

Intsebenzo Izuzana Ntoni?

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Abstract

The documentation and analysis of work is still critical in today's context as job scarcity widens and people are seen to have to create work for themselves and others. This means that the concept and reality of work has also become more complex. The paper explores the work forms of different groups of informal women workers in East London and sheds light on how the women navigate the work they do and how the work affects other aspects of their lives. The women are involved in the public food-making systems of work where they prepare and cook different types of food and trade these items. The work that the women do is the primary focus of the study, and the labour of these women informs us about the nature of working on the side-lines, the constraints of informality and the setbacks of precarity. The women go into detail about the work they do, and through their accounts we get to see the effort and the time the women put into selling good food to their customers and the sacrifices the women take as workers and mothers. The paper also touches on formal and informal discussions of work and the complexities that the cases arrive at, when explored through South African local contexts. Is formal and informal work really worlds apart or is the gap between the two being bridged as inequality widens?

Key words

work/*ukusebenza*, cooking, women, space, informality, precarity.

The Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality or Imonti (East London) as it is also known, is the second biggest metropolitan area in the Eastern Cape. The metro has a wide range of work done on the margins at different locations¹ around the city.²

This paper is based on an investigation of the meanings and activities of work that the women do in the so-called 'informal sector'. The study was conducted through

1 The use of the word 'location' in this context refers to the different townships as well as beach sites.

2 See T. K. Connor and F. Charway, 'Ambiguities of xenophobia in a border town: inner city informal traders and Ekasi shopkeepers in the city of East London, South Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 38, 2, 2020, 257-273.

interviews and time spent with women food workers at four 'informal' locations – Ebuhlanti, Fort Jackson, Highway and NU13 in Mdantsane. At Ebuhlanti there are approximately 60 women food workers; at Fort Jackson there are about 20; Highway has about 12; and NU13 or Kwa13 has about 10 working women. All of these women work in 'unregulated' situations.

At all of these sites, work is organised around food workstations. Each workstation has its own arrangements, and differing methods of work, although there are also common features. The work is situated in differing forms of public space – on open land or in zinc structures, which are self-generated. All the work involves cooking or forms of food preparation as well as organising the local cooking infrastructure and technologies of food preparation, particularly in relation to energy sources.

These sites of work are, in some cases, near formal sites of employment, such as in Fort Jackson which is in close proximity to a prison. Highway, on the other hand, is located on travel routes, alongside taxi ranks that move workers and commuters to and from the city. It, in turn, is located in an 'informal nexus', alongside one of the only shopping malls in Mdantsane. Ebuhlanti is different again, located at the Eastern Beach, where people gather to socialise and to spend leisure time in various ways. NU13 is a unit near the Fort Jackson entry of Mdantsane. This unit is also casually referred to as Golden Highway. NU13 has a few economic activities such as a mini retail centre and a Sasol petrol station, and it is a few kilometres away from the Fort Jackson prison.

Across the sites, these women have different work arrangements, with some women working together and others more independently but in an open shared space. A number of women are informally employed by someone else, but self-regulate their work as they are not supervised by their employees who are hardly ever present. The paper, then, aims to fundamentally ask what goes into the work that they do, how do they define it and how do they navigate and respond to what we can call the variables of work that they are dealt with. The paper also focusing on the space and the intricacies of work, which is self-defined and recognised as being on the margins, or on the 'side-lines'.

It is also important to note, as Connor and Charway have suggested, that '[a]lthough chaotic, East London offers a fairly relaxed regulatory atmosphere for informal traders'. They state that their research echoes that of Skinner³ who found that, unlike Durban, where a specific department of Informal Trade and Small Business was established in 1991, the East London City Council has not developed a distinct policy on informal traders. 'The Buffalo City Metro has also not had the resources or will to embark on an extensive inner-city renewal, and infrastructure has remained unchanged since the apartheid years.'⁴ They suggest this has protected traders from evictions and high levels of harassment. Relatedly, Hita has argued that 'the informal business sector is underdeveloped in Buffalo City Metro Municipality (BCMM), and

3 C. Skinner, 'The struggle for the streets: processes of exclusion and inclusion of street traders in Durban, South African', *Development Southern Africa*, (May, 2008).

4 Connor and Charway, 'Ambiguities', 2020.

is imbued with development challenges, namely: support services, such as infrastructure (designated municipal trading stalls) and access to financial support, and the lack of strategy/policy dedicated to the prioritisation of the needs of the informal business sector.⁵

Working women

The paper is part of a bigger project, 'Impuma Koloni Bearings: An Other Cape?', where the discussion speaks to the extensions and complexities of the Eastern Cape.

Recently, Anne-Maria Makhulu has provocatively and persuasively analysed the historic and contemporary complications of work and the problem with the notions of work in South Africa, where there are minimum work opportunities and what she refers to as a 'superfluid informal workforce'. She speaks about the various dimensions of working on the side-lines and how informal work has long overtaken formal prospects for work – 'the desire for sweat' and its material certainties – because of the absence of formal work and the job crisis in the country.⁶ She speaks about the 'longer history of informalization' in reference to the closing in between work and worklessness in South Africa and proposes that this marks a shift in the patterns of work from the 'ideal-typical figure of the miner and migrant worker to the service worker employed in the informal economy living precariously on the urban periphery' within the 'stark and ever-expanding reality of inequality'.⁷ Relatedly, she argues, though, that the '... growth of the informal sector entails a shift from thinking about "abjection" to considerations of the "work on the world" achieved by those engaged in everyday practices of social reproduction'.⁸

The relevance of the title, '*intsebenzo izuza ntoni?*' (meaning 'what are the benefits of work?'), became a common statement and question that came up during the interviews. The women often spoke about '*inzuzo*' (gains/benefits) because work is often associated with what one gets from it (in 'identity' or in 'rewards' terms).

Makhulu argues further that there has always been a consistency in how impoverished women stretch their bodies to provide their own services across both domains of work, and emphasises the sense of their location in a 'wage-less life'.⁹ The work of women shows how 'anti-women' and 'anti-poor' the systems of society are in relation to work and women. It pushes women to the edge in how and where they work and creates what Makhulu terms the 'disposability of the labouring body'.¹⁰

'Women didn't fight to work. Women have always worked. Women fought to earn, and they are still fighting to earn.'¹¹ The recognition of working women has

5 L. Hita, 'The role of the informal business sector in local economic development with reference to Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality' (PhD diss., Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2013).

