Becoming a social movement union: Cyril Ramaphosa and the National Union of Mineworkers

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In 1984, black African townships in South Africa exploded into popular revolt. The ANC called on township residents to ‘destroy the enemy organs of government’, rendering them ‘ineffective and inoperative’. Militant township youth seized on this principle of ‘ungovernability’ to impose ‘discipline’, often violent, on ordinary people trying to go about their everyday lives. Similar forms of disruption eventually spread from residential areas into factories in militant opposition to the apartheid work-place regime (Von Holdt 2003). ‘Ungovernability’ became a rallying cry for popular forces in the face of repressive violence from the South African state. Although resistance movements such as the UDF invoked the need for democratic order under a rubric of ‘people’s power’, the solidarities and liminalities of millenarian ungovernability and violence always lurked close to the surface in practices of confrontation during this period. This paper uses a single case to address the social origins of millenarian ungovernability on the South African gold mines in 1985. It also seeks to understand the potentials and pitfalls for union leadership of such enthusiasm and to outline union strategies to institutionalise and control it.

The National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa was avowedly not millenarian. Its leaders all – especially Cyril Ramaphosa – eschewed any claim to prophetic charisma. Nevertheless, I know of two relatively clear cases in the 1980s when NUM leaders arose who directly and militantly challenged management control, claiming charismatic power with supernatural assistance. One was at Cooke shaft on Randfontein Estates. The other was at Vaal Reefs gold mine – at the time the largest gold mine in the world with
more than 40,000 workers, three divisions (South, West and East), and nine deep shafts (about a mile and a half down). Events at Vaal Reefs South constitute the case study I shall deal with in this paper.

Events
The regional general manager at Vaal Reefs gave mine managers in each of the divisions virtually complete autonomy. Thus, in early 1985, the union had been recognised at Vaal Reefs West and was in the process of negotiating an agreement at Vaal Reefs East, whereas there was no union representation at all at Vaal Reefs South. Indeed, South management had been explicitly opposed to the union from its inception in 1982.

South division at Vaal Reefs, especially No. 8 shaft, was the milch cow of the entire Anglo-American corporation, producing thirty tons of gold a year. No. 9 (the other shaft in South division at the time) was a new shaft just coming into production. Other divisions handed over their most contentious and least hard-working workers (their malcontents) to No. 9 (as did No. 8 in South division, for that matter). Moreover, because No. 9 shaft was intended to introduce trackless mining at Vaal Reefs, workers with high school diplomas were hired to run the new machines. Many of them, as it turned out, had been township or homeland student militants.

The union leader at No. 9, however, was Lira Setona, an ordinary winch-driver from Lesotho who could hardly write his name. The high school graduates at No. 9 were suspicious of Lira but put up with him because his mobilising charisma outweighed his organisational unreliability. ‘Lira was somebody who was not educated. We suspected that he was using muti because everybody accepted him. He was never stopped [by management]...I was close to Lira because we were monitoring Lira’, Amos Mhlungwana, one of the ex-student radicals, told me. ‘We were not sure what really was happening. So we had to stay close to him. Because we didn’t want to make a strike that would backfire on us. Because he was sort of an individual. So we had to monitor him’. Lira had come over to No. 9 from No. 6 shaft on West division, which had been vigorously militant right from the beginning of the union. Although he had never been a leader at No. 6, on No. 9, Mhlungwana told me: ‘Lira was leading the whole thing’. The raggle-taggle, start-up bunch at No. 9 were not very productive as miners, but they certainly were militant under Lira’s prophetic leadership. As Mhlungwana mentioned, most of the workers who knew of him were convinced he used powerful muti. When I asked his sidekick, ‘Professor’ Salai, who is now a Zionist evangelist,
he laughed, however. ‘No’, he said, ‘it was holy water that protected him’. Muti by any other name, I thought.

Even No. 8 shaft was beginning to rouse up. An earnest young clerk, Nicholas Mkwanazi, recently transferred from East Division, was selected to head up the nascent branch committee at No. 8 shaft. Thanks to the efforts of Mkwanazi and his comrades at No. 8 and Lira at No. 9, the union had been signing up members in South division at a fantastic rate. There was no approach to management until shortly before the March 1985 liquor outlet boycott, however. South Division personnel manager, Stroom Strydom remembered: ‘Suddenly we had many stop order forms. It wasn’t a matter of hundreds; it was about thirteen thousand at one time that they presented to us. Immediately after that the next day the trouble started’. Because the union had not been recognised there were no procedures in place for discussion. Consultative committees were useless, black personnel staff had melted into the woodwork, and there was no institutional space for negotiation.

Lira was a legend at Vaal Reefs. A tall man with a soft voice, he seemed able to mesmerise huge crowds of black workers and turn them to his will. Nankie de Wit, manager of personnel for the entire Vaal Reefs complex, heard about him from John Mayer, a section manager at No. 9:

He was surely the most powerful guy that I’ve heard about. At No. 9 shaft the workers decided to stay underground. This guy I knew very well, John Mayer (he wasn’t scared of anybody) took Lira down there just the two of them. He says to me afterwards, he says, ‘Nankie, he stood up – the guys were going like mad, shouting and screaming – and Lira just said once or twice, ‘Amandla, amandla’, and everything went quiet. He said, ‘Now this is the story. You get right into the cage. I’ll make sure you’re loaded. We can’t stay here. We’ll talk about it when we are on top’. The guy opened the cages and they all got on. He got that whole mine cleaned that night. Just he and this John Mayer, only two guys. Remember down there you are in a shaft area. All those avenues to the shaft were packed. Between you and life is that cage. You must get into it and you must ring first and there’s a delay so you’ve got no chance. When you’re down there you’ve got no chance if those guys want to get rough. The two went down and they got the whole shaft up...That’s where I heard about Lira. He had a hell of an influence. Very strong.

James Motlatsi, the president of the union, also admired Lira for his daring and his leadership skill. In time, however, Motlatsi said Lira:
...started to fight not only against management; he also destroyed all
the union structures there. No branch committees, no shaft committees,
no shaft steward committees, it was he and four other guys who
commanded Vaal Reefs. He was saying he doesn’t report to anybody.
He reports directly to the president or the general secretary. All others
in between are sell-outs.

Union official, Jeff Magida, told me that he had a group of young men
moving with him, ‘…amabutho (meaning ‘warriors, people who are prepared
to fight’). They owed their loyalty to him, more than to the union. These were
the foot-soldiers, you see’. Menacing as were Lira’s amabutho, participants
told me violence was not necessary to get support for him. His special
powers and the discipline of his followers sufficed, I was told.

