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SHADOW AND IMPRESS: ETHNOGRAPHY, FILM, AND THE TASK OF WRITING HISTORY IN THE SPACE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The historiography of natural-resource extraction, especially in colonial contexts, is often torn between two temptations: to represent these histories in narratives commencing with discovery, and thus rupture; or to render them in tales of continuity and thus an identity that transcends history. In the increasingly common scenarios of deindustrialization, these twin temptations are sutured together via the figure of return. Thus, accounts of postindustrial life often construe it as a return to forms of life that preceded capital-intensive industrial practice, and are written in the idiom of the "artisanal." In doing so, they mistake a mere form of appearance, which is to say an image of the past, for its repetition, effacing the degree to which the materialities of industrialization shape, as both shadow and impress, the corporeal gestures and unconscious habits of those who inhabit its ruins. At the same time, and in an era of memory studies, truth commissions, and heritage projects, people who inhabit the spaces of deindustrialization often believe that they can survive the destruction of their life-worlds only by giving themselves to be seen in the form of an image that resembles the past, and in a museological register. In this essay, based on two decades of field research in the areas of deep-level mining in South Africa, and an ongoing documentary film project with informal migrant miners called *zama-zamas,* I attempt to find another form and method for producing a historical and dialectical anthropological understanding of postindustrial life. The essay is an experiment in narrative that attempts to redeem a photographic and cinematographic tradition that is often culpable of reproducing the above-named temptations. The essay thus weaves together forms of the close-up—a gesture that seeks to get hold of history by means of an image—with contemplative reflections based in the temporally extended accounts of those who inhabit the ruins of deep-level gold mines. In so doing, I propose a means of rethinking historiographical practice in the context of an always already vanishing present.

Keywords: postindustrial, mining and natural-resource extraction, history and historiography, anthropology, photography/cinema, artisanal, South Africa

> "There's always a return to ruins, only to the womb is there no return."
> —Sol T. Plaatje[1]

Early histories of gold mining in South Africa are typically introduced with reference to a discovery of the precious metal in 1886, on Farm Langlaagte, not far from Johannesburg. Often, these accounts share in the exuberant sense of a fated encounter that prospectors themselves expressed upon the revelation of glitter in

1. Sol T. Plaatje, *Mhudi* [1930] (London: Heinemann, 1982), 186.

their diggings. But, as is so often the case with colonial historiography, the claim to discovery rests on a repression or a disavowal of what came before. Mindful of this lacuna, but unable to fill it, Francis Wilson introduced his now-classic study, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911–1969,* with the observation that "Nobody knows how long gold has been mined in Southern Africa for in 1867 old workings were found on the banks of the Tatie river which flows through Botswana."[2]

It was in light of that discovery, and in the penumbra of a global gold rush already on the wane in the US, that prospecting was undertaken in the area of the Witwatersrand, commencing around 1871. By 1906, South Africa had become the largest producer of gold, a rank it would hold until 2006—thanks to the invention of industrial processes capable of separating gold from the pyritic rock in which it was embedded in the deep levels of the Witwatersrand, and to the development of racialized social technologies geared toward the maintenance of a transient, cheap, and rights-deprived labor force.[3] Thus, the historiography of South Africa's gold mining, whatever its narrative of discovery, inserts itself *in medias res* into a past of which it has remained only fitfully conscious and which in many ways remains veiled, as it were, in shadow.

The alternative to an overly "evental" account of the extractive industries in South Africa (and elsewhere) cannot be found in the mere postulation of continuities, however, despite the apparent resemblances between the forms of extraction that can be discerned in moments separated by vast chasms of time. As South Africa's gold-mining industry enters its twilight, the temptation to read processes of informalization and deindustrialization as a kind of return to a preindustrial mode of life becomes especially tempting. That lure resides most seductively in the technological simplicity, not to say rudeness, of the instruments used by informal miners in contemporary South Africa and throughout the continent.

2. Francis Wilson, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911–1969* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 14. The renowned gold rhinoceros that was found at Mapungubwe, near what is now the South African/Zimbabwe border, and which dates to the thirteenth century, was only recovered from a royal burial site in 1934. Archaeologists now recognize that the kingdom of Mapungubwe emerged as an imperial center thanks to wealth that arose from its command of the gold trade with the Swahili coast, and that extended as far as China. Nonetheless, that era was largely effaced by apartheid historians. See Leo Fouché, *Mapungubwe, Ancient Bantu Civilization on the Limpopo: Reports on Excavations at Mapungubwe (Northern Transvaal) from February 1933 to June 1935*. Edited on behalf of the Archaeological Committee of the University of Pretoria (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1937). For a recent account of the debates about gold's place as a signifier in early state development, see Thomas N. Huffman, "Mapela, Mapangubwe, and the Origins of States in Southern Africa," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 70, no. 201 (2015), 15-27.

3. The most important advance in this respect was the discovery, or, as Charles van Onselen says, the "re-application" of the MacArthur-Forrest process, which entailed dissolving the gold-bearing ore in a cyanide solution and then precipitating it with zinc. The MacArthur-Forrest process increased the recovery rates of gold from 60% to 90%, increasing the profitability of what was otherwise relatively low-grade material and ensuring South Africa's ascendancy among the global gold-producing economies of the world. Van Onselen delineates three main epochs of the early mining period, each of which was marked by a blockage caused by technical or physical limitations, a consequent fall in the fortunes of the finance houses and gold-mining entities operating on the Rand, and a technological solution followed by more intensive investment and subsequent social reformation. See Charles van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2001), 13, 3.

Pickaxes, hammers, tin pans, makeshift sluicing tables, and hand-grinders often comprise the totality of their equipment. And, as many writers note, they often seem to resemble those used by miners in ancient or premodern times.[4] Yet if, in contexts where alluvial mining dominates, these methods and instruments seem to incarnate a return to origins, or a rapprochement with the premodern, the kind of informalization that takes place in the shadow, and after the closure of deep industrial mines, cannot efface the determining force of modernization—technological and sociopolitical. That history haunts every gesture and infuses the consciousness of those who find their way amid the ruins. Thus, as much as the fantasy of discovery, it is necessary to resist the consoling lure that would render the loss of technology as a resurrection of the artisanal. Colonial capitalist and industrialized forms of mining, and the historiography that is their excrescence, both appropriate prior epochs and modes of life, which they interrupt and transform, and efface them in the phantasmatic figure of origin. The task confronting those who would write the history of extractive economies in South Africa (and elsewhere) is thus to steer a course between two monstrous temptations—the Scylla of absolute origination and the Charybdis of uninterrupted continuity—that afflict both formal historiography and every account of social life that grounds itself in a recognition of the historicity of the present.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE: OR, THE PAST IS YET TO COME

If Francis Wilson could observe, albeit in passing, that the histories of precolonial mining had vanished in the silence of undocumented social displacements, his own work, and that of other (more) left-leaning social historians, aimed to provide a critical account of how the social and political crises of the apartheid order (as they appeared in the 1960s and 1970s) had been precipitated and overdetermined by the ways in which the gold industry, and the larger political economy for which it functioned as the driver and symbolic center, had been structured as a system of racialized capital.[5] Denaturing history, and historicizing what had become second nature, they attempted to expose the structural violence that had otherwise receded below the horizon of visibility and assumed the (ideological) status of necessity. The so-called "need" for cheap labor was often explained in colonial and then apartheid accounts in terms of geological exigencies: the low grade of the ore, the volatility of gold prices, the limits of technology, and the supposed natural propensity of Africans (and for a time, Chinese) workers for manual labor and their assumed incapacity for skilled work.

4. Even when arguing that emergent types of informal mining may compete with or undermine "traditional" structures of authority, the literature on informal mining—throughout Africa—emphasizes the sense that its implements bear a striking resemblance to preindustrial technology. See, for example, Emmanuel Ababio Ofosu-Mensah, "Historical and Modern Artisanal Small-Scale Mining in Akyem Abuakwa, Ghana," *Africa Today*, 64, no. 2 (2017), 73.

5. The major figures in this debate were Martin Legassick, "South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence," *Economy and Society* 3, no. 3 (1974), 253-291; and Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," *Economy and Society* 14, no. 1 (1972), 425-456.