6 A. Makhulu, 'The Conditions for After Work: Financialization and Informalization in Post transition South Africa' (London: Cambridge University Press: *Special Topic Work Coordinated by Vicky Unruh*, October 2012), 782-799.

7 *Ibid.*, 792.

8 *Ibid.*, 792.

9 Makhulu, 'The Conditions for after Work', 782-799.

10 *Ibid.*

11 O. Etomi is quoted from her social media shared posts where she makes reference to labour and women. Etomi is a United States black feminist writer on gender, feminism, culture and shared human experiences which are offered across many media platforms.

been recorded for decades but still maintains relevance in current discourses because working women struggle with being emancipated in the material sense. The rewards system is gendered and predominately more accessible to men and this reservation has largely left marginalised black women more isolated and in more cycles of hard labour and precarity.

These manifestations stick – cohere – to the postcolonial and post-apartheid work identities of many working women. The characteristics of ‘over-extension and overworking’ burden the women as they battle with not fully belonging to the wage labour system but belonging to the daily activities of work. There is a sense of association of gendered work which offers a ‘backhand’ with regards to compensation or concession of the value of their work. The ‘responsibility to work’ is problematic because it loads ever more heavily women’s work while continuing to create patriarchal normalisations of the social dynamics of women and work.

The paper, then, wants to tackle aspects of the discourses of work by considering the meanings of *ukusebenza* as shared by the ‘scattered’ women workers in the ‘informal sector’ of East London in order to look at the detailed ways in which they work; discuss the differences that this work has to other forms of work and to engage the relationship the women have to the work they do. Here the related questions of the ‘disposability of the labouring body’, the ‘fight to earn’, the value and ‘rewards’ of and for work, and responsibilities and meanings associated with women’s ‘work on the world’ and changing forms of ‘wage-less life’ will be explored.

The use and understanding of work have been wired into colonial and capitalist constructions. What was constituted as work was heavily characterised and governed by the western colonial imprint, and the relevance of work is recognised and legitimised as far as it resembled European measures and rules as it simultaneously constructed black work as being manual and cheap and primarily located in the exploitative and oppressive largely male migrant labour system. This is the defining legacy of the Eastern Cape in relation to the experiences, meanings and understandings of labour and of work. But perhaps, ‘an other Cape’ might need to consider women’s work and ‘informal work’ more closely and more critically. This paper does not attempt to track these connections historically, although Makhulu has pointed to the considerable genealogies between current conditions of women’s informal work and their historical antecedents in spatial informalisation of South African cities, and how the associated ‘temporary labouring forces’ under apartheid influx control measures depended on the ‘...superexploitation of women, of forms of labour that were affective, reproductive, social and largely immaterial.’¹² The main argument of the paper, then, is that these forms of labour have been translated into the worlds of material productive labour with significant consequences for understanding the worlds of women’s work in this ‘other cape’.

The definition of informal work is based on work characteristics rather than enterprise-based definitions. It is understood as the most appropriate method of

12 Makhulu, ‘The Conditions for After Work’, 791.

classifying workers.¹³ This ‘work’ is fundamentally what this paper wants to highlight. Therefore, scholars such as Hart have suggested that the ‘human economy’ is made and remade by people in their everyday lives and by the characteristics of their work, amongst others.¹⁴ This work can be both personal and impersonal, and the justifications to work are not universal or linear. The variety and range of work that people do is simply coined formal and informal work, while these two definitions do not always accommodate the grey areas that define what work is in contemporary South Africa.

What’s in the work?

Ebuhlanti is behind the East London beachfront, where approximately close to thirty women work. They provide meat braaiing services for the public. This means that the customers supply the meat and the women braai it to specification and compete with each other for custom. The women, though, work at their own pace and discretion as they adjust their own times and terms of work. The braai services are predominately in demand on weekends, but on some weekdays they do get a few people who may want a braai for a mid-week occasion. Despite this, they routinely and regularly are present most days of the week, although weather does influence ‘going to work’ during the week. The services of these women are well known in East London and visitors are also mostly familiar with the work routines and practices that they provide, and some customers have regular arrangements with specific women.

Nozuko, in her mid-thirties, shares her work experience at Ebuhlanti:

We get to our workstations and clean. We then have to collect wood for the fire to braai. I then collect water and that will be used for the meat braaiing and for hygiene purposes. I then set the table to begin braaiing and working. This is my routine each day. I then wait for my wood supplier to arrive with his car to arrange how I am going to pay for the wood for the week. I can pay upfront or loan the wood till I make enough money to pay back.¹⁵

The activities that Nozuko outlines is just the preparation for the actual work she must do. Nozuko says that she has to clean and get stock for the day. This preparation can take an hour or more, depending on how she left the stand the previous day. Nozuko and the others work outside so they must clean up because bad weather or dwellers could have caused a mess to their stands. Nozuko says that they must ‘put in the effort to clean because people do not want to see a very dirty looking braai area.’¹⁶ Presentation and neatness matter for their customers, and the workers are very concerned about providing ‘quality braaiing’ to secure regular custom. Women

13 V. Padayachee (ed.), *The Development Decade? Economic and social change in South Africa, 1994-2004* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), 1-12.

14 K. Hart, J. L. Laville, and A. D. Cattani. *The Human Economy* (Cambridge: Wiley, 2010).

15 Interview, from 5-10 May 2020, conducted by Uthandile with the interviewee, Noluvo, who shared information about working at Ebuhlanti and the preparation that goes into braaiing and organising her workstation to be presentable.

16 Ibid.

at Ebuhlanti work independently; each woman is responsible for their own braai-stand, calling out for customers and doing the work of preparation and braaiing. The women only know each other from the neighbourliness of the stands, rather than through sharing their workstations, and there are no 'partners' in their braaiing service.¹⁷ The women also said that Ebuhlanti is an open space 'so any person can come set up if they let someone from the committee of women aware'. The only community agreement that the women share is the cleanliness of these beach grounds as well as the safety and security of the space.

Highway is the name of Mdantsane's biggest taxi rank, which is located in NU6, Mdantsane, and is a buzz of informal businesses. Highway is the township's convenience stop shop space, catering to the transportation and consumer needs of people. They range from the taxis awaiting commuters to the selling of different produce by street vendors, to traders in the form of container salons, spazas, clothing thrift shops, other smaller more informal shops, as well as the presence of formal retailers such as Shoprite and Spar.

