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Working Paper no.53

POST-COLONIAL WORKPLACE REGIMES IN THE ENGINEERING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA, SWAZILAND AND ZIMBABWE

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November 2004

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Post-Colonial Workplace Regimes in the Engineering Industry in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe

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Analyses of the apartheid dispensation have traditionally taken the nature of South Africa's labour regime seriously. This preoccupation became known as the 'race-class debate'. Initially the Marxist position posited a symbiotic relationship between capitalism and apartheid – the regime was all about cheap labour power.[1] However, as the spurts of rapid economic growth came to an end in the 1970s, scholars became concerned less with the functions of apartheid for capitalism, and more with notions of 'crisis'.[2] By the 1990s, scholars seemed to move on from these 'exhausted' debates. "The race/class debate over the relationship between apartheid and capitalism is now passé", argued Nicoli Nattrass in the mid-1990s: "The old dispute between radicals ... and liberals ... is of little more than historical interest".[3] New debates, she argued, had to focus on issues such as industrial restructuring and the position of the South African economy in the liberalising international capitalist economy.

With the dismantling of apartheid as a broader social system, it also became important to reconstruct the workplace and the economy. The state put in place a range of new institutions to "defuse the Molotov cocktail" in the workplace.[4] These included national forums for social dialogue and a range of new laws to regulate labour relations, minimum conditions of employment, employment equity and training systems. Indeed, the state developed some of its most coherent policies in order to address the 'crisis' brought about by apartheid in the workplace.

Hence, we have to consider the nature of the 'workplace regime' that is constructed on the ruins of the 'apartheid workplace regime'.[5] In order to answer this question, one has to take another look at how attempts to reconstruct the workplace, and the contestation generated by this, play out. We have to understand these processes as being embedded in certain spatial, social and political economic contexts. But it is also important to shake off the parochialism entrenched in many analyses of South Africa, and to compare South Africa to other societies in transition – specifically other countries in Southern Africa, and in light of this, to reconsider past debates.

As will be shown, almost ten years after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and despite a range of policy mechanisms to bring about transformation in the workplace, certain

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[1] Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy & Society*, 1:4 (1972), pp.425-456.

[2] See Stephen Gelb, 'Making Sense of the Crisis', *Transformation*, 5 (1987), pp.33-50; and Stephen Gelb, (ed.), *South Africa's Economic Crisis*, Cape Town and London: David Phillip and Zed, 1991.

[3] Nicoli Nattrass, 'Economic Restructuring in South Africa: The Debate Continues', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20:4 (1994), p.517.

[4] Edward Webster, 'Defusion of the Molotov Cocktail in South African Industrial Relations: The Burden of the Past and the Challenge of the Future', *Monographs in Organizational Behavior and Industrial Relations*, 25 (1999), pp.19-58.

[5] See Karl Von Holdt, *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa*, Durban: University of Natal Press, 2003.

key elements of the 'apartheid workplace regime' remain in place in some of the factories in a particular sector of the engineering industry.[6] The way in which the industry's geography has been reconfigured also reinforces an important aspect of the spatial structure of manufacturing during the apartheid era. The argument here is not that no change has taken place whatsoever, but rather that the transition from apartheid in South Africa to an uncertain future regime is not as unproblematic as is often assumed: one can sometimes identify continuities with the past in the way that change is taking place.

Indeed, history does not seem to be a linear progression of historical stages, leading to some grand finale – Hegel or Marx's 'final stage', when all sharp contradictions cease to exist. In his analysis of the beginnings of the South African transition, Francis Fukuyama was pleased that the rulers of the apartheid regime were facing up to their liberal democratic future.[7] He was concerned, however, that the new African National Congress (ANC) government might turn its back on the inevitable, and return to the past. In recent times, such a neoliberal metanarrative – often expressed in the language of globalisation – has forcefully reasserted a teleological view of history. Many analyses of how Africa 'responds' to globalisation have reintroduced the logic of modernisation theory. As Frederick Cooper points out:

> For all its emphasis on the newness of the last quarter-century, the current interest in the concept of globalization recalls a similar infatuation in the 1950s and 1960s: modernization. Both [emphasise] a process, not necessarily fully realised yet but ongoing and probably inevitable. Both name the process by its supposed endpoint. Both were inspired by a clearly valid and compelling observation – that change is rapid and pervasive – and both depend for their evocative power on a sense that change is not a series of disparate elements but the movement of them in a common direction.[8]

The modernisation of Africa is read from the text written by the former colonial masters, who seemingly 'opened up' African societies to the logic of modernisation.[9]

In South Africa, this logic was latched onto by a group of policy researchers, some of them trained in the discipline of developmental economics. The task, they argued, was for South Africa to "meet the global challenge".[10] Representing South Africa as a special case – as somehow being exceptional in the context of colonial Southern Africa – has enabled an understanding of South Africa as a racial Fordist system being transformed into a non-racial post-Fordist one (see Table 1).

This process is seemingly driven by the power of political democratisation and trade liberalisation. Indeed, this perspective has also become dominant in South African studies of the workplace. South African exceptionalism allows one to construct the country's transition as one that presents a radical break with the past. Thus, South Africa can become a special

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[6] To maintain the anonymity of the workers interviewed here, we do not identify the particular sub-sector or any of the factories where the research was carried out.

[7] Francis Fukuyama, 'The Next South Africa', *The National Interest*, 18 (1991), pp.13-27.

[8] Frederick Cooper, 'What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective', *African Affairs*, 100 (2002), p.196.

[9] See Cooper (2002), p.205.

[10] See Avril Joffe, *et al*., 'Meeting the Global Challenge: A Framework for Industrial Revival in South Africa', *Industrial Relations Journal of South Africa*, 14:2/3 (1994), pp.88-127; *Improving Manufacturing Performance in South Africa: Report of the Industrial Strategy Project*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1995; and 'South Africa's Industrialization: The Challenge Facing Labour', in S. Frenkel & J. Harrod (eds), *Industrialization and Labour Relations: Contemporary Research in Seven Countries*, Ithaca: ILR Press, 1995.

case – one that potentially represents a "beacon" for the rest of the post-colonial world, rather than a "mirror".[11]

Table 1 - Post-Fordist 'common sense' view of the transition
Source: G. Hart, *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002, p.25

Apartheid	Post-apartheid
State	Market
Repression	Freedom
Racial Fordism	Non-racial post-Fordism
Rigidity	Flexibility

Thus, as Mamdani has argued, the history of South Africa's transition is written as a history "by analogy".[12] Indeed, as James Ferguson has pointed out in his study of the Zambian copper mines, history is not made up of progressive stages. Working classes can be made and unmade.[13] In the Zambian copper fields – formerly the analogous 'Manchester of Africa', where there were high expectations of the modernising force of mining – 'modernity' is nostalgically remembered as something of the past. And indeed, as Cooper has shown, proletarianisation in Africa under the colonial regimes of both the French and the British took on its own dynamic – resembling what some would call "partial proletarianisation".[14] It was linked to a simultaneous logic of inclusion and exclusion. As Cooper argues elsewhere:

> [C]olonial territories were highly disarticulated politically, socially and economically: colonisers made their money by focusing on investment and infrastructure on extremely narrow, largely extractive, forms of production and exchange. They taught some indigenous peoples some of what they needed to interact with Europeans, and then tried to isolate them from others whose division into allegedly distinct cultural and political units ('tribes') was emphasised and institutionalised…[15]

The analysis presented in this paper is based on a study of seven factories in one sector of the engineering industry in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. This sector has been under considerable pressure following the rapid reduction in import tariffs, the unbundling of a number of South African conglomerates during which manufacturing operations were rationalised or sold off, as well as an increase in the cost of inputs – notably steel. As a result, imports of such products into South Africa have increased, while local players have been unable to penetrate export markets. Also, a number of firms were liquidated.

