In the Shadow of the Gold Mines: Migrancy and Mine Housing in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The profitability of the gold mining industry has long been based upon the exploitation of the vast reserves of African migrant labour drawn from South Africa and the sub-continent. A central institution of the migrant labour force has been and continues to be the vast housing complex, where the majority of the industry’s 700 000 migrant workers are housed in single-sex barrack-like accommodation under the tight control of the mining industry. Although in recent years the gold mining industry has attempted to use alternative housing strategies for its married migrant workers, today the barrack-like housing complex remains the most important institution of labour control in South Africa. This paper examines the mine housing complex and the social control mechanisms deeply embedded in the design and social organisation of migrant workers’ housing in South Africa. Although the new Government of National Unity is committed to improving the housing circumstances of all South Africans, mine workers face a housing problem inherited from segregation and apartheid which requires particular attention from employers, the government and the unions representing the mine workers.

Introduction

In his study of mine labour in colonial Zimbabwe, Charles van Onselen argued that the particular form of housing provided by the mining industry “was an institution which provided the framework for the total exploitation of black workers ... It was the compound, acting as the college of colonialism, that did much to rob Africans of their dignity and helped mould servile black personality ...” (1976, p. 157). Credited with forced production and industrial violence, migrant workers’ housing emerged in South Africa as a unique disciplinary space “simultaneously organising and subordinating mine labour to industrial capital” under the huge apparatus of rules and regulations (Turrell, 1982, p. 45). The housing provided by the gold mining industry for its African migrant workforce was not just a “college of colonialism” which converted “reluctant and forced labour into production” as van Onselen, (1976, p. 157) argued, it was an architectural discourse, a strategy of organising space and an institutional design which has emerged in various forms since the 19th century to discipline and regulate industrial labour.

An extensive body of work has been devoted to analysing the formation and operation of the migrant labour system in South Africa (Crush et al., 1991;
Johnstone 1976; Levy, 1982; Wilson, 1972). These studies, individually and collectively, provide an analysis of the centrality of the migrant labour system in sustaining the profitability of the gold mining industry in South Africa. Although each provides a nuanced study of the recruitment system, the factors which stimulated Africans to take up employment in the gold mines and the social, economic and political ramifications of large-scale labour migration in Southern Africa, the specificity of migrant labour housing, its social organisation and architectural discourse has yet to be studied.

The advances made in the study of migrant labour, without any doubt, have contributed to a richer understanding of South Africa’s economic and social transformation. Nevertheless, many gaps remain in our understanding of this historical process. For one thing, despite all the substantial empirical work done, it appears that historians of South Africa by and large treat the discourse of architecture and the organisation of space of mine housing as a peripheral subject. While issues of class formation, class consciousness, race and gender have emerged since the mid–1970s as a focus of study, very little is known about how these factors have shaped the organisation of space. Even in the most nuanced accounts of the migrant labour system, the architecture of mine housing, its social organisation and the way power is deeply inscribed within it ultimately remain little more than a form of mine owners’ concern of control over workers.

This paper explores the role of the gold mining industry in the development of mine housing in South Africa. The first section explores the nature of the gold mining industry and its particular labour structure. Against this background, the next section examines the development of mine housing, its spatial organisations and management structures. The third section considers the various alternative housing strategies devised by the gold mining industry in the aftermath of the labour crisis during the 1970s. The concluding section discusses the problems faced by the new Government of National Unity (GNU) in addressing the particular housing problem faced mine workers.

**Gold Mining and Migrant Labour**

The mining industry without [African] labour is as brick would be without straw, or as it would be to imagine you could get milk without cows. (Cited in Johnstone, 1976, p. 26)

The main gold reef of South Africa stretches some 300 miles from Kincross in Eastern Transvaal to Virginia Welkon in the Orange Free State in a series of rocky ridges. The gold fields located along the reef are controlled by six mining houses, which employ a vast number of migrant labourers drawn from both South Africa and the sub-continent. Although the character of the South African economy has changed quite considerably since gold was first discovered in 1886, the country remains substantially dependent on gold. Although this dependency has declined markedly recently, the gold mining industry generates 10 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product and 25 per cent of state revenues, employing over 700 000 Africans (James, 1992, p. 18)—the majority of whom are housed, 15 to 50 to a room, under the tight supervision of the mine management and under constant surveillance by management police in huge single-sex
barrack-like housing complexes for a predetermined contract period lasting anywhere from four months to two years.

The discovery of the main gold reef near Johannesburg in 1886 marked a turning point and ushered in the first phase of rapid economic and social transformation of South Africa. The mining of gold, it has been argued by many economic and social historians of South Africa, was the engine of rapid industrialisation: “perhaps the single most important factor determining the rate of economic growth of South Africa”. (Horwitz, 1967, p. 53). With the development of the gold mines, the entire region of South Africa became integrated into a labour market area concentrated on the Rand.

The vast reserves of gold reef found in the Rand were of low-grade ore located in hard conglomerate beds popularly known as ‘blankets’ which were unique in running in relatively long and unbroken sequences. Early mining operations of this reserve resembled those at the Kimberley diamond mines where small-scale diggers excavated row trenches using rudimentary mining technology. As with the Kimberley fields, pans, shovels, and picks were the most common tools used in gold fields. As further digging into the reef became common, new forms of technology were required to appropriate the gold ore.

The low-grade ore and the pyrite rock in which gold was embedded created significant financial pressure on the mining companies, and directly affected both labour demands and profits. Extraction of gold required increasingly sophisticated technology and expensive facilities to ensure maximum percentage of recovery and offset losses of free-milling gold. Thus, deep mining became both an economic and technical necessity for the mining companies.

Despite technical advancement, the geological system in the Rand presented technical difficulties, which resulted in the high cost of appropriating gold. The Chamber of Mines described the difficulties of mining gold in the following way:

Imagine a solid mass of rock tilted ... like a fat 1200 page dictionary lying on an angle. The gold bearing reef would be thinner than a single page, and the amount of gold contained therein would hardly cover a couple of commas in the entire book. It is the miner’s job to bring out that single page—but his job is made harder because the ‘page’ has been twisted and torn by nature’s force, and pieces of it have been thrust between the leaves of the book. (cited in Wilson, 1972, p. 16)

The major effects of these geological problems were financial, making production techniques less flexible, increasing production costs, and the utilisation of the workforce underground. Given the high development and overhead costs associated with deep level mining, the gold mining industry from the start sought to minimise its production costs to ensure its profitability.

