Their bows would have provided views on many coastlines and ports.

To think about work we must account for the spaces outside of the so called centers, spaces entangled by colonialism and globalisation. To think about images of work must take into account other images. Images from the spaces that have been designated as the margins and from which many narratives have been rendered invisible. If we are to conclude from Farocki's film, that we should return our gaze to the subject of work, then we will also have to adjust the place we stand, to take into account what is within our field of view.

Here are your workers

Within the South African context there exists a history of the looking at and imaging of labour. In the southernmost tip of Africa, the colonial administrations obsessed over work while the anti-colonial movements contested it. During the century covered by Farocki's film an abundance of images have been produced of work and workers.[13] Around the time that the Lumieres were directing their camera at the workers of their own factory, images of industrialised work were emerging from South Africa. These images, although largely photographic[14], through the forms of representation they established, would be the basis of and remain in dialogue with cinematic representations.

13 Farocki's film largely deals with more mainstream films, with some more obscure documentaries and arthouse productions. Most the images produced in South Africa would not necessarily be considered mainstream.

14 The uptake of moving image was particularly slow in South Africa. Television was first broadcast nationwide in 1976. The apartheid government perhaps rightly distrusted the medium.

Industrialisation would accelerate with the discovery of minerals and in particular gold. The very first prospectors to arrive and pan for gold could hardly be understood as engaging in advanced forms of industrial labour. Rather they would have worked on their own or in small teams at the surface of the seam. But very quickly the ambition and greed of the prospectors grew and larger teams and systems were put in place to extract it. The nature of the labour changed. Bringing with it forms of wage relations and discipline. The mines provide a defining image of work in South Africa, and as such can be looked upon as indicative of the modes of representation used.

Cameras in the early days of the mines around Johannesburg would have been large and cumbersome. They would have required lots of light to operate and used slow shutter speeds. They would have needed tripods and the subjects to stand still. To photograph in the mines, underground, would have been especially difficult. Not only because of the darkness but also heat and excessive dust, the enemies of film. The lack of space would have required wider lenses to get the kind of compositions popular for the time. Today's mines are probably a bit easier to work in and the cameras certainly more portable, with better lenses and much better in low light and the mine themselves often substantially less cramped in terms of space. Yet even with better cameras the problem of light is not completely gone.

It is precisely because of these constraints that I was drawn to looking at images of mining, in both the medium of photography and film. The difficulties of producing an image gives the aesthetic decisions a certain weight. It is of course impossible for me to know with absolute certainty the intention of a photographer when looking at an anonymous image in an archive. However, it is possible to make a reasonable assumption as to the intentions through a visual reading of the images. This may or may not exactly coincide with the intentions of the photographer but as a visual language develops through repetition over time it is possible to read the images in relation to this language. I have chosen to read both the archival images and the ones where the photographer is known to me with the same method. Reading the images in terms of what is depicted and how. Using the form of analysis that is used by Farouki in his film.



Anonymous - Source: Anglo archives



Anonymous - Source: Museum Africa

Looking through archives, books, catalogues and films it is possible to identify certain tropes. The decisions and use of tropes seem to often line up with the intent of the camera person and the intended use of the images. The popularity and repetition of certain forms and images is illuminating.

Much like the colonial farms of the mid 19th century, the mines struggled to recruit sufficient workers. It is a problem that continued far into the 20th century[15] until the increasing automation and shaft closures drastically reduced the need for labour. Like the colonial farms and their struggles, the mines looked to import a workforce. For the Chamber of Mines, founded in 1887, the task of recruitment was central to its activities. It would set up the system of migration that would come to define the character of Johannesburg, stretching its reach as far North as Malawi and Zambia, (although the majority of the migrant workforce in the 20th century would be brought from neighbouring Mozambique and Lesotho).[16]

As I began my research in the archives I was immediately struck by the discovery that the most common photographic representation of the workers at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th is the group portrait. A wide shot of a team of workers. Although not actually representative of the act of work this is an interesting place to start. In many ways this kind of image is simply practical, to take a photograph of the workers above ground in the sunlight would have been much easier than to do so underground in the act of mining.

Looking at these archival images it occurred to me that not much has changed in terms of the popularity of this form. While the images of work in action have become more common, I can think of countless workplaces that I have entered to find a group portrait of the workers on

15 Ruth First, *Black Gold - The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*, (New York: Harvester Press, 1983)

16 First, *Black Gold - The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*, 21-24

the wall of the reception or in passages to the manager's office. Commonly in contemporary examples, the scene will take place in front of a building of the worksite or on the shopfloor, sometimes with the camera raised above to look down upon the larger groups. Although the more senior members often occupy the center staging, the visual gesture of equality of the participants is in line with the current management gestures of horizontal structures. These images are intended to depict the collective workforce together (with the exception of the workers who were sick on the day of the photograph and whose absence is often duly noted in the accompanying list of names of the people depicted).

While the contemporary examples tend towards more subtle displays, early images explicitly stage the hierarchies of the worksite. In these photographs from the mines around Johannesburg, white bosses and miners stand at the back while the black workers sit on the floor in front of them, or the white bosses sit on chairs at the front while the black workers sit at their feet or stand to the sides. Despite the permutations of the arrangements, an emphasis on distinguishing the race and position of power is always evident. The photographs were documents that sought to record the group and their relationship as it was or as it was expected to be. The team photo is a photo of success, a document of the functioning nature of labour and recruitment. Although the contemporary example is less likely about the success of the coercion of a workforce into existence, group portraits can be read as the images of the ownership of labour. Occasionally something more becomes visible.

In an interesting example found in the archives of Museum Africa, a large group of miners are seated on the ground with only the back row standing. I can only identify four white men in the image out of a group of around a hundred and fifty. The first occupying center stage standing in the middle of the seated black miners. He holds a large sjambok[17] It leans against his shoulder, not exactly threatening but deliberately visible. At the back of the group stands the second white man, his head and shoulders appearing above the group. He holds what appears to be a stick,

17 A large stiff and heavy leather whip common in South Africa.

but with a posture as if it is a riffle. This posture is seen again with two black workers most likely overseers in uniform, also holding sticks. In the top right hand corner two more white men sit and watch the spectacle of the photograph from a distance.

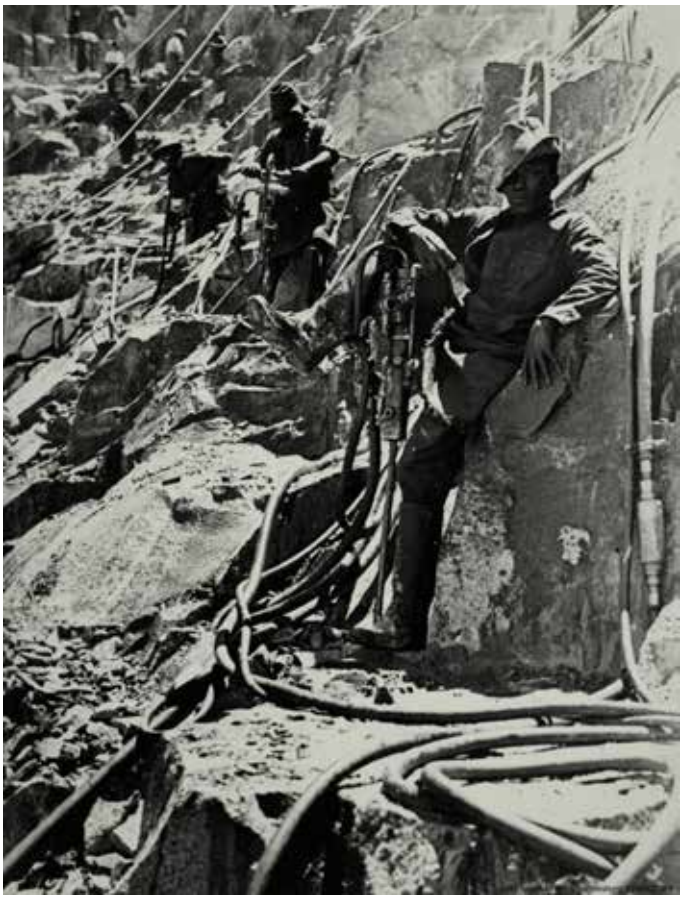
At first I read the image as only a display of authority, discipline and ownership, distinguished by the unusual composition of the man at the center standing amongst the seated workers, an explicit display of power. However, it was suggested to me to look again, particularly at the men in the front row holding shields and knobkerries[18]. It is often interesting what else can be seen that goes beyond the expected in the image.

Many of the men in the image in fact hold these items. Weapons are not just in the hands of the white men. While these two most prominent white men, probably bosses, might be displaying their authority, reading across the dress of the workers a different assertion becomes visible, that of identity. These workers in the front row seem to possibly hold a different status to the workers behind them.

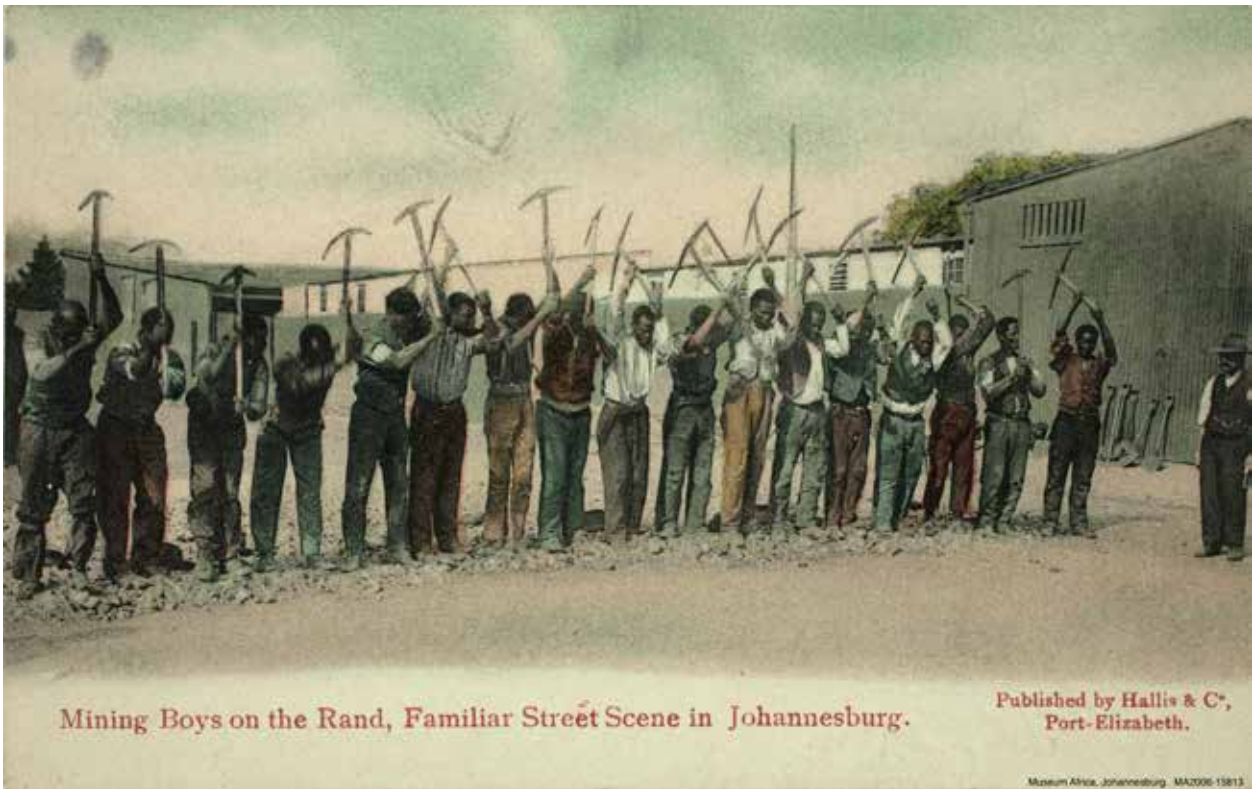
The shields and knobkerries identify the workers as Zulu, while many other workers are wrapped in decorative blankets that assert their Basotho origins. The workers holding the Zulu paraphernalia are all in a varying forms of dress suggesting a more complex form of identification. Clothes of urban origin were common among mine workers, however two men in the front row wear full three piece suits, far from practical on the mines. A distinction that possibly speaks to different forms of identification.

This image, when examined carefully, sets up some of the problematics of looking at the construction of work ethic. While colonial work ethic sets a limited range of subjectivities for the workers, these workers seems to be negotiating the gaps within this, pushing and pulling against and within the constraints and against the intentions of the photograph itself.

18 A wooden weapon, comprising a shaft with a heavy bulbous end.



Anonymous - Source: Museum Africa



Anonymous - Source: Museum Africa

A problem of light

The group portraits of the workers encapsulate in many ways the thrust of the early photographs. They seek to display the success of the industry and have a sense of the proprietary. Photographing work in progress adds another dimension though. What these images often do is to glorify the act of labour itself. I believe it is useful to read these images in terms of their relationship to a propagation of work ethic. How they expose a naturalised ideological construction of work. Photographing work itself has an element of more curiosity of mining, trying to document the process in some way. But these images were often still constrained by the same intentions.

The images of mining more directly have to respond to the problem of light. By far the easiest solution is to have the action take place above ground. In a striking anonymous photograph found in the Museum Africa archives, probably from around the early to mid 20th century, of a worker resting his leg on his drill, is an example of a situation where the activities are taking place in sunlight at the surface. However, it is seldom the case that mining takes place at the surface and that would be possible. This photograph is unusual for the sensitivity that the subject is given. He is able to choose his pose with a certain swagger, while in the background work continues. His seemingly effortless cool does, however, give the work, even if he takes a break to pause for the photograph, a sheen of desirability. The image could easily be advertising for mining as a job.

One of my favorite images I found in the archive is a small hand colored postcard, with the title "Mining Boys[19] on the Rand, Familiar Street Scene in Johannesburg". The scene would have hardly been familiar. The scene takes place above ground in what appears to be the yard of a company. I do enjoy the idea of mining happening in the streets of the city. The workers are

19 Black men have historically in racist and patronising way often been referred to as boys.

standing way too close to each other. This would be a very dangerous way to use a pick. Looking at the body positions, especially the feet, it clear that the picks could not be effectively swung, not with force or balance. There is no indication whatsoever that digging has taken place. The ground in front of them is smooth and undisturbed. It would appear some smoothing has been done in the darkroom and almost all detail has gone, this seems an unusual choice given the scene it is trying to depict. The photograph is very clearly staged.

What I enjoy so much about this image is the small mistakes that appear if the workers are carefully examined. The photographer would have had a slow shutter speed and directed the workers to stand still but in poses to suggest that they are working. The worker second from the end is standing with his pick raised but with no indication that it would be used. He is staring at the white supervisor with an incredulous look, bemused at the absurdity of the situation. On the other side of the image the fourth man from the left has begun to move. He seems to have responded to the absurdity of the staging in a different way by bringing some realism to the scene and actually enacting the work. Unlike the sharp rendering of his colleagues, his head and right arm are blurred in motion. This image is neither heroic nor does it emit a sense of cool, but it remains a naturalisation of work and certainly not a critique of it or its conditions.

The solution of shooting mining above ground was not however limited to the early 20th century as I first assumed when I found these images. Watching Jamie Uys'[20] 1964 film "Dingaka," I was amused to find that the mining scenes here also take place above ground. In a series of shots, running just over a minute in length, miners carry pipes, push trolleys and pull cables all while in song and in broad daylight. Appearing twice at the beginning and end of the sequence, a team of workers carry a large metal pipe up the side of a mine headgear for no fathomable purpose. Most likely either the budget or logistics required to shoot underground were too high for what is a

20 Jamie Uys is a South African director most famous for his film "The Gods Must Be Crazy," (1980). Despite its problematic politics of representation it remains the most successful South African film ever produced.

small part of the overall film.

What is interesting in these scenes is the emphasis on the enjoyment of the work by the miners. The overall film has a light critique of apartheid but there is no critique at all of the mines. The continual use of work songs becomes interesting towards the end of the film as the lead's (culturally non specific) community twice represent themselves through the singing of Shosholoza. Shosholoza is a Ndebele work song that describes the trains to the mines from Zimbabwe to Johannesburg, thus there is an irony in its use to signal untouched 'authenticity'. There are a few hints that the community is in fact meant to be Zulu although this is never stated.

The plot sets the indigenous community up as 'primitive' and prone to superstition and unaware of the 'modern' customs. They have no knowledge of the city, which leads to 'amusing' and tragic consequences for the lead and his accompanying friend upon arrival. Their nativity makes them vulnerable to the excesses and corruption of city. It is through hard work that these corrupting influences can be avoided. Work is the means by which the bad primitive can be discarded and colonial moral norms adopted. Work transforms him.

There are a number of films and photographs that do engage with work underground. On a whole most often of these images are not critical as access to the mines would be have been constrained. These images were often the only way in which mining labour would be visible, as the mines perform a sleight of hand to make their labour invisible, hidden below the ground in dark tunnels and shafts. It is perhaps not by coincidence that much of the critique of the practices and conditions on the mines has been through the depiction of what remains visible and accessible. The landscape, the homes and living conditions of the miners, without showing the work itself.

The images below the ground would have to confront the problem of light more directly. Mining is of course impossible without some light but it is often to illuminate the work rather than the



Anonymous - Source: Wits Archive



Anonymous - Source: Wits Archive



Anonymous - Source: *In the Common Interest*

subject. The camera person would have to bring some external light to increase the levels. There are multiple ways to approaching light, from flashes to flood lights. Often the images are flooded with light, pushing the shadows to the corners.

