Being a black mineworker in South Africa is neither a racial nor a class question; it is a multifaceted experience, one that challenges the presently dominant interpretations of what it means to be a black mineworker. These interpretations, characterised as they are by a logic of exclusive, singular extrapolations, do not allow for a holistic approach to understanding the experiences of the mineworkers, that is, an approach that encompasses economic issues, class issues, politics, gender, race and sexuality. A number of critical analyses of what it means to be a black mineworker within a non-Western spatio-historical temporality such as South Africa are based on a Marxist political economy paradigm (Allen 1992, 2003; Crush et al. 1991; Jeeves 1985; Yudelman 1984). These analyses reduce the experience of being a black mineworker to that of entering the proletariat, as though blackness as a racial category were not a problematic dimension of the experiences of black mineworkers. This approach to the meaning of being a black mineworker obscures rather than reveals the multiple concrete experiences of black mineworkers, as opposed to just mineworkers, within the present modern world in general and South Africa and the non-Western world in particular.

A second dominant paradigm underpinning analyses of what it means to be a black mineworker within a spatio-historical temporality such as South Africa is that of critical race theory (Magubane 2007; Pollard 1984), which reduces the experience of black mineworkers to a problem of identity politics. Thus, by privileging the question of identity over that of economic power relations, critical race theories, like many other cultural studies paradigms
such as gender-based or disability-oriented critical analyses, obscure rather than reveal the multifaceted nature of the experience of black mineworkers in South Africa.

The mineworker is disposable and dispensable (Magubane 2007), and lives and works in the shadow of death. In pursuing this course of reasoning, I deploy the epistemic method of ‘shifting the geography of reason’ in order to read the experience of mineworkers in South Africa from the locus of enunciation of the oppressed subject, within the scheme of a colonial power differential based on a hierarchy of humanity. This method allows me to speak with and from the perspective of black mineworkers – in this chapter, specifically black mineworkers in the Platinum Belt of South Africa – as opposed to speaking for and about them. I reach the conclusion that being a platinum mineworker in post-apartheid South Africa is a racially and market-determined identity of colonised subjectivity, one that relegates the dominated subject (the black mineworker) to the realm of the subhuman. This chapter, therefore, transcends the limits of current dominant reductionist perspectives on what it means to be a black mineworker in South Africa.

THE HISTORY OF MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Commercial mining of minerals in South Africa started with colonialism; the first mining operations took place in Namaqualand in 1852, and were followed by the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly in 1870 (MMSD 2002). The rise of capitalism saw the beginning of proletarianisation (or at least semi-proletarianisation) of the local populations due to land dispossession and forced removals; hence, many men were forced to sell their labour to the newly-formed mines as part of the migratory labour system (Worger 1987). In these mines, black male mineworkers were housed in well-secured, single-sex compounds and their movement was restricted to limit interaction with the surrounding communities. The compounds resembled prison-like conditions, with many of these workers dying of work-related diseases such as silicosis (a disease which of course also affected white workers) and starvation (Crush et al. 1991; Demissie 1998; James 1992; Worger 1987). The same system of black oppression in the diamond mines was transferred to the Witwatersrand goldfields in 1886, when black workers were sourced from various independent and colonised territories in southern Africa (Crush et al. 1991; James 1992).
From the time that the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, and throughout the apartheid era until 1979, labour laws in the country were based on colour distinctions. Black mineworkers were semi-slaves, and were not allowed to participate in any strike action; they had their own labour unions, but these were excluded from participation in bargaining processes. This situation was supported initially by the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 11 of 1924, the Wages Act No. 27 of 1925, the Mines, Works Amendment Act No. 25 of 1926 and the Labour Relations Act No. 28 of 1956. This entire legislative framework (as well as later legislation) was designed to protect the employment security of white workers, while black workers were employed as cheap labour, thereby reducing production costs, and were not allowed to hold even low-level supervisory positions as these were reserved for white workers (McBean 1978). Labour on the mines in South Africa continued to be sourced from neighbouring countries, notably Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland and Southern Rhodesia (later Rhodesia) (Department of Labour 2007; Jeeves 1985). The Witwatersrand Labour Organisation recruited most of the foreign workers. The work-induced death rate was high among mineworkers (Harington et al. 2004), with an estimated 470 deaths for every 100 000 mineworkers per year (this figure included white mineworkers).

