

Introduction to the Special Issue:

NEW FRONTIERS OF MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The argument that animates this special double issue of *Labour, Capital and Society* is that the concurrent ending of apartheid, decline of the gold mining industry and rise of platinum mining, opened up new frontiers for mining in South Africa, geographically and socially. In this series of processes, space, nature, community formation, legal regimes, authority and resistance have all been transformed, with new contestations emerging on different bases in new areas of South Africa.

This special issue of *Labour Capital and Society* thus opens up new lines of enquiry into mining, certainly in South Africa, and perhaps more broadly as well. Much of the research reported on in this issue was undertaken by researchers in, or associated with, Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP) at Wits University, and it should be read together with a special issue of the *Review of African Political Economy*, entitled ‘White gold: new class and community struggles on the South African platinum belt’ (No 146 December 2015), also guest-edited by SWOP researchers, in order to gain a full appreciation of the range of transformations underway on these new frontiers, and of the depth of research this has generated.

Articles collected here use macro-level data to analyse the expansion of coal mining and platinum mining in the post-apartheid era, and their spatial impacts on the environment, agriculture and patterns of urban settlement; and ethnographic sociology to explore the internal dynamics of community formation and contentious politics, as well as new forms of labour, industrial relations, gender and violence, in workplaces ranging from informal mining to the some of the biggest mining companies in the world.

While one of the papers draws connections with the mining regime that emerged in the gold mining sector, dominating South African mining for 100 years or more, and one focuses on the expansion of the coal sector, most of the articles focus on the new epicentre of mining, the platinum mining belt in the northern

provinces of South Africa. Comparison with the old gold mining regime remains implicit rather than explicit, but this does cry out for deeper comparative analysis of the forces shaping each.

Perhaps the most politically significant contribution to this issue, at least in South African terms, is the paper by May Hermanus, Ingrid Watson and others that examines grievous, entirely unintended, environmental and social effects of heralded post-apartheid mining legislation, the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA), on coal mining in Mpumalanga (South Africa's agricultural heartland). The MPRDA was deliberately designed (along the lines of accepted best practices elsewhere) to limit financial monopolies from holding but not using mining land. It also sought to redistribute mining opportunities to previously disadvantaged groups.² The outcome of the legislation, clearly demonstrated in the article, has been environmentally disastrous. There is a particular irony to this article since Hermanus was herself Deputy Director of the Department of Minerals and Energy at the time the MPRDA was drafted. It was celebrated as the major achievement in the legal transformation of South African mining after apartheid ended.

Moodie's account of the politics of management on the gold mines posits the importance of mine management practices for historical events, and in doing so shows that practices that evolved in the gold mines continue to shape events in the platinum sector. His work on platinum mine management is on-going, but his account in this paper of the transformation in industrial relations policy at Gencor is crucial for understanding events at Impala Platinum, the world's second-largest platinum mining company (see Moodie, 2015).

There is one clear similarity between mining gold and mining platinum in South Africa. Although completely different in geological formation, both gold and platinum mines involve following narrow, often broken, seams of ore at great depth. Mining such ore defies mechanisation.³ As a result, teams of miners are obliged to work deep underground in narrow stopes with hand-held drills and small winches under hot, cramped and dangerous conditions (Paul Stewart, 2014). Such unpleasant work requires skill and teamwork. Given the spate of retrenchments on the gold mines during the past two decades, skilled rock drill operators and winch drivers have been available in abundance for platinum mining. Most are migrant workers from either the Eastern Cape or Lesotho.

The centrality of migrant labour has thus continued on platinum, at least for the manning of underground teams.

The collective bargaining systems in the platinum sector, however, differ markedly from those that emerged in gold and coal mining. Since the early 1900s, wages paid by gold and coal mines have been set by the Chamber of Mines, which also supervised the recruitment of migrant labour from rural sending areas as far afield as Mozambique and Malawi in addition to Lesotho and the Eastern Cape in South Africa itself. This kept migrant wages low, by obviating competition among mines for labour. It also meant that with the rise of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) representing black workers in the 1980s, wages and work conditions were centrally negotiated and implemented.

