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Informal Livelihoods and Governance in South Africa

The Hustle

Zaheera Jinnah

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ISBN 978-3-031-10694-1 ISBN 978-3-031-10695-8 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10695-8>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbstrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

In 2014 I was working as a researcher at Wits University's African Centre for Migration and Society. With Dr. Aurelia Segatti, we were leading a multi-year research and policy programme on labour migration in several sectors including mining. As part of the fieldwork, our team visited an industrial gold mine. It was the first time I had been inside a mine, and on the drive west out of the city we passed neat rows of homes with beautiful gardens and fences. Everything orderly, everything in its place. At the entrance to the mine, the security guard found our names on a clipboard, checked our identity cards, and waved us through. We were scheduled to interview a manager, and he was a friendly Afrikaans man, neatly pressed trousers, perfectly trimmed moustache, affable and paternal. Much of our discussion centred on security and the future of mining. How difficult it is for the mine to remain profitable, and how much the company spends on security to prevent illegal mining in its shafts. After similar interviews at another two companies, it was clear to us that a broader field of study of informal mining was desperately needed to understand labour mobility. What followed was 6 years of work that has culminated in this book.

Trained as an anthropologist, my overall approach was to do an ethnography of informal mining. After Aurelia left to eventually take up a position with the International Labour Organisation on labour migration, I put together a team of researchers: graduate students, including now, Dr. Janet Munakamwe, who was then a doctoral student, and everyday members of the community who we trained in basic research techniques.

We spent hours in the field, building relationships, listening and learning from communities, refining our methods and adapting our approach. It was painstaking work. Urban informal communities have a right to be hesitant about allowing outsiders into their world. Could we be trusted? What benefit was it for them anyway? Why should they waste their time talking to us? All the risks were theirs.

We overcame the hesitancy allowed the community to guide our research; some days all we did was to observe in the field without asking a single question; other days we were denied access to sites we were already familiar with, because members of the community did not want us there. At times, I was afraid for my safety, and on a few occasions, the female foreign members of our team were sexually harassed by men in the community. On other days, we ferried family members and friends to and from court, tried to make calls to human rights lawyers and pleaded with the police to release miners. Famously, Janet and I were threatened to be thrown down and locked into the shaft we so desperately were trying to peer down, by a police officer. The other members of the team never forgot this, teasing us of the time we were trying to act 'too clever'. It was a reminder of how quickly relationship that we had thought we had built or nurtured, with the police or miners could dissolve, putting us all at risk.

By 2017, we had engaged with just over 100 miners and had hundreds of pages of field notes and interview summaries. Our interviews took place in the back of cars, in fast food places that are tacked onto gas stations, but mostly in community, near shafts and on surface sites while miners worked. We did our research through ongoing unrest in the community and on campus: protests across universities under the #FeesMustFall movement began in 2015 at Wits and continued for the next few years, demanding free, quality and decolonial tertiary education. The protest was violent and unsettling. At times we had to dodge rubber bullets from the police, and rocks from the protestors who were engaged in daily skirmishes on campus. Some of us were protesting too, and we jumped from community to campus facing off with different police commanders. The lines between us and the research were blurred, and the rules for ethnographic methods were re-written several times. We did not take notes in the field or used any recording devices, we often got involved in activities advocating with community members for access to services, and we rarely followed any interview guide.

In late 2017, I had secured funding to devote time to writing this book. I took a sabbatical and went to the University of Alberta and began writing. Within a few months the book was taking good shape, but then other things happened. One member of the team, we shall call him John, spent months on the surface and underground with miners getting a feel for the work and the people. Shortly after he completed the fieldwork, he was called by the ancestors to become a *sangoma* (traditional healer). He rejected the call and his health deteriorated. He refused medical treatment and in 2018 I received a WhatsApp message on our fieldwork group informing me that he died.

A month later, I received another frantic WhatsApp call from Johannesburg letting me know that my mother had suddenly taken ill. I went home and stayed at her bedside until she died three months later. The book would have to wait.

In 2020, I was ready to dive back in, but the country had changed. President Zuma was ousted in a counter-corruption clean-up by current President Cyril Ramaphosa, the feisty trade union leader, turned mining magnate and turned president. The years of silent political infighting within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) had intensified and factional lines were now publicly drawn. Many of the hints of the political and social climate we had seen in the field, for instance, vigilante gangs, corrupt police officers, and a paralysed state magnified across the country and beamed into our living rooms as a period of unrest spread in South Africa. Writing the book became more urgent now; here was a story that needed to be told not just of this community of miners but also for the country at large, and the delicate work of shaping its future.

The study was conducted under an Ethics Clearance from the University of Witwatersrand Ethics Board. I have changed the names of all miners in this book to protect their identity. Informal mining remains illegal in South Africa, miners are criminalised, and at the time of writing, violent xenophobic attacks remain commonplace.

Reference to non-English words are italicised. Excerpts from the fieldwork journal and reflections are italicised as well. Quotations are clearly marked but are not attributed to a single person, rather these reflect the summary of conversations from the field and have been edited substantially for brevity, clarity and to maintain confidentiality where possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is possible because of the support of many folks. The mistakes are all mine.

I am grateful to each miner who we engaged with, who shared a piece of their story with us. I hope this work does justice to their lives.

Janet, Ethel and the rest of the team made this research possible, and did the grunt work in the field. They were friends and colleagues of the best kind.

I am deeply appreciative of Aurelia's mentorship and friendship. She sparked my interest in labour migration and was instrumental in developing my academic career. *Merci*.

Professor Yasmeeen Abu-Laban hosted me at the University of Alberta, which gave me space and time to conceptualise this book. The privilege of being able to step away from the field and have a warm office with access to all the library resources, even as the freezing arctic wind ravaged outside, helped me make sense of years of research and develop the outline for this book.

Funding for this project came from the National Research Foundation, the Wellcome Trust, and the Economic and Social Research Council. I was privileged to work alongside colleagues at Wits University including Professors Jo Vearey, Loren Landau, Shireen Ally and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon. Lenore Longwe remains an administrative rockstar. Cool Bananas, thank you!

The love and support of my family and friends in South Africa and Canada, helped me to return to this book and complete it. In particular Sohayb showed me what a kinder world looks like, and why we need one.

Finally, my gratitude to the Palgrave team under Anne Katherin-Birchley for their patience and precision.

My hope is that the stories here allow for a nuanced reading of informal mining, and an appreciation of the everyday realities and ontological insecurities that urban poor communities face. That in the midst of the attention on the state and the politicians, the people are not forgotten, that their valiant efforts for normalcy, for dignity and survival are understood and supported. And that the sun can rise over this beautiful country which is my home, that the sun can rise on a better tomorrow, and end the suffering of the people.

CONTENTS

1	The Backstory	1
	<i>The Urban Poor and the State</i>	4
	<i>A History of Gold</i>	7
	<i>Mobility and Xenophobia</i>	10
	<i>A Conceptual Approach to Informal Mining</i>	14
	<i>Bibliography</i>	17
2	The Miners	23
	<i>Sipho</i>	25
	<i>Underground Mining</i>	30
	<i>Surface Work</i>	32
	<i>Buyers</i>	36
	<i>The Meaning of Gold</i>	39
	<i>Bibliography</i>	42
3	The Community	45
	<i>Townships</i>	46
	<i>Networks</i>	49
	<i>The Spiritual</i>	53
	<i>Bibliography</i>	55
4	The Accident	59
	<i>The Response</i>	62
	<i>Entangled Webs of Precarity</i>	65

<i>The People, the State and the Hustle of Governing</i>	70
<i>Bibliography</i>	73
5 The Future	75
<i>The New South Africa</i>	78
<i>Bibliography</i>	84
Bibliography	87
Index	97

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Location of gold mines by company, South Africa, 2020 (<i>Source</i> Minerals Council of South Africa)	8
Fig. 1.2	Production volume of gold in South Africa from 2010–2020 (<i>Source</i> US Geological Survey)	9
Fig. 1.3	Number of people employed by gold mining in South Africa from 2007–2017 (<i>Source</i> This is Gold, July 2018 Fact Sheet)	10
Fig. 1.4	Mineworkers on gold mines by country of birth, 1990–2006 (<i>Source</i> Data from Crush & Williams, 2010: p. 11)	11
Fig. 1.5	Mineworkers on gold mines by country of birth (<i>Source</i> Data from Crush & Williams, 2010: p. 11)	11
Fig. 1.6	Percentage of total gold miners that are foreign migrants (<i>Source</i> Data from Crush & Williams, 2010: p. 11)	12
Fig. 2.1	Map of Johannesburg showing mines and mining dumps in yellow at the bottom (<i>Source</i> Google Earth, May 2022)	26
Fig. 2.2	Aerial view of main reef road, with mine dumps, informal housing communities and a suburb in view (<i>Source</i> Google Earth, May 2022)	26
Fig. 2.3	Classification of informal gold mining based on chamber of mines	29



CHAPTER 1

The Backstory

Abstract This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the book. It discusses the concept of informal mining in Johannesburg and places this within a historical context of gold mining and labour migration in Southern Africa. The main conceptual framework of informality and exclusion are discussed, and an overview of the research methods presented. Finally, some key contemporary socio-economic indicators that provide context to informal and precariously livelihoods such as informal mining are shared.

Keywords South Africa · Southern Africa · Informal mining · Zama Zama · Precarity · Poverty · Inequality · Gold mining · Johannesburg · Ethnography

Over a century ago, gold was discovered in the barren and dusty area that is now called Johannesburg. Today the city is the largest in southern Africa and an economic hub on the continent. Over the years, millions of people have flocked here in search of refuge, or riches, experiencing both risk and reward (Landau, 2010; Moodie & Ndatshe, 1994; Nuttall et al., 2008). For a few there are fortunes to be made, but for many of the city's inhabitants, like the people in this book, Johannesburg is a place of struggle, a daily reality of multiple and intersecting precarity. The marginalisation of poor people in terms of jobs, services, security and governance leaves

millions of mainly Black South Africans and the majority of African international migrants facing severe and everyday ontological insecurity. Bred from centuries of land dispossession, racialised inequities, intergenerational poverty and trauma, and current-day economic exclusion, the urban poor wrestle with survival (Beall, 2002; Moyo et al., 2016).

One such group is the *Zama Zama* (translated from isiZulu as the hustlers), a term used to describe those that work in informal gold mining, and this book tells their stories. The lives of the *Zama Zama* are reflective of the history of the inequity and exploitation of gold mining (Wilson, 2001); and of the contemporary realities of urban informality, governance and xenophobia (Eliseev, 2008). These complexities, I argue, create a shadow state in which formal state institutions are absent or misdirected for personal means, leaving space for informal governance and politics to thrive. This form of governance and social order further marginalises the already vulnerable: the poor, women, migrants and those with limited social capital; reinforces ethnic and nationalist tendencies; sharpens divides among people, has limited opportunities for transparency and redress; and ultimately threatens the political stability of the country in the future.

Nonetheless, rather than suggesting that this class is dormant or despondent, this book's stories of the *Zama Zama* demonstrate agency among poor and marginalised people in South Africa. The work of informal mining is carefully constructed, connected to spiritualities and spatial realities, and organised and innovative. However, in their struggles to survive they are responding to, and reinforcing a new order 'outside' the state which is bottom-up, informal, patronage-based, and entrenched within racial, gendered and xenophobic notions.

This book is based on an extensive multi-year ethnography of informal mining by a research team that I led, in Johannesburg from 2012–2017. Using interviews, conversations, participant observation, participation, friendships and relationships, empirical material from miners, and the community they live in, this book tells the stories of informal mining in the city. The lives of the *Zama Zama* are characterised by ontological insecurity that includes informal livelihoods, informal housing and a precarious relationship to the state. It is these notion of informality—and the complexities, nuances and dynamics that they constitute—that are detailed and discussed in the chapters that follow. In hearing their voices, and taking an intimate look at their work, their daily life and the complex ways in which they navigate the city, this book illustrates broader themes

of poverty and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. To be poor. To have broken dreams, crushed promises, corrupt systems and a daily hustle for survival: to find shelter, to eat, to belong, to exist and to be safe. The disparities of fortunes and legal frameworks enjoyed by those at the top and bottom parts of gold's value chain reflect the vast economic inequality which remains predominant in South Africa.

But there is more. This story is situated within a broader discussion on the state and the people in South Africa drawing on a long tradition of how the state is imagined and formed (Crais, 2002; Mattes, 2002); and on its failure to deliver services in the post-apartheid period (Desai & Desai 2002; Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). Informal gold mining in Johannesburg occurs at the edge of the city in material, physical and legal ways. The daily struggles of the poor in this book call into question the role of the post-apartheid state. Through the stories of the Zama Zama, the ideal of a constitutional, rights-based society in South Africa gives way to a more organic and fluid form of governance: a country in which informality and inequality have taken root, and where a form of governance that threatens the fledgling democracy of the country emerges. This type of governance erodes the capabilities of a democratic state and gives way to an informal, patronage-based network of survival in which racial, ethnic and political identities matter.

The central purpose of this book, therefore, is twofold. First, through personal narratives, life histories, ethnographic observations and interviews, it documents the lives, livelihoods and everyday realities of a particular section of the urban poor in post-apartheid South Africa. These stories suggest a wide and deep form of pervasive precarity, flowing from historical structural inequities and contemporary restrictions that hinder full participation in the economy or political life, and push people to dangerous work in informal mining. Second, drawing on these narratives, I raise questions about the meanings of governance, belonging and citizenship in South Africa today. I argue that these stories demonstrate that South Africa's historical political economy and its current social structures recreate multiple, pervasive and colliding forms of informality that create an upside-down world in which the poor, and those that who are socially excluded, survive on the fringes of South African society in legal, material and physical ways, which are rooted in the city's histories and are a product of its contemporary socio-economic complexities. In this sense, rights and duties as understood in classical liberal theory do not

matter and, instead, governance and belonging are informally contested and based on patronage.

Overall, in this book, I posit that the experiences of this community are a symptom of a failing state in South Africa, when the capacity and authority of the state to govern is eroded or disregarded. In terms of jobs and services, security and governance, poor people struggle to survive each day, and from this sense of desperation and marginalisation their efforts, activities and existence become criminalised by the state through its various actors and institutions. At the same time, this community is creating a new order ‘outside’ the state which is bottom-up, informal, patronage-based and entrenched within predominant racial, gendered, class and xenophobic notions. It is a social and political order which is much less about rights, than about responding to precarity, accessing patronage networks and attempting to ensure survival. And while this communities’ strategies have potential to allow different understandings of citizenship and to create pathways to survival for poor and socially excluded people, the broader adoption of such strategies by more and more people has, I argue, risks for the survival of democracy in South Africa.

In the subsequent chapters of this book, the experiences and strategies of the poor and socially excluded in their daily quest for survival are shared. The main characters of the book and an overview of how informal mining works are described in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 contains a detailed discussion of informal communities and of how spatial and sacred dynamics inform the labour of the Zama Zama. In Chapter 4, I use a case study of an underground accident to explore informality and precarity in health care and the criminal justice system. Read together, these narratives provide a helpful way to understand the intersecting forms of informality and precarity, and the outcomes these pose for governance and how we understand and build citizenship in the global South which are summarised in Chapter 5. The rest of Chapter 1 provides some contextual pieces on South Africa’s socio-economic indicators, informal mining and labour mobility.

THE URBAN POOR AND THE STATE

Since 1994, South Africa is a constitutional democracy and an important member of the developing world. It is part of the G20, the international forum for economic cooperation, and has the second biggest economy

on the continent. Politically, South Africa is distinct in the region for its post-apartheid democratic order, pillared on a liberal constitution that favours broad civil liberties, for example, recognition of same-sex marriages, asylum protection, gender equality and the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights (Dempers et al., 2018). But despite its economic dominance and political achievements, South Africa continues to face significant challenges. Slow and unequal economic growth has resulted in persistently high rates of unemployment, for example, in 2021 the official unemployment rate was 33% (a statistic which excluded those who had given up looking for work) (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Poverty and inequality remain high, both in rural and in urban areas, and especially among Black households. Regional instability and a lack of opportunities in rural areas and small towns across the country have resulted in rapid in migration to the city, and together with international migration and natural population growth have resulted in high urbanisation rates. In this context, informal mining is a critical, but poorly protected and highly stigmatised, livelihood strategy for the marginalised and urban poor to survive.

Over the past 25 years widespread and systematic corruption, nepotism, poor or absent service delivery of essential services such as housing, electricity, education, health, water and sanitation, and poor law enforcement have been rampant. This has led to an overwhelming sense of political disenfranchisement among citizens. Consequently, a huge and widening gulf between the state and the people has emerged, characterised by a lack of trust in government on the one hand, and organic movements to meet service needs outside the state, on the other. Together this has contributed to a decline in the authority of the nation state and its credibility, and capacity to govern (Francis & Webster, 2019; Hart, 2002; Ledger, 2020).

While a sense of urgency about South Africa's political future and stability has reached a crescendo between 2015 and 2021, as the avalanche of publications, protests and political and legal challenges reveal a decade of corruption and graft under former President Jacob Zuma's rule (2009–2018), South Africa's current political, economic and social unrest cannot solely be placed on Zuma's back. Although South Africa experienced a period of economic stability and growth, and a respected international reputation during the Mandela and Mbeki eras, the benefit of this was limited to the middle class. For the majority of the country, the poor, Mbeki's administration denied anti-retroviral drugs to millions

of people with HIV, slowed down land reform, failed to convert economic growth into jobs or services, and instead invested heavily on the global stage, hosting the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2010, for instance, and pursuing political aspirations on the continent (Daniel et al., 2003; Habib, 2009). Mbeki, the well dressed, charming, western-educated politician, was out of touch with the majority of his citizens, paving the way for Jacob Zuma to grasp the leadership of the African National Congress, and with it the Presidency. The popular, and populist Zuma, carved a new image of the state. With his Zulu song and dance at public speeches, joviality, working-class background, and traditional Zulu values that he espoused, he would bring about a different form of politics, characterised by informality, paternalism, disregard for the law, and populism (Gevisser, 2013; Gumede, 2008; Gunner, 2009).