The life of black mineworkers was a daily struggle for existence. They were paid sub-poverty wages to cover their own expenses only (to the exclusion of their dependents), on the assumption that the wages they earned were subsidised by agricultural and other activities in their home areas. On arrival at the mine, they were often given loans or advance payments and this practice was repeated on an ongoing basis to maintain them in a state of perpetual debt, therefore trapping them in a relationship of never-ending dependency (Allen 1992; Demissie 1998; Van Onselen 1976). For those who did not die on the mines, there were no pension funds for them when they retired, although they were given a small amount of money to take back to their rural homes. But according to Charles van Onselen (1976), the amount was too little, only enough to pay the transport costs to return to their countries of origin or their homelands. The majority of these mineworkers would suffer a life of poverty, and would soon die of the diseases acquired while working in the mines; some ended up committing suicide (Meel 2003). This misery arising from the employment relationship was reinforced by the misery of the compound. The compound housing system was out of reach for the spouses and children.
Decolonising the Human

of mineworkers, and it perpetuated a lonely existence. In addition, during incidents of illegal labour unrest on the mines, compounds were quickly converted into actual prisons to inhibit and undermine the blossoming of such labour activity. At times, mineworkers’ strikes were subjected to brutal suppression by the repressive apparatuses of the South African state (Allen 1992; James 1992; Worger 1987).

This brutal site of economic production by, and social reproduction of, black mineworkers remained in existence until the end of apartheid. Significant changes did arise during the reform era of apartheid in the late 1970s and 1980s, at least with respect to the whittling away of the employment colour bar (because of the sheer demand for skilled labour on the mines) and the right to strike. Despite this, however, a combination of mine security forces and state repression was used to brutally suppress strikes by mineworkers during a period of mine unrest that lasted from 1985 to 1987 (Moodie 2009, 2013). During this time, surrogate forces were also planted among the mineworkers by the mine management to divide their union along ethnic lines and, as a result, workers were killed in uprisings between rival ethnic groups (Moodie 2013).

Up until the end of apartheid, there is no doubt that the semi-proletarianised status of black mineworkers also entailed a condition of racial capitalism such that their rights as citizens and as workers were both denied. This is what Halisi (1999) called racial proletarianisation – a process whereby black mineworkers were denied their citizenship rights in the city, with the result that they were forced to live half their life in the city and half in the rural areas. But, even in post-apartheid South Africa, mining has been resistant to broader processes of decolonisation and democratisation which are, arguably, taking place nationally. This was also articulated by Cyril Ramaphosa, one of the beneficiaries of the government’s black economic empowerment policies (Phillips 2004; Ponte et al. 2007), who argued that the mining industry in South Africa today is resistant to change because black people are co-opted into the mining industry but they are not given influential positions that will allow them to initiate change (Desai 2014). In short, black people do not have control of the mining industry, and the industry still operates on an apartheid template. Black mineworkers, as ‘subjects’ – in the sense used, in another context, by Mahmood Mamdani (1996) – and as workers continue to be subjugated socially, economically and politically through the specific
form of proletarianisation that took place historically in South Africa, and which saw them dispossessed of land and forced to be workers on the mines as well as in factories and on farms (James 1992; Worger 1987). This systemic condition, a condition of colonisation in the zone of ontological non-being (Fanon 1967; Gordon 2005, 2007) remains today (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Since 1994, certain reforms have been implemented to rectify past injustices and imbalances, but there have also been changes indicative of more fully integrating the South African economy into global neoliberal restructuring processes. Mineworkers are still not free to withdraw their labour, and when they do, they are usually subjected to coercive force from the state, as witnessed during the Marikana Massacre (Alexander et al. 2012; Bond and Mottiar 2013; Magaziner and Jacobs 2013; Ndebele 2013; Sorensen 2012).

Despite the non-existence of an employment colour bar, black South Africans have not made significant advances into managerial and supervisory positions on the mines. The black workforce continues to be subjected to dangerous working conditions, with low pay and living in conditions of poverty, either in mine compounds or in informal settlements near the mines (Ndebele 2013; Sorensen 2012). For example, in Rustenburg, miners work in compounds and informal settlements around the town while new housing development sites are reserved for white miners and the black middle classes (Macmillan 2012). What makes it more difficult for the miners is that the majority of them are migrant workers from the rural areas of South Africa or from neighbouring countries such as Lesotho and Mozambique; these workers need to maintain two households with their wages (Bond 2013).