Based on a total of seventy semi-structured personal interviews conducted with members of management, trade unions, and union officials in the seven remaining factories in the sector (see Table 2), an attempt is made to consider the problematic of reconstruction at the level of

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[11] See Gay Seidman, 'Is South Africa Different? Sociological Comparisons and Theoretical Contributions from the Land of Apartheid', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25 (1999), pp.419-440.

[12] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1996.

[13] James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life in Zambia's Copperbelt*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

[14] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. See also I. Brandell, *Workers in Third World Industrialisation*, London: MacMillan, 1991.

[15] Cooper (2002), pp.205-206.

the workplace. If the 'apartheid workplace regime' was constituted on (i) a racial division of labour, (ii) a racial structure of power supplemented by attempts to incorporate a colonial construction of 'ethnicity' in supervision, (iii) a system of migrant labour, (iv) the racial segregation of facilities, and (v) a location of workplaces in a bifurcated industrial geography, what kind of workplace regime is constructed on the ruins of this?[16] These five elements of the 'apartheid workplace regime' are each considered here, and this perspective on the past is used as a mirror to contrast present day transformations. Indeed, can we talk about a post-apartheid workplace regime, or, as Von Holdt contends, are we seeing the emergence of a neo-apartheid workplace regime?[17]

Table 2 - Background information about engineering factories included in the study

	Number of employees	Ownership	Comments
Factory A (South Africa)	1 300	Owned by a South African consortium, including the directors	Factories A, B & C are all part of one group of companies.
Factory B (South Africa)	470	Owned by a South African consortium	
Factory C (South Africa)	600	Owned by a South African consortium	
Factory D (South Africa)	900	Owned by a US multinational corporation	The multinational corporation bought the operations from a loss-making South African firm in the mid-1990s.
Factory E (Zimbabwe)	170	Owned by local Zimbabwean consortium, including the directors	Factory E was in the process of losing its market share to Factory F. Operations only operated at about 50% of its capacity. Operations of both factories were severely hampered by political and economic chaos in Zimbabwe.
Factory F (Zimbabwe)	250	Owned by Zimbabwean consortium, listed on the Zimbabwean stock exchange	
Factory G (Swaziland)	436	Owned by a South African consortium, including directors	

The Racial Division Of Labour

A first characteristic of the apartheid workplace regime is the racial division of labour. 'Black' workers initially occupied the positions of labourers and assistants to artisans. Later on they became semi-skilled operators.[18] 'Whites' were artisans and managers – including foremen, who supervised 'black' production workers. These foremen were assisted by 'black'

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[16] The first four characteristics of the apartheid workplace regime mentioned here were developed by Von Holdt (2003). The fifth characteristic of the apartheid industrial geography is added here.
[17] Von Holdt (2003).
[18] See Edward Webster, *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1985.

indunas or *baas-boys*.[19] In the administrative departments, a similar colour bar was maintained – no 'white' employee could be trained by a 'black' assistant training officer, for example. Whilst 'black' workers were not allowed to be trained as artisans, on an informal level they often possessed the practical skill to do these jobs, because "their white superiors were frequently too lazy or ignorant to perform their own work".[20] From there emerges Leger's and Adler's criticisms of the reference to 'unskilled' production workers and the notion of "tacit skill".[21] Yet, while these skills were not formally recognised, 'black' workers often had to teach new 'white' recruits how to do their jobs. These same recruits then became their supervisors. But, as Von Holdt points out, "while the racial division of labour was rigid, it was not static". Indeed, "racial boundaries shifted over time in response to changes in production processes and changes in the labour market".[22]

Post-Fordists posited that increased competition would force South African manufacturing firms to construct workplace regimes based on non-adversarial industrial relations and participative managerial styles – 'team work', 'multi-skilling', and 'flexibility', and later on 'world class manufacturing', would become buzz words from the mid-1990s onwards.[23] Whilst some of these words were used 'in theory' in this sector of the engineering industry, as one worker argued, 'in practice' the workplace regime operated on a different logic.

Since the early 1990s, this industry has not managed to become export-oriented. Instead, imports have increased rapidly. A number of South African firms were liquidated as a result, and the remaining factories were able to increase their market share somewhat. But this process did not lead to a wholesale reorganisation of production. Instead, work was intensified by adding additional shifts in some departments, the linking of performance to production bonuses, and by the piecemeal introduction of new machinery. The training of workers was not generally considered to be an important priority, leading to significant conflict between management and the trade unions. Indeed, during 2002, workers at one company went on a month-long strike. The strike related to what was called 'wage anomalies'.

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[19] 'Baas' means 'boss', but implies an important element of white supremacy – a more accurate translation might be 'master', rather than 'boss'. The English version, 'boss-boy', is also sometimes used. According to the Chamber of Mines' English-Afrikaans-Fanakalo dictionary, 'baas' is translated as 'bas' in Fanakalo. The Fanakalo 'bas boy' is translated to 'baasjong' or 'voorjong' in Afrikaans. The Afrikaans translation for 'supervisor' would be 'voorman' – which is already a gendered translation. But Africans are not considered to be 'men' here – the word 'jong' is used instead, which literally means 'young'. This is similar to the colonial use of 'boy' in English. In the same dictionary, the different versions for what later became a 'machine operator' are 'machine boy' (English), 'boorjong' (Afrikaans) and 'mtshin boy' (Fanakalo). The translation for 'miner' (in English 'ganger' is presented as a synonym) is simply 'bas'. A 'fitter' ('passer' in Afrikaans), is translated as 'bas ka lo fitas', a 'shaft timberman' is a 'bas ka lo tshaf'. Here we can see how certain jobs implied a certain racial category. A 'miner' can only be a 'baas'. In fact, the two concepts were synonymous. See Chamber of Mines of South Africa, *Miners' Dictionary – Woordeboek vir Myners*, 1969

[20] Von Holdt (2003), p.29.

[21] Jean Leger, '"Talking Rocks": An Investigation of the Pit Sense of Rockfall Accidents Amongst Underground Gold Miners.' PhD thesis, Arts Faculty, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1992; Glenn Adler, 'Skills, Control and Careers at Work: Possibilities for Worker Control in the South African Motor Industry', *South African Sociological Review*, 5:2 (1993), pp.35-64.

[22] Von Holdt (2003), p.29.

[23] See Joachim Ewert, 'Training for "World Class Manufacturing": Rhetoric and Reality in the South African Engineering Industry', *South African Journal of Labour Relations*, 21:2 (1997), pp.25-41; Mark Hunter, 'The Post-Fordist High Road?: A South African Case Study', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18:1 (2000), pp.67-90.

Indeed, the grading of jobs, and the linking of payment to those jobs, were very explosive issues when the interviews were conducted at the factories in South Africa. Considerable tension was caused by the fact that the company had moved from the Paterson grading system to the one prescribed by the Bargaining Council for the industry. A worker explained:

> Before they were using the Paterson system, which was grade one to ten. Then, suddenly last year, the company [decided] to use the NIC [National Industrial Council][24] system, which has thirteen grades...

