3. Distributed Livelihoods

Dependence and the Labor of Distribution in the Lives of the Southern African Poor (and Not-So-Poor)

It is common to suppose that people make their livelihoods by being "productive"—that is, by producing, via their labor, goods and services that either meet their own needs directly (as in subsistence farming) or meet the needs of others in such a way that either their goods can be marketed (e.g., peasant production) or their labor can be sold (via wage labor). In fact, that has never been an adequate account. In no modern industrial society does the number of people directly engaged in productive labor come anywhere close to accounting for the entire population. But the idea that the normal condition is one where most people earn their daily bread by either directly producing things or being paid for their labor remains a kind of common sense. Recent developments in the spatial and social organization of production, however, put that common-sense linkage of livelihood with production under considerable strain. As any observer of the contemporary world cannot fail to have noticed, more and more of the things in the world are produced by smaller numbers of people who specialize in it. Plastic toys for children are overwhelmingly made in China. Wheat is grown in Canada on a scale and at a price that few can compete with. And so on.

This is not simply a matter of the sort of functional global division of labor that is evoked by the phrase "comparative advantage." For the fact is that whole regions and populations find that they have no "advantage" of any kind and are (in some significant measure) simply left out of the global production regime. Even where valued products are exported, it is often in ways that do not generate much employment (as in the case of oil exporters and mineral export economies generally), even as the labor-intensive small agriculture that once supported most of the world's populations is in decline, being displaced by agribusiness, or both. In such situations, we have massive new populations that are, from the point of view of the production system, "redundant." Tania Li (2010) has recently posed the question as a matter of "surplus populations" (echoing from an Asian vantage an earlier critical discussion of apartheid South Africa's approach to "surplus people" [Platzky and Walker 1985]) that have been expelled from rural agricultural production systems but not incorporated into urban industrial working classes in the way that dominant developmental paradigms expected. Such people, now largely excluded from *any* significant role in the system of production, may often be found engaged in tasks whose fundamental purpose is not to produce goods at all but to engineer distributions of goods produced elsewhere by accessing or making claims on the resources of others. Such distributive processes have always been there, of course, but they take on a new centrality when more and more people are seeking to make livings without being able to rely upon either land-based livelihoods such as peasant production or those based on wage labor. Processes of distribution have thus come to acquire an extraordinary salience in the lives of those who inhabit the margins of the global economy, even as they have remained underdeveloped in our theoretical and analytical protocols.

It is time, then, to revisit the issue of distribution. This is, of course, a topic that was central to the "economic anthropology" of another anthropological generation (whether Malinowski's foundational account of the Trobriand *kula* ring, Mauss's brilliant treatment of gift exchange, or Karl Polanyi's influential analysis of systems of redistribution). Today, clearly, we are less concerned than we once were with hereditary chiefs and piles of yams and more concerned with such things as state bureaucracies, taxation, and programs of social protection. But it is worth insisting on at least one key anthropological insight that remains of great relevance: distribution is a crucial social activity that is constitutive of the social (and not only the economic) order. Accordingly, we need to pay attention to the idea of distribution as a necessary and valuable social activity within

what Keith Hart and his colleagues have called "the human economy" (Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010).

From Lumpenproletariat to Informal Economy to Distributed Livelihoods

Processes of distribution are ubiquitous, and of greater economic importance than is sometimes imagined. As noted in the introduction, even in the highly industrialized and relatively welfare-unfriendly United States, wage labor directly supports far less of the population than is commonly supposed. The idea that distribution is accomplished principally via direct remuneration for productive labor is even less satisfactory when we take a broader geographical view. Certainly, when we consider southern Africa, an account of distribution proceeding via wages and markets immediately and massively fails to account for how most people in fact obtain goods. For a huge majority of the African poor are not wage laborers and do not in fact access most of the goods and services they need by selling labor in a market of wage labor. Even in highly proletarianized South Africa, as we will see in the following sections, broad sectors of the population are largely or wholly excluded from the world of wage labor and instead piece together livelihoods through a complex mix of other activities. All across Africa, indeed, wage laborers (in the normal sense of the term) make up only a small percentage of the population. Nor are those who fall outside of the realm of regularized wage labor necessarily peasants or subsistence farmers, either. Instead, as was discussed in the introduction, Africa's fast-growing cities are increasingly inhabited by people who lack both land and formal-sector jobs and who improvise complex and contingent livelihoods through a combination of petty trade, hustling, casual labor, smuggling, prostitution, begging, theft, seeking help from relatives or lovers, and so on.

