Transformations of work: a discussion of the South African workplace

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Abstract

Starting with a discussion of some of the seminal texts of South African industrial sociology, this paper argues that since the late twentieth century the world of work in South Africa has been transformed in a number of ways. These transformations are linked to the global expansion of industrial supply chains as a result of the political and economic transition, technological changes, labour market transformations and a changing conception of time. A key argument is that rather than being discreet, the consequences of these transformations are deeply connected across place.

Keywords: Work restructuring; textile sector; labour market; time; South Africa

In his autobiography, worker-poet Alfred Qabula (1989, 67) described the Dunlop Tyre factory where he worked as a forklift driver from the early 1970s. 'A person' he said, 'works under difficult conditions at Dunlop. He works for one day on a job meant to take two days'.

This world of work as described by Qabula and other workers in their writing about their working life (see Makhoba 1984; Tom 1985) was the stimulus for the seminal industrial and economic sociology studies in South African sociology (see below). This literature outlined how work was managed and controlled. The paper begins with some of these studies which discussed the industrial workplace of the late twentieth century, outlining what von Holdt (2003) termed the apartheid workplace. However, from the late 1990s this world of work was fundamentally transformed.

The paper identifies some of the main dynamics behind this transformation. Firstly, it discusses how South Africa's political and economic transition post-1994 impacted this world of work with varying outcomes. It argues that some of the key areas responsible for change are transformations in the labour market, technological changes and the conceptualisation of time. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates the multiple connected dynamics that have transformed industrial work in early twenty-first century South Africa. It shows the deeply embedded spatial connections between different forms of work and work in different places, and demonstrates the ways in which globalisation has changed the world of work creating both winners and losers.

Research methods and sources

In addition to the existing literature, as referenced, this paper also draws from primary research that I have done over a number of decades. This includes research data from the following projects:

1. My master's degree research conducted between 1985–1987. A number of in-depth interviews were conducted with men employed at, and on strike from, the BTR Sarmcol factory in Howick (Bonnin 1987).
2. A joint project with colleagues from the UK. Interviews were conducted with the management of manufacturing companies in the auto supply chain.
3. Research in the home textile sector (2010–2014). In-depth interviews were conducted with textile designers, mill management, textile importers, convertors and buyers in retail (Bonnin 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

Industrial work during apartheid

In describing working conditions at the Dunlop Factory (Durban) Qabula (1989) called the workplace a 'place of hell' and 'degradation' (67, 51). These workplace practices, similar to those in many South African factories during the twentieth century, led von Holdt (2003, 27) to his conceptualisation of the apartheid workplace regime. This was a workplace and a labour market moulded by apartheid – by legislation determining who was eligible for which kinds of jobs, determining whose skills were recognised as skill and whose weren't. Furthermore, embedded in this world of work was a world of multiple violences – the violence of everyday insults, racism and assault; but also the violences of the unrelenting rhythm of the machine and the conveyor belt, poverty wages, scant regard for health and safety, and a lack of voice (representation).

Strongly connected to the violence of the workplace was the exclusion of African workers from the formal industrial relations system. The Industrial Conciliation Act (1924) specifically omitted them from the definition of employee and later in the 1956 Amendments denied them the right to join recognised trade unions. Thus, for much of the twentieth century white, Indian and coloured workers were incorporated into a formalised bargaining system guaranteeing certain workplace rights. African workers, on the other hand, had few workplace rights and were subjected to a despotic workplace regime, with racial structures of power and control as its foundation (von Holdt 2003, 37–40).

Amongst the key texts that shaped our understanding of the organisation of work was Webster's (1985a) study *Cast in a Racial Mould* which traced the changes in the labour process in South Africa's foundries from craft to industrial labour, simultaneously outlining the way in which the racial division of labour was entrenched and restructured. Equally important was Sitas' (1983) doctoral research *Black Workers Responses to Changes in the Metal Industry*, which focused on metalworkers on the east Rand, showing how cultural formations amongst migrant workers gave them ways to resist the alienation of migrant life and ultimately find strategies of resistance and control over these conditions. This tradition of South African industrial and economic sociology, termed 'new labour studies' by Webster (1985b), did not focus on the workplace alone; it went 'beyond the workplace to an examination of working class cultural formations, as well as [the] powerful political traditions that shape[d] the attitudes and political behaviour of black workers' (Webster cited in Sitas 1997, 102).

