

APPENDIX – PHOTO ESSAY

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DEEP-LEVEL GOLD MINER

This is a descriptive account of my immersion in the daily working lives of deep-level underground mining teams (see Chapter 2). This account of my participant observation down the mine is crucial for understanding the typical daily life of a deep-level gold miner inside and outside the pit. It consists of two parts. The first part is an account of the day's work underground. The second part comprises a photo essay – a tale gold mining in pictures.

On the bitterly cold morning of Wednesday, 4 July 2007, I woke up early. The time was around 4 am. Dlamini, one of my roommates from Swaziland, barked as he coughed. On numerous occasions, my sleep was interrupted because of his coughing. It was better when he had visited his family on certain weekends. As always, I had my alarm clock set the night before. It was still dark and very cold outside since it was winter. I went out to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I bumped into Donald – an underground mineworker from Swaziland and a famous football fanatic in the mine hostel. Donald was also brushing his teeth. I observed that there were also a few night shift workers taking a shower. '*Ishayile!* (It's time to go to work!)', Donald remarked to me. '*Yah, ishayile*', I responded. 'To which underground level are you descending today?' Donald asked. 'To 61 level – where I have been working [researching] since last week', I replied. Donald and I agreed that we would meet again in the kitchen for breakfast.

The mine hostel was already buzzing with a horde of men walking in and out of the kitchen. I brought along my spoon with me as I grabbed a big bowl in which food was served. I joined the queue. The menu for breakfast was soft porridge, sugar, plain brown bread, boiled eggs, coffee, morvite, peanut butter and jam. I had my favourite brownish soft porridge, four slices of plain brown bread and two boiled eggs. Donald was already at the dining table having breakfast. He had also grabbed a pack of morvite for lunch. Morvite is a powdered energy-replenishing ration provided to underground workers. It is easy to prepare. Just mix with cold water. I have eaten it several times underground. It is quite filling and tasty.

I ate my breakfast as quickly as possible. I then rushed to the change house. I met Joe – a young, quiet and shy stope worker from Transkei – busy putting on his gumboots. Joe and I agreed that we would meet in the lamp room. Looking at my watch, I hurried to my locker. I put on my overall, socks, gumboots, belt, hard hat and jacket. I also had my other personal protective clothing with me: goggles, earplugs attached to the hardhat and hand gloves. Of course, I always made sure that I did not leave behind a pen and the diary in which I recorded my daily observations, conversations and interactions with the informants. My ethnographic diary was like ‘gold’ to me – something which I was extremely careful not to lose under any circumstance. The reader can imagine how I would have felt had I lost the data I risked my life for.

I then went straight to the lamp room to get my lamp. I checked if it was working. I attached the lamp to my waist and fastened the belt. The lamp room was crowded with underground workers wearing hard hats of different colours. I had observed and learned that lamps and hard hats were a means of communication. For example, in the gully, inside the pit, workers waved or flashed their lamp repeatedly in a particular fashion to indicate that the winch operator had finished removing the broken rock. Waving the lamp twice or thrice signalled that it was safe to enter the gully. This signalled the ability of underground mining teams in creating informal work rules (see Chapters 4) that enabled them to cope with the danger of working in a deep-level underground gold mine – what Fitzpatrick (1980) refers to as adapting to danger (see also Dennis, Henriques, & Slaughter, 1956; Douglass & Krieger, 1983; Gouldner, 1954; Leger, 1992).

The gold miners wore hard hats of different colours depending on their job positions. The colour of the hard hat signalled the status and category of workers. For example, team leaders wore red hard hats, the miners wore blue hard hats, the shift-bosses wore yellow hard hats, management and union officials (including visitors) wore white hard hats. Frontline workers wore hard hats of different colours for those mentioned above.

I clocked in and passed through the turnstiles towards the shaft. I looked at my watch. The time was 5:14 am. Joe had clocked in already. As I joined the queue, he asked me to come forward. He had reserved a space for me in the queue. That was kind of him. I was so thankful. I greeted the other workers in the queue. There were a few women miners in the queue. ‘South African mines are really transforming’, I said to myself. One of the workers told me he had seen me in the hostel. The cage had already dropped off the first batch of workers. It was very cold in the passage near the cage. The cold air from the ventilation system made us shiver. The jacket did not help much. We were eager to get away from the cooled ventilation air and get into the cage. Workers often complained that the chilled ventilation air made them sick. I was also concerned about the effect of this cooled air on my health. It was almost unbearable. The time was now 5:43 am. The cage was running late by eight minutes or so.

The cage was due to arrive at 5:35 am. We eventually went down the mine at 5:51 am.