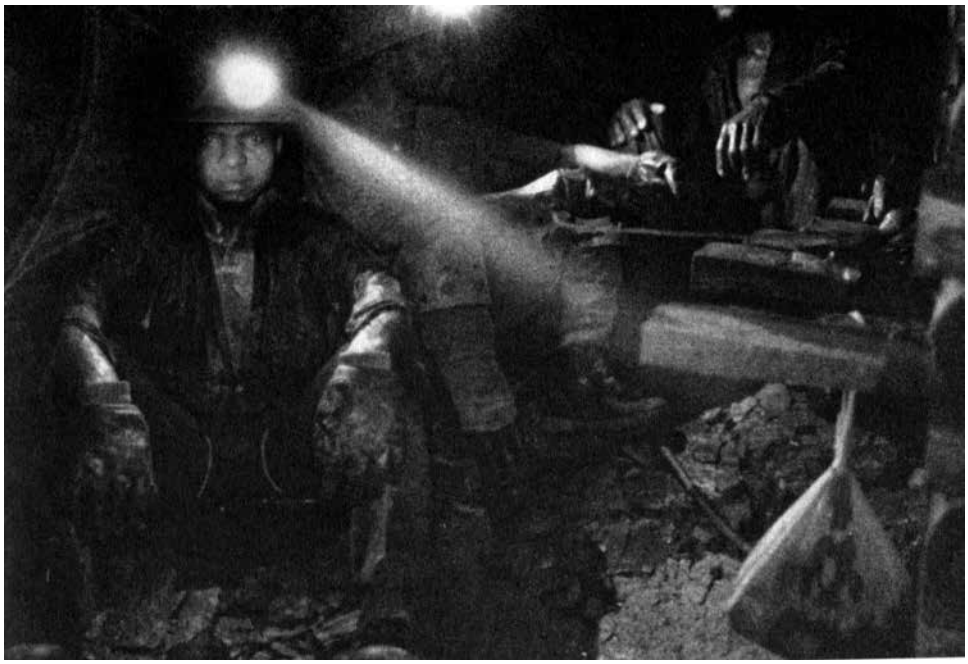
In two early images from the University of Witwatersrand a heavy flash is used. The space is cramped but this the light makes it feel as big as possible. The work is still somewhat staged, a miner with a drill has clearly stopped for the photograph, while in the other a white supervisor poses next to three black miners moving a rock. The miner on the left shows some strain while holding the rock for the photograph. A close examination of the image suggests the rock is balanced on a log below, not quite in motion, this miner shouldering the heavier weight to keep it from falling. The black miners are shirtless and muscular, which is a common trope in many images of mining.[21]

The pushing of the shadows from the image helps to lend a positive light to work. In a number of films produced by the Chamber of Mines, such as *A Mine in the Making,* (1966) and *West Wits Line* (1968), the same strategy is used - all of the shots of work underground are heavily lit. In a photo from the book *In The Common Interest: The Story of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Chamber of Mines,* (circa 1964)[22] almost all of the shadows have been eliminated. Work in bright light seems much safer. The hard working miners set about the jobs with strength and bravery, but the lurking dangers of the job are pushed with the darkness out from the image. Even in a rare film about the dangers of mining, in the case of *The Dust That Kills* (circa 1920s), the work is shown in bright light. It is only the the dust, a controllable problem according to the film, that presents some danger.

However, in contrast lurking shadows and creeping darkness are the aesthetic of choice for the

21 Looking through multiple images it would seem that working shirtless was common but certainly not uniform. The decision to show shirtless miners is no doubt deliberate.

22 Anonymous. *In The Common Interest: The Story of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Chamber of Mines*. (Johannesburg: Hortors Printers, circa 1964).



Santu Mofokeng - Source: *Violence in a Time of Liberation, Murder and Ethnicity at a South African Gold Mine, 1994.*

smaller group of images that seek to critique the mines or the conditions. The dangers of the job are visualized in these shadows. In *Gold* (1974), a terrible Hollywood production filmed and set on the mines in South Africa starring Roger Moore as the hero and directed by Peter Hunt, the dark cramped conditions represent the danger facing the miners underground. This sets up the plot where the greedy white mine owners conspire to stage an accident to push up the price of gold, with complete disregard for the lives of the black miners.

The white hero (Moore), who of course saves the day, puts himself in danger by going underground. The film uses what is a common trope for films about mines, a long (in this case 1 minute, which is exceptionally long for Hollywood movies) shot of the descent into the shaft, filmed from the elevator cage. In these shots the camera always faces up, watching the light as it gets smaller and slowly disappears. The noise of the descent is always loud and in this case the film cuts to the faces of the miners crammed inside the cage in almost darkness. This descent is a symbolic journey into danger awaiting them, as the safety of the light disappears above. The images of work in *Gold* are cramped and sweaty. But the workers are brave and noble in their

pursuit of it.

In a beautiful series of photographs published in *Violence in a Time of Liberation, Murder and Ethnicity at a South African Gold Mine, 1994,*[23] Santu Mofokeng documents the lives of workers at the Cinderella gold mine in Gauteng. The images show many aspects of the workers' lives both above and below ground. The images both document with empathy the workers lives while exposing the conditions they face without sensationalism. In the images underground the shadows are exceptionally heavy and their presence felt. The workers faces seem to be lit by a torch, possibly the torch on top of Mofokeng's own helmet and occasionally by that of his companions as well.

This light helps balance the light emitted from the workers' own torch helmets. This technique gives a sense of drama to the pictures. Often the rest of the background is completely erased by darkness or it is gloomy, barely lit and grainy. The darkness here is foreboding, emphasised by the fact that the images repeatedly carry a strong sense of racial division underground. The use of shadows plays a central role in the critique of the conditions of the work. At work the miners themselves carry a stoic air.

Probably the most well known images of work and of mining coming out of South Africa are a series of photographs by David Goldblatt. Goldblatt's images were produced over a number of years and originally published in the photobook, *On the Mines*, in 1973.[24] The book is structured in three chapters. The first chapter, *The Witwatersrand, Time and Tailings,* shows a range of images from the housing of both workers and managers, landscapes, equipment, offices of the mine owners, including one of the most well known images, a detail of the arm of a black supervisor

23 Donam, Donald L. with photographs by Sant Mofokeng. *Violence in a Time of Liberation, Murder and Ethnicity at a South African Gold Mine, 1994.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

24 Goldblatt, David and Nadine Gordimer. *On The Mines*. First Revised edition, (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012).



David Goldblatt - Source: *On the Mines*

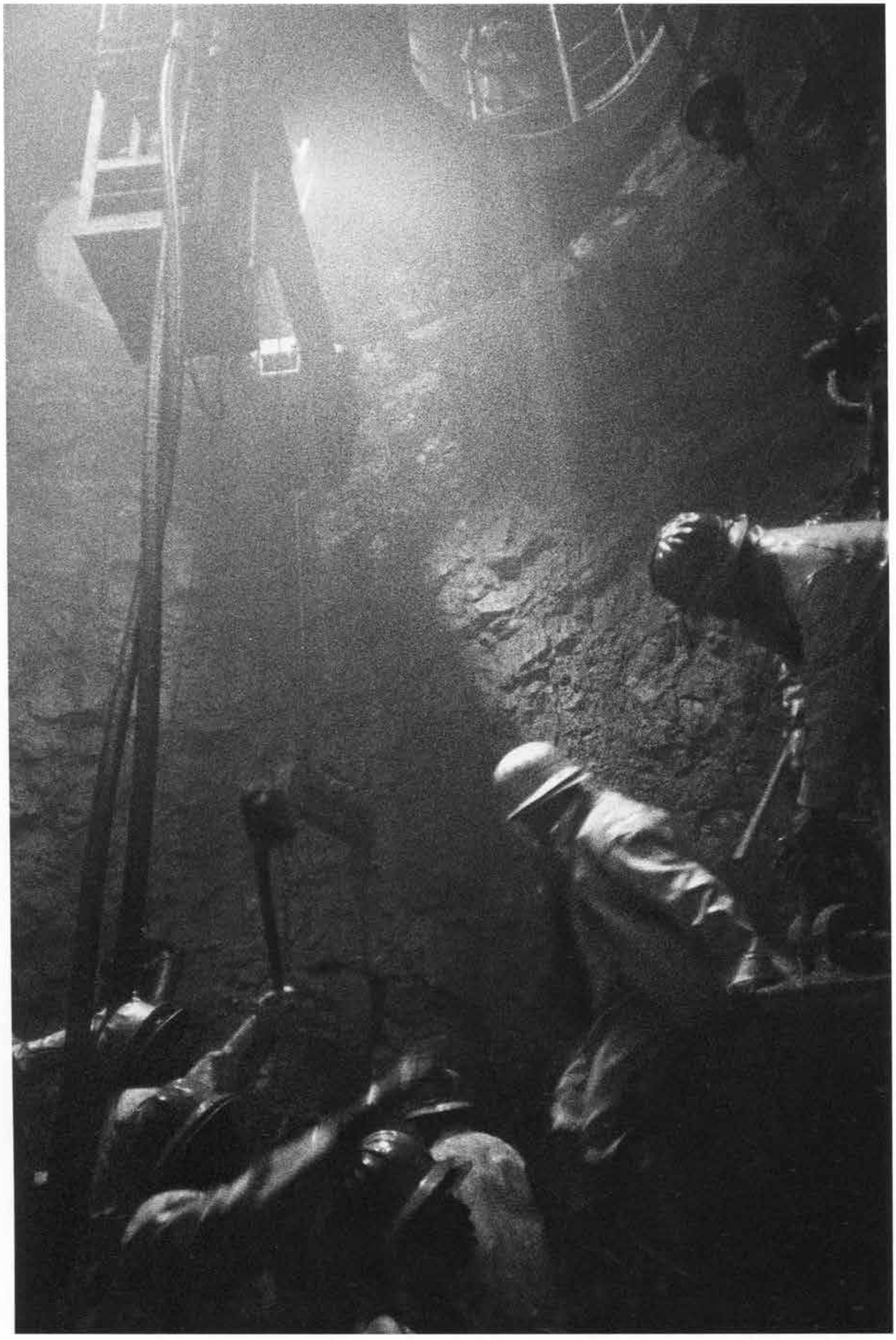
with a metal band that contains the derogatory and patronising phrase "Boss Boy". The second chapter, *Shaft Sinking*, shows images of the miners in the process of sinking a new shaft. These are images of miners at work underground. The third chapter, *Mining Men,* is a series of portraits of the workers and managers, both black and white.

The chapter with images of work has an exceptional and beautiful use of light. Goldblatt uses the available light seemingly without flash or external addition. The light streams through the dust. This soft haze is further emphasised by the grain of the film. The film itself looks to be pushed, meaning that it is shot at a higher rating than it is, essentially underexposing it. It is then processed for longer, allowing the image to emerge. This makes the film grainier, but also reduces the contrast. As a result, the shadows and highlights become less harsh. The shadows still retain their threatening in the image's feel but the light illuminates the workers in an ethereal way. There is a very strong religious feel to them. In some of the images where the light spills in from above it resembles a renaissance painting where the light of god emerges from the sky to give a holy illumination.

These images have a gentle empathy for the labour of the miners but a strong moralising tone to their depiction of work. I cannot help but read resonances of Max Weber's *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,*[25] where work becomes a religious "calling,"[26] blessed by God. It is a moralistic reprepresatation. On the one hand a celebration of workers and their work, but at the same time their value and celebration tied to their work. They are not individuals but workers in these images, bound and identified by their job. The separation of the portraits from the images of work becomes important in the way the book produces meaning, as it allows for work as act to be celebrated by itself.

25 Max Weber *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

26 Max Weber *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* 84.



David Goldblatt - Source: *On the Mines*

Reading the book as whole, the three chapters of the book work to present a narrative. The first chapter says: this is the mines and their structures of power, revealed through the landscapes, houses, the conditions and the unequal and racist divisions. The second presents the heroic workers whose work is noble in spite of the conditions and oppression. While the third, through the portraiture, suggests the humanity of all of those involved. The sequence seems to conclude that it is apartheid that is at fault. Should apartheid fall the problem would be fixed and the humanity of all, black and white, could be restored. Work itself is spared critique. Post-apartheid conditions on the mines reveal a far more complex set of problematics. Problems that suggest that a critique of work itself is necessary. As an ideological production, work in South Africa, that is a product of systemic oppression built through colonialism and apartheid, remains in place.

Idle hands

Photography and film are of course never straight forward documents of reality. The staging and framing of the images does not bring them into question but allows for a critical reading through the formal devices that are used. When work is framed or staged it takes on a symbolic representation. It is not just work but an image of work.

Because it is the image and not just the act of work itself, it is possible to read the production of this image in relation to the production of work as an idea. The production of work ethic. The choices of the camera person bring into visibility aspects of the activity while pushing others out of sight. In the images I have found the idea of work that presents itself is that which we have been taught to recognise, work made by work ethic. It is work that is good, even when the conditions of the work and the workers are bad. Work that through it execution uplifts us. Work that makes us participants in society, active citizens. It is the work enshrined by "the right to work" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The argument taken up by the images of work is not of work but of its conditions. It is an argument which I do not seek to counter, rather I would suggest that it should be problematised by its complicity to work ethic in its dominant form. Which through all of its mutations and

changes has its lineage in colonialism. It is the way in which work is validated in and for itself. It is an idea that is integral to the production of a workforce and the production of a workforce is integral to the production of surplus value.

However, sometimes something else can emerge in these images. Where the image is not overdetermined by the camera person, as is the case with the staged image of the miners with the picks above ground. Where the subjects or the framing or choice allows for slippages. In one case in my research I found something interesting where the intention of the image was open to the complexities of work. Where the work depicted did not seem to line up with the others.

In a 1990 documentary filmmakers Don Edkins and Mike Schlömer produced two films about the experience and effects of migrant labour on Basotho mine workers. *Gold Widows* (made in collaboration between the filmmakers and Ute Holl) importantly addresses the problematics of migration by looking not only at destination, but at the consequences on the families of the workers in Lesotho. It establishes an important counter narrative to the image of miners always going to South Africa to sustain or better their lives at home. It is rather the story of disruption and adaption of the women, the wives, partners and children of the workers. The communities left behind, and of the society strppied of its men of a working age. It is migrant labour not only as journey and destination but as having an origin point as well.

The Colour of Gold, fills out the more commonly depicted other half of the story. Of the workers' experiences of the migration and at the mines themselves. In combination the films bring attention to the acts of labour that are not valorised and uncompensated. The work of domestic labour and reproductive labour, raising and sustaining the workforce, and the work of migration, the work of movement to and living on the mines, both which are produced in this form by the systems of mining and both which without the system could not survive.

But also the *Colour of Gold* documents work as it is commonly defined. In some early scenes in *The Colour of Gold,* there appears for a short period the image of the miners underground

engaged in the act of mining. As would be expected, the shadows and darkness lurk in these scenes. Their ominous presence makes visible lurking power and abuse.

At the beginning of this sequence the voice of a worker, whose interview begins on camera in the concrete cathedral of the opening area of the shaft, carries over into the new images of the work itself. Hot, sweaty labour and the compression of the space. The voice describes the dangers of the mine, the horrific accidents that can easily befall a miner. These descriptions are of both the conditions of the workplace, the result of a systemic oppression, but also the system of apartheid itself enacted in the worksite. At first, reading the way in which the voice and images work, seems to continue in the lineage of the anti-apartheid image based critiques, but there is some more about these images.

This is not to doubt the veracity of the testimony detailing the combination of the horrific stories of mine accidents. However, the images chosen create an ambiguous and complex scene. The images of the miners at work are not quite pregnant with the danger that the voice carries. While this does not remove the foreboding of scenes, it does gives space for another narrative to emerge in conjunction with that of the dangerous conditions of the work.

It is worth doing a careful description of the visuals of the action. The sequence begins with miners walking down a tunnel into darkness. The torches of their helmets creating moving circles of light that illuminate details of the gloomy tunnel. The scene cuts to a medium close up of the head and shoulders of a miner. At first all that is visible is that he is at work but the details of activity are hidden by the darkness. The sense of the tightness of the space is strong. As he moves in the space and the camera follows, light from the tunnel enters the shot and we can see he is passing rocks to another miner. He is clearly strong but there is no emphasis on his muscles or body (despite the fact that he is shirtless).

The scene cuts to the faces of two miners. What appears to be torch light from the direction of the camera lights their faces. Due to their movement, their faces keep moving in and out of this

light. The rest of the image is impenetrable darkness. One of the workers wipes his nose. The faces display almost no emotion. They are simply at work and the work to them seems mundane. The film cuts to two scenes of workers moving more rocks and then an image of the tightening of a bolt. The lighting again is from the torches of the workers and the cameraperson but there is little drama present. It is again unromantic dull work.