Marx long ago identified the presence of a stratum of urbanites that fell outside of the production-based class categories of proletarian, bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie, peasant, and so on. These he identified as the *lumpenproletariat*, whose members he famously characterized in the following colorful terms in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

> Decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, rubbed

shoulders with vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, montebanks, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus*, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars—in short, the whole of the nebulous, disintegrated mass, scattered hither and thither, which the French term *la bohème*. (Marx [1852] 1978, 73)

While this vivid list is, as has often been noted, something of a grab-bag in sociological terms, it correctly identifies something that more recent social scientific treatments often sidestep or seek to minimize, which is the prominent role of specifically *distributive* processes in sustaining the livings of those on the urban margins. While a contemporary neoliberal policy literature seems to be sure that every poor person scrambling for a livelihood can be treated as one or another sort of productive entrepreneur or firm, Marx's account of the lumpenproletariat emphasizes livelihood practices that rely on direct distribution, including thieves and pickpockets, vagabonds and beggars, tricksters and gamblers—all those "living on the crumbs of society" (Marx [1850] 1964, 50). But the insight into the distributive basis of many marginal urban livelihoods is blunted by the unmistakable moralizing contempt with which such "parasitic" ways of life are understood. As noted in chapter 1, the Marxian overvaluation of production has made it difficult for those working within this tradition to see those outside of productive labor as anything other than a proletariat-in-waiting (as in Marx's concept of the "industrial reserve army") or else a kind of social refuse, of neither economic nor political value—the "scum, offal and refuse of all classes," as Marx himself put it, seeking "to benefit themselves at the expense of the laboring nation" (Marx [1852] 1978, 73).[1] And while Marx clearly recognized the role of direct distribution in politics (it is central to his analysis of the political triumph of Louis Bonaparte), he could understand such a politics only in entirely negative terms, as the means by which a reactionary populism could buy itself a lumpen following by plying them with sausages (Marx [1852] 1978, 124). Missing is any sense that achieving distributive results (i.e., "living on the crumbs of society") might in itself be a valuable social activity, along with any recognition that the distributive claims emerging from such forms of life might be either legitimate, or part of a progressive political mobilization.[2]

In more contemporary writing, the ragged and miscellaneous livelihoods that Marx analyzed as "lumpen" are more often described in terms of a so-called informal sector or informal economy. But this discussion, too, is not adequate to the problem for at least two reasons. First as Kate Meagher has pointed out, the sorts of economic activities the term was originally intended to capture have become so pervasive as to call into question the very concept of an "informal economy"; in her view this has led to "the collapse of the informality paradigm" (2010, 11). Indeed, the originator of the very term *informal sector*, Keith Hart, has suggested that in many countries informalization has now become so pervasive that it no longer makes any sense to seek to identify a distinct sector or type of activity. As he has put it, "When most of the economy is 'informal', the usefulness of the category becomes questionable" (2007b, 28). In this perspective, calling a domain of economic activity "informal" may be no more helpful than categorizing a language as "non-Chinese."[3] South African scholars, for their part, have long chafed at the very idea of a distinct "sector" or "second economy" defined by "informality," pointing to the many points of connection and integration between the livelihoods the terms seek to capture and the dominant, supposedly "formal," economic system (see van der Waal and Sharp 1988; Du Toit and Neves 2007; Valodia and Devey 2012).

Second, it is not at all clear what the word *informal* means here. A critical literature seems agreed on the term's inadequacy but has failed to produce an alternative terminology.[4] It is far from clear that formalization in any of the usual senses (documentation, bureaucratic regulation, paying taxes, adherence to law, etc.) is really the key dynamic at work. A small street hawker's fundamental situation is after all not much changed by having or not having a license, while even very large and well-organized corporations often evade regulations, laws, and taxes. Instead, I will suggest that the picture that emerges from ethnographic research in southern Africa suggests that the more fundamental characteristic of the ragtag livelihoods that support more and more of the region's population is that they are almost unbelievably precarious and insecure and that those who navigate them manage to avoid the worst only through a continual process of flexible improvisation.

This combination of precariousness and flexibility is not well captured by either the languages of "informality" or that of the "lumpen." I here therefore prefer to avoid both terminologies and to speak instead of a kind of *improvisation under conditions of adversity*.[5] At the bottom of the economic scale, such improvisation may in fact be a matter of real or perceived survival, a fact that once led Rogerson (1996) to speak of such informal enterprises not as the "micro-enterprises" that are often celebrated as sites of accumulation or advancement but rather as "survivalist enterprises," driven by a spare logic of simply making it from one day to the next. With such distinctions in mind, I characterize the precarious livelihoods of the southern African poor not in terms of "informality" but of *survivalist improvisation*—a term that finds support in the vernacular usage (which I have encountered especially often in Zambia) that provides a common response to questions about how someone is faring: "I am just surviving . . . " But the larger point I wish to make (and will argue at some length in the sections to follow) is that this work of "surviving" is in fact less about producing goods and services (though that is of course a part of the story) than it is about securing distributive outcomes. It is in large measure, that is, about accessing or making claims on the resources of others.[6]

If this is true, then the precarious survival strategies of the southern African poor might best be understood as neither the vicious predations of a lazy lumpenproletariat nor the bustling entrepreneurialism of an "informal economy" but rather as what might be described as a system of *distributed livelihoods*.

