

Political Work: Mobilization and Negotiation in the Shadows of Durban's Refineries

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If you flew in to the port city of Durban or eThekweni, you might not miss the petrochemical refineries next to the runway, but you might miss two small communities that live cheek-by-jowl with heavy industry. These communities, consolidated in an incongruous industrial-residential landscape by the violence of Apartheid spatial planning, are the "Indian" township of Merebank and the "Coloured" township of Wentworth.¹ On two sides of Duranta Road, and with roughly similar populations (about 27,000 for Wentworth and 21,000 for Merebank in 2001), these communities have been shaped in similar ways in some respects and in profoundly different ways in others. What is more, though both have lived with similar indignities, such as breathing benzene all their lives, and although Merebank's residents have only slightly higher household incomes, and slightly lower unemployment levels², Wentworth today is a hotbed of political activism while Merebank is relatively quiescent. Wentworth is more strongly a ghetto in the analytical sense proposed by Wacquant (2004) as shaped by stigma, constraint, spatial confinement and institutional containment.³ Although its residents have come from all over South Africa, this diverse product of miscegenation seems mired in the poverties of place. Across the road, Merebank's quiescence emerges from a very different history of space, through which a former village on the outskirts of Durban has become more organically part of the cultural political economic fortunes offered by the new

¹ Henceforth I do not systematically use quotes to indicate that "race" is a fiction, particularly since "Coloured" is presumed to be more of a fiction than "Indian", given there is no Colouredland to point to as home, as escape, or as the threat of repatriation, and the incredible difference between cultural productions that can claim to be "Indian" as opposed to "Coloured." What is more important are very different careers of "race" through these two communities. Table 1 in the Appendix shows that Indians and Coloureds continue to numerically dominate these townships, but that as a share of eThekweni or the province, Wentworth Coloureds are a much more significant share of the Coloured population than are Merebank Indians of the citywide or provincial Indian population.

² Individual monthly incomes for both communities are in the range of R1,600—3,200, though Austerville has a substantially larger population of individuals with no income (Table 2). Household monthly incomes are stronger for Merbank (Table 3). A comparison of household annual incomes with the neighbouring formerly 'African' township of Lamontville, and the much larger 'African' Umlazi, as well as formerly 'white' Musgrave and Kloof, shows that Wentworth and Merebank sit similarly between 'African' and 'white' areas in income terms, with Merebank appearing slightly more advantaged but not tremendously so (Table 4). What also stands out in this table is the enormous much higher number of households with no income in 'African' areas in contrast to others.

³ Wacquant (2004) derives this relational conception of the ghetto as a critique of the functionalist understanding of ethnic clustering and social domination in the 'urban ecology' of the Chicago school of sociology. Through concrete historical analysis, Wacquant argues that the ghetto emerges as a "social-organizational device" directed at producing and forcibly confining a dispossessed and dishonoured group, and it ought to be seen in analogy with other such forms of collective violence like the reservation, the refugee camp and the prison. Each form links economic exploitation and social ostracization differently, each presumes a different mix of the four general elements. A Coloured ghetto that breathes petrochemical fumes across town from the gentility of leafy English Berea, but not as far out of the city as African townships like Mpumalanga, carries its own particular social and geographic contradictions. Wacquant also points to two more important features about ghettos. First, people living in them create strong internal affinities, so that the experience of stigmatisation becomes bittersweet (See the representation of Harlem in *Sweet Flypaper of Life*, by the African American photographer Roy deCarava and the poet Langston Hughes). Second, the ghetto is unlike the ethnic neighbourhood in that it is less a springboard to assimilation in broader society than a walled-in "dissimulation." In this sense, Wentworth is akin to John Western's *Outcast Capetown*.

dispensation. Spaces of livelihood and belonging have been shrinking into a ghetto on the one hand, and broadening into South Africa's middle and upper class world of possibility, on the other.

At first glance, Wentworth and Merebank appear to sit very differently in their engagements with government and the corporations that surround them. The key civic in Merebank, the Merebank Ratepayers' Association (MRA), appears to be quite pragmatic in its relations with state and capital, and it has used "corporate social responsibility" funding from the refineries to fund a variety of community organizations. There are no civics to rival the MRA's claim to the community's mandate, as they can appeal to a long and hoary tradition of representation harking back to a village on the periphery of the expanding municipality of Durban. Indeed, despite a rich history of anti-Apartheid activism—with complex links between members of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), Black Consciousness (BC) activists at the Alan Taylor residence for black medical students of the University of Natal, underground uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) activists with connections to the ANC/SACP in exile through peripatetic underground figures, a range of safe houses and supporters, the last including decades of care-work from women like the heroic Aunty P—Merebank today is quiescent. Despite once being a hotbed of multilayered political activism until the final underground political and military 'plan B' of the MK/ SACP, Operation Vula, short for 'Vulindlela' or opening the door, today Merebank's door is only slightly ajar for the ruling alliance when it comes to exercising the vote.

Wentworth, on the other hand, has witnessed a very different history of space and place. Wentworth's residents have come from all over South Africa, perhaps the world. An unexpectedly large number of Coloureds were thrown out of backyard tenancies throughout the city of Durban, along the advancing expropriation of Indian landowners in the application of the Group Areas Act. This large population of Coloured tenants from places like Mayville, Cato Manor, and the city centre, were relocated along with Coloureds from the Eastern Cape in former military housing in the neighbourhood of Austerville in Wentworth. As in Merebank, the Group Areas Act was something of a blessing in offering improved housing to Coloureds, and therefore, it would seem, drawing them into a structural relation of complicity with the planners of Apartheid. However, this complicity was primarily a presumption, and residents drawn from far and wide into cramped flats next to refineries found their lives shaped by new forms of violence and constraint. Wentworth's residents have acted in relation to violence and constraint in three realms: gangs, churches and relatively rigid work trajectories. Wentworth's residents often claim waves of intense gang activity since the late 1960s as a direct consequence of the Group Areas Act, as portrayed at an exhibit on Wentworth's gangs at the KwaMuhle Museum curated by a man from Wentworth in 2001.

The most fortunate Wentworth men have been shaped into the pre-eminent semi-skilled industrial migrants of South Africa. They are the pipe-fitters, boiler makers, fitters and turners who have been at the centre of industrial construction work across South Africa's refineries. It is therefore with painful irony that they return to live in unemployment at the footsteps of the Engen and SAPREF refineries. Each of Wentworth's three realms of gangs, church and waged work are strongly gender differentiated, and each is spoken about in relation to challenges in the intimate lives of families. Finally, in the wake of the massive planned expansion of the Dube Trade Port, both eThekweni Metro and the ANC have come to think it important to engage with representatives from Wentworth. Current negotiations centre on an area development committee which can play the role of 'community stakeholder' in relation to government, and over the formation of a company to represent local contractors. This company, which defines itself not by its wickets but as a tool of 'poverty alleviation', is by some twist of irony also called 'Vulindlela.' Once more, Merebank is a strange mirror for events as they unfold in Wentworth.

The organizers of this panel pose that in the process of civic engagement in the new South Africa, two poles of opinion have emerged with respect to how civil society *ought* to act: on the one hand, as a voluntary sector or handmaiden to the democratic developmental state, and on the other hand, as a countervailing force that challenges state and corporate power. At a very general level, the dominant current in Merebank is the former of the two poles, but Wentworth's civic organizations are currently engaged in fierce debate about precisely the question of whom to negotiate with and to what extent. Actual agents in civil society manoeuvre between overtly technical-participatory and politicised-confrontational positions through the course of single campaigns for reasons that go beyond abstract commitments to resistance or collaboration. There are many reasons for these shifts. Decisions about how civil society ought to act relies on at least three key points: the continuing salience of prior forms of political consciousness and mobilization, the visibility of different faces of state and corporate power, and the political economy of everyday organizing labour.

