

# POLITICAL WORK: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LABOURS OF ACTIVISM IN THE SHADOWS OF DURBAN'S REFINERIES

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

If you flew in to the port city of Durban, or Ethekwini Unicity, 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 levels<sup>4</sup>, Wentworth today is a hotbed of political activism while Merebank is relatively quiescent. Wentworth has over time become a ghetto in the analytical sense proposed by Wacquant (2004) as shaped by stigma, constraint, spatial confinement and institutional containment.<sup>5</sup> Although its residents have come from all over South Africa, this diverse

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1 I am grateful to the Michigan Society of Fellows and the University of Michigan for funding to begin this research in 2002. Versions of this Report were presented to the School of Development Studies 50th Anniversary Conference, Durban, South Africa, 21-22 October 2004, the American Anthropological Association Annual Conference, San Francisco, 20 Nov 2004 and the African Studies Workshop, University of Chicago, 23 Nov, 2004.

2 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, escape, or threat of repatriation, and the incredible difference between cultural productions that can objectify Indian as opposed to Coloured artefacts from food to fashion and film. Instead, I capitalise Indian and Coloured as proper nouns. By 'cultural production', I follow Willis (1981) to refer to the broadest sphere of ongoing human creativity, much of which maintains hegemonic ideologies in the realm of cultural reproduction, which in turn makes possible the social reproduction of capitalism. Cultural production encompasses much more than is necessary for capitalist hegemony; it always contains multiple nascent and overt critiques of power.

3 Statistics South Africa gives us important data to begin with. Table 1 in the Appendix shows that Indians and Coloureds continue to numerically dominate these townships, but that as a share of eThekweni city or KZN province, Wentworth Coloureds are a much more significant share of the Coloured population than are Merebank Indians of the city or provincial Indian population. Indeed, Wentworth has a distinctive character as a Coloured community while Merebank is but one small corner of Indian Durban.

4 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 townships of Lamontville and the much larger Umlazi, as well as formerly white Musgrave and Kloof, shows that Wentworth and Merebank sit similarly between former African and white areas in income terms, with Merebank appearing slightly more advantaged but not tremendously so (Table 4). What also stands out is the much higher number of households with no income in African areas in contrast to others.

5 Wacquant (2004) derives this relational conception of the ghetto as a critique of functionalist conceptions of ethnic clustering and social domination in the urban ecology of the Chicago school of sociology. Through Wacquant's genealogy, the ghetto emerges as a 'social-organisational device' directed, in his terms, at producing and forcibly confining a dispossessed and dishonoured group; he suggests the ghetto ought to be seen in analogy with other forms of collective violence like the reservation, the refugee camp and the prison. Each form links economic exploitation and social ostracisation 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, carries its own particular social geographic contradictions. Wacquant gets us some distance in understanding ghetto culture, in that its residents create strong internal affinities to make the experience of stigma

product of the attempt to legislate against ‘miscegenation’ is now 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 been pulled apart and has become part of the cultural political economic fortunes offered by the new South Africa. Rather than a tale of two townships, what I narrate are divergent histories of space through which livelihoods and senses of belonging have been shrinking into a ghetto on the one hand, and broadening into South Africa’s broader circuits of class and social citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

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 organisations. 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 (including its most famous resident, Steve Biko), underground Umkhonto we Sizwe (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 been engaged in a very different history of space. 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

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bittersweet – a sentiment captured in Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes’ portrait of Harlem in *The sweet flypaper of life*. Unlike the ethnic neighbourhood, the ghetto is less a springboard to assimilation in society than what Wacquant calls a walled-in ‘dissimilation.’ Wentworth and Merebank diverge along these lines: Merebank has recourse to broader circuits of Indian diasporic cultural production while Wentworth produces a local ghetto culture through a range of citations, not least to a canon of ghetto archetypes from African American cultural production.

<sup>6</sup> Histories of space presume what Henri Lefebvre ([1974], 2001) calls a properly social theory of space that refuses the dichotomy of physical/ container-space and mental/ cognitive space, to apprehend how spaces are fought for, made, devalued, destroyed, restored, irrevocably lost or nostalgically remembered. Lefebvre’s central analytic – the triad of representations of space (maps, planning apparatus), spatial practices (normalised ways of using the built environment, migration streams) and representational spaces (unexpected reworkings of lived space, militant seizures of ‘the street’, gang turf, barricades) – fundamentally transformed the craft of radical geography in the spirit of new left Marxism. Disenchanted by the voluntarism of his fellow 68-ers, Lefebvre’s point was that the seizure of the state does not transform the spaces we live in. Following Lefebvre’s spatialised Marxism, Harvey (1982) explores the many ways in which capitalism’s anarchic developmentalism remakes social space, via the dialectics of fixity and motion through which crisis tendencies are constantly put off in space-time. The problem with this approach is that it converts a Eurocentric reading of Lefebvre into a Marxist physics determined by overaccumulation crises rather than by cultural historic forms of struggle over the land-labour-money triad.

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<sup>7</sup>, 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 key realms of social institutionality: gangs, churches and relatively rigid work trajectories.<sup>8</sup> 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 in 2001, to which I return.

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, and South Durban more generally, over their fate in this changing residential-industrial geography. 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 widgets but as a tool

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7 Following Farred's (2004a) prescient critique of Sanders' (2002: 113): 'In de-racialising and transforming 'complicity' into a non-racial category of apartheid experience, the differences between solidarity and collaboration, between sly civility and cooperation with the apartheid regime, between strategies of survival and wilful cooptation by the state, are erased in the name of a politically and ideologically evacuated 'complicity.' In the anti-apartheid struggle, 'complicity'...was...textured and complicated by white political *nous*, black political expedience, unfulfillable desires (for freedom, liberation, sex), literary and cultural ambition, as well as frustration with what appeared until the late 1980s to be the historic dominance of the white South African minority.' My task is to map specific dialectics of resistance and complicity, in relation to changing forms of state-sanctioned cultures of racism. I heed Farred's caution on the confessional logic of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), through which black struggle and enfranchisement are exalted while white property and privilege remain secure. Precisely because these moments are differently valorised by various forms of Indian and Coloured cultural production, what remains to be shown is when these forms are reproductive of black anti-black racism, and when, in rare moments, they are fiercely critical of multiple forms of black subjection. 'The black intellectual's work is never done,' as Farred puts it, because neither complicity nor resistance are guaranteed.

8 Sport is a fourth institutional realm, and indeed soccer clubs and struggles over non-racial sport at the black soccer grounds at Curries Fountain in town were part of the circuits through which young men were drawn into wider possibilities that quite explicitly called into question their racial and spatial containment in the ghetto. Soccer also provided an avenue for recruitment into anti-apartheid groups in the 1980s.