The introduction of deep level mining entailed costs which were different from outcrop mining. According to van Onselen, deep level mining had several characteristics: it (a) required the employment of a much larger pool of unskilled black labour; (b) necessitated the use of dynamite and blasting gelatine because of the geological nature of deep mining; and (c) increased the operating costs since the costs associated with dynamite represented 12 to 20 per cent of the total operating expenses (van Onselen, 1982, p. 12).

The high operating costs of deep mining led the mining industry to adopt various strategies to reduce production costs given the circumstances of the deep-level and low-grade gold production. The drive to reduce production costs
Figure 1. Major goldfields of South Africa. Source: James, 1992, p. 17.
involved three factors: (a) the judicious selection of reef workings within the possible permutations presented by the geological configuration of particular claim areas; (b) attempts to lobby the state to secure a favourable fiscal and financial environment; and (c) reduction of working expenditures which were directly amenable to management control (Perrings, 1977).

**Cost Minimisation Strategy and Mine Housing**

From the very beginning, the gold mining industry was faced with a number of technical and financial obstacles in appropriating gold. Since the potential profitability of the mines differed widely from mine to mine, the mining companies pursued a number of strategies to reduce their ‘working costs’. In 1925, the mine owner’s representative told the Economic and Wage Commission:

(1) that gold mines, unlike many other producers, cannot pass on to the consumer any increase in their cost of production; (2) that on most, if not on every mine, an increase in one direction in the cost of production gives rise to the consequent increases in some other direction, with the final result that the productive capacity and/or life of the mine is decreased. (cited in Levy, 1982, p. 16)

Because it was extremely difficult for the mining industry to minimise capital costs, the remaining practical alternative was to reduce labour costs. However, given that there were two major sources of labour supply, namely white and African labour, it was important to decide which labour cost component could be reduced and what methods were to be used. The view of the gold mining companies was that white workers were more expensive and limited in supply. They consisted of two groups: the skilled British immigrant workers who brought with them the concept of trade unionism which was modelled along the British craft unions (Simons & Simons, 1969); and semi-skilled and unskilled Afrikaner workers who were largely poor and unorganised plattelanders. Notwithstanding their differences, both groups possessed political and trade union rights which they could use to resist any reduction in their earnings. Reliance upon this relatively scarce and expensive labour was in direct conflict with the cost minimising strategies dictated by the imperatives of profitable production.

The solution adopted by the mining industry was to develop a production process that satisfactorily exploited the cheap and abundant supply of African labour. The Chairman of the Association of Mines, G. Albu, emphasised the importance of African labour as a crucial factor in reducing costs to the mines.

The reduction of Native wages is necessary for two reasons, the one is to reduce our whole expenditure, and the second has a very far-reaching effect upon the conditions, which may prevail with regard to native labour in the future. The Native at the present moment receives a wage, which is far in excess of his existence. The Native earns between fifty shillings and sixty shillings per month, and then he pays nothing for food or lodging, in fact he can save almost the whole amount he receives. At the present rate of wages, the Native will be enabled to save a lot of money in a couple of years. If the Native can save £20 a year, it is almost sufficient for him to go home and live on
the fat of his land ... I think if the Native gets sufficient pay to save five pounds a year, that sum is quite enough for his requirements, and will prevent Natives from becoming rich in a short space of time. (cited in Levy, 1982, pp. 23–24)

It was the use of African migrant labour which provided the gold mining industry with the flexibility to calculate wage rates around the individual rather than the cost of migrant’s family subsistence (Wilson, 1972). The Witwatersrand Native Mine Wage Commission (21/1944) clearly expressed the importance of fixing wage rates at the level of subsistence of the individual worker.

It is clearly to the advantage of the mines that native labourers should be encouraged to return to their homes after the completion of the ordinary period of service. The maintenance of the system under which the mines are able to obtain unskilled labour at a rate less than ordinarily paid in industry depends upon this, for otherwise the subsidiary means of subsistence would disappear and the labourer would tend to become a permanent resident upon the Witwatersrand, with increased requirements.

The wages paid to the migrant worker were equivalent only to his own personal needs, not those of his family who subsisted by farming in the rural areas and whose social needs were provided by the subsistence sector. No provision was made for the migrant workers’ retirement or social security, and little investment in training or education was necessary since most labour was unskilled or semi-skilled. Thus, a single migrant labourer was much cheaper to maintain than a worker whose family resided with him. To ensure the generation of future migrants, subsistence production in rural areas had to be maintained by members of the migrant’s household. The migrant’s link with the rural areas wholly or partially assured the maintenance of the migrant system, thus allowing the gold mining industry to employ African labour below the cost of its production and reproduction (Meillassoux, 1972; Wolpe, 1972).

The system was clearly dependent on the capacity of the rural subsistence production to continue to provide subsidy to the migrant worker. To ensure the viability of the migrant labour system, the mining industry pressed the state by demanding (a) the expansion of the reserves to sustain a larger African population; (b) the eviction of African squatters from land owned by absentee landlords and from the large farms of wealthy farmers and; (c) the relocation of these squatters to the enlarged reserves to boost the long-term viability of the migrant labour system. These demands by the mining industry were inscribed in the passage of the Native Land Act 27/1913 which anchored the migrant labour by reserving only 13 per cent of the land exclusively for Africans and prohibiting them from acquiring land outside the reserves. White farmers were opposed to the demands of the mining industry and demanded that the reserves should be restricted, squatters should be dispersed within the white farming areas and should be transformed into a reservoir of farm labour (Lacy, 1981).

The conflict between the mining industry and farmers over African labour was worked out in a compromise with the passage of two Bills, the Native Service Contract Act of 1932 and the Natives Land and Trust Act of 1936. The former carved the African population into two huge pools of labour by imposing a series of immobilising controls on African mobility within the white rural areas.
The Act in effect amounted to a system of forced labour which subjected farm workers to the direct control of the white farmers (Ainsley, 1977, p. 21). The Native Land and Trust Act clearly recognised the centrality of the mining industry and made provisions to purchase additional land to be added to the reserves to ensure the viability of the migrant labour system. The passage of both Acts formally resolved the conflict between the mining industry and white farmers and also laid the foundation for a state managed and controlled labour allocation system.

The alternative to the migrant labour system was a stabilised African labour force, which would require a revision of the wage rates to include provision not only for the single migrant but also his entire family including other welfare costs. Such an arrangement was unacceptable to the mining industry because, it conflicted with the mining industry’s strategy to reduce labour costs.