Bonnin (1987) in her study of the BTR Sarmcol strike also documents this brutal world of work. She describes the development of the Sarmcol rubber factory, outside Howick, from

what was primarily a jobbing factory in the early decades of the twentieth century to a large industrial plant with a semi-skilled labour force of over 3000 men by the early 1970s. Those employed, initially considered themselves lucky; lucky to find a job that enabled them to earn an income and so contribute to their rural households without having to go to the mines in Johannesburg. This sense of 'luck' was soon dispelled by the harsh conditions of work and authoritarian management. In the words of one of the workers:

> 'At first when I was employed at Sarmcol I thought, hey, I was just a lucky man, now I'll earn a lot of money. Only to find out … [that I was mistaken].' (Interview, Godfrey Lubazana cited in Bonnin 1987, 110–111)

> ' … [there was a type of] … punishment [used by management]. Say you are late from tea, they say now you are going to a hard place, … It was confinement. Just like confinement where you punish people.' (Interview, Godfrey Lubazana cited in Bonnin 1987, 119)

Remembering their working life at Sarmcol, the violence of the apartheid workplace regime is what stood out for these workers. But it was their collective history of removal and relocation from the land, unionisation and political struggle that provided the cultural capital to make sense of the situation in which they found themselves and forge the strategies to resist (Bonnin 1999). For them, as for other industrial workers (see Bhengu 2014; von Holdt 2003) it was what drove them towards unionisation:

> 'Me, I didn't scratch from the union I join the union right through from Gwala [the Rubber and Cable Workers' Union, an affiliate of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, was organised by Harry Gwala] until now. … Because they help me if sometimes they chase me from Sarmcol because Sarmcol they chase anybody anyhow.' (Interview, Simeon Mhlongo cited in Bonnin 1987, 178)

Yet these accounts of harsh factory work present a world of work that is fading along with memories of these workers. The East Rand foundry at which Mandlenkosi (see Makhoba 1984) worked has since closed down. The Dunlop Factory in Sydney Road, Durban where Qabula worked – a key site of worker organisation in 1980s Durban (Sitas 1984, 1996; Bhengu 2014) – was bought by the Indian company, Apollo Tyres. By then it had a much reduced workforce, employing about 840 workers, roughly half the number previously employed (Bhengu 2014). Sumitomo Rubber South Africa, a subsidiary of Sumitomo Rubber Industries headquartered in Kobe, Japan, bought Apollo South Africa, taking over the Dunlop Factory in Ladysmith while Apollo retained the Sydney Road plant. In late 2015 Dunlop, Sydney Road was closed, most of the workers retrenched and the historic site converted to a warehousing and logistics hub (Arde n.d.). The Sarmcol factory was no-longer owned by British Tyre and Rubber; it is currently owned by Dunlop Industrial Products with a workforce of around 500 – far fewer than the 3000 workers employed in the early 1970s (Bonnin 1987, 112).

Political and economic transitions

These transformations in ownership and numbers of employed, discussed above, are replicated across industrial sectors. In a seminal article, Adler and Webster (1995) referred to the post-1994 period as the 'double transition'. They argued that the changes in the workplace seen from the early 1990s were a result of two shifts or transitions – firstly, a political transition to democracy, and secondly, a change in the industrial policy which saw the development of a supply-side approach and a shift from import substitution to export-led growth.

I suggest that the dynamics of these transformations were multiple and contradictory with differing effects, depending not only on the economic sector but also on place. On the one hand, there has been unemployment and economic marginalisation, factory closures and hollowed out supply chains. On the other hand, some industries have expanded. All industrial sectors have integrated into global supply chains but with variable outcomes.

Hart (2002) documented the process of industrialisation and job loss in the industrial decentralisation points of northern KwaZulu-Natal. She (2002, 132) pointed to the 'interlocking dynamics of dispossession and industrialisation' and the political connectedness lying behind the industrialisation of small towns. In many of these small towns industrialisation was enabled by the industrial decentralisation policy of the apartheid state and the industries that proliferated were looking for plentiful and docile labour (see also Hunter 2010; Mosoetsa 2011). Taking Ladysmith as an example, in the post-1994 period there was a severe contraction in employment, the outcome for workers being retrenchment and casualisation. In the clothing industry total employment fell by fifty percent (Hart 2002, 159). The Ladysmith Defy factory survived the restructuring of its parent company, albeit with an insecure contract labour force (Webster, Lambert, and Bezuidenhout 2008). And the Ladysmith Dunlop factory shrunk its workforce to just over 800 from 1400 (Bhengu 2014, 7).