Distributive Labor and the Hard Work of Dependence

"Money does not stay with a person." So it was explained to me during my first research in Lesotho, as I sought to understand why villagers avoided converting assets such as cattle into cash (Ferguson 1990). It was not just that resources in the form of cash might be spent impulsively or unwisely; the greater danger was that they would become the object of perfectly legitimate (indeed, morally binding) demands for the care of others to whom one was bound: blankets to warm an older relative, school fees for a sister's children, taxi fare for a sick neighbor's trip to the clinic. The force of such demands always lies in the background when poor households across the region manage their economic affairs, and it explains a great deal about how both income and assets are handled. This is a theme that has been explicated at some length in an impressive regional literature on migrant labor and the ways that it historically supported workers' families and communities of origin (see, e.g., Murray 1981; Moodie 1994). But the larger point I wish to explore here is that such distributive pressures are not only brought to bear around migrant labor. Instead, they provide a crucial context for the social reception of *all* sorts of income streams.

In fact, any poor person who receives an income (from employment, to be sure—but also from disability payments, old age pensions, inheritance, or any other source) is likely to encounter strong claims on that income. The strength of these claims can be gauged by the extreme measures needed to resist them. As I found in Lesotho, money needs to be guarded—not just against illegitimate attempts to seize it (via crime) but equally against more or less *legitimate* takings in the form of social and moral claims by those to whom one has recognized obligations. In an influential recent study, a group of development economists reported the "perplexing" finding that the world's poor often save not by making deposits that earn interest but by drawing on informal mechanisms such as "money guarding" (i.e., paying someone to keep a sum of money and return it at a later date) to keep their small surplus funds secure for a certain period of time (Collins et al. 2009). Indeed, in some cases, they note that quite high rates of "negative interest" are paid for such services (they cite West African examples in which effective rates paid to a money guard are negative 3.3 percent per month, or a negative 40 percent at an annualized rate [2009, 21]). The widespread existence of such practices (in southern Africa and beyond) provides strong confirmation that "saving" (that is, keeping to oneself more money than one at present needs) is, in the midst of generalized deprivation, a very difficult thing to do. What is more, the ethnographic record suggests that the reason for this is not just lack of discipline or the "temptation" of immediate consumption (as the report seems to suggest [2009, 22]) but also the pressing and (often) socially legitimate demands of others.

Such, at least, has long been observed in the ethnography of southern Africa. Saving for retirement, for instance, has been noted to be associated less with bank accounts and stores of money than with the accumulation of assets such as cattle, even under circumstances (including limited and degraded grazing and high rates of theft and herd mortality) that would seem to make for a losing "investment." In Lesotho, a cultural disapproval of the conversion of cattle to cash (which I termed "the bovine mystique") enabled assets to be protected from the immediate needs and demands of a wage-earner's dependents, thereby slowing the inevitable dissipation of a fund of resources accumulated while working (Ferguson 1990). Similar dynamics have been observed around other sites where savings of some sort are required, such as funerals. Southern Africans have a long history of dealing with such problems collectively, via rotating credit and other saving schemes such as the South African *stokvel*, which enable funds to be detached from an individual and sheltered within a collective group that is less vulnerable to the daily needs and demands that make saving so difficult at the individual and household level. (The history of these schemes, and their latter-day revisions and updatings, have been described in Bähre 2007b and James 2012.) As in the case of cattle-keeping, we see here elaborate mechanisms for building assets in the face of strong distributive pressures.

As such details suggest, funds *not* carefully secured in such ways are likely to be subject to claims that may be very difficult to resist, and a great deal of the day-to-day activity in the region's low-income communities is related to making, negotiating, contesting, and sometimes evading the social and affective claims that can be made on the meager streams of income and sources of wealth that such communities contain. As discussed at some length below, such claims have long been brought to bear on the earning power of wage-laborers in the southern African region, but today even the very small income streams that come from social grants and pensions may be subject to similar claims. The amounts thus transacted are often pathetically small, but this does not mean that the impact is insignificant; on the contrary, the small dribbles that come to the poorest clearly provide at least part of the answer to the question (one that has vexed many an observer of urban Africa) of how people with no visible means of earning an income in fact manage to survive from day to day—a fact that has led some researchers to speak of a system of "informal social protection" (Du Toit and Neves 2009a).