In March 1985, union meetings started occurring all over the Vaal Reefs
complex without management authorisation. A ‘management summary of
labour unrest’ on Vaal Reefs South fills out some of the details. Liquor
outlets on the mines were boycotted and these boycotts soon spread to
concession stores, dry cleaning depots and local supermarkets. In one week
alone, R1.2 million was withdrawn from cash savings outlets administered
by TEBA, the recruiting corporation. Organised sports on the mines were
stopped. Ordinary workers marched into senior black messes set up for black
team leaders and officials and demanded service. On March 18, at No. 6, No.
7 and No. 9 shafts, workers upped the ante and started working short (four
hour) shifts. Union action had finally impacted production. On March 25, No.
9 shaft stewards demanded the dismissal of the Tswana induna; on March
27, at an authorised meeting at No. 8 hostel, shaft stewards publically
‘belittled and intimidated’ senior black employees; on March 28, a materials
car ‘fell’ down No. 9 shaft, stopping all work for a day; on April 1, the shaft
stewards at No. 8 hostel demanded the dismissal of the Xhosa induna; on
April 2, about 20 people crowded into the office of a PA at No. 9 shaft and
told him to leave the mine; on April 3, the Sotho induna at No. 8 hostel was
told to leave; on April 12, ‘a mob of approximately 200 people removed a
Personnel Assistant from his office at No. 9 shaft and saw the Production
Manager and demanded that he be removed from the mine’. From April 4,
management notes report ‘sporadic incidents with gradual erosion of general
discipline’. Cages were rushed underground, workers simply ignored orders
to be paraded for disciplinary hearings, people refused to hand in their work
tickets, making it impossible to keep track of who was working short shifts,
and there was a general tendency to ‘work to rule’, that is refuse ‘white man’s
work’.

The pattern is clear. The union campaign against racism on the mines was targeting racial ‘collaborators’, black workers who were perceived to administer the workplaces and hostels on behalf of whites. In targeting black officials, Lira was following NUM policy. Indunas had long been the subject of union criticism at West division and problems arose in regard to senior black mine officials at East division as well. Morena Phero at No. 8 at South division, remembered the Tswana induna whom the union tried to get fired, saying that ‘when you went in representing someone in a case, he would stand behind you and influence the hearing by making gestures to the compound manager’.

Incidents of intimidation and threats against team leaders, white miners and shift bosses – the principal agents of management control in the workplace – increased. White miners were targeted underground at both No. 8 and No. 9. ‘It was pretty tough out there...People were so scared they were trying to take revolvers down’, Dave Hodgson, production manager at No. 9, told me.

There were endless meetings with shaft stewards. No. 8 production manager, Andries Schoombee, (who had to deal at No. 8 with Nicholas Mkwanazi) remembered:

Now, instead of spending 5 or 10 per cent of my time with these black guys, I’m now doing 50 and 60 per cent. And it has to take place from four o’clock in the afternoon until ten, eleven, twelve or one o’clock at night. You have guys that are totally untrained – very anti-white, anti-management, anti-everything. Man, you must experience this to understand what we had to go through...It was impossible to deal with all these committees. You sit down and you talk about something logically and we’d all come to an agreement. OK, this is what we’ll do. Then they turn around and they go to the hostels and then somebody says, ‘No, man, you’re fucking working with the whites. You can’t do that’. Next morning you hear that the decision has been totally slung around and it’s now totally different from the decisions that were made at the meetings.

For the first time in the history of South African mining, workers were directly and collectively (and more or less democratically) confronting the structure that had sustained production in the industry for almost a century for its racist underpinnings. Ungovernability had come to the mines.

Workers refused to queue up endlessly while whites got hoisted first. Not
only did they demand that whites queue up alongside them, blacks also insisted that the white miners travel in full cages alongside them, not below them in separate half-empty lifts. They began to challenge the picannin system whereby every white worker had a personal retainer, a black, to carry his tools and often to work in his garden after hours. They also began to question the system whereby whites were paid to do the blasting but in fact induced their black assistants to carry explosives, to charge up, and to blast for them despite the law and without remuneration.

According to Schoombee, these demands for the removal of racial laws were accompanied by widespread industrial sabotage:

They were damaging winches, they were damaging locomotives, they were blocking drains underground, they were closing compressed air valves, they were stealing explosives. Man, it was chaos. And you couldn’t react. And they were intimidating their own people on a scale that you’ve never seen or experienced in your life ... Kick and hit and kill them ... Look, I can tell you it was a disaster. They were wrecking the underground situation and they were singing, toyi-toying and all that crap. You couldn’t but hate the guys eventually, I can tell you ... Because they do it underground. They do it on the surface. They wreck the hostels. Man, it is an unpleasant experience. It is something you want to avoid if you can ... There were bolts into the pinions of the winches. The controls of the locomotives – just take a hammer and break it up. On a major scale and a regular basis ... And then they were interfering with the hoisting. It was chaos. Chaos! ... Getting up in the cage and now they’re forcing the whites to integrate – to come up at the same time. And they were bloody hitting them and pissing on them from above and so on. Terrible, terrible. Pulling the onsetter off. Taking their keys. Operating the bells.

Stroom Strydom, chief personnel officer at South division, agreed. ‘I can tell you it was nearly a war’, he said: ‘It was really getting out of control’. It is hard to imagine a clearer description of ungovernability.

Interestingly enough, from the union point of view, Oliver Sokanyile, until recently local regional chairperson of the NUM, had a similar impression. ‘At No. 9 and No. 8 Lira was the boss now’, he told me:

At first I saw him at a meeting at No. 8. I slipped in and hid myself among the workers there. Lira first wanted the chairperson of the shaft there to address the workers. Lira wanted to hear first what he had to say. The chairperson didn’t know what to say. He tried to address the issues showing them how dangerous it was. Then Lira, who was a tall chap with a nice voice who could appeal to the people, took two chairs, sat the
chairperson down in one of them, stood on the other one and addressed No. 8 about what to do. He spoke in Sesotho with a chap interpreting. The chairperson had to run for his life because he wanted workers to go back to work. Machine operators were not working at all because Lira said they should not work. They should not go back until they had their demands met. The money was too little, conditions were bad. But they made no effort to negotiate with management or even to inform management about their grievances. It was just the action and then after the action it was grievance. It was desperate there.

Things had come to a head at a union meeting on April 24, when the drillers at Vaal Reefs South decided not to charge up, saying it was white man’s work – as indeed it was according to the law. Vaal Reefs management had arranged for legal exemptions to the regulations but the workers did not know that – and it was certainly not reflected in their pay cheques. Next day, Tuesday, April 23, 64 machine operators at No. 8 were paraded for a dismissal hearing. About 800 turned up, claiming that they too were not working and charging management victimisation. On Wednesday, April 24, when a further 250 workers were paraded for disciplinary action, more than a thousand showed up. Things were getting very, very serious. NUM Head Office was called in to try to sort things out, but Lira was inspired to insurrection. Oliver Sokanyile takes up the story at this point:

We reported [Lira’s defiance] to Head Office. First, Cyril [Ramaphosa] came to discuss it and a shaft stewards council meeting was called and we all went to No. 6 shaft, even the people from No. 9. And Lira defied Cyril. Cyril gave up. Then James [Motlatsi] and Barayi came. He defied them. James just laughed and said, ‘OK Lira, you can go home and whoever wants to follow you can follow you’. And that was that.