In addition, economic instability in the mining sector has led to new challenges; the industry has experienced major retrenchments, leading for example to a decrease in employment levels from 800 000 in 1987 to just over 400 000 in 2001 (Sorensen 2011). Statistics gathered in September 2018 show a slight increase in the number of people employed in the mining industry, from 457 290 in 2016 to 464 667 in 2018 (Minerals Council of South Africa 2018). A number of factors have increased production costs in mining, such as the political uprisings of the ‘Arab Spring’ and the concomitant sharp rise in oil prices, the devaluation of the South African rand, and labour unrest. Lower-grade ore has also resulted in lower profits, mine closures and retrenchments (Sorensen 2011). Following the gold seam deeper underground
through tunnelling, ventilation and locomotives has also resulted in higher costs of production and lower profits, and in even more inhospitable working conditions for mineworkers (Diering 2000).

The events in Marikana in August 2012, when 34 mineworkers were shot dead by police officers, show that the challenges faced by mineworkers in the country are still far from over despite 25 years of democracy. The wildcat strikes by mineworkers in Marikana, and the discontent of mineworkers in the country in general (Ndebele 2013; Sorensen 2012) are manifestations of the experience of being a mineworker in South Africa. The Marikana incident can in large part be viewed as an anti-colonial rebellion and a struggle against continued imperialism (Jacobs 2013).

DECOLONIAL UNDERSTANDING OF A MINEWORKER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Decolonial theory helps us to understand the processes that created a black mineworker, as well as the social, political and structural conditions under which black mineworkers continue to exist. As defined by Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), decoloniality consists of a family of thoughts that identify coloniality as the main cause of the problems faced by those people who happened to be affected by the negative aspects of Euro-North American modernity. These problems have included mercantilism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism, underdevelopment, structural adjustment programmes and the current neoliberal coloniality of markets. Coloniality is defined as a global power structure cascading from the above-mentioned processes, but surviving the decolonisation project and continuing to underpin asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and the Global South and to sustain a racially hierarchised modern capitalist world order.

This section of the chapter posits that it is difficult to fully understand the predicament of black mineworkers today without delving deeper into historical, discursive and structural processes unleashed by Euro-North American-centric modernity on those epistemic sites, such as Africa, that were subject to the darker underside – the more negative aspects – of this modernity, such as colonial dispossession, displacements, forced proletarianisation, peasantisation and impoverishment. It is within this context that the category of a worker named ‘mineworker’ emerged as a market-defined
identity. In this context, I approach South Africa as a neo-apartheid polity where mineworkers continue to exist as a category of the working poor, with no right to withhold their labour.

The specific entry point for this analysis is the concept of ‘coloniality of being’, as introduced by Maldonado-Torres (2007) and elaborated on by Walter Mignolo (2011). Coloniality of being is a concept that helps in understanding how blackness was produced by Euro-North American-centric modernity as a deficient and lacking subjectivity, one that was uncivilised and had less ontological density than white subjectivity, under whose tutelage it had to remain. Besides forced conversion to Christianity, manual labour was articulated as one of the means for civilising black people by drawing them into the evolving capitalist system as providers of cheap labour. But coloniality of being also speaks to the dispensability of black life, as happened in Marikana in August 2012. From a decolonial perspective, the mining sector is understood as a site of hyper-exploitation of labour just like the plantation in the period of the slave trade, and the factory under industrial capitalism.

Colonialism has left its mark, and in many ways continues to structure, for instance, present-day cultures, labour relations, sexualities and knowledge production. Coloniality stands on three pillars: coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of power and coloniality of being. Decolonial theory is an attempt to challenge the coloniality of knowledge, or the dominance of so-called Northern theories. Coloniality of being raises critical questions about the humanity (or, more specifically, the inhuman condition) of colonial-type subjects (Maldonado-Torres 2007); as Ndlovu-Gatsheni states: ‘coloniality of being is a useful tool that helps analyse the [contemporary] realities of dehumanisation and depersonalisation of colonized Africans into damnés’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 8), or those living in the zone of non-being (Fanon 1967; Santos 2007). Coloniality of power, or the colonial matrix of power, entails global power structures which continue to reproduce and re-inscribe – on an international scale – colonial-type economies, cultures, political landscapes and social reproduction practices (Quijano 2000, 2007).