Phelo sells mealies at Highway, at the biggest taxi rank in Mdantsane, the historic Ciskei township outside East London and now integrated into the metro. Some of the women who work alongside Phelo started working at this taxi rank in 1966, before there was a mall, serving buses and taxis that carried workers and commuters to East London. Phelo has not been there as long; she started off by selling fruit next to the travel stops, but moved on to selling mealies, a hundred steps west of the taxi rank, where she remains.¹⁸

Phelo also works with a group of women at this site where they cook mealies and sell to the public. Mealies are an 'on-the go snack enjoyed by many' and it is packed in transparent plastic so that customers can hold the bottom part of it. The women work as a 'group' but not in terms of actual sales and earnings made, which remain individual. Rather, they pool their labour together for the purpose of picking mealies at nearby farms, on transport fees and in the use of utilities such as pots. However, there is no sense of unity in the actual business of income, because Phelo says they cook more as individuals, and this applies to the process of selling as well, although they might use other women to walk around and sell mealies.¹⁹ Phelo describes her daily work as including the following duties:

We get here and boil warm water in the big black African pots. We light up the wood to use for cooking, and then we put the mealies in the boiling water and allow it to cook for about an hour. After cooking we place the corn on newspaper, let it cool off and cover it. Then we wait for customers

17 Interviews conducted by Uthandile with the working women of Ebuhlanti, at Ebuhlanti beachfront, about the relationships at work and how the women view working together. The interviews took place between 5-27 May 2020.

18 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Phelo at Highway, Mdantsane, from 20-24 May 2020, where the focus was on the long-term work experiences of selling different food items such as corn and other fruit and vegetables at the same taxi rank.

19 Ibid..

to buy, or we give them to other women to sell with salt and spices to season for the customers.²⁰

The third case looks at the women who work at Fort Jackson, which is about 2kms from the exit of Mdantsane and a former industrial decentralisation zone bordering Mdantsane. The space where the women cook is at a juncture where people commute to and from the city. These women cook sheep's heads. Nombulelo, one of the workers, says that:

Sheep heads is a delicious treat that many people enjoy. Sheep's head is enjoyed at traditional events or anytime of the week that one craves this meat. The meat is said to be so delicious that one does not need to bring spices to give it flavour. *Intloko yegusha* is tasty and has a distinct meaty flavour that draws people to it. One sheep's head is not enough for an entire family and therefore people buy more than one head to be enjoyed by a few members of the family.²¹

Nombulelo also spoke about the work that they do on site at Fort Jackson:

We have to arrive as early as 7.30 in the morning to come work here. We must first clean the raw sheep's head and remove the hair and other dirt on it. Then we take it to the women who are going to chop up the head for appropriate cooking use, then from these women we take it to the women who are going to set the fire and cook the sheep's head in the pots for an hour and a half.²²

The women who work at Fort Jackson are a group of 12. They work for an employee, who owns the business, and it is possible to see an emerging division of labour between these workers. The women themselves, though, determine how to divide their labour and give each other support when 'others are falling short on their chain'. The women cook about 120 sheep heads per day, however it not always guaranteed that they will all be sold. Nombulelo shares that the 'hottest sales' occur at pay dates such as the 15th and month end. The work site also has traffic on some Fridays and Saturdays. The work is done in an open field with a self-maintained shack that is used for trading as well as keeping the utilities at the end of business day.²³

At NU13, or Kwa13, Bulelwa runs a business of cooking the insides of cow's heads. This meat is referred to as *umqambulo* and is also a 'meat treat that can be

20 Interview conducted with Phelo who works at Highway, Mdantsane, and cooks corn with other workers at the side of the taxi rank. Interviews took place in the 20 to 24 May 2020 period.

21 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Nombulelo at Fort Jackson Industrial area from the 26-29 May 2020, where she prepares and cooks sheep heads with other workers.

22 The interview with Nombulelo that was conducted by Uthandile provides details of the type of work environment Fort Jackson is and what some of the group settings and day-to-day experiences are like for the workers.

23 Ibid..

enjoyed at any time. *Umqambulo* takes longer to cook because beef is tougher and needs one to be more patient in executing it.²⁴ Bulelwa works with a group of young women ‘employees’ at her work site. They help her cook and sell her products. She also makes vetkoeks (her best sellers) and fish and sells ready-made products like polony and viennas alongside the meat and vetkoeks. Bulelwa says that this is what goes on in her business daily:

Every morning I organise what I am going to be cooking. After washing everything, I then make sure that all the dishes are set out on the table and ready to start cooking. I also prepare the fire and keep it blazing as I knead the dough for the vetkoeks.²⁵

Bulelwa runs an organised operation; she even prepares the chopping of the meat the day before at her house. Bulelwa says that cooking the day before at her home spares her a lot of time, but she is worried about wasting her own electricity and gas with cooking these long-hour meals.²⁶ She has serious plans for her work and business, and one sees this by the ‘shack structures’ that she has started erecting to grow the informal space into a cooking and eating area. Bulelwa is ambitious and vibrant, and throughout the interview one gets a sense that her work has challenges but she is not prepared to let it weigh her down or dispel her intentions for her business.

The work that the women do predominately involves cooking of some sort, including those braaiing at Ebuhlanti. The women specialise in different meat parts such as sheep’s heads, cows’ heads, and the women of Ebuhlanti braai different meat such as pork, chicken and beef. On average the cooking takes an hour and a half. All involved argue that cooking on the outside fire makes the cooking process quicker and the flavour of the meat tastier. The organisation of the fire is an integral part of the cooking. ‘A good fire can make a very good meat batch and thus a good plate of food.’²⁷

The women work hard at these sites and have been working there for a long period of time. The longest period, as already stated, is 33 years, but many others have been working for 10 years or more at these outlets. This means that these jobs are not short-term, temporary or a means to move upwards into other jobs, or even to transition into other positions (as in ‘owning’ a business and employing others, where Bulelwa is the exception, rather than the rule). However there does seem to be a more intense ‘turnover’ of ‘younger workers’, who stay a year or less depending on ‘where they decide to work next’, but they do not always find other jobs and these are in the minority.²⁸ This longevity is determined by a) a lack of job opportunities and

24 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Bulelwa at NU13 Mdantsane on 24- 26th May 2020. Bulelwa describes running her business where she cooks cow heads, vetkoeks and fish.

25 Uthandile interviews Bulelwa, who is a vibey and active middle-aged woman and is quite passionate and dedicated to her business. She has always preferred the independence of working on her own.

26 Ibid..

27 Interview conversations conducted by Uthandile at Ebuhlanti from 5-10 May 2020 on the importance of wood in cooking and forming a structure for the three-legged pots. The conversations were about fire, and the importance of wood in cooking and braaiing.