On Friday, April 26, at both No. 8 and No. 9, the union took over the hostel, chained the gates, and nobody went to work. Shaft stewards at No. 8 shaft went from room to room announcing a meeting that afternoon. Nicholas tried desperately to persuade the workers to return to work. Wiseman Nobongwana, at that time an illiterate young migrant worker from Pondoland, still remembers that meeting and the tension between Nicholas and Lira:

Even on that Friday, in the afternoon, Nicholas addressed us saying, ‘No, no!’ appealing to us to go back to our jobs, saying in Xhosa, ‘If a ship goes back when it is fighting it is not running away, but it wants to get more power’. But Lira, who [had been addressing a similar meeting at No. 9] came to No. 8 and on his arrival Nicholas was actually addressing us. We were very reluctant to go back to our different jobs.
Lira said, ‘Viva, Number 8! Viva! Viva! Certainly at No. 9, nobody will report to his job’. Then the workers carried Lira shoulder-high from No. 8 to No. 9. That was how our strike started and we were dismissed on the Sunday. In fact, No. 9 was dismissed on the Saturday and on the following day they came back to No. 8 and they were dismissed.

In Wiseman’s opinion, there was a certain inevitability about the situation. In situations of confrontation with management, union leaders have to go with the will of the workers they represent. Nonetheless, virtually every participant to whom I spoke (white management personnel as well as black workers and unionists) insisted on Lira’s uniquely charismatic power and many mentioned *muti*. Every leader at the time to whom I spoke was troubled by Lira’s unwillingness to submit to union discipline, despite being impressed with his visionary power.

Over 14,000 workers were dismissed in all – 13,000 from Vaal Reefs South and 1,400 who attempted a sympathy strike at No. 7 shaft in the West division. To carry out the dismissals, mine security had to break down the hostel gates and release the workers, who had been sleeping on the ground with shaft stewards patrolling the perimeters. Workers were marched to the huge Harry Oppenheimer stadium in the centre of the Vaal Reefs complex where the turnstiles had been turned backwards. They were paid out, put into waiting buses and shipped home.

A few months later, Lira’s burned body was found at the bottom of a pass in Lesotho. Rumour has it that a black Mosotho personnel administrative official from No. 8 shaft took out a contract on him, but the case has never been definitively resolved.

On April 29, 1985, Ramaphosa met with the Vaal Reefs management team to discuss the mass dismissals. Lira Setona was gone. On May 1, Ramaphosa reported to the acting regional general manager, that the NUM shaft stewards now unanimously agreed ‘to do everything in their power to get the situation at Vaal Reefs back to normal as soon as possible’. He requested permission for them ‘to hold meetings at every shaft to communicate this decision...to members with a view of getting full agreement amongst members’. Meanwhile, he reported, ‘our shaft stewards are living in fear of their safety and life as they have been threatened with arrest and indeed some have already been arrested’. Management was suspected of being party to many of those actions, since, Ramaphosa wrote, senior black officials on the mine (indunas and umtetelis) ‘continuously ridicule and threaten our shaft stewards in a very provocative manner’.
At the time it seemed that the union had been decisively defeated on Vaal Reefs. That was what all the local union members I interviewed told me. They had learned a lesson, they said. Thenceforth, they always tried to persuade workers to accept compromises short of mass dismissal. For all his admiration for Lira’s personal charisma, Ramaphosa’s preference for governmentality was reinforced by the experience at Vaal Reefs. Two years later, when Anglo-American began to implement mass dismissals during the third week of the 1987 strike, Ramaphosa conceded defeat.16

What local union stalwarts did not know, however, were the long-term effects of the 1985 dismissals on gold production at Vaal Reefs. As I have said, Vaal Reefs, No. 8 was the milch cow of the entire Anglo operation, perhaps Anglo-American’s most productive single shaft. Each week after the dismissals was costing the corporation more than two-thirds of a ton of refined gold. At the then gold price of $325 an ounce, that amounted to lost income of roughly $15 million a week. Andries Schoombee, the production manager told me:

> At No. 8 [in the early 1980s], I was producing three tons of gold a bloody month – 320 or 330 thousand tons of reef a month. There’s nothing in this country that’s ever done that and there will never be a single unit producing that sort of tonnage again.

In the end, virtually every worker was taken back minus the ‘troublemakers’. Taking back experienced workers was only a beginning, however. Dave Hodgson explained that even supposedly loyal workers took their time returning:

> Pretorius [Anglo general manager for the Transvaal] thought that since the team leaders had been more loyal, they’d come roaring back. But some of them hadn’t got home yet. And they’d just been cashed out with a whole 20 years of service that they’d earned. They were in no hurry to come back and look after the mine’s production interests.

Even when they did get back, it was difficult to get immediate results. When people came back they were not necessarily put back in the job they’d previously been doing ...You know, the teams work together, they understand each other. At one stage there was a decision that we must just recruit people. I spoke out against that because in reality No. 8 was an incredible machine – doing 43,000 sq metres a month – more than any shaft today. They were efficient in terms of operations and getting the actual material down the shaft and getting the people up and down – you’re talking 7,000 people a day going down the shaft. That’s
logistics. You can’t just train 7,000 people to go down a strange shaft and mine 40,000 metres a month.

Mike Smith, who was manager of the South division, reflected with me on the difficulties:

Getting guys to leave the mine was the easy part. The difficult part was trying to put Humpty Dumpty together again. I never want to do that again. The stope crews were made up of guys from different parts of the world. So if you said to TEBA (the recruiting agency), ‘Right, we want X hundred guys back from that area’, you got pieces of every crew from all over the place. It was a logistics nightmare. I take my hat off to the guys. Andries Schoombee, who was the production manager, and others too. Within three months that shaft was back to stoping output. What happened was, because they’d been off now for two months, everybody [meaning top management] said, ‘Right, no development. Put everybody in the stopes’. We said, ‘Hey, bad decision’. But [Vaal Reefs general manager] Williams wouldn’t hear of it. He just said, ‘Everybody must stope’.

The intent in this case was to demonstrate to the union that mass dismissals had had no effect on the profitability of the mine. As we have seen, such dissembling worked quite well, but the technical costs were substantial. Mike Smith continued:

So we didn’t do any development for most of 1985. Then, it continued into 1986 because of the massive gold shortfall at the end of 1985. They said, ‘Right, you keep on going like that’. So we did very little development in 1986. Then came the 1987 strike. That’s what caused the [eventual production] slump at No. 8 shaft. We just ran out of development. But those were deliberate instructions...

The whole point of deep-level gold mining in South Africa is to use current revenue to cover development costs, which are very high. Development, which is unproductive, also opens up the mining of payable ore as one goes along. Cutting back on development after the 1985 dismissals meant that No. 8 didn’t really get back on track until the late 1990s, if then. The shaft certainly paid dearly for those mass dismissals.