Apart from the complaint that the trade union was not consulted about this change, there were problems with "balancing these grades as they transform them from the Paterson system". One interviewee described the move from Paterson to the NIC system as "a fuck-up", and another explained:

> On the Paterson system I was grade five and the other worker was grade six, but when we are transformed to [the] NIC [system], we are classified on the same grade, which is Grade G. Sometimes then we all become Grade G, but we are earning different rates.

Another said:

> The grading-system is totally corrupt, because we've got thirteen grades here and everybody here is not paid the same. Like the one artisan assistant, he's getting paid R18.57 the other one is getting paid R12.00.

There was also a feeling that the exercise was used to cut wages, and the result of this were the mentioned 'grade anomalies':

> It's terrible, terrible… You see, when people are doing the same thing, but their rate of pay on that [grade] is not the same… So we have been trying to sort this thing out, but [it's given us hard times]. Because we believe that, as the law states, if we're doing the same job, we're supposed to get [the] same rate of pay.

Workers felt that there were not clear procedures, that often the system was very arbitrary, and that this opened an opportunity for favouritism.

Thus far the situation might seem like teething problems following the introduction of a new grading system. However, 'grade anomalies' and allegations of 'favouritism' have an important 'racial' sub-text:

> The grading system is buggered because, if I can put it to you that way, it is still the old apartheid regime… You take the F-grade here, [in one department], where only coloureds work. [Then] you take F-grade in dispatch [where blacks work]. In dispatch they will be getting only R11.27 [an hour]… in [the other department] they will get R12.80, but they're both F-grade... These coloured people in F-grade are getting more money than the black people in dispatch. But the white people who [used] to work in material handling… they are also F-grade but they are getting R30 to R40 [an hour].

At another factory, an interviewee had the following perspective:

> [R]acism will always be everywhere in a way… But it's not [always] that obvious [here]. But there was a big issue on grades and race, you know? It's like the

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[24] Before the promulgation of the Labour Relations Act of 1995, Bargaining Councils were known as Industrial Councils.

> Indians were getting better grades, you see? But sometimes it does happen, because when I came here it was something like fifty blacks and thirty Indians… I don't know how they rated [the whole thing]. But mostly those Indians got better grades. It's either because they applied for those positions that came up, or they just somehow got the jobs. But the thing is not every position gets advertised. So you just see someone working on higher grade and you don't even know how the hell did he get there!

There was very strong support among workers at the South African factories for the 'broad banded' system consisting only of five grades proposed by National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. They saw a more standardised system, with clear procedures, as a way to fight discrimination based on arbitrary decisions by management. When the training of workers is linked to career paths, workers could advance in the workplace. One interviewee commented:

> This is what we have been arguing about, just because they have trained some employees here. When there are some vacancies they don't put them there, they just [take people] from outside…

In Zimbabwe, the grading system used by factories is prescribed by the National Employment Council (NEC), a body where employers consult trade unions on matters such as wage increases. These councils are a legacy of the state corporatist industrial relations system introduced by the post-liberation regime. The grading system resembles the Paterson model to a large extent. Grades are linked to the jobs that employees perform, and not to an employee's levels of competency.

At the factory in Swaziland, most interviewees were unaware of the nature of their grading system. Someone in the Human Resources department was able to confirm that the Paterson system was used. Most factory workers fell within the A-band, which is the lowest in the system. One employee, who was interviewed off the factory premises, held the opinion that white and African employees in similar grades, as in South Africa, were paid different wages. According to him, white employees were paid up to eleven times the salaries of African employees in similar grades. However, this could not be verified independently.

At all the South African factories, 'black' employees have steadily been promoted to the level of 'supervisor'. However, the level of 'superintendent' still remained the domain of mostly 'white' employees. "There is an improvement, because since I came here", said one worker, "I think there were one or two African supervisors, but now… maybe we've got about five or six African supervisors". In the past, he said:

> supervisory vacancies were… for coloureds and Indians only, and jobs like tool-setter, which are highly skilled jobs, or quality controllers, were reserved for Indians and coloureds only. But now there are Africans.

Another said:

> In [one department] there used to be coloured supervisors in the past. Now there are… two [Africans] on this shift, and there's one on the other shift – [so] there [are] three African supervisor… There's an African superintendent [there], he is nightshift… I mean when it comes for there downwards, that's where they actually balance the issue of the employment equity, but at the top they don't.

Another felt that the supervisory level was still dominated by 'coloureds' and 'Indians':

Now there are more Indian supervisors, or I should bind them together and say coloureds and Indians. The African supervisors I can count them and tell you it is so and so, so and so. When it comes to Indian and coloureds I [cannot] count [them] - they are more.

However, whilst African workers have steadily been promoted to the supervisory level, workers felt that they did not have real authority to conduct their work. Others felt that they were under-qualified for their jobs, and that was why management was able to undermine their positions. One explained:

I can take you to [our] department, you can see the top level management disregarding the supervisor and the superintendent and [going] straight to the workforce, and say: "Kom, kom, kom! Work! Do your job! What's wrong?" [This] is unacceptable.

He also felt that this did not happen in the past, when supervisors were mostly coloured and Indian. At a number of factories, interviewees echoed this view: "you find that the manager comes from top to you, instead of maybe go to the supervisor, and the supervisor must tell you [what to do]". And:

[From] the supervisors, to the foremen, to the manager - that chain is not that good, because if you say you are my manager, you believe in me that I can supervise. So you are able to give me instructions that I need my production at the end of the week: 'I need so much from you. So you must communicate with your operator so that I will achieve this production.' But you'll find that a manager goes [to] stay in his office, [and then] he comes and gives instructions to the operators, which is wrong. He is supposed to give the instructions to the foremen[25], the foremen must take it to the supervisor. You see, that chain of communication [does] not exist at all, more especially in my department. I don't know in other departments, but in my department that chain of communication does not exist.

Another said: "We want black people to be supervisors, then fine, they will be supervisors. [But] in some areas they are not recognised". One interviewee went so far as to use the term "glorified supervisors":

I would say the supervisors in this company, I do not know their credentials. [Some]… are promoted to be a supervisor, but I'm not sure whether the company gives them enough training [or if] they send them to some institution where they're going to learn the skills of being a supervisor, what a supervisor is like. Really, their credentials are not known to me… Hey! The company is full of glorified supervisors…

Ironically, the union was in the process of taking up this matter with one of the companies:

They [supervisors] are not empowered, although as the union we are trying to enforce that. We've got a dispute pertaining the way they're managing the factory... I think there is progress, because we have agreed with management last week that there will be weekly meetings, [which] will involve shop stewards, supervisors, and one or two of the workforce… And then monthly then we will

[25] Also known as 'superintendents'.

> meet with the top level and discuss the outcome of our weekly meeting. So, we hope that maybe there will be change.

However, he was quite sceptical about the potential for such a process to make a significant impact, since it was part of ongoing attempts to address a whole range of issues, which included the issue of 'grade anomalies', and the perception of the workforce that the intensification of work had reached unacceptable levels. Indeed, the dispute resulted in a strike.