As soon as the cage attendant instructed us to enter the cage, the guys hurried in. As we entered the cage, the guys shouted: '*Shoval!* [step back!], *shoval!* [step back!]'. We pushed and squeezed ourselves into the cage. Inside the cage, it was warm, but too squashed. I was sandwiched between two big old-timers. I felt so squashed. I could not complain but pretended as if I was okay. It seemed we were more than forty in the cage. The cage jerked up and down slowly before it descended to the sub-shaft station situated at 51 level. We passed through the turnstiles and walked towards the sub-shaft cage. The turnstiles were clicking rapidly. We queued again but not for as long as we did earlier on the surface. I was among those who got into the cage first. I picked a nice spot to stand by the corner of the cage. '*Shoval!* [step back], *shova* [step back!]', the guys shouted as they squeezed themselves into the cage. This time, I had positioned myself. I was not squashed like in the first cage. Joe also managed to squeeze himself into the cage. He was probably the tiniest chap in the mine. Therefore, I did not imagine him struggling to squeeze into the cage. The cage offloaded the guys working at 61 level. Joe and I were among the batch of workers that were dropped off at 64 level. The cage descended down for further drop offs at 68, 70, 73, 76, 78 and 79 levels.

In terms of depth, we were 2 300 metres below surface. As soon as the cage dropped us off at 64 level, Joe and I joined the guys moving quickly to the tram station to get a good position. It was like a rat-race. The tram or men carriage, as it was commonly called in the mine, had already been waiting to transport workers to various panels. Just like at the cage, we jumped into the tram. It was almost like a stampede. I had to be extremely careful not to injure myself as I got into the tram. Unlike the cage, the tram provided a bit of breathing space, except for our knees. We organised our knees, eight either side facing each other interlaced in the cramped space. The shift-bosses had plenty of space in the tram because only a few of them occupied it. Before we knew it, the tram was full of passengers and ready to go. There were two tram drivers – one a male and the other a female. They communicated by means of a whistle. Blowing the whistle conveyed a particular message to the driver – for instance, to stop or to go. I observed the slender female tram driver checking if everything was in order for safety reasons. As she passed us along the rails, the guys called her names and teased her with a lot of excitement. Women miners are a drop in the ocean compared to male miners. Given the history of single-sex hostels, seeing a woman always amused male miners. The amusement was even greater inside the pit. It seems that the employment of underground women miners has spiced up the day-to-day working lives of underground men miners.

I took off my jacket as the air was suddenly warm and thick. Inside the cage and inside the tram, the men discuss a lot of stuff relating to their work, their families, bonuses, leave days, mine management and football. They also make funny jokes. Making jokes is part and parcel of the work culture of

underground workers. A number of labour process studies have shown that joking practices is one of the means through which workers can resist or survive their shop-floor subordination, create meaning and identity in a capitalist workplace (see Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 1988, 1992; Noon & Blyton, 2007; Roy, 1958; Taylor & Bain, 2003). Indeed, inside the pit, it was common practice for underground workers to make jokes about work, fellow workers, supervisors, management, shop stewards, the bonus systems and women in ways that expressed pride, masculine identity, liveliness, resentment and conformity to managerial control.

I eavesdropped on one stope worker bragging to the other that his team had done well to earn a big bonus for the month. Another stope worker complained about the bonus system. Joe was dozing as the tram moved to the East of 64 level. Workers often doze in the tram. One day, Japie, the white miner, remarked to me as soon as we had jumped into the tram: 'Now it is time to sleep'. It was not only underground workers who dozed in the tram. The miners, shift-bosses and mine captains did too. The tram dropped off several bunches of workers in various cross cuts along the tunnel before it finally reached the final stop where we – the last batch – got dropped off. We made our way to the waiting place. It was hot and even hotter at the stope face. I took off the T-shirt I was wearing underneath my overall. We hung our jackets and T-shirts along the wall of the tunnel at the waiting place.

A safety and production meeting was conducted. All in all, the shift comprised of thirteen team members excluding the miner and the shift-boss. Madala informed the team of his early shift examination. He told the gang that the night shift gang had not removed the broken rock from the stope. Fakude grumbled: '*Sizakujoyina namhlanje*' [we shall knock-off late today]. Madala assured the gang that it was not that bad. So the team need not worry about being delayed. Madala informed us that the shift-boss had promised that the timber packs and the other material requested would be delivered sometime during the shift. It was such a huge relief for team members to hear such news. Nonetheless, production still went ahead in spite of material shortages. The team leader and production crew had been making a plan (*planisa* in Fanakalo) to address production bottlenecks (see Chapters 4 and 7). The team's bonus was also discussed. The crew was not so happy about it (see Chapter 5). The mining team had not been paid its bonus for a couple of weeks. Madala assigned different tasks to team members.