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.<sup>9</sup>

In the uncertain, unfinished process of social transformation that South Africans ambiguously call the ‘new dispensation’<sup>10</sup>, ‘civil society’ has emerged as a broad, polysemic terrain of debate, work, aspiration and control.<sup>11</sup> Various considered, civil society condenses a wide variety of experiments over what politics in post-apartheid society means and how people sign up. Within these realms of experiment and engagement, two broad poles of opinion have emerged with respect to how civil society ought to act in relation to wider processes: 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 perpetually challenges state and corporate power, typically through ‘social movements’.<sup>12</sup> As a first approximation, the dominant current in Merebank is the former of the two poles, but Wentworth’s civics are currently engaged in fierce debate about precisely the question of whom to negotiate with, how and to what extent. Actual participants in civic or activist groupings 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: multiple past and present cultural-material resources through which the civil and political are constituted, the political economy of everyday organising labour, and the visibility of different faces of state and corporate power.

The view from civil society offers varied perspectives on the state and corporate capital: 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

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9 This mirror is held deliberately to clarify new forms of racism and counter-hegemonic possibility in a constructivist ethnographic intervention in contemporary South Africa. In writing a historical ethnography of space, I carry the tools of a revisionist Marxism in which my act of revision comes from throwing the notion of the ‘detritus’, discussed in the next section, into the transformative cauldron of ethnography, what Jean and John Comaroff (2003: 164) call the ‘situated effects of seeing and listening...that, ineluctably, depend on a prior conceptual scaffolding, which, once the dialectic of discovery is set in motion, is open to reconstruction.’

10 The term ‘new dispensation’ questions what is actually new, as do the posts in postapartheid or postcolonial. The popular term, ‘new dispensation’ 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. Farred (2004b: 594) cuts to the most important aspect of what he calls in Carl Schmidt’s terms, the new *nomos* – by which he refers to the transitional order anchored in discourses of national sovereignty, law, dispossession and colonial/racial knowledge – as one in which ‘history (apartheid) and not-yet history (post-apartheid) coexist within the same temporality.’ In contrast with the old *nomos*, which could be attacked for its grounding in racially unjust laws, the new order is cloaked in a legality that seems to deny those who suffer class subjection to have recourse to older forms of protest. Farred is eloquent on this: ‘the post-apartheid present...manifests itself as insidious – as a political Trojan horse for the historically disenfranchised’ (p.595). My response as a geographer is that this Trojan horse is manifest differently through the differential sedimentation of the past-that-is-not-quite-history into social space, and this tale of two township speaks to this divergence.

11 Following Jean and John Comaroff (1999), p.33.

12 For instance, see Ballard et al. (2004), Greenstein (2003).

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 converge that civic movements might think across difference to forge what Michael Burawoy (2003) calls 'active society,' mobilised in defence of livelihoods, indeed of life. This formulation says precious little about the coherence in cultural production necessary to build a counterhegemonic force.<sup>13</sup>

The civil and political in post-apartheid South Africa are constituted through enormously varied forms of praxis, far exceeding canonical genres of struggle narration that become clearer in retrospect.<sup>14</sup> Much of the work on new forms of politics in South Africa has not yet asked what alternate histories of mobilisation, or what conceptions of 'community,'<sup>15</sup> activate political imaginations against the post-apartheid state and former liberation leaders. What animates the visions of the articulate young men of Youth for Work in Mpumalanga Township outside Durban (who distinguish themselves from the 'old youth' of 1976), or 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? How do their political imaginations capture the problem of post-apartheid racism as it permeates a variety of aspects of life? With few exceptions, the activist intellectuals who write for and from today's popular struggles against post-apartheid neoliberalism, despite their wealth of practical knowledge from engagement in the fray of activism, are only beginning to represent these complex histories with an attention to the multiplicity of black cultural politics and the difficulties in building solidarity.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Michael Burawoy's (2003) brilliant contrapuntal reading of Karl 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 fault lines of struggle, the paper forgets his ethnographic dictum. There is no mention, or theorisation, 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 if further complicated by the work of contemporary racism in differentiating those whom society can 'let die' in its modes of self 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?

14 This is one reason for the outpouring of literary and visual memoirs of everyday life under apartheid. Consider the commentary from a revisionist collection from someone marked as protest photographer, Paul Weinberg (2004), who returns to photographs taken since the 1970s which did not quite fit the struggle canon. Guy Berger introduces the images thus: 'These are not the images of apartheid's unabashed brutality, nor are they the chronicles of resistance or big-boy news-events. They are about lightness, about the special quality of ordinariness...Like me, you may find a poignancy in the plaintive innocence in many of these pictures.' (p.v-vi) Weinberg's own words are a bit more bittersweet, attached to documentary realism, sister project of Marxist social history, as he seeks 'the stories of 'life between the cracks', where the ordinary people, with extraordinary tenacity, live out their lives of pain, joy and unsung heroism on the social margins.' (p.xi) Unlike Berger, I see Weinberg's work as Marxist historiography open to black cultural production as well as to a triadic conception of power, such as Lefebvre's, in which the ordinary can surprise and disrupt rather than simple confirm truisms of domination and resistance.

15 See Watts (2004) on various mobilisations of 'community' in the wake of imperial oil politics and the crisis of secular nationalist development, in Nigeria as elsewhere. Jensen (2004) makes a parallel argument on the polyvalence of 'community' in local politics in the Cape Flats.

16 Some notable pieces are Lumsden and Loftus n.d., Greenstein 2003 and Barchesi 2004. One of the most vigilant voices within emergent counterhegemonic currents is that of Richard Pithouse. Pithouse (2004) begins by celebrating the 'established praxis of overt class and popular nationalist rebellion, and an emerging praxis of overt gender critique, so soon after the great national drama of the fall of apartheid' while arguing against the deferral of

Finally, the dialectics of engagement with state and capital are shaped fundamentally by the political economy of work in community organising. Usually called ‘community work’, these everyday labours of organising are often unwaged, though linked to circuits of formal and informal, legal and criminal waged work, and to gendered circuits of care and neglect.<sup>17</sup> 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, while bringing into the realm of ideology the sex/gender contradictions of a ‘community’ forged through stigma.

In what follows, I first step back to describe the larger project from which this Report 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.

### **Detritus in Durban**

This Report is part of a broader project called *Detritus in Durban*, on work and politics in lived geographies adjacent to petrochemical refineries. I focus on three key themes:

First, the keyword in this project is the ‘detritus’ of commodification and decolonisation. It is important to consider both aspects of the detritus. The commodity detritus is the biophysical, embodied and geographical medium, shell, repository, that which is wasted, and that which survives outside the commodity circuit. In Chari (2004), 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 acts as a medium of valuation to lube the commodity circuit,

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internal critique. For such ‘critique of critique’, Pithouse poses a staggering set of challenges to contend with: black anti-black racism; theory’s relation to lived realities; legacies of past struggles; the tasks of connecting struggles through what Alain Badiou calls the ‘hazardous unpredictable supplement’ that exceeds the situations of particular events (Narmada, Ogoniland, Chiapas, Genova, Seattle, etc); vanguardist/ Leninist representation within movements and across North-South connections which prevents radical change in ‘structural access to voice and influence’; the colonial/ racial present and its mirages of assimilation and global solidarity; and finally the indispensability of ongoing political education.