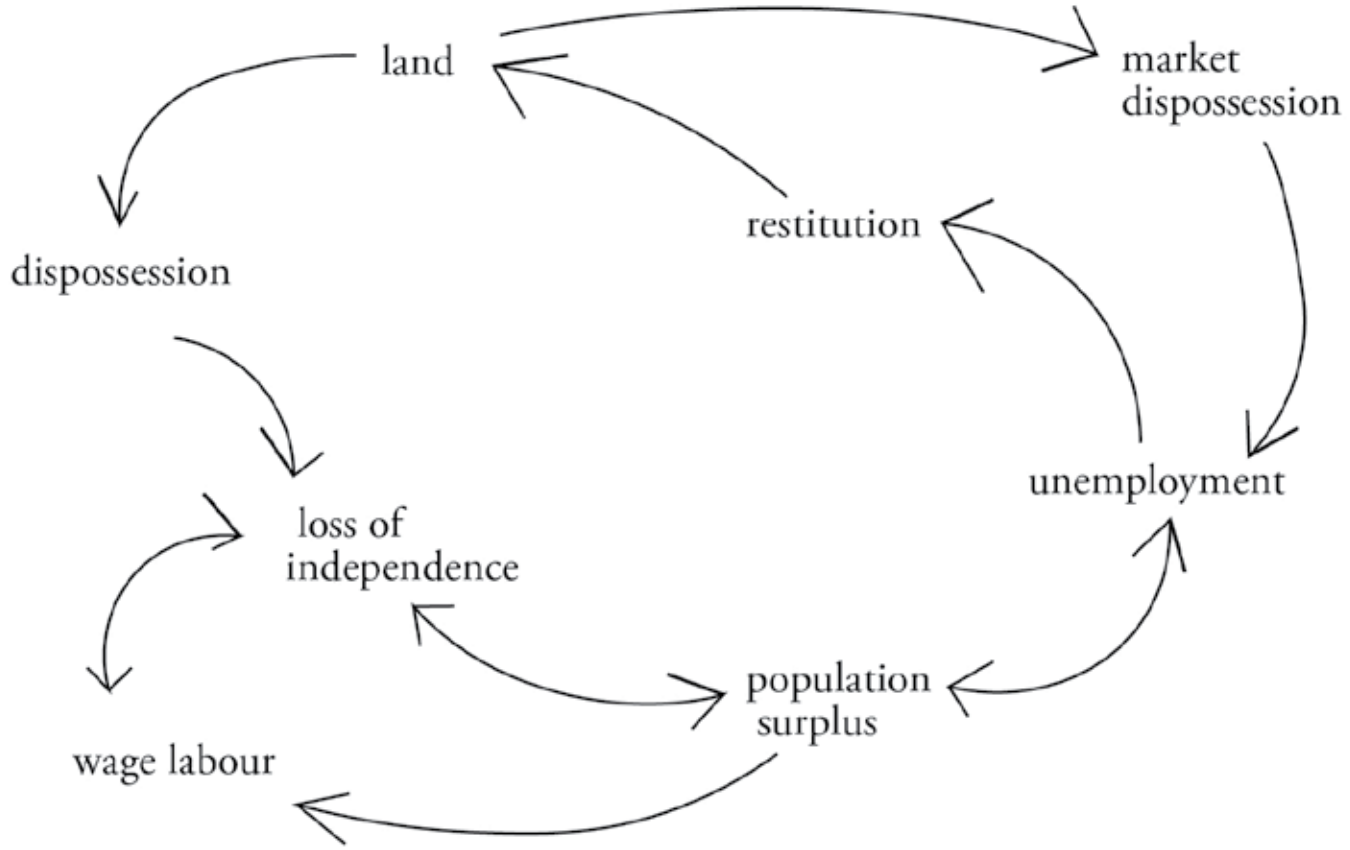
Next a man places a wedge between a wooden support pole and the roof of the mine. He searches for the right spot without urgency and then hammers it in. The film makers hold the shot while he strikes the wedge seven times. Next a man crouches and shouts to his colleague, his voice inaudible through the noise of the mine. The scene cuts to a miner with a jack hammer drill lugging its excessive weight into position, hampered by the tangle of pipes around it. The film cuts back to the previous worker awkwardly moving a bundle of short wooden supports. Too heavy to pick up properly in the low space, he half rolls it towards his unseen colleague.

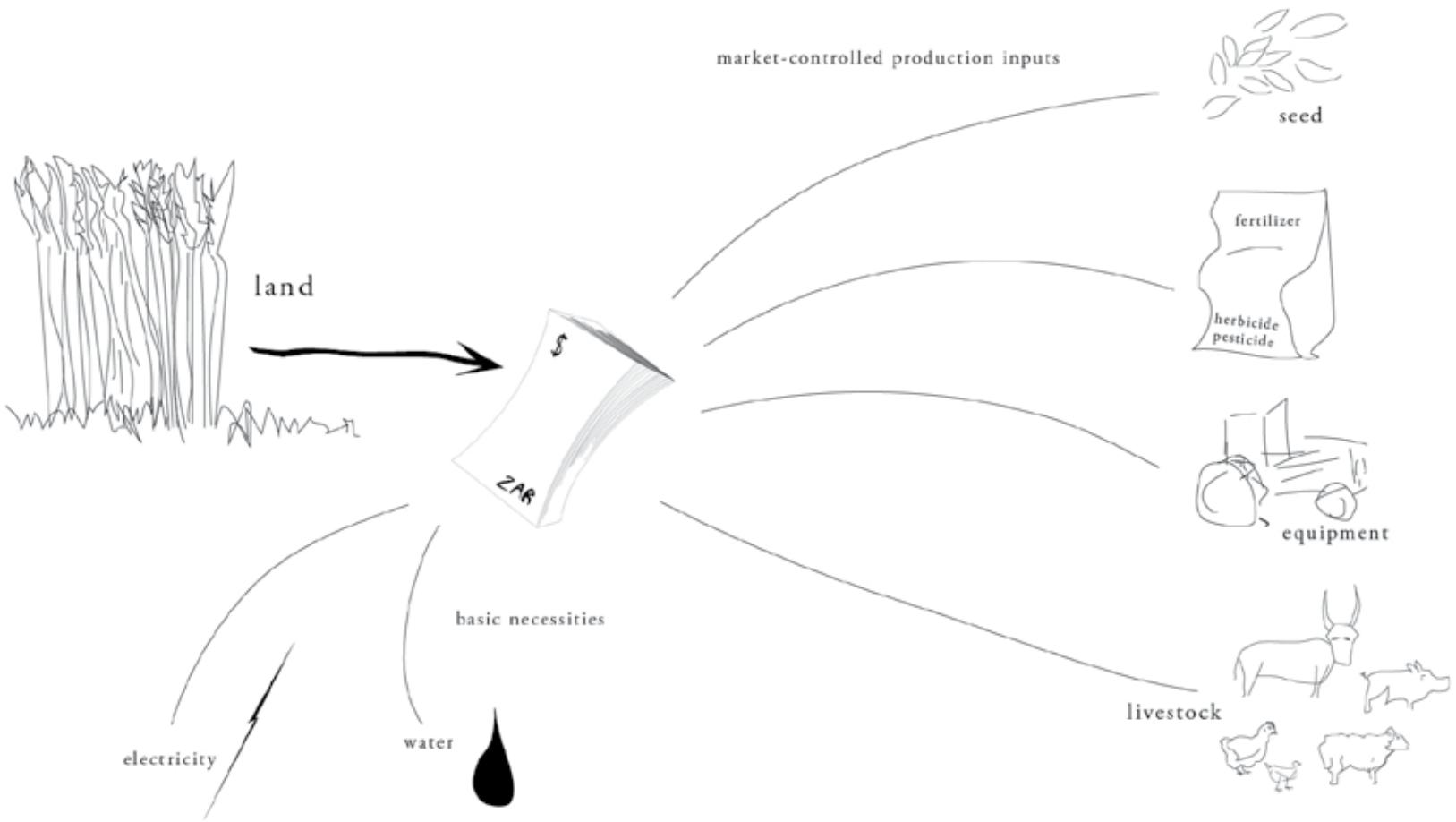
Next a close up of the face of a miner sweating in the heat and humidity of the underground. The shot holds while he seems to mouth something to himself, while the loud noise of a jack hammer dominates the image. In the following two shots four miners move large wooden support beams. Again they struggle to move them in the cramped space. The beams are just too heavy and the space constrains the movement of the workers. They cannot quite get a grip on the poles and one workers struggles with his balance. It is a scene filled with awkward uncomfortable movement. It seems difficult, yet not impossible, resoundingly unspectacular activity.

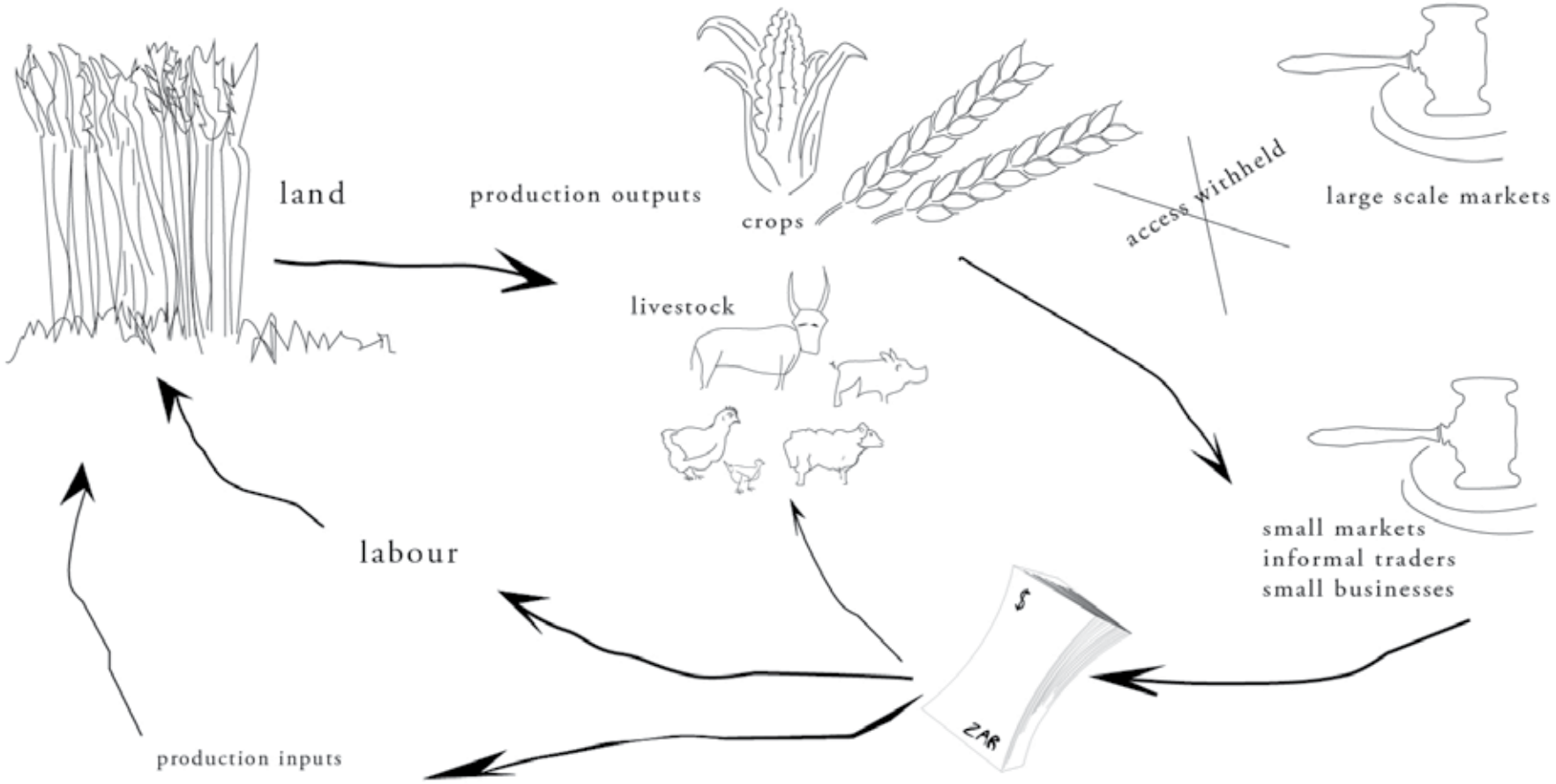
The work presented in this section of the film is dangerous due to the unseen lurking possibility of an accident, but mostly visualized as uncomfortable, mundane and repetitive. It is unromantic and certainly not uplifting. It is shown without moralising. It is rather activity done again and again, with little emotion. Watching this slow dull work of the miners I found that for the first time in my research work itself had become visible.

This remains only a start. If we are really to make a critique of work and its ideological

production, to find new forms of representation, we might have to step into the darkness itself. Let our eyes slowly adjust so that we can see what lurks in the shadows without the cleansing erasure of the light. In this darkness work comes into sight.


land
market
dispossession
restitution
dispossession
unemployment
loss of
independence
population
surplus
wage labour


market-controlled production inputs
seed
fertilizer
herbicide
pesticide
land
$
ZAR
equipment
basic necessities
livestock
electricity
water


land
production outputs
crops
access withheld
large scale markets
livestock
small markets
informal traders
small businesses
labour
$
ZAR
production inputs

a visible problem (II)

Post-work is here. Not the relief from work through automation. Nor the arrival of an abundance of leisure. It is not a utopian society beyond work, where work has been deliberately pushed from the center. Yet work is in retreat. Its centrality is already ruptured despite the stubborn refusal to let it go. It can no longer justifiably occupy the place it once held structurally or in our imaginations. Post-work is here, whether we like it or not and it is necessary to embrace the possibilities it might offer.

Unemployable

The crisis of unemployment is a much debated topic in South Africa. Officially, the unemployment rate is 27.7% and the expanded unemployment rate, which includes those who have given up on looking for work, 36.4%.[1] For those who have formal employment, work is likely to be outsourced and precarious and for those outside of waged work, it is largely intermittent and informal, if it is experienced at all. Yet despite its increasing absence, work dominates the foundations of our society.

The symbolic function of a job within society has not yet diminished. It is still the means by which the majority of South Africans imagine themselves, alongside their dreams and ambitions. Work plays a central role in subjectivity, how we understand ourselves and our place in society, and how society defines our role within it. The struggles against unemployment, for the improvement of living conditions, is often articulated through the fight for more work and for decent work.

South Africa, in terms of the dominant construction of work, strongly resonates with what labour theorist Kathi Weeks calls a "work society".[2] Weeks suggests that the role of work is

1 Statistic South Africa. "Quarterly Labour Force Survey – QLFS Q3:2017." October 2017. http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10658.

2 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Post-work Imaginaries* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2011), 5. Weeks is referring specifically to the U.S.A., however it is applicable to the South African context.

not constrained to simply the means by which income is distributed, but it is a fundamental structuring principle.

> "Work is the primary means by which individuals are integrated not only into the economic system, but also into social, political, and familial modes of cooperation. That individuals should work is fundamental to the basic social contract; indeed, working is part of what is supposed to transform subjects into the independent individuals of the liberal imaginary, and for that reason, is treated as a basic obligation of citizenship."[3]

When the role of work as the primary means of access to citizenship is conjoined with its substantial lack, much of society is excluded from the experience and meaning of citizenship. Activities outside of the narrow definitions of work are diminished in value and for those outside of work their sense of self value and their value within society is placed under severe strain. But within the circular logic of our economy work is proposed as the only solution to unemployment, despite the fact that an increasing lack of work has been created by the same measures that have been put in place supposedly to stimulate economic growth and employment. We are asked to believe that it is possible for this economic growth and a resultant increase in work to outstrip the influx of jobseekers.[4] The rationalisation of government policy depends on it.

Although the seeds of the current processes began earlier, the post-apartheid government began pursuing an aggressive neoliberal policy under Nelson Mandela's presidency in 1996, known as the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR).[5] This represented the formalisation of a contradiction as official policy. GEAR both brought the casualisation and flexibilisation of the labour market and the reliance on business to solve the unemployment crisis,

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3 Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries, 5*

4 This influx is both a result of labour migration and of youth entering the job market.

5 Prishani Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava, *Re-membering Movements: Trade Unions and New Social Movements in Neoliberal South Africa*. (Durban, University of KwaZulu Natal, Research and Education in Development, Research Report No. 28., 2005), 6.

resulting in a steady decline of work. It further accelerated the privatisation of basic services, necessitating that their access was through payment.[6] Because this was set against the backdrop of a policy that deemphasized social grants,[7] work became the primary (and the only official) form of the distribution of income and, as such, access.

In this sense the implementation of neoliberalism has steadily decreased wages and security, and increased unemployment and precarity. It has negated the governmental safety nets for the unemployed. It has slowed the roll out of basic services and dramatically increased the costs of access in a society where access has been for centuries deliberately unequal due to apartheid and colonialism. The few jobs that are available have become harder to get, not just because of competition, but because privileges of education and networks linked to status and employment play increasingly important roles. The divide of those with and those without has widened. It is important to emphasise here that what this history means and what the post-apartheid government is attempting to address is the fact that unemployment is overwhelmingly and disproportionately experienced by black people.

The hardening of the divide and the unlikely possibility of economic change that can result in sufficiently increased job opportunities to reduce unemployment, makes the construction of the idea of unemployment itself seem rather absurd. Unemployment prioritizes the relation of subject to work and is embedded in the belief of the situation's reversal. Yet the ongoing removal of the possibility of the means of independence, subsistence and survival and by colonial, apartheid and now neoliberal systems proceeds in a manner that has produced a surplus population that never was intended to be or cannot be integrated. In this sense, those on the outside are not just unemployed but in fact structurally unemployable, subject to a closed system.

6 Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava, *Re-membering Movements: Trade Unions and New Social Movements in Neoliberal South Africa,* 6.

7 Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava, *Re-membering Movements: Trade Unions and New Social Movements in Neoliberal South Africa,* 6.

The historical production of a surplus of labour is linked to the production, literally and conceptually, of work. The concerted efforts of the mid 19th century colonial administrations to dispossession of land with the stated intention of creating a landless proletariat.[89] Indigenous people who without a means of subsistence, whose communities' independent existence was being ruptured, and would have to turn to the wage for survival. Forced into work in settler colonial industries and farms, industries that were dependent on cheap labour for their existence. This process of dispossession of land in the production of a potential workforce is described in Marx's chapter on primitive accumulation in *Capital, Vol 1*.[10] It is among a number of processes that in the transition to capitalism allow for its emergence. For the emergence of a capitalist economy to take place in South Africa there would be an accelerated process of dispossession.

As result of this history, land occupies a central place within the South Africa political imagination. I believe that in understanding the present in relation to these processes, it is very useful to constantly refer to territorial logics of dispossession. This is not to reduce dispossession only to land, but to understand the importance it holds also symbolically within the multifaceted forms that dispossession now takes. This is especially useful in understanding how the ongoing forms of dispossession, including those forms happening right now and not always linked to land, act and can be understood in a continuum of the original colonial dispossessions.