The gold mining industry maintained that the profitability of the industry as a whole depended on its access to African labour to recruit and retain the required quantity and supply of cheap labour. Various complementary strategies were used to secure a steady supply of African migrant labour: the use of loan advancements, debt bondage and colonial taxes. In the event that ‘peaceful’ techniques failed to provide the required supply of waged labour, the gold mining industry used other coercive techniques to ensure a steady supply of African labour to the mines. While the gold mining industry did not oppose the use of force to secure its labour needs, Albu, the Chairman of the Association of Mines showed some preference in this matter when he told the Industrial Commission in 1897:

I as an employer of labour, say it would be a good thing to have forced labour, but another question is whether you would get it. You could exercise a certain amount of force amongst the natives if you impose a certain tax upon each native who does not work, or if he has not shown he has worked a certain length of time ... I do not know what the other countries do. In the [Cape] Colony there is a law which compels natives to work. It is the Glen Grey Act. (cited in Levy, 1982, pp. 62–63)

The mobilisation of African migrant workers was also facilitated by a number of legislative and administrative measures imposed by the colonial state. Among the early legislative instruments, the Glen Grey Act, which was passed by the Cape Parliament in 1894, occupies an important place in the development of the coercive migrant labour system. The Act introduced a system of individual land tenure among the African subsistence farmers and thus incorporated them into the expanding capitalist colonial economy. J. X. Merrimen, a Cape politician, argued the need for the introduction of an individual land tenure system in the following way:

The gradual introduction of individual tenure ... deprives Natives of the means of leading a lazy, lounging life, at the expense of their more industrious fellows, and will also form an inducement to others to endeavour to obtain a means of purchase ... Thousands of Natives ... will be forced to enter the colonial labour market to supply the needs so created. (cited in Bundy, 1979, p. 79)

To accelerate the development of African waged labour, various forms of colonial taxes were imposed, for example, the hut and head tax. The latter was
known as poll tax and was later called general tax. The hut tax forced every African hut owner to pay tax. But, since there were far more people in a single hut, on account of the extended African family structure, than the colonial government had estimated, the hut tax was replaced by the head tax which resulted in a greater proportion of households being required to pay cash taxes. In order to meet the new tax demands imposed by the colonial state, African males were effectively coerced to seek waged employment outside the subsistence sector, particularly in the mines and towns. The immediate impact of these changes was to tightly integrate African subsistence production into the mine economy. As a result, an increasingly large number of Africans began to migrate to the mines and to the towns seeking waged employment.

This migration was closely linked to the industrialisation of South Africa. The development of the mining industry, first in Kimberley and later in the Witwatersrand, drew large numbers of Africans to the emerging industrial centres. Although the extent and nature of African urbanisation is less clear during the first two decades of the 20th century, the tempo accelerated with the discovery of diamonds and gold in Kimberley and Witwatersrand. In 1890 alone, an estimated 20,000 Africans worked in the diamond fields of Kimberley and a much larger number of African workers (estimated to be around 60,000) were working in the Witwatersrand gold fields (Packard, 1989, p. 33). While a majority of Africans worked as temporary migrants for the mining industries, a small number were employed in the manufacturing, commerce and service sectors in and around mining centres like Johannesburg.

The movement of Africans to the cities significantly increased from 508,000 in 1911 to 587,000 in 1921 (Hindson, 1987, p. 33) and the proportion of Africans living in the urban areas jumped from 1.1 million in 1936 to 1.7 million in 1946 and to 2.5 million in 1952 (Union of South Africa, 1980, p. 17). Unlike temporary migrants who moved back and forth between the mine and the rural areas, Africans who settled in the urban areas lost their links with the rural reserves and became completely dependent on waged employment (Native Affairs Department, 1922–26, p. 10).

The sizeable increase in the number of Africans moving to urban areas was also directly related to the decline in the productiveness of agriculture in the African rural reserves. By 1920, the reserves were producing less than 50 per cent of the food subsistence requirements of their populations (Simkins, 1981). Cattle disease, soil erosion and drought further exacerbated agricultural crises in the reserves. Squeezed to starvation, African peasant farmers faced few alternatives. They could remain on the land and endure further uncertainties and starve to death or they could abandon the land and move to the cities and urban areas. Many African peasants and their families were effectively forced to migrate to urban areas in search of employment and a livelihood.

To reinforce and institutionalise the process of labour migration to the gold mines, the pass laws governing all African males were introduced. Although the passage of Laws 22 and 23 in 1895 restricted African mobility in the Transvaal, the whole system of pass controls governing migrant labour on the mines was consolidated in the Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911. This Act required the issuance of identification with fingerprints and a registration certificate which served as a pass to all migrant workers. Despite the strict regulations governing the movement of Africans, the effects of pass laws were more far reaching than had been envisioned. The pass laws and the contract system could not make the
circulation of migrant labour viable. The gold mining industry's need for large numbers of migrant labourers required the building of a centralised housing complex near the mines without burdening the industry with indirect costs. In other words, the specific nature of the migrant labour reproduction was not entirely based as Wolpe (1972) has argued on the migrants' access to the subsistence production in the rural areas, but also on the availability of cheap housing provided by the mining industry.

The development of large pool of cheap labour did not address the problem of how African migrant workers were to be housed, fed and controlled near the mines. A unique form of migrant housing which Rex (1974, p. 8) defined as "a kind of bachelor barracks to which workers retire when off-shift to bunk beds in communal dormitories and receive their food in a specifically provided communal kitchen" was devised first as a prison by the De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mine in 1885 at Kimberley, and was later adopted by the gold mining industry. The significance of this form of housing was noted by a commentator who suggested that:

... if thoroughly carried out, cannot fail to effect a momentous change for the better of our social conditions in many ways. Its object is to cut all means of communication with the outside world, which has hitherto afforded the stable mining labourers so many facilities for disposing of his employer's property. He will henceforth never be outside the pale of his employer's authority. He will sleep and feed in the new and comfortable quarters provided for him and his fellows. He will march to his daily work in the mine and return in the evening to the place from whence he came; all his wants will be attended to by his employers. (Cited in Doxey, 1963, p. 33)