A young interviewee, who was appointed as a contract worker, felt that the African supervisors were from an older generation who had not changed with time:

> [M]ostly people who are on supervisory positions right now are the old people from the old regime. For them language may be more of a problem than it is maybe for us. And for us, we see things much more easy and it's like if you do have a problem, you just say it right there and then. For them, you know, they just keep quiet for some time and maybe handle it later.

At the level of management above the level of supervision, there were very few Africans at any of the factories. One interviewee said:

> We've got only one African guy who is a manager, just a stupid manager, [who] does not have power - he cannot decide [anything]… Can you imagine an IR manager taking instructions and report to the operations manager, a person who knows nothing about the Act, a person who cannot even tell you where the CCMA office is in town? But you take instructions from him!'

At a factory in the Eastern Cape, some workers also felt that Africans who were appointed in the Human Resources department were not taken seriously by the company:

> In the past we [had] two black HR Managers. The reason why they left is because [for] all the years the HR managers used to get [a] car allowance, but they didn't get [it]. So automatically you think to yourself: 'No man, there's definitely [something wrong], and if you push for something, definitely you're not going to get it - you're black.' You understand? You see, you [ride a taxi], that's your problem.

At another factory, all the supervisors were 'black'. About management, however, an interviewee said: "There's only one management here: all [are] white". When asked about the African human resources manager, he answered: "No [he] is not regarded as a manager… They say he's a Human Resources Manager but he's not given a power to be like that." But there was another African manager at this factory that this worker did not mention. Another interviewee had to point out that there was an African production manager. He did not consider him to be more approachable than the 'white' managers, and called him "the oppressor":

> He is an oppressor, because if maybe there is a problem, even from the management, you'll find that he points [to] a worker inside… Even if maybe there is something that the company want to give us, he is the one that is a stumbling block… because [he says] now [they] spoil the people…. As a black manager, he is the one who is supposed to fight for us. [But] he's not doing that. [I'm not

saying that] if you are a black manager, you [should] fight for me, even if I am wrong - if I'm wrong I'm wrong.

Regarding the appointment of managers, an interviewee described his concerns as follows:

We don't know whether we have an Equity Committee or not…There are issues that are supposed to be discussed on the Equity Committee. There is the question of promotions, because one of the problems we have is that some of the promotions on the managerial level are not discussed [at the committee]. If they are going to advertise a post for a supervisor, a QC [quality controller], a team leader or a superintendent - those posts are discussed on the Equity Committee. When it comes to managerial positions, it does not discuss [appointments]… They just decide to advertise, to do interviews and appoint whoever they want to appoint… Most of the people are being appointed [because of] their connections. There are people who have been working for this company ages ago, who decided to take a package. But most of them are back now… And you can not find an African guy or Indian or a coloured in a top position. We've got only one African manager, an IR manager, and only one Indian lady [who] is a manager at [the] stores. Those are the only two. Most of them are whites.

Workers generally felt that they were still regarded as 'second class' employees:

The black employees in this factory are not taken into account as a people who are in the company, who're making the production or making the money in the company. There is nothing good for them. There are no benefits they get as the employees of the company… If the company can remove discrimination… everything would be alright, because if I see something, someone can listen to me.

The picture looked different in Zimbabwe, but there was an important difference between the two factories studied there. One company was considered to be a 'black' company, while the other was 'white'. At the two factories, dynamics regarding race also differed. At the first, there were no 'white' employees. The CEO and the managing director, for example, were African. A worker who had worked at the firm for more than thirty years said that conditions at the factory had improved vastly after independence. Whilst there was a feeling that factory management was very authoritarian, the relationships between workers, supervisors and management at this factory seemed more cordial than at the South African plants. An interviewee mentioned a certain 'Mr T', a 'white' person, who had worked as a manager to implement new production equipment: "It was not an issue. We worked on an equal footing", he said.

At the second firm, the situation resembled some of the dynamics found in the South African factories. Up until around 1994, supervisors were 'mixed'. From then onwards, supervisors, like ordinary factory workers, became mostly Africans. The management level was also 'mixed', but the Chief Executive Officer and the Managing Director were both 'white' Zimbabweans. Workers also held the perception that 'black' and 'white' employees on similar grades were paid differential salaries. Again, this could not be verified independently.

In Swaziland, an employee who had worked in engineering factories in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and then finally Swaziland, was asked to compare his experiences. "In Zimbabwe, factories are often run by blacks", he said. However, "here and there, whites still controlled".

Swaziland and South Africa were similar in his view. From the level of superintendent up to management, whites, coloured and Indians dominated positions. In South Africa he found it peculiar that "the appointment of relatives in highly paid, unproductive jobs" was quite common. Another worker at this factory felt that Swaziland was less xenophobic than South Africa. According to him, rather than racism, favouritism among supervisors, team leaders and workers was more of an issue. The factory there, like the ones in Zimbabwe, did not have superintendents interpositioned between supervisors and management. Workers and supervisors were mostly Africans, whilst management were all white and Indian, except for one African. According to a worker who had previously worked in South Africa, it was "not different from South Africa. It is the same". One employee had a culturalist explanation for the absence of more African managers:

> It is not race, it is more like a cultural thing. Swazi's are known to be people who are polite, humble and all that jazz… But it is changing about now. Swazi's are also not confident in higher positions. We want to rely on someone else to make the decisions.

Hence, in the context of the removal of formal legislation that imposed racial hierarchies, and the introduction of new legislation that attempted to redress the racial legacies, there seems to be a competing logic – a more informal one – that still operates in the workplace. Disputes about grading systems reveal that this logic still holds, and that it is justified that different 'races' should receive different wages, even when, on a formal level, they perform the jobs that are graded equally. One might call this an *informal wage colour bar*. Also, in the context of a breakdown in the formal colour bar of the apartheid era, Africans are appointed in higher positions – specifically as supervisors, but also in some managerial positions. Indeed, this slow process of deracialisation started from the early 1970s, as Nzimande showed.[26] However, workers often question whether these new supervisors and managers have real authority. The process resembles the *upward floating colour bar* already identified by Burawoy in Zambia in the early 1970s.[27]

Racial Structure Of Power

A second characteristic of the apartheid workplace regime is the racial structure of power in the workplace. This refers to the idea of *baasskap*[28] – any black person was by definition a servant of any white person, no matter what their position in the formal hierarchy. Von Holdt traces this back to "deep colonial roots", where 'blacks' were seen as "servants of whites". He argues:

> The relationship between managerial authority and the racial structure of power was complex. Not all whites were managers. However, any white had the 'right' to issue instructions to any black. This meant that there was no clear line of managerial authority or job demarcation – at least, as applied to black workers. White men made the rules and the cardinal rule for black workers was 'to obey that man's rules', however arbitrary or senseless. For black workers this rule spelt

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[26] Blade Nzimande, '"The Corporate Guerrillas" – Class Formation and the African Petty Bourgeoisie in Post-1973 South Africa', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1991.

[27] Michael Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines: From African Advancement to Zambianization*, Lusaka: Institute for African Studies, 1972.

[28] Literally translated, this means 'boss-hood', or 'being-the-master'.