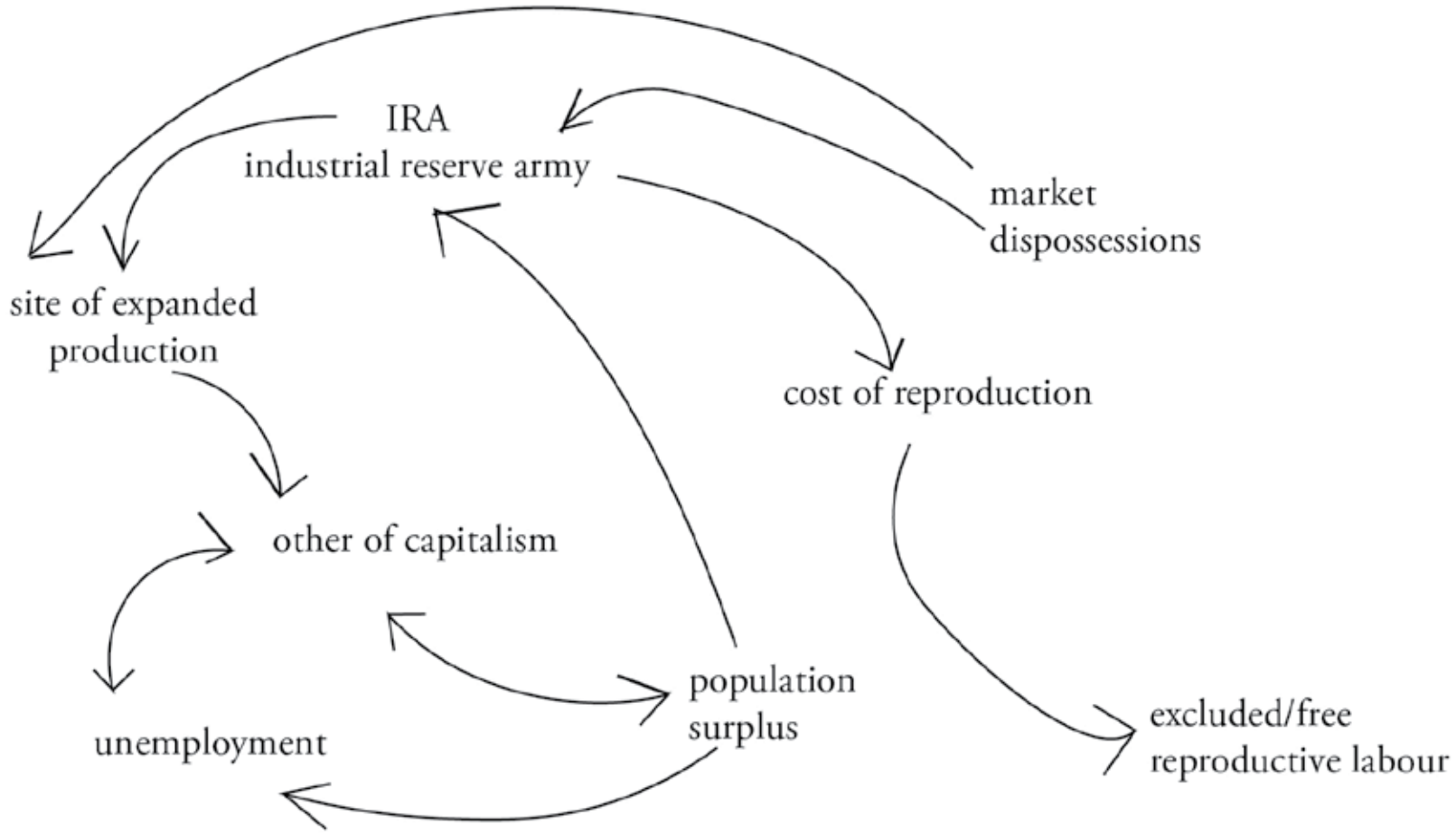
In this sense neoliberal privatisation is a continuation of colonial primitive accumulation. It is a dispossession and enclosure of a commons. The commons being the English term for the communal lands, used for grazing of livestock and small subsistence farming. Their enclosure was in some sense the literal fencing, but importantly also the processes by which they were privatised and placed under individual ownership. Alienating them from their function as a public good.

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8 Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is dead! Give us our money! The cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900* (James Currey, Ltd: London, 1993), 47.

9 J. B. Pieres, The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7, (Johannesburg: Ravin Press, 1989) 219.

10 Marx, Karl. *Das Kapital - Capital: Best Online Edition.* Edited by Friedrich Engels, Translators Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, (Aristeus Books, 2012), Kindle, loc 12544.


IRA
industrial reserve army
market
dispossessions
site of expanded
production
cost of reproduction
other of capitalism
population
surplus
unemployment
excluded/free
reproductive labour

Basic services, such as water (which has been privatised), electricity (which has been semi privatised and is rolled out along a logic of cost recovery), healthcare and education (in which the private sector plays an increasingly dominant role and has increasingly monopolised quality service) should be understood in this territorial logic of the commons, belonging to all. They had previously been services that the state provided, although in contexts where the state's understanding of what constituted that public was corrupted. All of which (with the exception of electricity) at a prior time would have been provided by the land or within the communities sustained by the land.

Colonialism saw land as a resource that could be turned into profit and the majority of South Africans displaced through this process were further excluded on the basis of race from access to citizenship and its benefits. After apartheid the privatisation of basic services reproduces this exclusion through constraining access to the still very much racialised form of waged work. Political theorist, Ahmed Veriava, points out that "primitive accumulation in post colonial societies often proceeds with large sections of those who lose their subsistence not being integrated into (formal) waged work".[11] It is the exact nature of the excessive production of a surplus population that is rendered invisible by the discussions of employment, jobs and unemployment. This is because those excluded are never meant to be permanently included. They are too a site for temporary profit in a cycle of market fluctuations and accumulations.

David Harvey's discussions of the "industrial reserve army" are useful here in understanding the role of this surplus of labour. One of the more commonly cited functions of unemployment, as Harvey (after Marx) argues in *The New Imperialism*[12], is that the creation of this "industrial reserve of unemployed workers" functions to drive down wages. In this sense we could understand the problem within the requirements of capitalism for its smooth functioning.

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11 Ahmed Veriava *The two economies, primitive accumulation, and the government of the state, or, Reflecting on the politics of the governed from South Africa,* Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, (in press).

12 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Kindle.

However, the surplus is way beyond this point, which is generally considered to be somewhat less than 10% unemployment.

Harvey goes further to show how this industrial reserve army functions as "other" or "outside" which can eventually become the site of expansion. A site that can"open up new opportunities for profitable development of capitalism."[13] That in the absence of a growth in demand for commodities, accumulation can be driven by cheaper labour markets. An expansion that territorially can only be temporary as new sites emerge driven by the excessive surplus somewhere else. The industrial reserve army is a site of speculation rather than an untapped potential market. Increased buying power through employment and wages to those outside of work is not a necessary development.

If work never arrived, the colonial forces of dispossession never intended or needed to absorb those who had been displaced and dispossessed. And if work will never arrive, employment shows no signs of increasing and there is no necessary need for unemployment to decrease. Then the conditions of post work are already upon us. It is an act of making visible what has been too long hidden from view.

Unrepresentable

I have been repeatedly asking the question of what images of work make visible, or rather what *work* do they do? There is a sense of ideological collaboration within the tradition of the representation of work. A symmetry exists in the way images act in the production of visibilities and invisibilities and how ideology foregrounds a set of ideas. Importantly, in order to naturalise these ideas, it must make others invisible.

13 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 141

I began my research into the history of the representation of work within the South African context with the film, *Iseeyou* (2013)[14]. In the film, I was attempting to answer the question of why, in 1964, the apartheid government (sponsored by the Chamber of Mines),[15] had built a monument to black workers.[16] This led me to an intriguing problematic around the aesthetics of the monument. Its heroic pose and realism closely mirrors Soviet socialist realism and is not what one would expect from a notoriously anti-communist government. I was interested to explore what might be common between these conceptions of work and what was being mobilised in both these contexts.

It was unexpected but not contradictory that apartheid would celebrate work. When looked at closely, the monument is not a glorification of workers but of work ethic. It is a celebration of a way of relating to work. This is emphasised through the moralistic suggestion of its heroic depiction. I make the argument in a follow-up film, *Calvin and Holiday* (2014)[17], that the religious base of apartheid, a localised form of Calvinism, was entangled in their labour policy. The Calvinist work ethic purports that work is morally uplifting, particularly emphasizing that work is valuable in and of itself. Whether self consciously or not, this responded to the ongoing struggle for labour and further legitimised the processes of dispossession that sought to force communities into work.

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14 https://vimeo.com/78477616

15 The Chamber of Mines, South Africa was formed in 1887, then the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, by the owners of the mines on the Witwatersrand. It functions include lobbying government around policy. Importantly it formed Rand (Witwatersrand) Native Labour Association (WNLA), later The Employment Bureau Africa (Teba), in 1897 to regulate recruitment of workers for the mines. Through WNLA it was begun actively recruiting workers from as far north as Congo.

16 This is the Miner's Monument, located outside the Civic Centre in Braamfontein. Made by David McGregor, it supposedly depicts "a typical underground team of 1936" (according to its plaque). The team is made up of two black miners accompanied by a white miner. Unsurprisingly, the white miner seems to be in a position of authority, guiding the two black miners. The latter are shirtless and muscular, representing a more physical idea of labour.

17 https://vimeo.com/83386558

Throughout the twentieth century, it is notable that the mines, South Africa's major industry, struggled to source sufficient workers from within the borders of the country. The resistance of local communities meant that a program of migrant labour was developed, drawing workers from a number of neighbouring countries to deal with the problem. The Chamber of Mines was central to this process. Their film and television unit produced a number of scripted 'documentaries' which not only legitimised the process to outsiders, but whose aim was to recruit potential new workers. These films often tell the story of how beneficial work on the mines can be to individuals and communities,[18] often emphasising how the money earned can be used to improve lives back home. The work depicted in these films is shown as hard but also heroic, masculine and ennobling.

Similar narratives regularly emerge in a variety of local feature films and documentaries. This is the case even in those that are not intended as propaganda and in some notionally critical of apartheid, or at least of its race relations. In the fiction films *Dingaka* (1964) and *Ipi Tombi* (filmed in 1992 , released 1997) for example, the lead characters go to the mines to elude the danger in the "rural" home. In both films, the mines provide a safe space of escape. Although the city itself, Johannesburg, is depicted as fraught with corruption and villainous intent, it is ultimately the modern influence of the society of work that proves decisive in solving the original problem when the lead character returns to their village. Modernity is framed as both a form of advancement out of backward practices and as a potential form of corruption of their innocence. When work is depicted in these films it is hard, but there is a joy in its execution and it is almost always accompanied by song.

The late 1970's in South Africa saw a noticeable increase in labour unrest and, in 1979, recommendations by the Wiehahn Commission to parliament resulted in the legalisation of black

18 For example: "*Native Recruiting Corporation*" (circa 1930s), "*Pondo Story*" (1948) and more recently "*Beyond the Gate*" (2017).

and non racial trade unions.[19] The result was that unions became one of the primary means of mobilisation and resistance, as well as the dissemination of information and political education. Destabilising production and contesting the conditions of the workplace was a way to undermine the economic base of apartheid.

Image production that followed often documented and critiqued the conditions of work. The 1986 travelling exhibition of photographs and accompanying catalogue "The Cordoned Heart", which looks at poverty in South Africa from a number of angles, provides a cross section of how lens based artists were approaching work. Consisting of short essays from photographers who were members of, or loosely associated with, the Afrapix collective,[20] the book shows photographs of migration, living conditions, workers hostels, transport conditions, the bantustans, forced removals, union meetings and the workers themselves. Here, the apartheid regime was substantially critiqued for its treatment of work and workers.

The tradition of the anti-apartheid image producers in relation to work is explicitly to expose the inequality within work, the racism and oppression. This is an important tradition that worked together with the politics of the trade unions. Omar Badsha, one of the founding members of the Afrapix collective, for example, worked both as a documentary photographer and as trade unionist. His work functions in a classic mode of documentary, pointing the viewer to the problem and its site: this thing is happening over there. But it is not the mode of working that is interesting for me but the central problem that it exposes. It is not a question of work itself but of the conditions of work. Conditions that are created by the system of apartheid or in contemporary post apartheid examples of the ongoing mistreatment of workers.

19 Sakhela Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory: COSATU and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2010), 55.

20 A documentary photographers' collective who took a explicitly politicised stance in their work. It was established by photographers and political activists in 1982. http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/afrapix.

The transition from apartheid brought with it new challenges for the unions. A consequence of the sanctions was that industries were protected and the lifting of sanctions in the early nineties exposed many sectors, especially manufacturing, to competition through cheap imports. The liberalisation of these labour markets, alongside the cutting of tariffs, saw a significant collapse in jobs, especially in the textile and footwear industries.[21]

In this context of declining jobs the unions, in particular Cosatu,[22] began the process of formalising their hard won gains in legislation. However, the formal recognition of the unions came with regulatory frameworks. In addition to the limits on industrial action, the processes for the organisation of worksites was unsuited to the changing nature of work.[23] The problem of how to cope with new forms of work, a problematic experience for unions internationally, jobs that are often temporary, flexible or outsourced through labour brokers, was exacerbated.

For Cosatu, the unionisation of the civil service gave the short term illusion of growth, while membership was often declining in other industries. Protection of the gains within the worksite is often positioned as one side of a false dichotomy, where more jobs are predicated on less controls, lower pay and further flexibilisation. The losing battle against market and labour liberalisation has taken its toll and distracted from the problem of who unions now represent. While the unions are very much aware of the need for new ways of organising and new forms of representation that can help incorporate workers outside of formal employment into their ranks, solutions are yet to emerge. For this to happen, work cannot remain central to the identity of labour, cannot be allowed to mediate access or identity socially or structurally.

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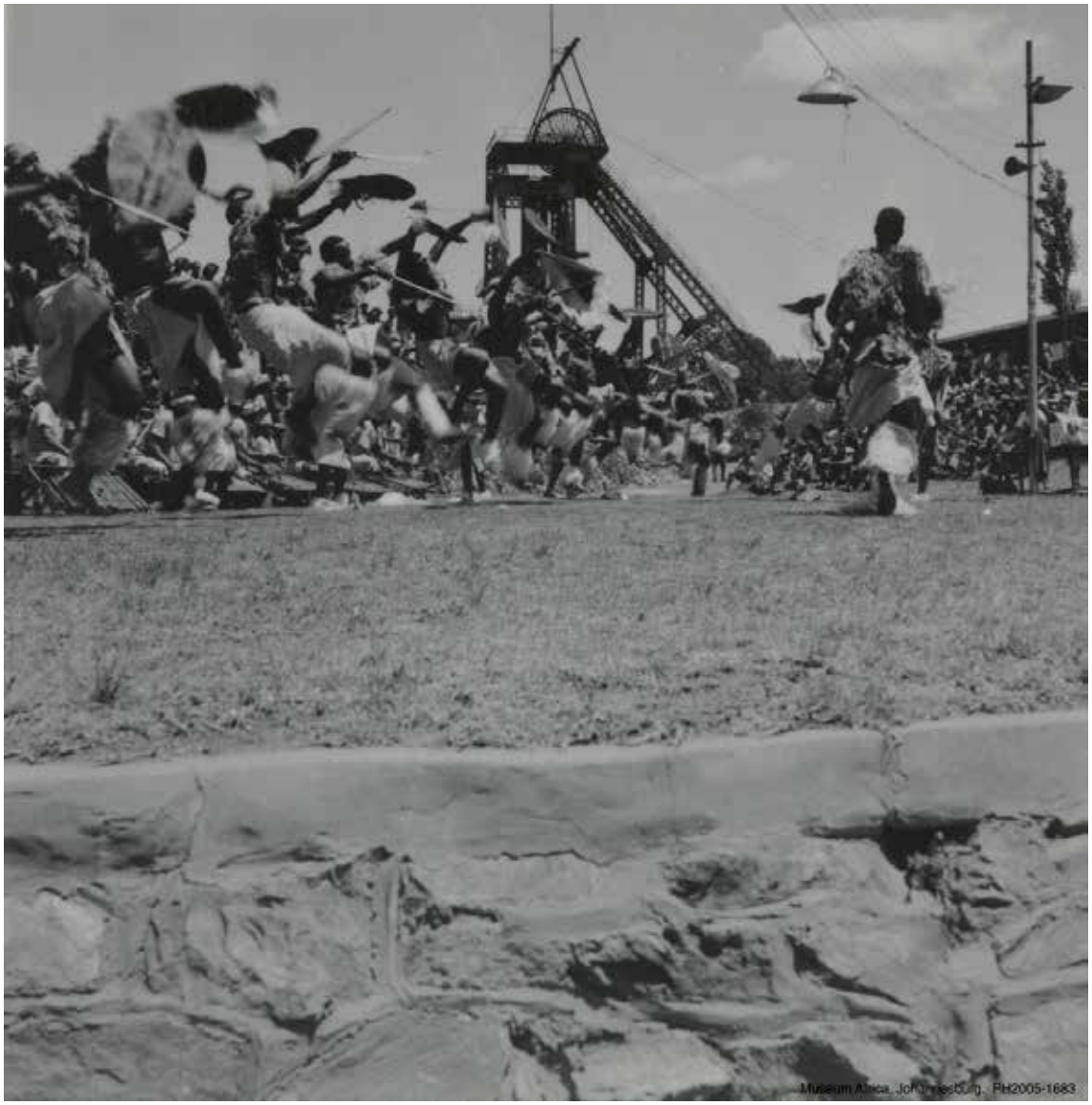
21 Naidoo and Veriava, *Re-membering Movements: Trade Unions and New Social Movements in Neoliberal South Africa*, 7.

22 Congress of South African Trade Unions, an umbrella organisation representing a number of trade unions in different industries. Formed in 1985, Cosatu was the largest and most dominant union body in the country until recent events destabilised its position. Cosatu has been in alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) since their unbanning in 1989.

23 Naidoo and Veriava, *Re-membering Movements: Trade Unions and New Social Movements in Neoliberal South Africa*, 8.

The problem that faces the trade unions is symmetrical to the problem of the representation of work. The question is then how can work be represented in a way that the system of which it is embedded become visible? So that work itself can be exposed as constructed and naturalised, its relation to its promises of social inclusion questioned and importantly the way in which economically and in relation to subjectivity it is centralised despite its lack.