First, local histories of political imagination and mobilization are enormously varied, and the resources that South African communities can harness go far beyond canonical genres of struggle narration.⁴ What alternate histories of mobilization activate the political imaginations of the young men of Youth for Work in Mpumalanga Township in Durban, or of Ashraf Cassiem's colourfully long Campaign For the Fundamental Right To a Home, or C.F.T.F.R.T.A.H ("powerful people like acronyms", he says mischievously) in the Cape Flats? These are questions that are just beginning to be asked, for instance in the papers from the social movements project of the Centre for Civil Society, UKZN.⁵

Second, the view from civil society offers varied perspectives on the state and corporate capital, as at times exploitative in the Marxist sense of extending the commodification of labour, at times developmental in broad social and redistributive terms, at times purely extractive of resources, or of bodies and places to dump the wastes of commodification, and perhaps all the while promising decisive deliverance from the burdens of the past. Civic action tends to be at least as multiple as the perspectives of power that are on offer. It is perhaps in contexts in which multiple degradations of commodification come together that civic movements hold the possibility of thinking across difference to forge what Michael Burawoy (2003), drawing on Karl Polanyi, calls 'active society,' but this says precious little about the coherence in cultural production—the human creativity at the heart of making any activity meaningful—necessary to build a counterhegemonic force.⁶ How people see class, state, capital, race and belonging in what South Africans ambiguously call the "new dispensation" remains to be seen.⁷

Third, the dialectics of technical vs confrontational engagement with the state and capital is shaped fundamentally by the politics and political economy of work in community organizing. Usually called 'community work', these everyday labours of organizing are often unwaged, though linked to circuits of formal and informal, legal and criminal waged work, and to gendered circuits of care and neglect. In contexts such as Wentworth, where much of this political work is carried out by unemployed women, there is much to be done in asking how they support themselves to continue the fight. Indeed, if this is vindication of a growing arena of working-class autonomy, it is as much shaped by race, gender and, in Wentworth, by a rising tide of Pentacostal or charismatic Christianity. While Pentacostalism is typically a conservative ideology in its conception of a woman's place, Wentworth women seem to affirm this conservatism in theory while using the power of the Holy Spirit for alternate, sometimes militant, ends. I will argue that Pentacostalism provides an ontology of political action, without an ideology to structure its course, but there are currents within Wentworth that contest this outcome.

In what follows, I first step back to describe the larger project from which this paper is but a first step. I then turn to histories of work and politics in Wentworth, to then return to what political work means to its grassroots activists and why it is understood through a charismatic Christian idiom.

⁴ One former activist who has managed to transit from struggle to state expressed a frustration to me that some of the scholar-activists of the 'Debate' listserv have no experience of struggle. When I suggested that the scholars in question were linked to specific forms of contemporary activism around the privatization of urban services in today's townships, he clarified that he meant The Struggle of the 1980s.

⁵ <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?5,56> last accessed Oct 5, 2004.

⁶ Paul Willis (1981) explains cultural production as the broadest sphere of ongoing creativity, most of which simply reproduces structures of class/race/gender domination, but which always contains nascent critiques of power; cultural production is necessary for cultural reproduction, or the maintenance of normative ideologies, which in turn are necessary for the social reproduction of capitalism. Michael Burawoy's (2003) brilliant contrapuntal reading of Polanyi and Antonio Gramsci is driven by the question of how counterhegemony is forged. While ending with a call for mobile ethnographies that follow the faultlines of struggle, the paper forgets his ethnographic dictum. There is no mention, or theorization, of cultural production, and far too much presumption about people acting from necessity in the wake of commodification. While new forms of society may indeed be produced to defend life against the ravages of capitalism, Burawoy's question ought to be "why do people act?" akin to the question he once asked of workers at the point of production ("why do workers work?") The question is further complicated by the work of contemporary racism in differentiating those whom society can "let die" in its modes of defence (Foucault 1976). If people are contained in ghettos in order to discipline their conduct, how and under what conditions do they call their containment into question?

⁷ The term 'new dispensation' questions what is actually new, as is the case with the post in 'post-Apartheid', but the first, more popular term carries a sense of passive deployment from above, as something merely dispensed to the public without justification in terms of something like the Freedom Charter.

This paper is part of a broader research project on the commodity detritus and the reworking of politics in communities surrounded by petrochemical refineries in Durban. The project centres on three key themes:

First, the keyword in this project is the ‘detritus’ of commodification. The detritus is the biophysical, embodied and geographical medium, shell, repository, that which is wasted, and that which survives outside the commodity circuit. In my prior research in India, I explore how Marx’s twin processes of the accumulation of capital and of surplus labour are held in tension through the power of gender. Yet, ‘surplus labour’ and the reserve army of labour are blunt tools to explain the mounting debris of capitalism: the many indignities, compromised intimacies, bodily infirmities, concentrations of waste and ecological disruption produced alongside capitalism’s anarchic fits and starts. What is more, unlike the medium of money, great “cynic and leveller”, which creates a medium of valuation within the commodity circuit, the devalued, decaying, semi-destroyed debris provides no universal medium to convey its potentially universalizable message of decay.^{8 9}

While this detritus is also fundamentally geographical, radical geographers have not taken great strides to interrogate its production. David Harvey has come a long way in theorizing the spatiotemporal dynamics of capitalism, and his recent work revives the notion of ‘ongoing forms of primitive accumulation’ to attempt a break from Eurocentric Marxism, but this break is far from decisive in at least two senses. First, ongoing primitive accumulation implies that primitive accumulation was not simply a single event in the past, through which capital and labour came to be actors on the world stage. Rather, ongoing primitive accumulation refers to new enclosures and new rounds of privatisation of the commons. What I would add is that proletarianization never came with guarantees for the reproduction of labour, only a rudderless drive for the social reproduction of capitalism.¹⁰ Once proletarianized, or stripped from land and other means of production, workers are reliant on selling themselves to buy the means of survival. However, in the context of mass unemployment and commodification of the basic means of survival, working class populations are forced into eating away at their last reserves. If capital is held to an implicit social contract to reproduce labour, these might be seen as hidden subsidies to capital. No invisible hand has signed such a contract. Indeed, under certain circumstances states have committed themselves to the social reproduction of labourpower, as Gillian Hart (2002) argues of East Asian “developmental states” pushed by U.S. imperialism as a bulwark against Mao’s mobilization of the Chinese peasantry. Hart’s call to Harvey’s Marxism and to the South African left is to imagine and fight against the erosion of the social wage in terms of the long history of racialized dispossession in South Africa. Indeed, the challenge is how such claims articulate, in the sense of linking and voicing, multiple forms of dispossession to current crises of reproduction of laborpower. There is no universal medium to spread the word. Or is there? Does the Holy Spirit, universal medium *par excellence*, do this work for the unemployed women of Wentworth?

If, as Harvey suggests, primitive accumulation is an ongoing and periodic process, then a Marxist geography has to decisively shift from a model in which the capital-labour contradiction as constituted in a landscape of ‘full proletarianization’ then ramifies through space-time in spaces of boom and bust. Fernando Coronil argues that by returning to Marx’s trinity formula of land, labour and money, a non-Eurocentric Marxism must also take stock of the spatial differentiations of the colonial present, through which ‘advanced capitalism’ in one place is organically linked to rentier extraction elsewhere. The detritus is a motley collection of other places and bodies, presumed necessary sites of decay and degradation for reasons that are irrational, non-modern or irrelevant. How people actually handle and possibly contest the colonial present depends on very different articulations of race, culture and politics. Wentworth and Merebank provide very different modes in this respect.