Decoloniality therefore helps us to unmask the challenges and problems created by current Euro-North American modernity or civilisation. It is beyond doubt that the South African mining industry of today inherited the colonial template for managing its activities; it is a direct product of a brutal colonial and apartheid structure that produced the mineworker as a category of the
poor. There is therefore a need to decolonise the industry in order to imagine a future beyond modernity, one that will recover the lost ontological density of black mineworkers in the country. And decolonising it will not only lead the recovery of this lost ontological density, but will also be a starting point in the project of imagining a future society beyond the rhetoric of modernity. The current black political leadership in the country have become gatekeepers of the system created by the colonial and apartheid-era oppressors, and have in effect become worse oppressors of the very people who elected them into office. Thus there is also a need to decolonise the Westernised elites holding influential positions of power in the government and in the mining industry.

Frantz Fanon argued that black people are generally viewed as a problem, and they live in what he called the ‘zone of nonbeing’ (Gordon 2005, 2007). Those who live in this zone have their humanity and their souls questioned, and their rights to satisfaction of their basic human needs are denied (Maldonado-Torres 2007). The globalisation of the political economy is still embedded in Western philosophy, which believes in the subalternisation of the world other, or the non-European world, and what is needed is a decolonisation of this epistemic view (Grosfoguel 2007). Therefore, to understand the situation of mineworkers it is necessary to incorporate new research techniques. W.E.B. Du Bois argued that to understand the oppressed people, particularly African subjects, within coloniality, the current conventional scientific methods were not helpful. Knowledge based on scientific investigation did not provide answers to the question of race. Understanding the system that was oppressing them was the best way to achieve this (Du Bois [1903] 2008). Hence decolonial theory is deployed here to understand the system behind the oppression of black mineworkers. Deploying a decolonial critique of the mining sector will enable me to assess whether the dignity of the African mineworker has been recovered.

The so-called discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 unleashed devastating consequences for the black indigenous peoples in the region that became the Union of South Africa in 1910, and the aftermath is being felt even today. The process of proletarianisation, based on accumulation by dispossession, was a violent one, as it involved forced removals, expropriation of land and slavery-like conditions to satisfy the mining industry’s labour needs, with labour seen as a civilising process for the subjugated (Allen 1992; Magubane 2007; Worger 1987). Capitalism took a pronounced racial turn
When it reached Africa and other non-European lands, and black people bore the brunt of this racialised capitalism (Halisi 1999; Magubane 2007). As Magubane (2007, 180) argues: ‘Every settler in the colonies wants to own slaves and thus avoid manual work. The use of slaves in the process of colonization was a calculated strategy to ensure a captive labour force to reap high profits, on territory appropriated without regard to any rights of indigenous owners … The question of slavery became a crucial issue for the rising bourgeois “civilization”.’ Cecil John Rhodes created a system of forced segregation on the Kimberley diamond mines, and this system was used over time as a crucial framework for social regulation on the mines and in the cities around South Africa (Allen 1992; Callinicos 1987).

In the South African mining industry, a mineworker can be fired at any time, and can be disciplined thoroughly for withdrawing their labour without the approval of their employer (Alexander et al. 2012). The abundant availability of potential mineworkers, and their possession of a widely available skill, make them ‘the dispensable other’ as described by Bernard Magubane in his book Race and the Construction of the Dispensable Other (2007). The dispensability of a mineworker’s life is evidenced by the events that took place at Marikana on 16 August 2012, when 34 mineworkers were slain for withdrawing their labour and demanding higher wages (Alexander et al. 2012; Bond and Mottiar 2013; Magaziner and Jacobs 2013; Ndebele 2013; Sorensen 2012). Being a mineworker in the South African context, as I have shown above, has always meant being reduced to the category of the miserable working poor, with the mineworker both past and present being paid a wage that Magubane (1984) describes as a slave wage. Trapped in extreme poverty, mineworkers continue to live in beastly conditions in hostels and shacks, unable to free themselves from this misery.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF A BLACK MINEWORKER