The union may have learned a lesson, but so did management. Mass dismissals were no simple solution to union militancy on technically sophisticated large modern mines. While other mining houses continued to use them, Anglo was always very careful. The price paid at Vaal Reefs South was simply too high and the corporation continued to pay it for many years.
It was a long road to a negotiated order with union participation on the South African gold mines – to governmental rather than disciplinary control – but it began with the lessons of the 1985 mass dismissals. Lira Setona did not die entirely in vain. Managers and the union alike drew their own conclusions from the experience. Gradually, some Anglo managers began to develop a more participative management style. But that is another story.\(^\text{18}\)

**Analysis**

In his classic essay, ‘The rise of social-movement unionism’, Eddie Webster (1988:174-96, and also 1987:21-29) argued that the South African union movement in the 1980s had two dimensions: a shop floor dimension (focused on winning increases and improvements in working conditions) and a political or *voice* dimension (focused on achieving rights and power for workers).\(^\text{19}\)

Shop floor unionism developed in South Africa after the Durban strikes in 1973 as a deliberately local, factory-based (and eventually industry-based) workers’ struggle for better economic and work conditions. It also had a social and political dimension, however, stressing leadership accountability and democratic organisation with popularly elected, activist shop stewards demanding basic human rights in the workplace.

Independent black trade unions that developed after 1973 deliberately eschewed national political objectives, however, because of a history of state repression. This changed at the end of 1984 when unionised workers in independent trade unions were drawn into the social and political movement against apartheid. The outcome was what Webster calls ‘social-movement unionism’. I shall argue in this paper that the events in early 1985 at Vaal Reefs were symptomatic of the NUM’s transition from an industrial to a social movement union. Moreover, as the case of Lira Setona emphasizes, union officials were well aware that social movement unions always ran the risk of tipping over into ungovernability.\(^\text{20}\)

Given the importance of social movement unionism more generally and the phenomenal growth rate of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in particular, there is a tendency to see the union as a social movement union from its beginning in 1982, especially since it was founded at the instigation of the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), the black power union confederation. It is a serious mistake to assume that because the NUM was founded as a CUSA union it therefore neglected shop-floor issues and local organisation. The union must be measured in terms of its own history rather
than simply painted with the CUSA brush. In the best treatment of the rise of the NUM, Jonathan Crush (1989:7) notes a phase of what he calls ‘formation and early growth’ between 1982 and 1984 before the union was ‘consolidated’.21

In the 1980s the NUM was the fastest-growing union in South Africa, indeed, probably the fastest-growing union in the world. Even in its formative stage it grew very fast. In 1984, within 18 months of its first congress, the union had been recognised for at least some segment of the work force on seven Anglo-American mines.22 After following a tortuous legal process to arrive at a strike ballot that year, the union obtained more than 43,000 votes for a strike on the seven Anglo mines. That is truly phenomenal growth and it accelerated in 1985, even though (perhaps because) the strike was called off at the last minute. However much the union strove to address shop-floor issues, such rapid growth would obviously have given rise to organisational problems. Despite his effectiveness as an organiser, Lira Setona provides an example of one such set of problems.

I would like to discuss two general issues illuminated by this particular case. Firstly, the rise of Lira Setona enables us to address feelings and emotions in the emergence of social movements – an issue that tends to be neglected in the social movement literature. Secondly, if it is possible to generalise about structures of feeling that enabled the rise of Setona, why was his charismatic brand of union activism with its liminal overtones not more common among NUM leaders? How did the NUM counter the tendency to ungovernability towards which Lira’s inspired followers were so clearly inclined? I suggest that Ramaphosa and the NUM exercised a particular form of leadership, what Foucault calls ‘pastoral power’, in leading the union between the Scylla of top-down authoritarianism and the Charybdis of ungovernability. The particular events at Vaal Reefs South can thus be generalised to enable theoretical insights into problems of leadership and how they were overcome in the rise of the NUM as a social movement union.

Structures of feeling
Raymond Williams, the British Marxist literary critic who himself grew up as a member of the working class in Wales, always insisted on the importance of what he called ‘structures of feeling’, elements of social experience that precede the emergence of social movements, ‘social experiences in solution’ as he put it (Williams 1977:133). Structures of feeling, for Williams, imply emotions common to members of a collectivity, and hence shared, but not
expressed to one another (or at least not expressed collectively) and hence ‘still in process, often indeed not yet recognised as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating’. Such structures of feeling, emotional processes ‘exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action’.

Williams is referring here, I think, to anger, moral outrage and despair that are intensely experienced by individuals but do not yet – and sometimes never – mobilise collective action. Structures of feeling arise as outcomes of intolerable institutional situations that participants believe cannot be changed. There is a tension, Williams writes, ‘between the received interpretation and practical experience…an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency; the moment of conscious comparison not yet come, often not even coming’ (Williams 1977:130). The characteristics of ‘structures of feeling’ (and Williams is often criticised for the ambiguity of this concept to which he clung so stubbornly)23 ‘are often more recognisable at a later stage, after they have been (as sometimes happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations’ (Williams 1977:132).

The emotional underpinnings of social movement organisations,24 for Williams, thus pre-exist organisation in common (but not necessarily consciously shared) individual experiences, make possible organisational mobilising power, and are often occasioned by structural pressures – even contradictions – built into pre-existing patterns of institutionalisation. Feelings are thus situationally structured without being experienced as collective. Mobilisation may indeed require organisational capacity and what Doug McAdam (1982:48-51) called ‘cognitive liberation’, but the latter is always embedded in already existing, but often latent, ‘structures of feeling’.

In an evocative honours thesis submitted for an undergraduate degree at the National University of Lesotho in 1976, Palesa Sebilo gives an account of Basotho migrant structures of feeling, entitled ‘What do the miners say?’ Her study was based on 55 interviews with miners and ex-miners and five of ‘their’ women, living in widely scattered villages across Lesotho. She makes a simple heuristic distinction between three different categories of migrant workers: uneducated miners, semi-educated miners, and educated miners. ‘Uneducated miners’ were either illiterate (quite rare in Lesotho at this time) or had completed only the lowest grades so that they could read and write only with difficulty and do little more than simple arithmetic. Such men were traditionalists who migrated to support their commitment to a rural way of
life. At this time in Lesotho, mine work (and occasional day-labour on Free State farms) was virtually the only option for wage labour. ‘Semi-educated miners’ had an elementary education through about standard six (eighth grade). They tended to have broken with ‘customs and tradition’ and were deeply estranged from both rural Sesotho existence and from the menial mine work they were forced to do. For these men too, mine work was their only option. ‘Educated miners’ had completed their Junior Certificates (tenth grade) or matriculated from high school. They included ‘people who have either been senior civil servants, teachers, policemen or occupied an important office in the civil service, and who have been dislodged in one way or another from their occupations’ (Sebilo 1976:13). Many of them, I suspect, took themselves off to the mines after Chief Leabua Jonathan annulled parliamentary elections and assumed absolute power in 1970. I have myself interviewed several such men, active in the Basotholand Congress Party, who ran the Lesotho liberation movement from the South African mine compounds and also became active in the National Union of Mineworkers when it was eventually established late in 1982. Their political networks were essential to the rapid growth of the union.