28 Ibid..

education for better prospects, b) a preference for independence than working for someone else and c) need – where poverty and vulnerabilities also influences the jobs people take on and hold on to.

Working lives also provide an important track into understanding the forms of work the women have entered into, the experiences they bring and the gendered trajectories that shape these insertions into the ‘work of food’. In the interview with Nombulelo at Fort Jackson, she tells us:

I started working when I was 15 years old here in East London. I didn’t get much of an education, so I was working vulnerable jobs. I have also worked as a domestic worker for a long period in East London and Cape Town.²⁹

Nombulelo has been working all her life and is still currently working at *Fort Jackson* at 61 years of age. Her childhood and adult years were spent working, first as a farm worker, then a domestic worker and now an ‘informal sector’ cook. She realises that her life’s work path has always been vulnerable and there is little progression in her job prospects but she has always kept herself determined because many of the circumstances life has thrown at her have been out of her control.³⁰

Cooking large amounts of meat is not an easy task. The meat must be fully cooked through, so it involves patience and the skill to cook big orders. As already stated, the women of Fort Jackson say that the minimum number of sheep’s heads they cook is 120. The ‘braai women’ of Ebuhlanti can braai for about 30 people in one batch in the summer-festive season and are routinely handed a few kilograms of meat to braai per customer. The NU13 business cooks cow’s meat but does not buy a uniform amount of meat each month. Bulelwa buys different quantities of meat depending on her cash flow. For all these women, they insist that their labour is ‘skilled’ as opposed to simply doing routinised manual tasks. It appears, though, that their notions of skill relate more to the fact that they have to make work decisions and participate in a range of multi-tasking, from obtaining supplies, providing energy and other infrastructures, like worksites and ‘shacks’, through to preparation and then the activities of selling their products to customers – of finding ‘localised markets’ if you like, often based on communication and interactive skills.

It is important, then, to also note that for many of these women, they do not talk about what they do in the ‘languages of labour’. For them, they run businesses, they have inputs and supplies, they service and attract customers and they provide spaces and infrastructures that need to resemble permanent transactional sites for sales and profits. In this sense, it is more the language of the entrepreneur and of business that marks how they think about and talk about work at one level.

As such, Padayachee describes the informal economy as being ‘unregistered enterprises in terms of commercial legislation’ and secondly, he notes this economy as

29 The interview was conducted by Uthandile with Nombulelo at Fort Jackson from 26-29 May 2020 who shares the vulnerability of being a child labourer and how those experiences manifested into her adulthood and exposed her to more work vulnerabilities.

30 Ibid..

also having an ‘unregistered employee base in terms of labour regulations’,³¹ which means that the work done is basically untraceable and without any formal governing structures. Instead he suggests that working in informality is characterised by ‘self-categorizing and self-instructing’ measures.

Bulelwa, albeit the most entrepreneurially successful of the women, speaks about the work involved in getting the supplies to start cooking:

I have to do quite the run around getting the supplies to start cooking and selling. I buy the cow set at *Lima* foods here at Mdantsane, at NU12 or at the abattoir in Cambridge. I then buy vegetables at the *Food and Vegetables* at *Wilsonia*.³²

Her stock is sourced from various retailers around East London. She even complains that some meat is finished before she arrives, or that, when she gets to the shops, the quality of meat left does not meet her standard, so she must look elsewhere for her multiple supplies. Bulelwa is the self-proclaimed ‘boss’ at the workspace at Kwa13; she is responsible for getting supplies for work, and she does this before and after her ‘opening hours’. She tells us of the sacrifices she makes in time and work to make a decent living. She employs four young women who have the ‘freedom’ to change work whenever they please. Bulelwa shares that, ‘I work with these girls, and they are able to move on to better work or start their own businesses if they wish to do so.’³³

Despite this ‘freedom’ the work structure in this workspace is top down. There is a defined work hierarchy and structure between Bulelwa and her ‘staff’. Bulelwa has a commendable work ethic and many dreams for her cooking business, but she also has expectations of her workers to ‘cook well’ while insisting that she is ‘flexible’ in how she deals with her ‘employees’. Bulelwa also has a more trusted relationship with her suppliers, and this adds more to the ‘value chain’ and hierarchy of her operations. In short, her ‘business’ is not as vulnerable for herself as it is for her employees, or the majority of other women working at the different sites.

On the contrary Nombulelo and the women of Fort Jackson are employed by their employer who ‘has formal employment and that the sheep’s head is her side-business’. Here they are simply responsible for cooking the sheep’s head, while the logistics of running the business are done by their employer. As stated, they do not have a supervisor and are all expected to fulfil their duties ‘on their discretion if they meet their employer’s target of sales.’³⁴ The women share that the employer pays them extremely low wages, at R50 a day, and that there is minimal communication and relations with them, which one could sense as being ‘undermining’ for them.³⁵

31 V. Padayachee. *The Development Decade? Economic and Social Change in South Africa, 1994-2004* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), 1-12.

32 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Bulelwa at NU13 Mdantsane who provides an account of the experiences of how she operates her workstation and keeps an orderly system.

33 Ibid.

34 Interview conducted with Uthandile with Nombulelo and fellow workers on the 26-29 May 2020 at Fort Jackson who share experiences of having an employer who keeps their distance and exploits their labour at the site.

35 Ibid.

Despite these sentiments, though, these women employees still think of their work as running a business, no doubt influenced by the lack of workplace oversight and that their work is regulated by ‘sales targets’, with all the implications of producing and selling enough sheep’s heads on a daily basis.