The East Rand – in the heart of the Gauteng (former Witwatersrand) industrial region – draws much of its migrant workforce from northern KwaZulu-Natal. The East Rand, now incorporated into Ekurhuleni, was populated with factories, predominantly metal. Sitas (1983) documented how these manufacturing workers, mostly male migrants from KwaZulu-Natal, became the nucleus of the emerging independent union movement. However post-1994 manufacturing work in this region dropped hugely from over 50 percent of employment in the 1970s to less than 25 percent by 2005 (Barchiesi 2011, 147). This according to Barchiesi (2011, 147) was less as a result of deindustrialisation and rather because of 'labour saving corporate strategies' which involved technological innovations, decentralisation, subcontracting, and casualisation. New jobs were in retail and services, and these – as Kenny's (2004) research on the retail sector has shown – were usually casual and temporary. By 1999 services and retail accounted for 44 percent of employment on the east Rand (Barchiesi 2011, 146).

Many of these East Rand foundries and metal factories were likely to have been part of the supply chain for South Africa's auto industry established in the 1920s. The auto sector consisted of assemblers (Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs)) and a vast number of

companies that manufactured components needed for the assembly of the vehicles or their repair. The component manufacturers encompassed a varied range of sectors and cascaded back through the supply chain. For example, foundries (many of which were located in the East Rand), tanneries or textile plants (often in KwaZulu-Natal or the Eastern Cape) were part of the auto-industry supply chain, ultimately resulting in sheet metal, leather car seats or airbags. Beginning in 1961, until the mid-1990s, the South African auto industry was encouraged through government policy to increase local content and to utilise locally manufactured components. The outcome of these policy interventions was 'the creation of domestically entrenched automotive value chain' (Barnes 2000, 404). As a consequence of sanctions, by the mid-1980s, four of the seven OEMs still operating in South Africa were locally owned, with one other partially South African-owned (Barnes 2000, 403–404).

From 1995 the government put in place the Motor Industry Development Programme (MIDP) which reduced tariff protection and local content requirements, and encouraged exports. The result of the policy shift was dramatic – exports increased substantially and there were significant ownership changes amongst local OEMs. This was followed in 2013 by the Automotive Production and Development Programme. The outcome has been a full integration of the auto sector into the global supply chain (Barnes 2000; Barnes and Morris 2008). OEMs compete globally for the 'opportunity' to manufacture particular models. At times they have been successful, for example, in November 2015 BMW, in Rosslyn, Pretoria was awarded the contract to produce the new generation X3 for sub-Saharan Africa (Furlonger 2017). Mercedes in East London was one of the four Daimler plants worldwide selected to produce the new C-Class Mercedes (Cokayne 2016a). The investments generated have been worth millions of rand. New plant has been built and jobs created (Cokayne 2016b). But at other times OEMs have not been successful when bidding; an example was in 2013, when in the wake of a strike, BMW lost the contract to build the 3-Series sedan (Gernetzky 2013).

Around these auto assembly plants, the supply chains have developed. Thus, the success of South Africa OEMs is likely to explain the survival of the Dunlop factory in Ladysmith. Sumitomo Rubber indicated that their investment in South Africa was due to the strong growth prospects of the auto sector (Le Guern 2014). In October 2014 they announced a R1.1 billion rand investment in their Ladysmith plant – at that time the main supplier of tyres for the new Chevrolet Utility manufactured by General Motors at its Struandale plant in Port Elizabeth – and had a contract to supply tyres to Toyota based in Durban and Volkswagen in Uitenhage (Le Guern 2014) from 2016. But, in many instances the South African segment of the supply chains only goes back to the first or second tier suppliers; hence, the need to question the meaning of 'success'.

