Introduction

This book may be read on a number of different levels. At its most accessible, it is a detailed description of the lives of black South African mine workers, written as far as possible from their point of view. Their tale is about men who migrate from all over Southern Africa to work the gold mines of the South African high veld. By 1910 there were about 200,000 of them; by 1940, 300,000; by 1985, 500,000. Historically, they have come from as far north as Angola and Tanzania, have been barracked together in huge single-sex compounds, and herded before dawn to work thousands of feet underground in desperately dangerous conditions.

The mines themselves opened on the Witwatersrand near Johannesburg in 1886 and spread east and west. By the 1930s the most profitable mines were in the far east. Now they lie in the far west and the southwest, so that the gold-bearing reef forms a great semicircular rim like the edges of a giant geological saucer, tipped and broken, covering a narrow, buried slice of gold-bearing rock, many meters beneath the earth (see maps 1–4).

Many have written of the forces, especially colonial conquest, taxation, and economic underdevelopment, that drove these men to the Rand and of the exploitation, indeed superexploitation, they suffered there. The standard works from this perspective are Wilson 1969 and Johnstone 1976. Others, usually associated with the industry, have claimed that the workers came of their own free will, led on by the lure of cash wages and a spirit of adventure. This book makes no effort to repeat these arguments or to refute them. Instead, it tries to tell of the integrity with which these migrant black working men, disciplined and controlled as they were, retained their senses of identity, measuring them not only against those of the white men who employed them and those who supervised them but also against those of black officials in the compounds and black supervisors

underground. Migrant masculinity was sustained in solidarity with fellow mine workers and in partnership with women and other men at home. Thus, migrant miners understood themselves as men not only in relation to their wage labor in the capitalist system on the mines but also through their independence as patriarchal homestead proprietors in the country.

The book tries to capture black miners' changing conceptions of personal integrity and collective solidarity within the power structures of the migrant system over three-quarters of a century. It analyzes changing discourses about personal identity, work, power and seniority, sexuality, solidarity, and violence. It seeks to relate these discourses and accompanying changes or practice to different rural opportunities and satisfactions, changing work conditions, shifting family and sexual politics, and changes and continuities in management control and worker action.

My own interest in black miners was initially an effort simply to understand their lives within their social context. In 1976, I directed a team of participant observers on the Welkom Mine for Anglo American Corporation and was adviser to a group of black theological students who engaged in work-study on the mines under the auspices of the Agency for Industrial Mission. Since then, with the help of Vivienne Ndatshe and others, I have striven to spread my net as widely and as deeply as possible to understand what migration to work on the gold mines has meant to the workers themselves. This resulting study is an interpretation of evidence from participant observation, archival documents, old men's stories, young men's reflections, the life histories of women, and testimony from black unionists. Of course, the book is my own interpretation of these varied accounts. Nonetheless, I hope it will ring true to the different owners of these voices even as it widens their own understanding of their total situation.

On the first level, the book is about character, about the practical integrity of black South African migrant miners. Here integrity is defined as taking responsibility for one's own life project, within the limits and pressures imposed by structural constraints, in accordance with consistent conceptions of the right way to live, and in partnership with others. The self is, of course, socially constructed within certain ideological, political, and economic contexts, but within these constraints (even in total institutions) I argue that there is space for character building, for the "practice" of integrity. Although I have not attempted to hide my opinions about the moral worth of various strategic choices or practices of integrity (and indeed wider moral implications can only be assessed contextually), this book is not an ethical treatise. Rather it seeks to show how men with integrity actually exercise their limited strategic options and how those lacking integrity manipulatively and self-indulgently exploit social structures.

Perhaps it is necessary to add at the outset that this book, dealing as it does with a gender-segregated male labor force, is primarily about men and their lives within very specific cultural and socioeconomic contexts (although country wives are essential to the men's formation of self, and town women are by no means irrelevant). My analysis emphasizes the gender identities of these migrants as men and the complicated way in which their practice of integrity intersects with male and female gender roles on the mines and in the countryside.

Character formation takes place in solidarity with like-minded others. Integrity, then, is as much a social as an individual affair, implying membership (whether explicit or implicit) in networks of social support. Thus, while character involves the exercise of responsibility within a particular moral context, it is false to assume that such responsibility is only individual, based on some sort of abstract personal commitment of means to ends. Male integrity becomes practical in the company of other men.