The second key theme of this research project is that the relations between ‘race’ and culture in South Africa are reproduced in very different ways, this tale of two townships speaks to this variance. Though each has its divergent residual and emergent narratives, in Williams’ (1977) sense, dominant tales of origin

⁸ Avoiding the dangers of progressivism as well as of romanticizing subaltern survival, we are left with images from Walter Benjamin, for whom the other of value is fundamentally diverse, fragmentary, and living out its half-life (see Benjamin’s “thesis on the philosophy of history”)

⁹ Benjamin’s thesis on the philosophy of history

¹⁰ Indeed, even attempts to reproduce specific forms of labourpower have to constantly manufacture consent, as Michael Burawoy has importantly argued. Moreover, as feminists have argued for awhile, the reproduction of labour requires gendered hegemony across spaces of waged and unwaged work. The Italian autonomist tradition has argued that while capital requires labour for labourpower to fuel the reproduction of capitalism, labour *does not need* capital for its own reproduction. The reproduction of labour is not guaranteed.

and belonging in these communities speak in fairly polarized terms. Merebank's Indians can draw on links to an elsewhere called India, to indentured labour followed by multiple livelihoods spanning market gardening and industrial work, to a long history of "cultural" activity in Merebank objectified in aided schools, the Merebank Tamil School Society (MTSS, which drew Tamils from across Natal), temples, mosques and bioscopes, fantasies of Bollywood, and trips to India and Mecca. Merebank's activism has been Janus-faced, holding onto conceptions of "Indian culture" while fighting ostensibly for non-racialism. When race becomes culture, this Janus-faced stance can be relatively stable. On the other hand, Wentworth Coloureds continue to battle with origins stories, claims to Griqua or Zulu indigeneity, related claims to land and/or chieftaincy, and disconnections from family who passed into white or Indian areas. When pushed to confront "Coloured culture", Wentworth Coloureds emphasize race mixture, and sometimes also the fiction of race, but more often the stigma of not being racially pure.¹¹ The continuing power of a colonial logic that accords primacy to race purity feeds into a sense that its lack has meant disenfranchisement in the past and present. "We were too black for the white jobs, too white for the black jobs" says Lenny Samuels, an unemployed industrial artisan.¹²

This brings me to the third key theme of this research: that the changing nature of work and politics is another arena of contemporary racism in South Africa, and that Wentworth and Merebank pose very different dynamics in this regard. The critique of contemporary racism in South Africa has focused on two key forms of racialized biopower.¹³ In the first instance, a neo Malthusian discourse of crime fear seeks to contain people in what Caldeira (2000), writing on Sao Paulo, calls the 'city of walls' in the interests of security, while managing practices across domains of vigilantism, crime, policing and penalty. In the second instance, a collusion of the state and transnational capital displaces the urgent need for treatment for people suffering with HIV/AIDS. In both realms, a very specific material and ideological matrix doles the right to "make live and let die" with disastrous consequences for the population, and disproportionately so for black people. Certainly, HIV/AIDS has been one of the most important realms of civic activism in the new dispensation.¹⁴

In seeing the politics of work as another realm of contemporary racism, it is important to define work broadly, to mean not just waged labour, but all creative acts of natural transformation and cultural production that provide resources for the survival of individuals and families. In the context of minimal self-provisioning, where consumption goods are typically commodities, while work may not be formal or waged, it is typically underwritten by income earned somewhere. Group-specific differentiation in mixtures of waged/unwaged, legal/illegal work is another hallmark of contemporary racism. A substantial share of work in Wentworth is illegal and related to theft, sex work, traffic in women and children, and drugs. Needless to say, this illegal work eats away at people, community and nature, and adds to the piling debris. On the other hand, the life histories I have collected point to a dramatic decline in forms of legal waged work. Families, of various sorts, rely on pensions, child support and disability grants, some legal waged work and some illegal waged work, all cross subsidized by the unwaged care-work primarily of women, who take care of the young, infirm and injured, and who share some resources through community welfare organizations.

By political work, I refer to work that is consciously directed to the transformation of shared conditions of survival, and indirectly to the terms of work itself. Political work in this sense is the labour of professional

¹¹ I find it therefore curious that Erasmus (2001) states categorically in the introduction to a book on Coloured identity in the Western Cape, that "Coloured" *cannot* mean mixture because that would presume race purity. There is no reason to presume the metaphysical primacy of the latter; indeed colonial obsession with and anxiety about race purity always relied on concern for the control of sexuality in the wake of pervasive transgressive sex across racial frontiers, as Ann Stoler's (1995, 2002) historical work has shown. What is important is that this colonial logic that privileges the primacy of race purity has such a continuing power in the lives of Wentworth Coloureds.

¹² Lenny Samuels, 26 Nov 2002. All names of living people have been changed, with the exception of a few people in the public eye such as Robert McBride, Greta Apelgren and Morris Fynn.

¹³ I take from Ruth Gilmore (2002) that contemporary racism is the "group-targeted, state-sanctioned deployment of the means of premature social death."

¹⁴ The Treatment Action Campaign draws together multiple histories of activism—including queer activists within liberation movements, activist doctors, HIV+ people and people living with AIDS, trade unionists—to fight Mbeki's denialism and its collusion with capital and, implicitly, contemporary racism. TAC's activism has done several things: it has exposed the power of multi-faceted activism that combines militancy and negotiation with the state. The spread of HIV/AIDS has also more generally brought questions of sex and sexuality into public discourse as never before (CITE MBALI, POSEL).

and temporary political activists, social workers and quiet supporters who participate in various bits of volunteer work in the community. This is also not to say that political work succeeds in transforming the landscape of work, rather than in shifting the terms of cultural reproduction. However, periods of heightened political work brings dominant narratives of hegemony into view, along with some marginal ones that are normally hidden in private and intimate domains, the silent realms of apparently natural rather than cultural reproduction.

In bringing into view the conflation of nature and culture, political work brings into view the raced and gendered character of the commodity detritus. Political work prompts people to ask whose bodies can be repositories of waste and decay. When people stop accepting their bodily infirmities and polluted environs as a part of nature, in other words, and when they imagine ways of taking hold of these realms of experience, the detritus comes into the realm of conscious struggle. If this sounds too much like raising Lazarus, it may be because political work in Wentworth acquires meaning in a specific cultural historic milieu in which, for many residents, the Holy Spirit enables political action. This paper is a first cut at the ways in which political work acquires meaning in Wentworth, for which task I rely primarily on popular historiography of work and political imagination in Wentworth.¹⁵

GANGS IN WENTWORTH'S PAST AND PRESENT

One of the primary stereotypes about Wentworth is that it is a place of gangs and violence. People as close as neighbouring Merebank have grown up with this conception. The notion that somehow Wentworth, gangs and violence go together is such a powerful fiction that many people in Wentworth say it themselves. Jerome Petersen says to me in no uncertain words, "If you live in Wentworth, you know that someday you're going to get cut."¹⁶

The exhibit on the gangs of Wentworth at the Kwa Muhle Museum in late 2002, researched and presented by a man from Wentworth, scripts local history in four movements: from the building of Wentworth as an "unplanned mistake", to Group Areas "social conditions and unemployment", to the emergence of gangs, and finally to the "community tak[ing] charge" with the Church at the helm. Gangs are presented as a pathological consequence of overcrowding and lack of facilities for leisure, and the primary forces to counter the pathology are the church and the criminal justice system. What is strikingly absent from the narrative are any connections to the anti-Apartheid movement or to an kind of "struggle narratives." Another striking absence from the commentary is any mention of gender, although the entire presentation is strongly gendered. Photographs are primarily of young boys and men, of cool gangsters in alleyways wearing smart clothes and hats, or of soccer players on the grounds. The problem of leisure is not posed for girls and young women

What is striking is that this exhibition, as a form of popular historiography, portrays Group Areas forced removals as a kind of original sin which produces a dystopian urbanity that draws young men into a cool but violent masculine subculture, and the only effective redeemer is the good priest, in implicit alliance with the police and state. There is no mention of active underground MK cells in the community, of periodic blasts around the community and in the refinery itself in the mid 1980s, no mention of Steve Biko's time in Wentworth and the vibrant political life around the Alan Taylor residence either in the 1970s or in the 1980s, and no mention of the United Committee of Concern, the UDF affiliate that organized sections of Austerville in the anti-Tricameral campaigns. Gangs are remembered as purely a matter of turf: of competition over space brought on by overcrowding after forced removals.

The picture that appears in life histories I have collected is that the gangs of the 1960s and 1970s were a kind of violent entrepreneurship, in which very little if anything is accumulated except a kind of masculine status. Even non-members of gangs emulated this search for masculine status, as is evident in a recent biography of Robert McBride in which much is made of the relationship of father and son, and guns.

¹⁵ My method thus far has primarily been through life histories collected in four periods of residence in Durban. I have also followed the careers of former political activists across the range of collaborators, liberals and anti-apartheid militants, tracing their movements out of these communities, and from the struggle to the state or Black Economic Empowerment ventures. This is a preliminary paper; the broader research requires filling out popular historiography through a wider archive of material that can speak to the forces that constitute Wentworth and Merebank, and the lived and imagined possibilities of its residents.

¹⁶ Jerome Petersen, 17 Aug 2004.