<sup>17</sup> Jensen (2001) engages with the production of Coloured subjects and their negotiations with gangs, crime and policing, and along the way he encounters the emergence of ‘community workers’ not unlike those I have found in Wentworth.

the devalued, decaying, semi-destroyed debris provides no universal medium to convey its potentially universal- message of decay.<sup>18</sup>

While the detritus is fundamentally geographical, radical geographers have not taken great strides to interrogate its production. David Harvey has come a long way in theorising 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 proletarianisation never came with guarantees for the reproduction of labour, only a rudderless drive for the social reproduction of capitalism.<sup>19</sup> Once proletarianised, 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 labour power, as Gillian Hart (2002) argues of East Asian 'developmental states' pushed by U.S. imperialism as a bulwark against Mao's mobilisation of the Chinese peasantry. Hart's charge to Harvey and to the South African left is to link contemporary claims to citizenship and a social wage, to the long history of racialised dispossession and erosion of livelihoods in South Africa. Indeed, the challenge is how in actual situations, people articulate these claims: how people both linking and voicing multiple forms of dispossession in terms of the crisis of reproduction of labour power. There is no universal medium to spread the word. Or is there?

The second problem implicit in Harvey's (2004) autocritique is that since, as he now sees it, primitive accumulation is an ongoing process, then Marxist geography has to decisively shift from his approach, in which the capital-labour contradiction as constituted in a landscape of 'full proletarianisation' then ramifies through space-time in geographies of boom and bust.<sup>20</sup> A non-metropolitan Marxism must, as Fernando Coronil (1997) argues, return to Marx's trinity formula of land, labour and money, to understand the spatial

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18 An inspiration that marks the dangers of progressivism as well as of romanticising subaltern survival, is Walter Benjamin, in whose vision the other of value is fundamentally diverse, fragmentary, living out its half-life in a state of emergency.

19 Indeed, even attempts to reproduce specific forms of labour power have to constantly manufacture consent, pace Burawoy (1982). Moreover, as feminists have argued for a while, 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-power to fuel the reproduction of capitalism, labour *does not need* capital for its own reproduction. The reproduction of labour is not guaranteed under capitalism. Thanks to Andreas Kalyvas for this point, Personal Communication, Ann Arbor MI, 2003.

20 Harvey's (1982) autocritique begins in the afterward to his magisterial *Limits to Capital*, in which he admits that he has neglected to theorise the state and inter-state relations as well as the family as the site of reproduction of labour-power. No small omissions, these.

differentiations of the colonial present, through which ‘advanced capitalism’ in one place is organically linked to rentier extraction elsewhere. In other words, while Harvey (2004) now poses a contemporary global transition from ‘expanded reproduction’ to ‘accumulation by dispossession’, what Coronil suggests is that both modes have always been intertwined and rendered separable by colonial amnesia. The commodity detritus marks the persisting effects of the land-labour relation within the Marxian trinity, and Coronil clarifies that the uncertain reproduction of land and labour in the wake of commodification is also always a struggle for decolonisation, particularly when the postcolonial state is propped up by spectral money in an orgy of oil rents. Postcolonial praxis defetishises the magical state, and also the crisis of reproduction that produces the detritus as a motley collection of other places and bodies, presumed necessary sites of decay and degradation for reasons that are irrational, non-modern or irrelevant. The detritus is the realm of unfinished nationalism emblematic of the postcolonial condition and its excesses. As Pithouse (2004: 4) puts it eloquently in conversation with C.L.R. James: ‘Two hundred years after the Haitian revolution, we too must confront “The waste, the waste of all this bravery, devotion and noble feeling on the corrupt and rapacious bourgeoisie.”’<sup>21</sup> Wentworth and Merebank speak to the different ways in which people handle, participate in and possibly contest the remaindered energies of national liberation struggle in a geography in which corporate power is the neighbour of the destitute.

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 and belonging in these communities speak in fairly polarised 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 objectified in aided schools; to the Merebank Tamil School Society or MTSS, which drew Tamils from across Natal; to temples, mosques and bioscopes; to fantasies of Bollywood, and trips to India and Mecca. Merebank’s anti-apartheid activism has always been Janus-faced, holding onto conceptions of ‘Indian culture’ while fighting ostensibly for a non-racial future. 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 emphasise race mixture, and sometimes also the fiction of race, but more often the stigma of not being racially pure.<sup>22</sup> The continuing power of a

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21 Pithouse (2004) commenting on a quotation from C.L.R. James (1989)

22 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, among others, Ann Stoler’s (1995, 2002) historical work has shown. What is important is that this

colonial ideology that accords primacy to race purity feeds a sentiment 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.<sup>23</sup> Farred (2001) argues that Coloureds experience both race and citizenship with uncertainty and ambivalence, even though South Africa is the only nation to which they can belong. This, he attributes to the hegemony of black/ white in constituting the nation, which, I suggest Indians can evade through the alterity proffered by 'Indian culture' while Coloureds cannot.<sup>24</sup> This said, the dominant view in Wentworth handles white/ black binarism as primarily English (or European)/ Zulu, in which the patriarch is preferably an Englishman whose photograph hangs proudly in the living room. Many with struggle credentials, and others since 1994 claim a resurgent interest in their black matriarchs, particularly if they come with royal ancestry.<sup>25</sup>

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 racialised biopower.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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

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colonial logic that privileges the primacy of race purity has such a continuing power in the lives of Wentworth Coloureds.

23 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.

24 Farred makes his point forcefully: '...they have no a priori or pre-lapsarian moment; [nor can they] retreat into a mythic precolonial 'innocence'. Coloured difference is...insufficiently different for them to conceive of themselves as anything but South African' (p.186). Wentworth Coloureds do try to make claims to Khoi-San indigeneity; Derek McBride began his life story to me with his Khoikhoi ancestor telling the first coloniser 'you must just *futsek!*' The contrast with the swirl of Indian cultural artefacts that can work to detach South African Indians from responsibility to racism and citizenship is striking.

25 See for instance Agnes Lottering's (2002) autobiography

26 I draw from Ruth Gilmore's (2002) conception of contemporary racism as the group-targeted, state-sanctioned deployment of the means of premature social death.