The platinum mines have avoided the wage-setting and labour-supplying practices of the Chamber of Mines. They have also, at least until 2014, avoided centralized wage negotiations. In fact, mine managers on individual mines (let alone the major holding companies) seem to have had the power to negotiate wages with groups of workers in different occupational categories. As a result, platinum mines have historically competed with one another for workers and independent (and often violent) worker collectives have challenged union authority (Moodie, 2016).

Mining companies in platinum have also been much more likely to sub-contract (even for core operations) with labour brokers who evade safety regulations and avoid lengthy contracts (Forrest, 2015). This provided platinum managers with greater flexibility in hiring and firing in the volatile platinum market. Sub-contracted workers are indeed much more vulnerable to dismissal and exploitation than workers on longer contracts. Asanda Benya's article in this special issue, graphically points up precarious work conditions for sub-contracted workers on platinum mines, while at the same time demonstrating that woman workers, hired in terms of governmental affirmative action legislation, face comparable, if different, precariousness in underground work. She examines new frontiers for women workers underground – driven by post-apartheid affirmative action legislation – and the multiple informal forms of discrimination and insecurity they experience despite formal rights and equality. She simultaneously critiques the blindness of industrial relations theory to gender.

Chinguno investigates violence attending the recent

implosion across the platinum mines of the huge National Union of Mineworkers – the agent of insurgent unionism that once rocked the gold industry in the 1980s – in the face of wildcat worker committees from below. His case studies imply that where collective worker solidarity exists, violence takes on a certain moral authority that simply dissipates when solidarity unravels.

Another fundamental difference between South African gold and platinum mining is the nature, status and spatial impact of the communities of black mine workers. Virtually all gold mining took place in regions that had been surveyed as farms for white owners. Such properties could be purchased by mining companies, which meant that they could invest in infrastructure, including compound barracks and worker housing, and establish direct control, security and order as well as providing services such as kitchens and health care, albeit at very low levels. In the case of platinum, however, much of the area was held under communal tenure in “trust” by local chiefdoms or Bantustan governments (see Capps and Mswana, 2015).

While in the pre-1995 period in both gold and platinum mining companies provided compound barracks (euphemistically called “hostels” since the 1970s) for their migrant black workforce, in the post-apartheid period workers were given the option of taking cash “living-out allowances” if they choose to live off the mine grounds. One consequence of changing government, corporate and union policies post-apartheid has thus been the demise of the old mine “hostel” system, and the explosion of huge informal settlements across the platinum belt centred on the mines. Since the mines refused to allow such settlements on mining land, migrant workers seized nearby private, municipal and communal, and defiantly squatted there (see Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2011).

Indeed, in addition to supporting communal subsistence farming, the Bushveld was also a sending area for Tswana and Pedi migrants to the vast urban and industrial conglomeration of the Witwatersrand and surrounding areas, where factories paid considerably higher wages than the mines. Recent informal settlements of migrant miners, largely from the Eastern Cape but also from Lesotho, in the platinum mining areas have thus encroached on communal agricultural land (as did the mines themselves), evoking anti-Xhosa and anti-Sotho ethnic resentment from local Tswana-speaking residents. At the same time, homeowners in Tswana

villages under chiefly control have further complicated matters by eagerly renting out backyard shacks to these same migrants.

At one obvious level, then, platinum mining seems in very complicated ways to reverse the historical geography of mining under apartheid, characterised as it was by spatial separation between centres of goldmining in ‘white’ South Africa and sources of labour in the communal ‘homelands’. While much of the platinum reserve is thus now found in former labour-sending areas for secondary industry, the continued dependence on migrant labour, albeit underpinned by very different institutional arrangements, increases rural stratification and community conflict.