Yet already by the time that Wilson published *Labour in the South African Gold Mines,* and as the pages of *Economy and Society* filled with essays debating the nature of the oscillating migratory system on which the mines rested, gold was losing its place as the largest generator of value for the South African economy. By 1974, that role had been usurped by the manufacturing sector.[6] It was thus in the mode of belatedness that apartheid-era historians of South Africa turned to the analysis of gold mining. Their object was already receding. Nor is this fact diminished by the continuing halcyon glow that gold continued to cast over the cultural imagination of South Africans, and that was projected in the statements of the South African Chamber of Mines and in apartheid propaganda addressed to the outside world. Nonetheless, and with that combination of lucidity and lamentation that Benjamin defined as the ethical mandate of historical dialectics, Wilson concluded the penultimate chapter of his book with speculations on what would happen after the closure of the mines.[7] He prophesied "some ghost towns," but despite having documented what he termed systematic "social destruction" among the black working classes, whose deprivations and dislocations had been caused by coerced migration, and despite the fact, which he grieved, that "whites [had] chosen to move toward the equilibrium of slavery," he knew that the processes by which the violence of a new system are normalized over time would ensure that a second dislocation, caused by mine closures or even a nationalization process that excluded noncitizens from employment under a more democratic dispensation, could be equally destructive.[8] Hence, the nearly apocalyptic tone of his conclusions. Restrained but certainly not muted, remonstrations accumulate at the end of *Labour in the Mines of South Africa,* where the word "peril" itself menaces his contemporary reader in the tense of future anteriority. Wilson asked his readers, whose actions might have changed the direction of the future, not merely, What is to be done? But: What will this moment have been? Entailed within this urgent but implicit query, which submitted his present to the hallucinatory gaze of a future, if not final judgment, is the recognition that history is best understood as being written from the point of view not of a vanishing past, but of an always already vanishing present. Wilson could not yet anticipate the debates that would engage historians in the aftermath of the turn to memory studies, including those revolving around South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which would see a modern and progressivist historiography supplemented and partially displaced by a concern with the persisting force of the past in the lives of contemporary subjects. Nonetheless, his simultaneous reference to a prior history, shrouded in mystery but propelling the

6. Sam Mhlongo, "Black Workers' Strikes in Southern Africa," *New Left Review* 1, no. 83 (1974), 41-49; Rick Turner (Gerry Maré), "The East London Strikes," *South African Labour Bulletin* 15 (1974), 26-32. Because he was banned by the South African authorities, Turner published under the name of his friend and ally, Gerry Maré. For an understanding of this history in relation to more recent crises in the mineral sector, see Rosalind Morris, "Learning to Learn: Linking Marikana and Labour History," *South African Labour Bulletin* 37, no. 2 (2013).

7. Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History,'" in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*, transl. Edmund Jephcott *et al*., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings [1938] (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 400; see also "On the Concept of History," especially 390-391.

8. Wilson, *Labour,* 139. The speculations about the end of the mines appears on 136-139.

boom in gold prospecting, and the future closure of gold mines, shares something of their ambivalence.[9]

Half a century after Wilson made his plea, the Chamber of Mines would issue a report estimating that formal gold mining using traditional methods will likely cease in South Africa by the year 2033.[10] And much of what Wilson feared has come to pass, including the increasing exclusion of noncitizens from formal employment in the gold mines in the now black-majority-ruled country—an eventuality that Wilson had described in 1972 as "particularly inappropriate," given that the mines' "development has been so enormously dependent on labour from other countries."[11] This essay inserts itself here, in another present whose now self-conscious mode is that of disappearance. If, as Benjamin says, "it is more difficult" for the historian "to honor the memory of the anonymous than it is to honor the memory of the famous, the celebrated," it is the task of an anthropologist to give testimony, however fugitive, to the perceptions of those unheroized figures and especially to their own sense of being in time.[12] The purpose of doing so is not to make the present available for a future historiography in which the past could be made present in an illusory fullness and artificial accessibility (this was the hubristic aim of salvage ethnography), but to learn from people who inhabit specific histories, such as those described by Wilson and others, how it seems or will have seemed to them, to understand what questions they pose of it.

Among the complications that hamper this task today, in an era of social media and the nearly universal dissemination of the technologies of self-documentation, is the omnipresence of that form of consciousness that not only anticipates its own future recall, but that lives in thrall to the idea of being seen from afar, and that gives itself to be seen as that which is to-be-remembered. Such anticipatory self-presentation suggests an effort to arrest history, or at least to answer Hofmannstahl's commandment (especially poignant for ethnographers of unlettered worlds), that historians "Read what was never written," with an image that they cannot, in the future, refuse.[13] In the course of doing ethnography and making

9. Berber Bevernage has persuasively argued that the double turn to memory that emerged from Holocaust and critical race studies, and the global phenomenon of truth commissions as the institutional apparatuses of transitional justice in post-conflict circumstances (he cites South Africa and Sierra Leone in particular), has generated a conflict between the drive to treat history as that which can be put behind one, and thus forgotten—a process ironically allied with positivist historiography—and a trauma-based conception of the effectivity or performativity of the past in contemporary circumstances. See "Writing the Past Out of the Present: History and the Politics of Time in Transitional Justice," *History Workshop Journal* 69, no. 1 (2010), 111-131; and "Time, Presence, and Historical Injustice," *History and Theory* 47, no. 3 (2008), 149-167.

10. Chamber of Mines, *Mining SA 2016* (Johannesburg: Chamber of Mines, 2017).

11. Wilson, *Labour,* 153.

12. Benjamin, "Paralipomena," 406. He is surely paraphrasing the apocryphal Biblical text, which would also be recovered by James Agee and Walker Evans as the title of their volume about impoverished tenant farmers in the US, namely *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The relevant passage: "There are some of them who have left a name,/so that men declare their praise./And there are some who have no memorial,/who have perished as though they had not lived;/they have become as though they had not been born,/and so have their children after them" (Sirach 44: 8-9).

13. The quotation, from Hofmannsthal's *Death and the Fool*, appears in Benjamin, "Paralipomena," 405. By "unlettered," I do not mean to imply illiterate, or preliterate. Rather, I mean to encompass in this category the vast domain of experience that goes formally unrecorded or unheard, ideologically repressed, or simply dismissed by dominant systems: the discourse of the subaltern, rather than the silence of anthropology's "primitive."

a film in and around the now-aging mines of which Wilson wrote, I have been compelled to think about these questions in ways that have demanded both the reconceptualization of historical and specifically dialectical anthropology, and the recognition that the task of historical understanding is already being enacted, precisely by those who inhabit the areas around the mines.[14] What I hope to show in the following pages is that, if there is a counter-history being produced in this space, now threatened by the specter of imminent ruination—and I think there is—it is split and doubled. Its assertions are often implicit, gestural, and imagistic, though they are also often explicitly narrative. On the one hand, this history emerges in a simulacrum of preindustrial life, which is brought to consciousness *in the image of the past,* in the very gestures of postindustrial mining, although such gestures are neither continuous with nor identical to that distant precedent. On the other hand, and at the same time, it declares the newness of the forms of life that are being generated in the space of deindustrialization, forms that are yet overdetermined by those produced in and through industrial capitalism. It is my contention that this duality becomes poignantly visible and is redoubled in ethno-cinema, where the aspiration that Walter Benjamin described as a function of technological reproducibility—namely the "urge . . . to get hold of an object at close range in an image"[15]—competes with the force of the storyteller's narrativity.

This duality gives to life in the space of deindustrialization an aura of belatedness, of being "out-of-joint" with time. And it is accompanied by specific affects. In the world of informal secondary extraction, what follows industrialization—in the sense of both coming after and pursuing the routes and paths laid down by industrialization—is saturated by an attitude of anticipation that, bereft of any faith in progress, assumes the sense of fatalism common to much gambling. Not for nothing are the informal miners of South Africa referred to as *zama-zamas,* one of the meanings of which is "the gamblers." Let me then turn to that scene, that drought-ridden plain above a prehistoric sea, where mine dumps stand in for the rocks of temptation, singing their siren song.