> extreme insecurity: one white man's rule might contradict another's, and in trying to follow both a worker was bound to transgress one or other instruction.[29]

As pointed out by Burawoy, *baasskap* was often violently enforced,[30] but also supported by the ability of supervisors to arbitrarily dismiss any 'black' worker without recourse to procedure, or by withholding bonuses for offences such as 'coming late' or 'insubordination'.[31]

Positioned in a dubious role between the 'white' supervisors and 'black' workers was the *baas-boy*, or the *induna*. Often 'white' supervisors were unable to speak an African language, and 'black' workers could often not speak English or Afrikaans. Thus an old colonial practice – what Mahmood Mamdani calls "decentralised despotism" – was also employed *in the workplace itself*. British colonisers called this system of manipulating traditional leaders 'indirect rule' and the French called it 'association'.[32] Von Holdt points out that the deployment of the term *induna*:

> ...reflects white efforts to affirm, strengthen or if necessary even create, traditional and ethnic identities for blacks as a bulwark against 'modernisation' and its attendant demand for modern rights such as democracy or trade unions.[33]

But unlike 'traditional chiefs' in the rural parts of the colonies, these *indunas* did not bridge the physical space between the village and the city, but the *social space* between the worlds of supervisors and workers. The (often brutal) power of *baas-boys* was derived from the positions of the 'white' supervisors and their role in the system as a whole. Their role was seldom a hegemonic one – no wonder they were sometimes called *impimpis*[34], and not *indunas*, by workers.

But from the 1970s, trade unions were already challenging the arbitrary nature of decisions made under colonial despotism. Industrial relations procedures were put in place, and this was formalised firmly under the new Constitution and a new set of labour laws. In Zimbabwe, the post-independence government introduced stringent procedures to limit arbitrary retrenchment exercises and dismissals. However, whilst 'permanent employees' now enjoy the protection of labour law, at all the factories, a significant proportion of employees have been appointed on 'fixed-term' or temporary contracts. At one factory in South Africa, these workers are known as 'STCs' – short for 'short term contractors'. It is especially during times when production has to increase that these STCs are employed by the companies. When workers are recruited for permanent positions, they are usually recruited from the ranks of the STCs. But often, workers work 'permanently' on a 'temporary' basis, as one worker pointed out:

> It depends on the market - if the volumes are high, maybe, for a period of more than six months. If you start, it should be a short term contract for a period of three months. If you exceed six months, you get a permanent position. But it depends on the market… Currently they are plus-minus five hundred - that's why I am saying it depends on the market. Like last year the company managed to

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[29] Von Holdt (2003), p.31.
[30] Burawoy (1972); and *The Politics of Production*, London: Verso, 1985.
[31] Von Holdt (2003), pp.32-33.
[32] Mamdani (1996), p.7.
[33] Von Holdt (2003), p.35.
[34] 'Informers'.

employ more than four hundred casual workers. Most of them were on a short term contacts, which expired at the end of last year.

At another factory, an interviewee explained that some employees were employed on a month-to-month basis. They were called 'contract workers'. According to him "some of these contract workers are working here up to three years", without being made permanent. Another worker from yet another factory explained the 'strategy' as follows:

What they do, if the contractor has worked say for six months, they will terminate the contract. And then they would say: 'No, they don't have the job for the contract anymore.' All of a sudden, after two or three weeks, they will say they need those contractors back again. You see, [that is] the strategy they are using.

At another factory, an interviewee explained it as follows:

Actually, every month they used to renew their contracts… Let me say, you'll be here about three months, or four months, which means [for that time] they will renew the contract. But you'll find that maybe others they are crying about that. Maybe after six or seven months I'm still [on] a contract, you see?

A contract worker explained the rationale behind the employment of her estimation of two hundred contract workers at the factory as follows:

I think the company doesn't want to pay. That's why they employ contractors… [I]t's cheaper, because when they don't want them again they just tell them: "Your closing date is in June. We are taking you away. We don't want you anymore." It's easy for them – rather than [with] permanent [workers, where] they have to go through some stages.

But this segmentation of internal labour markets was not peculiar to the factories in South Africa. At the two factories in Zimbabwe and the factory in Swaziland a similar system is used. At the factory in Swaziland, when the interviews were conducted, there were 436 employees. Of these, 193 were appointed on monthly contracts. One interviewee referred to these workers as "seasonals". At a factory in Harare, of a factory staff component of 170, 60% were appointed on a permanent basis, and the rest were appointed on contracts that were renewed every six weeks. These contracts meant that the company could give workers 24 hours notice. At the other factory, of a total workforce of 250 employees, only about 100 were on permanent contracts. The rest were all contract workers, whose contracts were renewed on a monthly basis. According to the production manager, the company had a policy to appoint new staff 'every year'. Table 3 provides a summary of how 'fixed term' contracts operate at the different factories. Proportions of contract workers range from 25% of all employees at one plant to a staggering 60% at a factory in Harare.

At none of the factories did trade unions actively recruit contract workers as members. At one of the factories, an interviewee even went so far as to suggest that "[t]he only difference [between] contract and permanent [workers] I think is being a member of the union - having a card and everything; that's the only difference". According to her "[e]verything [else] is just the same".

Table 3 - Permanent Employees and Fixed Term Contact Workers
Source: Interviews with managers, shop stewards, and meetings with shop steward committees.[35]

	Number of employees	Permanent employees	'Contract' employees	Comments
Factory A (SA)	1 300	800	500 (38%)	Short term contracts for duration of 3 months; Some 'toolmakers' and 'electricians' sourced by labour contractors
Factory B (SA)	470	350	120 (26%)	Monthly contracts introduced in 1996, when output increased; Some casuals used to fill in for absent workers; Contractors sometimes used for special projects
Factory C (SA)	600	450	150 (25%)	Monthly contracts renewed for up to 6 months; System introduced in 2000; At components factory, 80 permanent employees and 160 (66%) contract employees
Factory D (SA)	900	480	420 (47%)	Monthly contracts; New employees hired on contract basis, and subsequently laid off
Factory E (Zimbabwe)	170	100	70 (40%)	Six-week contracts, can be given 24 hour notice; Employment agencies used for skilled staff
Factory F (Zimbabwe)	250	100	150 (60%)	Monthly contracts
Factory G (Swaziland)	436	243	193 (44%)	'Seasonal' workers employed on a monthly basis

Hence, an important element of colonial despotism is retained in the new regime. Whilst a significant segment of 'permanent' workers have retained some form of security, a third of all employees employed are in insecure temporary jobs. But even with permanent workers, their 'permanence' is under constant threat because of firm closures. They are constantly reminded of this as managers employ the language of globalisation.

Migrant Labour

A third characteristic of the apartheid workplace regime is what Mamdani would call "the rural in the urban".[36] The workforce at the steel mill in Witbank studied by Von Holdt was divided – or segmented – into workers who had lived in the local township for some time, and

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[35] Since employment levels tend to vary, these figures reflect staffing levels for when the interviews were conducted at the factories.
[36] Mamdani (1996), p.30.

migrant workers who were housed in a hostel administrated by the local municipality.[37] These two categories of workers did not only live in two distinct social spheres, but they were consciously allocated to different positions inside the workplace by management. According to Von Holdt, "migrants were preferred for jobs in hot, dangerous places such as the iron plant tap floors or the steel plant furnaces, and for hard labour… Locals were recruited for "softer" jobs – such as artisan assistants".[38] He explains:

> This differentiated recruiting strategy was related to control, discipline and cost in the workplace. For migrant workers, pressed upon by the large reserve army of labour penned up in bantustans, and desperate for work, dismissal or non-renewal of a contract would be disaster. This imposed on them the discipline to accept the toughest and most gruelling work, at the lowest pay, and under harsh treatment….[39]

Migrant labour remains a key characteristic of the current Southern African labour market. However, in this industry, migrant labour is not a major feature any longer. One of the firms had an on-site hostel in the past. Losing your job at this company also meant losing your accommodation in the city, and this was used to keep workers compliant. But this system is no longer used. However, the segmentation of the labour market into 'permanent' and 'contract' employees maintain some of the workplace-based dynamics of the migrant labour system.