The article in this issue by Phil Harrison and Margot Rubin powerfully points up the extent of such developments at macro- and meso- levels over the past half-century in platinum-mining areas on the Western Limb of the Bushveld complex. Populations have skyrocketed in the region such that housing construction has simply not been able to keep up, especially in Madibeng municipality, which, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, includes Marikana, the scene of the recent police massacre of striking workers. Indeed, the Farlam Commission established to investigate the Marikana events was able to uncover the failure of the employer, Lonmin, to build houses for its employees despite legal commitments laid out to do so in its social and labour plan (Forrest 2015b).

A cluster of articles by Sonwabile Mnwana, Melusi Nkomo, Tasneem Essop and Joseph Mujere turn from Harrison and Rubin’s macro- level analysis to explore aspects of local social dynamics, including community formation, conflict, cohesion and politics in a number of different locations on the platinum belt. One consequence of the demise of the company controlled hostel system, and the relative absence of public services, has meant that those living in such communities have to find new ways of establishing order, security, health and subsistence. Each of these articles, in different ways, demonstrates the way the fragmentation of land ownership and authority regimes generates new forms of solidarity and conflict, new dynamics of exclusion and belonging, and complex strategies for making claims on authority.

Mnwana focuses on how Tswana autochthony and claims to platinum income have led to a sense of Tswana “tribal” entitlement that eschews wider South African identities, which in contrast are claimed by migrant workers in the name of national citizenship. In

both the villages he studies, however, divisions between “locals” and “foreigners” have been exacerbated by “chiefly” regimes siphoning off the platinum mining income with little redistribution to their subjects.

Nkomo tries to capture ethnographically the complex texture of community order, sense of ownership, local politics and gender relations in one predominantly (but not exclusively) male Xhosa-speaking migrant informal settlement in Madibeng municipality (see also Benya 2015). While recognising elements of ethnicity and the importance of mine employment, he insists that vibrant local moral orders should not be reduced to analysis in terms of social class, protest or merely generalised poverty.

Essop’s account of local EFF politics in Rustenburg provides a striking example of how local community networks may have national impacts. As with Nkomo’s account of the force of community consensus about proper *imiteto* (rules) in day-to-day affairs, Essop’s analysis of EFF “populism”, at least in North West Province, points up informal procedures requiring responsibility from political representatives.

Mujere raises the importance of structural differences by comparing three sets of protest movements in three different contexts (a “tribal” village, an informal settlement on land owned by the municipality and an informal settlement on private land) in the Rustenburg area. While their mode of organisation would be familiar to both Nkomo and Essop, the contexts of their struggles differ. Thus, as Mujere argues, the “trajectories their struggles take are shaped by local grievances, statuses of land, history of mining, historical geographies and regimes of authority”.

The articles in this special issue thus seek to move beyond conventional analyses characteristic of understandings of the political economy of, and industrial relations in, South African mining, which typically focused on the gold industry -- politically, economically and socially dominant in the colonial and apartheid eras. Instead, the primary focus herein is on new frontiers, spatial, methodological and conceptual.

These articles challenge old assumptions and venture into new understandings of post-apartheid orders characteristic of industrial and community relations as they have developed around platinum mining in North West Province. New patterns of environmental and industrial relations, community formations, political networks, and

local racial, economic and ethnic demands arise, creating new moral orders from the old. Thus mining, foundational in the transformations and specifically spatial forms of development of the economy and society in South Africa, under colonialism and apartheid, is revealed as once again of central importance in the reconfiguration of society, politics and the economy, in new spatial disjunctures of the post-apartheid and newly democratic nation on the south of the African continent.

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Endnotes

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2. For a useful theoretical discussion of the origins of the MPRDA, see Capps 2012.
3. Exceptions in regard to platinum, however, occur when mining the Platreef on the northern edge of the Bushveld complex and in the initial stages of mining platinum on the west and east limbs, where huge open-cast mines operate, eating up huge tracts of communal farm land.

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