I believe that Sebilo’s categories apply more widely than to Basotho (Moodie and Ndatshe 1994:11-43). The original Xhosa word for ‘working for the whites’ was pangela, which literally means to grab or seize. Several generations of young men endured the hardships of mine work so as to plunder, to pangela, the wealth that made possible respectable old age presiding over a homestead in the presence of the shades. For traditionalist young men in labour supply areas throughout Southern Africa, migration to the mines became an extension of male initiation rituals. Palesa Sebilo (1976:17) quotes an old Mosotho man, a traditionalist who started working on the mines in 1937, who said:

‘Although we had a lot of animals, I could not stay at home like women. It was unheard of for a young man to relax at home and look after cattle like a little boy or his old father. All young men went to the mines. I did not care for [about?] any trying conditions of the mines. After all, “a baby boy is born to be eaten by vultures” in his struggle for survival, even if it could be at the expense of his life’.

Traditional migrant conceptions of manhood deliberately invoked racialised ‘discipline’ on the mines as a test to be overcome. In the words of a younger traditionalist:
‘The work underground can be endured by only those with firm and tough knees; men suckled properly by their mothers. Cowards and weaklings are revealed, the white man does not tolerate such “bed-wetters”. When you show your talent with the shovel, he will never interfere with you’.

Sebilo’s ‘semi-educated’ miners were much more overt in their expression of dissatisfaction. These were men with elementary school education and much less commitment to rural life-styles. More wage-dependent, their concern was about pay and the self-respect decent wages might bring. In this regard they had become proletarian. The old rural integrity, already slipping away in 1976 even amongst the traditionalists, had completely disappeared in this group. Sebilo reported them to be much more politically-minded than the traditionalists, even revolutionary. Racial resentments cut deep. In the words of one of them (1976:33):

‘We are handled like unthinking animals … We are not regarded as people that bring such wealth to South Africa. You just have to stand and watch big towns of South Africa. Look at the towering buildings of Johannesburg and recall that they were built by the sweat and blood from your ancestors, but you don’t even have a place to raise your head in them. The most painful part of it is the knowledge that the very man standing by you and pointing with his finger where you should dig gets a salary that quintuplicates yours. Yet he does not recognise your job as important to him … And this act they put up to make us feel that we are pests that trouble them in their country is nerve wracking and intolerable’.

For these men, mine migration brought no promise of redemption in rural futures.

By the early 1970s, most traditionalists on the mines came from far beyond the borders of the country. When mine wages started to rise in 1972 and to attract more and more fully proletarianised workers from South Africa itself, the numbers of Sebilo’s second type of worker increased hand over fist. It was not so much that traditional standards of integrity dissolved overnight. They had long been eroding in the South African countryside as underdevelopment and apartheid resettlement took their toll. Rural possibilities for redemption in South Africa were more and more the pipe-dreams of reactionary old men without land as younger men began to rebel against a migrant system that held no hope for them (Bank 1999). On the mines, the change came fast because the composition of the labour force changed radically in a short time. Between 1974 and 1980 the labour force on
the South African gold mines changed from 70 per cent ‘foreign labour’ to more than 70 per cent South African. It is important also to note the impact of ‘labour stabilisation’ on mine migration. Computer tracking and re-engagement guarantees obliged mine workers to become ‘career miners’ with only short periods of leave at home (Crush et al 1991:152-75).

The old moral order on the mines, founded on the integrity of traditionalist workers with prospects for redemption in the countryside, collapsed almost overnight. Racial humiliation was experienced with new intensity by the ‘new workers’ as was poverty in the sending areas. As early as 1976 in Lesotho, Palesa Sebilo (1976:38-9) concluded that the miners of this type to whom she spoke ‘seemed to be saying that they are humiliated, their “ego” and dignity injured and dragged on the mud, by everybody that deals with them’.25

Looking back, then, Sebilo’s work enables us to divine an emergent structure of feeling on the mines that helps us understand the meteoric rise of the NUM. Migrant workers densely packed together in mine compounds had come to feel excluded from access to any redemptive power that might confirm their self-respect and integrity and enable them to transcend the contingencies and exigencies of their dangerous jobs and the desperate poverty that mired their distant families. For Kenelm Burridge (1969:107), writing of cargo cults in the Pacific, this type of situation is the first phase of a millenarian pattern because:

People are unable to participate in or manipulate that power whose ordering connotes a higher or more satisfactory redemption. They begin to regard themselves as ‘just rubbish’ or as ‘rubbish-men’, or feel they are regarded as such by others. But this cannot be borne. There must be some way of gaining an acknowledged integrity…What matters is that power, once recognised, should be ordered and rendered intelligible and that integrity should derive from this ordering.

Not all potentially millenarian situations have millenarian outcomes. Nonetheless, I wish to suggest that ordinary members the National Union of Mineworkers, when it was established on the mines in 1982, sometimes couched their demands in millenarian terms. Lira’s militancy gave voice to such demands. Although, as we shall see, these were usually firmly checked by the governing practices of union leadership, the union’s moral authority and its redemptive promise are very important for understanding its rapid rise and wide-ranging early support. For many of its grassroots members the union promised renewed integrity.
Let me be very clear here. The National Union of Mineworkers is not and never was a millenarian movement. It did, however, originate in structures of feeling which cried out for new patterns of redemption and to an important extent it delivered such new patterns for its members. When the union was formed by Cyril Ramaphosa late in 1982, he undertook the task at the request of CUSA, the Black Consciousness trade union federation. He himself had been jailed for his leadership in COSAS, the black consciousness student union at Turfloop, inspired by black theology and had earlier been involved in an evangelical Christian outreach organisation. He saw his leadership of the union as ‘a quest to drink from the cup of what I saw as the most oppressed … part of this apartheid edifice’, he told me:

As a young boy growing up in Soweto, I used to see [black miners] at Johannesburg station. They would be huddled up in a corner, holding their loaf of bread. People didn’t talk to them. We didn’t mix with them. They were a completely different breed of people and they were looked down upon…I mean they were treated as the lowest of even us, the oppressed people in this country. For me, the challenge was to fight for their dignity; to get mineworkers to walk tall; to be proud of being mineworkers; to be proud of the contribution they were making to the economy of this country; for mine workers not to feel that they were nothing, nonentities.

There was a sense in which Ramaphosa with his zeal for human dignity and the alienated structure of feeling of the ‘new workers’ on the mines were made for one another. But Ramaphosa was no millenarian and never set himself forward as a prophet. He was a lawyer, possessed of extraordinary energy and organisational skills and determined to found a union with deep local roots and a professional and incorruptible central administration.