The association of precarious work and money

Given that the majority of these women work on the informal margins of Mdantsane (with the exception of Ebhulanti), it is useful here to situate a basic context. Siyangwana and Chanza have highlighted how Mdantsane has been affected by the closing of factories in Fort Jackson, and the more general continuing separation from and constrained materiality in relation to East London. Here high unemployment rates (of around 50%), the collapse of infrastructural development, and the failure to create formal employment, intensify its apartheid induced marginality. Relatedly they point to rising levels of poverty, the poor quality of life and the constrained availability of money. Furthermore, they argue that the development of malls has ‘actually destabilised the operation of marginalised black entrepreneurs, as they have become “white elephants” without customers.’ Undoubtedly, they say, ‘this situation is likely to reinforce a continuation of income disparities and a perpetuation of poverty in the area,’ centrally ‘related to marginal incomes that are compounded by a shadow economy’.³⁶

More widely, Guyer has argued that we need to think about the nature and meaning of money and its transactional nature in relation to what she calls ‘marginal gains’. She argues these gains relate to shifting boundaries of exchange systems and at which gains could be made, but also to time – to what she calls ‘time-as-margin as well as time-as-duration’ – arguing that:

Inequality gaps are partly about durations. At the bottom, employment is temporary, houses are improvised, rights are contingent, some relationships are passing and not dependable, health is precarious, and getting anything at all ‘settled’ with the formal sector involves indeterminate waiting and extensive (and shifting) terms of qualification. People largely live in cash, which is a dwindling proportion of the total money supply...³⁷

The issue of the availability of money, then, can be a ‘crippling hindrance’ to the continuity and to the value and social reproduction of their work. Workers must calculate and navigate through their extremely limited finances, to the extent that during the interviews, money conversations were met with a lot of heavy breathing

36 P. Q. Siyangwana and N. Chanza. ‘Interrogating the post-apartheid socio-economic transformation in Mdantsane, Buffalo City’, *GeoJournal*, 82, 4, 2017, 735-750.

37 J. I. Guyer, ‘Gains and losses in the margins of time: from West and Equatorial history to present-day South Africa, and back’, *Africa*, 84, 1, 2014, 146-150.

and expressions of anxiety and vulnerability.³⁸ The difficulty in obtaining credit and the precarious backgrounds of poverty further limit access to money. According to Makhulu, financialization comes to be understood (often mistakenly) as the cause, not consequence, of inequality – and volatility is understood as following, rather than motivating, speculation.³⁹ Furthermore, the fluctuations in sales and profits of their informal work heightens their marginality. These women then, are in a constant battle with cash flow, with cost and with gains on these shifting boundaries. In short, poverty becomes expensive because these women are barely making means meet with the work they do on an everyday basis. Cooking on its own provides minimal gains. The necessary circuits of transactional exchange cannot bypass the actual presence of money itself, meaning that even though the women are making transactions each day, their overall socio-economic status does not change much.

Phelo, in her interview, said that informal work is underpinned by money challenges and that is what makes it so hard. She says that:

We live with the possibility that the work you put in with cooking this corn may not bring any money for the day and then we are unable to buy or pay for our supplies, or provide for our families.⁴⁰

Money can halt work because it slows down the process of buying and selling goods. The women describe difficulty and a slow-down when they do not make enough. The argument is that it brings with it many set-backs, interruptions and inconsistencies in terms of the necessary cash for acquiring 'stock'. The women workers constantly talked about how the lack of money 'drained' their work and working lives in these informal settings, as did Bulelwa as a 'boss'. It seems to breakdown the 'morale' of the workers and has serious emotional and mental issues around dignity, standing and self-worth, exacerbated by the suspension of work operations because there is no money to buy supplies like wood, meat and other cooking products (like spices, cooking oil, vegetables and cleaning products).⁴¹

The informal and formal work nexus divides what Hart calls the 'regulatory' nature of the latter. Salaries, expenditures and credit payments are all authorised and monitored in formal work environments, while informal workspaces do not have the availability of those regulatory scales, and this intensifies a negative sense of their own work environments.

According to Bargain and Kwenda, an important aspect of informal jobs may reflect the voluntary choice of workers, given their preference, skill endowments, and competing earning prospects.⁴² These women workers do share that their

38 An interview question, asked by the interviewer, Uthandile, at all the work sites on the impact of money on their state of being.
39 Makhulu, 'The Conditions for After Work', 793.

40 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Phelo, from 20-24th May 2020, about what outputs mean for the work she does at Highway, Mdantsane.

41 Uthandile interviews all the workers about the emotional and mental stresses of being without money and therefore without dignity or standing in their communities. The interviews were conducted in the May period.

42 O. Bargain and P. Kwenda, 'Is Informality Bad? Evidence from Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa', *Discussion Paper No. 4711*, 2010.

independence and ability to cook gives them a form of freedom and dignity. A worker like Bulelwa shares that she has never wanted to get a job but has always preferred to work and employ others. But this freedom comes at a cost – ‘... no money.’⁴³

These financial vulnerabilities are what the women call ‘stop-and-go’ cases. Nombulelo says that her employer pays them according to the amounts of sheep heads sold at their site. She says that they are very anxious when there is bad weather or a mid-month business ‘drought’ because this automatically means they will be paid R50 on that day. The only time that they earn R80 is when they have sold everything or even managed to cook more sheep heads for that day.⁴⁴ The women say that they cannot even afford to take transport to work. They must walk to work because ‘they earn very little to stretch their budget on commuting.’⁴⁵

Phelo says that they buy mealies from a farm that is 50 minutes away from where they live. They have to pay R400 in transport money to ‘pick a few days’ supply of mealies. They did not specify the amount of money they spend on firewood. The profit they make (though days differ); they mostly make R250 a day. This case shows the exceptional ‘loss’ that the women experience and the real marginality of the ‘gains’ of their labour, as well as their practical inability to ‘live in cash’. The transport and product costs far exceed income, and this begs the question of why the women would continue to work here. It becomes clear that the effort to keep going and to bring even the smallest amount to one’s family is better than sitting at home for some women. Work can offer a significant benefit in an improved sense of self-worth and status, and it might be argued that even these ‘marginal gains’ relate to what Guyer and Pallaver have called a ‘monetary multiplicity’, where its ‘store of value’ overrides it as the medium of exchange, unit of account or means of payment.⁴⁶

The precarity of a working ‘life without money’ places limitations on movement, constituting a boundary that does not easily shift gainful margins, while simultaneously reinscribing an inability to move from time-as-margin whether in and at work or, more expansively in expanding or shifting these boundaries. Stated differently, there is no existing logic in trying to circulate money rapidly or quickly converting it upward into other money forms or commodities. Rather, it is the symbolic forms and/or relationships that have more durable value. The case of Nombulelo reinforces how work does not valorise a person in monetary terms. Work that is ‘seeped into poverty’ is not valued but materially exploited, practically a ‘wage-less life’. There are limited chances of Nombulelo properly functioning, even as a worker, and this socio-economically disrupts a person’s right to a life of dignity, But the conditions of work are intertwined with the conditions of their lives, in the ‘human economy of their everyday lives’, as Hart suggests.

43 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Bulelwa at NU13 Mdantsane from 24-26 May where she discusses the lack of ‘desirability’ for formal work and what this has meant for her in creating her own work.