In interviews, mineworkers on South African platinum mines recounted their varied experiences in the mining industry; despite these variations, the majority of them gave similar accounts of poor working conditions and low wages. Others articulated personal experiences of ill health, while a few lucky ones who had no experience of illness were concerned about their friends who had succumbed to diseases. They also pointed to the continued experiences of racism and discrimination they endured.
Sondela informal settlement

Sondela informal settlement is a mixture of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses and shacks that make up the housing infrastructure of the settlement. It houses mineworkers from the mines around Rustenburg, the largest urban area in what is known as the Platinum Belt – an area of platinum mining in North West Province.\(^2\) Overcrowding in Sondela is common, as a result of high demand for accommodation there. The situation in the settlement clearly resembles Frantz Fanon’s description of a ‘Native city’ where people live on top of one another (Fanon 1967, 30). Around 15–20 people share a toilet and a tap for water in the RDP section of the settlement, while the shacks are devoid of any source of running water and electricity.

In fact, the Rustenburg Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for 2012–2017 demonstrates that Sondela is not necessarily unique in the mining area (Rustenburg Local Municipality n.d.). According to this IDP, in 2011 21 per cent of the houses in the city of Rustenburg were informal or backyard shacks, while 16 per cent were in informal squatter camps. There were about 20 000 RDP houses, 30 000 houses in informal settlements and 10 000 houses in newly developed areas that had neither waste management services nor sanitation facilities. As a result, residents revealed that they eased themselves in bucket toilets and nearby bushes. The Rustenburg Local Municipality IDP Review Final Report for 2018–2019 indicates that there are 24 informal settlements and 24 000 households in and around Rustenburg characterised by high levels of poverty and lack of security and shortage of housing; the total of backyard and informal units in Rustenburg numbers about 68 800 (Rustenburg Local Municipality 2018–2019, 14).

In the poorer section of the informal settlement, it is easy to find vacant shacks to rent because most of the mineworkers, on receiving some income, quickly vacate them for relatively better accommodation in the RDP section. Besides the absence of sanitary facilities, the shacks are rat-infested. The presence of large numbers of stray dogs at the dumpsites poses a danger to the residents. Some residents maintain the rural practice of keeping livestock with them such as goats and sheep, which occasionally feed from the dumpsites as well. Sondela is also a hub for unemployed rural immigrants and retrenched mineworkers, who turn to the dumpsites to search for recyclable materials such as plastics, paper and metal objects that can be sold.
Jabula Hostel

Jabula Hostel is located about 200 metres south of Sondela, and it houses more than 1 000 mineworkers from the Anglo Platinum Khuseleka Mine. Violence is common in this settlement, as witnessed during the platinum mining strikes in early 2014. Such violence and strikes often spread to the nearby Sondela informal settlement, where foreign-owned shops mostly owned by Somali, Ethiopian and Chinese nationals are targeted. Attacks are also directed by members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) at members of the rival union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and often result in serious injuries and fatalities.3

This is unlike the housing situation for mineworkers during the period of official segregation under colonial rule and the apartheid era, when black mineworkers were housed in overcrowded compounds (Allen 1992; Van Onselen 1976; Worger 1987). At the Anglo Platinum Jabula Hostel, communal accommodation has been renovated and divided into tiny single rooms with room for only a small bed. Apparently mineworkers are free to own a television set and a fridge, but no cooking is allowed in the rooms (interview, Leketo, 18 August 2014; interview, Mzala, 18 August 2014). Contrary to the claim made by Andries Bezuidenhout and Sakhela Buhlungu (2011) that, in post-apartheid South Africa, mining compounds (or hostels) are exclusively for lowly-paid contract workers at Anglo Platinum, permanently employed mineworkers are the ones housed in the compounds, while contract workers seek accommodation in the informal settlements in and around Sondela.

The monthly rent for the housing units in Jabula Hostel is R1 000, and another R1 000 is paid for food in the dining hall. Those staying outside the hostel are entitled to a ‘living out allowance’ of R1 000 for accommodation and R1 000 for living expenses. Contract workers are entitled to similar allowances, although their payment is regulated by their labour broker who determines the terms of their remuneration. In effect, a hostel dweller, in terms of their monthly wage, earns R2 000 less than a non-hostel dweller. Nonetheless, the lower-paid contract workers who live in Sondela must somehow ensure that the living out allowance, assuming they actually receive it in full, is sufficient for all purposes. Whether the allowance is sufficient to meet the needs of such workers is not a concern for management. This makes staying in the hostel more advantageous for the mineworkers, because they are closer to the mine and do not have to spend time cooking as they all eat
in the dining hall. Besides, there is more security and safety for them at the hostel than in Sondela.