The problem of imagining work has to begin now, from the space outside of work. It is a problem that might symmetrically be laboured on by image producers and labour organisations alike, by rethinking ideas of productivity, acknowledging and rendering visible unvalued forms of labour that have been marginalised or emerged in the space outside. It is the urgent task of clearing the space into which new forms of representation and importantly self representation might emerge. We need new forms of post work thinking and imaging that allow the imaginary and speculative potential of the art to dismiss the ideological constraints that limit us.



Anonymous - Source: Museum Africa

a visible problem (III)

I was looking for work

Or rather I was looking for images of work in the archives of Museum Africa.[1] I wanted to find photographs of underground mining. On arrival at the archives I was handed nine folders containing photographs from the gold mines around Johannesburg. A little to my surprise three of the folders were labeled "Zulu War Dances". Initially I ignored these and set about my task, they seemed unlikely to yield what I was looking for. But after I had finished browsing through the initial folders I got curious.

The Zulu Dance folders were full of images of miners in groups, dressed in a form of traditional Zulu attire, performing for an audience. The images varying greatly in style and covered roughly a similar time span the other folders I had looked at: circa 1900 to 1970. Yet despite the fact that the audiences were overwhelmingly black and male - leading me to believe the performances were primarily for fellow workers - the images are immediately recognizable as having been taken by a 'colonial' camera. Reinforcing this idea was a number of invites to these performances, included in the folders, produced by the mines clearly targeted at members of the white management and colleagues.

As is often the case what was made visible in these images is not so much the subject of the image but the gaze of the photographers themselves. In this case an exotic essentialist view. I began to wonder as to the specific intention of the images; whether they were taken with the express purpose of producing and reinforcing difference or if the photographs were unavoidably but unselfconsciously products of the photographers own prejudice. Soon I slipped all too easily into this reading and was oblivious to the possibility of these being more complex images.

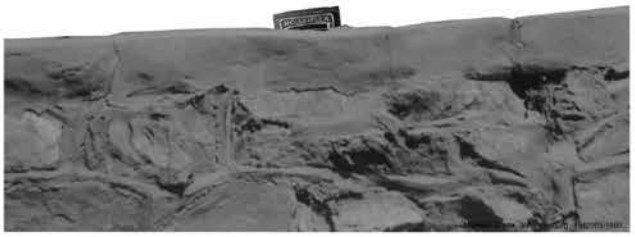
1 "The Bensusan Museum of Photography is named after Dr AD Bensusan, a former mayor of Johannesburg and a man who has devoted himself to the promotion of the art and science of photography in this country. It was donated to the city in 1968 and forms part of Museum Africa." http://www.sahistory.org.za/places/bensusan-museum-photography-and-library

However, my comfort zone was disrupted upon finding an intriguing set of small silvery photographs. They were undated, but I would guess that they were from around the mid 20th century, 1950s or 60s perhaps. The images were square, suggesting that they were taken using a medium format camera. A method that produces a four times larger negative than the standard 35mm camera. This means better reproductions, but it is more expensive and cumbersome, so it is most commonly used by professionals. But to me nothing about these images suggested a professional eye.

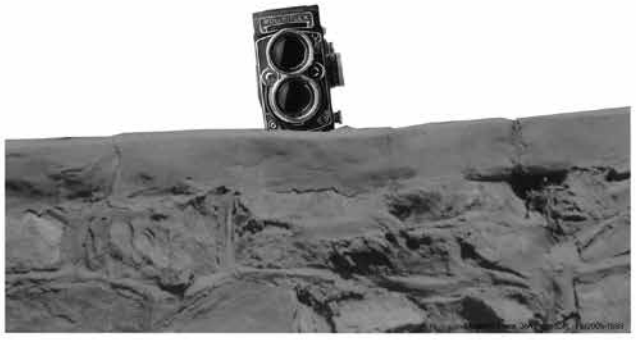
The image I found most intriguing showed the dancing in action. Taken from the side of the performance, the front row of men captured with the legs raised in the air. In the background a mine headgear is visible. Seated to the right of the image are the audience in a grandstand. The composition of the photograph is askew, tilted down to the left. The bottom third of the picture plane is occupied by a wall. Above the wall is a stretch of empty grass. Less than half the image is occupied by the intended subject matter.

Notably, the leader of the dancers has his back to the camera, in what I doubt is a coincidence. I got the strong sense that the photographer seemed scared, nervous of taking the picture. Overwhelmed by what they were witnessing. Looking at the image produced I would guess that they had used the wall to help conceal their camera and intentions waiting for the man to turn his back. They would have quickly lifted the camera when they were unseen to take the shot. The photographer using a deep depth of field keeping more of the picture in focus and facilitating a sneaky shot.

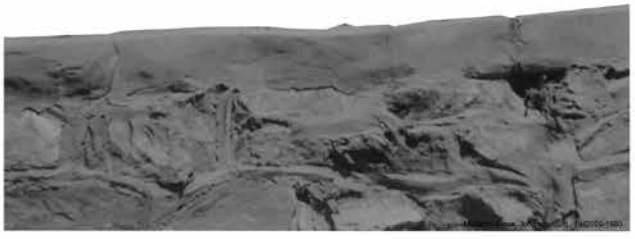
The awe with which the photographer seemed struck shifted the power relations of the image, and for the first time the visibility favoured the subject over their gaze. Now I wanted to know more about the dance and the dancers.











The Original Sin

In February 2018 the newly installed president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, stated in parliament: "Land taking was the original sin, causing divisions and pain amongst most of our people."[2] It was an apparent reference to Karl Marx's *Capital*.[3] Ramaphosa was flexing, showing off that he remembers his Marx and possibly hinting towards his political roots in the trade union movement. Undoubtedly it was a response to increased pressure from the left wing opposition around the question of land, and the ANC led government's failure to adequately address the problems of restitution and redistribution. The only thing was that Ramaphosa got the reference the wrong way around.

Ramaphosa's first few months in office were not easy going. In addition to increasing pressure to deal with the issue of land, probably the most hotly debated topic of the moment, there had been a number of service delivery protests[4] that had escalated out of state control. Added to this there was dissatisfaction and nationwide protest against the proposed new national minimum wage. A standard that, despite Ramaphosa signing it into effect, he had admitted is below a living wage. He insisted that "the struggle for a living wage is what you as workers must wage",[5] knowing full well that worker power has hit a steep decline.

The issue of restitution and redistribution of land, the failure to provide basic services, the

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2 Tom Head, "In a nutshell: What did Cyril Ramaphosa say in his SONA reply?", *The South African*, 20th February 2018, https://www.thesouthafrican.com/cyril-ramaphosa-sona-reply-2018/.

3 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital - Capital: Best Online Edition.* Edited by Friedrich Engels, Translators Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, (Aristeus Books, 2012), Kindle, loc 12544.

4 Genevieve Quintal, "Service delivery protests increasing and most are violent," Times Live, 14 May 2018 https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-05-14-service-delivery-protests-increasing-and-most-are-violent/

5 Sarah Smit, "'The struggle for a living wage is still on' – Ramaphosa," *Mail And Guardian*, 01 May 2018. https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-01-the-struggle-for-a-living-wage-is-still-on-ramaphosa

problem of a living wage and the ever present crisis of employment are symptoms of the same historical conditions. This is probably obvious. Why this is all relevant to the photograph I describe above requires further elaboration.

The reference the president was making was to Chapter 26 in *Capital Vol 1*, on primitive accumulation. The processes that prior to the advent of capitalism provided the conditions that would make its development possible. Importantly the production of a workforce, a proletariat. However the 'original sin' of capitalism (or colonialism) in the Marx text is not the acts of dispossession itself, but a description of the myth that obscures the reality of the violence. In a passage of prose that shows show Marx's alternatively humorous and poetic turn of phrase, he describes how notions of the deserving and hard working are mobilised, as is so often the case, to conceal the truth.

> "This primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past. In times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent, and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work."[6]

The image of the lazy rascals unwilling or unable to accumulate capital is resonant with the myths of colonialism. Throughout the 19th century and still pervasive within the 20th century the refusal of work or even the lack in the desire for the production of a surplus were branded lazy. It was then and still is now in the context of unemployment a racialized conceit. Applied liberally to the indigenous population of South Africa. Making the more poignant Marx's line: "the latter

6 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital - Capital: Best Online Edition,* loc 12551 - 12558.

sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins."[7]

Rather than the lack of a diligent and frugal life, what actually is at the core of this process is dispossession. Dispossession that takes a trifecta of violence: physical, economic and cultural. Within this the dispossession of land was initially the key. By removing the ability to live independently, to subside, to grow one's food, and choose one's own rules, communities are broken up and forced to look for work to survive.

> "In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capital class in course of formation; but, above all, those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and "unattached" proletarians on the labour-market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods."[8]

The period of accelerated dispossession of land in South Africa is a short century from around 1846 to 1913. It begins with the industrialization of agriculture, and is characterized by the expansion of industry and industrial wage relations with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly and later gold in Johannesburg. Prior to this point industry in South Africa was low. Most of the settler farms in the colonies were primarily subsistence based, their function defined by the occupation of land and the holding of territory for the colonial powers.

The Gates of Misery

In 1846, the commissioner of the Colony of Natal, Henry Cloete, began a process of active dispossession of land with the self conscious intent of forcing into existence a surplus population that would have as their only option work on the already flailing sugarcane farms in the region.[9]

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7 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital - Capital: Best Online Edition,* loc 12551

8 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital - Capital: Best Online Edition,* loc 12592 - 12600

9 This contrasts to the processes at work on the eastern edge of the Cape Colony, where the dispossession was initially territorially driven. Historical events would then present Sir

In 1843, Britain had annexed the Colony of Natal, adding it to the Cape Colony that it had wrested from the Dutch 30 years earlier. Natal however, unlike the Cape, was immediately identified for its productive rather than strategic value. The land was seen as fertile and sugarcane had been identified as a major cash crop,[10] an extremely labour intensive commodity. The British administration did not however anticipate labour supply as a problem. The local Northern Nguni population[11] would provide sufficient workers for the farms.

The Colony of Natal was located in a subtropical region on the east coast of South Africa. It was about half the size of the current province of KwaZulu Natal, with the independent Zulu Kingdom to the North. In the period leading up to the annexation of the colony by the British, political instability and social upheaval in the Zulu Kingdom caused many families to leave and cross southwards into Natal. Through social and economic circumstances they were available and were disposed to work on the white settler farms.[12] This was short lived.

Quickly it became apparent that the Northern Nguni population were resistant to work on the farms. Their initial participation was replaced by workers abandoning their contracts and jobs. Cloete responded with a plan which he believed would force locals back to work. He began setting in motion the constriction of land, forcing the communities into small overcrowded barren lands that would be unable to sustain subsistence. He called his process "the gates of misery"[13] through which the locals would pass, forcing them ultimately into leaving these

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George Grey, the governor of the colony, with the opportunity which allowed the process of industrialisation of agriculture. When in 1856 he forced labour contracts onto Xhosa people returning into the area after a series of territorial wars had forced them into smaller and smaller areas of land.

10 Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993), 84.

11 Indigenous communities that would now identify as Zulu but living outside of the Zulu Kingdom.

12 Keletso E. Atkins, "'Kafir Time': Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal." *Journal of African History* 29, No 2 (1988), 230.

13 Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is dead! Give us our money! The cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*, 47.

contracted locations in search of work.

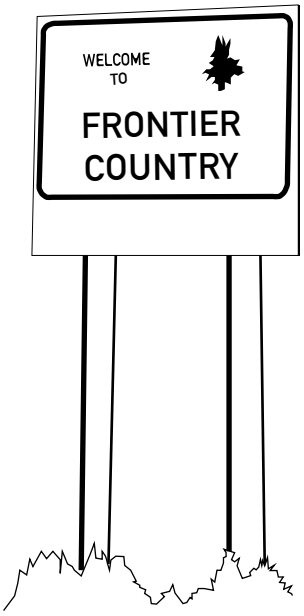
Welcome to Frontier Country

Around the Makana Municipality are a number of signs produced by the Eastern Cape Tourism board stating "Welcome to Frontier Country". This area in the early 19th century formed the eastern edge of the Cape Colony. A number of wars took place between Xhosa people and descendants of the Dutch settlers prior to the British taking ownership of the colony in 1814. These wars had prompted the new government to bring British born settlers in 1820, including my family, to occupy the region. The idea was that these settlers would occupy the land thus preventing the Xhosa from returning. This would allow for the British to establish control over the area.

During the 19th century the Xhosa would return repeatedly to attempt to retake their land and another five wars would be fought between the Xhosa and the British. In this way the land constituted a frontier in a territorial sense. A contested area in which one advancing power sought to impose rule over another, specifically through the control of the land.

While the dispossession of land removes a community from or limits the possibility of their independent survival, as Ahmed Veriava suggests, Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation is not limited to "forms of dispossession that separate people from their means of production, he also linked these processes to modes of subjection to sanctioned forms of life".[14] What this means is that control of territory is not enough. To establish power and governance, and the successful creation of a workforce, requires an ideological imposition, a form of cultural dispossession. Drawn along these lines is another frontier. A contested area in which one advancing ideology seeks to impose itself over another.

14 Ahmed Veriava *The two economies, primitive accumulation, and the government of the state, or, Reflecting on the politics of the governed from South Africa,* Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, (in press).


WELCOME
TO
FRONTIER
COUNTRY

Returning to the Colony of Natal, Cloete's plans did not sufficiently produce the desired result. As Keletso Atkins describes in her excellent book on the period, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*, this problem of insufficient labour would continue to dominate the colonial discussions in the 19th century in the region.[15] Not only did the problem of recruitment remain, with an ongoing series of taxes, an economic dispossession implemented to compound the misery, control of the worksite, was added to this. Not only did a lack of control here affect productivity but further increased the problem of workers disappearing altogether.

Atkins narrates how the colonial farmers' arrogance and cultural indifference was a defining factor in this failure. The settlers misrecognized the work ethics of local population and were unable to conceive of a mutually beneficial compromise. Most obviously, the misrecognition of the distribution of labour along the lines of age, a reasonably egalitarian mode by which every person would, as they became older, move up through the social ranks and perform different tasks. The settlers, oblivious to this, would regularly attempt to assign older men the tasks of boys and then become inflamed when the task was not completed.

Understandings of time became a further point of contention. The northern Nguni work day was based not on a number of hours but daylight, months by the moon rather than the colonial calendar and the work year broken up into defined seasons. Their disinterest to shift from an effective cultural norm was seen as an indication of the lack of ability to modernise.

There is a revealing incident described in one of Atkins' essays.[16] It takes place in the late 19th century in my hometown of Pietermaritzburg, in the central regions of the then Natal colony.

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15 Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is dead! Give us our money! The cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*, 1.

16 Keletso E. Atkins, "'Kafir Time': Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal." *Journal of African History* 29, No 2 (1988), 239.

In the town a system existed to signal the start of the workday where a gun would fire at 8am every morning. A time that would have coincidentally been roughly inline with the start of the indigenous working day at least for half of the year, around an hour after sunrise. However, later the time was changed to 9am, rupturing the work day rhythms of the labour force. While there remains a small change in time it is easy to imagine that its knock on effect on cultural institutions is much larger.

The workers, clearly frustrated by the new time, set about enacting a small form of resistance. Each day a representative would arrive at work at the original hour and the manager would be forced to send them away saying each time "come by and by when the gun fires." Seemingly in jest the workers named the gun ubai-n-bai, a name that stuck throughout the region. The anecdote was relayed by a colonial administrator seemingly unaware that the joke was on them.

This anecdote may seem trivial when read in relation to the violence and racism of the time but it highlights, I think, some important points. The implementation of a new (work) regime, even if taken up by the workers, does not necessarily mean acceptance. Their compliance is not the same as conversion. Secondly, the act of resistance is an act of remembering, a recall of what is being dispossessed.

Below the cost of reproduction

In 1972, Harold Wolpe produced the seminal text, *Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa,* on the policies of segregation and their relation to the form of colonial capitalism that developed here.[17] Wolpe describes how capitalism tends to, through its continuous expansion, erase forms of pre-capitalist society. In South Africa this expansion, especially through the dispossession of land, reached a limit that threatened to undermine the system itself.

17 Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa." *Segregation to Apartheid. Economy and Society* 1, No 4, (1972): 425-456.

The dispossession of land in South Africa was higher than in any other Africa country. At its peak, 87% percent was owned by the white colonial minority, less than 10% of the population. This is the direct result of the 1913 Land Act[18] which legalised this 87/13 racialised division of land. The stated intention of the act was the institution of segregation. However, it is worth noting that much of this land had already been dispossessed by 1913. The act, however, had two further consequences.

First, that it stopped the increasing number of black farmers, who were often more successful than their white counterparts, from buying back the white owned land. The second, and as Wolpe notes possibly unintended consequence, was that by stopping whites from buying land in the reserves, the territory allocated to the black people, the system of cheap migrant labour, on which the farms and mines depended, whose wages remained below the cost of reproduction, was sustained.

The reserves, later homelands under apartheid, separated the site of reproduction of the workforce from the worksite. Practices of subsistence and the fragile economies that emerged in these spaces were then forced to subsidize the cost of reproduction. A delicate and unstable balance act was formed. Dispossession had created a surplus population far beyond possible adsorption by the demand for labour. These sites then had to sustain a surplus as well as reproduce the workforce but not too successfully that the flow labour of labour migration would be affected. Neither could it collapse and raise the cost of reproduction.