The 'domestically entrenched automotive supply chain' (Barnes 2000, 404), a feature of earlier periods, has been hollowed out. The South African auto industry is now inserted into a value chain stretched across the globe (Barnes and Morris 2008). Local suppliers are affected by the closure of industries in South Africa, the higher commodity prices that have devastated the manufacturing landscape of places like the East Rand and the strict governance of the chain by the OEMs. In an interview with a manufacturer of auto parts (Interview, CEO of auto parts manufacturer, Durban, May 2014), a second-tier supplier, I was informed that the first-tier supplier tried to convince the OEM transnational

corporation that eight components could be manufactured and supplied locally. After presenting samples to the OEM's headquarters abroad they were authorised to manufacture only two locally.

Many have pointed to the success of the South African auto industry post-1994 (Black 2009) – both exports and employment have increased. But this success has limitations. The South African auto industry is nationally very important, contributing over seven percent of South Africa's GDP and employing approximately 120,000 workers. But globally it is insignificant with less than one percent of global vehicle output located in South Africa (Barnes and Morris 2008, 39). Its producer-driven value chain is controlled by the global assembler, one of the few global vehicle production companies. They control technologies, production processes and location, as well as research and development, deciding upon product specifications. They determine where and who shall manufacture components. This limits skill levels and ensures that R&D does not happen in the South African section of the supply chain (Dawood 2016). Furthermore, most employment and manufacturing value is in the components. These often arrive in South Africa as 'complete modules' (Barnes and Morris 2008; Black 2009).

The auto sector operates in a globally competitive environment with the supply chain integrated under the control of the globally powerful OEM. Just as South African manufacturers can win contracts, so they can lose them. Yet in a sector where relationships between suppliers are close, with investment in production processes and efficiency, there is also an investment in place and a local embeddedness (Dicken 2014).

While Ladysmith's spatial connections to the auto industry has ensured continued employment for some, this was not the situation for everyone. Ladysmith was also home to a spinning mill – part of the Frame Textile Group. The Frame spinning division, which included the Seltex 2 Mill in Ladysmith, employed around 16,000 people in 2003 (Crestani v. Frame Textile Group 2009). By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, this spinning mill along with many of South Africa's other textile mills had closed. The few mills surviving were skeletons of their former manufacturing selves (Bonnin 2013a). The successes, tenuous as they might be, of the auto sector stand in stark contrast to the difficulties experienced by the textile sector.

The first textile mills in South African opened in the late nineteenth century. It was state support, particularly in the form of protection, as in the auto sector, that allowed the industry to grow substantially during the twentieth century. Historically, the products manufactured were complex in their production and wide-ranging, spanning two main production pipelines – the production of yarn and the production of fabric (Roberts and Thoburn 2003). These included industrial textiles, apparel, and household textiles – both carpets and furnishings (Bonnin 2011). By the early 1990s the textile sector employed 100,000 people; slightly over 50 percent were male (Maree 1995).

Household textiles was dominated by four large companies: Frame Textiles, Whiteheads, Da Gama and Ninian and Lester. These were all vertically integrated mills, meaning cotton, wool or synthetic fibres went in one side and cloth came out the other; able to manufacture and print large volumes (over a million metres in a month) fairly rapidly; and, they all had

design capacity employing textiles designers (see Bonnin 2011, 2013a, 2013b). Despite the rapid removal of tariff protections after 1994, by the end of that decade it appeared that the South African textile sector supplying the home/furnishing fabric market would be able to survive the transition from a protected import-substitution industry to a global trading environment. New domestic markets were expanding with the development of mass retail stores (Mr Price Home, Sheet Street, @Home), the demand for value-added products (ready-made products) had increased, exports were robust and there was significant investment in new technologies and equipment. There had been uncertainties and some companies closed some operations and focused on one part of their product chain. Foreign investors were able to enter the textile sector when some companies unbundled and/or consolidated (Bonnin 2013b).

Yet today none of these companies has survived in their previous form, with many having closed. Bonnin (2013b) points to the period 2003–2008 as being extremely difficult – in 2004 alone 20 textile companies closed their doors. Employees were retrenched and machinery was sold off. Da Gama Textiles sold their entire East London spinning plant to a Pakistani company who shipped it to Pakistan (Interview Kevin Downes, CEO Textile Mill, Eastern Cape, 7 June 2011).