Surprisingly, access of women, children and other visitors to the hostel is still tightly restricted. If a spouse intends to visit her mineworker husband, she has to make an application to the hostel manager so that alternative accommodation can be sought for the couple for a short period of time (usually four weeks). By virtue of the fact that mineworkers number in their thousands, many stay on this waiting list for long periods before they can secure alternative accommodation for themselves and their visiting wives. The frustration experienced by mineworkers who fail to have access to their spouses is a concern for most of them. The branch chairperson of AMCU at Khuseleka Mine, Siphamandla Makhanya, who had a particular understanding of the role of Jabula Hostel and the state of housing for black mineworkers in the shacks around Sondela, provided a summary of all the problems of accommodation and living conditions experienced by the mineworkers:

Look at these shacks where they live, there is no electricity, no water and no sewage system but they [mineworkers] are the ones who extract this precious metal. Look at the hostels, if you go back to history these were designed purposefully to accommodate slaves, meaning they will stay ten of them in one room, and secondly they were not supposed to sleep with a woman because that was going to make him weak, unable to work the following morning and this is the case today with those hostels. (Interview, Siphamandla Makhanya, 20 August 2014)

What he claims clearly resonates with the thoughts of the black mineworkers interviewed. To a large extent, Makhanya’s viewpoint implies that black mineworkers are treated as labour units used for extracting and accumulating surplus value. Even with rooms of their own in Jabula, they are still not permitted visits from women and are denied their sexual rights; ongoing struggles for these rights are still being waged by the union and the affected mineworkers.

In speaking about how living conditions determine the working conditions of the mineworkers, Makhanya is not trying to give analytical significance to the former. Rather, he is simply claiming that an examination of their living conditions probably speaks volumes about their working conditions (which I discuss below). Specifically, the low wages they receive make it difficult for them to find better accommodation of their own. Unlike in the past, when
hostel accommodation was free of charge, charges are now deducted from their wages; and yet some problems still exist and restrictions continue to be upheld. In the next section I discuss the presence of diseases on the mines, and how this has impacted on the mineworkers.

**DISEASES, INJURIES AND COMPENSATION**

Those interviewed for this research, including union leaders, stressed disease outbreaks and high death rates among mineworkers. This was also highlighted by the then minister of health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, on 19 June 2014 in a parliamentary debate (Motsoaledi 2014). Silicosis and tuberculosis (TB) remain the biggest killers of mineworkers since colonial and apartheid times, as articulated by Allen (1992), Jeeves (1985), Van Onselen (1976) and many others. However, what is devastating is that the prevalence of silicosis is concealed by the mines as well as by the medical practitioners who diagnose and treat the mineworkers, in order to spare the employers from having to pay compensation to the families of dead mineworkers. Generally, mining companies are unwilling to pay for such ill health or death of mineworkers, as the law requires.

During an interview with the AMCU chairperson of education at Anglo Platinum Khuseleka Mine, Lazarus Khoza, on the prevalence of diseases among mineworkers, he had this to say: ‘Per day we have more than 300 people who are sick … Most of these diseases they get them at work but some diseases are those gotten outside such as HIV and Aids, but these become serious because of the conditions underground’ (interview, Lazarus Khoza, 3 September 2014). This statement by Mr Khoza is a gruesome revelation of how serious the question of health is among the mineworkers, and this of course threatens the viability of the mining industry as most of these diseases are acquired while working in the mines. The majority of the workers were reported to have spinal cord TB when they actually suffered from silicosis (interview, Siphamandla Makhanya, 20 August 2014).

Unlike the situation in previous years, when silicosis and TB killed black mineworkers together with white mineworkers (Allen 1992; Maloka 1996; Nicol and Leger 2011), today these diseases have become ‘a black man’s diseases’, mainly because of reduced numbers of white underground mineworkers in the country. Accordingly, most white mineworkers at Anglo Platinum hold supervisory positions. One of the mineworkers, Nkulumo, revealed that blast
smoke kills more people than dust, because it is very poisonous (interview, Nkulumo, 17 August 2014). Unfortunately, black workers are coerced into going underground, even when the tunnels are still filled with smoke and dust.