27 As Mbali's (2004) fascinating research shows, 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, and 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 in new ways, as Deborah Posel has argued, Howard Wolpe Lecture, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, July 2004.

and families.<sup>28</sup> 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. Differentiation in mixtures of waged/unwaged, legal/illegal work is another hallmark of contemporary racism, as a technology that determines group-targeted propensities to life and death. The making of a ghetto territorialises a group-specificity to the mix of possible work on offer. 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 and criminalised work eats away at people, community and nature, and adds to the piling debris. In the context of 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 subsidised 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 organisations.

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 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 degraded bodies and environs, and incomplete aspirations for social justice that comprise the detritus. Political work prompts people to ask whose bodies and whose front yards 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 Report 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.<sup>29</sup>

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28 In the paired introductions to two special issues, Chari and Gidwani (2005) and Gidwani and Chari (2004), we interrogate the traffic between ethnography outside anthropology, and spatiality outside geography, in relation to questions of work, value and the social reproduction of labour (necessarily outside the capitalist labour process). By turning to the commodity detritus, I am trying to think through the dialectics of reproduction (bodies engaged in paid/ unpaid care work for other bodies) and neglect (bodies as repositories of waste) a bit more carefully as a site of modern racism.

29 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 collabourators, 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 book project will have to contextualise this

## **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.'<sup>30</sup> Representations of gangs have become a powerful structure of feeling that permeate through conceptions of Wentworth from without and within the township, and through a range of other activities and affiliations.

I begin this short excursus into the production of this sentiment through the exhibit on the gangs of Wentworth at the Kwa Muhle Museum in late 2002, researched and curated by a man from Wentworth. The exhibit scripts the rise and fall of Wentworth's gangs 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 in command. 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. The photographs on display were 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. Women are perennially in a space of danger. The entire presentation is strongly gendered, though gender is absent from the commentary. The only exception is a brutal short story, written by a woman, called 'Tales of a Truck', which shows youth trapped as gang-bangers who don't know if they've just raped their own mothers. The family has been shattered. Group Areas forced removals are presented as an original sin which compelled this dystopian urbanity in which young men are drawn into this irresistibly cool subculture only to turn into beasts, and the only effective redeemer is the good priest, in implicit alliance with the police state.

There are several absences from this history, not least of which are any connections to the anti-apartheid movement or to any kind of 'struggle narratives.' 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 and social life around the Alan Taylor residence either in the 1970s or in the 1980s, no mention of the United Committee of Concern, the UDF affiliate that organised sections of Austerville in the anti-Tricameral campaigns. There is also no comment on street talk and street style, on urban hipsters with their cars, girlfriends and hangers-on. Instead, gangs are remembered as purely a result of brute competition over space brought on by overcrowding after forced removals. The amnesia is important; it brings in an important guest

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popular historiography through a wider archive of material that explains the forces that have made Wentworth and Merebank, and the lives and dreams of its residents.

30 Jerome Petersen, 17 Aug 2004.

through the back door: Thomas Malthus. With Malthus, the social science of gangs joins a broader tradition of loathing the urban experience.<sup>31</sup>

On the historiography of gangs in South Africa, Clive Glaser's (1998a, 1998b, 2000) work on Soweto stands out for taking on the Malthusian argument head on. In contrast to the thesis that street gangs emerged as a direct consequence of forced removals, as Pinnock (1987) argues of the Cape Flats, Glaser (1998a: 726) argues that removals disrupted territorial gangs, and they only re-emerged 'in more cohesive neighbourhoods, when male youths established a bond with their environment and their peers, when they develop a sense of identity based on overlapping personal and territorial familiarity.' In other words, masculine affiliation and a lived appropriation of urban space work together to make street gangs cohere. The life histories I have collected show how gangs emerge through ties between young men and claims to specific locales – the K1 Trucks in Austerville, the Drain Rats in Assegai, the Zanzies in the swampy, informal settlement of Happy Valley<sup>32</sup>.

In Soweto, Glaser (1998a: 723) explains the making of gang affinities through a mixture of rural idioms of male fighting skill and independence and new urban experience of street smarts, defiance of law, fashion, slang and sexual violence against township women. To the extent that school could be a counter-pole to the gang, it was 'an arduous route...with little guarantee of success, particularly in an under-resourced school system designed to limit black horizons.' Glaser (2000) finds multiple traditions of gang activity, but what is striking in the wake of vibrant student politics after the 1976 Soweto uprising is that gangs went on the defensive, apolitical gangs were marginalised, and '[g]ang life was gradually eclipsed by an alternative youth subculture' (p.179). The balance of choices was very different in Wentworth and, particularly, Merebank, where schools were a much better resourced counter-pole to gang membership. Gangs in Merebank were fleeting, and the co-ed hippie culture of the 1960s emerging from school and college provided a more compelling alternative subculture. In Wentworth, the church and soccer were alternatives, as was artisanal industrial labour, which took young men out of the locality at least for periods of time. Another contrast with Glaser's (1998a: 730) work is important: Soweto gangs were peer groups, 'something like an age phase, part of the transition from adolescence to 'manhood.'" Gangs in Wentworth were often multi-generational, and scores were settled over

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31 Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) make a provocative argument for circumventing this dystopian urbanism as well as provincialised/ residualised conceptions of Africa, by linking a Lefebvrian conception of space to Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of the unity of worldliness through multiple worlds. I feel common cause with their call to deprovincialise the South African township through divergent histories of space. I am less comfortable that this task requires blanket condemnations of materialist analysis of urban inequality, however economically rendered; this done, it is but a short skip down the yellow brick road of voluntarism before we are told that Johannesburg is 'like the continent itself...an amalgam of often disjointed circulatory processes. Turning back on the rigid rationalities of planning and racial separation, it has become, in spite of itself, a place of intermingling and improvisation. Its very porosity means that, released from the iron cage of apartheid, it can now continually fashion and refashion itself' (p.369). To my mind, Lefebvre's triad is such a compelling analytic precisely because it allows for diverse reworkings in lived space without presuming that dominant spatial practices and representations of space are quite so easily done away with.

32 The 'Zanzibaris' of Kings Rest on the Bluff were removed first to Happy Valley, before the majority re-classified as Asiatics so that they could be moved to the Indian township of Chatsworth.

generations. This has important implications for conceptions of turf to intertwine with 'family' and 'community' into a structure of feeling with staying power in the making of a ghetto.