TAKE TWO

In 2008, more than three decades after Wilson speculated on the matter, I asked people living on the Far West Rand, around what remain the deepest mines in the world, what they imagined would happen when the inevitable depletion of ores occurred and the mines closed. This question elicited the kind of silence that bespeaks the unthinkable. Given that the municipality (Merafong) in which I was working had been constituted in and for the mines at the beginning of the apartheid era, and that, as indicated above, the prior colonial settlement of the

14. I began work on this film, long after having met the residents of the community described in this essay, in 2016. *We are Zama Zama* is currently in postproduction.

15. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in Eiland and Jennings, eds., *Selected Writings,* 251-283. The notion of ethno-cinema belongs to Jean Rouch, and I am inspired by its principles, in the sense of recognizing the force and productivity of the camera in the ethnographic scenario. I do not, however, share Rouch's prohibition on second takes or the principles of continuity editing. See Jean Rouch, *Ciné-Ethnography,* ed. and transl. Steven Feld (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

territory had been spurred by the discovery of gold at the end of the nineteenth century, the very possibility of a future after gold seemed almost oxymoronic. It is not that such a question had gone unasked prior to my own interrogation. The mining companies operative in the area had publicly floated a few proposals for sustaining life in a postextraction economy. These included a rose-farming initiative and a lion park to be built on rehabilitated mine dumps. Both were transparently incapable of absorbing the labor force to be rendered obsolete by mine closures; the latter also induced anxiety about the risks for children and wandering cattle. Nonetheless, and perhaps because of the improbability of the proposals that had been set forth, my questions about a future after gold seemed to provoke perplexity. The rhyming bond between metal and settlement seemed irreducible: each the raison d'être for the other, and both together perceived as the condition of possibility not only for the municipality but for the nation's historical being.

Eventually, one and then the other person arrived at a potential means of survival, of living after gold.[16] The community could be sustained, I was told, if mining could become the object of a museological project, one that would make the *history* of gold's mining, rather than its actual extraction, the object of a touristic industry. The area was the foundational home of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM, created in 1982), and to the extent that people conceived of the museum in anything more than generic terms, they imagined that labor history and the place of the NUM in the struggle against apartheid would be central features of its narrative.[17] The museum would thus counter that heroic account of national capital enunciated by the large corporations—whose partnership with the South African state had been a feature of governance since even before the Anglo-Boer War—with a workerist alternative, equally saturated with romantic overtones, and not without tragedy.[18] By 2008, moreover, the memorial

16. The rose-farming initiative of Goldfields is ironically called "Living Gold."

17. Some years later, the heroism of the National Union of Mineworkers would be exploded and the union resignified as a predatory accomplice of the state and mining capital. This displacement of NUM, first in the platinum sector and then in the gold sector, occurred as a relatively immediate effect of the Marikana Massacre in 2012, when Lonmin mine security and the South African Police Services, with possible abetting by NUM, opened fire and killed thirty-four striking mineworkers and militant proponents of the upstart Association of Mineworkers and Construction Workers (AMCU). It is difficult to overestimate the sense of national trauma that resulted from that catastrophic event and the revelation that *both* the post-apartheid state *and the ostensible organ* of worker self-representation were haunted by the same alliances and indifference to the interests of the indebted poor as had operated under National Party rule. On the traveling discourse of the Marikana Massacre, following the movement of activists between the platinum to the gold sector, see my "Mediation, the Political Task: Between Language and Violence in Contemporary South Africa," *Current Anthropology* 58, no. S15 (2017), S123-S134. On the massacre itself, see I. G. Farlam, "Marikana Commission of Inquiry: Report on the Matters of Public, National and International Concern Arising Out of the Tragic Incidents at the Lonmin Mine in Marikana, in the North West Province," chaired and authored by I. G. Farlam, https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/marikana-report-1.pdf. Also, Luke Sinwell, Siphiwe Mbatha, *et al.*, *The Spirit of Marikana: The Rise of Insurgent Trade Unionism in South Africa* (Johannesburg: University of Witswatersrand Press, 2016); Keith Breckenridge, "Revenge of the Commons: The Crisis in the South African Mining Industry," *History Workshop Online*, November 5, 2012, http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/revenge-of-the-commons-the-crisis-in-the-south-african-mining-industry/.

18. For a brief period, I worked with the municipality on a proposal for such a mining museum, and consulted with TRACE, the design company behind much of South Africa's new museology. However, this project ended shortly after the deposing of the then-mayor, following disputes between

function of testimony that South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996–1998) had established as a means to enlarge and correct nationalist historiography had lifted off from its original purpose and acquired a reified value within the emergent economy of the heritage industry, one that was also being mobilized by corporatized ethnic formations.[19] And it was against that backdrop that I asked my question, and received in answer the dream image of that strange form of afterlife—at once preserved and suspended—that the museum grants to the dead and the past more generally.

The future anteriority that I solicited generated what one might describe as a form *nachträglichkeit,* a split and doubled temporality that is both belated and anticipatory, and that is linked to the retrospective assignation of traumatic significance to events, which become both foundational and haunting as a result.[20] In 2008, in much of the formal gold-mining sector, or at least that portion of it still resting on substantial reserves, both the gesture toward future anteriority and the sense of belatedness that it would call forth were somewhat premature. Gold prices were rising significantly, deferring the closure of some mines, enabling the industrial reclamation of the tailings, and tempting a few scavengers to find what they could in the refuse and abandoned shafts. And yet, not far away, the future of loss whose anticipation I had summoned was already past. Not the future of self-memorialization, but the future of deindustrialization. In 1993, on the cusp of the democratic era, Durban Roodepoort Deep (DRD), one of the oldest and largest mines on the West Rand, a mine close to Farm Langlaagte, came to a virtual close—partly because it had been largely mined out, partly because gold prices had declined to their lowest point since 1980 (a temporary trough, it turned out), but also partly because it had become the scene of violently politicized interethnic conflict in the last days apartheid.[21]

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the national ANC and the local municipality over a possible redemarcation of provincial boundaries, which would have seen the municipality transferred from the jurisdiction of Gauteng Province to Northwest Province.

19. On the corporatization of ethnicity, see Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). On the rise of the heritage industry, see Ciraj Raseel, "The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstruction of History in South Africa," *Kronos* 26 (August 2000), 1-21; and Annie Combes, "Witnessing History/Embodying Testimony: Gender and Memory and Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (2011), S92-S112. The literature on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is vast and varied, and cannot be indexed, never mind summarized here.

20. On the concept of *nachträglichkeit,* see Friedrich-Wilhelm Eickhoff, "On *Nachträglichkeit:* The Modernity of an Old Concept," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 87, no. 6 (2006), 1452-1469. On the spectrality of the past, as well as the contradictory impulses within museology, to preserve but also contain and economize that spectrality, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* transl. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Derrida's remarks about the possible drive to forget within archivization, articulated in relation to the TRC ("Archive Fever in South Africa") and Verne Harris's trenchant response ("A Shaft of Darkness: Derrida in the Archive,") appear in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, et al. (Cape Town: David Philips, 2002), 38 and 61-82, respectively.

21. The violent murder of several miners in December 1992 occurred against the backdrop of conflict between the IFP and the ANC, but in this case, local isiXhosa speaking mineworkers and residents from the surrounding community attacked migrants from Mozambique in the mine hostel. The mine's status and ownership is not easy to track, not least because it is so inseparably linked to the complex intergenerational story of the Kebble mining dynasty, much of which remains shrouded in suspicion and allegations of criminal activities, insider trading, and the dissimulation of ownership.

In the aftermath of the hostel fights that proliferated at that time, the company experimented briefly with a neoliberal model of flexibility, restarting operations with contracted-out labor, and bypassing the NUM by directly addressing miners and offering promises of freedom (from bureaucratic regulation, union fees, and limits on bonuses) as compensation for lower and less restrictive terms, if also lower wages.[22]

Finally, in 1997, 110 years after it opened, the mine closed. When, in 2016, almost twenty years later, I interviewed older residents of the area who could still recall the apartheid-era days of operation, they attributed its closure directly to white capital flight, motivated by a fear of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) regime's rise to power. Here is a reduced transcript of the conversation between two men who narrated the history of the closure as we walked around the abandoned mine compound:

A: There's still a lot of money in the mines and . . .
B: There's still a lot of money?
A: These mines were just closed when a black man came into power.
A: They just shut down.
. . .
A: They were upset because a black man was in power.
A: And they shut down, just like that.
B: Oh, they shut down when they heard, freedom is coming.
A: Freedom. And they closed.