Unfortunately, as reported by mineworkers in the interviews, the contracts of those who fell sick were often terminated without compensation. Ngqeleni lamented: ‘When you are sick the mine is losing because you are no longer productive’ (interview, Ngqeleni, 14 August 2014) The mine does not want to keep sick people on its payroll, and this is when the relationship between a mineworker and the mine becomes most tense. Another mineworker, Mzala equated the treatment of black mineworkers who fell sick at Anglo Platinum to a cow that stops giving milk to its owner (interview, Mzala, 14 August 2014).

Mine management sends the majority of mineworkers who are diagnosed with silicosis and TB home to die; those who seem fit can develop signs of silicosis years after they have left the mine (for example, after retirement). Usually, when black mineworkers are no longer wanted by the mines, they will go back to their rural homelands where they will die in poverty, as Meel (2003) argues in his research on the suicide rate among former mineworkers. And yet due to fear of losing their jobs, the majority of mineworkers conceal their sicknesses:

When you are sick they will send you to hospital and you will be given medication there … some people hide their illness for fear of losing their jobs because once you became sick all the time the mine will say you have a bad record and they will eventually send you to the Medical Board, which will then send you home and this will be the end of you … Once you are gone the company will forget about you and you will get nothing. (Interview, Mfundo, 18 August 2014)

Hence, to remove all responsibility for the ill health of mineworkers, the mine reconstructs the health problem as emanating from outside the mine and therefore washes its hands clean of all guilt.

But, even if in fact these illnesses emanate from outside the work environment, the mine cannot disclaim all responsibility for them. Indeed, not all diseases arise through underground work, because some are acquired from where mineworkers stay, notably under the inhumane conditions in shack accommodation at Sondela informal settlement described earlier. Sondela is a key site of accommodation for mineworkers because the wages paid by the mine are inadequate to obtain decent accommodation.
Similarly, many of the mineworkers who suffer injuries associated with mining accidents are neglected, receiving limited or no compensation. Instead, blame is heaped on them for negligence and they are at times suspended or fired. According to mineworker Mkhonza, there is a need for the mine to make payment to a worker who is injured. Families of workers who die as a result of accidents are only paid if it can be proved that the accident was not in any way the fault of the worker (interview, Mkhonza, 15 August 2014). For example, if a mineworker is hit and injured by a rock, the mine always looks for minor issues that suggest worker guilt. They pose questions such as: when the rock fell, did the mineworker have his gloves on? Did the mineworker have good quality boots? Was he in overall good health? Any negative answer to these questions would suggest to the mine management that the worker should be held in some way accountable for the accident.

The strategy of shifting the blame to the victim ignores the dangers associated with the mining environment. It also seeks to promote the colonial mentality of denying any authentic humanity to black workers, and denying their capacity to act in a reasonable manner underground. In this regard, the lives of black mineworkers can easily be sacrificed in the pursuit of mining profits.

The education chairperson of AMCU, Lazarus Khoza, thus emphasises a racial dimension to accidents and deaths at Anglo Platinum. In his view, white fatalities are unheard of. When asked about the life of a black mineworker in the mining industry, Khoza expressed the following view: ‘I would say it’s a very difficult life because a black person is still working under very difficult conditions, and we have many fatalities that lead to death. Ever since in my time here I have never seen a white person who has died because of accidents; only black mineworkers do. Black people are the ones working very hard extracting this platinum, the conditions are very dangerous’ (interview, Lazarus Khoza, 3 September 2014).

Thus, accidents, diseases, injury and death are the lived reality of black mineworkers. These, combined with other diseases such as HIV and Aids, mean that the health and safety of black mineworkers are currently severely compromised. This also leads to many social problems outside the mines, such as grinding poverty and the presence of numerous orphans in black communities such as Sondela.