Despite the performative politics of Zuma his policies and practice of graft worsened economic conditions in the country. Poverty, inflation, unemployment and inequality all spiralled. The poor responded largely through small-scale mobilisation in the form of recurrent service delivery demonstrations against local councillors that often turned into violent battles with the police (Basson & Toit, 2017; Mlambo, 2019; Rapanyane, 2020).

In this political and economic context, among urban poor communities such as the Zama Zama the concept and performance of citizenship has been redrawn. Defined as membership of a nation state (Shapiro, 2000) and a vehicle through which rights and duties arise, citizenship in the classical liberal sense is understood as people demonstrating choices through legal rights as members of a state (Lister, 1997). This understanding of citizenship is at odds with people's experiences across both time and space. Citizenship continues to exclude certain groups of people from membership and, therefore, from rights, based on migration status, ethnic, religious or social identity, political membership, etc. (Kabeer, 2002). At the same time, people have exercised agency and claimed rights through other forms of affiliation and belonging outside of citizenship (Meagher et al., 2014: p. 10; Reinicke et al., 2000). This has been formally organised through local political or ethnic groups, or informally through loose sets of networks, systems and processes which sometimes have acted as forms of governance. I argue here, that in South Africa, the urban poor have taken matters into their own hand, creating a parallel world of informality to meet their basic needs for services such as housing,

water, electricity, sanitation, education, jobs and protection, because of the absence of the state.

A HISTORY OF GOLD

Beneath the rocky outcrops and the scrub bushes which characterise the Johannesburg landscape, gold deposits have lain underground for 3 billion years in a geological basin that today stretches around 400 km from the Free State province in the central interior of South Africa northwards to the provinces of Gauteng and North West. At some points, it reaches 4,000 m in depth, making these gold mines some of the deepest in the world (Neingo & Tholana, 2016). In 1866, gold was discovered close to what is now known as Johannesburg promoting a scramble for profit that would shape the region's politics and economy. By 1899 the region was producing almost a third of the world's gold (Fig. 1.1).

Over the last 50 years, gold production has been steadily declining in South Africa. In 1970, a 1000t of gold was produced accounting for 40% for global gold supply, this dropped to just 99t, or 4% of global output in 2020, see Fig. 1.2 (Gopaul, 2019). This drop is attributed to two key factors: the remaining accessible gold reserves were deeper than the deposits previously mined making it more difficult, dangerous and expensive to extract; and extensive political and labour transformation in the country which impacted labour supply, and costs and capital ownership (Neingo & Tholana, 2016). There are currently 86 industrial gold mines in the country, almost all owned by four major companies: Gold Fields, Anglo Gold Ashanti, Harmony, and Sibanye Gold, and located in three of the country's interior provinces—Gauteng, the North West and Free State. Most mines are in the areas known as the West Rand, the location for this study (Minerals Council of South Africa, 2020)

The production of gold is laced with inequality and labour migration. Under British colonial rule, Black people lost land ownership, reducing them to waged work which would lock generations into poverty (Callinicos, 1980; Vosloo, 2020). Further land, education and social policies under apartheid entrenched racialised inequities and mass poverty. A primary component of this was the regional labour migration system which allowed the mining sector to outsource the reproductive costs of labour to regional countries. Under the Aliens Control Act of 1991, and various bilateral labour agreements between South Africa and Southern African governments (Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and

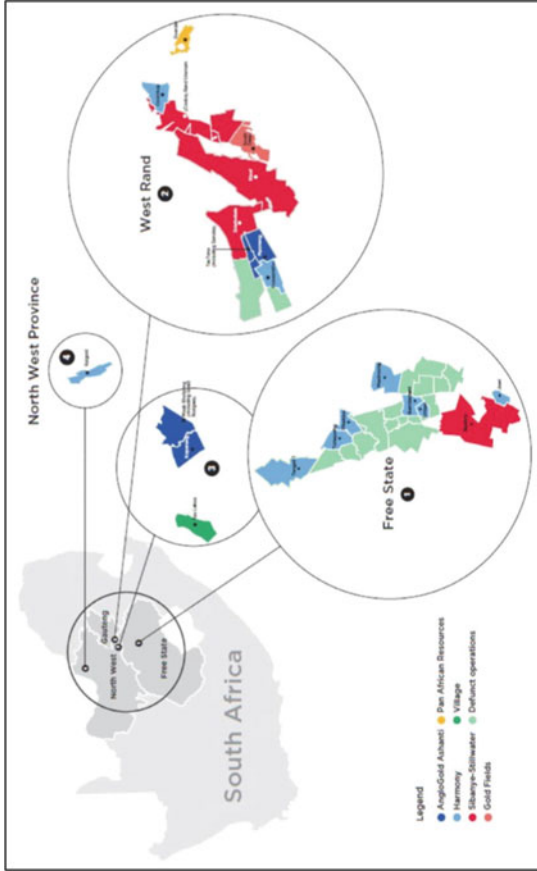


Fig. I.1 Location of gold mines by company, South Africa, 2020 (*Source* Minerals Council of South Africa)

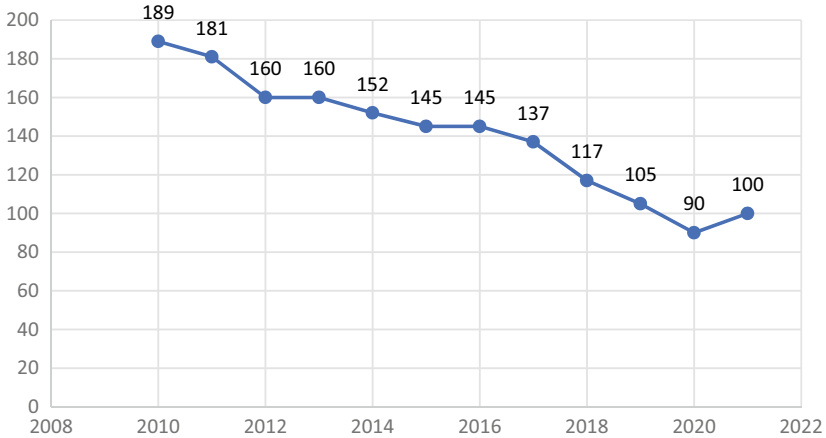


Fig. 1.2 Production volume of gold in South Africa from 2010–2020 (*Source* US Geological Survey)

Malawi), mining companies had access to steady supplies of labour at low cost, while making it impossible for migrants to ever become permanent residents of South Africa (Burawoy, 1976).

Gold is difficult, dangerous and expensive to extract and the gold mines in South Africa are notoriously deep, requiring intensive capital, technology and labour. To keep labour costs down, gold mining companies arranged “into nine holding companies” and “established a pattern of regional labour recruitment, remuneration, and accommodation that would mark subsequent social and economic relations in the country” (Gordon et al., 2022)

In southern Africa, industrial gold mining was a significant source of employment and livelihoods to thousands of households in the region. Throughout the twentieth century, at least 40% of workers employed on South African mines originated from outside South Africa’s formal borders (Wentzel & Tlabela, 2006). Between 1990 and 2006, the sector underwent rapid transformation resulting in a 47% decrease in the number of international mineworkers in gold mines across the country. Many companies turned to subcontracting to meet their labour often hiring former employees at lower wages and with limited or no benefits such as health care, housing or health insurance (Bezuidenhout, 2011).

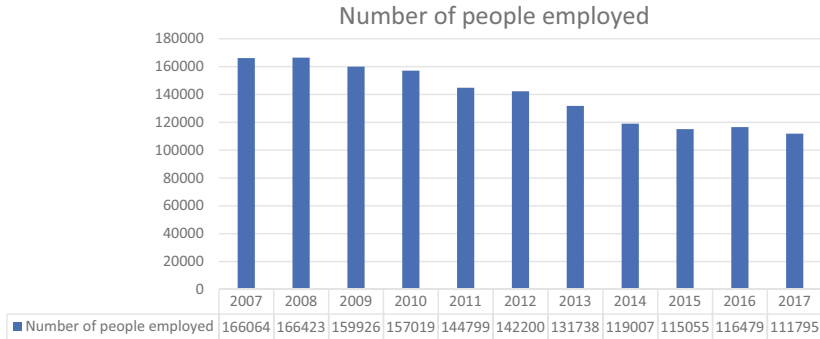


Fig. 1.3 Number of people employed by gold mining in South Africa from 2007–2017 (*Source* This is Gold, July 2018 Fact Sheet)

This further increases the precarity of families who are dependent on the wages and benefits of mineworkers in the region. Today, mining continues to be an important source of employment in South Africa, but with declining production, employment in the sector is also decreasing (Neingo & Tholana, 2016; Gopaul, 2019) (Figs. 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6)

MOBILITY AND XENOPHOBIA

Migration patterns in South Africa are changing. During apartheid, mobility was dominated by regional, temporary and circular labour migration in the mining and agricultural sectors. This movement was largely conceived and controlled by the state to ensure a steady supply of labour to the key sectors of the economy (Jinnah, 2016a, 2016b). During the 1990s, there was an inflow of migrants as the country re-entered the international community. In 1998, a progressive asylum and refuge regime that followed an urban self-settlement policy (opposed to an encampment one which was typical across southern and eastern Africa) attracted forced migrants from across the continent and beyond. In the early 2000s, regional migration persisted due to several reasons: the political and economic crisis in neighbouring Zimbabwe, and ongoing unrest in Mozambique, the decline of the textile sector in landlocked Lesotho and political and economic pressures in Swaziland (now Eswatini). By the mid-2000s migration to South Africa was mixed and fluid. The formal steady male-dominated labour temporary migration pattern had given

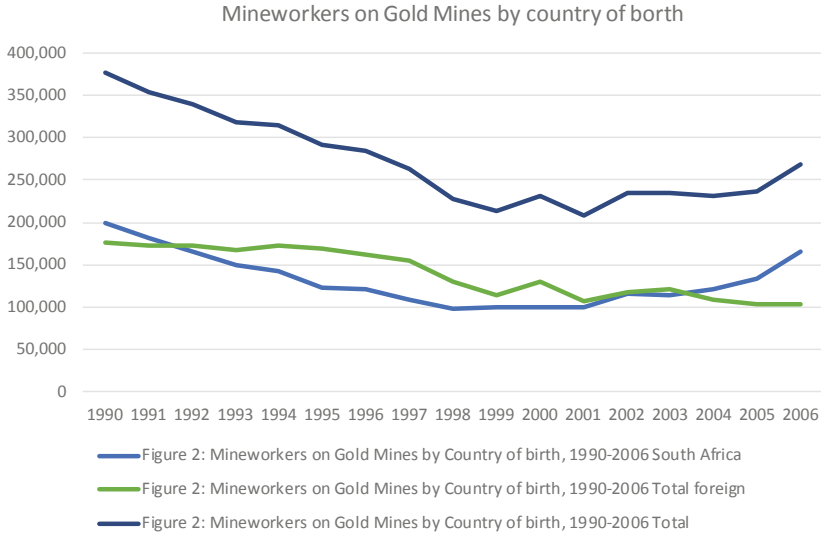


Fig. 1.4 Mineworkers on gold mines by country of birth, 1990–2006 (*Source* Data from Crush & Williams, 2010: p. 11)

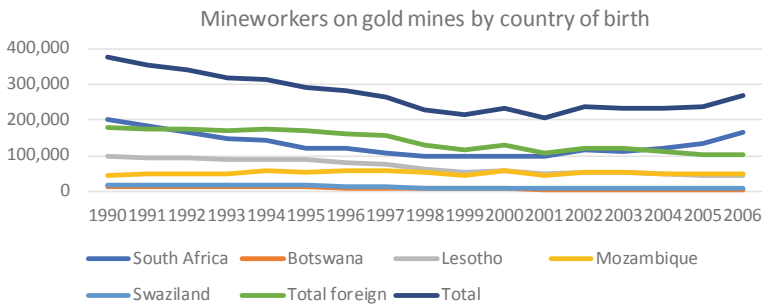


Fig. 1.5 Mineworkers on gold mines by country of birth (*Source* Data from Crush & Williams, 2010: p. 11)

way to formal and informal mobility with fluctuating numbers, a country which had porous borders and little idea how to count or manage the movement of people (Jinnah, 2016a, 2016b).

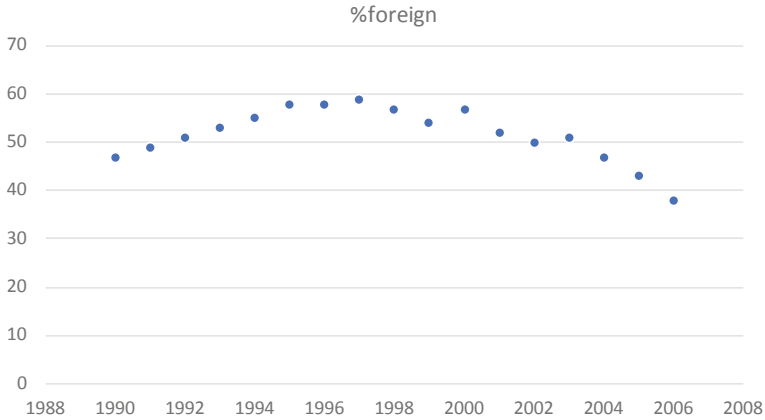


Fig. 1.6 Percentage of total gold miners that are foreign migrants (*Source* Data from Crush & Williams, 2010: p. 11)

These challenges paved the way for an increasingly anti-foreigner rhetoric and xenophobic violence on the ground, and a confused, chaotic and crisis driven migration response from the government. Stuck in the middle between a hostile host population and a corrupt and confused state, migrants did whatever was needed to obtain documentation, find shelter and earn a livelihood (Jinnah, 2017). At the same time, unemployment was increasing in the country and rural–urban migration was also on the increase. Today, Johannesburg remains a city of mobility. Of the estimated population of 4 million people, 10% are internal migrants from elsewhere in the country, and a further estimated 1 million are cross-border migrants (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Migration, both international and internal in South Africa, continues to increase. Between 2012 and 2017, there was a 1.4% increase of international migrant workers across the country. In real numbers, this means that there are 2 million foreign migrants in the country. Like poor south Africans there is no social security or housing assistance available and therefore migrants join the swelling ranks of the urban poor in search of shelter, and livelihoods. Consequently, vulnerable south Africans and migrants became entangled in race for survival and scarce resources, further exacerbating xenophobic tendencies and informal nodes of governance as street by street, township by township (as informal housing settlements are

known), groups wrestled for control of business opportunities, housing and services (Crush, 2022; Kok & Collinson, 2006; Landau, 2020).

Most migrants are drawn to the city in search of the promise of work. With rising numbers and a dwindling economy, jobs remain scarce, and unemployment hovers at dangerously high rates (in 2017, the unemployment rate for South Africans was 28% while for international migrants it was 18.4%). For migrants, like poor South Africans, the informal sector is a safety net. Migrants are more likely to be employers, and own account workers (self-employed) than South Africans) and are more likely to be informally employed (27% of migrants work in the informal sector compared to 16% of South Africans (Jinnah, 2020)). Available statistics offer a partial picture of mobility and employment. The limited scope of the migration module in the national labour force survey, the five-year gap in its administration, and the fluidity of migration, means that there is much we do not know about migrant and employment in South Africa. Similarly, the informality of employment is not completely captured in existing national surveys. The evidence that is available though is sobering but not surprising: a tanking economy, high levels of unemployment and poverty, and widespread precarity. Even using the narrow definition of unemployment, which excludes a count of discouraged job seekers, a third of the country's residents are without work, and almost a fifth rely on the informal sector. The latter is characterised by poor employment conditions such as long hours, dangerous work, low wages and little social protection. In other words, even when people do have jobs, it is not enough to escape poverty. Indeed, the reliance on the informal sector suggests that millions of people in South Africa are facing multiple and intersecting barriers to realising a decent life. Second, race and gender matter in South Africa. Black women continue to have the highest unemployment rates and the least desirable jobs. Among migrants as well, migrant men enjoy higher employment rates than migrant women. Third, migration is here to stay. South Africa has implemented a range of stricter immigration policies and border control measures nationally. In local areas, xenophobia remains a reality. Yet, migration is a strategy for survival for both low-income South African households and those in the SADC region. Historical inequities in wealth, underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment, as well as an economy that does not create sufficient jobs, mean that moving is often the only option for survival (Jinnah, 2020).

For foreign migrants, the search for a job or livelihood is coupled with the reality of violent and ongoing xenophobia. False rhetoric on migrants causing crime and taking jobs coupled with political opportunism and local level business conflict have fuelled strong xenophobic attacks in the last 15 years. In May 2008 violent xenophobic attacks left 62 people dead, in April 2015, 7 people were killed including Emmanuel Sithole in a particularly brutal way echoing the violence seen in township streets during apartheid. In 2019 unrest in the KwaZulu-Natal province, and later in Johannesburg led to displacement, looting and more than 300 people losing their lives. In January 2022, operation *Dudula* (to push back in isiZulu) led by a small group of locals targeted foreign-owned business forcing many to shut down and carried out vigilant checks on immigrants and business for permits and licences. At the time of publication, *Dudula* continues to gain momentum across the country (Eliseev, 2008; Everatt, 2011; Machinya, 2022).

A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO INFORMAL MINING

I situate informal mining in this book within two broader frameworks: informal economies, and social exclusion which together help to theorise the nature, function and outcomes of this type of work. Two billion people around the world rely on the informal sector to earn a livelihood (Bonnet, 2019). In sub-Saharan Africa, a history of colonialisation, rapid post-independent urbanisation and chronic unemployment have resulted in a vibrant yet precarious, innovative and growing informal sector that provides jobs for millions of people one-third of all employment in South Africa is in the informal sector¹ (ILO, 2018; Rogan & Skinner, 2022), with women, Blacks, (Rogan & Skinner, 2022) and international migrants disproportionately here (Jinnah, 2020). The informal economy is defined as (Chen, 2012: p. 7):

All forms of ‘informal employment’—that is, employment without labour or social protection—both inside and outside informal enterprises,

¹ Statistics South Africa’s measures employment in the informal sector among both employees and the self-employed. Employees are identified as working in the informal sector if they work in establishments that employ less than five people and do not report income tax being deducted from their salaries. The self-employed in the informal sector includes employers, own account workers and persons helping unpaid in their household business who are not registered for either income tax or value-added tax (Rogan & Skinner, 2021: p. 758).

including both self-employment in unregistered enterprises and waged employment in unprotected jobs.