While organized crime has progressively become stronger as a route to accumulation, through the alliance of drugs, big men and police, a larger population of informal drug runners mimic the older style of gang membership where little is gained but a little respect. This is not the only route from the gangs of the past. Former gangsters are today's labour brokers, labour organizers, entrepreneurs, social investment coordinators and saved pastors. This begs the question of what elements of the gang past—so important to Wentworth's imaginary and to its experience of stigmatisation—has become part of present institutional forms. I have been asking whether and how the spatial fragmentation and competition of gang turf battles takes new form in the recruitment networks of labour brokers, Churches and civic organizations. The connections are sometimes apparent, but are rarely clearly functional, or even causal. J. McCord, photographer and organic intellectual originally from Wentworth, suggests that gang culture is pervasive, simmers somewhere underneath; he captures the pathos of this gang sentiment in the everyday life of Wentworth.¹⁷ What can be said is that the fragmentation of Wentworth's gangs has forged a particular kind of raced/gendered stigma centred on the image of a potentially violent, desperate Coloured masculinity. The patriarchal church has been a place of counter-ideology to this stigma, as a sign of the father who can reign these improper masculinities in, back to proper families. Outsiders have subsequently seen Wentworth as a place of gangs and danger, and people from Wentworth tell their own histories with respect to the gang culture that has stigmatised them in a particular way. This specific production of stigma in Wentworth has followed the contours of labour struggle, church activity, civic organization and all other realms of social life, just as long as individuals have stayed within the 20 square km surrounding the refinery.

FROM CONTRACTING TO COOPERATIVES: LABOUR, POWER, COMMUNITY

Before addressing the question of waged work in today's Wentworth, it is important to note that at least a third of the population between the ages of 15 and 65 is unemployed; a sizeable group is unable to work due to illness or disability; an equally sizeable group either chooses not to work or could not find work; and a significant group is comprised of currently unemployed seasonal workers (Table 5). Of those who are employed, a large share are in building trades and in metal or machine trades, as well as in health associate professions (Table 6). Census data by sex suggests of a gender division of labour in which Wentworth men have been tracked into manufacturing, construction and 'undetermined' occupations, and Wentworth women have been made workers wholesale/retail, community/social/personal services, 'undetermined' or also in manufacturing (Table 7).

The work that brings the strongest sense of both pride and forced commitment in Wentworth is itinerant industrial work at the refineries. Lenny Samuels is one such itinerant industrial artisan, a large man with a personality than can fill a room of any size.¹⁸ He speaks with great gusto about the way in which he was forced, through a series of contingent events, out of higher education and a route to becoming a foreman, into the stereotypical Coloured male occupation. "We were the pipe fitters and boiler makers, the fitters and turners," he says, switching from the singular to speak for the lot of Coloured men. For most of his subsequent life, Lenny either worked on limited duration contracts at the Engen refinery in the middle of Wentworth, or he travelled the length and breadth of South Africa to work at Richards Bay, Sasolberg and Saldhana. He has since been active in the Chemical Engineering and Industrial Workers Union (CEIWU), a militant independent labor union that has persistently fought for the rights of limited duration contract workers at the Engen Oil Refinery and beyond since the late 1990s.

Lenny tells a complicated story about changing labor relations at the refinery through the 1980s and 1990s. In his rendition, permanent labor had made a shift from being almost entirely white to hiring in more Indians and some Coloureds. Workers from the community surrounding Engen were primarily hired on limited-duration contracts for maintenance work during the annual shutdown, reinforcing the stereotype that artisanal industrial work is the Coloured man's calling. In the last decade, the refineries started using labor brokers, following major strikes in the 1980s. Outsourcing really took off in this period, and Engen stabilized its relations with local labor in various parts of Wentworth, in one rendition, by building ties with ex-gangsters. "Gang leaders actually became labor brokers. It was a mob thing. It's not been broken," says Lenny. Hector Andrews, a former shop steward at Engen who was part of a series of strikes in the late 1990s says he doesn't see a strong link between gangs and recruitment, except in the case of a firm called The Mob which took over a large share of labor contracting from ENGEN during the 1980s.¹⁹ The

¹⁷ Peter McKenzie, 31 Jul 2004.

¹⁸ Lenny Samuels, 26 Nov 2002.

¹⁹ Hector Andrews, 13 Jul 2004.

owner of this firms was known to some as the Godfather of Wentworth. According to Lenny, “he would dictate rates. If you didn’t go to work he’d come to your house and kick you and make you go to work.” The links only become more complicated in the 1990s. More recently, labor brokers have formed a consortium to attempt to monopolize local labor arrangements, and to work with representatives of organized labour to control recruitment. In turn, unions have been criticized for leading strikes in the chemical industries sector and then bringing labor contracts to their own recruitment networks.

The links between labor brokering and labor activism are undoubtedly complicated. Alan Martin, an ex-labor unionist, has clearly made a shift to becoming a labor broker, and he lives in the more prosperous ridge in Wentworth called ‘Treasure Beach’ that rises above the oil refinery towards the sea.²⁰ However, this route to class mobility can only be the lot of a minority of workers. Others have been drawn to union politics through the efforts of the fledgling Chemical Engineering and Industrial Workers’ Union (CEIWU) which has specialized in organizing limited duration contract workers. For many, like Lenny Samuels, this has effectively meant being blacklisted by industry. Each year since 1998 CEIWU has struck during the annual shutdown at ENGEN primarily for parity between the entitlements of limited duration and permanent workers.

A manager at ENGEN, Gary Dent, admitted that as a consequence of unrest, “We used to do the management job ourselves, but now we’ve farmed out the management.”²¹ The management of contract labor for shutdowns has been outsourced through labor contracting companies, more so since the enactment of the 1995 Labor Relations Act. While the number of people on site has stayed the same, in the view of this ENGEN employee, the nature of work has changed substantially for Wentworth’s limited duration contract workers. After a major wildcat strike in 2001, ENGEN has shifted to a model of partial and so-called “unscheduled” shutdowns, planned at short notice in order to reduce this type of strike activity. CEIWU also claims that the refineries have been illegally blacklisting workers since the rise in strike activity after 2000. Lenny, who is sure he is on a blacklist, says, “I’ve lost my car, I’ve lost my wife, I’ve lost my house. I find myself in the situation where my lights are being cut and I’m being evicted because I stand for justice for workers.”²²

To try to screen its labor force, Engen had used a local training program, housed in the building from what once was the Alan Taylor Residence, once a hotbed of Black Consciousness activism when it was black student housing for the University of Natal Medical School, where Steve Biko once lived and studied. More recently, Engen has combined forces with SAPREF for certification of contract workers at a location farther south in Isipingo, which in the words of an Engen manager, means that “there are now fewer people who have jobs, but those fewer people will have more regular jobs.”

When 176 workers were dismissed for being on strike in 2003, CEIWU took up the cause of unfair dismissal. The union had used a combination of ongoing militancy at the swimming pool grounds across the road from the main gate, and patient legal activism through assistance from the Legal Resources Centre in town. CEIWU decided to use the opportunity of this case to challenge the nature of workers contracts, since the company had dismissed workers on the grounds that their contracts were terminated. Importantly, the judge ruled that the contracts of these workers were in no way limited duration contracts, as the contracts made clear reference to benefits, leave, overtime, and other conditions of service. Since none of the workers can be seen as limited duration contract workers after the recent ruling, their employment cannot be terminated either for insubordination or operational requirements without following due procedure. This judgement runs against the ruling in the landmark “Fry Metals (Pvt Ltd) VS NUMSA” Case from 2002, which held the right to dismiss workers on the basis of operational requirements while workers were on strike. Engen could have strengthened this verdict if it had won the case against the 176 workers, on the grounds that the strike was jeopardizing the contracts necessary for the obligations of work. CEIWU’s victory has quite fundamentally altered the terms of labour struggle for industrial artisans in the petrochemical sector, and the court decision is a resource for the struggles of contract workers across South Africa.

CEIWU has expanded to represent scaffolders, cleaners, and the core maintenance workers who have been its mainstay. The maintenance workers who spearheaded the militancy in CEIWU, have deepened unionization across the refineries of South Durban. What about the community of Wentworth surrounding the refinery and its strikers? Karl Green, a union organizer at CEIWU admits “the

²⁰ Alan Martin, 26 Nov 2002.

²¹ Gary Dent, 20 Dec 2002.