Africanist scholarship has long noted the reliance of African political-economic systems on processes of diversion, division, and tapping into flows. Jean-François Bayart (2000) has seen in such processes the roots of a distinctive modality of political power keyed on controlling externally oriented resource flows ("extraversion"), and has pointed to the

widespread use of such control to establish networks of clientage and patronage, in ways that remain crucial to understanding contemporary politics across the region. And a massive body of ethnographic evidence from anthropologists of Africa, assembled across the last century, documents a remarkable elaboration of mechanisms of distribution, thanks to which sources of wealth and streams of income are divided into smaller and smaller slivers as they work their way across social relations of kinship, clientage, allegiance, and solidarity.[7] These practices of distribution have changed in form over time, and we know them by a wide variety of names (remittances, kin-based sharing, political clientage, "corruption," etc.). But they are visible, and even prominent, in any detailed social study that attends to the micro-social level, where we find that those with access to incomes inevitably encounter a wide range of social claims on that income—claims that may be honored or scorned, to be sure, but in any case cannot be easily ignored.

But while the existence of such practices is well documented, we have perhaps not fully appreciated the extent to which the livelihoods of today's urban poor in fact depend on these ongoing processes of seeking and securing distributive outcomes. The ability to make successful distributive claims does not come easily, and long and careful work goes into building the sorts of social relationships that make such distributive flows possible. That is to say that material dependence on others is not a passive condition—it is a valued outcome of long, hard social labor. "Dependence"—that bogey of moralizing social policy—can in this respect be understood (in Bayart's felicitous phrase) "as a mode of action," and even as an achievement (Bayart 2000, 218; cf. chapter 5). For while "dependency" is obsessively decried as a problem or a trap in social policy discourse, an ethnographic view suggests that it is really only via relations of "dependence" that most of the population survives at all. Dependence is, in this respect, not the name of the problem; it is the name of the solution.

In this spirit, I propose an analytical focus on what I call "distributive labor." To appreciate the way that distribution can be the object of labor, I will suggest, we must be prepared to sever what has become an unthinking and dogmatic coupling of the concept of labor with the process of production. If we can do this, we will be able to arrive at new understandings, both of labor and also perhaps of the problem of distribution.

In reading the social scientific and policy literature, I have been struck by what seems to me a persistent misrecognition of the livelihood strategies of the poor, a misrecognition that I term "productionist." This misrecognition takes several different forms. On the political Right, the attempt is to see urban improvisatory survivalists as "micro-entrepreneurs"—if not actually capitalists in miniature, then at least "self-employed businessmen/women" or proprietors of (as the phrase has it) "small, medium, and micro enterprises." On the Left, the urge is to see the same people as "workers," implicitly sharing a class position (and potentially a politics) with the wage-earning proletariat. The policies and politics that such visions inspire are varied and ideologically opposed (ranging from Hernando DeSoto–inspired proposals to make capitalists out of the poorest shack-dwellers by titling their shacks to laborite projects to "organize" petty street hawkers into labor unions). Such projects are a diverse lot, and some may have their uses in specific situations. But they seem to have in common a sense of being a bit out of touch with the actual realities of survivalist improvisation, since they so often start not with what people are (or can reasonably hope to be) but with productionist ideas of what they ought to be yet inexplicably are not (that is, proper business owners or properly organized workers).

The more optimistic accounts see in the so-called informal economy not an inert reservoir of poverty but a vast potential for "creating jobs" (as they say). I come to such accounts with a considerable fund of skepticism, deriving from my experience on the Zambian Copperbelt. There, a disastrous downturn in the mining industry produced massive unemployment. Former mineworkers (who had enjoyed relatively well-paid and secure employment) were reduced to trying to eke out a living on the streets. One man I knew, for example, tried to survive by buying each day a pack of cigarettes and then standing on a street corner trying to sell them one by one to passers-by. As I was observing such things, a celebratory policy literature was praising the "informal economy" for its ability to "create jobs" at an unprecedented rate. One had to wonder: if putting a mineworker on a street-corner selling cigarettes was "creating a job," what did "losing a job" look like?

A second scene from the Copperbelt is perhaps equally telling. On a certain street corner that I knew well, two women were in the habit of sitting and selling vegetables, mainly tomatoes and onions. By the time I completed my research, the same corner had at least ten women selling the same limited set of goods, to the same limited set of passers-by. What boosters of the virtues of "the informal" might describe as an impressive expansion of employment (ten small business owners instead of two) was, on inspection, something quite different. For the fundamental dynamic here was not one of creating new services or tapping new markets but of splitting an already small market into ever smaller slivers—raising the denominator, in effect, below a more or less constant numerator.