I will return to this narrative of a future foreclosed at the end of this essay. For now, we need only understand that, for many years after its closure, the mine lay abandoned, even as mines elsewhere continued to operate. Its material infrastructure was initially disabled by the owners to discourage squatters, who nonetheless ransacked its remaining ruins for electrical cable, bricks, beams, and recyclable fixtures. The only functioning remnant of the mine, its hospital, was burned to the ground in 2007 when the South African government's removals unit, colloquially referred to as the "Red Ants," were called in to evict squatters.

The narratives recounted to me of the apartheid era are replete with tales of forced eviction, but mainly for reasons of indigence and failure to pay rents. The renewal of forced removals in the post-apartheid era incited a new and implacable rage, and a sense of violent regression, one that threatened to cast people out of the time of democratic modernity. These were, many felt, tactics that belonged in the past. In the conflagration, what people feared seemed to materialize as an effect of their very efforts to stave off the forced expulsion from what was otherwise promised as a new beginning, and a new era. In the end, the squatters'

22. Gwede Mantashe and the National Union of Mineworkers, *Contracting Out: The NUM View* (Johannesburg: National Union of Mineworkers, 1995), 153; Jonathan Crush, Theresa Ulicki, Teke Tseane, and Elizabeth Jansen van Veuren, "Undermining Labour: The Rise of Sub-Contracting in South African Gold Mines," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, no. 1 (2001), 5-31, 10. The crucial issue of bonuses tied to productivity is that workers are encouraged to work hastily, and to extend their hours beyond what has been determined are likely safety risks. Bonus pay is clearly linked to higher rates of accident.

incendiary protests and the state's violent response hastened the area's decline, which left burned remnants of buildings and a milieu reminiscent of war zones, establishing its reputation as a zone of lawlessness.

FLASHBACK OR DREAM SEQUENCE?

Into this deliberately ruined landscape of formerly industrial mines and compounds, a new wave of migrants moved—not only to squat in the ruined landscape, but to descend into the now-closed but unsealed shafts in pursuit of gold, which, many of them claim, is growing back.[23] These migrants come mainly from Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. For this reason, I refer to this place as LeZiMo—although it is also home to itinerants from Malawi and occasionally, from the Pedi- and Sesotho-speaking parts of South Africa. Some have experience in mining, but many do not; their previous occupations include fishing, farming, carpentry, domestic work, gardening, and a variety of relatively unskilled jobs. Many have come to join relatives—brothers and sisters, cousins and uncles—and most send a portion of their modest earnings home to sustain other family members. They have nonetheless established secondary households, married or taken up with locals or other migrants, and many have children in South Africa. Largely undocumented, and thus bereft of formal recognition in the papered world, these migrants have traversed the borders at the points where those dividing lines dissolve into the natural landscape or become the smoothed surface across which deterritorializing capital moves. They have walked through the bush, crossed the Limpopo River on foot, or, equally clandestinely, hidden in taxis or lain prostrate in flatbed trucks, concealed by blankets or, if that fails, resorted to bribes, which buy from the border guards and the police a temporary invisibility.

I call these people migrants, but this appellation is not framed in opposition to the refugee—that figure of displacement in the aporia between national and international legality that Hannah Arendt described as the one who lacks the right to have rights.[24] "I am free. No one tells me when to work, what I must do." "I work for no one." "Every man works for himself." Such phrases resound throughout the many conversations I have had in LeZiMo over the past three years. Nonetheless, although these migrants assert their sovereignty at every turn, the predicament of these men and, to a lesser extent, women, will not be captured in the idiom of mobility. They move, true, but they do not enjoy the freedom to *not move* and *to not be moved*. Deprived of the negative ground of meaning, the "ability" that is implicitly inscribed in the term "mobility" loses its sense and force.[25] Here, even in the space apparently vacated by capital-intensive industrial

23. It is tempting to read this notion of earthly regeneration as the sign of an animist ontology, but the situation is more ambivalent than that. Many claim that the fact of gold's constant discovery demonstrates that gold is organic matter, germinated by a persistently fecund earth, but they mock the attribution of personhood or even animate force to that earth, and quickly invoke the mine engineers' own terminology for the venting chimneys, namely "breathers," and insist that their own metaphoricity be granted equal status.

24. On the refugee as one who lacks the right to have rights, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951).

25. In making this argument I am following Samuel Weber's analysis of the concept of "ability"

mining, the economy has taken into itself the function of coercive force so well described by Marx in his account of *ursprünglich Akkumulation* (what we generally refer to as primitive accumulation).[26]

I take this persisting inversion of the relation between contract and force in the economic domain to be a key signification of the term "precarity." In LeZiMo, it expresses itself in a relentless movement without mobility.[27] This movement conjoins spaces—at once material and social—but it also entails a disjointing of time. Or, rather, it involves a double displacement—such that the postindustrial has the preindustrial as its *form of appearance*. Nonetheless, appearance is not identity. However "traditional" or "primitive" the techniques of the *zama-zamas* seem (and this language saturates virtually all public discourse about their activities), their works and lives are entirely conditioned in their possibility and shaped in their forms by the fact of industrialized mining.[28] What looks like a reconstituted

in Walter Benjamin's writings. See *Benjamin's –Abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

26. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1,* intro. Ernest Mandel, transl. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977). See especially chapter 26. Although the retreat of industrial deep-level mining has been temporarily stalled, with both tailings reclamation and a recent (2018) effort to restart limited extraction in the form of open-cast mining in the area, this has only meant a greater marginalization of informal mining and of the *zama-zamas* in particular. Of course, these miners have no ties to the land, and their eviction is no longer part of a process that will drive them into waged labor; it is but the repetition and intensification of an originary dispossession, albeit one on a horizon that lacks the sunset promise of employment.

27. The terminology of precarity may be new, but the analysis of this structure, by which violence is sublated in the economy, was crucial to Marx's analysis of *ursprüngliche Akkumulation*. On recent debates about this concept, and the question of precarity, see my "*Ursprüngliche Akkumulation:* The Secret of an Originary Mistranslation," in *Marxism, Communism, and Translation*, ed. Nergis Ertürk and Özge Serin, special issue of *boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (2016), 29-77.

28. The category of the artisanal is often used, in South African contexts and more broadly, in the conjunction, "artisanal and small-scale mining," and indicated with the acronym ASM. The literature is suffused with reference to the "traditional" nature of the practice, or the "rudimentary" status of the technology. ASM was formally recognized in 1994, under the terms of the post-apartheid Reconstruction and Development Program, but the referent of that legislation was mainly licit, small-scale mineral entrepreneurialism undertaken by citizens. More than a thousand licenses have been granted under this legislation, but in addition, and despite state efforts and professions of a desire to bring the sector under regulatory authority, many thousands of itinerant miners, grinders, and informal processors of tailings operate "outside of the legal framework." The South African Human Rights Commission has estimated that some 30,000 people had been involved in illegal ASM mining by 2015, and P. F. Ledwaba has calculated a tenfold increase of such activity in the decade prior to 2017, noting that poverty, unemployment, and the high cost of licensing for small-scale mining has ensured the relative growth of what I would prefer to call the illegalized (rather than illegal or criminal) sector. Some writers, including Ledwaba, distinguish between informal miners working without licenses, and hence illegally, and those who are involved in overt and/or organized criminal activity, particularly those who operate in abandoned shafts. He refers only to the latter as *zama-zamas,* while conferring on the former the legitimating moniker of "traditional" informal workers. Other writers distinguish among informal miners on the basis of scale. Nonetheless, in most popular discourse, the cloud of illegality and suspicion hangs above them all not only by virtue of the activity, but because of the undocumented status of many of the migrants who are thus engaged. Criminal gangs play their part in this world, but there is still a great deal of independent, self-organized activity, performed by actors who strain against the threat of violent crime and who are far more often its victims than its perpetrators. They share much of the fear that others project upon them as its agents, and they similarly lament the absence of policing in the areas where they work and live. See P. F. Ledwaba, "The Status of Small-Scale and Artisanal Mining Sector in South Africa: Tracking Progress," *Journal of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy* 117 (January 2017), 33-40. Also: Kgothatso Nhlengetwa and Kim Hein, "Zama-Zama Mining in the Durban Deep/Roodepoort Area

continuity with the past (often written under the heading of the *artisanal* in studies of informal mining in Africa), demands recognition as something profoundly novel, if nonetheless haunted by what historiography had previously repressed.[29] It is predicated on resemblance to *and* an often-times explicitly avowed departure from the past. Thus, for example, despite every invocation of the ancestors, which occur daily—in both colloquial gestures of greeting, and on the cusp of descent into the mines—the young men who call themselves *zama-zamas* always draw a distinction between what their parents desired, namely continuity and self-reproduction in place, and what they desire, namely, to go beyond familiarity and be with others, in a manner that is as full of threat as it is of opportunity: "Our parents did not want to know about others, how they do things; we are interested in the new things."