In 1984, wage negotiations stalled and the union called a strike. The Chamber made a last-minute offer and the strike was called off. By then, however, 50,000 workers were already out. Union officials worked through the night, several nights in a row in fact, to talk workers back. Workers remained unhappy and many ‘educated’ early representatives found themselves voted out of office. Also the strength of the strike turn-out persuaded management that they had to take the union seriously and managers started to put pressure on black administrative staff on the mines who were also union representatives. Many resigned from the union. Workers responded by simply choosing shaft stewards from their own ranks. Ramaphosa explained:
We knew, I knew instinctively, that the initial leadership that we courted, it was necessary to get that elite type of leadership because they were the gatekeepers. They were going to open the doors for us ... They provided respectability and they gave a perspective, a basic understanding to the general mass body of mineworkers. It was not essentially their interests that we wanted to advocate because they were already earning enough. It was the interests of those at the lower levels that we wanted to cater for and advocate, and we knew, I knew, that they were very conservative, many of them; not all, by the way. Many of them were very conservative... And the shaft steward training was aimed at ensuring that, you know, the roots we were setting up in the various branches go deeper. So that we don’t have sort of a skin deep organisational structure.

Early shaft steward training was conducted by Ramaphosa (as general secretary), with James Motlatsi and Elijah Barayi, the elected president and vice-president of the union. It was eye-opening. At once latent structures of feeling became shared understandings. Myriad worker grievances were brought forth. Many centred on the experience of racism.

At the annual congress of the Union in January, 1985, a new strategy emerged, incorporating insights from the structure of feeling about racial humiliation. On May 6, 1985, Cyril Ramaphosa gave a public lecture at the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR Topical Opinion, PD 3/83, July 31, 1985) announcing the drastic change in NUM strategy that had taken place at the beginning of the year. The National Union of Mineworkers, he said, had been ‘trying to make fundamental change in a system using structures and instruments that were designed to perpetuate the system’. For the first three years of the union, they had organised around issues like safety, wages and working-class unity. Since the 1984 strike, however, democratically elected shaft stewards had urged the union to embark on more general resistance to white control both at the point of production and in the migrant hostels. Management control on the mines was expressed in a racist system ‘defined by oppression and exploitation of the black miner’. Resistance to racial exploitation and thoughtless authoritarianism had become the fundament of the NUM’s new organising strategy, he said. Constant pressure on mine managements by black workers underground and in the hostels was the only way to confront the industry’s ‘ancient industrial relations practices, its mindlessness, and its violence’.

Ramaphosa was careful to insist that the new strategy derived directly from meetings of union shaft stewards. Physical resistance against humiliating
and dehumanising white violence underground, for instance, came directly from the ‘utter frustration and pain’ of black workers themselves, he said, making a direct reference to the structure of feeling outlined by Sebilo. The entire tenor of Ramaphosa’s argument, as Marcel Golding pointed out to me:\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{...was about the restoration of dignity, the rights of workers, how the mining industry had degraded people and that degradation was precisely one of the leading causes of violence. You cannot keep people in unacceptable conditions and expect them not to be hard people, expect them not to resist.}

Instead of relying purely on strike threats, Ramaphosa said, shaft stewards had decided to adopt new tactics. Besides fighting back physically against all assaults by white supervisors underground, shaft stewards were resolved to attack the induna system in the compounds and the picannin system underground. Shaft stewards were refusing to give white miners preference in queues waiting to be hoisted, they were determined that whites not use black workers for charging up without extra pay and they had begun to protest excessive profits at mine liquor outlets and concession stores and price gouging by taxi drivers and supermarkets around the mines. Thus, at the end of 1984 and the beginning of 1985, rank and file shaft stewards steered the growing union into a general popular struggle against racist and authoritarian white control at work and in the migrant hostels. Vaal Reefs South was at the crest of this new movement. Leaders of the NUM found themselves surfing a mighty wave of collective racial resentment, trying to govern the thrust to ungovernability. Unique as Lira might have been then, his charismatic power stemmed from union activation of widespread structures of feeling.

I asked Ramaphosa if Lira had ever been to shaft steward training. ‘No’, he said, ‘Lira just shot up from nowhere. He was an extraordinary man. Really extraordinary. Like Bhala at Randfontein, Lira was an incredibly difficult guy’.\textsuperscript{28} I asked him what the appeal was of such prophetic characters. Referring directly to the structure of feeling I have described, he said:

\textit{Man, they came through and they were able to strike a very sensitive chord on issues which were irking the workers. Where workers were in great pain and deep grievance. They just needed somebody who would just, you know, organise them to overthrow the institution that seemed to be perpetuating this. I mean, I saw it with Lira Setona. He had enormous power. He mesmerised the workers. Over and above us. Yes. I mean, we were nothing. He was very, very talented.}
It would be difficult to find a description much closer to Burridge’s conception of the millenarian prophet.

Individual experiences that made up the structure of feeling so well described by and to Paleso Sebilo ten years before, now burst forth in a social movement union fueled by intense moral outrage and liminal conviction. According to Burridge (1969:164), a prophet ‘shows forth the contradictions of a particular social experience, posits solutions, and enables followers to define what they are or want to be’. On Vaal Reefs South, under Lira’s prophetic leadership, neither management nor union leadership could control the liminal fury that burst forth. In this regard, Lira was as much a symptom as a cause – but on the mines ungovernability led to mass dismissals and disaster for the NUM on Vaal Reefs South. We may leave the last word from the union point of view on the 1985 dismissals to Oliver Sokanyile, the first NUM regional chairperson in the Vaal Reefs region, who said to me: ‘No. 8 and No. 9 followed Lira and they learned a lesson. Lira never came back and No. 8 and No. 9 became weak again’. The union needed to develop leadership techniques to ride the waves of racial resentment on the mines.

**Pastoral power**

What is perhaps most extraordinary is that there were so few ungovernable millenarian events on the gold mines during this turbulent period. Given the speed with which the union grew and the racial humiliations that continued to be both consciously and unthinkingly imposed on black workers, it is a credit to the organising ability and leadership style of Ramaphosa and his colleagues – and to the good sense of local union leaders like Charles Mapasheoane and Oliver Sokanyile – that prophetic figures like Lira were few and far between. When I asked Ramaphosa how they avoided repetitions of the Lira disaster he simply said: ‘We learned a lot. We learned’. I would suggest that the union countered millenarian tendencies by exercising what Michel Foucault called ‘pastoral power’.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Michel Foucault proposed that we analyse power not only in its repressive aspects but also as formative, creating consent from individuals on and through whom it works by constituting their very selves. He distinguished punitive, ‘juridical’ power from an alternative type that produces ‘subjects’ (in both senses of the term) and ‘normalizes’ them (Foucault 2000:118-33). To describe such power, which he saw as typical of liberal modernity, Foucault coined the term, ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 2000:208-222). Foucault was wont to invoke
Christian pastoral techniques of control as originating the intersection between knowledge, power and subjective experience that was central to this problematic.\(^{29}\)

What did Foucault mean by a ‘pastoral’ style of leadership? If, as I wish to argue, it characterised Ramaphosa’s leadership style, how are we to describe it? In the first place, the pastoral leader does not dominate. Instead, he gathers his followers together, guides and leads them. This is fundamentally beneficent power, directing the conduct of its followers, individualising them in a complex mutual relationship of responsibility. For the pastoral leader, wielding power is a duty, pursued with zeal, devotion and endless application, offering care to others but denying it to oneself. Leadership is defined not as an honour but rather as a burden and effort. The leader puts himself out for, acts, works and watches over all his followers – and each of them as well. He acts not like a judge but a healer. Followers are expected to work on their own behaviour, to obey, but willingly so because the aim of the pastorate is their own salvation. The goal is not just the prosperity and wealth of the family or household but ‘salvation of souls’.