44 Uthandile interviewed Nombulelo at Fort Jackson about commuting to work and what challenges transport and commuting fare present.

45 Uthandile continues the interview with Nombulelo at Fort Jackson from 26-29th May 2020 about money and sustenance.

46 I. J. Guyer, and K. Pallaver, ‘Money and currency in African history’, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2018).

Boundaries of work, space and association

According to Beebeejaun, there is an increasing mismatch between the ways in which everyday life is framed within spatial planning and the direct experiences of marginalised urban dwellers.⁴⁷ As has been argued, BCM is not a city that has adequately planned and created space for those who work in the informal sector. Traders are scattered everywhere from the city centre to the outside peripheries of the metropolitan area, with no allocated working infrastructures or support to facilitate their businesses and workplaces. Related then, to mobilisations of workplace dignity, these articulations spatialise the need to see and provide morally 'good spaces' for their work.

Masuku and Nzewi, argue that in BCM many informal businesses believe that they are 'excluded from accessing basic urban infrastructure and from integrated development processes on decision-making affecting them and as a result this makes informal businesses vulnerable to negative forces ...'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, they argue, from a survey of informal sector food workers in 2020, that 'the participants suggested that their relationship with the local government is hostile and stated that the government did not care about the struggles they face in accessing basic needs and the efforts they were making to improve their livelihoods by engaging in the informal business sector'.⁴⁹ Independently, then, these women have occupied and traded in many different parts of the city, and they are 'allowed' to enter these spaces of local government neglect if they do not disrupt other informal activities. They have taken to the streets, open land, abandoned areas, beach parks and strategic public spaces near public activity or other enterprises. Sites are not fixed; they can move and occupy different spaces. For example, Phelo can adapt by selling corn during the warmer days after the summer harvest, and during colder months she crosses the road to go back to selling fruit and vegetables.

This is not to suggest that these are not vulnerable spaces, and that in transgressing public and private distinctions, particularly through public food production, as well as being inserted in dangerous and violent situations related to street crime and to abuse, derision and related forms of violent masculinities, all of which the women recounted in various ways, reinforces a sense of these spaces as unstable and 'excluded' from governance, from power and from BCM servicing.⁵⁰ The boundaries of safety and security are a big issue that the women constantly deal with. Their boundaries are not always respected and maintained by men. They share that they do not always feel safe in the city and don't feel secure from possible threats of assault and harassment. For example, the women of Ebuhlanti appealed to the municipal council to have some security measures but this was not addressed. However, their say that

47 Y. Beebeejaun, 'Gender, urban space, and the right to everyday life', *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 39, 3, 2017, 323-334.

48 B. Masuku and N. Ogochukwu, 'The South African informal sector's socio-economic exclusion from basic service provisions: A critique of Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality's approach to the informal sector', *Journal of Energy in Southern Africa*, 32, 2, 2021, 59-71.

49 Ibid..

50 Interview conducted by Uthandile in May 2020 about women and spatial movement in the BCM and how this affects their work and lives.

their fears around gender-based violence and misogyny ‘does not slow them down’ because they have work to do and cannot restrict their movement in work because of the dangers. They keep aware and vigilant of the space around them and ‘look out for each other’.⁵¹

It was interesting to see different workstations had their own work hours and flexibilities, cooked different types of meals, and were composed of different group settings, as has already been stated. These group settings were varied in their unity and coordination. On closer analysis, on the one hand, individuals in these groups ‘keep distance’ for competitive reasons, as their work relies on their ability to sell. A different view is that solidarity cannot be reinforced in working spaces where informality and flexibility is very open and subject to competitive individualised self-regulation. Trust and a consistent work ethic are not guaranteed because the women can determine their own time and labour disciplines, or be absent from work as they please. The responses from the women also show us that there is an ‘openness to move’, even if this is largely a myth, and it does not produce stability but rather a sense of the temporary nature of the work, determined in its spaces of informality.

Hart argues, though, that informal work does often entail an insertion into other systems, a making of associations for their own protection, betterment and recreation.⁵² Convenience is often seen to be at the core of informal work, working to provide ‘others with an accessibility to their needs and wants’, and is one of the driving forces for this work. Hart emphasises throughout his book that informalisation attests to the importance of working for oneself, but also to putting in the effort to work and provide for others, making it a more ‘humanist form of work’ because of the connection and servitude it has to other people; these form associations of connection and meaning. Food, in short, is universally an aspect of survival as well as a connecting substance, and these connections build associations. Resonant of what Keletso Atkins has called ‘kitchen associations’,⁵³ through the interviews with these women and observing their interactions, they share a homeliness experience about their work. That they have used their ‘kitchen’ experiences to make themselves a wage and their community with each other is built around those communal strengths in the kitchen.

The disadvantage of these associations is that groups do not always form an extended closeness, and trust is not always guaranteed. The women may work collectively, but they maintain distance in social terms. The women of Highway who sell mealies say that the shared responsibility is ‘taxi fare to the farm in Gonubie and the few pots we share but that is where it ends’. They do not participate in social activities outside of that.⁵⁴ The ‘associations’ are not necessarily friendships, but they are

51 Uthandile continues the interviews in May 2020 with the working women and covers safety and security as being one of the major issues of working and living in a city that does not offer much security especially in marginal communities.

52 Hart et al., *The Human Economy*.

53 K. E. Atkins, ‘The Moon is Dead! Give us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900’, *The Internal Journal of African Historical Studies*, 1993, 668-672.

54 Uthandile covers work and associations in the interviews with the working women. She looks at the extent these work associations have for the life and work of these groups of women.

systems of an operation determined by the workspaces, rather than community spaces, but still offer 'some cushion from the harshness of everyday life and constant struggle for a life to make meaning'.⁵⁵

According to Peterson and Charman, the business of informal foodservice could be seen to enhance both the customer's and the owner's personal food security, while building localised spatial connections. Township food enterprises represent an important contribution to food security, primarily with respect to food accessibility.⁵⁶ They provide an important argument about access points and the ways that these local circuits of consumption connect these spaces to the communities to which they are near. The women all reflected on these connections and argued that this made them 'invaluable' to the community. They suggest that provision of food 'cannot be left to formal establishments' because food retailers are not located in peripheral residences and spaces. 'People would have to travel about 30-50 kms to get to the nearest food outlets', and informal food stations were primarily provided to ensure accessibility and convenience to those that want food locally and without the cost of travelling to the city for it. That is why spazas, cooks and hawkers all play a significant role in keeping a sense of food security in the 'buzz' of where people live and work.⁵⁷ Battersby and Watson share, then, that what they call 'urban food systems' are not only shaped by consumer demands but also by the food systems that supply certain foods to the cities as well as other aspects of urban culture.⁵⁸ Food preferences are understood through social engagement. Food preference can differ in different spaces, meaning that what is preferred in the city, township or suburb differs in terms of taste preferences and affordability. However, it can also be a shared experience regardless of backgrounds. Thus, it is not farfetched to connect these workers to the time, food, cultures and spaces of their work. Here too discourses of moral value, of dignity and of responsibility articulate to the spaces of work and association of these women.