²² Lenny Samuels, 26 Nov 2002.

community has a love-hate relationship with strikers at the refinery. They say ‘Eey, you’re going out on strike, Again! Other people haven’t got work. We’ll go down and work down there!’”²³ CEIWU has had problems with scab labour from the community, but they say they have had been able to convince them that if they went in, they would face the same problems in the future. Recently, CEIWU has been approached by call centre workers from Pinetown, also on limited duration contracts. Packing workers from a logistics centre in the retail sector have also approached CEIWU. Marginal workers, “for want of a better word,” who are outside the provisions of the Labour Relations Act by virtue of their short term contracts, have found CEIWU to be an effective voice. The union’s policy is to try to represent contract workers if they cannot find a bigger union to refer them to.

CEIWU’s labour organizing is progressing on three fronts. First, CEIWU would like to consolidate its base in the engineering sector in the South Basin, across refineries and subcontracting companies. Second, CEIWU now represents workers who can potentially redefine the accountability of capital under the Labour Relations Act, to fight against contract work itself. This has expanded their focus from the chemical engineering industries to workers on very short term contracts in retail and services as well. Often, this expansion of focus has come through the activism of former refinery workers who were blacklisted for militant labour unionism, and who have since shifted to work in call centres and other forms of short term contract work. Finally, CEIWU has begun to see that it has built capacity in organizing contract workers who are constantly in flux. Bigger unions presume that organizers can be sent to a site to unionize workers, while CEIWU talks to people across work and home, individually and in groups, and in informal locations. CEIWU has most recently been searching for ways to impart this activist expertise to larger, more bureaucratized labour union federations.

A small group of unemployed industrial artisans who have participated in the militant unionism of CEIWU have over the past two years also been experimenting with forming industrial coops. The attempts to build worker coops has had to contend with the fundamentally gendered fissures in the community. Lenny Stevens was part of the initial phase of building worker coops. He explained to me that male artisans from Wentworth continue to engage in long distance migrant work; they go to abattoirs in Ireland and Scotland; they go to construction work in New Zealand and Australia. Against this drain of artisanal work, Lenny says he has decided to stay and fight for an alternative future, Solomons analyses the political economic transformation in a very specific way in a new vision centered on cooperatives.

“We are looking into forming little cooperatives. I look at a cooperative as something that will oppose multinational capitalism. This will unite our community and also address our socio-economic needs... Giving a sense of dignity as you owning something that belongs to you, not to some white guy that’s hidden, that you don’t even know... The government has encouraged this by a program which they call GEAR: outsourcing. I’ve had my toilet fixed now; it was supposed to be done by the department of housing, but they sent a private contractor to my house now. We’d rather all become contractors or coops. We want to contract *to* the government to address our own needs. Why don’t we say we are cooperatives and do this work ourselves instead of allowing this outsourcing to be done. There are no permanent jobs in the municipalities today; there are no permanent jobs in the hospitals today; there are no permanent jobs in schools today because of outsourcing through GEAR and the redistribution of wealth. So we’ve got our own ideas about the redistribution of wealth. If I belong to a coop that does metalworking, and my wife belongs to a coop that does sewing for instance, we could support one another, and then we could have another coop which would be a buying coop, then maybe a gardening coop. We’re looking at reversing things. We’ll barter.”

This popular political economy can be written off as utopian populism, but such scholarly cynicism does not do justice to the way in which people living under neoliberal restructuring experience the present and conceive of alternatives. Lenny knew as we spoke that this vision was already compromised by tensions within the community over what cooperatives mean and what community development should be.

The Metalworkers’ Cooperative was formed by a small number of unemployed artisanal labor unionists from CEIWU, including Lenny, and the late Skido Joseph.²⁴ CEIWU’s involvement was in the inception, as part of the ‘Wentworth Poverty Alleviation Program’ (WEPAP) which was to pitch a community-based cooperative initiative to the Poverty Alleviation section of eThekweni Municipality’s Economic Development section. WEPAP was based on the formation of two initial coops which would then spawn

²³ Karl Green, 21 Apr 2004.

other coops engaged in other kinds of work. The men of CEIWU started a metalworkers coop, and a group of women unemployed by the massive retrenchments in the clothing industry were to start a sewing coop. Conflict soon emerged, because it seemed that the sewing coop was led by a mother and daughter from outside Wentworth who apparently saw this as an opportunity to harness a dependent contract group to their connections in the clothing industry. Lenny put it categorically: “They are taking the cooperative and offering big businesses cheap labor; that’s exploitation.”

There are several things that can be said about this vision of cooperatives without exploitation, as a grassroots challenge to GEAR, and as a proactive way of addressing poverty. What is clear is that at least some of Wentworth’s working-class population are aware of the way in which their livelihoods are bound up with the government’s macroeconomic policy. What is less clear in the ideology but blatant in practice is that community debates over cooperatives became polarized through the work of gender. Indeed, some of the unemployed women in the sewing cooperative did not conceptualized cooperatives in anything like the materialist idiom used by Lenny Stevens.

For instance, in the heated meetings between members of the metalworkers coop and the sewing coop, Greta Jones rose up to control the negotiations and said, “I don’t know much about cooperatives, but I know that I’m hungry and my clothes are falling off my body.” Pin-drop silence followed and she seemed to use a command of Biblical oratory to steer very different factions into engagement. When I asked her about it later, she smiled and said, “You saw what happened, didn’t you! He was there, the Holy Spirit speaks through me to show us the light.”²⁵ Greta and her friend Diane call themselves “intercessors”: they describe their primary work as intervening in oppressive marriages to show women the way to take control of their lives. They speak of the deep fissures that migrant work has driven into their possibilities of having stable families, and they are proud to be single mothers. It is important to note that in today’s Wentworth, there are almost the same number of female as male household heads (Table 8); male household heads are significantly more likely to be employed (female-35%, male-53%), and only slightly more likely to be unemployed (female-10%, male-14%), (Table 9). Census data on “marital status” shows 25% of the population of Austerville is married; 60% have never married; 4% live together “like married partners”, and 5% are separated or divorced (Table 10). Stable marriage is not in actuality the norm. In the context of high rates of familial conflict described in many of my interviews, my conjecture is that these and other women I have talked to find in Pentacostalism a way of maintaining their political engagement within the community without compromising their moral stature, or their commitment to an ideal of family that they know has already been deeply compromised. I will return to why the practice rather than ideology of Pentacostalism that has become more important to them.

Over the past year, the sewing cooperative has seen a revival, though the ‘outsider’ leaders have left, and the entire workforce has turned around. Janice Clayton left out of disgust with the politics surrounding the cooperative, and a sense that more middle class women were beginning to use the workers for their own ends, to bolster their role as champions of women in the community.²⁶ Three sisters, Leanna, Georgina and Pearl are now running the cooperative. Two of them are unemployed machinists who returned to work once this opportunity presented itself. When I met them, they had just been squeezed on a payment by a more middle-class woman activist in Wentworth, for whom the cooperative was doing subcontract labour. They admitted to me that it is still difficult not to act in fact as a subcontract unit under such circumstances. The cooperative has also rebuilt an alliance with the metalworkers cooperative.

And the metalworker’s cooperative has had a significant turnaround over the past year as well, principally through the entry of Lorraine Lesley. Lorraine was a significant figure in the major Engen strike in 1980, when she was a key activist in CEIWU. Subsequently, when I last interviewed her in 2002, she had left the chemical engineering sector to work at a call center. It was her initial work organizing workers at the call center which brought CEIWU into organizing very limited duration service workers there and elsewhere. When she lost her job, Lorraine returned to being an industrial artisan. Importantly, Lorraine flouts the conception that this work is Coloured men’s work, rather than the trade she is most attached to. When I spent time with the members of the coop in early 2004, they had just decided to draft a business plan and to pose as a small business, because it seemed they were not getting contracts because cooperatives cannot be held liable in the same ways that businesses can. It is ironic that while they were once critics of the sewing coop’s role as a subcontract unit, the metalworkers coop might become a small business. This is not to say that it’s members are not idealistic or committed to cooperatives, but that larger forces call the shots.

²⁵ Greta Jones, 21 Nov 2002,

²⁶ Janice Clayton, 14 Sept 2004.