Marcel Golding, who joined Ramaphosa as deputy general secretary, talked about how important it was for the union to deliver in redemptive as well as pragmatic and practical terms. The union led by playing a pastoral game, producing new ‘selves’ in Foucault’s terms, forming trade unionists. This involved both intense educational work on the meaning of trade unionism and productive leadership with tactical skills. Golding remembered an occasion early in his career when Randfontein workers were out on strike, 15 or 16 thousand of them on three shafts. ‘I went from shaft to shaft, standing on a drum, trying to tell the workers, “Look, we’ll sort this out, just go back to work, relax”’. It didn’t work, he told me:

They kept refusing to go back. Then you learned very quickly. Listen, first solve the problem, and then come back to the workers. So we solve the problem, we come back and say, ‘Look, this was your demand, this is the solution’. Workers ecstatic, believe the union can solve their problems, join the union … Sometimes these problems were very minor problems. If management had been more astute and packaged things better, consulted, these things would never have happened. But because of their arrogance and their refusal to be sensitive we were able to capitalise on those issues … Even gaining the right to consult enhanced the workers’ respect.
He added that as a union official it was crucially important to listen to what the workers themselves had to say: ‘Never, ever, just take the liberty of deciding for them. They must decide what to do on their own and I think that was one of the good things we learned. That mine workers were not fools. They knew what they wanted despite [low] levels of education’. Local initiatives were crucially important. ‘Never try to stifle what the workers want to do’, Golding insisted. ‘These were all local initiatives, but under this great thrust – we’ve got to restore the dignity of miners’. This fundamentally redemptive aspect of union organising, returns again and again in conversations with early union leaders.

Charles Mapeshoane, who was eventually chief shaft steward at Vaal Reefs West, provided a clear statement of the sources of union policy and the moral resources upon which the shaft stewards were able to draw in recruiting union leadership. In an interview with me, he started by referring to divisions among Basotho workers and then moved on quickly to the question of human dignity. ‘In the mines, before the coming of the union’, he said, ‘people tended to congregate depending on their classes – educated, traditional, etc – although they all spoke Sesotho’.

But when the union came, then people realised that now you have to move from up or down, meet a person where he is. Those who did not understand preferred to remain there on top; others preferred to remain on the bottom. The union was there to point out, to persuade people to understand that regardless of your education, you are a human being, belong to the human being class, you are the same as other people, you shouldn’t regard yourself as the best person…. [In recruiting shaft stewards] you would look for someone who was able to speak clearly and simply to ordinary people and who cared about them and treated them with respect. You would also look for people who were not subservient to management…I was very careful to talk to those who respect themselves and also respect others and who taught the workers respect.

This appeal to respect was profound – and profoundly pastoral, in Foucault’s sense. Note the crucial importance of Charles Mapeshoane’s leadership style as a counter to Lira Setona’s top-down style of charismatic intensity.

Pragmatic results were crucially important for building membership but my interviews always came back to the moral point. Thus after noting that Ramaphosa kept the union strongly centralised, Golding reverted to talk of human dignity that echoes Foucault’s notion of governmentality:
A lot came from the centre in terms of how to go, where to go. Both a strongly decentralized component, allowing shaft stewards to do their shafts, but through Cyril and through the office of the President, it was a very focused, strategic view and plan of where to take things…Regular conferences were held, regular central committee meetings, regular regional conferences…[There were many local initiatives although a lot came from the centre in terms of how to go, where to go] but under this great thrust – we’ve got to restore the dignity of miners.

Ramaphosa never lost sight of the moral and redemptive pastoral imperative that had driven him at the outset.

Golding mentioned his splendid sense of timing. Central initiatives were often political and symbolic. In 1986, for instance, Nelson Mandela was elected honorary president of the union. The NUM was a major player in the formation of the COSATU federation and international links were established with mining unions, particularly in the Miners International Federation. At the same time, union leaders always kept returning to the grassroots for input in wage negotiations and for strategic discussions about how to proceed on the ground.

In a very real sense the proceedings of NUM meetings were redemptive in their own right. NUM members would often meet at a community centre in Soweto. In the early days ‘it was always whole night meetings’. The union could not afford overnight accommodation. So the buses would pull in to the conference centre at six or seven o’clock in the evening and the meeting would go right through to the next morning:

The buses would pull in [and] there’d be strong, strong regional songs, etc. We’d go into the meeting. We’d have about 400 people in a meeting – no tables, just chairs – the Basotho workers in their blankets – it was bloody cold in the winter. So we’d sit there. The smoke – a cloud of smoke would hang in the meeting – and we’d sort of discuss serious business, we’d take decisions. There used to be everyone sort of falling asleep and then someone would jump up and sing a song and…everyone up again! And then we’d sort of sit and debate again and, you know, fall asleep again. You’d shake them and it would go on again…Even Congresses we used to hold like that – whole night, over the weekend.

Workers returning would toyi-toyi through the compounds on their return, passing on some of the collective effervescence to their fellows who had remained at home.

Union meetings in the compounds took on similar characteristics. Management minutes are full of futile efforts by hostel managers to control
‘singing and dancing in the hostels’. As the union grew in size, a struggle arose with management about control of public space and what was said at union meetings. More reactionary traditional workers, especially team leaders from Lesotho, began to object to being disturbed by the boisterous racket of singing and dancing union members marching through the barracks. In 1986 at Vaal Reefs No. 5, four Basotho team leaders who attacked a union march were killed. That is a story too complicated to tell here but, in my opinion, it points to how reactionary traditionalists sought (successfully in the short run in this case) to break local union organisation with implicit management support.

Violence and the threat of violence, ungovernability, always lurked at the edges of union organising on the mines in those early days. In a situation where men had felt so powerless for so many years, the discovery of their potential power was both heady and terrifying. This is the structure of feeling in which prophets like Lira arise. Pastoral power was originally formed, as Foucault (2007:195) put it, ‘against a sort of intoxication of religious behavior’ that required pastoral order. As Burridge points out (1969:172) ‘power cannot be allowed to run wild; it must be comprehended and controlled’. It was a situation in which the mettle of the union, its pastoral and governmental capacity, was tested time and again.