Although globally, scholarship and policymakers have questioned a dualist approach to the sector, in South Africa responses to supporting informal work in its own right as a sector of employment, innovation and opportunity are still limited (Potts, 2008). Instead, informal mining like other forms of informal work is often criminalised and stigmatised. I distinguish between informal mining and illegal mining using three factors, once again drawing on Chen (2012). Firstly, I note a distinction between illegal *goods and services*, and illegal *systems and processes*. In this case, artisanal mining consists of producing goods (gold) that are legal, but the production of which is undertaken outside of legal frameworks. Secondly, it is not possible to determine whether those engaging in this activity are doing so with the *intention* of avoiding the costs associated with legality. In other words, there is no evidence to suggest that informal miners are overtly operating outside of regulation, with an *intention* of avoiding taxes or other statutory obligations. In fact, the data in this study suggests the opposite, namely that many informal miners want to have their activities recognised as work, and many have stated their willingness to pay taxes. In many instances, remaining informal and within the precarity that accompanies it (evidenced by frequent injury and mortality, regular arrests, the payment of bribes to police and poor working conditions with no access to social security) comes at great risk to the worker. Thirdly, the ‘illegality’ of informal mining stems from a lack of effective regulatory provisions for small-scale mining, rather than overt criminal intent on the part of those engaged in it. The challenges of the process for obtaining legal permits to mine as a small-scale artisanal miner are overly bureaucratic, expensive and administratively inaccessible (see Legal Resources Centre [LRC], 2016). Narrow provisions for legal artisanal small-scale mining in South Africa do exist, but they favour capital investors who can negotiate the bureaucracy needed to obtain the necessary permit to mine. The majority of small-scale miners have neither the monetary nor, at times, the legal capacity required to obtain permits. Although many are migrants, some undocumented, the majority of small-scale miners are South Africans who work in the informal economy or are internal migrants with little formal education, and therefore limited access to the formal labour market.

A strong case can be made to define the work of the Zama Zama as a form of artisanal informal mining as opposed to illegal mining. Miners

use basic equipment, have limited safety mechanisms, and there is weak or absent regulatory framework around artisanal informal mining in the country. These characteristics echo the definition of the sector by the ILO (2018). Artisanal mining is also associated with several challenges, including death and disability for miners who work under poor and risky conditions, poor health outcomes, as a result of limited protection and awareness (ILO, 2018). Thus, informal artisanal mining involves all activities related to prospecting, mining and selling minerals which occur in abandoned or closed mines, which occur outside of registered and formal processes of regulation, and is undertaken by people who work with limited or a lack of access to safety mechanisms, as well as to labour and social protection.

There is no firm data that quantifies the extent of artisanal informal mining globally, or in South Africa. What do we know, is that artisanal mining is an important source of livelihoods for people in the global South. In 2015, an estimated 13 million people around the world worked directly in the artisanal mining sector, with a further 80 million people rely on it for income support. The majority of artisanal mining occurs in the global South, where the availability of mineral resources, coupled with weak regulatory systems, high unemployment and poverty push many into this sector. In South Africa, anecdotal data suggests that internal and international migrants may be disproportionately involved in this sector, and that it also constitutes an important livelihood activity for the urban poor (Jinnah, 2016a, 2016b; 2017).

I expand on this concept of informality by turning to social exclusion theory, which is defined as ‘a process and a state that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life and from asserting their rights; it derives from exclusionary relationships’ (Beall et al., 2014). This approach helps to contextualise artisanal mining as a livelihood strategy as a response to legal and social marginalisation of migrants in post-apartheid South Africa (Jinnah, 2016a, 2016b; Kihato & Landau, 2017). In addition, my argument in subsequent chapters regarding informal governance can be placed within social exclusion theory as a form of agency among the urban poor.

Informal mining is rooted in the city’s history and is a product of its contemporary socio-economic complexities. It is an important, but high-risk livelihood strategy of the urban poor, especially cross-border migrants, and is wrought with legal and social restrictions that further compound the dangers that miners and mining communities face in their

work (Thornton, 2014). There are significant health, safety and well-being outcomes and conditions associated with informal mining that are poorly documented. In particular, the rise of informal settlements in or near mining towns, the lack of adequate protection to workers in the sector, the criminalisation of the sector and the disregard for the environmental rehabilitation of mines have colluded to create a risky and dangerous environment for those living and working in mining communities. Mining in South Africa is also rooted in long-held beliefs and rituals that bring into question how the ownership of natural resources, the structure of work teams and the organisation of labour have been squashed to fit normative, western concepts of ownership and legality. Through an anthropological reading of informal mining, a decolonial approach to informal mining is developed, an approach that questions the use of land and resources, the role of the state and the art of governance among the urban poor. It is within this context of informality, violence and precarity that the Zama Zama live and work.

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CHAPTER 2

The Miners

Abstract This chapter has two main objectives: to introduce readers to the main characters of the book, the Zama Zama, or miners, and to outline in detail the process of informal gold mining. The chapter begins with some content on the extent of informal gold mining, followed by a rich ethnographic narrative of Siphon, an informal miner, and his pathway into informal mining. It then explains the process of informal mining in detail, from extraction to when gold enters the formal market. At each point, the story of a key individual involved in mining is discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes by placing informal mining with a decolonial context, showing how the Zama Zama regard mining as a bounty of the land and the Creator. This concept is returned to in subsequent chapters. The overall thesis statement in this chapter is that informal gold mining is a precarious livelihood activity for the poor and marginalised, but is unfused with carefully constructed rules and norms by the Zama Zama.

Keywords Buyers · Sponsors · Informal mining · Zama Zama · Gold mining

Golden-hued heaps of sand tower high across the Johannesburg landscape. These are mine dumps, marking the spots where for the last 130 years capitalists dug holes, or sunk shafts to mine the gold reserves

underground (Goldblatt, 1973). Today, they loom like giant tombstones, mounds of sand stacked high, anchored by crops of weeds and wildflowers growing on their slopes, littered by debris, as the city grows and bustles around them (Bobbins, 2018; Goldblatt, 1973; Tang & Watkins, 2011).

Mining has raped and robbed the earth of its riches, leaving mines standing damaged, disused and discarded. After more than a century of industrial mining, thousands of mines have been left ownerless and abandoned. Despite extensive regulations on mine rehabilitation and safety, in practice there is little enforcement once they are abandoned or closed down (Legal Resources Centre [LRC], 2016; SAHRC, 2015). The national government is responsible for securing and rehabilitating closed or abandoned mines, but has lacked the capacity to do so (Bobbins, 2018) contracting the Council for Geoscience and Mintek, who has largely excluded mining communities and the Zama Zama from the process (Makhetha, 2020; South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC], 2015; Watson, 2019). In reality, closed and abandoned mines are sealed with flimsy fencing, shafts are closed with a layer of thin concrete and some shafts have a single security guard lazily keeping watch.

In South Africa, abandoned mines are a serious challenge to regulate and a hazard to surrounding communities. Mining companies are able to simply abandon mines with no responsibility towards their rehabilitation due to weak regulatory frameworks. One study suggests that up to 6,000 mines are abandoned in this way (Stacey, 2010). As Mholongo and Dacosta (2016) argue more efforts to secure mines is needed to ensure the safety of communities and to address the environmental impacts of decades of mining. To compound the challenge, pervasive urbanisation and in-migration, coupled with unemployment and poverty has added further pressure to land access and use. In the meantime, the legacy of mines remains long after they are closed. This includes challenges with environmental rehabilitation, safety hazards, socio-economic implications for former workers and surrounding communities, and public health concerns (Mholongo & Dacosta, 2016). Globally, there have been uneven efforts at addressing the roles and responsibilities of mining companies and governments towards closed mines. Part of the problem stems from a disagreement of how to define whether a mine is abandoned the lack of clear standards in mine rehabilitations, and the high cost associated with this process. At the same time, the entry of small-scale mining in abandoned mines complicates any efforts to close and rehabilitate the

space. In this study, as is others, the burrowing of tunnels and active work underground make it difficult to safely close a mine once it is abandoned.

SIPHO

Gold deposits remain buried deep beneath Johannesburg, luring thousands of people who are seeking survival, or fortune, much like those who came more than a hundred years ago when the mineral was first discovered. Today the people that come to the mines are the urban poor, a mixture of South Africans and migrants from neighbouring countries connected by a shared search for a livelihood, and driven by a sense of desperation from being unable to find steady work, or sufficient wages that can meet the needs of their families. Among them are former mine workers who have the skills and knowledge of working underground, but here too are ordinary people, those who have piece jobs in low-paying work such as construction, street trading or gardening (LRC, 2016). Still others are those in search of a quick fortune, lured from their comfortable abodes in the suburbs to the dusty mines by tales of bags of gold. And so they congregate, early in the morning until sundown, each to their assigned task, a carefully organised economy, highly structured with practical rules and spiritual principles, each day, each person carefully striving to balance the hope of a livelihood, with fear of the danger that surrounds it (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).

There is a city park on Main Reef Road, in western Johannesburg, fenced in by a green municipal fence. Behind the park, hugging its southern perimeter is a shaft, a hole blasted into the surface decades ago by industrial miners that leads to a labyrinth of tunnels underground (Goldblatt, 1973). The park contains a monument commemorating the site of the first discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand. During apartheid, it was a recreational space for “whites only” a place to enjoy an afternoon tea perhaps or play some rugby. One can imagine the chatter of children as women with carefully coiffured hair lay tablecloths and set out thermos of tea and rusks. Now the park is derelict, weeds everywhere, garbage strewn around and all the grass long gone. Main Reef Road is a major artery into the city and so streams of people walk by, and public minibus taxis race along in the early morning and late evening, on their way to and from the big city. The park looms like a ghost from days gone by.

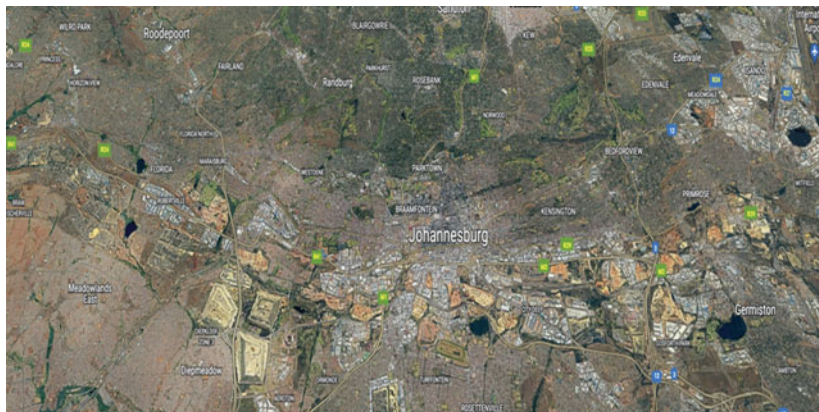


Fig. 2.1 Map of Johannesburg showing mines and mining dumps in yellow at the bottom (*Source* Google Earth, May 2022)



Fig. 2.2 Aerial view of main reef road, with mine dumps, informal housing communities and a suburb in view (*Source* Google Earth, May 2022)

At the entrance to the park, a tall man stands nonchalantly, watching people streaming past. He is dressed in the dark blue overalls common to workmen all over the city: the top buttons are undone revealing a stained t-shirt underneath, and between his lips dangles an unlit cigarette. His name is Siphon, and he is the boss of this park, this shaft. Siphon's power is evident in the quiet respect he commands from the groups of men who file past the gate of the park in threes or fours, making their way to the shaft entrance at the rear. He determines who enters the shaft and under what conditions, who will alert rescue teams if there is an accident, and who will arrange reparations and compensation in the event of a fatality. As the one with real authority here, he holds a commanding presence over this park and over this community. His authority is cloaked not in his stance or formal position (of which he has none), but in the quiet respect and deference he receives from this community.

Siphon has had a long and difficult journey to get here. As a young man, he did what countless others before and after him did, joined the queue at The Employment Bureau of Africa, TEBA, formerly known as the Native Recruiting Corporation, the company established in 1902 to recruit men for the mines. He signed on as a worker at the gold mines, leaving the fertile green valleys and meadows of his home in the beautiful coastal province of KwaZulu-Natal for the concrete, mines and dust of Johannesburg. For him, beauty did not fill empty bellies. For years he was employed on a yearly contract, earning enough money to send back home to his mother, and indulge his love of tobacco, sleeping in mine hostels, worked in the shafts, learning how to extract gold; slowly forgetting his other life in the peaceful rural homestead, and building a new one in the bustling city.

Siphon's story is not unique. For most of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Black men were trapped in a capitalist system of exploitation and migrancy which extracted profits for white-owned mining companies (Callinicos, 1980; Goldblatt, 1973) which in turn helped prop up South Africa's apartheid regime (Vosloo, 2020). These men sacrificed their labour, their futures, their ways of being and knowing, their families and their health, to extract gold they would never own or enjoy.

The transformation in gold mining in the 1990s and 2000s resulted in a 38% drop in the number of people employed in the sector between 2009 and 2018 (Statistics South Africa, 2019a, 2019b). One of the 61,891 people who were made redundant by the industrial mining retrenchments

was Sipho. With nowhere else to go, no other home left to return to, and no other work he knew of, he remained in Johannesburg, moving out of the mine's hostel and into a backyard shack, a type of informal housing constructed of corrugated metal sheets in a township, close to the mine he had worked at. He took odd jobs as a day labourer when he could find them, on construction sites or in gardens in middle-class suburbs. But the wages were inconsistent and too low. He needed to find another way to survive. He knew there was still gold underground, he had seen it, and he knew how to extract it. In the informal community he lived in, he heard of men working at another shaft nearby, doing the exact same work he had done for decades, but this time they were selling the gold themselves and keeping the money. With his skills and experience, he entered the underground world again, this time as a Zama Zama. He made enough money to cover his rental, and look after his family, and even managed to save some cash each month.

Over the years his expertise, his long connections to the Zulu men of his community and his strong personality made him a leader. People trust him, because of his knowledge and connections, and they like and admire him because of his affable manner. He is street smart, and he sniffed an opportunity when he saw young men like him coming from the rural areas, or from neighbouring countries, looking for work. Eventually, he stopped going underground and started hiring and training other men to do the work instead. Carefully he selected who he employed, testing them with small tasks each day to determine their loyalty and honesty. He kept his eyes and ears in the townships open, did the men drink too much, or argue with their girlfriends? If so, they were not to be trusted. But the ones who were eager to work hard and live clean, these he took under his wing, and soon he was employing a small group of Zama Zama who he sponsored with clothes and equipment, trained with skills and knowledge and provided access to the best shafts in the city.

In this park, at this shaft, access to the abandoned mines and the gold wedged in them, is navigated through a complex web of patronage-based relations that exemplify and exercise informal power. And at the heart of such power are people like Sipho.

The Work

The informal mining economy in Johannesburg is a wide network of employment and business practices involving men and women. Some of

these practices are well organised, led by groups of people, following standard rules and processes, while others are organic and fluid. The economy of informal mining includes underground mining; surface work of extraction; supporting economies of food preparation and childcare; supply networks of essential materials and services; buyers; and sponsors. This is the bottom end of a global gold supply chain, a ground zero if you will. It is the most precarious but also the most important. The Chamber of Mines of South Africa in a 2017 report provides a helpful classification of gold mining structured across five tiers. I have illustrated the formal/informal connections across tiers below and discuss these in more detail later on. The work of the Zama Zama is mainly located in tiers 1 and 2 (Fig. 2.3).

Miners refer to their labour as ‘work’ or ‘business’. The common words used to describe their own activities included: *korokoza* (‘we are doing business’ or ‘we are trying to earn an income’ in Shona). Men who are engaged in artisanal mining are known as *gweja* and women as *gwejeleni*. The plurals used extensively in this book of *magweja* or the more well-known Zama Zama both mean ‘we are hustling or trying’ and borrow from the self-identification and preferences of the people interviewed. Many miners spoke of their desire for their work to be legalised, but there are narrow provisions for legal artisanal small-scale mining in South Africa, which favour capital investors who can negotiate the bureaucracy needed to obtain the licences to explore and mine. The majority of small-scale miners have neither the money nor the ability to secure permits. In contrast the popular and academic press in South Africa misrepresent informal mining with multiple forms of illegality (Munakamwe, 2017; Thornton, 2014). This includes an assumption that most miners are ‘illegal’, that they are all foreigners with no documentation, and are involved

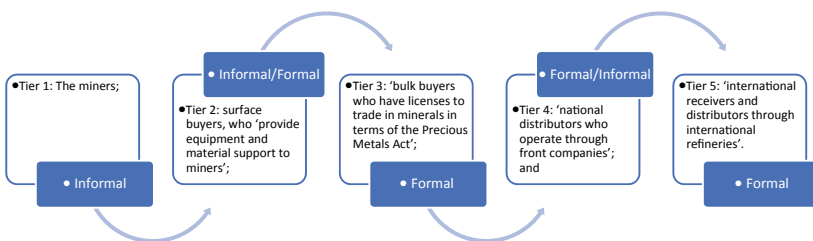


Fig. 2.3 Classification of informal gold mining based on chamber of mines

in criminal activities such as drug dealing, human trafficking, robberies. Rather than adopting a binary, normative, approach on informal mining as good or bad, the approach here, as informed by the South African Human Rights commission hearing on informal mining (2015), is to centralise the voice of miners themselves with an effort to understand and contextualise their realities and lived experiences.

UNDERGROUND MINING

Miners get to and from the shaft on foot or in public minibus taxis. As they get closer to their worksites, they walk along rough pathways which have been hewn by heavy foot traffic to reach the mine shaft. At the shaft, miners don dark clothes and caps, and huddle at the entrance as they prepare to go underground. Some say prayers and offer food to the ancestors to bless their way, others take care of more practical matters: water, food and torches. The entrance of the shaft is littered with the tools of the trade: old plastic water bottles used to clean their faces, discarded rags and clothes that lay dusty on the ground; batteries from headlamps rusting in piles and foil wrappers from energy bars, and packets of crisps. As some get ready to enter the shaft others emerge in cloud of dust, squinting in the harsh sunlight after days underground, weary, but proudly carrying their packages of gold.