As argued in the section below ("A Distributive Political Economy"), a great deal of what counts as "informal" activity is fundamentally fractional in this sense—less about creating new goods and services than about raising the denominator in a distributional process. A good part of such activity, too, involves ways in which people who do not have access to wage labor endeavor to capture a piece of the wages earned by those who do. This is one of a number of reasons why it is misleading to speak of a "second economy" as if it were separate from the "first" (cf. Du Toit and Neves 2007); it's also one of the reasons why it is misleading to simply merge improvisatory survivalists with workers as if they formed a single class. The tendency to see production everywhere one finds people "working" means that the perception of a particular livelihood activity as productive (or not) often ends up depending more on the common sense of the analyst than on any inherent property of the activity. Are garbage pickers, for instance, engaged in "production" (as we might readily say if they were foraging in a wild landscape and not a dump)? Or "distribution" (as we would more likely assert if they were asking for scraps at the back door instead of taking them out of piles of discarded trash)?

Many of those who emphasize the productive element in informal improvisatory labor, of course, do so in order to defend the moral and economic virtue of the urban poor. The improvisers are not idle, they insist, but in fact highly productive—therefore (it is implied) they deserve our respect and help, not our disdain. Modern ideas of democratic citizenship have long relied on the dignity of wage labor as a kind of moral credential, authorizing social and political membership (Barchiesi 2011). Where large proportions of the population are left out of the world of wage labor (as they are in most African cities, and in many other places as well), it is understandable that those who would make claims for social inclusion and membership should be eager to argue that the urban poor are, in fact, highly productive workers and that we would see that if only we would look a little more closely.

Of course, work in the (so-called) informal sector, even at the lower, survivalist end of it, is indeed often productive in an economic sense, just as it is often integrated with (or functional to) the celebrated productivity of the (so-called) first economy. My point, however, is that even where it *isn't*, there is no cause for disdain, and no reason to ignore the fact that even the unproductive are both engaged in labor and entitled to social membership. The woman begging on the street may not be producing a good or selling a service, but she works all day. To say that she is not productive is not to denigrate her labor. It is, instead, to underline the importance and value of distribution.

In this perspective, it is significant that a great deal of what the improvisers actually do, in a day-to-day way, in fact has as much to do with distribution as with production. I emphasize that this is not a matter of a merely quantitative process of income distribution but rather involves (just as production does) a set of social relations, social institutions, and social processes. The concept I propose for grasping this key fact is "distributive labor."

Consider the following four examples of survivalist improvisatory labor (which one might easily observe in any African city today):

1. *A windshield washer:* A haggard older man hops up at a street corner when the light turns red, aggressively providing unsolicited windshield washes to motorists as they wait for the light to change. His hope is that he will receive a few coins as a tip before the driver speeds away.
2. *A panhandler:* A familiar sight in most cities today, the panhandler enacts in one way or another a picture of need while waiting, hour after hour, for the generosity of a passer-by. Male or female, he or she may have (or affect) a disability.
3. *A pickpocket:* The epitome of street hustling, the pickpocket is engaged in one of the many petty criminal pursuits that sustain uncounted masses of urban survivalists. The prototypical "lumpen," he is typically young, male, and despised by law-abiding folk.
4. *A mother making a family visit:* An older woman who perhaps comes from an impoverished rural area to visit her employed urban son. She expresses through her visit her love and commitment to her son, while explaining to him the problems and hardships of people back home, perhaps returning home with money and gifts enabled by his wages.

If analyzed in conventional terms (where distributive dynamics are relegated to the background and productive labor is radically separated from other sorts), this list shows four quite different sorts of activity:

1. The window-washer is vending a service; he is a self-employed member of the service industry—some will perhaps even see him as a micro-entrepreneur.
2. The panhandler, in contrast, is unemployed, idle, and seeking charity.
3. The pickpocket is a predator committing a crime.
4. The rural mother is performing a kinship role and invoking traditional morality.

Seeing these four figures as different forms of distributive labor, in contrast, allows us to recover their fundamental unity. For all four of my examples involve people engaged in a form of labor, one that seeks to secure a transfer of resources from those who have them to those who don't. The indiscriminate application of the label "service industry," on the other hand, obscures the distributive point. The window-washer is not really selling a service (doesn't the motorist really wish he would just go away?) but rather pressing a distributive claim. The pickpocket is neither producing a good nor performing a service, but he is also working hard at the job of distribution—just like the others. The mother is not just being a mother—she is also working hard to press a distributive claim. Now, to be sure, distributive labor is not necessarily morally virtuous or ethically well justified. The young thug who beats up his grandmother and steals her pension is (in my terms) engaged in distributive labor, but there's certainly nothing commendable about his actions. Broadly, though, distribution (especially in a spectacularly unequal society) is a necessary and valuable social function, and it should be recognized, named, and valued as such.