Work never arrived

Land is of course never just land. It is a productive asset. It is the spatial location of farms and factories. It is the ownership of the raw materials beneath its surface, (especially gold and

18 Originally known as the Native Land Act and later the Bantu Land Act.

diagram 1

the colonial territorial production of work

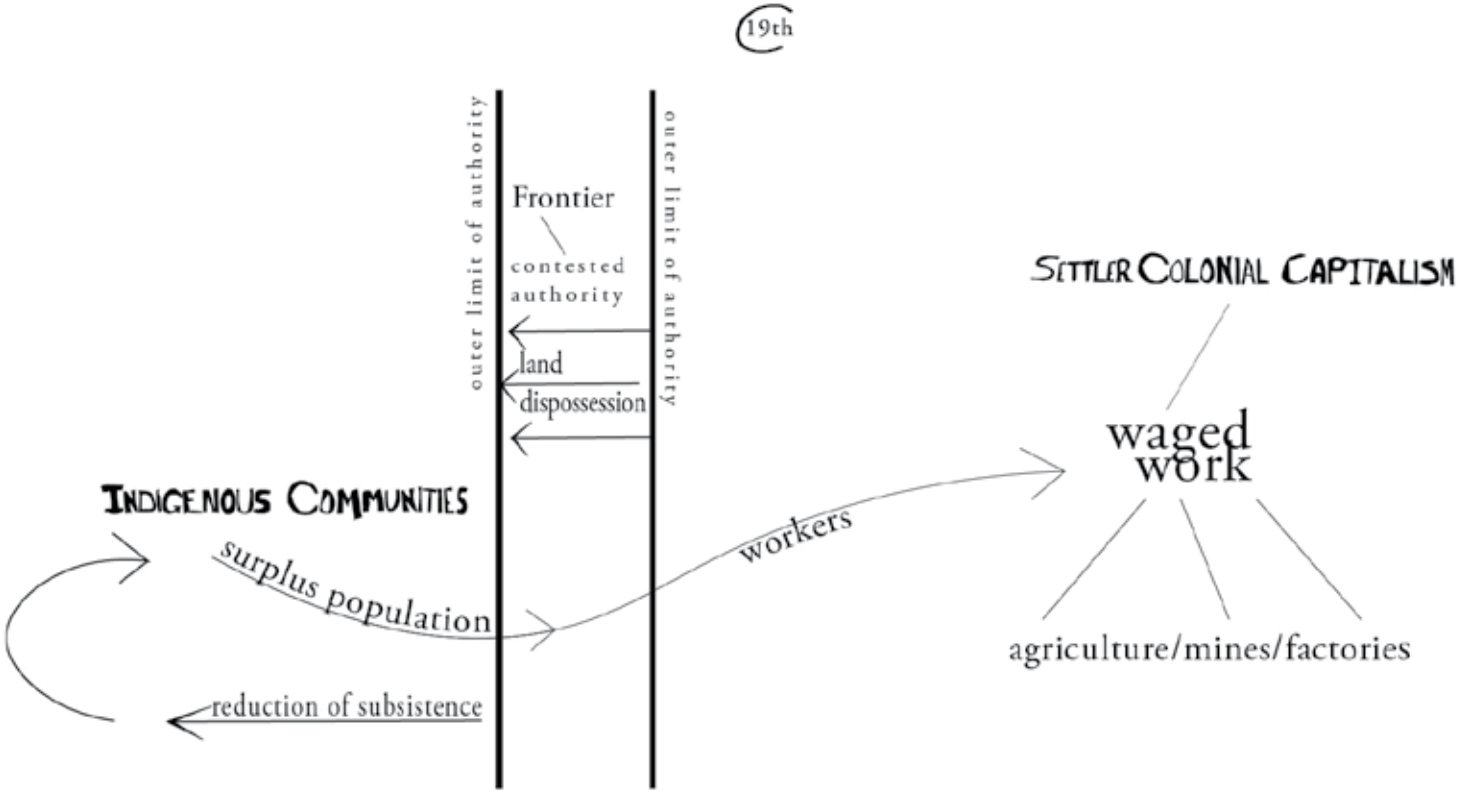


diagram 2

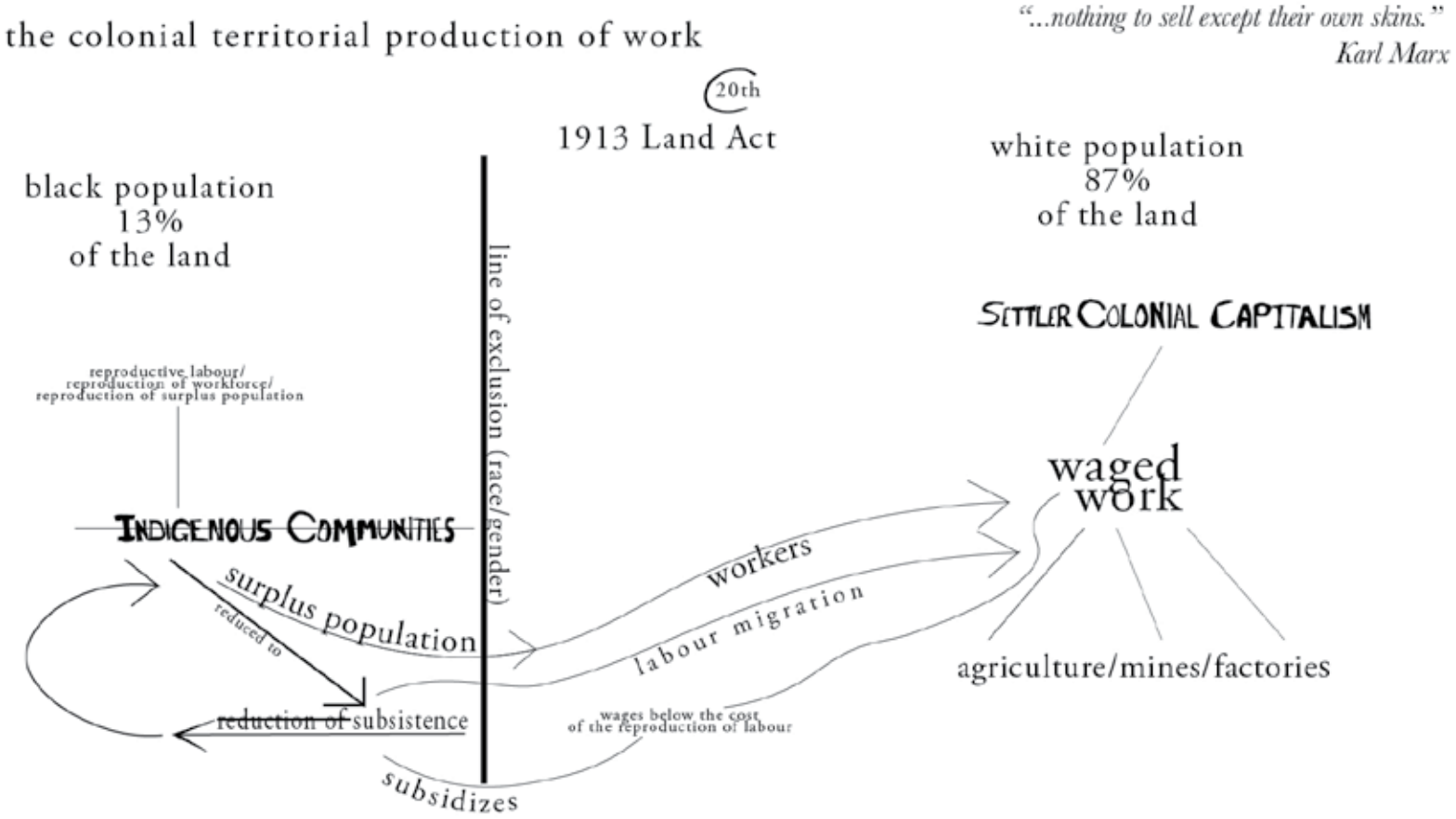
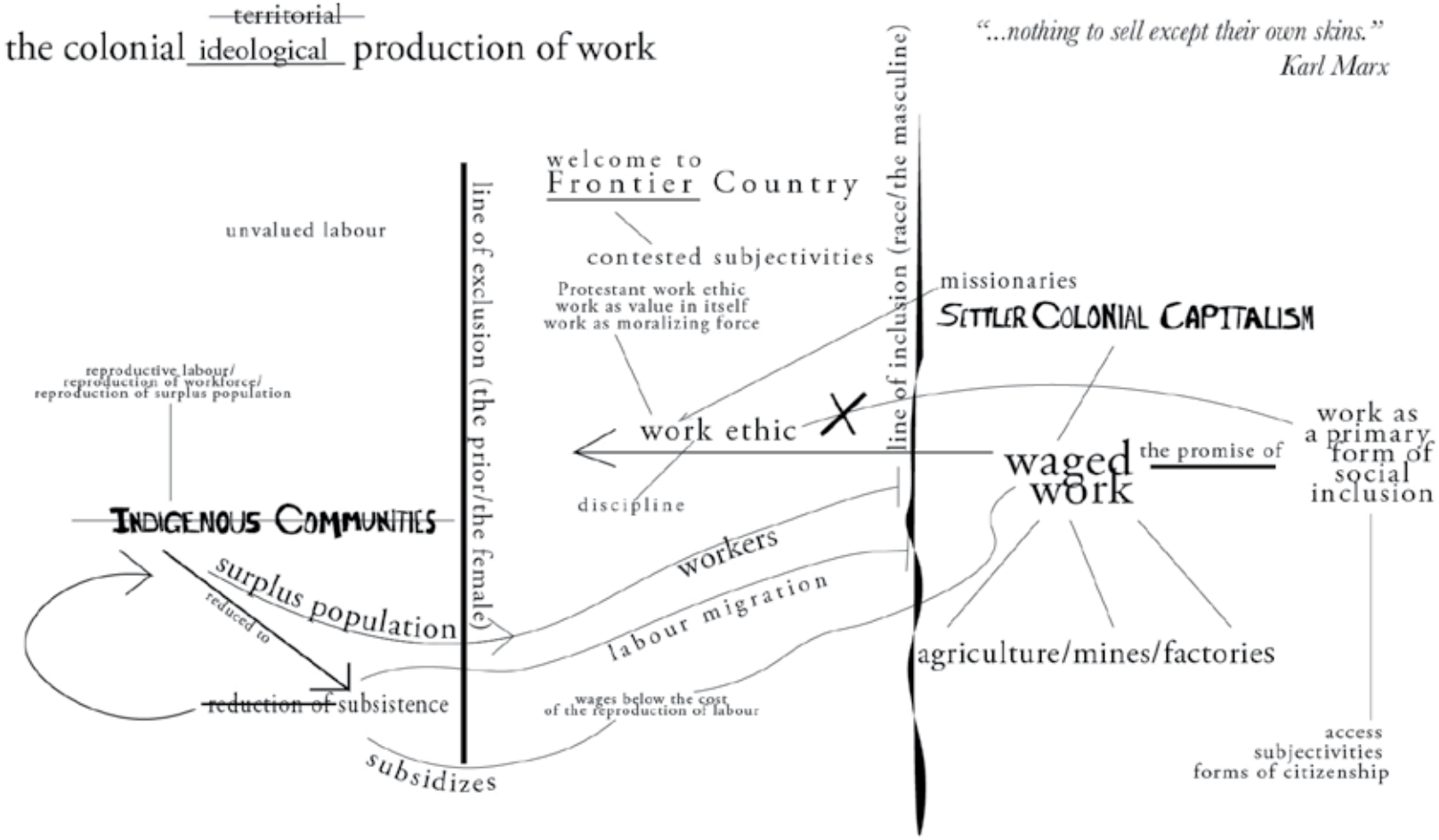

the colonial territorial production of work
"...nothing to sell except their own skins."
Karl Marx
20th
1913 Land Act
black population
13%
of the land
white population
87%
of the land
line of exclusion (race/gender)
SETTLER COLONIAL CAPITALISM
reproductive labour/
reproduction of workforce/
reproduction of surplus population
waged
work
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
surplus population
reduced to
workers
labour migration
agriculture/mines/factories
reduction of subsistence
wages below the cost
of the reproduction of labour
subsidizes

diagram 3


~~territorial~~
the colonial ideological production of work
"...nothing to sell except their own skins."
Karl Marx
welcome to
Frontier Country
unvalued labour
line of exclusion (the prior/the female)
line of inclusion (race/the masculine)
contested subjectivities
missionaries
Protestant work ethic
work as value in itself
work as moralizing force
SETTLER COLONIAL CAPITALISM
reproductive labour/
reproduction of workforce/
reproduction of surplus population
work ethic
work as
a primary
form of
social
inclusion
waged
work
the promise of
discipline
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
workers
surplus population
reduced to
labour migration
agriculture/mines/factories
~~reduction of~~ subsistence
wages below the cost
of the reproduction of labour
access
subjectivities
forms of citizenship
subsidizes

diamonds in the case of South Africa). It is, as I have highlighted, the source of independence and subsistence that through its dispossession produces a surplus population that is needed in the service of work. Importantly, it is also the basis of community and identity for the people who live on it.

The colonial production of work begins with the expansion of settler colonial capitalism. In South Africa, the early colonial project is centered around the control of the Cape, the southernmost tip of Africa, as a strategic point in the shipping route between Europe with India. This colony served the mercantile capitalist system. Work in the colony was largely in service of this and its maintenance. Land under colonial control was largely unutilised for the production of surplus beyond the needs of the colony and the passing ships.

Towards the middle of the 19th century this began to shift, particularly within the British colonial system. The governors of Natal and the Cape Colonies, Henry Cloete and George Grey[19] respectively, both desired the transformation of the economies of their colonies towards the production of surplus. Prior to the rapid jolt of industrialisation provided by the discovery of diamonds and then gold, this was through the transformation of settler farms from subsistence to capitalist.

Both governors understood the dispossession of land as key and moved self consciously (Natal) and at least partially retrospectively (Cape) in service of this idea. Expansion and dispossession of territory is the opening of land as the site of these farms. Importantly and specifically in relation to the production of work, it is the dispossession of the independence and subsistence of the communities to force them into work. It is significant to note that the British had abolished slavery in 1830, not long before this push to transform the economies.

19 J. B. Pieres, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7.* (Johannesburg: Ravin Press, 1989), 219.

However, the dispossession of land is not enough. For the production of a workforce there needs to be an ideological shift as well, another layer of dispossession. Work is an activity that is socially constructed. The place and value of work has to be naturalised for it to be reproduced. I will use work ethic to name the way work is constructed and naturalised within society, the ideological production of work. As Max Weber pointed out the shift to Protestantism from Catholicism in Europe, and the resultant changes in work ethic, was a key factor in its success. This centering of work or the idea of work as a "calling," that has value in and of itself "began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order."[20]

Capitalist expansion in South Africa needed implementation of new work ethics that would be more conducive to its functioning. The preexisting work ethics did not necessarily induce the participation in wage labour required. The Zulu work ethic, for example, reverses the relation of work to status, where status (most commonly expressed through age) determines the work rather than work conferring status, thus the incentive to work in forms of labour outside of one's status was severely lacking.

Grey, with a mandate of civilising the indigenous population in the Cape Colony, and in his ambitions to transform the economy, produced public works projects and funded schools for the training in technical and work directed fields.[21] These schools were run by the missionaries. Missionary schools, in the Colony of Natal, actively taught ideas about the value of labour, and also the value of labour over time in ways that would be more conducive to the success of labour contracts.[22]

It would be too simplistic to suggest that the forms of work ethic enforced in the colonial setting

20 Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), loc 1708.

21 Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, *The Land is Ours: South Africa's First Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism.* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2018), loc 234.

22 Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is dead! Give us our money! The cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*, 83.

exactly mirror protestant work ethic as described by Weber; however the moralising, transformed in colonial terms into civilising, force of work he articulates was key. In some accounts of the time, such as by historian J. B. Pieres, there is an implication that the public pretense of civilising was cover and flimsy justification for naked economic ambition.[23] Rather it seams congruent to read the processes of violent dispossession, reeducation and inducement to labour, in other words economic transformation, as the colonial process of civilizing itself.

The production of work is not then the creation of jobs or limited to the creation of a surplus population in need of a wage for survival, but it is the production of new sets of work relations combined with the rearticulation and centering of work.

I want to use a process of diagrammatic mapping of the colonial territorial production of work as a way of producing a framework from which to work. The map is not a representation, it cannot account for all the shifts from the colonial reserves to the system of homelands or the relation of the townships in the segregation of land. But it is a way of laying down some terms and questions. Specifically in relation to the second part of the mapping process, in which I will, on the same formal plane, lay out the colonial ideological production of work.

I believe that this is possible because although territorial and ideological are not interchangeable, they are tethered. What tethers them is subjectivity. The colonial territorial production of work is the attempted break down of land as fundamental in the constitution of subjectivity. The colonial ideological production of work is the attempted implementation of new subjectivities in its place.

To help to map this I will utilise Vivian Ziherl's categories laid out in her text, *The Fourfold Articulation*.[24] Ziherl's categories, "the female; the racial and the prior," function as the cuts that

23 J. B. Pieres, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7.* (Johannesburg: Ravin Press, 1989), 219.

24 Vivian Ziherl, "The Fourfold Articulation." *e-flux Journal* 81. (April 2017), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/126968/the-fourfold-articulation/.

separate and produce the natural, i.e. that on which capital acts in the production of surplus value. The lines of exclusion of modernity from its outside.

The female is that which is feminised, most often including but not limited to gender. In its intersection with race, for example, blackness is often feminised and is in contrast to rational masculinity. (To begin with I will use gender in the territorial mapping in reference to the narrower scope of the gendered division of labour within the colonial territorial construction, but shifting to the female with the ideological mapping, as the division of complexities of the division of labour expand). The racial is the line of exclusion of blackness from whiteness. The prior is produced in contrast to western modernity, where indigenous culture is produced as ahistorical and atemporal and thus cannot be modernised only replaced. While the prior is most often racialised, the distinction between race and the prior, as I will demonstrate, remains important.

With territorial expansion a frontier zone is formed at the edges. But what is created in this process is not a line that marks the outer limits of the Settler Colonial territory/authority and the beginning of the Indigenous territory/authority. It is the spaces that with this expansion and through occupation, the colonial powers attempted to exert and naturalize their authority. Grey described the frontier as "where natives would be worn by exertions to Christianity, trained in agriculture and in simple arts," and that the indigenous population would become "accustomed to our laws and aware of their advantages, attached to us from a sense of benefits received, respecting us for our strength and generosity."[25] But in the space of the frontier the process is incomplete. As such it is a space where forms of authority still remained contested and responsive. Its wide open field of space where the laws and practices of one form of social organising do not yet have legitimacy over another, (diagram 1: The colonial territorial production of work).