Emmanuel is a miner. He nears the entrance to the shaft, a small dark hole wedged into the cliff. Facing it, the sounds of the city can be heard in the distance, fading slowly as he goes further and further in. Inside it is dark, cold and silent. He braces himself for the chill that will grip him as he begins his descent into the mine. He says a prayer, pleading with the ancestors for help and protection, and uses the rope that has been tied to the entrance to guide him, as his body adjusts to life underground. Emmanuel started doing underground work as an artisanal miner near Bulawayo, although the mines are not so deep there and are better secured with pillars and beams, he claims. He has been mining in Johannesburg, on a casual basis for about 3 years, supplementing his income as a contracted security guard with a private company. When work is slow, he comes here to the shaft going underground, deeper and deeper until he can imagine 20 buses piled on top of each other, remaining underground for a few days at a time to loosen and retrieve rocks with gold deposits which he will give to the women to grind.

Underground mining is the principal component of artisanal informal mining and miners demonstrate a wealth of knowledge, skills and creativity to do this work informally. The long and well-established industrial mining sector on the Main Reef (Witwatersrand) has resulted in a significant network of underground tunnels that stretch for kilometres. Miners say that they can enter a shaft in the west or central part of the city, walk several days underground, and emerge in eastern shafts or shafts further south from the Reef. At times, a miner walks for three days and at depths of 4000 metres to get to gold-bearing deposits, and works there for three to four days before returning to the surface by walking all the way back to the entry point. Although many informal miners follow tunnels that already exist underground, at times miners bore and drill new passageways, using small amounts of dynamite.

The majority of the 100 or so *magweja* we interviewed for this book were Zimbabwean, although there were also South African, Malawian, Mozambican and Basotho informal miners we engaged with. Some of the respondents had previously worked in industrial mining in South Africa or Zimbabwe; others had worked in other informal employment. Among the former, experience with underground mining is an important form of knowledge. Miners state that they look for '*solid rock, which has money*'. To know if a rock contains gold, miners test it by chiselling a portion of it into a plate and sieving it. The goal is to look for a "belt", or a stretch of rock rich in gold deposit, chisel it into smaller rocks that can be fit into a sack, and carry these out to be extracted. The knowledge and skill one has determines how much of useless stone you will carry versus gold-rich rocks, how safely you work to access and loosen the belt, and how long it will take. In informal mining, just like in any other economy, time means money. The more skilled miners have perfected the art of informal mining, they are able to complete the process safely and quickly, allowing them to return back to the surface within a few days and rest until their next shift.

Informal miners use and adapt a variety of tools and materials in their work: hand-held tools like hammers are used to break smaller rocks; they fuse, ignite and coat chisels and copper cables to assist; or they use drillers called *mugwara* (long chisels) to extract gold underground. On their heads they wear simple head torches. Some also use basic "Nokia" cell phones (i.e. not smartphones) for torches, they prefer these for the longer battery life they offer. Where a huge concentration of gold has been detected, they use dynamite or generators to blow out the rock.

However, the use of “large machinery” has been attributed by some informal miners as the cause of rockfall landslide accidents. Copper cables are used to suspend materials or to steady their foothold on loose underground surfaces or when the ground is not stable enough for miners to step on without causing rockfall landslides. However, this is regarded as the worst form of conveyance as miners mentioned that any slight mistake may lead to very dangerous conditions, including fatal accidents. To loosen rock and create passageways, miners use dynamite, known as *hoora* (see Chelin & Els, 2020). This process can take several days, as conditions are difficult. As one *magweja* puts it, “it’s us who are the real soldiers”, referring to the bravery and hard work that informal mining demands. At one of the shafts, *hoora* is sold by women to miners (see Chelin & Els, 2020).

Miners work on narrow underground ridges, where there is little light or ventilation, and in high temperatures. To survive, miners strip their clothes off down to their trousers or underpants only. In areas where ventilation is poor or oxygen supply limited, informal miners have developed a system of using domestic-use garden hose pipes to facilitate breathing while they are working in small groups of four to six. Some miners will stay in higher shafts where oxygen supply is good and act as the base location for the hose pipes. A smaller group will carry the other end of the hosepipe with them as they descend further down, and use it for breathing once they reach lower depths where they will work. Once rocks have been chipped off at a “belt” and broken into pieces that are easier to handle, they are loaded into makeshift sacks and backpacks and carried back to the surface. From here miners will retrace their steps to get a taxi that will take them to the surface workers.

Miners engaged with police as well as private security guards, who control and regulate the site of mining in multiple and strategic ways. These include the payment of bribes for access to sites, or to evade arrest, or using networks to create a warning system if police are nearby. Despite this, we had witnessed many raids and arrests, and were aware that part of work in this sector involved adopting strategies of survival in the face of the criminality associated with the sector in South Africa.

SURFACE WORK

After their massive efforts underground to obtain the ore and bring it to the surface, the bundles of rock, held in domestic-use plastic buckets or

backpacks, are carried by hand or transported in public minibus taxis to surface sites located in nearby communities. At the four sites, where we conducted our study, surface work is done in various types of spaces. At one site, there is a long stretch of open land behind a line of informal houses where some of the miners live. The Zama Zama rent the open land from local ‘landlords’ pay an average of R 400 per month to use it for surface work. At two other sites, work is done in an abandoned and half-demolished old mining compound. At the fourth site, surface work is done in a secluded thicket, hidden by thorny bushes and trees hidden from view from a major road. Further surface work on that site takes place in the backyards of houses and shacks nearby.

Surface work involves extraction of the mineral deposit or ore from the rock, and much of it is done by women, often with young children tied to their backs or playing nearby. One of them is Gloria, a 20-something woman of slender built and piercing eyes from a village near Bulawayo. She has been in South Africa for about 5 years she says, leaving her home and family so that they “could eat”. Mugabe’s devastating economic and political policies has turned the former bread basket of Africa, into a begging bowl (Dzingirai, 2015). And millions of Zimbabweans, like Gloria have fled in search of protection and livelihoods. She left elderly parents, three younger siblings and her own child at home. She came to South Africa on a visitor visa and applied for asylum as a refugee. Hers is one of the approximately 1 million asylum applications that have yet to be determined by the Department of Home Affairs, effectively placing her in legal limbo (Fassin, 2017; Mukumbang, 2020).

With no formal employment or access to social security and limited social capital, Gloria worked odd jobs as a cleaner earning around R 2,500 a month, just enough to pay for her backroom shack in Alex, the township bordering wealthy Sandton in the north, some food and transport. She remitted money home when she could. One evening she heard neighbours talking about making money in gold mining. They pointed her to this mine in the west of the city, and she arrived at the surface area bright-eyed one morning demanding work. It had been a busy time, miners had brought up a lot of rock and hands were needed on deck. She was hired by another woman, a ‘syndicate leader’, on the spot joining a group of women for R 150 a day. Working 7 days a week meant she could almost double her monthly wages. That was two years ago and now Gloria has saved up almost enough money to open a small spaza shop, the informal general dealers in the townships.

Surface work is organised into teams, or ‘syndicates’ as the women refer to them, consisting of families, friends or people who sometimes hold shared ethnic ties. This helps maintain trust in the group, we are told. The ‘syndicates’ are employed by ‘sponsors’ or miners often with reference to shared ethnic identification. Some surface workers are hired as day workers (paid by the day), alternating between various casual jobs such as domestic work or child minding to supplement their income, while others are on the site full time on longer ‘contracts’. Some women are hired by individual miners, although the majority are recruited and paid by ‘sponsors’ who are men like Siphso. Each ‘syndicate’ is overseen by a surface leader who is responsible for all work arrangements, maintaining a ‘store room’ where work equipment such as iron balls and *maphenduka* gas cylinders, because *maphenduka* is a reference to the rolling action that gas cylinders perform in crushing the rock) are kept, and for liaising with buyers.

MaElizabeth is a syndicate leader. A heavy-set woman in her late forties or early fifties, she has a commanding maternal air about her that she uses expertly to shepherd the cluster of younger women working around her. MaElizabeth is an old hand at mining. She is South African, Zulu, and has lived in Johannesburg all her life. Her mother was a domestic worker, her father she had never met. Elizabeth rents a backyard shack close by, where she stores the tools her syndicate needs: gas bottles, stamps to grind the rocks, jugs and buckets to wash and other bits and pieces of the trade. She gets bags of gold-bearing soil from the underground miners because she sponsors them, giving them food, buying torches or batteries for the headlamps, and paying the ‘tributes’, the money used to pay the shaft owner to go underground. From the soil she earns she pays women like Gloria to grind for her. All of these transactions she manages in her mind with no written record, yet she effortlessly gives us a tally of how many men are underground and how many women are above, grinding her rocks.

‘Syndicate’ members are grouped as a team, where each member specialises in certain aspects of work. For example, some work as grinders, some in drainage and others work only with mercury. Incomes vary depending on the type of contract and employer a woman has, and the amount of gold that is yielded; for example, some women each earn R 100 per day (approximately \$8) grinding a 20-Litres bucket of rocks. Others get paid much more because they have the skill to grind and extract faster and more carefully. Newcomers start off as grinders, ‘working’ for either

the *magweja* or ‘syndicate’ leaders, and are paid per 20-Litres bucket of rock that they grind. The ‘syndicate’ leader pays the syndicate members a wage that varies from week to week: a typical amount reported to us was R 600 each a week, but this depends on the amount of work done.

Gloria and other women in the group are also paid “in kind” through being allowed to collect the leftover, gold-bearing soil known as *mvhovo*, which can be further refined and sold directly by ‘syndicate’ members to buyers. Gloria keeps her sacks of *mvhovo* in Elizabeth’s shack until she has about 20 bags, then takes these to a white man at the other end of the city. He has some electrical equipment that can further extract gold from the soil and she often comes back with another R 200 or so per sack. MaElizabeth thought prefers to use another white guy who will send a driver to the shaft, and they will fill his pickup truck with bags and bags of soil, up to 100 in exchange for more money.

The first stage of surface work consists of crushing the rock into smaller pieces and then grinding it (*kukuya*) until it looks ‘ash-like’ or is ground into a fine sand. The process is physically demanding and takes place outdoors on concrete slabs. Often the slabs have been salvaged or stolen from the foundations of buildings and houses. The flat and tough surface is ideal to crush and grind, although it results in chapped hands and knees, as the women work on all fours. While they rock back and forth under the hot sun, the whiteness of the concrete reflects a harsh glare. A 20-Litres bucket of rocks and stones takes about four to five hours to process. For this a woman is usually paid around R 100 per bucket, in addition to the *mvhovo* they will collect.

In the second stage, the ashy-like sand is mixed with water and drained through a drainage system. Drainage consists of washing the ground sand several times and is done on structures that are especially built for that purpose. Typically, a drainage site involves several pipes, wash areas and sieves, all set up across a stretch of land.

Finally, the sand and small particles of stone are treated with mercury which clings to gold once it has vaporised, thereby facilitating the extraction of gold. Only the most skilled of the women work with mercury, and they are proficient at extracting even the tiniest particles. Using tin or zinc sheets which have been taken from abandoned machinery or stolen, a fire pit is created. Firewood from trees and shrubs is gathered and burnt to create the heat necessary for *kupisa*, the burning process.

It is mainly women engaged in surface work and their burdens are many, and heavy. Women in the mining communities are particularly

vulnerable to crime. Rape and gang rape are reported commonly. For this reason, some women we interviewed said that they enter into ‘protective relationships of convenience’ with men to make them feel safe, but this does not always work. At other times, their partners are the danger. Three incidents of domestic abuse were reported to us, two were Zimbabwean women who said that as migrants they do not have any rights in the country. By this they refer to their fear of being further victimised by police because they are migrant women.

Women also bear the major responsibility of childcare. Informal childcare arrangements with neighbours, or women who operate overcrowded, and unregistered day cares are the only childcare option in the communities. Many mothers hesitate to leave their kids in these either due to the cost or concerns about how well they would be taken of. Instead women doing surface work bring their children, especially those under 5 years of age with them, tied to their back or playing at their feet. For children of schooling age, migrants report that they are forced to pay bribes to school principals to allow their children to register in the school, and some simply find it cheaper and safer to send their kids home to Zimbabwe to be cared for by extended family.

The earth below holds many riches indeed, but extracting it comes at a price. Hands are chapped and lungs are infected, backs are broken, burns are common, and limbs become stiff. Mining is dangerous. Here aboveground, like the men underground, only rudimentary equipment is available which provides little, or no, safety or protection. “We are always coughing, its hurts here”, they say, pointing to their chests. Some cover their mouths and noses with a wet *doek* (Afrikaans for small cloth). Because of these risks, many prefer to work hard for a year or two and then use their earnings as ‘capital’ to start small businesses like selling food *shisanyama* (isiZulu: to burn/braai/barbecue meat) and pap in their communities. After almost two years Gloria has saved up almost enough to do just that. She laughs coyly, when we ask her about her plans: “hah! I was a nobody, everyone was saying oh poor Gloria she works so much she is the cleaner, but now gold has made me a somebody, and one day I will have my business and they will line up to buy from me”.

BUYERS

After extraction on the surface, shaft owners and miners sell gold to buyers at a price determined by the international market. At the time of

this portion of the study in 2016, it was fluctuating between R 480 to R 510 per gram. The sellers use a small digital scale to weigh it. Once sold to an informal buyer, the gold then enters the formal market for gold: it is either sold directly to traders who have permits and shops for dealing in gold; or sold indirectly through other buyers who will resell it to the traders. This constitutes what the Chamber of Mines described as Tier 3 (Chamber of Mines, 2017). Among surface and underground workers, these end-buyers are referred to as the “market” and usually refer to those places in Johannesburg or Roodepoort that trade in gold.

We witnessed a few of these transactions and interviewed four buyers. Paul is one of them, and according to Siphso he is a ‘big man’ referring not to his physical stature but his social status. Paul is Sotho, and his family come from Soweto. He owns several shops in the townships and is well connected politically to the local African National Congress (ANC) branch, the governing party of the country. Some say he was part of the anti-apartheid movement, living in exile, but Siphso laughs this away, saying that people like Paul make up their history to suit their future. Nevertheless, Paul is friendly and approachable and we manage to meet and interview him.

Late one morning, he arrives in the informal settlement behind a surface site in his shiny SUV. The car is parked under a clump of thorny trees, the engine running. After a quick call a sponsor hustles over to Paul’s window which glides down smoothly. Paul and the sponsor talk for a while and then they make their way into a nearby shack where goods and money are exchanged. Paul agrees to meet us another day at a local KFC. Paul orders two lunch combos (at our cost) and after a satisfying meal he is ready to talk. Buying gold is a small-time side hustle for him, he says, he has a job with the local municipality, something he hates. All those queues and angry people who want you to fix all their problems. He has a hearty laugh that makes his belly dance. He buys gold maybe once or twice a month and sells it to someone in the city centre. The money is used to finance his luxury car.

Other buyers measure the gold on scales that they bring along, although miners sometimes complain that these scales are not accurate. As the entire transaction is in cash and involves sums of up to R 100,000 buyers take precautions to ensure their security by bringing bodyguards to accompany them and by carrying firearms. The majority of the buyers do not live in the mining communities, but in the middle-class suburbs, although they employ assistants who live locally and who will act as

middlemen for the buyers. For the buyers, there are risks too: trading without a licence is illegal, and buyers are weary of the police, who they say are more likely to confiscate their money and gold than to arrest them.

To make money they take risks. Informal mining is bound by danger: gangs prowl, criminals pounce, rockfalls and death are realities of everyday life. In addition, police are always on the prowl, doing so-called clean-up operations where they round up foreigners, looking to butter their own bread from the gold they know is all around. And then there are the private security companies employed by mining houses, and by neighbourhood community groups, heavy-handed men who pounce on the poor, doing citizens arrests, and beating up miners (Legal Resources Centre [LRC], 2016).

The Supporting Economy

Thokozani is an affable woman from Harare. Short and plump, she has dimples in her cheeks when she smiles. She is an astute businesswoman and turns on the charm often. Thokozani lives in the city centre near the Methodist church which has become a haven for Zimbabweans and other migrants in the face of xenophobia, providing protection, accommodation, food and even a school for kids (Bompani, 2015). Not content with selling fruit and vegetables as a street trader (another informal form of livelihoods in South Africa that is often criminalised and subject to harassment from police (Skinner, 2018), Thokozani has diversified her business, buying and reselling prepaid cards, cellular data in small denomination favoured by many due to their affordability, in townships. For this she takes the minibus taxi to different informal settlements each day of the week selling data, logging entries in her notebook and collecting the payments at the end of each month. She usually offers credit to people from her church “so I can trust they will pay” she laughs. With her friendly personality she struck up conversations with Gloria and the other women working the gold, and now she sells various goods to them including drinks and foodstuff that she can source at better price than the local township store (the *spaza* shop). She also sells similar supplies to other women who in turn supply the underground miners.

To enable survival underground, a parallel economy supporting the underground miners’ activities has been created aboveground and is run by sponsors. This parallel economy supplies food, usually *pap* (the staple diet in southern Africa, Afrikaans for maize porridge) and soft drinks at

highly inflated prices, provides communications networks through the use of runners, stores essential tools such as torches, chisels or *hoora*, and, most importantly, activates search or recovery efforts when a miner is missing or there has been a rockfall. This complex network has been developed to support informal underground mining and is accessible exclusively through patronage-based networks.

THE MEANING OF GOLD

The miners believe that “gold lasts forever”. This approach represents the value associated with informal gold mining, as one bucket of gold can sustain the livelihoods of many people, from underground workers to buyers and end users. As one respondent noted.

The *magweja* bring gold containing rocks, gives them to grinders or they lend the *maphenduka*, the payment is residues of the soil, *mavovo*. The *maphenduka* owner or grinders or drainage owners process the *mavovo*, leave them for others and so on. The *mavovo* can be recycled for close to a decade, and the processor still gets something from them. For us gold lasts forever, and no one starves.