The metalworkers cooperative has also recently been in negotiations to sign on to Vulindlela, a consortium formed by enterprising men, primarily Coloured, partially from Wentworth, to try to secure 'Black Empowerment' contracts for smaller contractors. The consortium aims to secure contracts and provide basic business skills which are beyond the overheads of small contractors, and its aim is also "poverty alleviation" in Wentworth. The two arms of Vulindlela specialize in construction and metalwork, and the metalworkers' cooperative is an important member in the consortium because it stands for the company's commitment to poverty alleviation. The undercurrents in Vulindlela are an attempt to use black empowerment to address the needs of a Coloured community—with all the complex race politics this point evokes; second, its focus on construction and mechanical engineering focuses primarily on the stereotype of Coloured male work—with all the complex race and gender politics this point evokes. This story is currently unfolding.

POLITICAL WORK

Apart from struggles over possible forms of legal work, and apart from the illegal work that I have mentioned in passing, many people are involved in civic and social organizations. In addition to the work of labour organizers and of the pioneers of cooperativisation, several people are involved in work aimed at the transformation of the terms of work, life, environment, family and community. Although I have suggested that Wentworth has become more "ghetto", its residents refuse to move if they can help it because Wentworth is a vital, "vibey" neighbourhood. Even in the flats of Woodville Road, which Jane Glover calls "the ghetto within the ghetto", they refuse to forget how cool it can be to sit at the front door step and see the whole world go by. Many residents have used their time and energy to engage in a variety of political, civic and social groups, many fronts in the fight for social and environmental justice. Today's struggles coalesce around a range of concerns, including limited-duration contract labour in the petrochemical industry, air pollution primarily from the refineries and the Mondi paper mill, sub-standard housing, and care for those living with HIV/AIDS.

The range of tactics in these struggles also varied considerably. There are some who appeal to many years of struggle activism. Robert McBride and Greta Apelgren were notorious for spectacular acts of sabotage in the mid-1980s. Robert in particular became iconic in the media of late Apartheid as the terrorist uncaring of civilian casualties. His partner in action, Greta Apelgren was a social worker in the community who joined the armed struggle in desperation at the structural rootedness of poverty and inequality not just in her surroundings, but across black South Africa. Both Robert and Greta played upon the Apartheid conceit that the internal enemy would not *look* like them: well-dressed, educated, "Coloured". Greta describes walking alongside the hated Caspirs with duffle bags full of information, money and arms, or driving in and out of Botswana like a couple of naïve holiday makers, their car loaded with explosives. Unlike most activists in Wentworth, both Robert and Greta could make the transition from the struggle to the state, and, at least thus far, out of the community in which their activism was forged.²⁷ There is much to be said about the way in which Robert and Greta stand in for the community despite their difficult decisions in the 1980s. The media has followed Robert's twists until his current appointment as eKurhuleni Police Chief, while Greta has taken a much quieter route through the state.²⁸

Several people could not cash in their struggle credentials to the same effect. Some moved on to other forms of activism, as in fighting for the rights of contract workers in the refineries. Others appeal to years of parliamentary action through the Labour Party, while its members diverged when it supported the Tricameral system of divide and rule.²⁹ A few actively worked with the National Party; one man fought to bring the National Party into Wentworth in the first democratic elections.³⁰ Yet others turned to their histories, to question what it means to be Coloured in the new South Africa, and how claims on the past can be used for entitlements in the present. Morriss Fynn dons Zulu garb to claim the chieftaincy and ancestral land offered to his ancestor, an Englishman who went native, Henry Francis Fynn. Morriss Fynn

²⁷ As another activist and Robben Islander reminds me, returning to Wentworth is difficult for multiple reasons, not least of which is that despite friends and family, most people want to get out of the ghetto. The other important point is that he feels people ask him to be responsible for their declining life chances in post-Apartheid South Africa. Vincent James, 8 Oct 2004.

²⁸ Robert McBride, 25 Sept 2003; Greta Apelgren, 9 Apr 2004; Mokae 2004; Grunenbaum and Robins 2001.

²⁹ Tommy Abrahams, 26 July 2004; Llewellyn Landers 8 Aug 2004

³⁰ Hector Henry, 6 Sept 2004

was once active in the Labour Party and participated in the exclusionary LAC and Tricameral structures of the 1980s, before sawing down racial signs on beaches in the last years of Apartheid.³¹ Another, less flamboyant resident of Wentworth, Louise Landers, has made unsuccessful claims on her ancestral property as a descendant of Adam Kok, the Griqua founder of Kokstad. While her family was dispossessed before the 1913 Land Act, the cutoff date for restitution through the Land Claims Court, she claims her Griqua indigeneity to argue for her rightful property and identity in the rainbow nation. She showed me the polite official letter that affirmed her history but refused her inheritance, and she also showed me an advertisement for a farm that invites tourists to experience a real Afrikaans outdoor experience.³² Not many others have recourse to such direct claims to origins, let alone to dispossession from land and means of production, in their complex and unrecorded family histories.

As new struggles have emerged from the changing terms of life under the new dispensation. Environmentalism would seem to have been the most efficacious of these new terms, as it holds the promise of drawing together a variety of constituencies across race and class in shared mobilization over their commons, which is also the waste dump of petrochemical giants. *groundwork*, an organization which emerged from Wentworth, has become South Africa's key environmental justice organization. By 1995, *groundwork* spawned the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance or SDCEA to link racially divided communities across the South Durban basin to respond to pollution in the local environment. SDCEA was launched in response to the interest with which Nelson Mandela listened to the concerns of protestors outside the Engen refinery in 1995 who had interrupted his visit with their concerns. Environmentalism also musters scientific knowledge, which on the question of South Durban is clearer than ever. Public health scholars from the University of Michigan and the University of Natal have shown that Engen, Sapref and Mondi contribute to 80% of the pollution that people in South Durban have to live with. Yet, several residents appeal to a kind of pragmatism, arguing that the only way to make the giants in their backyards pay, is to extract from their 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) programs. SDCEA/ *groundwork* are categorically against CSR as mere "greenwashing".

However, a persisting strength of the SDCEA/ *groundwork* alliance has been that it can wear many hats—militant and professionalized, grassroots and networked, confrontational and negotiable—and it can work across multiple scales: local, city, provincial, national and international. Of these, the unicity and national levels have been key points to pressure government, particularly with the weakening of provincial government since the turn to decentralization. Consequently, while the power to decline Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) is at the provincial level, only one of the 64 EIAs concerning South Durban between Jan 2003 and March 2004 was declined. *groundwork*'s mandate has been to address three major concerns: oil and air pollution with regard to chemical industries, health care waste and incineration, and hazardous waste. The campaign on corporate accountability emerged out of this and attempts to bring them all together. Rather than corporate social responsibility or CSR, *groundwork*'s position is, "we say no, we need accountability in terms of rules and regulations: international and national binding rules and regulations for industrial development and industrial capital flows and the impacts of that." *groundwork* facilitates links with communities across South Africa, but it continues to use SDCEA as an index of community-based environmental justice struggle. In other words, *groundwork* tries to use the history of environmental activism centred on Wentworth, to try to create similar capacity elsewhere in South Africa where similar 'fenceline' issues can be politicised.

However, SDCEA does not command a steady mass base in South Durban, or even in Wentworth. As a consequence, SDCEA's work within the community has been multi-faceted. There are three important points to be noted about SDCEA's strategy. First, while the organization is small and its presence in daily organizing is weak, it can pull in a crowd for spectacular events by drawing on a variety of other community organizations, even if they come to dissent with SDCEA's tactics or point of view. Second, SDCEA/ *groundwork* has tried to pursue a technocratic approach by claiming to empower residents in community monitoring of pollution levels, and community collection of research data to demonstrate ongoing ill-health in the shadow of oil refineries. While this technocratic approach has not made an army of resident scientists monitoring pollution levels, this technocratic approach has won SDCEA important allies in international environmental justice research. Third, SDCEA has also taken recourse to legal activism, by pursuing Engen, SAPREF and Mondi in the courts. This constitutional route, alongside periodic mass action, has been quite fruitful, particularly in the recent victory against Mondi's plan to build an incinerator/ combustor.

³¹ Morriss Fynn, 29 Nov 2004.

³² Louise Landers, 19 Dec 2002.