The popular explanation for this nose-dive was 'cheap imports'; and while this, including the under-invoicing and 'incorrect' statements of country of origin of these cheap imports, was an important factor, it was just one of the reasons for the devastation of the sector during that decade (Bonnin 2013b). In the early 2000s export trade declined significantly fuelled by the volatility of the currency. Many companies found their export order books closed at short notice. This compounded the difficulties they faced of inputs purchased at a dollar price which had little resemblance to the rand price quoted to customers. Countless companies shut their doors which impacted others in the supply chain. It exposed those downstream to vulnerability, lowering their demand, putting pressure on their prices and they in turn closed. For those upstream there were no longer South African suppliers for that particular input which forced them to look abroad. And so surviving companies sourced mills abroad to manufacture their product, or imported yarn or cloth to fill the gaps in their supply chain.[1] The dominoes continued to fall and more mills closed.

> 'When X went bust we were in big trouble. … Because we had a massive percentage of our business [there], massive. … So we had to completely reinvent our business. … So we took them to [mills in] the UK. (Interview, Roslyn Phillips, buyer for a large retailer, 17 October 2012)

> '[It] had a knock on effect on yarn suppliers, we didn't use as many meters, so we needed less yarns. So yarn suppliers began to fall by [the] wayside. Then commissioned dye-houses – today there are two people left who supply dye stuffs, before we had choice – today you don't have options.' (Interview, Fred Fischer, manufacturer, 16 October 2012)

Maree (1995, 35) in his industrial strategy study found 588 textile firms in the mid-80s; the 2012 Textile Federation membership list shows slightly fewer than forty members who are manufacturers. The textile supply chain has become completely hollowed out with the

lower end of the vertical pipeline displaced by imports. Another perspective is to see the supply chain extended beyond South Africa's shores and integrated into global textile production. In line with global trends there was a transformation in the governance structures of the textile supply chain, and manufacturers no longer controlled the supply chain; instead, it was controlled by retailers (Gereffi 2001). They determined product specifications, place of manufacture and most importantly the price point (Bonnin 2013a).[2] The South African clothing and textile sector has become part of a globalised clothing-textile value chain.

Over these two-and-a-half decades of restructuring South Africa has lost significant manufacturing capacity and thousands have lost their jobs. When a mill closed all those employed, from semi-skilled to highly skilled, lost their jobs. In 2002, 181,000 people were employed in the local textile industry; by 2013 100,000 had lost their jobs and only 80,000 were employed in the sector (IDC 2014). The highly skilled were able to enter the global labour market and off-set their personal disasters. For example, the production management team at one of the oldest and technically most respected printing mills in the textile heartland of Lancashire (United Kingdom) is staffed almost entirely by South Africans. They had lost job after job as they moved from closing mill to closing mill before being drawn into the global labour market (Interview Michael Jones, Director of a large British textile mill, 17 April 2012). The labour market for textile designers has shrunk dramatically; those who have found employment in the new labour market are required to work in a very different way – the work is less creative, the pace has increased, the control is tighter (Bonnin 2013a). But what of the semi-skilled workers who kept these mills working? As Webster et al. (2008, x) noted, one of the missing aspects of labour studies has been the impact of global restructuring on the non-working life of workers – their household and the community in which they lived.

Mosoetsa (2011) has explored the fall-out from this mass unemployment. Her research focused on two areas in KwaZulu-Natal – Mpumalanga and Enhlalakahle, both industrial decentralisation points – where local residents were dependent upon the clothing, textile and footwear industry for employment. Her work demonstrates the ways in which communities responded to their deteriorating circumstances arising from factory closures and mass unemployment. Households became places of work as well as reproduction. But the resources generated caused conflict between genders and generations as household members struggled to survive. This conflict threatened the cohesion of the household and the possible benefits brought by the collective project of the household. Social grants were the main source of survival. Hunter (2010) documented industrial decline in another KwaZulu-Natal decentralisation point, iSithebe. At first the men were laid off when the metal factories closed in the 1990s and then the women when the clothing and textile factories shut in the 2000s. They also struggled to survive on social grants and generated incomes through the informal sector.