This is a decolonial approach that symbolises an interconnected relationship to the land and its resources. For generations of people who lived off wage work, the ability to access, mine for, and sell gold represents a deeper connection to being self-sufficient and to find a pathway out of intergenerational poverty. For millions of Black low-skilled workers, who were denied access to land, adequate education and services that kept their families in cycles of grinding intergenerational poverty, informal mining is an opportunity to move up. For many the high cost of living in a major urban centre such as Johannesburg, means that their wages cover only basic needs such as rental of a backyard shack in a township, public transport to and from work and some essential groceries. In the townships, people hear and see the fruits of informal mining, a job that is risky and dangerous, hard and unconventional but which pays better. Some begin to try it out working part-time, going into shafts on the weekend or during lulls in their casual employment, but soon realise they can make more money in informal mining. As one miner said, he had earned in one weekend the equivalent of his monthly wages as a security guard and decided to become a full-time Zama Zama. And for South Africans from the towns, and townships, the villages and cities across

the country, the pathways into gold mining are similar. High unemployment and poverty in rural areas drive many to seek employment and opportunity in Johannesburg. Once here they are trapped into a cycle of low-waged work, rising costs and limited future prospects. All the miners agreed that informal mining is hard work but rewarding. Many have little knowledge of what they are getting themselves into, but skills and information is freely shared, and in turn the recipients become experts of the hustle and share what they know with newcomers.

A Zimbabwean miner said that he is considering returning home to start a farming and livestock business once he raises enough capital. Other miners drive expensive cars, and some had moved up the supply chain to become influential buyers. These Zama Zama who have accumulated capital are known among the surface and underground miners as “big shots”, who can afford to buy larger amounts of mercury, cyanide, electric blasters and dynamite. This enables them to become “sponsors”, that is, they can finance *magweja* to go underground. The more capital that is invested, in terms of equipment or labour, the greater the return. Among women too, informal mining can be rewarding. Many begin as grinders and work their way up. Some are involved in the support economy, selling food, drinks or alcohol at sites. A few dealt in dynamite, a prized resource for underground mining. Others are syndicate leaders and employ men to go underground. A young woman told us that she has employed her former teacher. Another woman from Zimbabwe started working at sixteen and now has built a home and bought several cows.

Alongside the riches though, lurk risks. Competition within the sector is stiff. Between 2012 and 2016, two new surface sites emerged in the areas in which we conducted research, and miners told us that new members join the sector every day. Shafts are loosely controlled by men like Sipho and his team, and fighting among groups is commonly reported. The police play an important role in balancing power relations within the community. Competition between traders is often resolved by ‘snitching’, calling the police to raid a site and confiscate goods, which are returned after paying a bribe. Police are also reported to work with syndicates of robbers and provide them with guns to rob their fellows. *Mkunzi* is a form of daylight robbery by fellow neighbours or friends, depriving miners of their earnings.

Many miners do not have bank accounts, due to either a lack of documentation among migrants and some South Africans from rural areas, or a lack of trust in the banking sector, and so the economy is largely a

cash or favour-based one (Landau, 2005). Miners are constantly entangled with each other, borrowing or being owed money, trading goods, or as needed. Both cash and favour systems lend easily to accusations of cheating, and fraud, and inevitably to drunken brawls. And so, the money that is earned disappears as quickly as it comes in, leaving many families indebted to informal loan sharks or *mashonisa* who charge interest of fifty per cent or higher. The *mashonisa* are part of the township too, and a part of everyday life, and if a miner no longer needs a loan, he is still persuaded into borrowing when the former courts him, slyly whispering, “my friend, did we fight that you no longer come to me?” Miners refer to *mashonisa* loans as “an albatross around our necks”. These loans keep many in perpetual debt, and that to honour them has dire consequences, including physical harm by the *mashonisa* or their bodyguards, or the destruction of their property.

It is a delicate job, balancing the risks of gold mining with the rewards it offers.

* * *

And so Paul, and Siphso and Gloria and MaElizabeth, and Emmanuel, and the other men and women find themselves connected in this chain of gold extraction and supply. Whether as locals, or as visitors on this land, they are bound by a search for money, to survive or to get ahead.

As the sun sets over the golden cityscape of the Highveld, the raucous shouts of the hadada birds and the cries of crows’ echo. Siphso, MaElizabeth and Gloria make their way to their shacks in the township close by, Paul is long gone to his comfortable home in the suburbs. In the township, those who are lucky to have a job return from their work elsewhere in the city, wearing private security guard uniforms or in a smart pair of trousers and shirt. Many more come home from a day’s work as a gardener, as a domestic worker or as a day labourer on a construction site. Women arrive carrying bundles of groceries balanced on their heads and in their arms, while children in their school uniforms are filling rickety old buckets with water from the taps nearby. They splash in the drainage pipes and laugh as their mothers call out. And many, many more people sit, at a corner or outside their homes, to talk, drink and smoke, while they are waiting to wash, to cook and to bed down for another night. On borrowed land, they dream of the beautiful hills and valleys of a home long left, of hot water on tap in their homes and of a full belly.

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The Community

Abstract This chapter begins to explore additional levels of informality and precarity in the lives of the Zama Zama. In particular the informal settlement or township in which mining occurs is discussed. In this chapter, I argue that spatial and spiritual realities and beliefs inform the labour of informal mining which is further developed in Chapter 4. The chapter shows, through first-person narratives the multiple and intersecting forms of informality, producing persistent forms of precarity, laced by pockets of resistance, resiliency and agency among the Zama Zama. Insecure housing, rumours and connections, and spiritual beliefs and practices inform social relations and work arrangements. For the Zama Zama the spatial, spiritual and political organisation of the township informs how they live and how they do their work.

Keywords Spiritual · Township · Zama Zama · Johannesburg · Precarity · Housing · Services

Let us take a step back from Sipho and the others, to get a sense of the type of space they live and work in, and the community that has moulded them. Here in the township, there are multiple and intersecting forms of informality, producing persistent forms of precarity, laced by pockets of resistance, resiliency and agency. Insecure housing, rumours and connections, and spiritual beliefs and practices inform social relations and work

arrangements. The township is heaving with energy and filled with nuance of risk and resiliency. It is a dynamic and fluid space capturing the harsh socio-economic realities of deprivation that are prevalent in post-colonial cities, and a fertile ground for organic forms of governance and agency to emerge. Rapid urbanisation in South Africa means that townships are bursting at the seams, and scarce resources are calling into question who belongs and under what conditions. For the Zama Zama the spatial, spiritual and political organisation of the township informs how they live and how they do their work.

TOWNSHIPS

Townships go by different names: informal settlements, slums and shanty towns. Regardless of what they are called this form of informal housing and shelter are a symbol of post-colonial cities across the global South (Desai, 2013; Gunter, 2017; Huchzermeyer, 2006). Townships and mining have an entwined history of racialised control, segregation and inequities in this country. The first township in South Africa was established by the colonial government in 1901 in Cape Town to isolate the local Black population, deemed a health hazard, after an outbreak of the bubonic plague (Philip, 2014). In 1913, the Natives Land Act began the process of dismantling Black ownership of land and livelihoods forcing Black people into low-waged work and poverty, a legacy that still prevails. At its heart the Act was aimed at dispossessing Black people of their land and ensuring a supply of labour to the growing demands of the mining industry. Over the next 100 years, Black people became temporary residents in their own land, their very existence policed and criminalised, their ability to access the resources of the land severely compromised and their daily existence confined to life in townships (Philip, 2014).

The spatial development of townships is characterised by resource-poor spaces of cheaply built houses on poor quality land that would not lend itself to farming, far away from white areas, to reinforce the out of sight, out of mind ideology of apartheid, connected to the city by rail to make a cheaper, and more efficient transit, and accessible by one road only.

Politically, control has been the core principle driving the governance of townships. This was achieved through a number of policies and approaches. First townships were divided by racial and then ethnic lines, reinforcing the divide and conquer philosophy of the British colonists. This would come to inform enforce the latter-day rumours, suspicions

and xenophobic attacks. Second the organic and customary practices of propel in the townships were constantly criminalised, subduing the spirit while crippling the township economy. The extensive measures taken by the government to disband the production and distribution of beer in townships during apartheid are a good example of this (Philip, 2014).

Third, governance of the township was always undemocratic, removed from its people, politicised, reinforcing difference and administering violence rather than emphasising service delivery and unity (Philip, 2014; Schenck, 2021). In the 1970s, centralised boards of administration led by white civil servants managed the affairs of Black, mixed race and Asian townships from afar. Later, Community Councils with duly elected bodies of administration were put in place, but voter turnout was low, and any effort at development was minimal. The scarcity of services continued well into the post-apartheid era, where a major public housing development strategy was pursued, through the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). Although it achieved some success in building new homes, other services such as education, sanitation, water, health care and roads failed to keep pace and eventually corruption and increased sustained demand collapsed any gains that were made (Meth, 2013; Philip, 2014).

Today, townships remain a mishmash of overcrowded spaces with physical depravation, few public services and poor governance (Jürgens, 2013). In their seminal work on townships in South Africa, Bonner and Segal (1998) cited in Philip (2014: p. 34) conclude: “the key focus of the specifications set down for townships was to enable the government to exert control” (p. 34). Townships are sites of contested power between and among people and the state, exercised in and through the spatial realities of townships and the ways in which these are governed.

* * *

From overhead, the township shines and glints in the hot sun, rows upon rows of tin shacks, wedged in every available space, punctuated only by those looming mine dumps. To reach the community where Siphso and the others live, there is sharp and bumpy turn off the main road and then down several dusty, and unmarked roads barely wide enough for a car. To go deeper still, one needs to follow footpaths carved into the Highveld grassland by thousands of pairs of tired feet each day. No tarred roads here, no road signs, or street names, nor any traffic lights or pedestrian

crossings. Walking, like driving, is an art of survival, cutting a pathway here, hopping over a bush there and always watching over both shoulders for criminals, stray dogs and other forms of danger.

Once inside the township proper, there are a mix of tin and brick shack dwellings built in dense proximity, with roofs hanging as low as 1, 5 meters high, barely high enough to stand upright in for most adults. The shacks are built from scavenged materials, tin and zinc preferred for their sturdiness, but plastic sheets and other plastic materials will do too. In some homes a few foundations, or one or two walls have been built in earnest with bricks and cement, the rest of the home a patchwork of other material. Doors hang from haphazard frames and many shacks have no windows at all. Cold water taps are scattered every 70 meters or so, as are outbuildings with pit latrines, a nod to a dysfunctional government that drops these indignities on its people. For many, there are no pit latrines at all, the bush works as a toilet. Both buzz with flies and the stench settle permanently in the air. Household waste is dumped among scratchy bushes, from which people scavenge recyclables to sell, and where children play, and chicken scratch. In the mid-morning sun, and women dump grey water from their laundry outside their homes before hanging clothes to dance and dry on taut wire or string tied between roofs or poles.

In South Africa, 13, 7% of households live in informal shelter, in the city of Johannesburg this figure rises to 19%. In other words, nearly one in five households in the city are living in an informal dwelling. One in five households are living in a permanent state of temporariness, a permanent state of being unable to meet their most basic needs of shelter, water and sanitation. Fifteen per cent of households in the country have no access to electricity, a figure that in the Gauteng province is actually increasing year on year due to rapid urbanisation, 12% of homes have no water, and 12% of urban homes in the country use their own rubbish dump to dispose of garbage (Statistics South Africa, 2019a, 2019b). This sense of being in limbo, of waiting for things to improve, to settle and find permanency is associated with refugees, those fleeing their homeland (Hari, 2013). But here in post-apartheid South Africa, disregard by the government does not discriminate against citizens and migrants; being poor means to be marginalised and to face daily ontological insecurity.

This is the township. The jobs are long gone here; 44% of South Africans are unemployed, young Black people are disproportionately

represented in this statistic, and most find themselves here in the township, doing what they can to make ends meet (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Women sell airtime vouchers and groceries on upturned crates at the side of the street; men fix car tires and batteries in ditches and clearings, youth wash cars with rags underneath flimsy tin roofs, women sell sex and home-brewed beer; men sell drugs, people mine for gold. This is the informal economy, the lifeblood and safety net among poor South Africans. This is the daily hustle.

This is the township. The police don't come if you need them, and ambulances are scared to pick up the sick. There are informal nodes of governance here where elected ward councillors have their hands greased before they look up from their desks; where school principals charge fees to line their pockets for access to free-fee public schools, where unelected local elites like community and business leaders have the power to summon the police, and direct the authorities to action. Here the police will arrest someone if you pay them nicely, source you a firearm if you want to take care of the matter yourself, or lose a charge sheet if you get into trouble. There is no justice here, instead groups and gangs patrol the streets to keep the area safe or to break up a fight (Alexander, 2010; Netswera, 2014; Pattillo, 2012).

The trees stand alone here in the informal settlement; silent witnesses to the rapes and robberies, the kisses between innocent young couples who steal some privacy; and providing reprieve for children who play, as their parents work. Young people kick tattered soccer balls all day and long into the evening when the shadows turn dark and long, and many, many more just sit and watch and wait, a permanent state of disease and precarity. This is home for millions of the urban poor. But there is also an energy here. A spirit of resiliency to make things work. A hustle to keep going. The township never sleeps, it doesn't catch its breath, it doesn't pause, or wink, yawn or stumble. Busy, busy, busy. Each person is connected to another by money, and duty, and blood, and love, and lust, by guilt, and by burden, by need and by choice. This is the township.

NETWORKS

We have our own rules here, our way of working. There is no councillor or premier or minister what-what in the township. We have our leaders. If you want nothing done go to the police, but if you want stuff fixed fast-fast come to us, we are the eyes and ears and the muscles of the community.

These are the words of the miners. They articulate well the reality of informal governance in the township where a patronage-based system of governance is in place. Community leaders, who are unelected, and can be religious, or traditional leaders, or simply prominent business-people, have considerable influence on how communities are run: who has access to resources, who can live in an area or who do business, who hears about job or tender opportunities, etc. Elected officials have vested business interests in the community, including in the gold mining informal economy, sponsoring miners or introducing buyers. Police have a reciprocal relationship with the community, protecting and harming, benefiting from and facilitating gold mining in equal breaths. It is a complex web of governance, and social order, drawing on money, resources, nationality and ethnicity, position and power. And it is at the heart of how informal mining, and by extension the townships they are located in, are organised and governed.

Networks are “ties and interactions, whether formal or informal forged between a multiplicity of actors” (Ramia, 2018). Networks in the governance literature refer to formal and informal connections between actors, organisations and sectors (p. 331) with a purpose of policymaking and/or implementation (Klijn, 2008: p. 511 cited in Ramia, 2018). The informal aspect of governance networks is poorly understood in general (there is an emerging literature on backroom deals and lunch club agendas in the European and American context but that is not relevant here). Instead, the connections of the Zama Zama speak to how power and governance is exercised through informal connections between formal and informal actors, in parallel to, or at times completely replacing formal governance.

At another level, among the Zama Zama, connections are a form of resiliency and are essential for survival. Knowing one person will lead you to another and another and will take you underground. For international migrants, the men and women from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho migrants, life in South Africa begins with work in low-skilled or informal employment, such as domestic work, construction, in small shops or as security, where wages are low (typically around R 2,000–R 3,000 a month), hours are long and exploitation by employers is rife. Through connections, a pathway to informal mining and the economic stability it holds are offered. Given the limited reach of the state in a positive sense among the urban poor, connections become a means to access the resources of the state either through parallel actors who provide these services or through state agents who facilitate access through a bribe. A

compelling example of this is around physical security. If there is a theft among the miners, they know that calling the police will likely not result in a case being opened, or an investigation carried out. Instead as a group of miners told us, they will resolve the matter internally. They will carry out an investigation by collecting information through their networks, asking around to see if anyone heard or saw anything. They will confront the alleged suspect and then depending on their response find a resolution. This could either be the return of the stolen goods and an admission of guilt, or failing this, beating the suspect, or even invoking curses on them through their ancestors. Another option would be to pay a private security or even a police officer to investigate and resolve the matter.

Alongside connections are perceptions and rumours. Rumours are defined as “public communications that are infused with private hypotheses about how the world works (Rosnow, 1991), or more specifically, ways of making sense of things “to help us cope with our anxieties and uncertainties” (Rosnow, 2005). Rumours often arise in conditions of uncertainty, when the truth is obscured. In the African literature, (Musambachime, 1988) provides a helpful synopsis, stating “rumours are fuelled by a desire for meaning, a quest for clarification, or a logical explanation of an event ... by people socializing together, or those affected by them” (1988: p. 201). Rumours have a long history as a form of political control. In Zambia for instance, rumours were used by the authorities to govern and control by spreading fear, or anxiety.

Words then become weaponised means of exerting power. Life in a township is characterised by rumour. What is right is less important than what is *perceived* to be right, what is useful matters more than what is allowed or legal. The rumours fly thick and fast in the community:

Where is Mpho? Did you hear she was raped and the family are gone maybe Boksburg where they have a brother or maybe Soweto?

It is bad.

The other day two tsotsti (thieves) came into the house through windows, while she was sleeping with her husband and her 6 months old baby. They took plastic and burnt it on the stove and burnt it on the husband and shot him, and they raped her, they wanted money and they wanted the pendukas.

The husband said he is broke he is working as a tailor in Fordsburg but they burnt him with plastic on the foot and legs. After shooting the husband in the leg they took Mpho to another woman who used to be a dealer, who was also her sister to get the pendukas, but her sister was gone back home so no one was there and then they left her outside at night, but she survived.

That one is strong, maybe she put a curse on them.

No, she came home and now her house is empty. The Zama Zama are becoming tsotsis now, or the tsotsi are becoming Zama Zama, I don't know, but it is bad.

Using the literature on refugees to conceptualise rumours for the urban poor provides a helpful analytical framework given their shared sense of precarity. In ‘the national order of things’, Malkki (1995) wrote that “everyone belongs to a nation state and through citizenship of the same, claim rights and incur responsibilities”. For refugees this concept of statehood and citizenship is of course, flawed. Turner in his work with Ugandan refugees in Burundi showed how refugees use rumours to express their expectations and relate to the international community in the absence of formal rights of voting, decision-making or participatory governance. For the urban poor like the Zama Zama, rumours become tools through which an alternate reality can be constructed, through which meaning can be made of things around them, and in doing so, they can articulate a sense of control and claim a sense of presence in an otherwise invisible state of relations between them and the government.

Rumours for this community are ways to feel connected to each other and create a sense of legitimacy and belonging. Simply put, they help people make sense of what is going on, and insert their agency in situations in which they would otherwise have no voice. There are many rumours in the township around relationships, who is connected to whom in which ways, rumours on mining and who is getting rich, who is stealing from whom, and how much of gold was found. These are the stories of the township. The stories of survival.