There were important shifts in Wentworth's gang culture. The gangs of the 1960s and 1970s were part of a cool and violent male subculture, with little at stake except status. Even non-gang-members emulated this search for masculine status, as is evident in Mokaë's (2004) biography of Robert McBride in which much is made of the relationship of father and son, and their relationship to guns. After some of the more lucrative jobs in building the refineries of Sasolberg, men coming out of circuits of gang and artisanal labour began investing more in conspicuous consumption: in fancy cars, and occasionally in guns, and a growing drug trade. While organised 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 among 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 stigma – has become part of the present. 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 organisations. The connections are sometimes apparent, but are rarely clearly functional, or even causal. Peter McKenzie, photographer and organic intellectual originally from Wentworth, suggests that gang culture is pervasive, simmering somewhere underneath it all; he captures the bittersweet quality of this gang sentiment in his photographs of everyday life in his old gully in Wentworth.<sup>33</sup> This sentiment appears in various ways, in valorising control of turf, or of a reckless, potentially violent Coloured masculinity. The patriarchal church has often been used as a counter-ideology to this stigma, as in the exhibit at the KwaMuhle Museum, as a sign of the father who can reign improper masculinities in, back to proper families. This specific production of stigma in Wentworth has followed the contours of labour struggle, church activity, civic organisation and all other realms of social life, just as long as individuals have stayed within the 20 square km that surrounds the refinery.

### **Conceiving counterhegemony**

If the conception of Wentworth as apolitical, stigmatised and closed in on its own pathologies is a dominant one, recurring through time in narratives that criss-cross its borders, this is not the only one. Wentworth has been made as much by its connections to other places by the movements of people, in their relocation to the township, in their subsequent trajectories as industrial migrants, and in their connections to wider political currents and counterhegemonic solidarities.

What is important to recognise about Wentworth is that at least until the mid-1980s, its anti-apartheid history was in the shadows. Janet Milling moved to Wentworth from Cape

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33 Peter McKenzie, 31 Jul 2004.

Town in the late 1970s and was shocked at the quality of public discourse; there was no trace of the vibrant collective anti-statism of her student days, when she was active with the Black Peoples' Convention in the Western Cape.<sup>34</sup> This, despite the fact that Steve Biko was once resident at the Alan Taylor Residence, black student housing for medical students at the University of Natal. Biko had drawn in a wide group of young people to transform Alan Taylor into a hub of political activity in the early 1970s, but its connections were primarily into the city centre and, subsequently, to Indian youth from the township of Merebank. It was only after the assassination of Steve Biko and the suppression of Black Consciousness, and after a period of quiet in the late 1970s that Alan Taylor would become a hotbed of activity again in the early 1980s. This time, an important MK cell would emerge through the activism of a racially mixed group of doctors. This cell is not often remembered of as an element of Wentworth's activist past, because it has been overshadowed by the most spectacular product of Wentworth: the MK cell of Robert McBride and Greta Apelgren, the media spectacle of late apartheid called 'the McGoo Bombers'. VJ, the only member of both cells, pressed to me that the Alan Taylor cell was made up of people from elsewhere, with a stronger intellectual scene, and a penchant for staying up talking over red wine.<sup>35</sup>

This might be a moment to give pause to what the MK was, and what it meant for its participants. Troy and Virana were lovers for several years while being part of different MK cells in Merebank and not knowing precisely what the other was engaged in, right until the unbanning of the ANC. Much of what VJ related to me about MK was pieced together subsequently on Robben Island, where he could make it known that he was part of both VR's cell at Alan Taylor as well as of McBride's. There was clearly a class difference between these cells. McBride's cell was primarily made up of people close to him: his father Derek, his girlfriend Greta, and a few young men from Wentworth. Their most daring adventure was to rescue a captured and injured Gordon Webster, Robert's close friend who had recruited him into MK, from Edendale Hospital. Elaborate disguises and plans framed a rescue operation which was seen by others as either extremely foolhardy or an incredible act of bravado. This was clearly a risk-taking cell. Another key aspect of McBride's cell was its 'special ops' structure: it did not emerge from a cascading pyramid of cells, but from a single chain of command, from Slovo, through Rashid, to Gordon Webster and McBride. This meant the decisions around the bombing of the McGoo's Bar at the Durban beachfront, in which civilian casualties were at the centre and which had major consequences for the ANC's representation in the media, was bound to be a topic of debate within the liberation movement. The chain of command was clear that Oliver Thambo supported the event. When VJ later heard Thambo, 'roar, young lions roar' from Robben Island, he felt they had already answered the call in Wentworth.<sup>36</sup>

What I want to point to are two important things about McBride's cell. First, while Robert and Greta now say that they played upon conceits of Coloured middle-class virtue while posing as apolitical 'holiday makers' taking their caravan across the border to load it

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34 Janet Milling , Sept 11, 2004.

35 VJ, Oct 8, 2004.

36 VJ; Mokae (2004).

up with arms and ammunition. On the other hand, they were also being used within a conception of Coloured adventurism as a particularly risky section of MK special ops. They were not given a mandate to 'conscientize' as a political cell, but to create spectacular acts of sabotage, and they were seen as particularly good at it. As a consequence, Wentworth was beginning to be seen in exile and prison circles of the ANC as a hotbed of activism.

When sabotage was close to or within black communities, as in the case of the bombings of the refinery at the heart of Wentworth in the mid-1980s, it brought quite a bit of community anger against the ANC. This kind of event prompted strong debate within the MK in exile about sabotage operations in black communities, following which peripatetic figures like RL, from Merebank, began to experiment with bringing political and military cells together within the country. In the MK's Natal Command, this took the form of Operation Butterfly, a precursor to Operation Vula, which was to bring leadership in to coordinate internal political and military operations.<sup>37</sup> I raise this trajectory in the underground because it runs somewhat counter to the cell that Robert McBride was in, to reinforce my argument that this cell was driven as much by a broader movement as by a local world of masculine bravado. Mokae's (2004) biography of McBride scripts his bravado emerging from his relations with his father, and with the gangs. His friends report to Mokae that though Robert wasn't in a gang, he was feared by all the gangs as a kind of one-man gang, as a consequence of which the gangs stayed clear of the MK grouping. But how was the underground grouping recognizable in everyday life? Was this MK cell seen as another gang? The women, Greta and her sister Jeanette Apelgren, were open as community/ social workers, but it is not clear that the men could escape from the vocabulary of gang membership. However, unlike the gangs, the MK held up a broader political conviction delinked from local turf, and much of the sabotage work undertaken by McBride's cell was inland in rural Natal. Robert's evidence to Mokae is of a gradual transition out of Wentworth alongside a growing affiliation to black liberation. Racial affiliation for Wentworth's activists remains a vexed affair.<sup>38</sup>

Not all anti-apartheid activity was underground, particularly by the early 1980s. Vincent and his friends were also involved in above-ground activism through COSAS, the Congress of South African Students, and through the United Committee for Concern, a UDF affiliate. The 1970s and 1980s also offered many people in Wentworth spheres of formal, legal political engagement within apartheid structures. These range from involvement in the Nat-affiliated Freedom Party to the liberal Labour Party during the period of limited representation for Indians and Coloureds under the LACs and the Tricameral Parliament.