I joined John and Kez, the rock-drill operators, on their way to the stope face. Madala followed as we carefully walked down the raise towards the gully. It was dark, wet and very hot in the gully. I watched my step. I could hear the sound of pneumatic drills and scraper winches in the adjacent panels below us on the incline. At the stope face, Madala conducted the test for flammable gases such as methane. By this time, I was wet with sweat. No big deal! I was heat tolerant. I observed that the previous day's blast was not bad at all. The holes had all been burned properly. There were clearly no misfires from the

previous day's blast. This therefore meant that the gang made a good face advance.

I lent John a hand as he cleared the two pneumatic rock-drills away from the bottom of the rock-face. Kez was holding the pinch bar and getting ready to bar [keep out or remove] the loose rocks from the top to the bottom of the rock-face. Joe, Philip and Sam had already started with the installation of temporary support as near to the rock-face as possible. John and Kez exchanged roles as they removed loose rocks from the top to the bottom of the rock-face. Madala was busy behind the rock-face marking areas at which to install permanent support by means of timber packs. Edward, the winch operator, was getting ready to remove the broken rock from the gully into the ore-bin. This was teamwork at its best. As soon as loose rocks were removed from the top to the bottom of the rock-face, the miner, Kleinbos, joined the crew to mark the holes to be drilled on the face by rock-drill operators. In a short while, it was all systems go. Kez and John started drilling the face. The fan pumped cool air towards the face, but it did not make much difference. It was still hot. It was quite noisy at the face. I put my earplugs in. Permanent support [through timber packs] was being installed behind the temporary support towards the face. However, the timber packs were not sufficient at the stope face. More packs needed to be transported to the face.

Sam and I walked back to the cross cut. At the cross cut, Roger was busy clearing timber packs out of the way of the mono winch. Sam and I joined him, but could not wait to drink water. I cleared one or two packs and quickly made my way to the waiting area to grab my two-litre bottle of water. I was so dehydrated. I drank almost half of the water in the bottle. Sam went back to the stope. I remained behind this time and sat down next to Roger. We chatted as we transported the packs to the face by means of a mono winch. Madala, the team leader, was busy moving up and down ensuring that the production process was being run as smoothly as possible. The shift-boss came in. He discussed a few things with Madala (the team leader). He seemed fine – not as much of a bully as always. We (Roger and I) overheard Lee, the shift-boss, telling Madala, that the material would be delivered today and that he had sorted out the bonus issue. Roger whispered to me: 'We will see ...', 'Mate, let's take his word for it', I said to Roger, smiling. The shift-boss and the team leader then went into the stope. After an hour or so, the shift-boss came out of the stope face and went to the tram station. After a short while, the timber packs were delivered as the shift-boss had promised earlier.

Roger and I transported enough packs to the stope. I went back to the stope. The rock-drill operators had made considerable progress. The permanent support was tightly and nicely lined up behind the face. The miner's assistant was busy putting the explosives into the holes. The miner was preparing to charge-up the face. The day's job was almost complete. The gang was able to achieve its goal – to get a blast. The team leader and crew were very pleased. The machines in the panels below us were humming. We imagined the lads

were still drilling the rock-face. So we finished a bit earlier than the other crews.

Joe, Sam, Philip and I made our way out of the stope via the gully and up the raise towards the waiting place. The rock-drill operators, John and Kez, were following us. The miner, Kleinbos, the miner's assistant and the team leaders remained at the stope for a short while. Just a stone's throw from the waiting place, there was a tap to which we rushed. There we washed the slime off our faces, hands, arms and gumboots. We changed at the waiting place. We grabbed our jackets and t-shirts and made our way to the tram station. It was time to doze and make jokes again. The nice thing was that the tram was not as congested as in the morning. I was very tired and hungry. My gumboots and the lamp seemed heavy all of a sudden. The guys were moving faster than they did in the morning. We joined the queue and waited for the cage at the sub-shaft station. The cage attendant let us through. I could feel the draught of the sub-shaft as the cage elevated us to 51 level. We joined the queue and waited again. The main shaft cage finally lifted us up to the surface. The time was 2:46 pm. It was not too late. We moved faster to drop off our lamps in the lamp room. I lost track of Joe in the cage.

I went straight to the change house. The shower water was lukewarm since many of us were taking a shower at the same time. I wondered how the food was prepared today. I rushed to the kitchen. The menu for lunch was porridge, braised beef, beans and samp, chicken portion stew, mashed potatoes, beetroot salad, beef and onion soup, orange cool drink and rooibos tea. I had beef, porridge, mashed potatoes and the soup. I went to my room to rest a bit. An hour later, my buddy, Nkosi came in. We then walked together to the shops outside the mine hostel. We met fellow workers. We played snooker. I was victorious twice before one chap defeated me. We decided to have dinner in a shop a stone's throw from the main gate of the mine hostel. We had barbequed meat and porridge. Benjamin, Nkosi's friend from Mozambique, joined us with a litre of Coca-Cola. Having had dinner, we made our way back to the hostel. I wrote detailed field notes in my diary before I got into bed.