The recent struggle around Mondi's expansion has been very important for its multiple dimensions of activism. The expansion centred on what Mondi calls a combustor, and which SDCEA/groundwork identify as an incinerator. Mondi first made the proposal in 1998 to put in a new 'fluidised boiler,' but the context is important. By November 1998, they found they had to extend their ash landfill site in neighbouring Merebank, but SDCEA opposed this and it was stopped. They then dumped the ash in the township of Umlazi, 7km away and there they were effective. SDCEA had managed to close down the Umlazi dump for toxic wastes in February 1997, an important moment at which the residents of this African township were mobilized into the regional environmental justice movement. As Bobby Peek laments, "every environmental justice struggle is bittersweet mate, you win here and you lose there," and Umlazi was once more a dumping ground. However, Mondi knew they were going to run out of space in Umlazi, and they didn't want to transport their waste all the way to Shongweni, 35km away, so they planned to re-burn it in a boiler on the plant. This is effectively what an incinerator does.

Three points emerged through the proceedings of the case. First, definitions of the expansion were key to the case. Was this a combustor to produce steam and power, as claimed by Mondi, or an incinerator to burn waste, as argued by SDCEA? Definitions are key to organizing, as "anti-incineration" has been a key moral claim made by community residents. Second, the legal activists of the LRC caught the respondents on a technicality that exposed the development of informal ties between capital and the state. The company contracted for the expansion claimed to have obtained exemptions from conducting an environmental impact assessment and preparing a report, while no such exemptions were granted through formal procedures. Third, the possibility of a negotiated settlement exposed contradictions between legal counsel and community activists, as the latter would not give up its militancy even for important concessions from the industrial giants. Ultimately, anti-incineration works both as an emotive organizing tool at the local level, and it brings international allies in the global anti-incineration movement. These are two key constituencies for SDCEA/groundwork.

Bobby Peak concedes is that SDCEA must decide its battles carefully and concentrate energies on key cases. Given that SDCEA does not have a mass base but that it can bring together a strong crowd around issues like incineration and relocation, it has to deepen the links between campaigning and episodic militancy. One of the challenges will be to draw a tighter link between organized labour, to bring together questions of environmental pollution and jobless growth in the expansion of the South Durban industrial basin. As Peak warns, "The environmental movement is just beginning to challenge the economic system."³³

However, not everyone from Wentworth sees the environmental movement as the prime mover. Jane Glover, an activist fighting for decent housing in the "ghetto within the ghetto" in Woodville Road says, "I'm not worried about the environment; all I want is my piece of oxygen!"

Jane's primary battle has been to take over a set of flats left vacant by the Provincial Housing Department. The gist of this struggle is that in early 2003, a group of women from Woodville Road formed a small organization to stage a putsch against the leadership of the Wentworth Development Forum (WDF), the community development organization linked unofficially to SDCEA. The WDF's position was that they were negotiating with the Housing Department to employ local contractors for construction work. The women of Woodville Road decided they could wait no longer. One night, they held hands and prayed, and they say that the Holy Spirit descended upon them and enabled them to act. By the next morning they had taken over the new housing stock and could not be dislodged. The WDF then called a meeting with key external activists, and the women of Woodville Road were chastised for defying the leadership. Jane Glover was eloquent, and her impromptu response, after a careful apology to the WDF leadership and the community, demonstrates the continuing centrality of gender in the everyday work of organizing.

"I woke up one morning and I said to myself, 'What is it that depresses me so much about living here?' And when I looked around, I looked at the flat and I said "My god! It looks like the walls are closing in on me!" So, with that in mind, that is what our committee was all about. If we failed somewhere along the way, we are so sorry. You know, when we needed some men around, there were no men available. So we took it upon ourselves to get in there and take on the task."³⁴

³³ Bobby Peak, 22 Apr 2004.

³⁴ Jane Glover, Meeting in Wentworth on the Woodville/Wolraad/Tayne Residents Committee, undated tape from early 2003.

There are two intertwined dynamics at work in the activism described by Jane Glover. On the one hand, she and her comrades experience being moved by the Holy Spirit to act in their interests and against the commands of their male leadership. On the other hand, the ideology employed is conservative of conceptions of family and sexuality that in practice have been transformed dramatically.

ORGANIZING WITH GOD: PITFALLS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Diane Elson once famously argued that structural adjustment programs rely on “unlimited supplies of female labour”, a play on Arthur Lewis’ classic work on economic development through unlimited supplies of agricultural labour. Elson’s argument is that cutbacks on welfare and social security through Structural Adjustment Programs require women in households to absorb much of the shock, through increased unpaid care-work.³⁵ Within the profound hollowing of the South African state and society in the new dispensation, as both capital and state have turned to forms of contracting to circumvent labour law and organized labour, what we are only just beginning to understand are the raced and gendered ways in which communities pick up the pieces. What cannot be assumed, is that these women only engage in survival, or in getting by. The activist women of Wentworth also periodically contest the very structure of contracting, as well as Apartheid legacies of raced/gendered work and politics. These are continuing struggles, often against the odds.

In one instance, a women from one prominent women’s organization in Wentworth, has used her home as a meeting ground for community activists of all sorts. Each week, surplus food from grocery stores comes to her home from the correctional center for youths on the Ridge, which she distributes to hungry families. Several unemployed poor women participate in this women’s organization in order to keep active and to retain a sense of pride. One unemployed woman has sent her children to live with foster parents in a farm near Kokstad in the Eastern Cape because she cannot afford to raise them. She goes to the women’s organization every day to work for ideals she believes in, while receiving some tea and food in the process. Another young unwed mother runs youth programs and a young girls’ after-school group. The women’s organization is able to harness wider resources to make a variety of projects work, but these resources also filter into and support forms of mutualism in the context of deepening unemployment. This is not to say that mutualism is not internally exclusionary, but it does provide an alternative to a violent search for economic security through the drug trade, sex and theft. All alternatives, needless to say, are profoundly gendered.

What I have also found is that this mutualism is expressed by a significant fraction through a charismatic Christian idiom, and this has important implications for its ability to be seen as part of a political imagination. There are indications that the incredible number of Pentacostal sects in Wentworth, which people put at between 40 and 60, are something like pyramid schemes found in various contexts of political economic instability. I am currently researching what tithing means to people and to what extent it allows pastors to accumulate capital. Lorraine Lesley says a prominent pastor has been reported to say to his congregation “How much is your pastor worth?”³⁶ Marcel Jones is both a young entrepreneur and an aspiring pastor, and he says there are many who get into this vocation for the wrong reason to misuse the mechanism of tithing as prescribed in scripture.³⁷ What Marcel hints at are the ways in which pastoring draws on other spheres of masculine affiliation, principally gangs and artisanal labour networks. His father interjects to put it more bluntly: they are all based on control of turf.

What is not clear from conversations with unemployed women engaged in political work, is that Pentacostalism provides any significantly oppositional ideology. Why then do these women not intuitively follow Diane Elson’s Marxist feminism, and why do they turn to an alliance with God. However, there is something important at an ontological rather than epistemological level, in the way in which these women become agents when they are saved by the Holy Spirit. My conjecture is that the Holy Spirit provides a theory of interpellation; that is, of individual action enabled by broader, ultimately incomprehensible forces. The Holy Spirit makes women act in ways they would not normally act perhaps even defying dominant conceptions of femininity—in speaking out loud at meetings or taking on the male leadership. After all, it is a masculine God who enables their actions. Is there a nascent message in this medium?

³⁵ Elson 1995, p.24.

³⁶ Lorraine Lesley, 13 Sept 2004.

³⁷ Marcel Jones, 13 Sept 2004.

While the Holy Spirit provides a political ontology for some unemployed women in Wentworth, the ideological package it brings leaves conservative conceptions of family and feminine propriety ostensibly intact. In this sense, organizing with God carries strong risks. These risks are particularly strong in the sphere of activism for the rights of people with HIV/AIDS. Greg Andrews fights a slow and surprisingly marginal struggle for the rights of those who suffer with the virus, many of whom are hidden under the mantle of Wentworth's powerful currents of Christian conservatism. Greg questions the stigma ascribed to people living with AIDS, and in the process he faces constant opposition to discuss questions concerning sex and sexuality. Greg has personal networks into illegal work of various sorts, as he does into the morally upright work of saved social workers. He walks a tightrope while quietly pushing against the Churches to spread condoms along with the word. Others address questions of HIV/AIDS and sexuality through the rubric of protecting families and family values. A recent campaign by WDF responds to Thabo Meki's 2004 pre-election trip, in which he was apparently told about the "degeneration of the family" and the rising exchange of sex for survival in Wentworth; these points were met by indignation from some in WDF who saw it as an affront to a community that has been stigmatised enough. Mbeki's eccentric response was to call for a multi-faceted approach to Wentworth's problems, beginning with increased policing. Greg Andrews continues to work in a more modest way with the variety of forces that divide the community of Wentworth.