As Ngatiane et al. have argued, 'these findings are consistent with the finding of Hani who contends that most municipalities interpreted LED⁵⁹ as purely centred on enterprise development'. For them, this meant that '[t]hese efforts included (i) helping members from identified marginalized groups to identify business opportunities, (ii) joint business plan development with interested locals, and (iii) offering business advice'. While they point out that the BCCM is only 'poorly embedded', it is this dominance that links business languages of work to those of local political power discourses and practices.⁶⁰ And it is important to note that, as Apraku has argued, the East London Hawkers and Informal Traders Union has not been effective and that

55 Ibid.

56 L. Peterson and I. Charman, 'The scope and scale of informal food economy of South African urban residential townships: Results of a small area micro-enterprise census', *Development South Africa*, 35, 1, 2017, 1-23.

57 The interview was conducted by Uthandile on May 2020 about the value of food access points in township communities.

58 J. Battersby and V. Watson, *Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

59 LED refers to Local Economic Development.

60 M. Ngatiane, N. S. Dyubhele and H. Lloyd. 'Local economic development in Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipalities: An empirical investigation', *African Journal of Business Management*, 15, 10, 2021, 299-308. See also T. W. Setebe, 'The contribution of social networks on the performance of small, micro and medium enterprises in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality', (MA thesis, University of Fort Hare, 2016).

the informal traders union's participation in BCM activities is essentially 'rubber-stamping' and 'over-looked'.⁶¹

These links can be further seen in the ways that these women 'move around the city when they are looking for product supplies.' This also moves these women between their places of home and work and the formal business spaces where they buy meat, mealies and other food and production inputs. These movement and space transitions are a key part of the work and of the processes the women routinely go through, needing to push through boundaries of resources that significantly affect them as individuals as well as their work operations.

Phelo says:

We go pick and buy corn at different places, we buy at the Gonubie farms, and that costs R200 a round trip for all the workers, we also buy corn in the Transkei and that is R500 and Mgobiso which are the areas outside of East London and that is R300.⁶²

The transport expenses and engagements in these different more formal spaces have created small-scale capital barriers of entry, negotiations around transport, payment and supply and issues of inequality that they struggle with daily. It could be argued that the women have an awareness to how gendered the spaces are whether it is the public transport they take or the farm or abattoir owner they buy from; to the relationships they go back to in their homes. The spaces require constant gendered negotiations from pricing, product quality to home dynamics of sex and responsibilities. The negotiations are seen as endless. Space, then, is gender.⁶³

It could be argued, then, that these working women defy boundaries, because if they conform to these boundaries, they 'suffer and bend to poverty'. Inclusion, for groups including women, is often gained through, 'concerted struggle', demanding the right to be seen, to be heard, and to directly influence state and society.⁶⁴ These women, through their occupation of these spaces and the work they do in it, are asserting their rights to conduct work where they desire – that vulnerable social groups such as the homeless and trading women have the rights to access and use the city like other citizens. So, this reinforcement and struggle to work is a way of them maintaining their power and agency in a society that keeps them out and confined to boundaries of poverty and powerlessness. It is relevant to discuss the importance of the women actively shaping their space in the city and forming their spatial relations with each other and the public of East London. Affirming their right to work and live in the metropolitan city is a key part of their personhood.

61 A. Apraku, 'An assessment of the effectiveness of trade union participation in municipal decision-making: a case study of the Buffalo City Municipality' (PhD diss., Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2010), 50-51.

62 Uthandile interviews Phelo at Highway Mdantsane from 20-24 May about the movement between her informal work and buying at formal entities such as farms and butchers in BCM.

63 See J. Wardrop, 'Private cooking, public eating: Women street vendors in South Durban', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 13, 6, 2006, 677-683. She argues here, persuasively, for the formulation that 'space is gender'.

64 D. Mitchell, *The Rights to the City* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003).

Conclusion: The conceptual debates around work

According to Wrzesniewski et al., people see their work as either a Job (focus on financial rewards and necessity rather than pleasure or fulfilment; not a major positive part of life), a Career (focus on advancement) or a Calling (focus on enjoyment of fulfilling, socially useful work).⁶⁵ From the women that were interviewed, only one spoke about their work being their passion and purpose and, unsurprisingly, that was Bulelwa, the informal 'owner' or 'boss'. In discussing the scholarly interpretations of work, Anne Mager shares that *ukusebenza* means to work, labour, operate; and secondly puts forward that *ukusebenza* is an activity that results in a reward (*ubaso*).⁶⁶ In Mager's terms, 'rewards' here refers to various forms of wage, income or payment for work undertaken, but as Wrzesniewski et al. suggest, this notion of reward can be extended to forms of 'advancement' or fulfilment.

Translated into the controversies around the forms and self-meanings of work in the 'informal sector', wage rewards are primarily located in 'marginal gains', which means it is very difficult for ideas and meanings of reward for hard work to align in any meaningful way. These working women describe work as simply being an 'obligatory activity one must do to get through', to 'survive' and to maintain a 'sense of sanity from everyday tribulations'.⁶⁷ 'Reward', being a consequence of hard work, is highly contestable, especially in informal work – as shown there are minimal or no significant material rewards. It could be argued that this form of work is not really seen as 'work', but rather as 'survival' and as resilience.

The definition of someone who has a work ethic is '*umntu onentsebenzo*'. It is clear that the majority of these women have a work ethic that aligns an efficient hard-working person who works with dignity, with social awareness, responsibility and respect, with concern to health and sanitation.. Alongside this, the lack of reward and recognition of the moral and social good of their work in wider frames compounds their senses of frustration and marginality. These definitions of work can be contested in South African contexts because the meanings and connotations of the work do not always match.