Racial Segregation Of Facilities

A fourth characteristic of the apartheid workplace regime is the racial segregation of facilities. Up to 1983, this was formally legislated by government. However, as Von Holdt points out, when this legislation was repealed, many firms continued with the practice of providing for separate canteens, change houses and toilets.[40] He makes an important point in this regard:

> Labour legislation reform – an alteration in the national regime of labour regulation – did not necessarily translate into change in the workplace regime. Racial identity was constructed by white political, managerial, trade union and social power, rather than by the law alone, and it was the basis of that power. Power in the workplace was *racially constituted*.[41]

At some of the South African factories, workers had the impression that some forms of segregation were still practiced in the factories. A worker from a factory in South Africa explained:

> We should learn to live together, then we can work together, because it's not a big deal. But the supervisors, they've got their own kind of tea that they drink, we've got our own kind of tea. They drink fresh milk, and we only drink only tea. The management drinks even better. You see. I am not saying they must buy us like juice and everything - that is expensive - but if we can learn to live together, I mean we can work together. They've got their own toilets, we've got our own toilets. Even us shopstewards, we were denied the opportunity to use the toilets up

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[37] Von Holdt (2003), pp.40-46.
[38] Von Holdt (2003), p.40.
[39] Von Holdt (2003), p.42.
[40] Von Holdt (2003), pp.29-30.
[41] Von Holdt (2003), p.30.

there, in the training centre. We were using them before, but all of a sudden they said no… During the negotiations we were able to use those toilets, but all of a sudden they decided, no, we must not use those toilets. If you want to go to the toilet you must like go out and… stuff like that. So it's not healthy.

From this quotation it is clear that segregation is not always 'racial' *per se*, but rather operates along the contours of the company hierarchy. Another interviewee said the following:

We [African workers] also communicate with them [coloureds and Indians], we don't have a problem - except with the management. Everybody is worried with management at this company. But with us as workers we don't have problems, because we eat together… They don't treat us as tools, because there are whites who treat their employees as tools, you see. So you don't stay with tools - tools stay separate.

At another factory, where the canteen was used by workers and management alike, management had an earlier lunch time, and after their lunch time, factory workers used the canteen. Managers got enamel plates, and workers had to use plastic ones. Again, one has to emphasise that the practices are based not on 'race' as such, but the company hierarchy. It is important to note, however, that workers interpret this as *de facto* discrimination, since the hierarchy is still racialised.

Apart from mentioning specific examples, employees had comments about the general state of affairs in their factories, and some linked this to national issues:

I told you here it's the racist thing. I have never ever… I have never seen a place where apartheid is this bad, never in my life. Now that's why I was thinking: 'Why is it so many farmers getting killed, because now I can see why the white people are getting killed on the farms - because of this attitude.' It is not them, but it is the parents that taught them to be like that, you understand? So you can't actually blame him - you have to go deeper…

At the one factory that is owned by a multinational corporation, there was a perception among workers that the managers from Europe interacted with workers with more respect than their South African counterparts:

Oh, they [South African managers] can learn a lot – they can learn a lot, you know, because if you get like the [managers from Europe coming], when they come for the normal visit, [they] come and wish you 'good-bye, take care they'll see you later, the next turn'. It really puts a [good] feeling in the employee to actually…

In the Zimbabwean factories, workers did not feel that some forms of segregation were practiced – this had changed after independence already.

Discrimination on the basis of 'race' is no longer legislated in South Africa. It is actively discouraged by state policies and legislation has been put in place to bring about 'employment equity'. But workers interpret the segregation of facilities according to the company hierarchy as implying that certain elements of racial segregation in the workplace remain. This is true for especially the factories in South Africa and Swaziland. Workers hold strong opinions and continue to challenge these practices. These continuities may be temporary phenomena that form part of a process of decolonisation. Also, the study is based on a sector of one industry

only. One cannot generalise the findings – essentially based on opinions expressed during interviews – to include all of South Africa. But the perspectives presented here do raise important questions about the ability of a particular formation of the post-colonial state to 'penetrate' the workplace.

Location Of Workplaces In A Bifurcated Industrial Geography

Fifth, an important element of the 'apartheid workplace regime' was the way factories were inserted into the *industrial geography of colonialism*. Mamdani refers to the bifurcated state, and the different logics of colonial rule in urban centres and rural areas.[42] In the South African context, 'indirect rule' took the form of the Bantustans created by the migrant labour system and formalised by the apartheid government. Whilst Von Holdt identifies the importance of the migrant labour system, he fails to recognise the significance of the apartheid industrial geography itself.[43]

Until the changes to labour laws in 1979, all African workers were excluded from the legal definition of 'employee'. By using strategic court cases combined with a programme of mobilisation, the independent trade unions that emerged after the 1973 strike waves were able to slowly chip away some of the legal pillars of racial despotism. But accounts of South African labour history often fail to consider that a significant number of workers were located in areas that were not included in South African labour law. These workers were often in what became known as 'industrial decentralisation zones' in the so-called 'homelands'.[44]

The idea of this kind of 'spatial fix' to urban worker militancy predates formal apartheid.[45] Indeed, it was raised for the first time in the 1940s, and a limited process of state support was initiated. In the 1960s, the government stepped up its support for 'border industries', but factories were not located within the borders of Bantustans. Only from the late 1960s to the early 1970s were factory owners encouraged to set up shop within the Bantustans themselves. This had the added advantage of the location of employment relations outside the scope of the reforming South African labour regime. Thus, if one alters Mamdani's language somewhat, whereas workers in urban centres were making progress in achieving some form of *industrial citizenship*, workers in rural areas were very much the *subjects* of the neo-traditional rulers of Bantustans. In the South African context, the way in which the 'bifurcated state' shaped the industrial geography of apartheid is often ignored by a 'metro-centric' approach.[46]

Following the spate of liquidations in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, three of the four remaining South African factories in this sector of the engineering industry are located in these areas. However, the union has been addressing the disparities in wages and conditions between these areas and factories located in urban areas. One interviewee still had concerns: "We have two other sister-companies… So there is a disparity, the wages are not equal".

Whereas NUMSA (and its predecessor, the Metal and Allied Workers Union) was able to organise urban factories in the 1970s, factories in these former decentralisation areas were only organised in the late 1980s. The civil war in the early 1990s in especially KwaZulu-Natal

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[42] Mamdani (1996).

[43] Von Holdt (2003).

[44] Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987, p.475; Hart (2002).

[45] See Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[46] See Hart (2002).

severely disrupted union activities. However, currently processes of 'reconciliation' in the workplace are leading to former United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA) members being organised into the NUMSA structures. An interviewee at one of the factories pointed out:

> Even in 1988 when we joined NUMSA nothing [collective bargaining] was happening… Then in 1994, that's where they started to bargain, [later] they joined Bargaining Council and the grading system.