Wentworth's many struggles continue into the present and do not converge in any clear way. The environment and labour struggles are the most organized, but a large number of people continue to participate in the everyday work of political organizing across a range of concerns that comes from living in a ghetto surrounding a refinery. Each form of political work confronts an aspect of the elements that make Wentworth, for the time being, a type of ghetto, characterised by particular forms of stigma, constraint, spatial confinement and institutional containment. The work to undermine these elements continues as part of the bittersweet experience of living in Wentworth. The rise of Pentacostalism in Wentworth is significant for what people do with it, and what is rare for Pentacostalism, given its conservative gender ideology, is for it to become a tool for women-led militancy. Does the Holy Spirit convey an internal and external critique of the stigma that contains Wentworth as a ghetto in the new South Africa? Not decisively, but it does allow some people to claim their place as moral beings. The Holy Spirit also allows unemployed women to work act as agents of change outside the church, as heirs to the fruit of this world: to its housing, its basic services, its jobs, its medicine and its clean air. In this sense, and its own quirky and exclusionary way, the Holy Spirit has come to a community living next door to oil refineries, to stand in for a very different universal medium than money, one that can be used to confront the multiple degradations of commodification.

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APPENDIX

The following tables use Austerville and Treasure Beach to refer to Wentworth, following local talk. This paper uses Austerville as a proxy for working-class Wentworth, which locals call “the village”. Census data uses ‘Wentworth’ to refer only the area directly to the North of Austerville beyond Wentworth Hospital, the former white area of Wentworth. My research centres on former Coloured areas of Austerville and Treasure Beach, and Merewent, also called Merebank in local talk, which includes what locals call the Ridge, central Merebank and the Navy.

Table 1: Population by Racial Classifications against Durban, eThekweni Municipality and KZN Province

	Black African	Coloured	Indian or Asian	White	Grand Total
Austerville	1,304	23,411	232	81	25,028
Treasure Beach	202	1,371	163	6	1,742
Merewent	524	855	19,135	42	20,556
Durban	197,925	55,051	146,808	136,857	536,641
Durban: EtheKwini	2,110,557	87,267	614,770	277,529	3,090,123
KwaZulu-Natal	8,002,638	141,853	798,190	483,335	9,426,015

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Head of Household - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 2: Individual Monthly Income in Wentworth and Merebank

	No Income	R1 - R400	R401 - R800	R801 - R1 600	R1 601 - R3 200	R3 201 - R6 400	R6 401 - R12 800	R12 801 - R25 600	R25 601 - R51 200	R51 201 - R102 400	R102 401 - R204 800	R204 801 or more
Austerville	7,798	520	1,832	1,500	2,261	1,820	661	75	15	3	21	-
Treasure Beach	423	33	52	78	165	222	156	42	18	3	3	-
Merewent	6,036	333	1,682	1,640	2,225	1,793	710	96	15	21	3	-

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Labour Force - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 3: Household Monthly Income in Wentworth and Merebank

	No income	R1 - R4 800	R4 801 - R9 600	R9 601 - R19 200	R19 201 - R38 400	R38 401 - R76 800	R76 801 - R153 600	R153 601 - R307 400	R307 201 - R614 800	R614 401 - R1 228 800	R1 228 801 - R2 457 600	R2 457 601 and more
Austerville	411	92	493	631	1,017	1,122	785	287	39	6	24	-
Treasure Beach	21	9	18	9	21	64	125	73	15	9	6	-
Merewent	346	69	445	595	1,057	1,460	1,041	365	49	12-	3	-

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Head of Household - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 4: Household Annual Income (Percentages by area across salary ranges)

	No income	R1 - R4 800	R4 801 - R9 600	R9 601 - R19 200	R19 201 - R38 400	R38 401 - R76 800	R76 801 - R153 600	R153 601 - R307 200	R307 201 - R614 400	R614 401 - R1 228 800	R1 228 801 - R2 457 600	R2 457 601 and more	Total
Austerville	8	2	10	13	21	23	16	6	1	0	0-	0	100
Merewent	6	1	8	11	19	27	19	7	1	0-	0	0	100
Lamontville	26	6	14	16	18	13	5	1	0	0	0	0	100
Umlazi	30	7	14	17	17	9	4	1	0	0	0	0	100
Musgrave	6	2	6	8	11	19	21	17	7	2	1	1	100
Kloof	9	2	8	10	10	12	17	19	9	2	1	1	100
EtheKwini Municipality	23	6	13	15	15	12	9	5	2	0	0	0	100
KwaZulu-Natal	26	9	19	15	12	8	6	3	1	0	0	0	100

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Head of Household - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 5: Employment Status of Labour Force (aged 15-65) in Wentworth and Merebank

	Employed	Unemployed	Scholar or student	Home-maker or housewife	Pensioner or retired person too old to work	Unable to work due to illness or disability	Seasonal worker not presently working	Does not choose to work	Could not find work
Austerville	6,834	3,576	2,153	1,243	814	728	418	389	352
Treasure Beach	669	93	227	102	46	21	18	9	9
Merewent	6,733	1,668	1,764	2,351	997	502	109	220	210

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Labour Force - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 6: Occupations of Labour Force (aged 15-65) in Wentworth and Merebank

	Corporate managers	General manager	Physical, math & engineering	Life science professional	Teaching professional	Other professional	Natural & engineering science associate professional	Life science & health associate professional	Teaching associate professional	Other associate professional
Austerville	143	139	84	15	51	197	168	216	231	219
Treasure Beach	24	36	12	9	15	63	21	21	33	21
Merewent	257	245	116	36	123	255	257	82	108	332

	Office clerks	Customer service clerks	Personal & protective services workers	Models, salespersons and demonstrators	Extraction & building trades workers	Metal; machinery and related trades workers	Handicraft printing and related trades workers	Other craft and related trades workers
Austerville	858	426	517	339	639	698	36	138
Treasure Beach	120	21	33	24	33	51	-	-
Merewent	1,266	309	244	298	378	289	69	151

	Stationary-plant and related operators	Machine operators and assemblers	Drivers and mobile-plant operators	Sales and services elementary occupations	Mining; construction; manufacturing and transport labourers	Not applicable (not economically active)
Austerville	48	255	177	282	323	9,673
Treasure Beach	-	3	3	24	6	526
Merewent	43	441	370	208	307	7,821

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Labour Force - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 7: Sector of Employment of Males/Females in Wentworth and Merebank

	Agriculture hunting; forestry & fishing	Manufacturing & gas & water supply	Electricity; water supply	Construction	Wholesale & retail trade	Transport; storage & communication	Financial, insurance, real estate & business services	Community, social & personal services	Private House holds	Undetermined	Not applicable
Austerville Male	12	956	12	453	350	222	213	344	21	745	4,436
Austerville Female	15	517	9	36	925	90	289	826	96	700	5,237
Treasure Beach Male	-	66	3	33	39	12	21	42	3	117	209
Treasure Beach Female	-	12	6	39	12	39	96	15	114	317	
Merewent Male	15	1,456	27	207	745	441	307	403	15	485	2,743
Merewent Female	12	818	3	27	497	100	262	509	91	311	5,078

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Labour Force - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 8: Male/Female Household Heads in Wentworth and Merebank

	Male	Female
Austerville	2,597	2,310
Treasure Beach	259	111
Merewent	3,423	2,018

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Head of Household - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 9: Employment Status of Male/Female Household Heads in Wentworth and Merebank

	Employed		Unemployed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Austerville	1,389	819	375	246
Treasure Beach	214	66	12	9
Merewent	2,148	583	277	160

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Head of Household - South Africa by Province and Municipality

Table 10: Marital Status in Wentworth and Merebank

	Married civil/ religious	Married traditional/ customary	Polygamous marriage	Living together like married partners	Never married	Widower/ widow	Separated	Divorced
Treasure Beach	615	9	-	30	999	51	12	30
Merewent	8,052	658	7	290	9,494	1,452	130	470

Source: Statistics South Africa, Census 2001, Family - South Africa by Province and Municipality