25 Cited in Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, *The Land is Ours: South Africa's First Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism,* loc 243.

These geographic or territorial zones of contested authority are, through the 1913 Land Act, effectively closed or at least their existence is doomed. Importantly, this also means that the maintenance of territorial exclusion is formalised. An outside that is constitutive and supplementary to the system of wage labour rather than a space for further territorial expansion. Through this the system of labour migration, particularly for the mines, and the separation of the reproduction of the workforce from the worksite is sedimented, (diagram 2: The colonial territorial production of work part 2). The freezing of territorial expansion does not mean the absolute end of the expansion of authority, however this process becomes tied to other forms of dispossession.

In the territorial mapping of the production of work, the lines of exclusion between settler colonial capitalism and indigenous communities are race and gender. Black men form the majority of the labour migration moving from the reserves to the workspace and back. The gendered division is an essential part of the separation of the site of reproductive labour from the worksite. The families are forced to stay in the reserves and are dependent on the wages of these men but also the economies and often substance to survive.

Shifting to the ideological mapping this same line of exclusion is drawn along the female and the prior, (diagram 3: The colonial ideological production of work). As previously discussed, the territorial dispossession is not enough to force people into work, work itself has to be produced within a different system of value. The meaning of work changes as well as what it promises. The wage is simply not enough. Work is centered and valued as a value in itself. It takes on a moral force.

The line of exclusion along the prior then means that part of the construction and inducement to work is the promise of social inclusion. Through work is the promise of access, forms of citizenship and subjectivities linked to modernity. Through the migration of workers towards wage labour they will become 'modern men' in the colonial image and in the colonial terms 'civilised'.

The prior has an internal contradiction which means that is has to be constantly reproduced. As a line of exclusion that is based on the idea of the ahistorical it is unsustainable in relation to the ongoing changes within the societies it excludes. The interventions of authority and capital, as well as the ongoing changes that are present with all societies, within the space of exclusion undercut the foundations of the construction and cause it to be a malleable line.

The racial remains in play as a line of exclusion. While the promise of work might be implicitly extended to those who enter the labour force, in practice this remains denied. Through the racial, black workers are denied access to the forms citizenship that the ideological construction of work promises as it reward. Race is the basis of social exclusion. A space then is opened up between these two lines of exclusion, between wage work and the construction of indigeneity, between the racial and the prior. This space is occupied by workers on which work ethic attempts to enforce itself but without the possibility of its social benefits. The space of ideological imposition without closure. I would like to propose that this is a frontier space.

Here I differ from Ziherl in my construction of the frontier. Ziherl emphasises the frontier in terms of a a point of contact. In my own conceptualisation of the frontier I rather foreground it as a space in which authority is under contestation, where competing modes of power struggle for dominance. In the ideological imposition of work it is rather the naturalisation of subjectivities that is contested. Within this space work ethic or work as a primary form of social inclusion is not therefore a given but contested terrain. The degrees of its partial efficacy changing and always contingent. While the outside in this formation remains constitutive of an inside it is possibly more antagonistic than supplementary.

The relationship of gender to the lines of exclusion is complex in that it is contingent on its intersection with race. Full inclusion remains within the domain of white men only. The female operates across the space of the frontier and into what is further excluded from that. The labour of women with the workforce is divided along feminised lines and outside the

promise of inclusion. However, the way in which it intersects with the racial is important. White women's labour is excluded but through race offered some forms of inclusion, a slightly different configuration of the frontier. While black women's labour would almost always be completely excluded from the frontier and have no promise of inclusion. Forms of labour completely outside the system of value, such as reproductive labour, is both feminised and excluded by the prior from the frontier, regardless of race.

What is important about the frontier in this framework is that it is a way to attempt to make visible the way in which the ideological framing of work and the consequential imposition of subjectivities is not a given. That the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion within this contested terrain opens up the possibility for divergent subjectivities.

Look for the markers of resistance and listen for the silence of refusal

I will now return to the image of the dancers where I began this text. The mines around Johannesburg have depended on cheap migrant labour as the source of their workforce. From an early stage this labour was recruited both from within South Africa, as well as from neighbouring countries. The Chamber of Mines, an organisation formed by the mine owners, was established within a few years of the discovery of gold, with the dual purpose of the managing and recruiting of workers and lobbying of government around policy, especially policies directly relating to or affecting the supply of labour.[26]

The maintenance of the migrant system meant that workers would be given short contracts, varying at different periods but usually around 18 - 24 months, after which they would be expected to return 'home'. Films such as *Pondo Story* (1948), produced by the Chamber of

26 Ruth First, *Black Gold - The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant.* (New York: Harvester Press, 1983), xxiii.

Mines, and *Matsele* (1946), produced by the Nasionale Veld Trust,[27] are just two classic examples amongst many others of the propaganda that was produced to lure potential workers to the mines. In both stories the mines offer the lead characters a way out from the poverty of their home life. They are recruited for work and during the course of their contracts they are able to earn enough money so that upon their return their lives can be dramatically uplifted.

In *Pondo Story*, the lead character is from Pondoland, a traditionally significant labour sending area, that would under apartheid be subsumed into the 'homeland' of the Transkei, as part of the racial division of land. The lead, while enjoying the rigor of work, yearns for his home. When he returns he is able to pay lobola, (the bride price for his wife), and begin his new life and start a family. Interestingly when he is on the mines he says: "On some Sundays we dance," however he is not depicted dancing but only watching.

In *Matsele*, the eponymous lead, (this time he has a name), is from Lesotho. His family are struggling as the soil has become unproductive, through overgrazing and bad farming methods. Matsele leaves for the gold mines and when he returns he is wealthy and women show him lots of attention. On his return he is a changed man, gone is his traditional blanket, the aesthetic device used by the filmmakers to distinguish him, and now he wears a suit. However, he finds the family still struggling with the land. His father has asked a sangoma[28] to solve the problem of the arid soil but Matsele knows this to be futile. He goes on a new mission in search of the white agricultural officers located far away. They will teach him the modern and correct farming methods. When he returns again he is able to transform his family's fortunes. Now he can marry and start a family. These are explicit examples of the narrative of how the work on the mines can transform and sustain subsistence and reproduction. However, both spend little time with the life on the mine, life outside of the act of work.

27 Veld is an Afrikaans term for field or land.

28 A traditional healer.

The men leaving for work on the mines would have to be housed in compounds and hostels during their stays. Work consumed the majority of their time and the sleeping and living conditions were notoriously bad. But the men did not work, sleep and eat without breaks; they had limited amounts of free time that would be necessary for them to recuperate. However leisure is always a problem for an authority that is excessively concerned with work and control.

From the perspective of management the question of what to do in this leisure time was framed as a moral one. They feared that leaving the men to their own devices, they would indulge in excessive drinking of beer, crime and the frequenting of sex workers.[29] As Goolam Vahed suggests, "Sport and recreation were used as an antidote to protest and militancy, and a means of instilling appropriate discipline amongst Africans."[30] Management were particularly concerned that these activities of sport and leisure would reinforce good values such as teamwork that would enhance their work performance.

The dancing of the workers emerges uneasily into this space. The dancing is known as ingoma (sometimes ngoma) dances. Ingoma dances exist throughout Southern Africa. While it seems to have been especially popular with Zulu migrant workers, many migrant workers from different geographic locales participated.. There are at least three major forms of Ingoma dance that were popular on worksites, isishameni, umzanzi and isiBhaca amongst many others as well as sub styles and forms.[31]

The ingoma dances are sometimes referred to as traditional or alternatively neotraditional. Without delving into the problematics of the notion of tradition as static category, it is important that the dances are adaptations. Prior to their use as a form of activity or leisure in worksites

29 Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s." *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 18, (1998), 69.

30 Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s," 72.

31 Veit Erlmann, "'Horses in the Race Course': The Domestication of Ingoma Dancing in South Africa, 1929-39." *Popular Music* 8, no. 3 (1989), 260.

they would have been tied to specific contexts, for example most have their origins in regimental dances performed by soldiers, while others in ceremonies such as weddings. Their use on the mines was a recontextualisation and with some resultant shifts in choreography.

Of course this adaption was invisible to the colonial masters. They perceived the dances as 'tribal' and 'aggressive' and unchristian.[32] Goolam Vahed in his study of the leisure time activities of workers in worksites in Durban shows how early colonial reactions to the dances were hostile and permission was often refused for the performances.[33] It is not surprising given some of the lyrics must have been unsettling for the colonial authorities.

Who has taken our country from us?
Come out! Let Us fight!
The Land is ours![34]

However, in the frontier space of the worksite where the dance is a negotiation of the new conditions, so too were the colonists responsive to their changing realities. Management began to change their strategy and sought to recuperate the dances rather than try to curtail it. Thy began to build facilities, hold officially sanctioned competitions, believing that the activity could foster useful skills, such as teamwork.[35] Even within these new structures many white people were still threatened.

However, the dance, for the colonial gaze, functioned not only within the realm of sanctioned activity but was useful for reinforcing ideas of race and culture, functioning within the colonial production of difference. The events were advertised to white colleagues, curios were sold at the competitions. This way they were able to use the dance as a way to affirm the idea that the

32 Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s," 92-94
33 Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s," 90
34 Cited in Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s," 90.
35 Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s," 90-98.

workers were unable to be 'modernised'. But the attempts at recuperation do not necessarily mean that one should at any level assume that the workers themselves became complicit in this construction or that generalities could be formed. Certainly not all the workers wanted to participate in the dances; some actively petitioned for other forms of activities besides dances or soccer, such as classes, lectures and concerts.[36]

The dance,further, by no means represents an unbreakable tie to an ahistorical idea of identity. This form of identification did not necessarily exist outside of the colonial gaze.[37] They are rather markers of resistance to over identification with the ideologies of worksites and the ethos they encapsulate was not easily recuperated. New dances would form out of the older ones, such as gumboot dancing, which emerged out of an isiBhaca dance, and would later often play a part in anti-apartheid resistance theatre productions.

I believe that the dance is a moment of visibility of the negotiated identities in relation to changing conditions and pressures of work, which required the construction of multiple divergent, contingent, adaptive and collectively produced subjectivities.

Postscript 1: Lazy rascals everywhere

My interest in producing a framework for trying to unpack the conditions of subjectivity and dispossession within the colonial context in South Africa is due to an intuition that this might have some relevance beyond this context. Given the contingent and local ways in which dispossession proceeds and adapts, this is not proposing a one size fits all solution but a framework where forms of inclusion, the lines of exclusion and the sites of contestation through work might appear. That the production of the frontier in these terms might have some

36 Tara Firenzi, "The Changing functions of Traditional Dance in Zulu Society," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012), 420.

37 Tara Firenzi, "The Changing functions of Traditional Dance in Zulu Society," 420.

continuity with the present both nationally and in the relationship of the 3rd world[38] or so called developing economies to the 1st world developed economies. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to complete this work in any depth, I would like, however, to at least propose the idea.

Both the cases of national and international productions of work, land and territory still have a foundational role. In the case of the international, borders still give weight to the geographic as a point of reference. The white 1st world countries are dependant on the labour of mostly black 3rd word workers, although now it is not only the labour that can move but the site of work itself.

European economies still depend on immigration each year, to fill the menial jobs, to expand the internal buying power and to increasingly pay the taxes that sustain the system of welfare for an aging workforce. A welfare state that emerged as a solution to the problem of a surplus population created by the complete internal dispossession by capital of the prior.

The expansion of the European Union into eastern Europe may in fact have been an attempt to keep this immigration white but it has not been enough to sustain the system. The rise of xenophobia has seen the ever tightening of the route to citizenship of migrant labour. For example, in Germany the children of legal workers are not automatically granted citizenship and those who choose to pursue it are confronted with increasing tests and obstacles.

However, it is not necessary now for only labour migration, the worksites themselves can now migrate to the labour. Factories and mines owned by large corporations located outside the countries in which they are located employ locals at wages well below the cost of reproduction of the workforce of the companies' home nations. Often the wages are below or are barely sufficient

38 I favor using the now somewhat out of fashion terms, 1st world and 3rd world, in tribute to the Non-Aligned Movement. The Non-Aligned Movement's attempts at solidarity of 3rd world has a resonance that the idea of the global south, I think, lacks.

to cover the cost of reproduction in the sites they occupy.

I would argue further that the frontier is expanding. That the growth of neoliberalism has increased the precarity of jobs with spaces where secure full time employment would have previously been the standard. Thus even citizens of 1st world countries can no longer experience the security or forms of inclusion that their parents would have had. They are in a different way both included but excluded.

My argument is not that 1st world economies have simply replaced conquest with market relations as forms of power and control. Rather, that by looking at the example of colonial South Africa, in terms of the relationship between inclusion and exclusion, forms precarity and the subjectivities that it can produce can be illuminated in within the context of contemporary work.

Postscript 2: Ramaphosa and the problem of restitution

It is probably a little too unfair to pick on Cyril Ramaphosa for his misquote. It was after all an off the cuff remark. At the same time, it is a revealing mistake. The conflation of the myth surrounding dispossession with the physical act suggests a lack of differentiation between the action of the taking of the land and its ideological accompaniment or any of the others forms of coexistent dispossessions. Multiple layers of dispossession reduced to one.

The restitution of land taken under the colonial and apartheid regimes is a process of both real and symbolic justice. Real in the return of stolen property, and symbolic in its recognition and attempted redress of the history of colonialism.

In my research around the land claim in Salem, Eastern Cape, a question kept nagging at me. What was taken and what is being returned? To many of the community who would receive the restituted land it is multiple things. It is the physical land that had been taken but in many

diagram 4

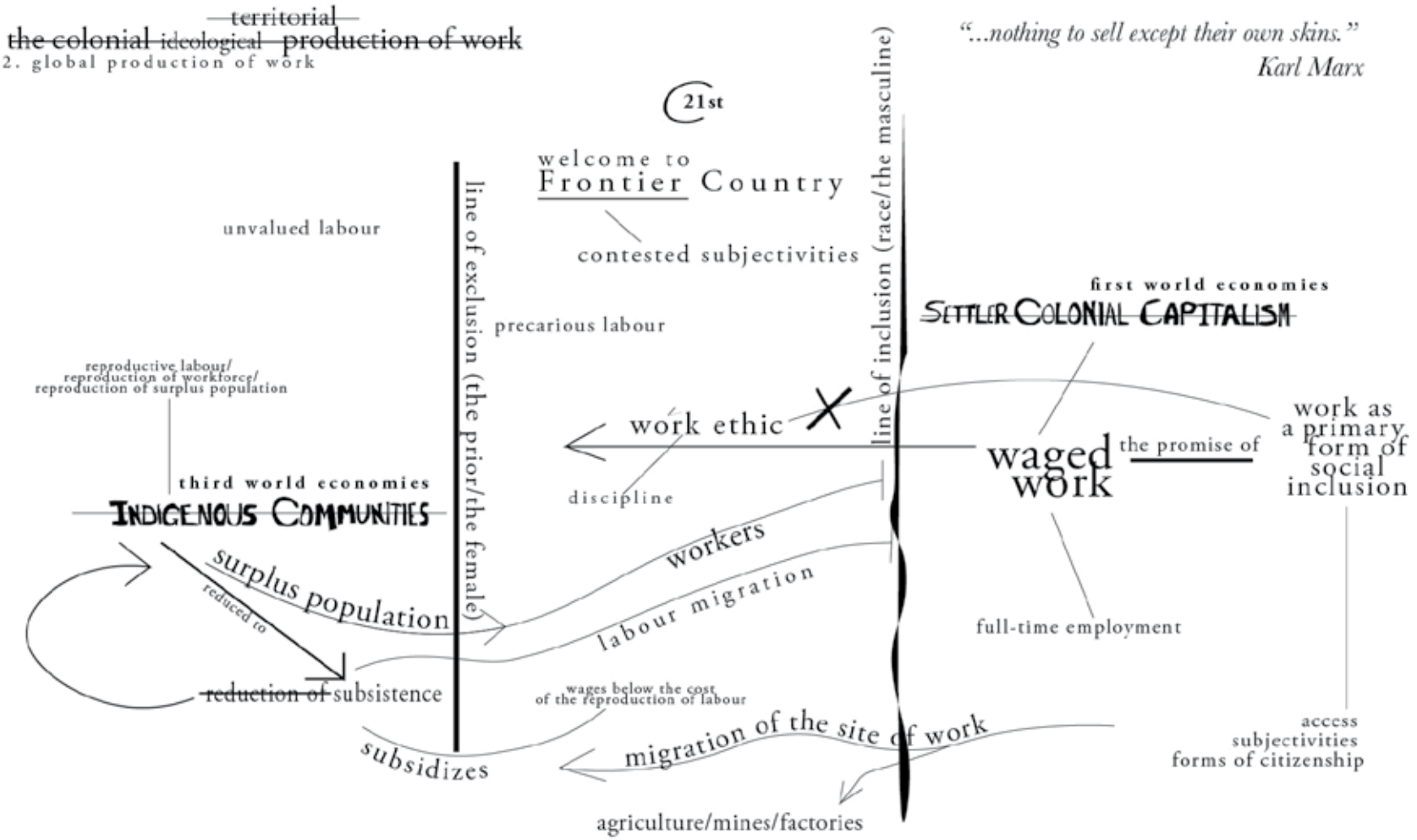
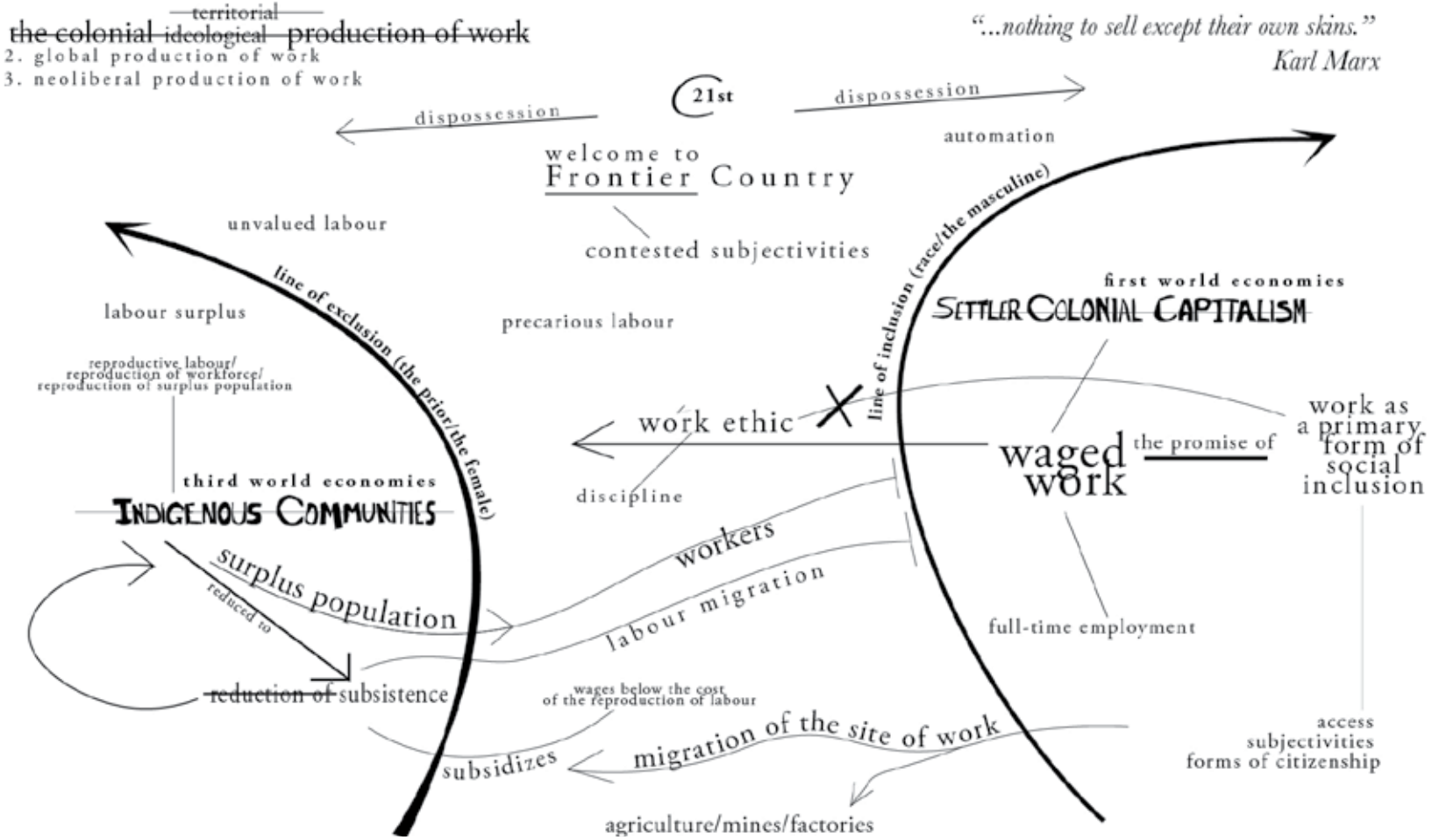