On a second level, the book has been organized as a series of historical essays on crosscutting aspects of mine life. Changes in discourse and practice occurred within formal structures erected out of struggles between migrant cultures, mining management, and the state between 1910 and 1920. Given that formal structures are sites of struggle and yet persist over time, they are always in contention and subject to reinterpretation. Social structures cannot be firmly fixed but must be protected by the constant vigilance and strategic shifts of dominants and their agents, who modify them in response to resistance from subordinates and changes in external environments. Actors may bring in rights and resources from the outside, for instance, the varying rural resources of migrant proprietors or the political privileges of white miners. Moreover, changes in the work environment, including technological improvements in production methods and supply problems, may radically alter the terrain of struggle and the actors' understanding of their situation.

On a third level, this book assumes that in a capitalist society personal integrity is ultimately trammeled by the forces and social relations of a system of production based on the contradictory logic of capital accumulation. In turn, formal structures and informal conceptions of order, whatever their particularities, are similarly bounded. For the migrant miners in this study, this level of analysis manifests itself most clearly both in systemic pressure toward proletarianization (defined as dependency on wages) and in resistance to proletarianization derived from the demands of a material base rooted in homestead agriculture. Of course, resistance was further sustained by the mine owners' need for cheap labor and by white South African fears of a potentially militant African proletariat.

After the Second World War, as proletarianization proceeded apace in South African secondary industries, mine owners—with the approval of the state—spread their recruiting networks deep into the heart of tropical Africa (Crush, Jeeves, and Yudelman 1991) in an effort to find cheap, nonproletarianized labor.

At this third and most general level, the argument of the book focuses on rural homesteaders' resistance to proletarianization and on the impact of uneven rates of proletarianization on relationships among workers once dependence on wage labor became more widespread on the mines during the 1970s.

In the years before the 1970s, the migrant labor and compound systems necessarily excluded proletarianized workers because the pay was so low. Between 1910 and 1970, despite substantial wage increases in manufacturing, real wages on the mines remained consistently low. Black South Africans without a subsistence base in the country, or at least the possibility of establishing one, might work on the mines for a contract or two but they would soon leave for better-paid industrial and other urban jobs. Thus, although there were some changes in work processes and in the management structure of the compounds, the mine workforce, whose "tribal" makeup was always changing, was never fully proletarianized, and indeed resisted proletarianization because of its links to rural homestead agricultural production.

After the rise in the price of gold in 1973, a radical change occurred in the makeup of the mine labor force.[1] A rapid rise in mine wages along with substantial restructuring of the South African economy led to a sharp shift on the mines from a largely illiterate peasant workforce (with its own migrant cultures) to one that included numerous better-educated, proletarian (if often still migrant) workers. This transformation, which took

[1]For workers from Lesotho, this change had occurred a decade earlier, when the South African state refused to permit Basotho workers in South African industry *except* on the mines. One of the mines, ERPM, had also earlier tried hiring proletarianized workers from Harare township, an experiment that was unsuccessful. Generally, problems associated with these earlier shifts were seen as resulting from the higher educational attainments of the new workers, and indeed, proletarianized workers in South Africa *are* generally more schooled. This is an additional variable to be taken into account, but our evidence suggests that education is less decisive than dependence on wage labor in explaining recent changes in mine-worker conduct and organization.

Workers from Mozambique, driven to work on the mines by forced labor in their homeland and early forced into peasant production, present a rather different experience and one that has been slighted in this volume for want of sufficient information and access. Studies dealing directly with workers from Mozambique include the doctoral theses of Jean Penvenne (1982) and Patrick Harries (1983) and First (1983).

place in less than a decade, was part of a conscious effort by certain mining houses to decrease and "stabilize" their black workforce in order to introduce more mechanized production techniques on deeper-level mines at the same time that they avoided dependence on labor from the increasingly hostile postcolonial frontline African states to the north.