Jeeves (1985) and Turrell (1987) have suggested that the single-sex mine housing complex at Kimberley was designed in response to the specific and peculiar problems of diamond mining, namely theft and illicit diamond buying. However, Turrell (1982) has argued that migrant workers' housing also functioned to discipline and regulate a pre-industrial workforce. But this task was very complex and the mine management used various methods at its disposal to ensure that the workers accepted working and living conditions during their terms of contract. While the system of closed mine housing at Kimberley functioned to regulate and discipline a migrant labour force, the early, open migrant housing served merely to allow migrants to recover from their journey, housed them close to the mine, and protected them from the extreme high cost of living that afflicted the Rand (Harris, 1994, p. 112). Unlike the closed mine housing in Kimberley, the gold mining industry preferred an open housing complex incorporating new ideas about hygiene, sanitation, control and social order. Much of the experience gained in accommodating African mine labourers in Kimberley was later incorporated when the gold field opened in the Witwatersrand in 1886. Initially there was considerable controversy whether the compounds in the gold field should be closed or open. In the Report of the Native Grievance Inquiry in 1913, (Union of South Africa, 1914) the argument for closed compound accommodation was presented in the following ways:

Theft of gold is rendered more difficult; the natives are better and more cheaply supplied by the compound stores than by outside store keep-
ers; desertion is reduced; the curse of the illicit liquor trade is completely done away with, so far as the mine native is concerned, and he is protected from many other sources of temptations. In fact, at the Premier and at De Beers there is practically no crime.

Although closed mine housing was not adopted by the gold mining industry, many mine owners believed that it would give them complete control over African workers. However, unlike Kimberley, there was strong opposition from the Johannesburg white traders who relied on trade with African miners for a considerable portion of their profit. For example, it was estimated in 1907 that each African mine workers living in compounds spent on average up to 20 shillings on extra food and drink out of his monthly wage of 50 shillings during the duration of his contract (Moroney, 1978, p. 32).

Although the open mine housing emerged to be the primary housing type designed to accommodate African mine workers, the Chamber of Mines devised a number of measures to attract workers to the mines, especially after the South African War. As Moroney has argued, the Chamber of Mines began to ‘liberalise’ the mine housing regime “by low cost way of attracting workers at all levels of experience; and this could be achieved, inter alia, by allowing liquor brewing, providing a generous beer issue and improving food rations, and by instituting relatively better living conditions. Two of the more important inducements were, first, the discretionary issue of ‘special passes’ by compound managers to workers, allowing workers to move about the Witwatersrand, particularly on weekends; and secondly, permitting mine locations or providing married quarters” (Moroney, 1982, p. 260).

The issue of freedom of mine workers to move in and out of the mine housing was related to both work efficiency and mine security. While mine management recognised the necessity of workers having freedom to move in and out of the compound, the central question was the circumstances under which African miners could legitimately leave. To ensure that the majority of African workers remained behind the gates of mine housing, mine management setup complex regulations, which effectively discouraged many from obtaining passes.

**Design and Spatial Control**

In recent years, historians of the prison, the asylum, the hospital, churches and school during the 19th century have demonstrated the profound extent to which design itself was conceived as a mechanism of social control and moral discipline. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault portrays the birth of the modern prison as emblematic of this radically new form of reformatory power. Foucault argues that the prison was conceived and designed to discipline individual criminals in the privacy of their secluded cells. The various regulatory mechanisms, including timetables, classifications, diets and drills, of prison life were designed to produce docile inmates. As Foucault argues, “discipline fixes, it arrests or regulates movements; it clears confusion ... it establishes calculated distribution” (Foucault, 1977, p. 219). Foucault has shown how disciplinary procedures produce efficient, well-behaved, and productive individuals; how norms of behaviours and rationality were internalised through education and training. But the development of such disciplinary procedures also implied that the architecture of disciplinary structure has to be developed first.
Foucault outlines four critical disciplinary technologies to achieve power, each signifying the connection between visibility and power. First, the building of ‘observatories’ modelled primarily upon the spatial configuration of the military encampment which serve “the diagram of a power that acts by means of general visibility” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 224). Here space is designed and arranged in order to facilitate observation of those within, and by rendering inmates visible it in turn makes it possible to know them and to alter their behaviour. While the arrangement of the disciplinary space is critical, Foucault places power not in the physical property of the architecture of buildings, but rather in the way the design of buildings serves as a relay system through which power is produced and individuals are distributed in a permanent and continuous field. The second instrument of disciplinary power is that of a normalising judgement. As Foucault argued:

The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micropenalty of time (lateness, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (in attention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (‘incorrect’ attitude, irregular gesture, lack of cleanness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency). (Foucault, 1977, p. 78)

For discipline to obtain control over the daily activities of inmates or workers, the imposition of a regime of discipline and regularity on behaviour down to the very movements of the body is crucial. The importance of disciplinary power operates through punishment as well as through gratification via hierarchical observation. For Foucault, the importance of disciplinary powers lies in normalisation through the uses of ‘infra-penalty’ as the foremost instrument of the exercise of power. Finally, the instrument of disciplinary power is exercised through examination, which combines the techniques of both hierarchical observation and normalising judgement. This feature manifests itself in compiling reports, files, computer records etc. and organising them into a cumulative system.

Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary power and its specific manifestation provide a useful starting point to explore the design of mine housing in South Africa. While full exploration of mine housing in terms of Foucault’s argument is beyond the scope of this paper, his discussion of the technology of disciplinary power illuminates certain specific functions of mine housing.

The design of the mine housing was intended to function in three different ways: to separate the mine workers from the rest of the community; as a deterrent against uprising; and as a basis for fragmenting mine workers’ solidarity. The first, the separation of mine workers from the community, was achieved in the design of the closed mine housing complex at Kimberley diamond fields which served as a model for the gold mining industry. For the entire duration of their contract, mine workers were spatially separated from the outside world. While the diamond mining industry initially justified the closure of the housing complex to deter diamond theft, the logic of confinement served a wider social control function. As Turrell (1987) and Wroger (1987) have argued, the closed mine housing complex served to facilitate the exploitation of labour and ensured a steady supply of labour.

It was evident from reports of various state-sponsored commissions that there was widespread fear among the mine officials as well as municipal administra-
tors of the presence of thousands of African miners living in huge housing complexes near white residential areas. If social unrest and workers’ militancy were to be curtailed and disciplined, architectural technology was to be deployed to ensure that the mine housing was indeed a territory of containment and control. The architecture of mine housing ensured that in the event of uprising, it would be easy to control them. Yet, it was the third rationale for fragmenting mine workers’ solidarity, particularly in assigning beds and rooms on the basis of ethnicity, that proved the mine housing complex to be a durable institution for fragmenting workers’ solidarity.