Our mental habit is to do the opposite. We readily oppose productionist virtue to distributive vice, as the honest worker stands in contrast to the moocher, the layabout, the parasite, and the leech. Indeed, in our usual way of speaking and thinking, it is a denigration, almost an insult, to say that someone is "unproductive." But we seem much less ready to fault someone for being "undistributive" (indeed, the closing off of distributive channels may even be praised as "thrift" or "saving"). A truly "unproductive" person is not engaged in the great societal task of production. But almost inevitably, we will find that that person is engaged in the perhaps equally great societal task of distribution. Such forms of labor, I suggest, are important everywhere, but in southern Africa they are in fact central to the entire regional political economy. The next section seeks to demonstrate this in order to lay the groundwork for the analysis, in the chapters that follow, of the special issues of distribution that are raised by the growing role of social payments.

A Distributive Political Economy

The issue of distribution has long been at the heart of scholarly understandings of the political economy of the southern African region. As suggested above, this has largely been due to the highly developed and well-studied relations of interdependence between wage-earners and their rural communities of origin, especially in the context of the so-called migrant labor system. Such relations have been central to my own work. In my first research in the region, in highland Lesotho, I encountered an apparently rural people whose basic livelihood in fact derived from industrial employment that was geographically located hundreds of miles away, in South Africa's gold mines. Villages of what appeared to be peasant farmers were in fact, as Colin Murray memorably put it, a proletariat that "scratched about on the land" (Murray 1981, 19). But the scratching about was all the same crucial to maintaining livelihoods—not so much because it produced a robust agricultural income (in most cases it did not) but because it established the rural homestead as a viable home base, to which labor migrants would plan to return. A relation of dependence and mutual obligation between migrant mineworkers and their rurally based wives and kin was at the center of both the social and the economic system.

In later research on the Zambian Copperbelt (Ferguson 1999), I found that a key issue for urban mineworkers was how they would manage their

retirements. With high and rising costs of urban living and meager employment options after leaving the mines, retiring to "home" villages was very much on the agenda, even for workers who did not relish the idea of rural life. But "going home" meant, first, having a rural "home" and, second, being welcome to "return" there. Relations with rural relatives were often tense and conflictual, and those who had not adequately attended to the needs and demands of kin "at home" during their working years could encounter social rejection and even violence in their own time of vulnerability and need. Even those who had kept close relations with a home community encountered distributive demands that they regarded as overwhelming, and a common strategy was to plan one's return to the village for the middle of the night, in hopes of avoiding a kind of public inventory of one's goods that would provide the basis for later distributive demands. Relations of generosity and sharing were in some sense obligatory for those anticipating a return to rural life. Mutualities of this kind, indeed, were often based on (as Bähre [2007a] has usefully put it) a "reluctant solidarity" often enforced through violence and other sorts of coercion; we should not suppose that such sharing ever emerged spontaneously out of some romantic and conflict-free communal unity. Yet fraught as such social solidarities undoubtedly were, rural communities, quite literally, lived on the distributive flows that they enabled.

Nor was this just a matter of Lesotho and Zambia. Across the region, the literature shows us that broad access to wage labor created streams of income that were rapidly channeled, via social processes of distribution, into a multitude of ramifying capillaries that spread it (unequally, to be sure) across geographical and social space. Through such processes, the resource streams embodied in wages, modest as they were, fed the needs not only of workers but of countless dependents of those workers—and, indeed, the dependents of those dependents.

So far, so familiar. But a sharp decline in demand for low-skilled and manual labor across the region has meant that access to wages is today no longer such a dominant route to income for poor people in the region (for South Africa, see Seekings and Nattrass 2005). Instead, other sources of income, especially social grants and the loosely structured improvisations of the "informal economy," loom increasingly large. Under such conditions, Lesotho can no longer really be termed a labor reserve, since there is so little demand for the labor that it still holds "in reserve." But relations of distribution, rooted in practices of sharing and dependence, continue to be crucial, as Turner has argued (2005). And while young men can no longer access migrant wage labor in the way that they did in the past, new streams of income have appeared, albeit usually much smaller. Women, for instance, have gotten some unstable, low-wage employment in a fragile, on-again, off-again textile industry. And old people now get pension grants (even if these are much smaller than those of other southern African states that have more elaborate social protection systems, such as Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa). Here, as elsewhere in the region, aging grandmothers no longer have much reason to think about how to make claims on the earning power of their sons and grandsons, since young men have so largely lost that power. Instead, relations of dependence are often reversed, as it is now young men who are likely to be dependent on others. Indeed as du Toit and Neves (2009b) have shown for South Africa, both social transfers and most forms of informal enterprise are bound up very tightly with social networks and the petty reciprocities that make them work. For this reason, it is increasingly the case that successful livelihood strategies for the poor hinge crucially on the distributive dynamics associated with these networks.