As the wage levels at the different production locations in South Africa even out, workers interviewed at some of the factories were concerned about whether the company would maintain their operations in former Bantustans. This state of affairs is a constant source of insecurity, with workers referring to factories that are 'running away' from them. Some were aware of the fact that the discontinuation of subsidies for companies was putting pressure on the industrialisation models followed in the former industrial decentralisation zones. About plant closures in one of the areas, an interviewee said: "I think maybe it is because there are no company subsidies… There were some subsidies [for] seven years. So I think there are no subsidies now". Some related the closure of companies in this area to racism:

> What makes the companies to close down? The answer is simple. It is the white men who have the money, they do not want the black government. That is why they run away with the money and hide it in another place, and sit upon it. That is the reason.

Another:

> What I mean is that business owners think that there is a problem (that they must give people jobs). They fight the people because they want to bring back the white government.

Whereas the industrial decentralisation zones served as a mechanism to discipline labour in the past, this dynamic is now replicated in the Southern African region. In this industry, a competing factory was set up in the neighbouring Swaziland in the 1990s. Within two years it captured 40% of the South African market. Also, 90% of its produce was exported to South Africa. Swaziland is notorious for its labour repressive regime, and South African management and trade unions alike raised this issue publicly.

Indeed, interviewees were very much aware of some of these dynamics. One worker said:

> I think the government must try to stop taking goods from other countries and not allow so many countries to bring their goods here in South Africa - just because our factory are closing down due to that goods from outside the country.

Whereas trade union rights in South Africa are formally recognised, unions in Swaziland still have to fight for their right to organise workers. An interviewee at the factory in Swaziland did not have a lot of respect for the track record of trade unions in that country: "Unions in Swaziland are weak. They are not doing their job – they are not standing for worker's rights". But the problem was not only a lack of effort from the trade unions. He said: "You should remember, this is not a country, it's a kingdom". Another said: "The government of Swaziland is not giving power to unions". Indeed, no collective bargaining over wages and conditions took place at the factory. Another employee pointed out that there had been a union "across the road" which had tried to organise workers at the factory in the past. These

attempts were unsuccessful: "[The manager] believes people's attitudes change when they join unions. He promised to look after the employees if they do not join a union".

Another worker who was interviewed in Swaziland had previously worked in a factory in Zimbabwe. In his perspective, unions there were "not weak or powerful". According to him, "there are not that many strikes [in Zimbabwe], but worker's rights are followed through the worker's committees". Indeed, workers in Zimbabwe in this industry were organised by the National Engineering Workers' Union (NEWU). Wages were negotiated in the National Employment Council for the engineering industry, which basically prescribed minimum wages to the industry – very much like the Bargaining Councils in South Africa. However, unlike South Africa, collective bargaining for wages did not take place at the factory or company level. At this level, permanent workers elected representatives for Worker's Committees. These representatives consulted with management in a Works Council. The union as such was not involved in this process. Indeed, according to the managing director of one company there, less than 50% of their workforce was unionised. At the other company, the firm set their wage levels at a higher rate than the prescribed minimum wages – even for contract workers. This was usually discussed in the Works Council. Workers seldom went on strike as part of a collective bargaining process, but sometimes engaged in demonstrations and sit-ins. Once, when this happened, the company called the police. According to the production manager at the plant, unions were "ineffective".

Thus, as the uneven labour market brought about by the industrial geography of apartheid is levelled, the same logic is replicated in the context of Southern Africa, and the availability of a state form and labour regime in Swaziland that resembles the former 'homelands', enables a rearticulation of the logic of the apartheid industrial geography. South Africa's internal spatial fix is externalised to include Swaziland in the case of this sector of the engineering industry, but also Lesotho in the case of the textiles and other industries.

Conclusion

What can we then say about the workplace regime that is constructed on the ruins of the apartheid workplace regime? Based on his analysis of a number of workplace restructuring exercises at Highveld Steel, Von Holdt identified three possible future trajectories for the post-apartheid workplace regime:

First, *authoritarian restoration* implies a return to the logic of despotism. This would entail what Burawoy would term "market despotism",[47] or 'unitarism' in the language of industrial relations theory. For Von Holdt, in the South African context this implies some kind of neo-apartheid workplace regime.[48]

Second, *negotiated reconstruction* implies cooperation between management and a strong, independent trade union so as to establish a less authoritarian workplace regime. For such a workplace regime to survive in the long run, the establishment of a more generalised 'hegemonic' regime of control would be required.[49] It would have to be supported by a social democratic 'class compromise'. In the language of industrial relations theory, a 'pluralist' system would be the outcome of such a process.

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[47] Burawoy (1985).
[48] Von Holdt (2003).
[49] See Burawoy (1985).

Third, Von Holdt identifies what he calls *wildcat cooperation*. This is when union members buy into managerial ideology and cooperate in restructuring exercises without the union's support. For Burawoy, this implies "hegemonic despotism",[50] and in the language of industrial relations theory, 'neo-unitarism'. But in some way, this is where this comparison between the various theoretical strands discussed here runs into conceptual inconsistencies. Indeed, Von Holdt attempted to construct a theoretical language more appropriate in the context of the South. 'Hegemonic despotism' is a moment that follows the 'hegemonic' regimes of the North, when the welfare state comes under pressure because of economic liberalisation. It is a post-welfare state moment – with cut-backs in social security legitimised by the ideology of globalisation. Also, 'neo-unitarism' implies a moment that follows 'pluralism' – the *re*-assertion of unitarism. Von Holdt is careful to point out that the apartheid workplace regime was despotic in nature. Can 'hegemonic despotism' follow 'racial despotism' as a regime of control?[51]

Indeed, one should ask oneself whether these categories help us to understand better what has happened in this sector of the engineering industry in South Africa. Also, how do we understand this in comparison to Swaziland and Zimbabwe? While the notions of "apartheid workplace regime" (Von Holdt) and "colonial despotism" (Burawoy) are useful in describing the past, the above categories of possible future trajectories are less helpful. Rather, we are forced to consider new concepts. In light of the criticism of South African exceptionalism, the concepts 'post-apartheid workplace regime' and 'neo-apartheid workplace regime' also seem inappropriate. Rather than simply authoritarian restoration, negotiated reconstruction or wildcat cooperation, or even market despotism, hegemony or hegemonic despotism, we see in the context of Southern Africa what one could call a *post-colonial workplace regime.*

Indeed, this study has shown that in this sector of the engineering industry a number of elements of the apartheid workplace regime are reconfigured in new ways – but that this process of reconfiguration also mirrors some key characteristics of the logic underlying the apartheid workplace regime – there is continuity in change as such. Table 4 summarises the argument.

Table 4 - Continuity in Change: From Racial Despotism to the Post-Colonial Workplace Regime

Apartheid workplace regime or racial despotism	Post-colonial workplace regime
Racial division of labour	Upward floating colour bar and an informal wage colour bar
Arbitrary nature of racial structure of power draws on the colonial state for legitimacy	Industrial relations procedures limit arbitrary exercise of power. Rearticulated as 'labour market flexibility' and ideology of globalisation
Migrant labour	Migrant labour remains as a characteristic of the labour market in Southern Africa, articulates with a re-segmented labour market in this sector
Segregation of facilities in the workplace	Racially segregated facilities illegal. Segregation shifts to class segregation, which often still coincides with 'race'
Location in bifurcated industrial geography	Attempts to level uneven labour markets. Rearticulated in context of Southern African regional integration – case of Swaziland.

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[50] Burawoy (1985).
[51] Von Holdt (2003).