But of course rumours can also be dangerous. Without adequate mechanisms for transparency and accountability life in the township can quickly dissolve into suspicion, personal agendas, jealousy and revenge. Miners spoke of how they were beaten up by rival gangs, of vigilante groups who dispense their own form of violent justice by assaulting, and even killing suspected criminals, and how certain ethnic groups, or those with connections to the police can turn on the innocent if they are weak, or come from an minority ethnic group. And it is a form of fear mongering, and performance-based politics that is being echoed on the national stage by a prominent political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (Mbetse, 2015; Satgar, 2019), which I return to in Chapter 5.

THE SPIRITUAL

African spirituality, and traditional systems of healing, prayer and care are integral to Indigenous peoples across the continent. In southern Africa, there is a long-documented tradition emphasising the role of Indigenous knowledges systems in care and healing, social norms and everyday life (see for instance Bojuwoye, 2013; Edwards et al., 2009; Naidu & Darong, 2015). Here I conceptualise Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices among the Zama Zama as acts of resiliency, adding to the literature on spirituality and work. For this community, connection to the spiritual world creates a sense of security, purpose and comfort. For the miners, gold, like other mineral resources, belongs to the land. The land and spirits are interconnected, and therefore, gold is owned and controlled by spirits known as *nzuzu*. This belief informs how miners approach the labour of gold mining and the rituals they perform in its extraction and use.

The *nzuzu* are water spirits that emerge from deep underground and control the mines. Miners have to be mindful of the spirits in their work and they do so by connecting and appeasing the ancestors and spirit world. In order to be protected and seek the blessings and favour of the spirits, rituals are performed. The most common practice by miners in this study was to make offerings of food or silver coins near the entrance to the shaft. To protect themselves from the dangers underground and above, miners also consult *sangomas* (traditional healers) who offer rituals that protect miners and offer messages from the ancestral world that provide guidance. These beliefs inform how one should carry out the labour of mining, maintaining a sense of selflessness and not being greedy in extraction, and being in a state of cleanliness. Most miners agreed that women cannot go underground as they menstruate and this makes them impure. This then informs the gendered divisions of work in the community, with women taking on the surface work.

If miners do not respect these customs, there are consequences for the entire community. For instance, a flooded tunnel underground is understood to be the work of an *nzuzu* as one miner explained:

Yes, they are male snakes and women snakes in the shaft there are dams of water that's where these snakes stay even nzuzu (mermaid) a half fish, half person they stay they in these motoros (gold soils which appear like mountains). When the spirits are angry, the snakes will cause the mountains to

move or the smoke to come out. Remember when that woman went underground and there as a big rock that fell and how many people died? 20 or 30? Women know they must not go under. Remember when those people were greedy and they took more than what they need? Greediness can cause people to die. And remember when they didn't pray and they didn't leave stuff for the spirits how many people got sick then? But they think they clever, and they don't listen to the sangomas.

Rats or snakes serve as 'ancestral geologists', according to one miner. Seeing a rat or snake underground could mean that the area has gold or that there is danger around. To know which omen this is, one needs to stop and follow the creature, if it pauses on a rock, this means there is gold around. But if the snake or rat heads towards the next entrance underground, this is a sign of danger and one needs to leave the area immediately.

In 2012, I woke up in the morning and headed towards Springs mine with my colleagues. On our way, I saw a huge shadow in front of me it was a rat but it was running here and there looking to escape. At the very moment, I felt weak. Then I decided to go back home. I donated mbuva yangu (packed food parcel) to my colleagues. I decided to go back and market (meaning soliciting for work from those who had the gold-rich rock to be 'crushed'). Before 12 noon, hardly an hour after I left my colleagues, I heard that there was a rockfall accident and all my six colleagues perished. A total of 40 miners died in this incident, some were relatives married to my sisters. Up to this day, it haunts me, I thank my ancestors for protecting me from this disaster.

The spiritual realities of the Zama Zama reflect broader experiences and expressions of the urban in Africa. It creates both a form of order and morality and reinforces or produces new forms of exclusion Wilhelm-Solomon (2016). But spirituality offers more than just a means of making sense and coping with the challenges that the urban poor face. A broader reading of these practices suggests the need to reframe how the Zama Zama interface with urban realities. Here additional questions on land possession, historical land dispossession and communal access to the resources of the land become pertinent questions. The stories of the Zama Zama suggest the remaking of an urban enclave in which the spiritual and the physical exist side-by-side, where normative and legal frameworks are interpreted through spiritual lens, and where present and future realities are informed by the past.

* * *

Mining, therefore, is connected to land in social and spiritual ways. And the township then is more than just a space that miners move within, and across. It is a space bound by socially produced norms. The absence of government authorities and services, creates a vacuum in which new forms of governance fester. A form of governance where connections and money are power, and where the weak remain further vulnerable.

The labour of gold mining is more than just physical work. Mining is located on land that holds gold, the wealth of the Creator. Mining is connected to spiritual beliefs and practices of how to engage with ancestors. Mining is more than a personal livelihood. It requires collective effort in treading gently and correctly, careful reflection of one's own intentions and of how the community as a whole will be impacted. This approach is echoed among other Indigenous groups who also holds and sanctify minerals, for example, the Maori who consider jade and other minerals to be sacred (Ruckstuhl et al., 2014). Such an approach has not been fully explored in mining in South Africa. Recent transformation to the sector has considered socio-economic benefits for surrounding communities when mining licences are appraised, but efforts to include the sacred, and spiritual values and beliefs of communities towards land and natural resources have not been part of the mining policy directive as yet. The Zama Zama in their small-scale informal mining demonstrate aspects of a deeper connection to land and Indigenous beliefs that have the potential to inform more a socially just ethic in a sector that has for centuries been exploitative.

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The Accident

Abstract In this chapter, I use a case study of an underground accident to illustrate the pervasive forms of exclusion that the urban poor face. It follows the story of Florence, the wife of a miner who has been injured underground, and subsequently arrested, as she and others like her interface with the criminal justice and public health care sectors. Through these engagements, the chapter constructs an argument of the informalisation of governance in South Africa and its dangers.

Keywords Hospital · Accident · Court · Police · Zama Zama

I know one day I might get underground and never come back.

Mining is dangerous work. Over the last century and a half, the extraction of gold has come at a price of thousands of lives (Moodie and Ndatshe, 1994). In South Africa, the national government and mining companies are legislated to pay close attention to preventing fatalities and accidents in the formal mining sector. It is well documented that work in the informal sector carries additional health and safety risks, and this is particularly true for informal mining (Cadiz, 2016). Yet the response to accidents in the informal mining sector, by authorities is often to close off shafts, or arrest miners on charges of trespassing or being in illegal possession of minerals. Little attention is paid to regulating informal mining, recognising it as a livelihood strategy and developing appropriate

regulatory frameworks to make conditions safer. This approach reflects a position of prioritising property and capital rights over the rights of the poor to a decent livelihood and is also common elsewhere in the world (See for instance how the poor and migrants are squeezed out of informal mining in Indonesia [Spiegel, 2012]).

Informal mining is even more dangerous than industrial mining. As an unregulated sector, statistics are not easily available and much of what happens underground remains hidden from public view. Miners in this study were afraid to report incidents or seek help when things go wrong for fear of retribution from the police, in the form of arrests, fines or an end to their source of livelihoods. This echoes other work which found similar sentiments among the Zama Zama (Johnson, 2016; Ledwaba, 2018). Yet the danger remains real and ever present. Johnson's report suggests that between 2012 and 2015, 312 people died while informally mining in South Africa, a number that is increasing year on year. Fatalities in informal mining are caused by a number of factors: rock falls, accidents involving the use of explosives, gas poisoning and suffocation. In addition the fierce competition for access to shafts and the antagonistic relationship between miners and police and private security companies employed by mines also results in violent clashes, murders and gang wars. Here in the west of Johannesburg, the smell of danger hangs in the air.

The construction and response to the everyday risks and dangers that miners face in their work and in their communities suggest a general narrative of precarity and disenfranchisement among the urban poor and marginalised in South Africa. In this chapter, I use an example of an underground accident in the mines to critically examining how it reverberates in the lives of the miners creating further risk and uncertainty as they navigate the health care and criminal justice systems. In doing so, I suggest that what is playing out here in the margins of Johannesburg reflects broader patterns of how the state is misdirecting its resources and power to hurt, rather than help the poor. In negotiating the complexities of legality and illegality, this group of miners are engaging with an alternate form of hybrid governance in which formal and informal actors, institutions and processes are the norm.

* * *

On 2 September 2016, some of the Zama Zama 'open a belt', in other words they discover a gold-bearing reef. The rumours go around and

around, getting louder, and bolder: *“A gold belt has been opened”*, and everyone gets prepared to go into the shaft, everybody hurries. On Friday, and Saturday, and Sunday, they all go, alone and in syndicates and with family or new-found friends; the husband and the wife forget their quarrel and they go; those who are working, leave their jobs that day and go; and those with kids leave them with the old neighbour; they all go to the mine. Equipment is hastily put together, supplies are found and bought, and prayers are quickly mumbled. Several entrances to the mines are used and there is a steady stream of men going underground. Above ground, there is excitement and anticipation.

“Did you hear? People were coming out with a 5 litre bucket and it will give them R 15,000, Aw!”

R 15,000 means food the whole year, it means the roof will stop leaking, and I can leave my husband who beats me, it means I can marry the woman I love, I can send my kids back home to my mother, I can pay my father’s tombstone and make him proud.

“R 15,000! Aw!”

And so they all hurry, hurry, faster now, bring all the tools, the rumour gets louder, and louder.

“A golden belt has been found!”

On September 6 the excitement has faded into fear and grief. There has been an accident underground. The message is picked up and carried in the air, through frantic calls and text messages, it reverberates through the townships. The families all come running, from Langlaagte park and Tshepisoong, Mathole, Braamfisher Sol Plaatjies, Durban Deep, even—Duduza people all Lesotho people, Zimbabwe people, they all come, there are wives and children and uncles and aunties, and neighbours and friends and cousins and they all come to the shaft. They pray, and cry and wait, and wait. The shaft resembles a dark hole of danger, and everybody is afraid.

Now that there has been an accident, everyone turns to prayer and to the Sangomas who are imploring the spirit to turn off the smoke. *“Let the bodies of our beloved come out so they can rest in peace, so that they can*

lay where their forefathers came from". The crowd sings and chants, hums and nods, dancing as they connect to the spirits. Prayers and sacrifices are offered, oaths are made, and money is pledged.

THE RESPONSE

It is a beautiful spring day. The sun is warm overhead, but not yet too hot as it will be in a few weeks' time, the winds of August have calmed down, and the early morning winter frost is just a memory. At the shaft, there is a group of people clustered in a tight circle, chatting quietly and watching the spectacle unfold. Police, paramedics and rescue teams are here. An important Minister from the Department of Mineral Resources has come. There is media everywhere, filming the shaft, and interviewing anyone who want to come in front of the camera. Some young men guffaw at the Minister's empty promises of supporting the Zama Zama, others admire the luxury German cars of the motorcade that brought him here, a young man tries to get close and is threatened by a protection officer. The Minister goes on and on, how they are there to protect the community, how people need to follow the rules so that no-one gets hurt, "don't go underground" he pleads. "We will provide for the community, our government will create jobs, look at how many houses we built? If you need anything we are here", he says, and then he is gone. "What about the people inside", everyone asks, but their voices remain unheard.

The police take charge and move the crowd out of the way. The shaft is sealed with concrete, the rescue teams say it is too dangerous for them to go underground and leave, and the police try to shoo everyone out of the park. Throughout all this, Siphso remains hidden in plain view, one of crowd lurking around. Then later, when all the officials have gone, and the media have filed their stories, he jumps into action. Quickly, the concrete used to close the mine shaft is blasted open, the barriers erected by the rescue teams and inadequate padlock installed by the police on the park fence are all broken down. Where the rescue teams and police stood a few hours earlier, now stands Siphso, smoking his cigarette, a tattered baseball cap on his head, hands thrust into his pockets. Even when the Minister and the police were here, it was *he* who held the real authority: whose word was respected, who was able to chase off thieves and rival gangs, and who will organise the help needed underground.

The next day there are crowds of people at the shaft, worried and praying, gossiping and selling. The shaft had been re-opened and Siphso is

watching and waiting. The police are back and hover in the background, watching and waiting too. After a few hours, Michael, a 27-year-old Zama Zama, is the first to come out of the shaft that morning. He is restless, wild-eyed with fear and exhaustion, his clothes are torn and he is covered with dust and blood and sweat. Everyone crowds around him and he gesticulates wildly, the words tumbling out: there has been an accident underground, *“nobody is moving there”*, he says, *“some are dead, some, they are alive, and only they can’t move because of the smoke, the smoke stays in your throat and you can’t breathe, and it makes you weak so you have to crawl, lucky you if you can crawl, crawl out then like a baby, up and up the passage until you see the light. But there at the bottom, you can’t see, and it is hot, too hot. My uncle is inside the shaft”*, he says, and breaks down crying. But the crowd push forward still more, *“what about so and so, and what about so and so?”*. They desperately start yelling, their voices catching in the lumps in the throats. Michael is surrounded, and he is overwhelmed. Siphon pushes to the centre and quietly announces, *“we have to get them”*.

But the rescue teams reiterate that it is too dangerous to continue and they need to secure the shaft before anyone else can go down. A plan is hatched. *Baba Mabena* and *Baba Mulauzi* (two Elders) call a meeting with all the family members who are affected by the accident. They take charge making a count of those that are missing and then withdrawing to try to deal with the police. The discussions take some time, and the crowd get tired and sit down but respectfully watch and wait. There is an ebb and flow to these negotiations, each man takes their time, leaning on a stick, explaining, imploring, quietly at first, and then louder, gesturing wildly and then submissive. The police are listening respectfully as if the Elders were their uncles. Eventually, they move away from the shaft, their silhouettes drawn long by the sun, dancing on the mine dumps as the old men recede, the police van following them. Slowly news of a deal with the police has emerged. The miners will form their own rescue teams, while the police look the other way. The Zama Zama can enter the shaft, but only from the side entrance not the main one, where the media is not watching. There is hope again, and women cry out, as men busy themselves to go underground.

The Sotho people, the Zimbabweans, they all make plans to go underground, everyone united in the same belief: you cannot leave someone in the mine, the ancestors will be angry, now is not the time to be afraid, they need to be courageous. Down they go, slowly, remembering not to “jump any bodies” they find for this will be disrespectful to the dead but

to go slowly, treading carefully underground for their own safety and out of respect for their compatriots. Some rescuers are tempted to take the stones they find in the men's pockets and bury them to retrieve later, but then the smoke comes again, and they too fall down. When no one emerges, yet more rescuers go down and this time they do not search the men's pockets and they do not take what is not theirs.

As the sun rises overhead and the shadows lengthen, a vigil is set up at the shaft. Florence who worked in the same syndicate as Gloria is here, she has abandoned her street stall nearby to hear about her husband, Eddie, who was inside shaft. Both are Zimbabwean and have been living and working in this community since 2008. As miners come out, she asks about him, describing his stature, naming his home village, and the nicknames he has in this community to help identify him. She hears that he is still alive but not able to walk. And so she prays, harder, louder.

Gradually over the next two days miners emerge from the shaft, dusty and weak, some are being carried and some stumble out, paramedics are summoned and they take the injured to the hospital. As each miner reaches the surface, the crowd sing and praise the Creator, crying out of worry and relief. Late in the day as the sun dips and the chill settles in, another group emerges and Eddie is carried out, he is taken by private car to a hospital. Siphonhwezi arranges for the shaft to be watched overnight and a small fire is lit in an old paint tin. Over the next few days, the bodies of miners are brought out, slowly at first and then one almost every hour, dusty, and covered in the rags that the miners, who have turned rescuers, wrap them in. Each one is brought to the surface and identified where possible, carried away by mourners and families. Behind the scenes, Siphonhwezi has made arrangements with funeral parlours and embassies for the remains to be carried, and washed and repatriated. Documents are made of those without any, and permits are secured. Money is raised to cover the high costs of paperwork and bribes.

For the poor safety nets come in the form of family and friends, community burial societies and *stokvels* (informal saving schemes). Bank loans are inaccessible to the poor who have no steady income, or the migrants who have no secure documentation. There are no government emergency grants or additional social security mechanisms available. For those who work in low-waged sectors such as domestic work, gardening, or even retail, it is time to plead for favours from the bosses in the suburbs. These are the voices of the desperate in times of need.

“Ma’am my brother, has died, please can I get R 1, 000; please can I have an advance on my pay, I know it’s still early in the month, please”.

“Please can I take some days off, I don’t know maybe 4 days or maybe 5, it depends on the border, and how quickly the papers come, but I need to go home?”

“My husband, sir, he has died we need to bury him I need to borrow some money please.”

“Yes I need this job but I also need to go, please ma’am”

And for the ones whose bosses say no, or who have no jobs tending the gardens, or cleaning the homes of the middle class and the rich in the neat suburbs down the road and across the town, the loan sharks are there, circling, ready to pounce.

For those that died, this is how it has ended. All the roads have led to this day, this moment. All the hopes for a better future disappear, and all the dreams are crushed. But the struggle for those left behind continues.

ENTANGLED WEBS OF PRECARITY

As the spirits do their work of healing and rescuing and returning souls to ancestors, above ground the state brews its own potion. The news is that those taken to hospital have been arrested, and family members, including Florence spend two days and hundreds of rands travelling to several hospitals in the area, pleading with security guards to access wards, trying to communicate with hospital clerks and nurses, turning the other cheek as they are spat on and called *makwerekwere*.¹ Finally, they find some of the miners under police guard in nearby Krugersdorp, about an hour further west. After days of waiting, searching and praying, they are confronted by a police guard and denied access to visit their loved ones, to hold their hands and pray by their bedside, to offer some homemade food, to apologise for that quarrel, or perhaps to hug and kiss.