For several decades, formal, large-scale gold-mining operations in South Africa have been undertaken as deep as 2.5 miles below the surface, and the mines are a vast network of involuting networks of tunnels that traverse many tens of miles. These activities depend on massive levels of capital-intensive mechanization, including the drilling of shafts and construction of reinforced cement tunnels underground, the use of pneumatic drills and blasting explosives, automotive removal equipment and electrified rail transport, not to mention large-scale dewatering and oxygenation, as well as cyanide- and mercury-based communition processes and industrial smelting. *Zama-zamas* descend with no more than picks, hammers, battery-operated headlamps, and, on occasion, rubber boots and protective clothing woven from jute sacks. They follow the same routes as industrial miners did, but without the assistance of mechanized carriages and electric transport vehicles. They slide down the shafts with old and fraying cable as their guide, traversing gaping holes on beams that once served as vertical supports. Upon finding what appears to be a potential vein in the rock, they use small amounts of dynamite (about the size of a cigar) purchased on an illicit market to blast rock that they then sort by hand and carry on their backs in bags that once held mealie-meal (cornmeal) or rice. The men stay underground for days and weeks at a time, depending on what they can carry as food and how successful they are in finding gold. Working in small groups of friends and relations, or as men from the same region who share a language, they sleep and eat, work and rest, listen to music stored on cellphones, make offerings to the ancestors, smoke cigarettes, tell jokes about women and stories of home.

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of Johannesburg, South Africa: An Invasive or Alternative Livelihood? *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2, no. 1 (2014), 1-3; Nellie Mutemeri and Francis W. Peterson, "Small-scale Mining in South Africa: Past, Present and Future," *Natural Resources Forum* 26, no. 4 (2002), 286-292; Robert Thornton, "*Zamazama* 'Illegal' Artisanal Miners, Severely Misrepresented by Press and Government," *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2, no. 1 (2014), 127-129.

29. A notable exception in this literature comes from Elizabeth Hull and Deborah James. While still using the terminology of the "artisanal," they depart from much of the discourse on this topic when they claim that the "informality" that has arisen in the mining sector in South Africa is "neither a throwback to some pre-capitalist past, nor an accidental fall-out from a dominant structure" (Elizabeth Hull and Deborah James, "Introduction: Popular Economies in South Africa," *Africa: International Journal of the Africa Institute* 82, no. 1 ["Popular Economies in South Africa," 2012], 5). They argue, further, that "it is the result of intentional retractions of governmental regulation."

Above ground, in the area of which I write, women receive the miners when they arrive, if they have been able to leave the shafts and pass unmolested by police or tsotsis (thugs), back to the "crushes."[30] Immediately, the women set about breaking rock with hammers or other rocks, then grind the broken stone into powder using only bodily energy, returning it to the men who claim it as their individual property. The women are organized in teams under the severe authority of the men who are recognized by other such men as the temporary owners of both the grinding territories and the women's dependency. The men observe the women and test the consistency of the powder, not infrequently demanding that it be reground to produce a finer texture. Those same men mix the powdered rock with water and then pour it over sluicing tables that are made of mud, old planks and ribbed towels, gathering visible gold nuggets and flakes from the table before consolidating and sifting the runoff. This is finally amalgamated with mercury, which the men pass between their bare fingers, feeling the silt for those unusually abrasive elements that signify the presence of gold. The residue of the sluicing processes constitutes the payment for the women, who then reprocess it, transforming the mud into mineral cake by drying it in the sun and then smelting it on wood fires. Each of these substances is referred to as "money," and it is precisely the absence of money in their place of origin that everyone in LeZiMo laments. "There are jobs, yes, but no money," they all say.

At the end of these gendered processes, which differ in both the time they take and the amount of gold they generate, tiny nuggets will be sold into the market, via local middlemen who keep track of spot prices on the international commodities market, and pay in cash. Thence, the gold will travel along the capillary networks that extend from Johannesburg to China and Pakistan, the US and Europe. Most of it, like all gold, will end up as jewelry.

CLOSE-UP, FREEZE-FRAME

What I have narrated as a practical and methodological sequence, decomposable into elementary units, takes place in a scene that is by turns meticulously rationalized and exuberantly ludic. Partly, it is visible as such a sequence because of the cinematographic eye with which I have observed it during three years of filmmaking with the men and women of this area. The gestures recounted here become describable as such because they have been seen in the form of a close-up. And this is true even in the absence of a camera. Indeed, if the camera (and especially the film camera, with its roots in chrono-photography) was once the technical condition of possibility for such looking, it now merely literalizes with its lens, and the demands of its focalization, what Benjamin rightly described as a generalized urge in the modern era, an urge that saturates anthropology, though perhaps no more than any other mode of (social) realist representation. To recall, that desire is "to get hold of an object at close range in an image." And it is related

30. In some areas this work is performed by young men. And occasionally, men who are unable or who do not like to go underground also join the women in the crushes. Their status is lower than that of those who work underground and they earn less money, but they enjoy relative freedom from accident, and the possibility of returning home each night, to family or other kinds of piece-work.

to what Benjamin described elsewhere as a forensic disposition. The exposure of that aesthetic and epistemological orientation is what he discerned in Atget's portraits of Paris, vacated of their residents and thus as empty as a morgue.[31] Yet if the technological liberation of an optical unconscious, whether through close-ups or replays, permits that which "goes without saying" to rise above the threshold of visibility, the sequences of detail need also to be situated in their social fields, lest the arrest of the moment become a fetishizing gesture, which can only "extract sameness even from what is unique."[32] The frozen frame needs to dissolve and resolve in time, to be returned to the flow whence it came, but now as a cipher for a broader, deeper set of histories, and not merely as a form, which is to say an image of that which remains the same.

At the crushes, that flow has a particular tempo; it pulses between the conserving, reserving dimensions of women's labor, and the expenditures that follow the men's. The men who come up from beneath the earth, ghostlike thanks to the dust that cakes their bodies, are quickly bathed and re-attired, and in the euphoria that attends their emergence into the living day, they eat and drink heavily. While waiting for the women to complete their grinding, they gamble: throw dice, play checkers, and bet their earnings on chance. The word *zama* means "to try," in isiZulu, and the reduplicative *zama-zama* means "to keep on trying." As mentioned earlier, it also means "to gamble," and *zama-zamas* are those who keep on trying or seeking, gambling as they do, and more with each passing day. This makes *zama-zamas* those who have not yet lost—at least not everything.

If life underground, for the men, demands that they wager everything, all the time, their struggle lacks the dimension of a dialectic insofar as the only escape from the dependency of life underground is through an irruption of fate: an extravagant discovery, guided by ancestors, perhaps, but always surprising. Yet it is less that possibility—which looms as a wishful specter on the imaginary horizon of every underground miner—than the ordinary recompense of labor that holds people here. The gambling of the *zama-zama* is not like the lottery, they insist; here, they know that they will get "something."[33]

A young *zama-zama* puts the matter succinctly: "You go there to look for money. But sometimes, you can't find money . . . you can't go outside without money. You have to sacrifice yourself, stay underground for three, four, five days, until you get what you want."

This something is irreducibly linked to effort, to both time and the accumulated knowledge that working in the mines generates. That knowledge does not so much lead to efficiency as it enables the men to recognize the opportunities that arise in the spaces abandoned by industry. There, they say, they look for the traces of the old mine's operational centers, seeking out the rock pillars near former blasting sites where, they believe, gold is likely to be found, then remining the area while using old timbers to balance and support the increasingly unstable internal spaces.