Social grants, in such a context, are not simply payments to individuals who are thus enabled to use small amounts of cash to meet their needs. Instead, those who are able to access resources as dependents of the state are themselves the *source* of income for others we might term "sub-dependents." The truly destitute household, on the other hand, is the one with no children nor old people nor disabled members and therefore no eligibility for state distribution.

But such distributive processes are not only a matter of those with regular cash incomes such as wages or grants and those who directly depend on them. Instead, a much broader domain of social practices is implicated, comprising nothing less than an entire distributive political economy, cutting across what are commonly thought of as distinct social domains. Here I consider six such domains, summarizing the distributive practices that the literature has shown to be central to the livelihood dynamics that unfold there. The six domains are land and landholding; kinship and sharing; migration and movement; work and business; sex and love; and death and funerals.

Land and Landholding

As noted above, in a regional political economy long dominated by an extensive system of migrant labor, the ability of land to support at least minimal agricultural livelihoods has historically also provided a crucial distributive resource in that rural dependents of absent laborers could expect some measure of material support from those who would one day return "home" to fields and cattle as well as to wives, kin, and loved ones. For many in the region, such a dynamic continues to this day, enabling at least some portion of wages earned in distant cities and mines to be circulated within the (typically poor) rural communities that depend upon them.

Today, however, far fewer rural households have a member employed in wage labor (migrant or otherwise). What is more, in much of the region smallholder agriculture itself seems to be on the decline. In parts of the former "reserves" of South Africa in particular, it is reported that fewer fields are being cultivated, and those that are are cultivated with less intensity, even by those who do have land rights (see, for instance, Aliber et al. 2005). The percentage of people farming "seriously" (as they say) seems to be shrinking, while the dreams and ambitions of young South Africans focus less on smallholder farming and more on urban living, consumer goods, and the ever-elusive "business." As Mudhara (2010) has put it, rural smallholders today "only derive a minuscule proportion of their livelihoods directly from agricultural sources. In its place, non-agricultural sources such as remittances, off-farm work, and government transfers have all been gradually strengthened in light of the demise of agriculture" (2010, 1). Yet even as rural holdings have become less productive in agricultural terms, they have hardly ceased to have their value. As I have argued at some length elsewhere, the reasons for this are largely distributive (Ferguson 2013).

While cities in southern Africa have long been defined as the place of work, rural settlements have historically served as refuges for the supposedly "non-productive" (the old, the sick, the disabled, young children, etc.). But nowadays it is precisely the "non-productive" who are, as state dependents, likely to be key sources of income. To have a piece of land where an elderly parent or grandparent can stay (typically with much lower living costs than in town) today often means having access to that elderly person's pension money. If children are sent to the countryside to be cared for, the child care grant likely goes with them.

Such distributive payments flowing into rural households form a key resource for rural households seeking to find non-agricultural livelihoods in today's "informalized" economies. As du Toit and Neves (2009b) have shown, petty retail trade is a shoestring operation, operating on the margins of the huge supermarket chains that have now spread across the region. And in pursuing such trade, the small but regular payments provided by social grants are often key. The month's pension money, for instance, may provide a trip to the supermarket and a small bag of "essentials" that can later be sold slowly over time in one's own neighborhood. The effect of this, of course, is principally distributive, in that it involves not creating new goods and services for the market but taking a fairly static retail trade and chopping it into smaller and smaller slivers. And this, what we might think of as an urban pattern, seems increasingly to be at work in the countryside, too, even when it comes to trading in agricultural goods and foodstuffs. A vision of rural smallholders as farmers would lead us to look for small producers bringing their produce to town to sell it (and no doubt there are many contexts within which this happens). More characteristic of the times, though, is a very different scenario, in which the smallholder packs up money (not crops) for the trip to town, and where cash (obtained via circuits of distribution rather than agricultural production) is transmuted into food via the magic of the supermarket. Landholding here helps put food on the plate, not by growing it but by providing a support base for the non-agricultural distributive activities that end up enabling a trip to the supermarket. In this way, the possession of small plots of land can catalyze distributive flows and associated economic activities, even where remittances of wages have diminished. Land, long understood as a "factor of production," may today be equally important as a "factor of distribution."