The De Beers Diamond Mining Company developed the first mine housing in the mid-1880s to accommodate its migrant work force (Turrell, 1987; Wroger, 1987) and it proved to be particularly effective in terms of maintaining discipline, reducing costs, establishing an efficient labour force and in preventing diamond theft. Although there were important differences between the mine housing complexes built by the diamond and gold mining industries, the architecture and layout of the housing remained essentially the same over the decades.

Initially, there was no specific or uniform design standard for constructing mine housing. With the increase in labour turnover and crisis, the mining industries tightened and introduced more elaborate and centralised systems of control. Early reports by mine inspectors and visitors indicate that the design of mine housing was rectangular with rooms back-to-back sharing walls in rows, high fences (20 feet) and a single entrance manned by mine police. For example, a mine inspector in 1879 described the design of single-sex closed mine housing at Kimberley as follows:

> The blacks are lodged in barracks, which are build in the form of square, the outer wall being much higher than the inner wall; the roof slopes inside. The entrance to the place is by a large gate, over which at night hangs a powerful lamp, which lights up the whole place. (cited in Turrell, 1982, p. 56)

Mine officials were quick to note that such mine housing was not only a success, but also prevented absenteeism and theft. Others noted how such a form of workers’ accommodation served in teaching “natives ... cleanliness and sobriety” and kept them from “falling into many of the vices that they otherwise would if permitted to associate with what is known as the town boy” (cited in Harris, 1994, p. 77). Philanthropists and the clergy insisted that the single-sex mine housing complex with its disciplinary regime would protect mine workers from the evils of industrialism.

While mine housing has differed in size, age and construction materials, the central function in the reproduction of the migratory labour has remained essentially the same to this day. As Johnstone (1976, p. 38) has clearly suggested:

> Economically, the system helped to reduce costs and stabilise the African labour supply. The standardised mass feeding and of housing African workers permitted economics of scale, and established living standards at a level of subsistence and cost chosen by the mining companies. And the compounding of workers served to inhibit absenteeism and desertion. But the important advantages were of a more political nature. The system served both to maximise the control of the
gold mining industry over the behaviour of African migrant workers’ and to isolate these workers from the society around them.

The mine housing complex was conceived to deal with a wide range of social and security concerns. Like the diamond mines, the gold mining industry always placed a high priority on the social control function of mine housing, both physically and psychologically. Given the importance Foucault placed on the instrumentalist thinking behind the design of the prison, its has become abundantly clear how the mining industry placed design criteria as an important element of the mining housing complex.

In 1914, the Buckle Commission considered the design of mine housing in order to prevent desertion and unrest among African mines. Notwithstanding differences among mine housing complexes, the Commission noted the importance of easily converting mine housing into places of detention with “strong steel cased gates which [could] be locked from outside and with only one entrance, and high walls with no outer windows” (Union of South Africa, 1914).
Similar security considerations were in the mind of the Deputy Commissioner of Police of Johannesburg who suggested that the model mine housing be, "... surrounded first of all by a high galvanised iron fence ... to prevent anybody getting in and out" and a "reliable guard, a sufficient supply of arms and ammunition in the manager’s office and strict supervision over entry and exit" (cited in Johnstone, 1976, p. 39).

The mine management also considered the implications of a large number of Africans living in close proximity to white residential areas. For example, the Native Grievances Inquiry clearly articulated their position.

There are normally 200 000 native mine labourers on the Reef. They are all males, particularly all adults and the large majority in the prime of life. They are scattered over 50 miles of the country in blocks of from 1000 to 5000 in each housing. They can mobilise themselves in a few minutes, armed with such weapons as assegais, jumpers, axes etc. A good many of them consider, whether rightly or wrongly, that they have grievances against Europeans, and most of them are savages, whose idea of reform is violence ... It is not necessary to emphasise the possibility of mischief which are latent in such a condition of affairs. (Union of South Africa, 1914)

The Native Grievances Inquiry heard various suggestions about how to foil "a general outbreak among the native mine labourers", including the following:

- A dormant military organisation among whites in every mine.
- A permanent European guard on each mine.
- The closed compound system.
- Compounds should be designed so that, while habitually open, they should be closable upon emergency.
- An intelligence department or secret service in the compounds to keep in touch with native feeling.
- A mobile force of police available to strike in any direction.
- The limitation of the number of natives in the housings to a definite proportion to the number of Europeans.
- Closer supervision of the compounds at night.
- Searches for arms at regular intervals.
- The more complete separation of tribes in the compounds as well as work.

While these proposals were considered seriously in the long-term strategy of workers’ control and supervision, the industry also adopted other schemes to ensure that mine workers remained isolated and fragmented. However, mine workers did not readily accept the harsh and brutal conditions imposed upon them. Since the beginning of the formation of the gold mines, African migrant workers have contested their harsh working and living conditions. Both in the 1920 and 1946 African miners’ strikes, mine management sought to curtail trade union activity and promoted greater repressive measures to control political activity among African migrant workers. In each case, but more particularly in the 1946 African miners’ strike, Moodie (1986) has documented how mine housing complexes were transformed into instant jails, providing mine management with a secure dependable architecture of physical control.

The particular form of mine housing over a period of time proved to be an effective mechanism for the regimentation and stabilisation of African labour.
The system made no provision for women and children in townships, and therefore evaded costs for schools, clinics, hospitals and other social services. The effective control of large numbers of African migrant workers required the development of extensive regulatory measures, including isolation of the workers from the wider urban environment and an assault upon the self to strip the worker of individuality. As Pearson noted, these practices included: (a) utilising a worker’s fingerprints and number identification while his name, his most distinctive personal characteristic, was never used; (b) the invasion of privacy to increase surveillance, even in ablution blocks and lavatories; (c) continuous lighting through the night in dormitories to control violence, sodomy and theft; (d) regular detailed searches. All these practices were intended “… to create a subservient and contented labour force … by means of surveillance and punishment” (1977, pp. 3–4, 14–16).

Management Structure and Mine Workers’ Control

Management structures within the mine housing complex rested upon a racist discourse which viewed migrant workers as ‘docile’, ‘ignorant’ and ‘childlike’. The system rested on three interlocking and overlapping structures: (1) the formal rules and regulations established by management; (2) the unwritten but well-established rules developed by workers and supervisors; and (3) those well-established informal customs among workers, which made up the migrant cultures (Moodie, 1994, p. 84). Cartwright explained the rationale behind instituting a management system within the housing complex.