Such systemic changes in the mine labor force in the 1970s have begun to break up traditional resistance to proletarianization and not only to redefine mine work but also to transform the structures of social order and control on the mines and alter the discourses of both miners and management. Notions of resistance and solidarity, management styles, types of collective action, conceptions of manhood, and styles of sexuality have all changed dramatically. Thus such terms as alcoholism, homosexuality, aggression, masculinity and femininity, work and family, and democracy may be deconstructed and relativized by their different meanings on the mines before and after the 1970s.

Increasingly miners' perceptions of themselves are proletarian, that is, they see themselves essentially as wage workers rather than as farmers striving to fund their rural homesteads. In more technical Marxist terms, these "new miners" have finally been "freed" from proprietorship on the land and from agricultural means of production. The coming of the National Union of Mineworkers has given a voice to the new workers' demands for the abolition of migrant labor.

Before the shift to a more proletarianized workforce (and the changes have been uneven, differing from mine to mine and on the same mines over time), the Chamber of Mines deliberately recruited migrants who continued to have substantial investments in rural livelihoods and to share a goal of rural self-sufficiency. Indeed, low mine wages made this the only viable recruitment policy for the chamber. The rise in mine wages since 1973, along with the restructuring of South African commercial agricultural production and the collapse of even marginal Bantustan rural subsistence, has attracted a substantial proportion of the contemporary mine labor force from rural proletarians (and on some mines even from urban youths) rather than from aspirant subsistence proprietors as in the past. My account of mine-worker experience of migrant labor thus seeks always to specify the historical period, the sorts of men who made up the mine workforce at the time, the nature of mine work, and, perhaps most important of all, the level of underdevelopment[2] in the migrant sending areas. All these variables have changed over time.

[2]I use the term *underdevelopment* in the sense in which it has come to be used in contemporary social science. It refers to a peripheral political economy that has

Notions such as "colonial despotism" fail to capture the historical complexity of the strategic exercise of power even in contexts of "ultraexploitation." Quite as important as political and economic exploitation for understanding men's lives on the South African gold mines are the changing ways in which power was actually exercised in the process of production and in compound life, the moral unity of subdominant cultures of resistance that made possible the maintenance of personal integrity and appeals to justice, and the strategies for social mobilization that linked practical interests and moral outrage in contexts of apparently total control.

I begin with a general discussion of the practices by which integrity was traditionally maintained on the South African gold mines before proceeding to accounts first of underground work and then of mine compounds as sites of struggle as well as centers of control. Next, I describe shifts in the meanings and practices among black miners of sexuality, drinking, and fighting as the processes of proletarianization brought different, sometimes incommensurable contexts for integrity and new forms of worker organization. This topic leads naturally to discussion of obstacles and achievements in black union organization on the mines in the 1940s and 1980s. After a brief theoretical discursive, I conclude with a detailed case study of two related faction fights at one compound on a Transvaal gold mine in 1986.