~~territorial~~
~~the colonial~~ ideological ~~production of work~~
2. global production of work
"...nothing to sell except their own skins."
Karl Marx
21st
welcome to
Frontier Country
contested subjectivities
unvalued labour
line of exclusion (race/the masculine)
line of inclusion (race/the masculine)
precarious labour
first world economies
~~SETTLER COLONIAL CAPITALISM~~
reproductive labour/
reproduction of workforce/
reproduction of surplus population
work ethic
work as
a primary
form of
social
inclusion
waged
work
the promise of
third world economies
~~INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES~~
discipline
workers
surplus population
reduced to
labour migration
full-time employment
~~reduction of~~ subsistence
wages below the cost
of the reproduction of labour
access
subjectivities
forms of citizenship
subsidizes
migration of the site of work
agriculture/mines/factories

diagram 5


territorial
the colonial ideological production of work
2. global production of work
3. neoliberal production of work
"...nothing to sell except their own skins."
Karl Marx
21st
dispossession
dispossession
automation
welcome to
Frontier Country
unvalued labour
contested subjectivities
line of exclusion (race/the feminine)
line of inclusion (race/the masculine)
first world economies
SETTLER COLONIAL CAPITALISM
labour surplus
precarious labour
reproductive labour/
reproduction of workforce/
reproduction of surplus population
work ethic
waged work
the promise of
work as a primary form of social inclusion
third world economies
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
discipline
workers
surplus population
reduced to
labour migration
full-time employment
reduction of subsistence
wages below the cost of the reproduction of labour
access
subjectivities
forms of citizenship
subsidizes
migration of the site of work
agriculture/mines/factories

aspects of what is dependant on the land, its role in the formation of the community and what that provided, the ability

The restituted land, for most of the people I spoke to, meant a way to employment and income. Yet the reality for emerging black farmers on restituted land is not so easy. As Katherine Verdery describes in *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*,[39] land is not always the most important asset within a neoliberal economy. Multinational corporations that control access and prices to the seed, fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides that form the basis of agriculture, constrain the ability for success of the emerging farms which often cannot afford these necessary resources to compete. In the case of South Africa access to markets and the very real racism that is experienced by the farmers further make profitability difficult. An example of this is the Mandinda family's experience of selling cattle at auctions and their cattle selling for around 75% of the price of the white farmers.[40] I would strongly argue that the constraints that the market places on these communities constitute new forms of dispossession that are in a continuum with colonial dispossession.

If I set aside the suggestion that the Salem case seems to make to rethink the idea of the land as commons and think differently about how community might constitute itself, and accept that it is most likely that the context of capitalist market relations will remain, there is still much that has to be done to secure some form of viability for these farms. There is a very real possibility that the failure of the restituted farms can result in them being put back on the market at a reduced value. To take the premise of restitution as a form of justice, equally real and symbolic, and if South Africa is to take seriously the idea of return of what has been taken, then a more complex and nuanced understanding of dispossession is necessary.

39 Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare, Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

40 This interview can be found in *Working the Land*.

w o r k
n e v e r
arrived

A Timeline of Work in South Africa

1652
Cape Colony established by the Dutch East India, slavery introduced.

1808
Slavery in the Cape Colony abolished by the new British Administration.

1856
Master and Servants Act by British administration requires workers to give complete obedience and loyalty to their employers.

1860s
Workers rush to Kimberly Diamond mines. Migrant labour is divided along racial and gendered lines.

1860
Indentured labour brought from India in response to the British administration's partial failure to force local population into work.

1886
Gold discovered in the Transvaal.

1896
Mines lower the wages of black workers.

Transvaal government stops black workers from living on mines unless in the service of a white employer.

Labour tenants on farms limited to force local people to seek work in urban areas.

Employed black workers in urban areas required to carry a metal badge, unemployed are allowed 3 days to seek work.

1897
Rand Native Labour Association established to recruit workers locally and from neighbouring countries.

1907
White workers strike against increasing use of workers of colour on the mines.

1911
Native Labour Regulation Act makes it a criminal offence for workers of colour to be absent from work.

Mines and Works Act reserves skilled mining jobs for whites and people of mixed race only.

Black miners strike at 3 mines, strikers jailed under the Masters and Servants Act.

1912
African National Congress (**ANC**) established.

1913
Land Act confers black South Africans to "native reserves", comprising 13 percent of South Africa's territory. Passes required to enter and leave urban areas.

1914
Riotous Assemblies and Criminal Law Amendment Act prohibits gatherings deemed a threat to public order.

1916
21,000 black workers sent to work in France to fill the labour gap caused by World War I. Government insists they are kept in compounds away from Europeans.

1918
190,000 black mine workers strike for better wages.

Industrial Workers of Africa (**IWA**), the first trade union for black workers, established.

1919

Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (**ICU**), the first non-racial trade union in South Africa, established.

ICU strike of 2000 dock workers organised and wages are doubled.

1920

Price of gold drops. Mines dismiss 10,000 white workers, replacing them with cheaper black labour.

IWA absorbed by ICU.

1921

South African Communist Party (**SACP**) established.

1922

Apprenticeship Act limits apprenticeship programmes to whites.

1922

White mine workers strike against mines favouring workers of colour for unskilled positions. Military kill more than 200 strikers and imprison 2,000.

1923

Natives Urban Areas Act establishes "locations" on the outskirts of major urban centres for employed workers of colour.

1924

South African Trade Union Congress (**SATUC**), for white workers, established.

1925

Minimum Wages Act reserves trades for white workers.

1926

Mines and Works Amendment Act reserves mining jobs for whites in response to 1922 revolt.

Malawian Clements Kadalie, leader of ICU, is convicted for entering Natal without a pass.

1927

ICU membership reaches 100,000. ICU is refused representation in SATUC.

1929

Clements Kadile resigns from ICU to establish Independent ICU (**IICU**).

1930

Great Depression causes an influx of poor whites to urban areas seeking work.

ICU closed.

IICU organises a rail and harbour workers' strike. Clements Kadalie and 8 IICU leaders arrested, charged with incitement to public violence.

1939

South Africa enters World War II. Increase of black workers in industrial employment.

Worker militancy increases.

1940

Bus boycotts occur after attempts to raise bus fares for travelling workers.

1941

Factories, Machinery and Building Works Act creates legal basis to force factory owners to racially segregate work.

Council of Non-European Trade Unions (**CNETU**) established.

1942

Black workers, **l**argely un-unionised, strike successfully for wage increases.

War Measure 145 prohibits strike action.

African Mine workers Union (**AMU**) demands a minimum wage with annual increases, an end to racial divisions and restrictions on workers' movement.

1943

Lansdowne Commission finds that the sustainability of mines is dependant on cheap black labour. Small increases in wages are recommended to subdue growing unrest.

An estimated 308,374 black workers are employed in mining.

1945

CNETU represents 158 000 workers across 119 unions. Its members comprise 40 percent of the 390,000 workers of colour in commerce and manufacturing.

1946

Food rations to mine compounds cut. Food protests and riots erupt.

100,000 black miners strike at 21 mines. Armed police attack, seal off compounds and force miners down shafts at gunpoint. 10 miners killed, 1,000 injured and 88 arrested.

AMU goes into terminal decline.

1947

Industrial Conciliation Bill seeks to control black trade unions through registration and certification. They are forbidden to participate in political activity.

1948

National Party (**NP**) comes into power, introduces apartheid system.

1950

Suppression of Communism Act bans SACP and any party or individual promoting "disturbances and disorder". Trade union leaders banned from organising and attending meetings.

Bantu Building Workers Act permits black people to be trained as artisans in construction industry, precludes whites from employing workers of colour to perform skilled work within their homes. Working outside of demarcation becomes a criminal offence.

CNETU call for South Africa's first mass worker stay-away on 1st May. Workers march against the Suppression of Communism Act, call for higher wages and better working conditions. Police kill 19 demonstrators.

CNETU goes into decline from internal divisions and increasingly restrictive government legislation.

1952

ANC Youth League, led by Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, organise the *Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws,* calling for passive resistance to apartheid laws and strongly supported by trade unions and workers.

1953

Bantu Education Act establishes a racialized, separate education system designed to limit people of colour to manual and unskilled jobs.

Native Labour Act makes all strikes as well as activities that "might lead to strikes" by workers of colour illegal.

1955

South African Congress of Trade Unions (**SACTU**) established.

SACP disbanded and re-formed underground.

1956
Trial of 156 anti-apartheid activists charged with treason. 24 are SACTU leaders.

1956
Labour Relations Act prohibits black workers from joining trade unions. Other workers of colour forced into segregated unions.

Riotous Assemblies Act prohibits public gatherings considered a threat to public order.

1957
SACTU and the ANC launch a national stay-away. 70-80% of workers boycott work in major centres.

1960
Unlawful Organisations Act bans organisations considered a threat to public order.

ANC banned.

Police open fire on demonstrators protesting pass laws in Sharpville. 69 people are killed.

ANC calls for national convention of organised mass action. Failure of this action leads to the call for armed struggle.

1961
Establishment of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the ANC's armed wing. The entire SACTU leadership is recruited into MK.

1962
Terrorism Act authorises indefinite detention without trial on the suspicion of terrorism.

1964
The Miner's Monument erected in Johannesburg.

1966
SACTU ceases to operate inside South Africa. Remaining leaders forced into exile.

1969/1970
Formation of the Black Consciousness Movement (**BMC**).

1971
Black Allied Workers Union (**BAWU**) established, backed by the BMC. Focuses on conscientization.

1972
4,000 dockworkers in down tools and demand higher wages.

1973
Black Labour Relations Regulation Act allows black workers to create management-sanctioned 'liaison committees' but not trade unions.

International trade union conference in Geneva establishes resolutions for unions to lobby their governments to pressure South Africa to end Apartheid.

100,000 workers around Durban strike.

Transvaal striking mine workers shot by police. 12 killed and 38 wounded.

1974
Explosion of new unions begins. At least 6 new unions launched.

5,000 workers strike in East London. Strike begins at Mercedes Benz plant.

1976
26 trade unionists receive 5 year banning orders.

Soweto Uprisings begin in June. Police brutality causes

coordinated stay-aways of students and communities, supported by workers.

1977

Steve Biko, BMC leader, arrested, dies in custody.

1978

First legal strike by black workers in 20 years.

1979

Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act legalises black trade unions through registration, amongst other cautious reforms aimed to bring unions under control. Affiliation to political parties denied to unions.

Federation of South African Trade Unions (**FOSATU)** established, representing 20,000 workers in the car manufacturing, textile, food and transport industries.

1980

Collections of duties by FOSATU banned.

FOSATU membership reaches 95,000.

Strikes of hundreds of thousands workers across different industries spread through the country, resulting in police brutality and mass dismissals.

1982

Trade unionist Neil Aggett dies in detention. 40,000 workers down tools for half an hour.

CUSA establishes National Union of Mineworkers (**NUM**). Cyril Ramaphosa is leader.

1984

NUM organises the 1st legal strike of mine workers of colour in South African history. 70,000 miners strike.

1985

Congress of South African Trade Unions (**COSATU**) established. 33 unions, including FOSATU and NUM, bring 449,679 members.

1986

Police raid COSATU headquarters.

1,5 million workers stay-away from work on 1st May.

180 miners die in underground fire. 325,000 miners and 275,000 industrial workers participate in protest work stoppages.

1987

COSATU launches *living wage campaign* with stay-away planned for 1st May. Government declares it a public holiday.

COSATU headquarters raided by 100 police officers, numerous officials and workers arrested.

COSATU calls for stay-away, 2,5 million workers respond.

The next day, security police detonate 2 bombs in COSATU headquarters.

Strikes, go-slows and work stoppages become a regular occurrence across all industries.

1988

Government bans 17 political organisations. COSATU is not banned but prohibited from political activity.

COSATU calls for 3 day stay-away in protest of the *Labour Relations Amendment Bill.* Almost 3 Million workers respond.

Labour Relations Amendment Bill, reversing most 1979 reforms, passed.

1989

Over 3 million workers stay-away for 2 days to protest the new bill. Production comes to a standstill.

1990

Government agrees to negotiations with liberation movements. The ANC, SACP, PAC and other political organisations unbanned.

Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners released from jail.

Mercedes Benz workers build a car as a gift for Mandela.

Tripartite Alliance between COSATU, ANC and SACP formed.

1991

SACTU merges with Costau.

1992

Negotiations stall. Violence escalates in townships

Tripartite Alliance calls for 'Rolling Mass Action'. Mass stay-aways of up to 4 million people. Negotiations restart.

1993

Chris Hani, leader of SACP, assassinated by right wing militants. Strikes erupt across the country.

1994

1st democratic elections in South Africa. COSATU mobilise an ANC (Tripartite Alliance) victory.

ANC win elections and Nelson Mandela becomes 1st president.

*Restitution of Land Rights Ac*t passed, beginning restoration of land rights lost in 1913 Land Act.

1995

Revised Labour Relations Act (**LRA**) recognises and protects unions. Labour court and Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (**CCMA**) established, without a right to unprotected strikes for workers or a duty on employers to bargain.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (**TRC**) established.

National unemployment is 20%.

1996

Government adopts neo-liberal policy with *Growth, Employment and Redistribution* (**GEAR**), a free-market macro-economic plan that deregulates markets and promotes labour casualisation.

1997

Basic Conditions of Employment Act set out new workplace basic standards. Employers are able to negotiate lower standards with employees.

1998

Employment Equity Act, aimed at eradicating discrimination in the workplace, established.

Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (**AMCU**) established.

1999

First large scale public service strike.

2000

Establishment of Anti-Privatisation Forum (**APF**), with affiliates from unions, students and activists.

2001

70,000 workers participate in COSATU's national strike against privatisation.

2003

Introduction of Black Economic Empowerment (**BEE**), to facilitate growth of workplace equality.

National unemployment rate reaches 31%.

2010

Large scale public sector strikes, involving 1,3 million teachers and hospital staff, last for 20 days.

2012

Wildcat miners strike in Marikana mine, with large AMCU support.

Police shoot 32 miners at Marikana. 78 are injured and 259 arrested.

Farm workers strike in Western Cape wine district and clash with police.

2014

70,000 platinum miners strike for 5 months. 12,000 miners dismissed.

COSATU Central Executive Committee expels National Union of Metal Workers (**NUMSA**) for not supporting the ANC in upcoming general elections.

7 unions announce voluntary suspension from COSATU.

2015

COSATU general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, is expelled from the federation.

Student protests erupt across the country over fee increases. Workers join protests, worker insourcing added to demands.

National announcement of no fee increases is made. Insourcing subsequently negotiated at many universities.

2017

South African Federation of Trade Unions (**SAFTU**) established, with NUMSA and smaller unions. Membership of 700,000 workers led by Zwelinzima Vavi.

National unemployment rate is 28% and expanded unemployment rate 36%.

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