Despite being marginalised by the formal economy, individuals and households are still deeply connected to it. Some take advantage of the work opportunities offered by the state's expanded public works programme. For example, in road building or road maintenance the materials needed are provided by the formal economy while labour is sourced from the small towns and villages through which the road passes. Others do

piecework – sewing garments or stitching shoes, in their backyards – contracted by the factories that retrenched them. And many have road-side tables or spazas, purchasing sweets and cigarettes from the large wholesalers or retailers that are part of the global food-production supply chain. While this work is tightly integrated into the formal economy it's not all equal. The links between the individuals, different types of informal/flexible work and the formal economy is hierarchal – heavily influenced by race, gender and class. While perhaps also as precariously balanced on the economic edge as the woman who stitched garments in her living room, the freelance textile designer interacted with the formal sector from a position of greater control and privilege. Her access to better skills, cultural capital and assets allowed her to better navigate this transformed landscape of work. Despite its connection to the formal economy, precarious and casual work eroded and bypassed the post-1994 labour market institutions and befuddled the trade unions that had built their strength and power in the formal economy and labour market (Webster 2005; Englert and Runciman 2019; Webster and Englert 2020).

Technological change transforming work and employment

In mapping the changing geography of production in the East Rand, Barchiesi (2011, 146) argued that behind the unemployment and factory closures on the East Rand are technological changes and work reorganisation. Many companies came to terms with the globally competitive environment they faced in the post-1994 period by introducing a range of labour-saving strategies. Amongst these were technological changes which led to retrenchments and the reorganisation of work. Perhaps the most dramatic example, due to the scale, was the Vanderbijlpark plant of ArcelorMittal. The introduction of wide-ranging technological changes over the last twenty-two years was accompanied by the dramatic downsizing of the workforce (from 59,000 to 9300 employers between 1988 and 2010) (Hlatshwayo 2013).

A consequence of late-apartheid sanctions was the difficulty of importing new plant. As a result, much of what existed was outdated resulting in inefficiency and poor productivity. Post-1994 many companies replaced outdated technologies with new imported machinery. This was particularly the case in the textile industry. However new machines required significant investment which often burdened the company with cash flow difficulties contributing to its demise; furthermore, as order books closed, many companies found that they had production capacity they were unable to utilise.

> Investing in 2002, buying machinery. 2003 they were working short-time. And 2005 closed down. Literally buying machinery one year. Working short-time the next. And closing two years later. (Interview, Textile Mill Owner, 6 December 2012)

Alongside this investment was the introduction of new ways of organising work, in many cases drawing on post-Fordist philosophies of lean production. For production workers lean production was associated with downsizing, retrenchments and insecurities (Sitas 2004).

The changing production conditions of textile designers speak to some of these dynamics. Historically, textile designers hand painted their designs. They (unlike production worker) controlled time, process and conceptualisation. Designers were given a brief and would

interpret it. They had the freedom to interpret the brief and produce as they desired. It was acceptable for a designer to take two months to produce a design. Management recognised that designers were creative professionals and they were not 'controlled' and monitored as in other labour processes. For example, designers could 'check out' of the workplace, visit exhibitions and museums, browse bookshops or wander city streets, in order to 'feed' the creative process. Much of this changed, not only in South Africa but globally, with the introduction of Computer-Aided-Design (CAD) technologies alongside changes in the governance of the supply chain and pressures to work faster to feed the new business models of production (Bonnin 2013a).

The introduction of CAD into South African design studios from the mid-90s changed the work of textile designers significantly and fundamentally. Technological developments enabled production managers to demand that designers work more quickly to facilitate their need to be more competitive and profitable. Secondly, these new technologies impacted on the designers' skill and knowledge. CAD required a different set of skills from those of a designer who hand-drew and painted designs. Many designers no longer needed to be able to draw and paint – a fundamental skill before CAD. Jobs changed with a blurring of 'professional' boundaries and graphic designers with CAD skills but little technical knowledge of textile design (repeats, the ability to create a design that is aesthetically pleasing and follows the principles of good design; and, the knowledge to mix colour) were employed as textile designers, albeit in new Cut-Make-and-Trim (CMT) factories. Design work in CMT factories involved little creativity; the primary task being to follow customers instructions and ensure the designs supplied were compatible with manufacturing software (Bonnin 2013a). As the chief executive of one of the remaining South African print mills explained,

> 'We have a different calibre of designer today, who doesn't have to be the interpreter, the originator, innovator. They really have to copy what they are told or given to make.' (CEO in a division of a large textile mill, Cape Town, Interview 23 August 2011).