First, historically the industry emerged as one with workplace regimes based on a racial division of labour. In some of the factories, 'race' was remoulded, with the position of 'coloured' and 'Indian' workers changing over time.[52] The 'racial' mould is by no means a fixed one. But South Africa is not an exception to the rule. In Swaziland workers also fought racial discrimination in the workplace, and in Zimbabwe 'white' craft unions depended on the state to fix the definitions of their deskilled jobs as a defensive strategy against their 'black' counterparts.

In the context of the post-colonial state, the racial division of labour can no longer be legitimised by the state. In fact, policies are put in place to bring about redress. In South Africa, legislation aimed at rectifying skills imbalances as well as the promotion of employment equity was promulgated. But the post-colonial state does not always have the capacity to enforce such legislation, and substantial scope exists for an upward floating colour bar and an informal wage colour bar to exist within the informal realms of formal organisations. Indeed, whilst the colonial *state* collapses, the 'racialised' post-colonial *society* is quite capable of holding on to colonial values. Of course, trade unions challenge these practices in the workplace, and they may only be a temporary phenomenon that follows the first decades after independence. Indeed, Zimbabwe constructed a form of state corporatism after independence, thus incorporating trade unions into a nationalist project. The positive side of this state-led programme should not be ignored. The key difference between South Africa and Zimbabwe is that the vocational training system in Zimbabwe was deracialised more aggressively than in South Africa. While trade unions remain weak at the level of the workplace – a legacy of state corporatism – the 'racial' character of despotism in the workplace is less harsh than in South Africa. But in the context of the political and economic chaos in Zimbabwe, it is difficult to construct a useful comparison. A possible lesson from Zimbabwe, however, is that the 'colour bar' may shift out of the workplace to the economy as such – specifically with regards to ownership – one company is considered to be a 'black' company, and the other 'white'. Thus, the politics of 'race' remain engrained in post-colonial Southern Africa – not only South Africa, even though meanings shift over time.

Second, under colonialism the racial structure of power in the workplace drew on the state for legitimacy and formal legal sanction. Under pressures from post-colonial states, this regime collapses, and new sources of legitimacy are needed to maintain managerial control over the labour process. An important element of racial despotism in the workplace is the fact that decisions are made arbitrarily. These essentially pre-bureaucratic forms of work organisation are challenged by trade unions, who force companies to sign 'procedural agreements', and who challenge the absence of formal grading systems, or the anomalies inherent to such grading systems once they are implemented. In a way, one might argue that the struggle against racial despotism is a *struggle for bureaucracy* – one that is based on a different logic, which is seen as more 'rational' by workers. The managerial fix to this challenge is partially found in the *market*, with the introduction of new forms of insecurity – a layer of fixed-term contract workers in the case of this industry. Another form of insecurity is the constant threat of relocation under the 'pressure' of 'globalisation'. The discourse of colonial management fuses with the discourse of globalisation through the language of flexibility. The bureaucratic measures that were meant to transform the colonial despotism into some form of post-colonial hegemony, are seen as obstacles to productivity and employment. The result is the language of the market legitimising the continuing dominance of 'white' managers in the workplace, and a reassertion of their despotism by using fixed term contracts, threats to relocate, and the

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[52] See Webster (1985).

language of neo-liberal globalisation. Thus, the *state* as locus of racial despotism disappears, and the *market* is used to enforce discipline.

Third, the system of migrant labour is still a major feature of the labour market in the broader context of Southern Africa. While this is not a key factor in the case of this sector of the engineering industry as such, the system of using fixed-term contracts replicates the dynamic of labour market segmentation brought about by the migrant labour system. Where migrant workers at one of the factories were at risk of losing not only their jobs, but also their accommodation in the hostel on the firm's premises in the past, a new layer of vulnerable 'STC' workers are subjected to the threat of exclusion.

Fourth, the segregation of facilities on the basis of 'race' becomes illegal. But we see that some petty past practices still persist. Segregated facilities in the workplace are justified on the basis of seniority. In the context of informal colour bars, this remains a very sensitive issue in the workplace – but, as mentioned, less so in Zimbabwe.

Fifth, the location of the industry in a bifurcated industrial geography is replicated in the context of regional integration. This should be understood in the context of the somewhat different post-colonial routes the countries took. In Swaziland, the monarch succeeded in establishing his hegemony through traditionalism. In the realm of industrial relations, a 'traditionalist unitarism' was established, building on key elements of colonial despotism. As a form of state, post-colonial Swaziland maintains the bifurcation brought about by colonial land and labour policies. Ironically, the monarchy's bourgeois nature is entrenched by the maintenance of this distinction. Allowing for trade unions and parliamentary democracy would undermine this arrangement, and unions are thus actively discouraged from organising 'the friends of the King's' factories. This creates the space for the South African system of industrial decentralisation to be replicated in the Kingdom, with the industrial relations practices that are associated with that.

When the post-apartheid government came to power in South Africa, there were attempts to put in place a broader set of institutions to support such reconstruction of the workplace. But the establishment of these institutions were premised on false assumptions. The extent to which trade unions were able to establish such 'rational' procedures in the workplace was overestimated. Many sectors of the economy were never organised, and because of the nature of the apartheid industrial geography, significant spaces of the manufacturing industry were located outside the national regime.

The authors of the labour laws assumed that one would be able to convince the players that the establishment of new institutions, or bureaucracies, in the workplace would be to their benefit – in the long run – even if they were not established yet. Therefore the Labour Relations Act of 1995 contained significant elements of social engineering, specifically Chapter 5 that deals with so called 'workplace forums'. The hope was that generalised exercises of 'negotiated reconstruction' would add up to become a social trend, and in this way create the high road of post-Fordism. A better understanding of the emerging post-colonial workplace regime in South Africa equips us with more appropriate theoretical tools to understand the limits to the post-Fordist strategy. Indeed, the post-colonial workplace regime is quite able to *contain* elements of 'negotiated reconstruction', 'authoritarian restoration' or 'wildcat cooperation' – often simultaneously, but also at different times. A strategy of authoritarian restoration, as in the case of a number of factories in this industry, often leads to *stalemate* and continued ungovernability in the workplace. The trade union was

able to extract some concessions from management – significantly a process to address the wage anomalies the union found so offensive. Thus, workers actively resist attempts at authoritarian restoration. But because of the ongoing stalemate, the resulting resistant work culture is not conducive to significant increases in productivity based on worker cooperation and initiative. However, even if firms shift their approach to one of negotiated reconstruction, the question remains as to how sustainable such an approach would be in the context of an absence of state structures to sustain large-scale transformation. Islands of cooperation in a sea of despotism do not really change landscapes – they lead to the enclave economies created by settler colonial societies based on the logic of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Only now the 'racial' dimension may be less pronounced, even though historical tension will remain and flare up at certain times.

Indeed, the key to understanding the continuities with the apartheid workplace regime lies in seeing South Africa as part of a Southern African political economy, historically tied together through processes of colonial conquest and the establishment of a relatively cohesive settler society with its own identity. In the context of the 'Northern' metropolis, hegemonic regimes of control slowly give way to hegemonic despotism. In the former colonies, colonial despotism gives way to a market despotism that reinforces some of the key characteristics of colonialism. This is what characterises the post-colonial workplace regime – the rearticulation of past logics within a process of change.

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The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

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Research Objectives

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.

- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.

- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.

- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.

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