31. Benjamin, "Work of Art," 258.

32. *Ibid*., 255-256. Although I think Benjamin was correct in his diagnosis of the urge, I do not share his sense of the liberatory possibilities of the processes that he also linked to the destruction of aura.

33. Ironically, a lottery game called "*Zama Zama*" was introduced in South Africa in 1994.

The spaces underground in some senses appear to be reverting to the status of caves, partaking of a regression that is so often attributed to the miners themselves when, for example, people remark that their practice differs little from that of Roman imperial or Medieval times. And a certain habit of thought leads one to think of a mine as being something like a manmade cave. There is no etymological affinity between the two terms in English. Nor is there such an affinity in any of the languages that are spoken in the gold-mining regions of South Africa, but most people refer to shafts in one or another word for "hole" (*mgoti/umgodi*), a term also used to describe graves. Moreover, the artificial ceilings or walls of mines sometimes cave in, effacing the difference.

I became conscious of this resemblance with particular force while filming *We are Zama Zama*. In the interests of security, we chose an infrequently used entry to a shaft. The opening was invisible in the high-veld grasses. Indeed, walking across the field on a moonless night, one might easily fall into it. It wasn't until fifteen meters beneath the surface, in the slender beams of battery-operated headlamps, that the old machine-opened tunnels became visible, emerging from the shadows as unnaturally regular shapes. The geometries of these tunnels had been eroded; rocks obtruded, beams and supports had fallen away or had been removed for construction purposes above ground.

As infrastructure theory leads us to expect, the machinic origins of these spaces are never more visible than when a structure has broken down or been disassembled. Again and again, the difference between the worlds above and below ground was described to me in terms of an opposition between smooth straight paths, and broken labyrinthine tunnels, the latter of which reduce men to a verily animal nature:

> Going there, underground, it's not easy like outside. It may take time for you to walk a kilo [kilometer]. A kilo: you can walk for two to three hours because the paths there are not free like outside. You may walk, hard, sometimes you may walk like a cow, using your knees and your hands. Sometimes you use your stomach . . .

One cannot read this imagery of dehumanization as a simple metaphorization of regression; that would imply a temporalized evolutionary chain, and it is not clear that such an understanding undergirds these references. Yet the ideal of smooth space was not limited to the above-ground world in these conversations; it also referred to the subterranean routes of the industrial mines, whose railroads and straight paths were also frequently remarked, if only as the now-inaccessible framework for *zama-zamas'* improvisational journeys. In this manner, a temporal conflation took place, such that the time of infrastructural modernity was split and divided: underground, it was but a trace of a ruined past; above ground, and despite the erosion and decrepitude of township roads, it was the material of contemporaneity and the literal ground of freedom, however limited. Miners remarked this freedom when they came out from underground, rhapsodically describing their sense of liberation, which they said they experienced in the mere fact of a choice of food, and in the sensation of light (likened to the eyes' eating fresh food), but also in being able to walk upright and untroubled on a straight path.

FLASHBACK

Despite the contrast, both the above- and below-ground worlds are in shadow, negatively shaped by the history of industrialized extraction. Everything about life in LeZiMo is conditioned by the histories of the mine, which was first opened in 1897 by a typical joint-stock company formed on the basis of investments generated on the Johannesburg and London Stock exchanges, the former being established in 1887 precisely in order to enable the kinds of capital-intensive mining that was required in an area where the geology conspired to make access to the gold dependent on the use of advanced industrial technologies. The reefs in which the metal is found slant downwards from the surface and are buried beneath sediments deposited after a cataclysmic meteoric event about four billion years ago (the Vredefort crater). This accounts for the famous depth that makes South African gold so expensive to extract. The geologically overdetermined nature of the mining has as its corollary the forms that I have already described: shafts and tunnels produced by mechanized drilling, iron supports and cable, and above all electrification. Accordingly, the evacuated earth has as its skeletal support the geometries and regularities of machinic fabrication—and their collapse—and these combinations of ideal emptiness and rocky occlusion shape the routes and possible itineraries of the miners. The artificial folds introduced into the rock by blasting, which, as I noted earlier, mimic natural caves, provide places of rest. The pile of rocks interrupting the path—the result of a blast or a collapse—is but another layer in the dense residue of material traces that, in their accumulation, simultaneously distance the *zama-zama* miner from the last moment of the industrial mine's forms and bind him to it in the shape and tempo of his movements, his tactics and his strategies. As much as the closure of the mine, then, the functioning prehistory of that closure—what is often referred to as the life of the mine—demands that the miners conform their actions to technology's forms. This means not merely following the routes already established, but also negotiating the abyssal gaps and severe angles that traction cables, hoists, and pumps enabled one to traverse in the time of electricity.

What is true below ground is also true above ground. The women who break the rock and grind it with other stones or handmade hammers do so on the cement foundations of ruined buildings. They dry their pats of sluice on the same horizontal planes, grateful for the uncracked surfaces that make the sweeping of powdered stone easier and less vulnerable to loss in the crevasses and furrows where grasses grow and rainwater pools. Nonetheless, the infrastructure of the mines is irreducible to these solidities, for it includes, in addition to the system of financial capital already alluded to, the social organization of the migrant economy and its histories. That economy, as is well documented in the voluminous literature on mining in South Africa, was organized through systems of land expropriation, militarily enforced expulsion, legally regulated confinement on reservations, and international labor importation. It depended on the complex

distribution of governmental authority between the state and mining capital. The latter, as embodied in the Chamber of Mines, managed laboring populations through pass systems, biometric surveillance, racially and ethnically segregated housing, the operation of company stores and private security systems, and so forth. In the cyclic migration compelled by time-limited work-permits and pass laws regulating movement, as well as native reservation systems that installed the rural as the origin and destination of migrants, the mines also governed the temporality of life. All of these phenomena were distributed via structures of sexual difference. During the colonial and apartheid eras, men and women both migrated to cities and the periurban worlds around the mines, but they did so relatively independently—and according to different contractual temporalities and sex-segregated residences. If women tended to move for work as domestic laborers, they also took up lives as small-scale entrepreneurs in the areas near mines, as launderers and the brewers of beer, and/or as the providers of sexual services. Nonetheless, the rates of migration were higher for men, with the result that women became the trustees of the rural even as access to public authority for men was confined to the ritually inflated and politically eviscerated forms of chieftainship and appointed civil service in the reservations or homelands.

Now, it is here, in the domain of a social life riven by hierarchies of gender and seniority that one must begin to confront not merely the fact of shadows but of simulations. The question of simulation poses itself along a double axis: that of historicity and especially the historicity of labor, and that of sexual difference, but the two are related.

Those who look at the women grinding stone may find themselves gripped by the uncanny sensation that this grinding is, in its form, its rhythm, and its product, indistinguishable from the grinding of corn as it is done in many poor, rural parts of this world. The fact that rock can be ground into a powder so fine that it can hardly be differentiated from corn, except by smell or taste, comes as a surprise to afflict the consciousness of any observer—with the virulent sting of the real. Let us not forget that this powder, in its infinitesimal fineness, clouds the air and enters the lungs of the women and the infants strapped to their backs, just as the dust that rises from the blasted rock enters the lungs of the underground miners, scarring and thickening the passages of their lungs and infiltrating them with death. The oracle of that death writes her prophecy in the indecipherable lines made by sweat or tears on the dusted faces of the men and women and the children who cling to their backs.

Nonetheless, while they live, the women can seem to be bearing within their corporeal techniques the memory of a verily primordial form of work, one passed from one generation of women to another, via processes of mimesis that are integral to all learning. Indeed, the histories that attributed to women the function of preserving the rural also demanded that they signify it, and rendered the African Woman in a kind of hieroglyph whose outline is that of a female form, grinding corn. We might therefore say that what migrancy has both posited and alienated in the women (what it has forced them to be and to leave behind), the mines of the deindustrializing world seem to have recalled, thus transforming the women's very movements into the statements of a bodily archive. This

is a tempting reading, but it is contaminated by the same misrecognition that leads people to find in the men's technology-less mining a return of the archaic practice of artisanal mining. The mere image of the past is not evidence of its continuity in the present.