The task was to build up (the African’s) confidence in all the white men who would be in charge of the compounds where he lived while he was on the Rand and to make him feel that the tribal authority to which he had been accustomed all his life would be replaced by an equally benevolent system of rules and customs that he could understand and trust. (Cartwright, 1963, p. 215)

At the centre of this system of management was the mine manager who by law had to be white and male. Because of his position within the structure of the mine housing, he exercised total control over the daily lives of the mine workers. Under the Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911, the manager was required to maintain law and order. Given the manager’s role as the supreme authority, he was expected to be “knowledgeable in African customs” and “able to speak one or more Bantu languages” as well as have a “knowledge of mining procedures and conditions” (Pearson, 1976, p. 2). As Bozzoli (1981, p. 72) noted:

Placed as he is, in charge of a number of grown-up children, it is obvious that if the duties of the compound manager are to be properly and effectively carried out, some latitude must be allowed him and some authority must be delegated to him ... With a good manager in charge of the compound, the work of the mine will always run smoothly and satisfactorily. A white man accustomed to the habits, usages and languages of Natives will exercise that quiet authority which long command of inferiors gives, being firm without being harsh, and just without being unnecessarily severe. At the same time he
must be granted sufficient authority to punish minor offences, for with Natives the punishment must follow swift on the commission of the offence; otherwise all discipline is soon lost, and the labourers become quarrelsome and discontented.

The rigid and elaborate system of authority and control within mine housing as Bozzoli suggested depended “upon the utilisation of the workers’ own ideologies” (Bozzoli, 1981, p. 72). The Native Commissioner, W. Grant wrote that:

It is essential to utilise the Native habits of looking to his recognised head and of implicit obedience to it, and that the manager should be constituted in the native mind as a tribunal for ultimate appeal under any grave sense of injustices. (cited in Bozzoli, 1981, p. 73)

The managers’ authoritarian mode of control was exercised and regulated through an elaborate structure of ‘line management’ which included functionaries such as the induna, mine police and isibonda. Each of these functionaries played a critical role in ensuring that the formal and informal power of the mine manager remained unquestioned. As Moodie (1994, pp. 81–82) has argued, “... rules may be formal or informal as long as infractions can be sanctioned in some way. Institutionalisation of commands within rules is a means of extending the range of domination more widely, but those who dominate by authority pay a price of being subject to their own rules”.

The ability to exercise power and impose formal and informal rules by the mine manager relied on a number of key functionaries, each with his own demarcated responsibility. What the mine management sought was to replicate customary power relations in African communities, by appointing the induna as an intermediary between mine management and mine workers. Although there were no standard criteria for the nomination of the indunas, the mine manager considered indunas who possessed some qualifications an indispensable instrument of control.

From the point of the mine management, the indunas had to be able, by their action and personality, to command attention and respect from the African miners. If possible, they were to have some connection with the African chieftainship. This requirement was encouraged by the belief that the indunas’ authority would not only have the manager’s sanction but also the customary and traditional sanctions conferred on chieftainship. The indunas reported directly to the manager in the areas of order and discipline. As right-hand men of the manager, the indunas, “informed on what was happening and [what was] said in the housing” (Moroney, 1976, p. 45). The indunas could arbitrate minor disputes, but major cases remained the prerogatives of the manager. By the 1980s, the induna and isibonda system had outlived its usefulness and was partially abandoned in a number of mines and, in newer mines, replaced by a bureaucratic system of housing management.

Across the whole body of the administration of mine housing, the housing police, formerly the ‘police-boys’, formed the most important coercive group. They assisted the indunas in maintaining discipline in the housing complex. When men queued at the main shaft, the mine police were always around to see that no one acted against regulations. The manager did not promulgate and proclaim the regulations in vain. During periods of strikes, or ‘faction-fights’, the
mine police were assisted by the South African Police with riot gear to ensure the maintenance of ‘law and order’ at all costs.

The men who effectively confront management and bridge the communication gap between miners and mine management are the isibonda. As heads of each section of the mine housing, the isibonda are responsible for dormitories. Although isibonda are selected by miners within each dormitory, final approval of the position rests with the manager. The isibonda are responsible for each dormitory, convey grievances and report to the manager. The migrant workers believe that the isibonda may communicate more effectively and represent them to management.

The pattern of housing devised by the gold mining industry depended on the exclusion of the migrant’s family, which had a far-reaching consequence. First, the pattern of relying on single male migrant workers led to structural imbalances in the sex ratio within the housing unit provided by the gold mining industry. Second, the pattern of recruiting only male workers led to intense competition for women in the nearby townships. Since the housing itself lacked basic privacy, mine workers were discouraged from developing intimate relations during their stay at the mines. In addition, the migratory nature of their labour meant that establishing long-term relations with women in the townships proved to be very complex. Equally, the nature of the mine environment and the presence of large numbers of male workers encouraged prostitution. Although the gold mining industry did not officially acknowledge the presence of women in the nearby townships, they encouraged it indirectly because the presence of women stabilised the workforce and became a medium through which the industry used sex as a means of social control.

Prostitution outside the gold mine was encouraged as long as it did not endanger the workforce and productivity. But the nature of prostitution and the mine worker wage rate meant that all the male workers did not participate in prostitution equally. It was only the privileged segment of the mine workforce who could afford the prices charged by prostitutes and for the majority of the mine workers, this was beyond their reach (van Onselen, 1976). Homosexuality and female assault have been a major source of tension in the migrant workers’ housing.

The provision of migrant labour housing together with the existence of subsistence production in the African rural areas has, and continues to be, the central component in the institutionalisation and maintenance of the migrant labour system. As a particular form of working-class housing, it has retarded the permanent stabilisation of the migrant workers and continues to constitute a vital institution of labour control. As Johnstone (1976, p. 53) argued:

The fragmentation, isolation and concentration of the African labour force in separate, dependent and prison-like compounds was of great advantage to the companies in the management of unrest and insubordination among African workers.