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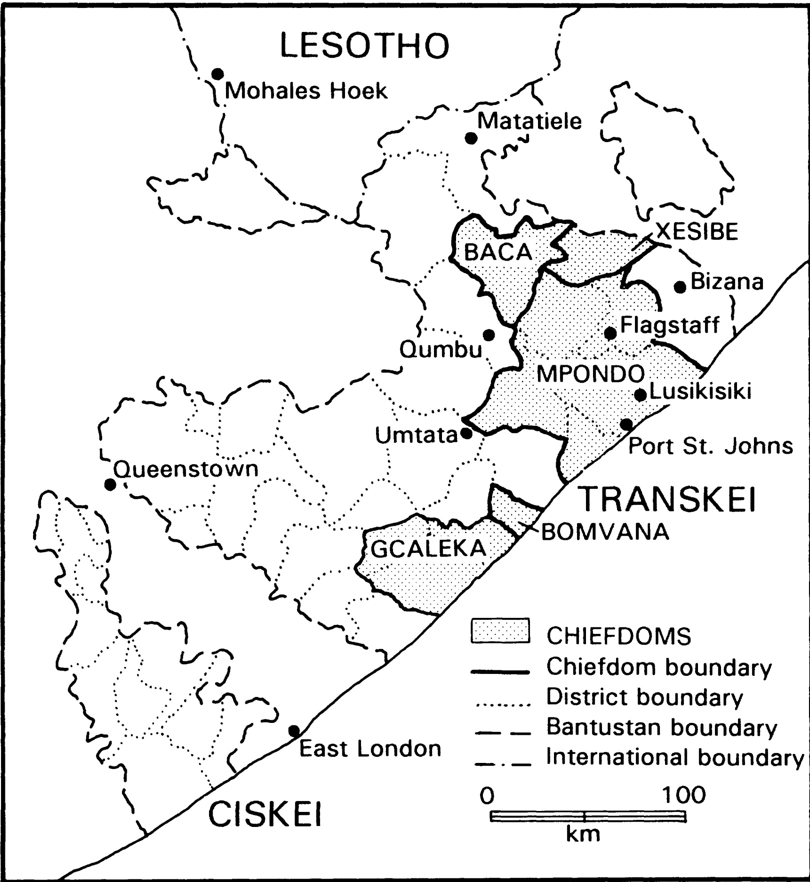
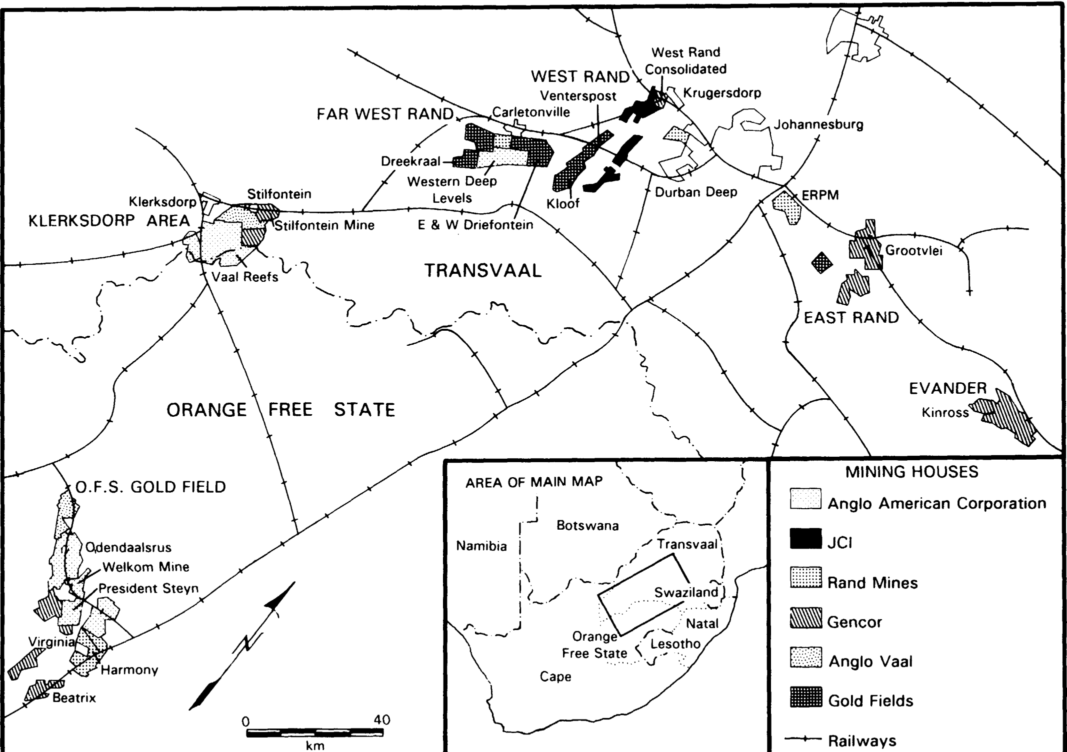
become economically dependent upon a more powerful central economy whose ongoing prosperity depends upon the systematic exploitation of the major resources of the dependent system. Instead of economic development, such dependency leads to systematic "underdevelopment," defined as the destruction of the potential for autonomous economic development of the dependent system. The fruits of productive activity by workers from the periphery are thus exported to sustain economic growth in the metropolitan center, leaving the dependent economy bereft of resources for investment. In the case of the rural areas in South Africa, it is literally the labor of its migrant inhabitants that is exported. As the rural areas become more underdeveloped, more and more of the wages remitted are invested not in sustainable agricultural production but rather in the simple day-to-day maintenance of family members who remain at home.