Unlike most activists in Wentworth, Robert McBride and Greta Apelgren 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.<sup>39</sup> There is much to be said about activist trajectories in a

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37 RL, July 29, 2004.

38 Gordon Webster speaks of this in relation to McBride's life in Mokae (2004).

39 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.

post-revolutionary context, but it suffices to say that Robert has had to contend with continued controversy, while Greta has been able to taken a much quieter route through the state.<sup>40</sup> Several people could not cash in their struggle credentials to the same effect at all. 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.<sup>41</sup> A few actively worked with the National Party; one man fought to bring the National Party into Wentworth in the first democratic elections.<sup>42</sup> Yet others turned to conscious fabrications of their histories and of their affiliations to the 'Coloured' tag, to claim 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 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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. Certain forms of politics have been able to articulate as counterhegemonic, while others such as claims to land, have not. I turn next to activist labours that have emerged from the dominant labour regime which has harnessed and disposed a large share of Wentworth's labour.

### **Work in a time of unemployment**

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 Census reports a large local

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

41 TA, 26 July 2004; LL 8 Aug 2004

42 HH, 6 Sept 2004

43 Morriss Fynn, 29 Nov 2004.

44 Louise Landers, 19 Dec 2002.

population of individuals and households with 'no income', for whom legal, waged work is 'not applicable', which Statistics South Africa translates as 'not economically active.' Austerville contrasts with Merebank in that this category for whom legal, waged labour is 'not applicable' is similarly high for both women and men (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.<sup>45</sup> Samuels 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 of artisanal industrial labour. For most of his subsequent life, Lenny either worked on limited duration contracts at the Engen refinery in the middle of Wentworth<sup>46</sup>, 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 labour 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 labour relations at the refinery through the 1980s and 1990s. In his rendition, permanent labour 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 labour brokers, following major strikes in the 1980s. Outsourcing really took off in this period, and Engen stabilised its relations with local labour in various parts of Wentworth, in one rendition, by building ties with ex-gangsters. 'Gang leaders actually became labour 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 labour contracting from Engen during the 1980s.<sup>47</sup> The owner of this firm 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, labour brokers have formed a consortium to attempt to monopolise local labour arrangements, and to work with representatives of organised labour to control recruitment. In turn, unions have been criticised for leading strikes in the chemical industries sector and then bringing labour contracts to their own recruitment networks.

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45 Lenny Samuels, 26 Nov 2002.

46 Engen was initially Standard Vacuum Oil Company of New Jersey at its inception in 1954; the company subsequently changed its name to Mobil, which suddenly pulled out of South Africa in 1989 and was bought over by a South African mining giant, Gencor; it has since become Engen which was listed on the Johannesburg stock exchange and bought out in two major shares by the Malaysian state oil corporation, Petronas. Management from Exxon-Mobil have continued to have a presence in the refinery throughout its history.

47 Hector Andrews, 13 Jul 2004.

The links between labour brokering and labour activism are undoubtedly complicated. Alan Martin, an ex-labour unionist, has clearly made a shift to becoming a labour broker, and he lives in the more prosperous ridge in Wentworth called 'Treasure Beach' that rises above the oil refinery towards the sea.<sup>48</sup> 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 specialised in organising limited duration contract workers. For many, like Lenny Samuels, this has effectively meant being blacklisted by industry. Each year since 1998 CEIWU has gone on strike 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.'<sup>49</sup> The management of contract labour for shutdowns has been outsourced through labour contracting companies, more so since the enactment of the 1995 Labour 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.'<sup>50</sup>

To try to screen its labour force through a certification process, Engen had used a local training program, housed in the building that was once a hotbed of Black Consciousness activism. Since 2002, Engen has combined forces with SAPREF to shift the certification of contract workers to 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.'<sup>51</sup> The refineries have also, in the past year, shifted to unscheduled partial shutdowns and to getting work fabricated elsewhere, as far as Gauteng.

In 2004, the labour union CEIWU won an important victory by turning a case of unfair dismissal of 176 workers into a challenge of limited duration contracts themselves. CEIWU 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. The judgement in 2004 ruled that the workers' contracts could not be considered limited duration, as they made clear reference to benefits, leave, overtime, and other conditions of service. As a consequence, the striking workers' jobs could not 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

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48 Alan Martin, 26 Nov 2002.

49 Gary Dent, 20 Dec 2002.

50 Lenny Samuels, 26 Nov 2002.

51 Gary Dent, 20 Dec 2002.

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 jeopardising 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 since 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 unionisation 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 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!''<sup>52</sup> 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 organising 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 organising contract workers who are constantly in flux. Bigger unions presume that organizers can be sent to a site to unionise 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 bureaucratised 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 have had to contend with the fundamentally gendered fissures in the community. Lenny Samuels 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

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<sup>52</sup> Karl Green, 21 Apr 2004.

Scotland; they go to construction work in New Zealand and Australia. Against this drain of artisanal labour, Lenny says he has decided to stay and fight for an alternative future, Samuels analyses the political economic transformation in a very specific way in a new vision centred 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.<sup>53</sup>

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. What he perhaps did not question was the undercurrent of gender politics.

The Metalworkers' Cooperative was formed by a small number of unemployed artisanal labour unionists from CEIWU, including Lenny, and the late Skido Joseph.<sup>54</sup> 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 local government's Economic Development section. WEPAP was based on the formation of two initial coops which would then spawn 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 labour; 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

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<sup>53</sup> Lenny Samuels, 26 Nov 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Skido Joseph passed away tragically in late 2003, after I had the opportunity to get to know. Although Skido was quite open about his faults and prejudices, he was articulate about his feeling of post-revolutionary betrayal and commitment to continue the fight for social justice in Wentworth, and he put in hours of unpaid labour to this end.

macroeconomic policy. What is less clear in the ideology but blatant in practice is that community debates over cooperatives became polarised through the work of gender. Indeed, some of the unemployed women in the sewing cooperative did not conceptualise 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.'<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> Stable marriage is not in actuality the norm, even if open divorce or separation is not either. In a context of what several people from Wentworth see as endemic familial conflict, my conjecture is that these and other women find in Pentacostalism a way of maintaining their political engagement in the name of 'community' without compromising their moral stature, knowing full well that their ideal of family has been deeply compromised.

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.<sup>57</sup> 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 ties with the metalworkers cooperative.

The metalworker's cooperative has also 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 centre. It was her initial work organising workers at the call centre which brought CEIWU into organising very limited duration service workers there and elsewhere. When she lost her

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<sup>55</sup> Greta Jones, 21 Nov 2002,

<sup>56</sup> 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).

<sup>57</sup> Janice Clayton, 14 Sept 2004.

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.<sup>58</sup>

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 specialise 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.

### **Nature and gender in the ghetto**

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 organisations. 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, which I have discussed, air pollution primarily from the refineries and the Mondi paper mill, sub-standard housing, and care for those living with HIV/AIDS.

