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From Boardrooms to Mine-Shafts: Researching the Anglo American Corporation

It is not until you are right inside 20 Carlton House Terrace, London that you will see a small sign letting you know that you are inside Anglo American's London HQ. The impeccably designed lobby, a multi-storey glass atrium decorated with fountain, chunks of mineral ores in glass cases, a plaque to Sir Ernest Opp who founded the company in 1917, beaded christmas decorations, sourced and imported from Kwazulu-Natal by the décor consultant, books of African art sit on the table alongside copies of the financial times and on the reception desk there's a picture of two small children outside a rural village school and scrawled in kid's handwriting at the bottom, the words, 'Thank you Anglo'. In Johannesburg the Anglo complex is well known. Fourty-four and fourty-five Main street with there huge stain-glassed windows and sandstone eagles guarding the forbidding front façade were built by Ernest Oppenheimer himself. It is said that he told his architect that he wanted something between a cathedral and a bank. Round the corner, Anglo American's subsidiary, Anglo Platinum's (the world's biggest Platinum producer), is housed in a fifteen storey, 1980's glass corporate office-block[1].   It is hard not to feel the strong visual impact of moving from these sites to the barren landscape of Platinum Belt in South Africa's North West Province, a landscape scarred by imposing mine dumps, towering mine shafts, smelters, refineries, crushers, converting plants, pilons, chimneys and barrack's style hostels.

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[1] While officially under separate management, Anglo American have been incrementally increasing their share to 75% and the presence of the parent company is powerful, especially in the fields of CSR and socio-economic development.

This paper is concerned with the multi-sited ethnographic study of a transnational mining corporation. While anthropologists of development have long been concerned with the way in which power is mediated through the dominance of 'Western', technocratic forms of knowledge, and the discursive practices of powerful institutions, the relationship between the construction of knowledge and power within corporations has, to a large extent, remained veiled behind the elevation of the 'local' in both anthropological writing. The corridors of power within transnational companies (TNC) and international agencies have, for the most part, remained hidden. Indeed, Gupta and Ferguson ask:

> 'Why…has there been so little anthropological work on the translocal aspects of transnational corporations?'
> (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 15).

Two major obstacles have stood in the way of the anthropological study of transnational corporations: the first being the methodological commitment to the local; the second, the disciplinary preoccupation with the subaltern, resulting in the marginalisation of anthropology in the public mind as a source of knowledge about the society in which we live (Forman 1994: 7). In recent years this disciplinary bias has begun to be disturbed as anthropologists turn their lens to towards the corporatised, capatalist society in which we live, taking on, what Rose has termed 'the corporate form that encases us all' (Rose, quoted in Schwartzman 1993). This paper is based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the headquarters of a transnational mining corporation in London and Johannesburg and at the site of their Platinum Mining operations around the town of Rustenburg in South Africa's North West Province. This research turns the ethnographic lens precisely onto the 'translocal aspects of transnational corporations' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 15), as it investigates the role of transnational mining corporations as agents of social development.

The ethnographic study of TNCs presents particular challenges. TNCs operate in what Martin describes as 'a globally integrated environment' in which 'ideally, capital flows unimpeded across all borders' and 'all points are connected by instantaneous communications' (Martin 1997: 243). The mobility of corporate personnel and the global

dynamics of mining activities demands a multi-sited approach that engages with the multiple locations in which socio-economic development policy – or corporate social responsibility (CSR) - is articulated and enacted, both within and beyond the corporation. Difficulties in gaining access to the formal world of business requires flexibility, adaptation, opportunism and pragmatism. The need to find in-roads and entries into this giant of a corporation from a variety of angles and points across the geographical and social space in which Anglo operates, but also at different points in a rigid vertical hierarchy, makes a multi-sited approach not merely a choice, but a necessity. This paper focuses specifically on the experience of multi-sited research across the vertical hierarchy of sites within the corporate structure. However it is important to note that – a master narrative within the discourse of CSR is partnership. Thus the study of CSR - tracking the concept of responsibility - takes the researcher into a variety of sites beyond the formal corporation itself and into the so-called 'partnerships' with service providers, NGOs, government agencies and other companies.

The multi-sited ethnography aims to dismantle the simplistic binary of centre and periphery, global and local. By shifting the focus onto transnational processes, it is possible to explore the the ways in which global processes and local worlds are, in fact, 'mutually constitutive' (Sanders and West 2003: 9). This paper explores the way in which the dual reality of the mining business - the stark contrast between 'corporate' and 'operations' - expresses a powerful discursive framework within the corporation, and the broader mining community, according to which identities are shaped and power is mediated. Individuals within the company's management, from Sustainable Development Coordinators to Rock Mechanics, define themselves in terms of proximity to the mines – as 'corporate' or 'operational' and with it they claim the attendant characteristics of down-to-earth or cosmopolitian, practical or strategic, suit-wearing or boot-wearing, local or global. This is epitomized in the words of an engineer at one of Anglo Platinum's refineries:

> I've always been at the operations. I wouldn't want to go to corporate office. It's a
> different culture there. It's more English than England. You won't see anyone in the
> corporate office taking their jacket off. All the top guys went to Oxford and their

father's all went to Oxford and sat on the board as well. I suppose there's a a role
for strategy, but they're very far from the mines

Manager, Platinum mines, Rustenburg Section, North West Province.