Section 27 of South Africa’s Constitution states “that everyone has the right to have access to health care services, ... and no one may be refused emergency medical treatment” (Government of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The language is deliberately broad and inclusive to ensure no differentiation between residents and immigrants, between rich and

¹ Makwerekwere is a colloquial and derogatory term used by locals toward Black, African migrants in South Africa.

poor. In practice though, access to health care in South Africa for migrants and the poor is complex. The South African healthcare sector consists of a large, underfunded public sector that is responsible for the health of over 80% of the country's residents, and a small, well-resourced private health-care sector that caters to the minority that can afford it. The public health system is crippled by poor administration, underfunding and corruption, and is unable to meet the increasing demands of a growing population that is burdened by malnutrition, disease and substance-related trauma and ill health (Matatiele, 2021).

Access to health care for the poor in South Africa is severely constrained. This is perhaps most sharply illustrated by what would become known as the Life Esidimeni tragedy. In late 2015, the South African government decided to transfer 1,711 patients from various mental health facilities, managed on contract by a private sector partner, Life Esidimeni, into the care of 27 non-profit organisations. This resulted in 144 of the most vulnerable people dying, and 44 people simply falling off the records with no trace of where they are. A subsequent investigation found that none of the non-profits were licensed, that the transfer by the provincial health authority was contrary to the policy set out in South Africa's National Mental Health Policy Framework, and that a provincial court erred in dismissing an application brought by an advocacy group, to prevent the transfer. In other words, government failed in its duty of care (Ferlito & Dhali, 2018; Life Esidimeni hearing report, 2018). In 2019, The National Prosecuting Authority stated that it had insufficient evidence to prosecute. To date no one has been held responsible for the deaths and suffering of the patients. An inquest into the deaths is currently taking place where evidence is being presented in plain view that demonstrates the multiple failures of government.

For non-nationals including migrants and refugees and asylum seekers, there are additional complexities to navigate in search of health care. The National Health Act and the Refugees Act both emphasise that everyone can access public health care. The Health Act states: "All persons in South Africa can access primary health care at clinics and community health centres" while the Refugees Act provides: "Refugees in South Africa have the same right to access healthcare as South African citizens". The Immigration Act though which governs all non-nationals who are not asylum seekers or refugees, asks that healthcare staff determine the legal status of patients before providing any non-emergency care, and places a

duty on them to report any persons who do not have legal documentation to be in the country. It gets worse though. Given the climate of corruption and xenophobia in the South African public service, even documented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers report being harassed, denied health care, reported to immigration authorities and even detained by police. In essence then healthcare workers and hospitals have become de facto immigration agents, and the right to seek care for migrants is severely constrained by the fear of being persecuted (Scalabrini Centre, 2022).

This is exactly what happened to Florence and her friends. Within the group only one man is undocumented, his asylum permit had lapsed, the rest hold valid work or asylum permits, and one was indeed South African. But the hospital staff decided that they were undesirable: they looked scruffy and poor, they were migrants, informal miners and therefore likely to breaking some law and not deserving of health care. Instead of treating them, they called the police who arrested them.

Over at the Helen Joseph and Leratong hospitals, a similar hustle plays out; other miners who have non-life-threatening injuries are denied admission because they are foreigners. The security and clerks turn them away, but the police intervene as they are under police guard and eventually, they get admitted into overcrowded wards, and dirty beds with no linen, handcuffed to the bed. The bribe to get a bed at Helen Joseph is R 350, over at Leratong its just R 150 because as the rumour goes you will die there anyway. The weary nurses ignore everyone for at least 3 days, threatening to call the immigration authorities for the families unless they produce original immigration permits (the certified copies of their documents that they carry are not deemed valid), and speaking in Sotho, a tongue that many do not understand. Then a man dies at Leratong. Now the doctors are angry because the injuries were not serious, the family learn later that the patient's wounds had turned septic and that he was not fed for several days. Families arrive to collect the remains and face another battle from the mortuary; providing documents, and passports, work permits, and death certificates, paying undertakers, pleading and appeasing so that their loved ones can be returned to the soil. The land which holds all the riches and all the hope, which has caused all the suffering and the fear, now gets ready to receive the soul and spirit again.

Florence cannot find Eddie in any hospital. She learns from a cleaner at one hospital who is also Zimbabwean that several miners had been discharged and were detained by the police. With a group of six other

women, they travel to all the police stations, asking the police officers, “*who is in the holding cells, where is so and so?*” And they are laughed at, or ignored, and some are arrested because they did not have their permits with them, and others bought chicken and coke for the police officers so they could visit their husbands for a short while. But Florence still does not find Eddie. At the police station, they are unable to see their husbands but they hear that they are in the holding cells and will go to court, likely for a bail hearing.

There is relief for Florence that at least he has been found and is alive. She frantically tries to find a lawyer to help him, and hears of a human rights organisation in the city centre which might help. After waiting for several hours, they turn her down saying that they work only on human rights cases, not on informal mining issues. So at 5am on the day when he is to appear in court, when the sun has just risen and the city is stretching to life, Florence, her neighbour Lizzy and others take two minibus taxis to go to court. It is still early, even for the morning rush and the driver stares at them. But they ignore him and bundled in their blankets, they feel warm and protected. Downtown the city centre is coming to life. Pigeons fly en masse and get ready for a day of squabbling on the sidewalk. The streets have been swept clean the night before, the roads are empty and the sun is beginning to warm the city up. They walk this way and that, this is unfamiliar space for them, and they feel exposed and scared. The Johannesburg Central magistrates court is a short walk away from where the taxi leaves them, on the busy Ntengi Piliso Street, named after the famous jazz musician. It is an impressive three-story building, designed by the English architect John Perry in the 1940s, complete with separate entrances which were once used to segregate entry by race. The exterior of the building has intricate design elements, with granite and stone, and wooden framed doors, leading to a large and grand concourse inside, more than 100 m long with marble columns (Portal, The heritage, n.d). Nearby is a statue of a young Nelson Mandela in a boxing stance, he would frequent this court as a practising lawyer in the city. Many of his clients were disenfranchised Black people facing legal troubles for not holding the correct permits to be in the city or in settling disputes with landlords or employers.

Today the beautiful building is closed in by an ugly steel fence mounted atop a concrete foundation and topped with barbed wire. When Florence and the others arrive one of the many security guards at the courthouse is ending his 12 hour shift, and he sends them to this door, and that line,

and instructs them to wait there. They sit on the pavement and pray. They have not seen their husbands since they went underground more than a week ago now. Around them the city stirs to life, a few street traders began setting up their stores on or near the fence of the court building. One elderly woman with a small baby on her back, likely a grandchild carefully turns over 6 crates that have been stored in a nearby shop, covers them gently in cloth and carefully arranges fruits in twos or threes in plastic bowls for her display. Other snacks hang off the fence behind her. Minibus taxis and buses begin screeching up and down the busy street, a new melody now for Bra Ntemi to play to.

Florence and the others are allowed inside the building, and at 8 am in court number 34, the miners connect from prison via video link. First 3 men appear: Oscar, Mike and Tongai who were among the first group of miners who came out of the shaft after the smoke spread and were arrested at the shaft. Eddie was arrested when he was taken to hospital. The judge talks and the lawyers talk back, and the women strain to understand what is going on. Eddie and the others only speak Chigaranga a dialect of Shona, and there is no Shona translator, only English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Xhosa Zulu and Ndebele. It takes long, and the magistrate is getting frustrated. Without identification papers or a fixed address, not much can be done, and the bail hearing is postponed for another 10 days. The court has promised to bring a Shona translator the next time.

And so it drags on, through the warm spring and into the sweltering summer months. Eventually, the men are charged with trespassing. The case gets postponed time and time again, *“no verifiable address, the copy of the work permit is not clear, the ID looks damaged”*, the police cannot find the charge sheet, and at the next hearing they bring the wrong one for another case involving other informal miners. The court appointed lawyer for Eddie seems more interested in his phone than his clients, and requests for a meeting with the family are ignored. Several more hearings are postponed after he fails to show up. By December, the Highveld storms come charging in every evening. Crashes of thunder, and bolts of lightning with heavy downpours send the women rushing back to their homes seeking shelter from the rain; another wasted day in court or in prison, dashing between finding a lawyer, an agent, a fixer, anyone who can help them, visiting their family, bribing the guards to let them in, and hand over food and cigarettes. Siphon is called in eventually and he works his cell phone trying to find someone to help. But the news of the accident has been all over the media and everyone is scared to get involved

for fear that they will be arrested or harassed by the police. Eventually, one of the buyers says to Siphio that he may be able to help, but it would not be cheap. His contact negotiates with the police and the lawyer representing the state, money changes hands and the men are finally released in late January after paying an admission of guilt fine of several hundred rands for trespassing.

Access to justice for migrants and the poor, like access to health care is conditional upon local favours and feelings. The rights that they are guaranteed in the Constitution remain theoretical. Instead, each day, each case is determined in its own way, on the whims of those involved: the police whether it is the arresting officers, station commanders or officers responsible for the holding cells; the courthouse clerks, the lawyers, the judges, the queue holders (who hold a spot in the long lines), the private security who guard over the court house or the immigration agents. At each stage of accessing justice, there are corrupt individuals who will either create problems or make them go away (Buur & Jensen, 2004; Hornberger, 2011).

A corrupt criminal justice system further excludes already marginalised groups (Bullock & Jenkins, 2020), making it: “more difficult for them to ... participate meaningfully in politics and business” (p. 1) (Bullock & Jenkins, 2020). But it is not just bad news for those who fall victim to it. This form of governing leads to parallel nodes of authority and power, an alternate, dangerous reality based not on laws or formal position, but on informal networks, patronage and corruption.

THE PEOPLE, THE STATE AND THE HUSTLE OF GOVERNING

Where are our leaders? Do you see them? Ha! All we see is the blue sirens flashing (when the ministerial motorcades whizz by in luxury German cars). I had someone curse me because I bought a plasma TV with my money I made from mining, and my leg was swollen and sore. I went to Helen Joseph (hospital) and the nurses laughed at me and said, ‘this one he is crazy’, and I waited and waited and showed everyone my leg. But no one helped me. One nurse said I am crazy talking about a curse; and another said ‘you worrying us you are problem Zimbabweans, you give us more work’, and the security said he will call the police because they know the Zama Zama like me, we are

doing illegal mining. So, I came home and my wife's sister told me to go see the sangoma, and he cured me, no problem.

The police rob us, from the mine shafts they come and take everything they need, and ask us questions, 'oh I see you have a new Samsung (cell phone), from where is it? I will confiscate it unless you give me some money', and if I don't give the money, they will take it and they beat me also.

Across the Highveld of Johannesburg, stories like these are told and retold. In poor communities on the edge of the city, in townships, and taxis, the narrative is similar: exclusion and injustice, a rhyme that rocks us forward to a new day with its struggles, just as it holds us back in poverty and injustice. It is a story familiar to these lands, steeped in the colonial histories of discrimination, marginalisation and oppression. The architecture of the South African apartheid state enabled corruption. This was a state which deliberately withheld information, censored news, thrived on secrecy and lacked transparency (Camerer, 1997). It paved the way for sustained corruption. Today, corruption and mis-governance perpetuate and intensify the suffering of the poor.

In the communities where the Zama Zama work and live, the role of the state ebbs and flows on its own whim, ever present in its ability to punish for by-law infringements, co-opting private security for informal housing evictions, and conveniently absent when needing to provide services, resulting in an ambiguous relationship between people and their government. This makes for a complex relationship between the poor and the state, and one which calls into question the very notion of citizenship on which modern democracies, including South Africa's rely. Kabeer (2002: p. 1) writes:

Conventionally, citizenship has been traced to the rise of the nation state and taken to refer to membership of the nation state and the formal duties and rights which membership carries (Shapiro, 2000). This understanding has been contested by those who point out that such membership may mean little to its members in other contexts compared to other forms of affiliation with which they identify.

In modern times, citizenship is also the vehicle through which the state and its people incur duties and responsibilities towards each other, a tool by which people can exercise agency, make their voices heard and hold their leaders to account. But in post-apartheid South Africa, citizenship and in turn governance is diluted by a range of complex, intersecting dynamics.

People of colour including regional migrants, but local Black Africans in particular, were legally excluded from full rights of citizenship during colonial and apartheid systems of rule. Denied basic rights to vote, protest or advocate, people were compelled to seek alternate ways to make their voices heard. They held no faith in elected leaders, how could they when that authority was used to oppress them? Centuries of white colonialism and decades of apartheid also subjected Black communities to severely under-serviced, or completely absent resources in policing, education, health care, housing, recreation and sanitation. Instead people found representation, and access to resources at the local level, with church leaders, community activists, business people and the local underground branches of the exiled political leadership (Sithole, 2015). Invariably these structures were entwined, with political and personal relationships and systems becoming blurred.

Over the decades this morphed into a citizenship of the excluded, an identity and sense of belonging characterised not by rights or laws, but by *relationships* shaped by local level dynamics, reinforced by the laws of reciprocity, or opportunism, and fuelled by individual personalities rather than official positions. Here, people, like Siphso, loom large, in every community and on every street corner, controlling spaza shops, community centres, jobs, public transport routes for minibus taxis, and providing policing and protection (Meth, 2013).

In 1994, democracy was introduced into *this* climate, a set of active and complex processes that people had been accustomed to, not into a vacuum on which laws and rules could be imposed upon. And so, what was before, in the deep soils of township politics, and the rhythm and daily lives of the urban poor would nurture what would come after. Moreover, two significant choices by the ANC as governing party in the 25 years since the end of apartheid would sharpen this pathway. First the adoption of a neoliberal macroeconomic policy framework largely crushed any hope of a developmental state and meant that the poor got poorer; and second, corruption took stead at all levels of politics, business and society further dismantling any respite for the poor (Habib, 2005; Segatti, 2013).

And so, a constitutional and democratic order built around a fine framework of rights remained a mirage for the urban poor. Their reality is characterised by a precarious citizenship and a life of intersecting precarity, living on the margins in multiple ways. Economically excluded from jobs in the formal economy or business opportunities, and politically marginalised with pleas for services unheard. As Kabeer asks: “We do not

know what citizenship means to people, particularly people whose status as citizens is either non-existent or extremely precarious nor what these meanings tell us about the goal of building inclusive societies”.

For the Zama Zama, governance and citizenship emerge in the form of social mobilisation, an effort to organise society, and to provide access to resources and services. Built entirely on social capital, it begins to redraw nodes of identity and power, creating both room for inclusion for those who fall on the margins of formal governance and drawing new, and sometimes violent boundaries, in excluding others. The governance around a shaft, who control access to it and under what conditions, who provides support, who benefits from what it brings forth, is mirrored in the surrounding informal communities. Here a broader network of local property owners, business people and community leaders have created multiple informal nodes of power and authority. These are the ways in which the Zama Zama are striving to stay afloat. To survive another day.

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CHAPTER 5

The Future

Abstract In this chapter, the arguments and evidence from proceeding chapters are woven together to discuss how informality can lead to an erosion in democracy. Additional political analysis from 2021–2022 help frame the argument of a precarious future for the country’s political stability. At the same time, the book ends on a note of hope by returning to the voice of the Zama Zama, and how they construct agency and meaning in the face of ontological insecurity.

Keywords Religion · Prayer · Zama Zama · Formalisation · Politics · State Capture · Looting

Where to from here? What do these pervasive forms of precarity, and informal relations mean for governance, and for the work of the Zama Zama? This final chapter looks at possible pathways moving forward: how marginalised residents carve out space for voice and agency through protests, what might happen to South Africa if the absence of the state persist, and finally what future there might be for informal mining in the country.

The miners and the people living in the township do not care for the government. When things go wrong, instead of calling local city councilors or voting in elections, they make their voices heard through protests. South Africa is known as the ‘protest capital of the world’ (Bekker, 2021)

with an average of 11 protests each day (Alexander et al., 2018), and the frequency and violence associated with these in South Africa is increasing. Protests are more than just a once off event or a demonstration of specific grievances. In South Africa, protest actions are deeply moving voices of agency and transformation among the poor. The mobilisation of ordinary people, the coming together of coalitions from churches and other faith groups, trade unions, non-profits and local community groups to amplify access to rights are characteristic of the anti-apartheid struggle, when civil liberties were curtailed for people of colour, and this momentum of taking to the streets has persisted in the democratic dispensation (Bond, 2013; Chigwata, 2017; Ngwane, 2010; Pithouse, 2008).

But what exactly are protests and what role do they play in governance and state making? Protest action has been theorised as a “rebellion of the poor” a way for marginalised communities to make their voices heard and to get the attention of those in power (Breakfast et al., 2019). They can also be seen as “weapons of the weak” to borrow from Scott’s work on everyday forms of resistance among villagers in Malaysia (Scott, 2008). In this sense, protests are a way to re-establish relations within a community and with the state. Alexander defines protests in townships as “socially-organised protests that place demands on people who hold or benefit from political power (which includes, but is not limited to, local politicians)” (2010: p. 25). Although there are strong arguments and evidence to suggest that this form of protest is concerned with service delivery, Pithouse argues that the frequent, violent forms of service delivery in South Africa today are concerned with issues of citizenship, belonging, legitimacy and inclusion (Pithouse, 2008). In urban poor communities, where the government is absent, and the people are desperate, protests have now become a way to carve out and claim power. And this has become dangerous for democracy.

* * *

In the southern winter of 2021, a series of events played out that would plunge urban poor communities into further precarity and push the country to a proverbial edge of instability (Singh, 2021). On June 29, the affable former president, Jacob Zuma, was sentenced to 15 months in prison for contempt of court after he failed to appear before a National Commission of enquiry into corruption and abuse of state power, known as ‘state capture’. Following a few back and forth legal challenges between

his legal team and the state, the court ruled that he had until July 7 to hand himself over to the police, or face arrest. Meanwhile, a small but strong group of loyal supporters began to camp outside his rural home, Inkandla, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, vowing to protect him from the “politically motivated “smear campaign” that Zuma claimed he was a victim of. Eventually, eleventh-hour, backroom negotiations between Zuma and the government resulted in the former president being taken into custody by the police (Singh, 2021).