Mine Housing in the 1980s and 1990s

The changing labour market in the 1970s and 1980s and political developments in the region created a labour crisis, which forced the gold mining industry to seek alternatives to migrant labour. The mining industry adopted an aggressive
Table 1. Married housing for African workers on Anglo-American gold mines, 1960–85

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Units</th>
<th>Workforce</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>51,136</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>77,121</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>98,347</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>86,841</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2653</td>
<td>135,893</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>2844</td>
<td>167,208</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


recruitment strategy through higher wages, home ownership and rental housing schemes as means to attract workers from South Africa and to reduce its dependence on migrants from the surrounding countries.

The collapse of Portuguese colonialism in 1974 and the rise to power of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique, as well as the withdrawal of 130,000 Malawian mine workers from South Africa, altered the political landscape which threatened foreign labour supply to the mines. By 1994, foreign migrant workers made up almost 80 per cent of the mine labour force and in some mines the figure was 90 per cent (Crush et al., 1991, p. 101). The uncertainties caused by political changes in the region and the mining industry’s dependence on foreign labour led to a major new labour recruitment strategy. Beginning in 1974, the mining industry introduced policies to reduce foreign mine labour while attempting to increase the size of its workforce recruited from within South Africa.

As part of the strategy of reducing its dependence on foreign workers and restructuring its workforce, two complementary schemes were pursued by the gold mining industry. First, the industry began to build more rental housing for married African workers.

As Table 1 indicates, the number of rental units built by the Anglo-American Corporation for its married African migrant workers rose from 656 in 1960 to 2844 in 1985, averaging 474 units a year. Given the size of its workforce, the units only accommodated less than 2 per cent of its workers.

The second strategy adopted by the mining companies which had varied success, was the acceleration of the home ownership scheme which involved either the development of company towns on mine property or, more preferably, negotiation with councils in existing nearby townships for additional land for housing development. Once such an arrangement was secured, construction companies would build houses and sell to eligible married mine workers.

Examination of the adoption of these schemes as a whole must be looked at within the political reform instituted by the apartheid state following the Durban strike of 1973 and the Soweto uprising in 1976. The widespread labour militancy among the mine workers and the widespread resistance to apartheid which was sparked by the events of 1976 led to a policy shift within the mining industry, particularly on home ownership. While the gold mining industry as a whole depended on the migrant labour system, the abolition of influx control legislation in 1986 created new opportunities for the industry to expand home ownership among African migrant workers. However, the Black Labour Act
Table 2. Anglo-American Corporation home ownership scheme 1986–89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Housing Scheme</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3618</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3810</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1964 placed a limit on the number of African miners who could live with their families on mine property at 3 per cent of the total number of miners employed on a particular mine. However, this limit was also repealed when the influx control legislation was abolished in 1986.

Despite legal and political problems associated with African home ownership schemes under conditions of apartheid, the Anglo-American Corporation has taken the lead in expanding home ownership among its migrant workers. The company’s home ownership scheme was initiated in 1986 when it signed a formal agreement with contractors to build formal housing, with house prices ranging from R20 000–R80 000. Since the market price was considerably more than what the miners could afford, the company provided a subsidy and reduced the required deposit from 5 per cent to 2.5 per cent of the mortgage price.

The home ownership scheme sponsored by Anglo-American was able to build only 3423 formal houses (less than 2 per cent of the company’s 174 207 workers) since the programme was launched in 1986. Given the high cost of buying a house, and the lack of information about the company’s home ownership scheme, it is no wonder that the scheme attracted only a small percentage of mine workers. Similar patterns can also be observed in other gold mining companies such as Anglovaal Holdings, General Mining Union Corporation, the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company and the Rand Mines Gold Division. The housing schemes of the gold mining industry mainly attracted higher income categories among the semi-skilled and skilled mine workers.

Housing Reform and the Future of Mine Housing

One of the persistent and visible legacies of apartheid in South Africa is the magnitude of the housing crisis in general and the particular housing problems mine workers face throughout the country. The elements of the country-wide housing crisis manifest themselves in the acute shortage of housing for the majority of the African population; affordability of low-income housing; availability of land for housing development to meet the existing and projected needs; provision of infrastructure to service people at the lower end of the economic scale; and delivery of housing and housing finance (SAIRR, 1989).
In 1990 the Urban Foundation estimated that 1.8 million houses were needed to meet current shortages, with another 2.8 million needed by the year 2000 to accommodate the projected population growth. This will require 400 000 units to be built each year, or approximately 1096 units each day, at a cost of R6.9 billion each year which represents 24 per cent of the gross domestic fixed investment at 1986 prices (SAIRR, 1992). Similarly, the National Housing Forum estimated that given the 2 per cent state housing expenditure in 1993–94, the required investment estimated by the Urban Foundation study will require an annual growth rate of 17 per cent. Since the average growth rate of the economy was 1.03 per cent between 1986–91 (National Housing Forum, 1994), but reached 3 per cent in 1993 and 2.5 per cent in 1995, it is highly unlikely that the new Government of National Unity (GNU) will have the internal resources to deal adequately with the magnitude of the housing crisis created during the apartheid years.

Before the 1994 general election, statutory bodies were created to negotiate on a wide variety of issues between the crumbling apartheid government and the democratic movement. In the field of housing, the National Housing Forum was established in 1992 by representatives from 19 organisations, including political parties, trade unions, financial and construction agencies, development and civic organisations to "negotiate policies and initiatives which will help redress historical imbalances and meet future needs for shelter" (National Housing Forum, 1994). The discussion among various political parties, bodies and institutions represented in the National Housing Forum led to the signing with the apartheid government of an ‘Accord’ which spelled out a vision for housing policy in which security of tenure, adequate water, sanitary facilities and electricity supplies was to be made available for all South African people.

The blueprint for transforming the housing legacy of the apartheid era was also formulated in the African National Congress in its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (ANC, 1994) which outlined the enormous housing backlog and set out short and long-range policies to address the problem in an integrated and comprehensive way. The RDP was the centre piece of the ANC’s alternative development and economic strategy designed to unlock existing resources to meet the housing, electricity, education and health needs of the vast majority of the population. The Programme also set out a comprehensive and ambitious programme of housing production to meet current and projected needs which included the building of 1 million low-cost houses within five years. The RDP gave priority to housing legislation and commitment from key sectors, which play a critical role in housing production and finance as well as institutional reform. The programme also gave strong support for community based housing associations and co-operatives and policies to improve security of tenure and housing conditions in rural areas.