This duality is deployed as a powerful binary through which accountability is displaced
and decision-making veiled. At corporate level you are presented with flawless, sanitised
policy expressed in the language of 'scientistic rationalism' (Apthorpe 1997:55), attended
by state-of-the-art mechanisms for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting
alongside neat shiny tool kits which comply with all the latest technology of international
treaties, initiatives and compacts. Failures or gaps in implementation are thus
represented as unauthorized activity outside a flawless, coherent and standardized
system and attributed to the misconduct of one particular errant subsidiary or operation -
infrequent anomalies to a functional system to policies, goals, implementation targets and
tools. According to this representation, the careful work of policy advisors and
executives at corporate head offices is frustrated by the technical, production-orientated
and conservative mindsets of the 'operational people':

> *We have a post-closure vision, but not a plan. We don't need to worry about that*
> *yet – there's 110 years of platinum there still to mine... Of course committment*
> *varies from operation to operation. Some of the mine managers are good, but*
> *generally they don't see why the money they make should be handed out to the*
> *community to pay for things after they've finished their business in the area.*
> *That's the biggest challenge – trying to break that old 'Meneer' culture at the*
> *mines, and making them understand they need to think beyond getting the rock out*
> *of the ground.*

Anglo Group CSR/Sustainable Development manager, Johannesburg.

This is exemplified in the case of the company's HIV/AIDs Voluntary Counselling and
Testing (VCT) programmes. The policies at group level are progressive and
sophisticated. Yet strikingly low uptake of VCT at particular Platinum minining
operations is compared with impressively high uptake at certain coal mines and is put
down to lack of support, leadership and committment at the mine management level. The

mine becomes a scapegoat and the buck is effectively passed to the mine management who are described as conservative, narrowed-minded and concerned only with technical issues and production targets. This highlights the pressure to maintain the belief that action is driven by policy, designed at corporate level and implemented in a top-down way according to the company's rigid vertical hierarchy . This need to assert the primacy of policy as a driver for activity is driven by financial imperatives - the fundamental need to project the image of stability, efficiency and security of the corporation onto the market of nervous and volatile investments, where perception translates directly into capital.

The emphasis on creating perfect policy as articulated in corporate reports and company strategy, has led to the neglect of the relationship between these frameworks and the practices that they are assumed to drive and legitimise (Mosse 2003: 2). Such documents are all too often taken as statements not only of intentions, but of activity. This paper challenges the prevailing belief that the practice of CSR is driven by policy rather than by an intricate web of social relations, power dynamics and organisational culture interacting within constantly changing socio-economic realities. As Mosse suggests, 'the things that make for "good policy" – policy which legitimises and mobilises political support – in reality make it rather unimplementable within its chosen institutions and regions' (ibid). At the same time internal corporate management systems, alongside external frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative and the UN Global Compact, demand that the actors involved strive to 'maintain a coherent representation of their actions as instances of authorised policy, because it is always in their interest to do so' (ibid: 7).

Yet at the operational level managers express feelings of impotence and uncertainty trapped under the weight of the company's rigid hierarchy and opaque bureaucracy. Many local level managers spoke of budgets suddenly cut, projects prematurely curtailed, and having to creatively negotiate ways to fulfil commitments to their beneficiaries and sustain relationships that they had personally built up.

> *You have your budget and here I've been planning to build them a soccer pitch,*
> *my hostel has won the soccer tournaments every year for the past 5 years. So I*

cut and saved. But then someone puts 100,000 Rand on your budget from somewhere else and they tell you you must make cuts of 10%. I can't build the soccer pitch now. If you don't keep your eye on it, they'll put money on any budget they they can to make the cuts.

Miners Hostel Manager, Platinum Belt, NW Province.

Front-line CSR practitioners often found themselves acting as local patrons. A role which at times inspired a sense of personal achievement, at others, discomfort. In this way responsibility is personalised and shifted from the corporation to an individual. The sense of personal honour derived from the role of patron is evident in the words of a CSR coordinator at the mines:

You see this is how we empower the community – we needed some land clearing – so I got young people from around here who were unemployed to form a company and I contracted them to do the job and then they have something to take home... Now in the village they'll shout "hey Mr Enele"[2]. This is the thing that Daniel has done... I can feel proud of that.

Conversely, the coordinator of the mining company's education programmes within the SED unit, when honoured at a function for one of the outside school programmes said,

I don't like it when people give me things like this – because it's not me it's (the company) – I'm just a vehicle for (the company) to work through – so you must thank them – it's they who gave you all this, it's their money.

While the mechanical frameworks of policy and planning strive to depersonalise and depoliticise SED policy processes within the corporation, the precarious and personalised relationships created through the quest for the the slippery notion of 'responsibility' unsettle the confidence placed in the scientific rationality of policy and increasingly sophisticated management models.

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[2] For the purposes of anonymity all names have been changed.

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