Certainly, the women draw on the forms of labor that they or, just as likely, other women in rural areas performed in other times. But any postulation of an identity between these forms, an identity that rests on the effacement of difference between both the product and consequences of grinding corn or stone, as well as the relative intensities of energy that must be expended for one rather than the other, is guilty of substituting that "copula in effigy" whose burning Irigaray once invited us to think in her condemnation of the Platonists, and the aesthetics of representationalism.[34] That this grinding has as its support the foundations of ruined buildings, making a modern infrastructure the base for an action that arises in its ruins and in the image of its past, can provide an allegory with which to think—but only if the very status of that allegory remains fixed in our mind. One could say, of course, that the difference is to be found in the material itself, in the stuff being ground. Does the stone and cement not remake these female bodies by transforming their habitus? Here a conflation of material solidity with materiality needs to be resisted. The most concrete and materially determining force in this world is an absent presence. It is the fetish of gold, which continues to function as both a symbol and its own referent within the economic system where it is both image and ground of support. As I write this essay, the headlines report decisions by the Russian government to purchase gold and to sell its US dollar reserves. Such eruptions into the formal economic domain of a popular belief that gold remains immune to the vagaries of international monetary systems are not infrequent, even today, though the gold standard is ostensibly a relic of the past, and finance depends less on the phantasm of a real store of value than on the infinitely expanding circulation of digital signifiers.

POST-PRODUCTION

Now, as I said, some *zama-zamas* believe gold is growing back in the abandoned shafts. And they refer to the earth as a breathing, living entity. There is *something like* animism here, so I need to be clear that this is not the "fetishism" of which I speak; it is merely the expression of a particular ontology. The fetish of gold is that which renders it as the natural repository of wealth, as the motivated sign, the guarantor and the generator of value—precisely because of its uselessness, its exclusion from use-value. In this context, one of the most perplexing aspects of the *zama-zama* discourse is the virtual absence of any explicit reference to gold—except when explaining the process of mining to someone from outside. To the contrary, the precious metal is almost always referred to as money (*imali*)—a term that, in many of the languages spoken in this area, can be used for any valuable object. Yet whether it is embedded in the rock or is sparkling in the sluice, gold (which is also lexicalized in all of these languages) is generally referred to as

34. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, transl. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 252.

imali; it is, in other words, always already money. For the *zama-zamas,* its convertibility rather than its interest-bearing capacity is its essence. Precisely because of this capacity for the substance to vanish in exchange, it is desired, and for this same reason, because it is desired for its capacity to transmogrify, it is surrounded by violence. Gangs and underground conflict are common, and an elaborate security system, in which guards take fees at the entrance of shafts in exchange for protection—the going rate is about 30–50 ZAR per descent—has been established.

The police rarely appear in the vicinity, and when they do it is mainly to threaten a future arrival and an imminent enactment of those laws enabling the arrest and deportation of the undocumented migrants. Daily bribes defer this promised intervention and ensure for the *zama-zamas* a condition of visible invisibility, if I may borrow Foucault's felicitous language.[35] If the police occasionally stage raids, rounding up or arresting a few dozen men and women at a time, this is only because there is no ongoing police presence that could claim the function of preserving order. In fact, the police raids are militarized operations: of strikes, captures, and withdrawals. They work to "secure the perimeter" of what is otherwise a zone of abandonment.[36] Even so, they seem less aimed at terrorizing the illegalized residents than demonstrating a capacity to exercise force for a South African citizenry for whom the term *zama-zama* connotes a profound antisocial violence, a menace whose elimination they constantly avow. And there is an enormous amount of violence here. But nor does the state apparatus maintain any other outposts in this space—even in the form of information-gathering for population-management purposes. There has been no census, and the occasional proposal for household surveys has foundered. This is not a site of biopolitical governmentality, and it as far from a "camp" as one can get. And yet, life is concentrated here. As is death.

Three years ago, the state cut off the supply of electricity, plunging the community into darkness and, according to many, inaugurating a new era of violence—including that form of violence that is meted out by informal tribunals as punishment for transgressions of the local order: murder, rape, assault. Simulating the state in its absence, these tribunals also reenact the history of apartheid separatism; authoritative members of one or another ethno-linguistic group are charged with the responsibility of eliminating "criminal elements" from their midst. Stoning is an increasingly common form of execution. It is perhaps the most brutal testimony to the contradictory life of people here, who both live and die by rock. As the local saying goes, "where there's gold, there's blood." There is something about this visceral, technologically denuded modality of execution that seems to express the predicament of those evicted from automated life.

Indeed, the violence, as opposed to the blood, is said to derive from the lack of electricity. It is not merely that the loss of electricity has created darkness, such

35. Foucault developed this terminology in his account of clinical medicine's development: *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith [1973] (New York: Vintage, 1994).

36. I take this phrase from Joao Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Abandonment,* rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). I owe this conception of township policing, as a form of "securing the perimeter," to Abdoumaliq Simone, personal communication, May 4, 2018.

that the night now enters the interior worlds of building and shacks even at noon, making it possible for menacing people to hide in the nearly endless recesses of the informal settlements. Certainly, this is true. More than this, however, the decision to sever the entire grid made it far more difficult for these modern men and women to tap into sources of power, so necessary for everything from recharging cellphones to boiling water. People therefore remark that the severance of electricity ensured an increase in the theft of cable, copper wire, and other conductive materials.[37] And with robbery comes resistance or its anticipation, and with resistance, force. The withdrawal of power concretized in the domain of visibility the state's retreat, and gave it a new spatiotemporal dimension. The shadow world of which my interlocutors spoke was thus of double order. It led to the intense experience of a radical deprivation of modernity. However, those who experienced this deprivation were also assigned, by those who enacted it, a fundamental belatedness. The representational politics in which the *zama-zamas* appear render them as fundamentally uncivilized and incapable of acceding to the regulatory norms on which the modern state rests. Stories in the South African press about life among the *zama-zamas* often make recourse to the rhetoric of savagery when they describe the intensity of violence. This is the residue of a racist primitivism. But the violence is real and frequent, even though it is endured most by those who are accused of being its perpetrators. Nonetheless, the accusation made in the popular media is at least partly misdirected. The residents of LeZiMo have themselves been savaged by the municipality, by the economy, and by the spurious effort to distinguish the migrant from the refugee. The "primitivity" of the conditions that I have described is thus precisely a function of industrial modernity, but more important, of being evicted from the condition of possibility of technologized existence—*after* having had it, and while dreaming of all that it made possible. This is why I want to invoke the concept of *nachträglichkeit*. Not merely belatedness, but the assignation of traumatic significance to a past event, which becomes foundational as a result. And the living afterward.

POSTSCRIPT

Earlier, while describing the filmmaking whence much of the above account derives, I suggested that the men and women who reside in LeZiMo, like people everywhere, long to be seen from afar, and that they in fact have given themselves to be seen, while imagining their own inscription in cinematic and textual mode as a means of ensuring their own future recall. The relationships produced in ethno-cinema, like those in every ethnographic exchange, are inevitably subject to the dynamics of transference and counter-transference (although historians and those who reside only in archives may perhaps escape them). The *zama-*

37. The conception of the state as a provider of infrastructural and "service" support is widespread in South Africa, and there is excellent writing on this issue (see, for example, Antina von Schnitzler, *Democracy's Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest after Apartheid* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) and Ann McLennan and Barry Munslow, *The Politics of Service Delivery*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009). In the case of the informal community described in this article, however, the possibility of overt protest is limited by the illegality of the residents and the threat of expulsion that shadows their existence.

zamas with whom I have worked long to be recognized; they often narrate their own predicament as a kind of being overlooked. And they have accorded me a certain function, of bearing the gaze that will grant them not only recognition but a kind of historical truth. Similarly, or in return, they have assumed that function for me, granting me recognition as someone who listens, who can be trusted with this history. Their speech and their self-revelations have thus come to me, and are passed along, as a gift of sorts, and also as an obligation—as all gifts are. In this light, one may wonder if the aspiration to get hold of this world in the form of an image, or a series of images, may also have led me to (over)emphasize the gestural. In seeking that which goes without saying in order to make clear how deeply a history of industrial mining has impressed itself on that which would otherwise resemble what the industrial era displaced, I have perhaps neglected a more explicit narration. I therefore want to conclude with the account of that industrial era that was itself narrated by the residents of this now-ruining world, while still attending to the saying, and not merely the said, of that narrative. To do so, I want to return to the dialogue with which I began:

A: Given that we're struggling, maybe there will be a change and the mines will re-open.
B: Do you think the mines will re-open?
A: Yes. And there will be jobs
B: Do you still hope that the mines will re-open, because they say there will be development in this area?
A: There's still a lot of money in the mines and . . .
B: There's still a lot of money?
A: There's still money in there. No. These mines were just closed when a black man came into power.
B: They just shut down.
. . .
B: They were upset because a black man was in power.
B: And they shut down, just like that.
A: Oh, they shut down when they heard, freedom is coming.
B: Freedom. And they closed.