According to another mineworker, David, the system of payment for injured and dead mineworkers has been complicated by the agreements accepted by
the previous union (NUM), which mostly connived with mine management. According to him, NUM ensured that the families of dead mineworkers were not paid any money due to these mineworkers, including their pensions, so that the money could be shared between NUM representatives and some corrupt mine managers. He said this was also the case with respect to diseases:

When you are sick, this is the time when the mine dumps you, here they want people who are healthy, even if you have worked for more than 20 years for the mine without having health problems, but the day you will get sick everything changes. This is the time Anglo wants you out of their premises. What they will do is to send you to the hospital and doctors will recommend you unfit, then you are sent back home and you are given only R4 000 and that’s all. (Interview, David, 17 August 2014)

Based on interviews with mineworkers, there appear to be different understandings of the time period that should elapse before a worker starts receiving compensation payments while recovering at home or in hospital during an illness, insofar as compensation is received. The variance in the interviewees’ understanding of this issue might have arisen because many of them had never had the experience of being sent home as a result of ill health; but, for those who had, it took from two to five months for the worker to access the money, which was usually paid in instalments.

**CONCLUSION**

The mining industry in South Africa needs to be understood in the context of coloniality, as it continues to function on an apartheid template with race in large part structuring social relationships and social status on the mines. It is an industry that remains resistant to change, and thus a decolonial critique of it becomes fundamental not only analytically but ultimately for transforming the industry to the benefit of black mineworkers. The AMCU branch chairperson, Siphamandla Makhanya, speaks about ‘the living and housing conditions of mineworkers reflect[ing] their working conditions underground’ (interview, Siphamandla Makhanya, 20 August 2014). This statement is important in the sense that it highlights the conditions of existence and experiences of black mineworkers both inside and outside the work environment. These conditions, as this chapter highlights with specific reference to the case
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study of a mine in the Platinum Belt, are marked by poverty, frustration and indignity – as indicated in relation to daily work activities, wages, hostel and informal settlement accommodation, and health and safety. The question of dignity is particularly crucial, because coloniality of being is a condition in which people are stripped of their human dignity and their very humanity is questioned. By extension, mineworkers need decent accommodation and social protection against unhealthy and unsafe work conditions. This is what black mineworkers are saying, and I have sought to give voice to their far-reaching concerns in this chapter. But, within the mining industry itself, their voices are rarely heard unless they engage in overt struggles around their demands. In line with the coloniality of knowledge, black mineworkers are treated by the mines (and by government) as unworthy of being heard, as if their thoughts are not sufficiently rational and reasonable. All this reflects the enduring prevalence of the coloniality of power in the mining industry in post-apartheid South Africa.

NOTES

1 The mineworkers quoted in this section of the chapter were interviewed for a broader research project I undertook from 2013 to 2016. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the interviewees, with the exception of AMCU union representatives who agreed to be identified by their full names.

2 The Platinum Belt is located in what is called the Bushveld Igneous Complex (BIC), which harbours the largest platinum reserves in the world. The BIC is so vast that it covers several heavily populated urban centres such as Rustenburg, Polokwane and Pretoria (Davenport 2013). The North West Province, in which the Platinum Belt is located, produces 65 per cent of South Africa’s platinum as well as 35 per cent of its chrome (Davenport 2013; Manson 2013).

3 See for example reports of such attacks published in the Mail & Guardian (19 September 2012), Drum (22 May 2014) and News24 (3 May 2014). AMCU has been the dominant union in the Platinum Belt since 2014, taking over from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which was the dominant union there for many years. Soon after the Marikana massacre that saw 34 mineworkers gunned down by police officers in August 2012, NUM lost its majority of the workers on the mine, who defected to the rival AMCU because they felt that NUM was siding with the employers and that mineworkers had been reduced to a life of poverty under its leadership (Bond 2013; Bond and Mottiar 2013; Saul and Bond 2014).
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**Interviews**

David, mineworker, Sondela Informal Settlement, Rustenburg, 17 August 2014.

Lazarus Khoza, AMCU education secretary, Meriting Township, Rustenburg, 3 September 2014.


Siphamandla Makhanya, AMCU branch chairperson at Khuseleka Mine, Seraleng Township, 20 August 2014.


Mzala, mineworker, Sondela Informal Settlement, Rustenburg, 14 August 2014.


Ngqeleni, mineworker, Sondela Informal Settlement, Rustenburg, 14 August 2014.

Nkulumo, mineworker, Sondela Informal Settlement, Rustenburg, 17 August 2014.