When they were first getting the union organised, Ramaphosa told me, ‘even as we organised, James and I used to virtually cry out for the first strike’. We wanted a strike. We were in a sense organising for a strike. When we would see other unions … going on strike … we kept having this sense: ‘When are we going to get to a point when we have a strike?’ 1983 we had the first strike with the Impala workers at the refinery. They were the ones who gave us our first strike. Then, I mean, the strikes started coming and they rained on us. 1984, 1985, they started raining on us.

When things finally broke, Ramaphosa’s inherent pragmatism served as ballast for his commitment to the redemption of mine workers’ dignity. Thus, despite set-backs, especially after the massive three-week-long 1987 strike, the story of the NUM is a success story. Ramaphosa and Motlatshi have reason to be satisfied with their work. For all their commitment to redemption, neither saw himself as a prophet. Ramaphosa told me as much himself in typically pastoral language:
We always felt that the mine workers themselves had to provide the leadership...I wanted the union to be delivered into the hands of the mine workers. It is their union. They work in the industry. I’ve never worked in the industry so I have no real right to be leading that union. I would only get it founded and hand it over to them. We’ve achieved that. It is exactly what we did. The union is led today by the mine workers themselves.

Under Ramaphosa’s leadership the NUM became a formidable trade union. It was always more than a millenarian movement – or perhaps one should say that its millenarian tendencies were always curbed by its commitment to organisation and negotiation. Pastoral leadership skills, commitment and hard work were required to reign in millenarian tendencies in the union. The dramatic appeal of Lira Setona’s leadership style represented both a risk and a challenge for the mushrooming union. Without its redemptive appeal, with all the risks of ungovernability, however, the union would likely have failed to achieve its goal of restoring dignity to black miners. Perhaps it would have failed altogether.

Notes
1. Belinda Bozzoli (2004) is the most complete discussion of millenarian aspects of township ungovernability, but see also Von Holdt (2003) for a fascinating case study of ungovernability in the workplace as well as migrant hostels and townships. I rely for analytical insight most heavily on a brilliant analysis of millenarian movements by Kenelm Burridge (1959).

2. A probable third case, at Western Holdings No.6 shaft in 1987, is less easy to fathom from available evidence. Muti was reported to have been used in the killing of two white employees – an engineer and the head of security. For an account clearly based on inside information, see Schuitema (1994:45-7). Allen (2005:216-22 and 287-88) provides an alternative view.

3. Rian Malan (1990:236-63) describes events on Randfontein Estates in 1986, when migrants doctored with battle medicine (muti) from Pondoland killed two white policemen. Muti is medicine with paranormal powers concocted by African spiritual specialists for particular purposes like protection from accidents, success in love, victory in battle, and immunity from witchcraft and evil spirits. When Vivienne Ndatshe and I interviewed Elliot Bhala Nomazele, who had been one of the leaders at Randfontein, in Flagstaff in August, 1994, he smiled slyly and said that the policemen’s heads had never been discovered. He seemed to believe they had been used to make even more muti. When I mentioned Lira Setona and the Vaal Reefs case in an interview with Ramaphosa, he immediately volunteered Bhala’s name as a comparable case. Muti also seems to have been involved in killings by a union faction at a Western Holdings shaft
in 1986.

4. In 1985, South Division consisted of Numbers 8 and 9 shafts, East of 1, 2 and 5, and West of 3, 4, 6 and 7. Vaal Reefs divisions varied greatly in the richness of their ore with Number 8 shaft at South Mine being huge and prodigiously wealthy and Number 9 potentially good but just starting up, Vaal Reefs West being made up of low-grade and relatively mined-out shafts, and Vaal Reefs East being of good but not stellar grade level.

5. To get some idea of the magnitude of production at this single South African shaft, note that the entire California gold rush produced 500 tons of gold. The Klondyke gold field produced 150 tons – the equivalent of a mere five years of production at Vaal Reefs No. 8.


7. I interviewed Professor Salai in Klerksdorp on July 16, 2002. A mine cook from the Hlubi chiefdom in Transkei on the southern Lesotho border, Salai was fluent in both Xhosa and Sesotho. He translated for Lira, who spoke no Xhosa. I was told that the two of them were never far from one another at No. 9.


11. Details of these events from the management point of view are taken from the legal files of Cheadle, Haysom and Thompson which I microfilmed in 1995 and are available either in the African Collection at Sterling Library, Yale University, or at the library of the University of the Witwatersrand (Reel 3, D11).


15. NUMCorr, Ramaphosa to general manager, Vaal Reefs, 1/5/85). This refers to microfilms of Vaal Reefs East industrial relations files available at Sterling Library, Yale University.

16. In light of what follows, it is important to note that Anglo’s mass dismissals during the strike were very carefully orchestrated. They dismissed workers from the least profitable shafts first. Managers remembered that process as much less traumatic than the 1985 dismissals. They too had learned their lessons.

17. I interviewed Mike Smith in Johannesburg on October 20, 1998.


19. Although it is not part of the argument of this paper, I should perhaps also add that in a contemporaneous article written with Rob Lambert (Lambert and Webster 1989), Webster distinguished ‘social movement unionism’ (combining
shop floor union commitments with support for national anti-apartheid struggles) from ‘political unionism’ in which labour organisation is subordinated to nationalist political strategy. This set of theoretical distinctions more or less coincides with empirical descriptions of three ‘blocs’ within COSATU when it was established in 1985. See Baskin (1991:102-3).

20. For similar problems in a completely different industry, see Von Holdt (2003).

21. His account does not clearly separate the two phases, however.

22. Including President Brand, Western Holdings, Saaiplaas and Welkom mines in the Orange Free State; Elandsrand and Vaal Reefs East and West mines in the Transvaal.

23. For the most complete discussion of Williams’ structures of feeling concept, see the essays in Prendergast (1995).

24. Social movement organisations may of course as likely be reactionary as progressive.

25. According to Burridge (1969:152), an important precursor for millenarian movements is that the rulers and the ruled come to share the same values: ‘But as the Melanesians begin to share in the same hierarchy of values at the whites … so do they begin to realise that the whites have an exclusive access to the rewards of what are believed to be commonly held assumptions. Money comes into the hands of the Melanesians only to trickle through them and pile up in the houses of the whites’. The parallels with the situation I am describing in South Africa are quite startling.


28. For the story of Bhala and the 1986 Randfontein Estates uprising, see Malan (1990:236-63). He was the single other union leader for whom a case might be made that he was a millenarian prophet. Malan underestimates Bhala’s importance in his account, focusing on one of his younger protégés.

29. Foucault spells out his conception of pastoral leadership as the most important precursor of ‘governmentality’ most fully in his 1977-78 lectures at the College de France, Security, Territory, Population (2007:115-293). He also summarised his conclusions in two lectures at Stanford in 1979 (Foucault 2000:298-325). It is interesting that in Weber’s sociology of religion, tensions between prophets and pastors were a major dynamic in social change and the process of rationalisation.


31. Notice that Mapeshoane confirms Sebilo’s stress on education as central to old divisions. Eschewing the old educational divides was an important aspect of the new structures of dignity.

References