Following the election in April 1994, the Department of Housing under its late Minister, Joe Slovo, held a round of consultations with a large number of stakeholders and interested parties before the housing policy of the GNU could be finalised. They met at a historic conference held at Botshabelo in October 1994 which attracted 600 delegates who signed the Housing Accord: Housing the Nation, (Department of Housing, 1994b). The Accord was based on ‘incremental policy’ which addressed three fundamental issues: (1) the affordability profile of low-income families; (2) the capacity of the construction industry to deliver; and (3) fiscal realities and the budget available for mass housing delivery. The
incremental policy’ for housing development, incorporated in the drafting of the final White Paper, was presented to Parliament, public and press in October 1994. The policy framework included the following:

- Stabilising the housing environment. Dealing with political constraints including bond, rent and service charges, boycott, violence, and negative equity. Mobilising private sector investment and facilitating the partnership with private and public sectors.

- Facilitating the establishment of, or directly establishing a range of institutional, technical, and logistical housing support mechanisms to enable communities to continue to improve their housing circumstances beyond that provided by the housing subsidy. This strategy is directed at supporting extant capacity and directing it in ways to facilitate the overall success of the entire policy.

- Mobilising private saving (whether by individuals or collectively) on a sustainable basis and simultaneously ensuring adequate protection for consumers.

- Providing subsidy assistance to disadvantaged individuals and assist them to gain access to housing.

- Rationalising institutional capacities in the housing sector within a sustainable long-term institutional framework.

- Facilitating the speedy release and servicing of land.

- Co-ordinating and integrating public sector investment and intervention on a multi-factional basis so that housing is dealt with as part of the broader socio-economic environment.

The White Paper provided a detailed blueprint for the creation of ‘a normalised housing market’ in order to encourage the participation of private financial institutions in housing investment. The White Paper argued that:

> The state has insufficient resources to meet the needs of the homeless on its own and recognises that sustained substantial investment from sources outside the national fiscus will be required. Housing policy will therefore need to recognise the fundamental precondition for attracting such investment, which is that housing must be provided within a normalised market and thus attract maximum private investment. (Section 4.5.2)

The White Paper accepted that the housing market was distorted and that “the reinstatement of a habitable public environment has to be the precursor to a resumption of public investment and sustainable developments” (Department of Housing, 1994a, p. 33). It outlined limited areas of state intervention to transform the “vicious and degenerative cycle” into a “cycle of reconstruction and development”, particularly in “Reconstruction Areas” “where conditions are increasingly becoming conducive to viable development” (Section 5.1.2). To achieve this and other elements of the housing policy, various mechanisms are envisaged to encourage, and in effect subsidise, private financial institutions in the housing programme. It is clear from the White Paper that South Africa’s housing policy will operate within a market-oriented framework with limited state intervention. Since the government assigned strategic importance to private financial institutions in stimulating sustainable housing strategy, it is unlikely that it will jeopardise its emphasis on macro-economic stability as a condition not only for
economic growth but also the delivery of housing to a large segment of the population.

In the White Paper the government acknowledged the special circumstances of the migrant labour system and noted that, “circular migration and dual households, hostel accommodation, the prevalence of single (often female headed) households, cultural and legal impediments to access for women housing, and traditional tenure systems” (Section 3.3.8) pose important constraints on housing policy. Beyond acknowledging these “important sociological considerations”, the White Paper provided no specific policy initiative regarding the overcrowded, regimented, single sex mine housing where 90 per cent of the mine workers are currently living. While the White Paper called for employers “to know the housing circumstances of their employees and to, within their means, provide advisory, administrative, financial and other material assistance in order to improve the housing circumstances of their employees” (Section 5.2.6.4), no mandatory requirement such as minimum housing for their workers and their families and plans for improvement of mine workers’ housing were specified.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which represents a majority of the workers has voiced its reservation concerning a number of key elements of the housing policy. The NUM argued that given the “unique nature and historical background, both in terms of the migrant labour policies of the apartheid government and the racially-based provision of accommodation in the mines, ... special attention (be) given to the mines with respect to housing policy, hostel redevelopment and provision of family housing”. The NUM called for a range of measures, including the following:

- The duties of employers regarding accommodation of their workforce should be regulated.
- State subsidies for both hostel upgrade and conversion should be made available to mines that can prove that they need them.
- The government should, as a minimum, spell out the process and timeframe for the completion of a detailed policy on private sector hostels.
- The government must oblige all employers to meet minimum requirements for housing their workforce and their families.
- Mines must be obliged to produce annually, plans for improvement to their employees’ housing with budgets and timeframes, with short, medium and long-term objectives.
- A tripartite committee of government, employers and employees must be established to oversee the phased upgrading and conversion of the current hostel system with a view of providing family accommodation for workers who require it, and single units furnishing privacy for those who do not. (National Union of Mineworkers’, 15 April 1996, pp. 2–4)

It is beyond the scope of this paper, to undertake a full analysis of the Government of National Unity’s housing policy or NUM’s demand for the revision of the national housing policy. However, it is clear that housing policy of the new government has opened new possibilities where new competing groups—those possessing economic power on the one hand and political legitimacy and moral authority on the other—will continue to shape the trajectory of housing policy of the country.
Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the centrality of the mine housing complex to the maintenance of the migrant labour force. The housing complex, its design and its internal social and spatial organisation has remained to this day the central institution of labour control in South Africa.

Since the late-1970s, the mining industry has been closely examining alternative strategies of meeting its labour need as well as housing (and related policies) for its African migrant workers. Despite the attempt to expand housing provision to the skilled and clerical mine workers through high subsidies, the experiments have proved limited. One factor that has complicated the provision of family housing is the falling price of gold in the late-1980s and 1990s, as evidenced by the closure of a number of gold mines. The gold mining industry has argued that, “profitability of the industry has deteriorated to the lowest level in real terms since the 1960s, as rising costs erode the margin between revenue and working cost” (Chamber of Mines, 1991, p. 3). In light of this, the gold mining industry has come under considerable pressure to keep a check on working costs and welfare spending. In such an environment, the limited experiments with family housing are becoming even more tenuous.

The new government has embarked on a new national housing vision and a programme to provide a sustainable environment to remove the legacy of apartheid housing. For too long African mine workers were forced to live in overcrowded housing and denied the right to live with their families. The housing vision of the new government will address many of the housing problems faced by miners. However, the centralised mine housing complex, which was developed during the early part of the 20th century, will continue to provide accommodation for the vast majority of African mine workers for a considerable period of time. Dismantling such massive and centralised housing complexes by the new government will not be easy and it remains entangled in the politics of post-apartheid South Africa.

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