The response from his supporters was swift. After another legal challenge was thrown out by a judge on July 9, a campaign to mobilise support for Zuma was organised and a series of protests erupted. In the previous five years, protests had changed gear across the country. Since the success of the 2015 #FeesMustFall movement when university students demanded access to free, decolonial education, protests often called for a national ‘shutdown’ and employed tactics of blocking roads, burning tires and spreading fear and disunity on social media. For this campaign, protestors organised a #NationalShutdown on the N3, a major national highway between Durban and Johannesburg, close enough to Zuma’s homestead to bus in mobilisers, and important enough for the live media coverage that ensued. A series of long-haul trucks at the heart of the economy that ferry much-needed goods from the port of Durban to the commercial hub of Johannesburg were forced to stop, drivers hauled violently out, and the trucks set alight, effectively closing a major road and making a strong statement. What happened next, was devastating and unpredicted. Within days KwaZulu-Natal unravelled into anarchy, protestors and looters taking over the street, shopping centres looted in plain view of rolling television cameras and police officers who stood helplessly watching. Police were dismal and slow in response, unable or unwilling to act. In their place citizens stepped in, setting up armed roadblocks on entry points into neighbourhoods, arming themselves as they patrolled homes and businesses, and co-opting private security guards to patrol, and arrest anyone suspected of being associated with the looting and unrest. Effectively, the people became a form of de facto police, taking the law into the own hands, and at times breaking it, as they tried desperately to protect lives and livelihoods. Invariably, vigilantism crept in, and racial dynamics spewed to the forefront, with racial profiling of Black African people at roadblocks by mainly Asian, ‘Coloured’ and white ‘community protectors’ (Singh, 2021; Vhumbunu, 2021).

For days the country was on the edge, holding its collective breathe to see if it will tip into civil war, or if somehow the government could hold things together. Eventually, the army was called in, the riots and looting were stopped and economic activity resumed. But the damage was done. The relationship between people and the government, at the heart of the disorder and chaos, was fractured, and the fissures in government was all too evident on television and online. Within days the country's historical racial tensions surfaced, threatening to undo decades of a democratic and non-racial order and further deepen economic and political instability in the country. At the end of a fortnight of terror, 337 people had died, the currency had lost 2% of its value, the economy suffered R 23,5 billion of loss, and racialised and ethnic identities became sharper and politicised (Singh, 2021). The absence of the state, the individualist survival of every person, the emergence of local mobilisers and informal authorities were evident. But this is not new. These dynamics, and this socio-political reality, has been evident in informal communities for decades. What the Zuma mobilisation did was to push the politics of the poor in informal townships into mainstream middle-class suburbia and onto the front pages of the major newspapers.

THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

How did South Africa get here? How did one of the most powerful nation-states which thrived on a perverted sense of order and surveillance during apartheid, which metamorphosed into the darling of donors in the 1990s, eschewing liberalism in its progressive Constitution, its rainbow nation of multiculturalism, its vibrant civil society and free press, an independent judiciary and a robust democracy become reduced to a gangster state? In *Political Order and Political Decay*, Fukuyama writes, “strong established institutions are needed to enable order”. He goes on to argue: “...a functioning healthy bureaucracy is essential to maintain the law and order” (Fukuyama, 2014). In South Africa, a progressive Constitution exists side-by-side with broken, bruised or absent institutions. Recent investigative journalism and academic research have shown the existence of a ‘shadow state’ created by former President Zuma between 2009 and 2019. The question of course is whether the state has eroded or whether it was never present for informal communities in the first place. The recent literature on state capture in South Africa argues the former: that South

Africa's healthy institutions and strong state have been undermined by corruption and collusion.

And while Zuma indeed leveraged the shadows for his own gain, he did not create them. This state of malaise is a deeper and wider infection which has been caused by more than the chaos and corruption from 2009. Indeed, its existence lies in a disconnection between citizens and the state caused by the fundamental absence of the state in providing basic services and the erosion of any trust in formal authority due to years of state-fuelled oppression during apartheid. The vacuum that has been created by this disconnection has been filled with all sorts of political and economic opportunists. For Zuma and his friends, it was the capitalist, those with the money to buy power and those with power who would sell it, i.e. "networks [that] reciprocate" (Fukuyama, 2014). In Siphosiso's position, and indeed in the broader politics, economics and social conditions in the informal community in which informal mining occurs, we see a fundamental absence of state-centred, institution-driven governance.

Communities in which the state is absent, or its resources subverted for personal gain, are common across urban and rural South Africa (Friedman, 2019; Haffajee, 2021). And people like Kennedy know this first hand. Kennedy has lived in South Africa for most of his adult life. He was recruited to work in the gold mines through TEBA and lived in the mining hostels in one of the areas where informal mining is now common, on the west rand of Johannesburg. When the mines closed, the hostels were sold off, and as a former worker he has preferential access to buy a new home that was being built by the government nearby using part of the retrenchment package he received from the mining company. But municipal corruption set those plans aside, instead the homes were sold to relatives and friends of the municipal workers. Kennedy alleges that it quickly deteriorated into an ethnic game, with houses being sold to people from a certain South African ethnic group who resold or rented them to foreigners to make money. In 1994, almost 2 million people had no homes in South Africa. In the next 25 years, nearly million homes would be built by the national government for the poor. Despite this, the housing backlog in 2019 was at 2,3 million people. Some of the problems with access to housing can be attributed to population growth and migration, but corruption through nepotism, bribery and misallocating title deeds to the wrong person are mostly to blame (Hyslop, 2005; Maluleke, 2019).

Kennedy's experience and that of the many others in this book whether of the criminal justice system, health care or protection point to a pattern of governance in which the state has failed. The unravelling of law and order and the rise of anarchy during the political mobilisation, looting and violence in July demonstrate the extent to which the authority of the state has eroded. But what has emerged in its place?

Occurring outside the state, the lives of the miners illustrate how communities respond to state failure. Globally, there is an engaging literature in this field. Hagmann and Peclard's concept of a negotiated state draws out the formation (and failure) of the state by a range of nonstate actors. Menkhaus's mediated statehood shows how sub-Saharan states in the context of protected violence do governance without a government, and Meagher argues for a nuanced understanding of hybrid forms of government which include "both corrosive and constructive forms" (Hagmann, 2010). In South Africa, there is emerging work on the potential for positive outcomes for communities when the state is not functioning adequately (Rubin, 2011). A state is a "central authority that can exercise a *monopoly of legitimate force* over its territory to keep peace and enforce the law" (Fukuyama, 2014) [own emphasis]. Unlike many of its neighbouring countries, especially in the wake of independence, South Africa has boasted of a successful transition to democratic governance, characterised by free and fair multi-party elections held every 5 years, a progressive Constitution, strong and impartial institutions to uphold it, a free press and a vibrant civil society that can (for now) operate without fear or favour. The question, therefore, is less of its legitimacy than of *the state's reach* and consequently of its ability to hold a 'monopoly of power'.

This is the new South Africa. A country in which there is a hybridity of governance, a form of authority consisting of multi-actors, where formal and informal systems interconnect (Gross, 2017). Whether in the form of community protection forums and neighbourhood safety groups, or civil society-led service provision of basic amenities (e.g. the non-profit The Gift of the Givers has been instrumental in drilling boreholes for public hospitals), these forms of governance form part of what (Raeymaekers et al., 2008) terms the "creativity of African societies in coping with limited statehood and political turmoil". The governance of life and livelihoods in informal communities' points to a pervasive sense of multiple nodes of power, of which the state holds only one lever. Alongside the state, and in some instances in a direct replacement of it, there is a range

of local, patronage base systems that claim and exercise control over their spaces or “territory” (Jinnah, 2016).

The danger of course, is that left unchecked, an absent or misdirected state, can create space for dangerous, violent and discriminatory politics that fuel and embolden populism, hate speech, fake news, xenophobia, ethnic and racial discrimination and vigilantism. As we see in the lives of the Zama Zama this is especially destructive for the poor.

* * *

Sipho is chewing the end of a cigarette as he sits on a rock near the entrance of the shaft. The dust has settled on the accident and he has done what he could to help the miners trapped underground, to recover the remains of those who died, to comfort the ones left behind and to do good for the families far away. But now the shaft is opened again, and the tears have dried, and the work has to go on, for the livelihoods of thousands of people depend on it. Sipho is whimsical today, he dreams of being the real boss of this shaft one day. Perhaps have an office here instead of the concrete pillars he sits on, a nice desk and chair?

Efforts to support the informal mining in South Africa are limited. If formalised, the benefits would be multi-fold, and much-needed: safer conditions for miners, participatory and inclusive economic development for communities, skills transfer that would benefit environmental rehabilitation, increased tax revenue for the state and a supportive economy that could create jobs and livelihoods. Similar calls are being made around the world to promote, rather than punish informal mining (Bester & Groenewald 2021; Hilson et al., 2017; Shen & Gunson, 2006; Hilson & Yakovleva, 2007). But there is hope. Informal mining in the diamond sector in the country appears to be moving towards recognition and support. A coalition of informal mine workers together with other civic society groups working in the area of land rights, environmental justice and informal workers’ rights have successfully advocated for reform. In 2018, the government issued thousands of mining licences to informal diamond miners (another group of Zama Zama) in the Northern Cape province (Khumalo, 2018). This group faced similar challenges to the Zama Zama in the gold sector: violence, subject to arrest, dangerous conditions underground and little proportional benefit from their mining once diamonds entered the formal supply chain. Alongside the licences to mine, supportive measures for assisting the Zama Zama to sell their

diamonds in the formal market and access to land where mining takes place were also made (University of Cape Town, 2018). Similar efforts are also underway to support women in the sector (Tran, 2022). But with centuries of dispossession and inequities to address, progress is slow.

For now, this life, this precarious life, this life of hardship, exploitation, oppression and equally of agency and opportunity continue to characterise the stories of informal miners in South Africa. From early prospect mining, to organised industrial labour, and the work that now falls in its shadow, mining has been central to the lives, identities and social context of millions of mostly Black people in the region. In the stories told here, the desperation to access basic rights, housing, food, health care, employment and education is an everyday reality. For migrants, there are additional issues to navigate. For migrants there are additional issues to navigate: xenophobia, physical insecurity, and insecure documentation. The latter from a broken immigration system that is unable to process legitimate asylum claims or naturalise neighbours who have lived and worked legally for decades in the country. For internal migrants, those forced to be away from loved ones and the confidence and peace this brings; to be able to go home and put your feet up after a long day, instead of being forced to make two homes, and speak in two tongues. To think about a family, and responsibilities, and traditions left behind in fertile valleys while opportunities, and risks and promises emerge in the dust of Johannesburg's sprawling shadow.

And for women, oh for women it is the burden of their bodies; of childbearing and child rearing, while they are barely able to protect themselves. *“Will you watch my child”, she asks the neighbour, “I have a job today?” “Can you let me pay rent next week please, she asks the grumpy old landlord?” My children here, and my children at home, they need me. I must walk on, even though my body is tired, and my hands are chapped, my heart is sore, I must walk on, work on, carrying this child inside of me, or behind me, I must go on.* Around her is a violent rage, she sees the bruises on her friend's face, and she hears the screams in the township at night. But she must go on, as her mother did before her.

And so, on they go on. Old and young, onward they go hustling another day. It is an arduous journey navigating physical hurdles in the form of an unsympathetic, and corrupt bureaucracy, a broken public transport system that keeps people away from services and the state. It is a mental hurdle to overcome colonised ways of being that exclude the Black who are poor.

The resignation lingers in the way the miners at court hang their faces when the case is postponed again, or when the docket is lost, and the ways the wives wrap their blankets around them when the police arrive at the shaft following the accident. It is a resignation that this is the way things are, the way they have always been, if you are poor and Black. The fancy words in the Constitution might say you have rights, but the system still oppresses you.

So there is no faith no hope in the state, no desire to turn to it when needed, because it has not provided, and cannot be trusted.

But there is comfort and there is strength, and there is resilience in the midst of this suffering. Sundays are glorious days! The sun shines bright and the women wear white dresses that are bleached and ironed to stiff creases. Their heads are adorned with snug turbans and headdresses, and their faces shine as they gather under the shady trees. The dust and the thorns of the Highveld landscape retreat as they sing the glories of their Lord.

The singing and the hymns revive the crowd, energise them, make them and put their struggles into perspective. And within the crowd there are sisters who care and brothers who ask about each other, and visit the sick and care for the old. And when the prayers are over and the songs have been sung, there is the food! Beautiful warm food cooked with love: steaming spinach spiced with flavour, creamy butternut and cabbage that has grown in patches near their homes, crispy chicken feet from the hens that were squawking outside their homes yesterday. And the food is always plentiful, because they are a people of God.

The spiritual is always here; the symbols and rituals guiding the men as they go underground, removing danger and guarding against greed; the souls of the ancestors comforting the bosoms of the women as they grind above, driving away jealousy. This is a people who have love for God, and this love guides their ethics, and guards their resentment, fills them with hope and strength and creates a community bound by spiritual ties and material needs.

As so the rock from the Creator is brought forth from the ground, and the sand is dusted, and the gold glitters. As the seasons change, they run from the late afternoon summer storms, putting out their buckets to collect the rainwater as it seeps through the tin roofs of their homes; and huddle around the woodfired stoves to ward off the bitter cold winds of the winter Highveld, until it is spring again and they can gather outside

and plant some vegetables and sing under the trees, praising the Creator and the land He has given them, full of promise and risk, and hard work, and hope.

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INDEX

A

Accident, 4, 27, 32, 59–61, 63, 69, 81, 83
African National Congress (ANC), 6, 37, 72
Apartheid, 7, 10, 14, 25, 27, 46, 47, 71, 72, 78, 79
Artisanal mining, 15, 16, 29
Asylum seekers, 66, 67
Authority, 4, 5, 27, 62, 66, 70, 72, 73, 79, 80

B

Buyers, 29, 34–40, 50, 70

C

Church, 38, 72, 76
Colonialism, 72
Constitution, 3–5, 70, 72, 78, 80, 83
Corruption, 5, 47, 66, 67, 70–72, 76, 79
Court, 41, 66, 68–70, 76, 77, 83

D

Decolonial, 17, 39, 77
Dudula, 14
Dynamite, 31, 32, 40

E

Economic Freedom Fighters, 52
Economy, 3, 4, 7, 10, 13–15, 25, 28, 29, 31, 38, 40, 47, 49, 50, 72, 77, 78, 81
Environment, 17, 24, 81
Ethnicity, 50

F

Fatalities, 59, 60

G

Gauteng, 7, 48
Gold, 1, 3, 7–9, 11, 12, 15, 23, 25, 27–31, 34–39, 41, 49, 52–55, 59, 60, 79, 81, 83
Gold mining, 2, 3, 9, 10, 27, 29, 33, 39–41, 50, 53, 55

Governance, 1–4, 6, 12, 16, 17, 46,
47, 49, 50, 52, 55, 60, 71, 73,
75, 76, 79, 80

H

Hospital, 64, 65, 67, 69, 80
Housing, 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 26, 28,
45–47, 71, 72, 79, 82

I

Illegality, 15, 29, 60
Informality, 2–4, 6, 13, 16, 17, 45
Informal livelihoods, 2
Informal settlement, 17, 37, 38, 46,
49

J

Jobs, 1, 4, 6, 7, 13–15, 25, 28, 33,
34, 48, 61, 62, 65, 72, 81
Johannesburg, 1–3, 7, 12, 14, 23,
25–28, 30, 34, 37, 39, 40, 48,
60, 68, 71, 77, 79, 82

K

KwaZulu-Natal, 14, 77

L

Labour migration, 7, 10
Land, 2, 6, 7, 17, 24, 33, 35, 39, 41,
46, 53–55, 67, 71, 81, 82, 84
Lawyer, 68–70

M

Mandela, Nelson, 5, 68
Migrants, 2, 9, 10, 12–16, 25, 36,
38, 40, 48, 50, 60, 64–67, 70,
72, 82
Mine dumps, 23, 26, 47, 63

Mining, 2–5, 7, 9, 10, 14–17, 24,
27–32, 34–40, 46, 50, 52, 53,
55, 59, 60, 68, 75, 79, 81, 82
Mobilisation, 73, 76, 80

N

nzuzu, 53

P

Police, 6, 15, 32, 36, 38, 40, 49–52,
60, 62, 63, 65, 67–70, 77, 83
Police station, 68
Poverty, 2, 3, 5–7, 13, 16, 24, 39,
40, 46, 71
Power, 27, 28, 40, 47, 49–51, 55,
60, 70, 73, 76, 79, 80
President, 5, 76–78
Protest, 5, 72, 75–77

R

Race, 12, 13, 25, 47, 68
Ramaphosa, Cyril, vii
Refugees, 48, 52, 66, 67
Religion, 6, 50
Rock, 30–35, 39, 54, 60, 71, 81, 83

S

Sangoma, vii, 53, 61
School, 36, 38, 41, 49
Services, 1, 3–6, 13, 29, 39, 47, 50,
55, 71–73, 79, 82
Shaft, 23–25, 27, 28, 30–32, 34–36,
39, 40, 53, 59–64, 69, 73, 81,
83
Small-scale mining, 15, 24, 29
Social capital, 2, 33, 73
Spirits, 47, 49, 53, 61, 62, 65, 67
Sponsors, 29, 34, 37, 38, 40

State, 2–7, 10, 12, 16, 17, 31, 47–50,
52, 53, 60, 65, 70–72, 75–83
Syndicate, 34, 35, 40, 61, 64

T

Township, 12, 14, 28, 33, 37–39, 41,
45–52, 55, 61, 71, 72, 75, 76,
78, 82

U

Underground, 4, 7, 24, 25, 28–32,
34, 36–40, 50, 53, 54, 60–64,
69, 72, 81, 83
Unemployment, 5, 6, 12–14, 16, 24,
40

V

Vulnerability, 2, 12, 36, 66

W

Women, 2, 13, 14, 25, 28–30, 32–36,
38, 40, 41, 48–50, 53, 63, 68,
69, 82, 83
Work, 2–5, 7, 13–17, 25, 27–36,
38–41, 45–50, 52, 53, 55, 59,
60, 64, 65, 67–69, 71, 75, 76,
79–82, 84

X

Xenophobia, 2, 13, 14, 38, 67, 81

Z

Zama Zama, 2–4, 6, 15, 17, 24, 28,
29, 33, 39, 40, 46, 50, 52–55,
60, 62, 63, 71, 73, 75, 81
Zimbabwe, 10, 31, 36, 40, 50, 61
Zuma, Jacob, vii, 5, 6, 76–79