As new struggles have emerged from the changing terms of life under the new dispensation, environmentalism would seem to have been the most efficacious as it holds the promise of drawing together a variety of constituencies across race and class in shared mobilisation over their commons, dispossessed to be the waste dump of petrochemical giants. The origins of environmental organisation in South Durban is often attributed to the interest

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<sup>58</sup> Lorraine Lesley, Sept 13, 2004.

with which Nelson Mandela listened to the concerns of protestors outside the Engen refinery in 1995, when he stopped to talk to them about their concerns. After some fits and starts, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) was formally begun in early 1997 as an alliance of organisations committed to linking environmental justice struggles across the racial boundaries in Wentworth, Merebank, Bluff, Isipingo, Clairwood and Umlazi, in order to respond systematically to pollution in the South Durban industrial basin. SDCEA is located in Wentworth, but it has tried to maintain a sense that it represents all these communities.<sup>59</sup> Bobby Peek argues that SDCEA had effectively challenged the Merebank Ratepayers' Association's hegemony over the environmental debate in South Durban. The element of SDCEA representing Wentworth is the Wentworth Development Forum, a merger of three civics in 1994 with unofficial sanction from the ANC. At its early stages, SDCEA received considerable support from the activism in WDF as it built its reputation as a regional alliance of civics. Over time, Peek shifted the focus of his activism outward from the local, to later help found South Africa's key environmental justice organisation, groundWork in 1999.<sup>60</sup> 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.

A persisting strength of the SDCEA/ WDF/ groundWork alliance, from the perspective of Wentworth, is that it can wear many hats – militant and professionalised, grassroots and networked, confrontational and negotiable – and it can work across multiple scales: local, city, provincial, national and international. Bobby Peek and Desmond D'Sa are perceived as very different types of activists; Bobby as more negotiable and Des as an element of the 'ultraleft.' They speak of this perception openly, as if it is part of their tactical arsenal. Local and national levels of government have been their key points of pressure against the corporate-state alliance, particularly with the weakening of provincial government since the turn to decentralisation.<sup>61</sup>

Another key strength for the environmental movement is that the scientific knowledge on pollution in South Durban is now clearer than ever. Public health scholars from the University of Michigan and the University of KwaZulu-Natal have shown that Engen, Sapref and Mondi contribute to 80% of the pollution that people in South Durban have to live with. Newspaper reports put leukaemia rates in South Durban at 24 times the national average.<sup>62</sup> What is striking in the wake of clear evidence that the residents of South Durban live in a toxic soup, is that the lines of 'friend' and 'enemy' are by no means clearly drawn. Many residents appeal to a pragmatism, arguing that the only way to make the giants in their

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59 Bobby Peek, one of its founders, comments on the difficulties in getting the Umlazi Reconstruction and Development Forum onto the environmental justice platform, although he had witnessed commitment to the issues in Umlazi through the difficult period of the ANC/ IFP tensions in 1995. Personal communication, Oct 31, 2004.

60 Bobby Peek, Personal communication, Oct 31, 2004.

61 As an indication of this weakness, while the power to decline Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) lies at the provincial level, only one of the 64 EIAs concerning South Durban between Jan 2002 and March 2003 was declined.

62 *The Mercury*, September.

backyards pay for pollution is to extract from their ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) programs.

SDCEA and groundWork are categorically against CSR as mere ‘greenwashing’. groundWork’s 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 that the underlying problem is to make capital accountable across multiple spaces and scales. To this end, 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.

What must be said is that SDCEA does not command a steady mass base in South Durban, or even in Wentworth, through the WDF. As a consequence, SDCEA/ WDF’s work within Wentworth has been multi-faceted. There are three important points to be noted about SDCEA/ WDF’s strategy. First, while both organisations are small and their presence in daily organising is weak, they can pull in a crowd for spectacular events by drawing on a variety of other community organisations, even if they come to dissent with SDCEA/ WDF’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.

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 mobilised 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.<sup>63</sup>

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63 AP, 20 Apr 2004; Bobby Peek, 22 Apr 2004.

Three points emerged through 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 organising, 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 organising 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 Peek concedes 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 organised labour, to bring together questions of environmental pollution and jobless growth in the expansion of the South Durban industrial basin. Despite the fissures within the SDCEA/ WDF/ groundWork alliance, all of them supported the militant labour union CEIWU during the important 2003 strike. As Peek warns, ‘The environmental movement is just beginning to challenge the economic system.’<sup>64</sup>

However, as I have already suggested, not everyone in Wentworth sees the environmental movement as the key issue. 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!’ It would be a mistake to see this as just a competition between ideologies rather than one window into the profound gender tensions within various domains of political work in Wentworth. Jane represents a much more contingent grouping of women who have found it necessary to organise themselves rather than accept being represented by the Wentworth Development Forum (WDF), the civic linked to the environmental organisation, SDCEA.

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 organisation to stage a putsch against the leadership of the WDF. 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’s impromptu response, after a careful apology to the WDF leadership

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64 Bobby Peek, 22 Apr 2004.

and the community, demonstrates the continuing centrality of gender in the everyday work of organising:

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.<sup>65</sup>

In her public comments, Jane describes the difficulties of being sexually intimate, of performing 'family obligations', in overcrowded flats. The appeal to both Malthus and family values is bound to win points, but she also comes back with stinging critique against the political inactivity of men in securing basic means of survival. In private, Jane describes to me how a friend of hers found while buying used clothing that her ex-husband had been selling her things off for awhile. 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.

### **Organising 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 (SAPs) require women in households to absorb much of the shock, through increased unpaid care-work.<sup>66</sup> Within the profound subcontracting 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 organised 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, but their idiom is certainly not in Elson's Marxist feminism.

In one instance, a women from one prominent women's organisation 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 centre for youths on the Ridge, which she distributes to hungry families. Several unemployed poor women participate in this women's organisation 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

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65 Jane Glover, Meeting in Wentworth on the Woodville/Wolraad/Tayne Residents Committee, undated tape from early 2003. Interview with Jane Glover, Wentworth, 23 Aug 2003.

66 Elson 1995, p.24.

the Eastern Cape because she cannot afford to raise them. She goes to the women's organisation 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 organisation 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 often expressed in a charismatic Christian idiom, and this has important implications for its ability to (not) be seen as part of a political imagination.<sup>67</sup> The incredible number of Pentacostal sects in Wentworth, which people put at between 40 and 60, might be something like pyramid schemes found in various contexts of political economic instability, and certainly tithing does allow some amount of accumulation by pastors.<sup>68</sup> Lorraine Lesley says a prominent pastor has been reported to say to his congregation 'How much is your pastor worth?'<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> 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 bluntly that they are all based on control of turf.