Ultimately CAD enabled faster design; consequently, fewer designers were employed. But it also enabled the global dispersion of the supply chain, concentrating design work in the political north. South African designers were forced to become part of a globally competitive labour market (Interview, Gil Anderson, South African textile designer, March 2009). File-Transfer-Protocols (FTP) utilising cloud technology allowed CAD designs to be sent anywhere. Much design originates from design studios based in the UK, Europe or the USA (Interview, CEO UK-based Design Studio, Manchester, 11 April 2012; Interview, Head of Design Studio, UK Converter, 28 August 2013). These studios dominated the design market selling into the global textile supply chain.

> It means you can work instantly with people. If we sold a design in South Africa, but they want it printed in Pakistan – they tell us the mill that they are working with and we send the files directly to the mill from the UK. You know instantly. I mean last week I had a customer – he bought two designs from me and whilst he was in the studio we FTP'd them to India and he was then talking through what he wanted them to work with – almost instantaneously – and he wanted them to start work on

those [designs] that afternoon. (Interview, CEO, UK-based Design Studio, Manchester, 11 April 2012)

Labour market transformations

Transformations in the labour market have impacted directly and indirectly on work. The managerial project of outsourcing, downsizing, casualising and sub-contracting has resulted in a working class mostly excluded from the formal and primary labour market and a labour market dominated by insecurity (Theron 2005). As a number of studies (Buhlungu and Webster 2006; Englert and Runciman 2019; Webster and Englert 2020) has demonstrated, the increased use of labour broker employees has been key to post-1994 workplace restructuring. They have been excluded from the post-1994 gains made by workers in South Africa and remain excluded from much of the protection offered by post-1994 labour legislation, despite recent amendments to the Labour Relations Act (Englert and Runciman 2019; Webster and Francis 2019).

While the working class found little relief from the post-apartheid regulatory instruments, the situation was different for the black middle classes. Bonnin and Ruggunan (2016a) draw attention to interventions to bring about access to, and equity in, the traditional professions in South Africa. Historically, the apartheid state's professional project operated as a form of social closure based primarily on race and to a lesser extent, gender and their intersections. Despite attempts at transformation, these legacies still shape the post-apartheid professional labour market. Nevertheless, there exists an active project of racial and, to a lesser extent, gendered transformation. The state attempted to address historic forms of social closure based primarily on race but also around gender. The success of this project is variable, with the public sector experiencing rapid and deep transformation on the basis of race; by the end of 2010, 87 percent of senior management were black compared to 6 percent in 1994. However, there has been far less success in the private sector. The 2015 Jack Hammer Executive Report showed that only 21 percent of the 334 people constituting the executive teams in South Africa's Top 40 companies were black South Africans.

Turning to the professions, one finds there are only a small number of black professionals in the traditional professions of accounting, engineering, law and medicine. To address this, some professional associations initiated their own programmes for redress and transformation. Amongst the most active has been the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). Recognising the deep-seated problems with maths education at school, they run a number of programmes for both school learners as well as university students. These focus on skills development, particularly in maths education, as well as financial assistance. Yet, despite such interventions, by 2016, only 10 percent of registered chartered accountants were black South African, and even smaller percentages black females (see Bonnin and Ruggunan 2016b). Black trainees and CAs refer to hostile environments in both the tertiary sector as well as in their professional training (see Bonnin and Ruggunan 2016b). Research (for example see Hammond et al., 2009, 2012; Perumal et al. 2012; Sadler and Erasmus 2003) has shown the way in which organisational cultures contribute to social closure and gatekeeping (racial and gendered) in these professions. An informal colour bar as manifested through language and cultural competencies operates in these professional environments, providing the key components of professional closure.

Impatient with the slow pace of transformation, the state has intervened in the regulation of a number of professions, passing legislation to enforce transformation (Bonnin 2019). Amongst recent legislation is the Legal Practice Act (2014) and the Auditing Profession Amendment Act (2015). An objective of the latter legislation is to amend the qualification route to become a registered auditor. To quote the relevant Minister ' … [it is] unacceptable that 21 years after democracy [amongst auditors, only] eight percent [are] Africans and 23 percent women' (see Bonnin and Ruggunan 2016b).