The cases of these women zoom into the discussion of *intsebenzo yabo* (performance) and of the distinctions between the wider societal constructions of what counts as work and its 'moral good' and what does not. This is well captured by Phelo, who in her interview puts forward the idea that while the selling of mealies is part of making strides to provide for her family, her work is 'shaky and brutal because there is not stability in the earnings' whereas she knows that 'full employment' would make her and her family 'more grounded and secure'.⁶⁸

65 A. Wrzesniewski, C. McCauley, P. Rozin, and B. Schwartz, 'Jobs, Careers and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work', *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 1, March 1997, 21-33.

66 A. K. Mager, 'Tracking the Concept of Work on the Northeastern Cape Frontier, South Africa', *Doing Conceptual History in Africa*, 2016.

67 Interviews where the women share the sometimes-obligatory nature of work and the need to work for survival.

68 Interview conducted by Uthandile with Phelo, who shares the brutality of low earnings and the exclusion that minimum wage can bring.

Hart has argued that what distinguishes and contrasts informal and formal work, and 'self-employed' earnings and wages, is, in part, the degree of rationalisation of working conditions.⁶⁹ The major claim that formal work has over informal work is the lessened exposure to material lack and to the volatility of surprise set-backs and inconsistencies. More generally, as Makhulu, Lawhon et al., Bolt and Rajak have illustrated, the 'classic figure of the wage laborer persists', marked by the re-emergence of the dominant 'worker-citizen trope' of post-apartheid as the ideal and typical one, and where wage work represents 'material security'.⁷⁰ Relatedly, as Lawhon et al. argue, this 'dominant productivist work ethic, which instils a set of virtues that values labour as a means for spiritual maturity and political citizenship' and where formal economic employment is integral, but also where benefits to work 'are articulated as being of symbolic social value rather than ends in themselves'.⁷¹ In other words, work is understood as a materially, but also as a socially and politically significant cultural construct. While they equally point to the limits, tensions, contradictions and 'disillusion' of this ethic, and argue, as Barchiesi has, 'such accounts underemphasise the very real opposition to participating in the modern (white, colonial) economy'.⁷²

Alongside these formulations, then, are the ones that identify informal work with independence, with 'freedom' and control of working lives, including work time, self-regulated discipline, and the broader constructions of waged work, underpinned by its productivist regimes of racialised exploitation. Michael Burawoy has called these regimes of work 'colonial despotic' – based on the colonial character of the apparatuses of production.⁷³ To this we need to add the gendered basis of opposition to this productivist work ethic as well. The limited reward or inclusion of women within formal production, or undervaluing of women's work as 'reproductive', and the violent formations of masculinity that underpin much of this labour regime, have all sustained their exclusion from these productive values and work ethics.⁷⁴

However, as these working women in the informal cooking sector in East London powerfully demonstrate, there is little 'independence' or 'freedom' in their working and largely wage-less lives. The interviews show us that working in the informal margins is heavily underpinned by 'insecurity' and this causes the physical and psychological strain on the women and their work. This means that their understandings of the meaning of work are framed by its lack of value, its marginal gains and its frustrating and oppressive conditions of the necessity for survival.⁷⁵

69 Hart et al., *The Human Economy*.

70 See Makhulu, 'The Conditions for After Work', 789; M. Lawhon et al., 'A Labour Question for the 21st Century: Perpetuating the Work Ethic in the Absence of Jobs in South Africa's Waste Sector', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44, 6, 2018 1115-1131.

71 Lawhon, et al., 'A Labour Question', 1118. Here, they draw on and follow the work of F. Cooper, J. Comaroff and F. Barchiesi, amongst others.

72 Ibid.

73 M. Burawoy, *The politics of production*. (London: Verso, 1990).

74 See M. Bolt and D. Rajak, 'Introduction: Labour, insecurity and violence in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42, 5, 2016, 797-813, for a useful and significant overview of these arguments.

75 Ibid.

This distinctively South African story faces challenges that are familiar from elsewhere. The provision of social support is contested by a strong normative discourse that valorises work. Increasingly, the emphasis is now on entrepreneurialism and micro-enterprise. Both are peddled by donor and state agencies alike, not just to the jobless but also to those in wage labour, glossing survivalism as resourcefulness and precariousness as opportunity. As Prentice argues, the precarisation of work is reconfigured as an opportunity for ‘empowerment’ and self-actualisation, in which the precariat are ‘free to author their own destinies while negating the histories of struggle that have made this framing possible’. Drawing on powerful ideals of choice and freedom, a discourse of self-sufficiency leaves the majority with the experiences of insecurity ...⁷⁶

Finally, Barchiesi has argued that ‘the idea of the “informal economy” evokes the active, industrious, and entrepreneurial poor, to replace the undisciplined and troubling casual or intermittent workers of colonial and early post-colonial memory’.⁷⁷ As has been argued above, this sense of these informal women self-defining their work simultaneously in relation to a desired access to the productivist work ethic of symbolic social value and material reward, and also as a ‘business’, as a micro-enterprise and an entrepreneurialism that depends on an enduring commitment and belief in the hard work of resourcefulness and in its opportunities, if only they could be recognised, supported, serviced and rewarded.

Again, this situation resonates with Lawhon et al. who argue that:

Deepening unemployment rates paradoxically seem to have reinforced the central tenets of the work ethic while shifting responsibility ever more towards the individual: entrepreneurship calls not just for work but for the creation of it by individuals. In the colonial discourse ... the morality of work was conjoined with a demand for labour from a growing economy. Here, in contrast, entrepreneurialism is understood as a necessary, morally valuable step towards the creation of work itself. In articulating this revised work ethic, responsibility is reconfigured away from a lack of formal jobs to individuals. Individuals who do not become successful entrepreneurs are deemed to lack the appropriate engagement with the opportunities provided. While the economic context has substantively changed, the valorisation of work has not.⁷⁸

These women are working for a living – survival work – holding on their backs the notion that work is better than no work, while barely surviving the cruelty of

76 Discussion on precarity and work. The linking of how difficulties of work can become difficulties of life.

77 Barchiesi, F. *Precarious Liberation: Worker, the State and Contested Social Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa* (State University of New York, 2011).

78 M. Lawhon, N. Millington and K. Stokes, ‘A Labour Question for the 21st Century: Perpetuating the Work Ethic in the Absence of Jobs in South Africa’s Waste Sector’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44, 6, 2018, 1128.

hunger and impoverishment, of marginal gains and of a wage-less life. In addition, though, they are read as a subject of disposable lack – as a working self, lacking ‘appropriate engagement’ with entrepreneurial initiative, determined by the gendered discourses and meanings associated with the working black women subject.

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