This explanation, however, says precious little about why unemployed women tithe, and what their engagement in political work might have to do with Pentacostalism: certainly not the most useful oppositional ideology. Why then do these women not become Marxist feminists like Diane Elson, and why do they turn to organise with God? I suggest an answer through three propositions.

The first responds to what Comaroff and Comaroff (2000, 2003) call the emergence of occult economies in the wake of millennial market fundamentalism, particularly in postcolonial and postrevolutionary contexts. This provocation is important at a moment when rash promises of deliverance through Adam Smith come precisely when secular nationalist developmentalism is called into question across the planet. While this moment has given way to revisionist neoliberalisms, imperial resurgence and renewed oppositional cultures<sup>71</sup>, the

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67 Ashwin Desai, in response to an earlier version of this Report, says all pastors are in the pay of the Engen refinery, hence 'the Holy Spirit is commodified'; end of argument. While Ashwin is cognizant of the way in which he invokes local terms – God and the Devil in Wentworth, Deepavali or the festival of lights in struggles around electricity re-connections in predominantly Indian Chatsworth – my response to him is that when he speaks to unemployed women moved by the ghost of God, he is effective partly for what he says, and partly because he plays into a specific cultural idiom as a combination of bad boy and preacher. (School of Development Studies 50th Anniversary Conference, Durban, 22 Oct 2004.)

68 Thanks to Richard Ballard on this. Katherine Verdery's (1996) work on pyramid schemes in Romania's transition from an authoritarian command economy is exemplary on this point.

69 Lorraine Lesley, 13 Sept 2004.

70 Marcel Jones, 13 Sept 2004.

71 Watts 2004, p.213.

provocation remains a reminder that commodification *anywhere*, as it defers the promise to reproduce labour, can provoke a variety of claims to raise the dead. Their ‘zombie’ clarifies what I aim to explain with the ‘detritus.’ While the zombie is the ultimate super-exploited labourer, ‘all surplus value, no costly, irrational, troublesome human needs’, the detritus is the human geography laid waste by the circulation of value; it is what zombies are supposed to be have been torn from: land; means of production; irrational, troublesome human needs. What is important is that neither Wentworth nor Merebank are extreme sites of dispossession in which the zombie becomes a key site of critical consciousness; people here have access to housing, services, some legal/illegal work, and proximity to the city and industry. Within this proximity, Merebank is more linked to lines of possible escape from jobless growth in a toxic soup, while Wentworth is increasingly trapped in the ghetto. In this latter, carceral geography the detritus, by other names, can become a site of intense struggle.

My second proposition is that there is something important at an ontological level in the way in which unemployed women become agents when they are saved by the Holy Spirit. My suggestion is that the Holy Spirit works like the notion 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. In this sense, it is not unlike other forms of spirit possession. But the Holy Spirit is no ordinary spirit; he is after all the one, true (and truly-masculine) God who enables human action between the Crucifixion and Armageddon. Is there a nascent message in this medium?

While the Holy Spirit provides a political ontology for some unemployed women in Wentworth, one would expect its Pentacostal message to reproduce conservative conceptions of family and feminine propriety. In this sense, organising with God carries strong risks.

My third proposition is that this is not guaranteed, and that the Holy Spirit brings gender, family and sexual propriety out of the domain of doxa, into the realm of contestable ideology. For instance, when women channelling the Holy Spirit are seen as transgendered, the process can provoke the collectivity to recognise ‘the very social life of gender...to be malleable and transformable.’<sup>72</sup> This can be an important moment in the struggle against stigma in the ghetto. What is more, the fact that the possessed woman is never *just* human also opens the possibility of collective recognition of ‘a right or entitlement to a liveable life when no such prior authorisation exists, when no clearly enabling convention is in place.’<sup>73</sup>

However, these possibilities come with strong forces of conservative reaction. The risks of organising with God are particularly strong in the sphere of activism for the rights of people living 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 HIV/AIDS, and in the process he faces constant opposition to discuss questions concerning sex and sexuality. Greg has personal networks

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72 Judith Butler (2004), p. 216

73 Judith Butler (2004), p. 224

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 Mbeki'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 formally organised, but a large number of people continue to participate in the everyday labours of organising 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 rapid 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 and it brings into ideology a domain of gender and sexuality. In these uses, the Holy Spirit counters the salvific claims of millennial capitalism in its post-apartheid incarnation by offering unemployed women the option to work as agents of change outside the church and labour market, 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, to confront the degradations of commodification and incomplete decolonisation in contemporary South Africa.

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## Appendix

The following tables use Austerville and Treasure Beach to refer to Wentworth, following local talk. This Report 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, eThekwi 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: eThekwi	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 - R1600	R1601 - R2000	R201 - R400	R401 - R800	R801 - R1600	R1601 - R2000	R201 - R400	R401 - R800	R801 - R1600	R1601 - R2000
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 - R400	R401 - R900	R901 - R1900	R1901 - R3800	R3801 - R7600	R7601 - R15300	R15301 - R30700	R30701 - R61400	R61401 - R122800	R122801 - R245700	R245701 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	-	100
Merewent	6	1	8	11	19	27	19	7	1	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	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**

	Em- ployed	Unem- ployed	Stud- ent	Home- maker	Pensioner or retired person	Unable to work due to illness	Seasonal worker not 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**

	Corp- orate man- ager	Gen- eral man- ager	Phys- ical, math and engine- ering science	Life science and health	Teach- ing	Other profes- sional work	Math and engine- ering science (assoc- iate)	Life science and health (assoc- iate)	Teach- ing (assoc- iate)	Other assoc- iate profes- sional
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 and protective services	Models, sales and demonstrators	Extraction and building trades workers	Metal, machinery and related	Handicrafts, printing and related	Other craft and related trades
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 mobileplant operators	Sales and services	Mining, construction, manufacturing and transport	Undetermined	Not economically active
Austerville	48	255	177	282	323	607	9,673
Treasure Beach	-	3	3	24	6	93	526
Merewent	43	441	370	208	307	522	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 and fishing	Manufacturing	Electricity; gas and water supply	Construction	Wholesale and retail trade	Transport; storage and communication	Finance, insurance, real estate and bus. serv.	Community, social, personal serv.	Private domestic	Unknown	Not applicable
Austerville	Male	12	956	12	453	350	222	213	344	21	745	4,436
	Fem.	15	517	9	36	925	90	289	826	96	700	5,237
Treas. Beach	Male	-	66	3	33	39	12	21	42	3	117	209
	Fem.	-	12	-	6	39	12	39	96	15	114	317
Mere-Went	Male	15	1,456	27	207	745	441	307	403	15	485	2,743
	Fem.	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 or customary	Poly-gamous marriage	Living together like married partners	Never married	Widower/widow	Separated	Divorced
Austerville	6,264	83	6	965	15,215	1,303	239	953
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