The pages that follow tell a tale of deep-level gold mining in photographs.

A TALE OF DEEP-LEVEL GOLD MINING IN PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure A1: One of the Blocks in the Mine Hostel



Figure A2: The Shaft with Production Material in the Foreground



Figure A3: Production Material (Timber Packs, Props, Pipes) Being Transported from Surface to Underground



Figure A4: On Their Way to Work, Underground Workers Waiting for the Sub-Shaft Cage



Figure A5: Mineworkers Getting into the Sub-Shaft Cage



Figure A6: Out of the Tram/Men Carriage/Locomotive, Workers Walking Towards the Waiting Place



Figure A7: At the Waiting Place, the Stop Team Getting Ready for an Underground Shift



Figure A8: Rock-Drill Operators Drilling the Gold-Bearing Rock (the Reef) by Means of a Pneumatic Drill



Figure A9: Rock-Drill Operators Drilling the Gully Face Paving the Way to the Gold-Bearing Rock. This Is Called Development – The Process of Accessing the Ore-Body through Shafts and/or Tunnelling in Underground Mining Operations



Figure A10: A Stope Worker Inside the Stope. Also Visible Is the Installation of Temporary Support Using Props. Permanent Support Is Installed Using Timber Packs

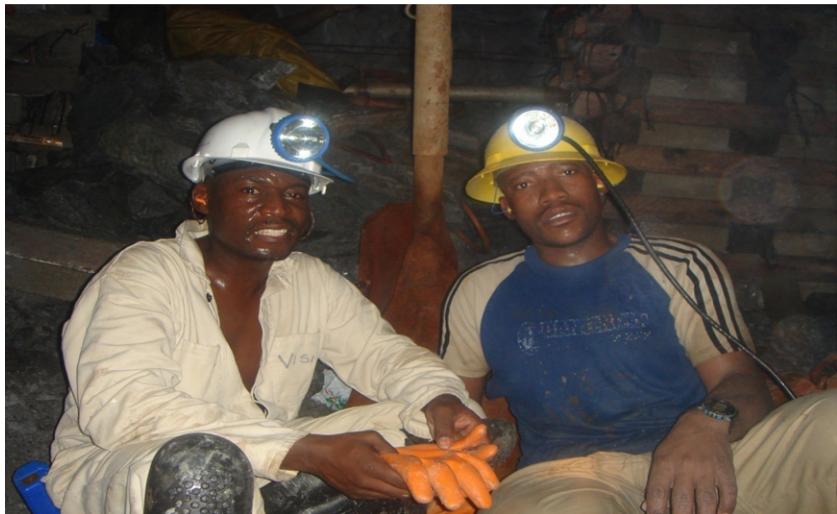


Figure A11: The Author (in White Overall Sweating Profusely) and the Stopes Worker



Figure A12: Scraper-Winch with Which to Remove the Broken Rock



Figure A13: Timber Packs in the Haulage, Underground



Figure A14: An Underground Store



Figure A15: Team Workers Clearing the Route Via Which the Mono-Winch Conveys Material to the Stope



Figure A16: The Author Taking Part in Some of the Team's Production Tasks



Figure A17: A Team Worker Tying the Timber Pack to the Mono-Winch with a String



Figure A18: A Timber Pack Being Conveyed to the Stope by the Mono-Winch



Figure A19: Mineworkers Walking to the Hostel after an Underground Shift



Figure A20: The Laundry in the Hostel



Figure A21: The Change Room in the Hostel



Figure A22: The Pots in which the Miners' Food Is Cooked



Figure A23: Mineworkers Being Served Food in the Kitchen



Figure A24: Pay Day! Mineworkers Queuing in the Remuneration Office



Figure A25: After Work, Miners Chilling and Playing Snooker in a Restaurant a Stone's Throw from the Hostel



Figure A26: Mineworkers Playing Cards in the Hostel



Figure A27: The Trade Union Rank-and-File Gather at the Arena for a Mass Union Meeting



Figure A28: At the Arena in the Hostel, the Mine Manager Holding a Mass Communication Meeting on Production and Safety



Figure A29: The Plant to Which the Broken Ore Is Hoisted for Milling



Figure A30: Miners Performing an Enjoyable and Cheerful Traditional Dance in the Hostel

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