The globalisation of South African supply chains and subsequent changes in the labour market obstructed opportunities for the racial transformations of the labour market. The structural changes that triggered the closure of textile mills and the shifting of much production off-shore also resulted in a reconstructed labour market for textile designers (Bonnin 2013a). There are now fewer job opportunities and the 'place' in which textiles designers might find employment has changed. However, despite these changes and the demise of formal apartheid the race and gender of textile designers has not changed significantly over the past forty years. White female designers who entered the labour market twenty-five or thirty years ago have been able to utilise their networks to negotiate and find new places in a labour market reconstructed by the globalisation of the supply chain. Newly qualified black textile designers, who were denied training opportunities by the apartheid education system, have fewer job opportunities in a labour market that is employing fewer textile designers. The labour market restructuring resulting from globalisation is countering the possibilities of equalising access to the labour market in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Transformations of time

New ways of measuring and conceptualising time are central to industrial capitalism. Furthermore, these 're-conceptualisations' are at the heart of many conflicts between worker and manager. The re-conceptualisation of time is forced upon workers and enforced by capital though the organisation of work.

In his well-known text, *Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism*, E.P. Thompson demonstrates the way in which clock time and through that industrial time was imposed upon the English peasantry. He draws attention to the imposition of the 'new time-discipline' (1967, 85) in the textile mills and engineering workshops of industrialising England. The struggle between owner and worker became one over the length of the working day.

These struggles over time and work are also embedded in South African labour history. The settler-based colonial administration forced a temporal reorientation on local societies as a prelude to industrialisation. Atkins (1988) demonstrated that the settlers arrived with a pre-conceived conception of time, derived from their British heritage, one that had already absorbed the new time-discipline of the clock and the factory. The erection of the public clock and the use of church bells were important disciplining mechanisms in the enforcement of industrial time, as was the Christian week. Ultimately the settler conceptualisations of time were legislated; the Master and Native Servant Law, Act 40 of 1894 forced the issue by legislating the number of days in a month – an equal thirty – for

the purposes of work contracts, hence finding a middle ground in the dispute between the Georgian Calendar and a lunar month which excluded moonless days.

While these might have been the most fundamental of struggles over the conceptualisation of time where industrial capitalism was able to both discipline and transform time, the struggles persisted as capital continued to restructure labour time. At the heart of Fordist mass production are economies of scale with the need to reduce variable costs as much as possible. The ensuring conflicts were wide-ranging, across sectors and intersected with struggles over skill, job content and the racial and gendered divisions of labour. Webster (1985a, 31–31) documented the struggles by iron-moulders, in the early part of the twentieth century, over the length of the working day in the metal industry. One of the major issues fought by shop-workers' unions in the 1930s and early 1940s were hours of work (Kenny 2004). Qabula (1989, 66) wrote that he began work at Dunlop in 1974 after the previous workforce was fired as a result of their strike over the introduction of a new shift system. And Stewart's (2010) work reflected on the stalemate between mineworkers and mine bosses over a five-day working week versus a continuous shift system.

Casualisation brought a new dimension to the transformation of labour time – flexibility of labour time. Kenny's (2004) research in the retail sector indicated that approximately 65 percent of the retail workforce were casual workers, meaning that they did not have fixed hours of work, generally working only nineteen hours per week. Furthermore, there is no predictability to the days they work or the times they work on those days. Casual workers bear the burden of the company's use of numerical flexibility – when the store is busy, they work more often or longer; when the store is quiet, they work less.

Conclusion

Over time the South African workplace has changed fundamentally, influenced by a variety of dynamics. Some of those discussed in this paper included changes in the political sphere and shifts in economic policy, labour markets, technology and the construction of time. Yet the effect of these changes has not been uniform. Sectors and workplaces have been affected differently, influenced by the ways in which their supply chains have been reconfigured by the integration of the South African economy into the global economy. These transformations are not discreet but connect and transform sectors across place.

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Notes

[1] This narrative is drawn from interviews conducted with those in the textile supply chain.

[2] In Bonnin (2013a) I provide a detailed account of this shift in the local textile industry.

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