I had asked two of the more senior residents of LeZiMo to tell me the story of the mine, asking what it had been like in the days of active deep-level extraction. They had started by remarking that this history extended over "more than a hundred years." As has often happened in my conversations with mineworkers, much of their conversation revolved around food. In this case, it was concerned with a now-absent bounty. The elder of the man recalled plentiful meals, the smell of bacon, and the taste of eggs, the sound of the trucks arriving to deliver sides of beef in the early mornings (he made uncanny sounds, to simulate the squeals of the tires and the pneumatic brakes).

This fond recollection is surely partly because black mineworkers rarely had access to such food, and were often fed little more than gruel. A local idiom describes hunger in an oneiric idiom. "The mouth is dreaming," people say. And so it is perhaps not illegitimate to say that the decaying architecture, with

its sprouting grasses and insurgent trees, led the men, and especially the older of the two, to savor now-distant episodes, as though the ruin itself could be held in the mouth and transformed into something like a madeleine. Indeed, the historical unconscious shares something of the logic of the dream, such that present phenomena, perceived as images, can both condense and displace others while mediating that which is or has been experienced more recently.[38] Each crumbled arch and collapsing wall, each tracery of a foundation now emptied, incited the resurgence of other images, some of which elicited a narrative moving back in time, while others summoned a tale of possibility moving forward. Thus, in a tense suspended between present continuous and past perfect, the men described: a home where resided the man who delivered mail from the villages; a shop where shoes could be bought; a shed where batteries were stored; a place where workers gathered to eat their own food when they grew tired of the mineworker's fare; a waiting room where patients sat in hopes of seeing a doctor; a doorway where men awaited and received their wives or mistresses. Between the buildings were the faint outlines of paths, smoothed by the men who shambled there in the mornings, awaiting their turn in the toilets and ablution facilities.

Many of the conversations at the old compound that were not concerned with consumption, whether of food or goods, indeed centered on the toilets and the bathing facilities. These dialogues also took their apparent cues from the milieu. Thus, the enormous green water tank at the center of the old facility became a *lieu de mémoire*, to borrow Pierre Nora's phrase, prompting talk about the latrines today. Beneath the leaking faucet, water had gathered in puddles that reflected the empty skyline. On the day of our filming, an oblique line extended from those shimmering puddles, where women continued to fill jerrycans for laundry or cooking, to the two men's reflections on what remains an issue of urgent political contestation today. The informal settlements in this area have provisional drop-toilets, and no running water. The lack of basic sanitation is a litmus test for all political parties, and the failure to provide it is often adduced as evidence of corruption.

As we continued our tour, often stepping over rank and fetid water in the ditches between buildings, the older man's discontent about the lack of sanitation services today grew more and more vociferous. He bemoaned the running water, and noted that, with no electricity, people had become dependent on candlelight, something that had never occurred when the mines were in operation, he said. The younger of the men, an immigrant from Zimbabwe, had been resident in the area for nearly twenty-five years, and the elder, a South African from the Eastern Cape, for more than fifty. The younger man was eager to learn about how the facilities in the apartheid era had been contrastingly located for white and black workers (the former's toilets were private and internal to the housing, but those for black workers were public and external). It was he who asked whether the differences in what can only be called excremental space were an expression of the apartheid regime's contempt for the black workers, the material instantiation of their status as waste-able.[39] But the elder man demurred. His narrative vacillated between a

38. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* transl. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1900), IV, ix-627.

39. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," transl. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003), 11-40.

nostalgia for the plenitude of the mine's heyday, mournfulness for the ways in which people had been evicted when they had not been able to pay their rent, and a polite deference to the laws of property. He sometimes suggested that the mine's ownership of the compound had underwritten a veritable "right" to expel residents when they could not pay the rent. However, this acquiescence, and the narrative of submission that it implied, halted with the recollection of Kaiser Mathanzima, one-time president of the Transkei (1979–1986), whom he described in reverential tones as something like a savior-figure. By his account, the man he called simply Kaiser had successfully advocated for migrant workers from the Bantustans, and especially the Eastern Cape. "Kaiser put a stop to all that," he said, referring to the raids carried out in the night or during residents' absence, when their property was cast into the street, and the locks changed. It did not seem to matter to him that Kaiser Mathanzima, who was also Nelson Mandela's nephew, had also opposed what he believed was the impossible radicalism of the ANC and its proposal for direct rule in a black-majority government. And Mandela himself went unmentioned, except by allusion: he was the black man who came to power. He whose inauguration heralded the end of this world.

The lamentation of the older man's discourse—which was improbably punctuated with moments of lightness and cheer—suggests that he was captured by the imagery of a bygone world, and that his mind's eye was turned fixedly toward the past. It is therefore important to recall the frame narrative that brackets the retrospection. The old man's discourse had introduced the explanation for the closure with the assertion that "There's still a lot of money in the mines." It thereby threw radically into question the history of the closure, and its reduction to natural history: to a question of technological insufficiency in the face of geological depth, or of the ore's depletion. For him, history functioned as one of the names of the political, of a force exercised in time and in the interest of the few.

The two men reminisced for hours, stopping occasionally to point to the *zama-zamas* as they passed by, backpacks full or empty, their faces soiled with earth, their headlamps strapped on but unlit. The older praised them for their diligence and their respect for other people's property: "Wonderful! There are a lot of them. . . . That's how they survive. They come from Lesotho, they come from Zimbabwe, from Malawi . . . and Shangaan coming from Maputo. . . . They're trying for themselves, they're not stealing. They're not stealing from anyone. They're trying for themselves." But their presence, however admirable, only proved to him that a better future needed to be cultivated.

As the two men contemplated the forthcoming elections, and their hopes that the toilets would be repaired, if only as a vote-getting strategy, they also remarked the numbers of people who had died in the mines. It was then, turned to the future, stumbling through the ruins in which *zama-zamas* incarnate the illusory image of the past, that the younger man proffered that one solution to the problem of "all the suffering" might be a museum, "a historical site." It would be a means of preserving the memory of the dead, he said, and of ensuring that the present would not vanish from the future.

The pathos of this gesture is poignant. But there is something revelatory in the men's otherwise ironic turn to the museum as the guarantor of life after the death

of a mine. Following a meticulous recounting of the defunct mine's history, and a bitter analysis of the ruinous forces of industrial mining's racialized politics in the apartheid era, but also since then, the two men had transformed the mute stones and broken walls into the elementary basis of an eloquent testimony. They spoke in the knowledge of being filmed, to an as-yet unknown audience elsewhere. And their proposal for a museum was made with the full knowledge that it would itself constitute a preservation *for others*. But there is no doubt that such a museum would constitute an alternative to the informal activities of the migrant *zama-zamas*. This is not merely because a museum represents an ostensibly economic solution to contemporary unemployment as much as a historiographical ambition. It is because the *zama-zamas* do not belong to the past, but to the future of industrialization, to its afterlife. Despite appearances—of the women whose grinding of cement seems to resemble the preparation of corn, or of the men, whose digging seems to resemble that of the preindustrial miners who were displaced by industrial technology—they are the children of industrial mining. When, as is sometimes the case, young men refer to the mines as their "parents," they give voice to the occulted truth of the old men's discourse about a possible museum. Against the fantasy of return, they spoke in the only idiom available to them about the irreversibility of industrial modernity's transformations. If such an idiom is itself overdetermined by the forces of the international heritage industry, if it partakes of the commodity logic for which the gold standard was a temporary instrument of globalization, this does not mean that it is bereft of insight. Embracing the institution that makes of past life an image to be looked upon, and holding fast to the idea that the truth of experience can be conveyed in narrative form, they seem to share Sol Plaatjie's admonition, cited at the beginning of this article, that it is the ruin and not the origin to which historiography and the desires it encodes, can return.

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