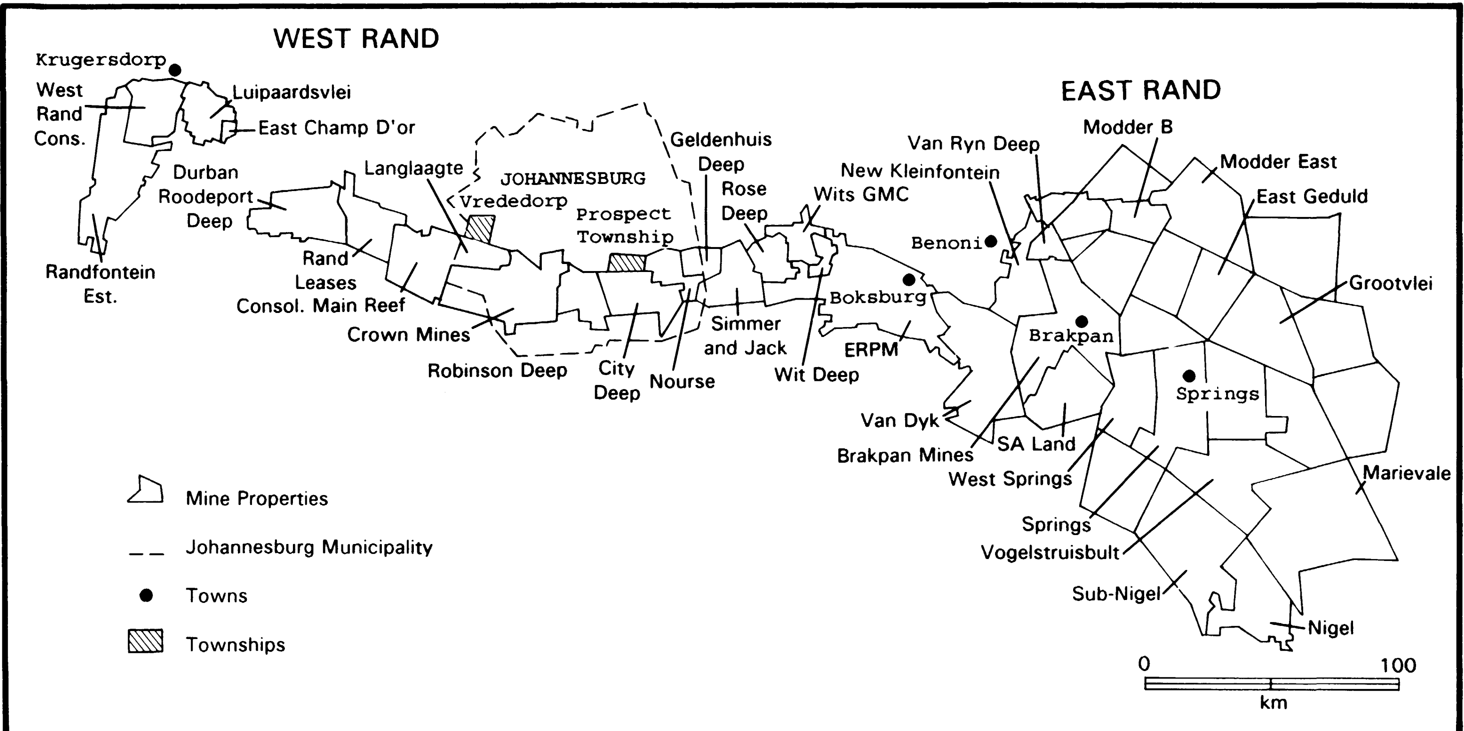
Map 1. Southern Africa, key map for maps 2 and 3, showing major labor supply areas for the mines.



Map 2. Xhosa-speaking areas, showing towns and chiefdoms mentioned in the text.



Map 3. Contemporary gold-mining areas of South Africa, indicating mines mentioned in the text. (Based on J. Crush, A. Jeeves and D. Yudelman, *South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines* [Boulder: Westview Press, 1991], p. 1.)



Map 4. Witwatersrand gold mines, 1938, indicating mines mentioned in the text.