Kinship and Sharing

Kinship has always been a key vector of distribution, and kin-based distributions of cash and other resources are one of the main ways that those excluded from the circuits of wage labor and social payments in fact survive. This should not be romanticized: as noted in chapter 2, visions of

unlimited generosity on the part of African "extended families" were always overdone, and the claims that poor people can make on their kin are nowadays probably even more restricted than in the past—generally directed at a tighter cluster of relatives (and increasingly concentrated on the maternal side), as Sarah Harper and Jeremy Seekings have shown in a recent Cape Town study (2010). As Bähre (2007a) has emphasized, the solidarities of kinship do not unfold in opposition to conflict but in the midst of it; they involve "small bonds fraught with social tensions" (2007a, 52). But distributive claims based on such "small bonds" continue to be extremely important to day-to-day survival strategies, especially among the poorest.

Indeed, sharing among kin should be seen as part of a larger set of phenomena that du Toit and Neves (2009b) have termed "horizontal philanthropy," on which, as they note "the survival of the poor . . . crucially depends" (2009b, 23). A national survey in South Africa (Everatt and Solanki 2008) revealed that huge numbers of respondents reported giving money or goods to those in need. Some 45 percent had given money to a poor person within the last month, and a similar percentage reported having made in-kind gifts such as food or clothing. Even larger numbers (55 percent) reported having given money or goods to "members of their family not living in their household" in the month preceding the interview. Tellingly, percentages were even higher in the provinces with the greatest concentrations of poor people, such as the Eastern Cape (75 percent) and Limpopo (73 percent). As the report authors noted, such "giving" was highest among those in low socioeconomic categories, suggesting that such practices lie at "a considerable distance from traditional notions of philanthropy" (2008, 64). Such findings come as no surprise to those who have lived and worked in poor communities in the region. Indeed, the entire ethnographic record can be read as a kind of documentation of the key role of practices of distribution in such communities.

This suggests the vital importance of being able to draw on the income and wealth of better-resourced others and (what must come first) of achieving the sort of social standing that would *enable* one to make claims on those others. Mere blood kinship brings no automatic ability to make such claims (as Seekings [2008a] rightly emphasizes), and a great deal of work goes into establishing the kind of social standing that might enable distributive claims. Dependence of this kind is not a passive condition—

it is a carefully cultivated status that is the result of long processes of building social ties and reciprocal obligations (cf. chapter 5). Here, too, the securing of distributive outcomes does not occur all by itself but only as the hard-won outcome of a kind of distributive labor.

Movement and Migration

Southern African political economy has long been characterized by high levels of mobility. But why do people move? The old story gave a central place to labor—the "migrant labor system" induced or coerced the movement of massive numbers of workers to industrial sites such as mines while failing to accommodate their permanent presence; hence an endless (and socially damaging) churning from rural to urban and back again. Today, as is widely agreed, the declining availability of manual-laboring jobs combined with the growing possibilities of urban settlement has resulted in a marked decline (though not an end) to this sort of labor-based migration. But there is still a striking amount of spatial movement (including movement back and forth between rural and urban areas), much of which can only be understood in the context of the sorts of social dependencies and distributive pressures I have discussed here. Moving today may be less about getting or losing your job and more about finding a place where you have people who can care for you. A person lacking an adequate income may no longer find work by moving but may instead find a place to live at a lower cost, or an opportunity to move in with a relative with some sort of an income.

Anthropologists have long commented on the dynamic composition of households in the region, with people moving in and out of various domestic arrangements in ways that confound attempts to identify static entities like "families." Yet as Seekings (2008a) has argued, movements are not random, and it would be useful to go beyond simply pointing to "fluidity" and to arrive at a better account of exactly who moves from one household unit to another, when, and why. Much of this research has not yet been done, but Seekings (2008a) points out that much of the shifting membership of households derives from the movements of children and elderly people in and out of them, largely in the service of managing distributive claims and distributive flows. As he suggests, it is "very likely that children are moved between households not simply to facilitate access to school but also to facilitate access to care and food" (2008a, 43). And the same is probably true of other movements between households.

> Older household members might also move to access food, care or other resources. Furthermore, people may move in order to provide care or to bring resources into a "household." This might be true not only for adults, but also for children—who might be sent, for example, to a rural area to care for an elderly grandparent at the same time as benefitting from the grandparent's access to pension income." (Seekings 2008a, 43)

A special case of this general process of moving people within a field of distributive flows involves the movement of the ill when they are in need of care. This has, of course, become especially crucial in the light of the region-wide AIDS/HIV epidemic, which has stricken millions. This has placed extraordinary burdens not only on clinics and hospitals but perhaps even more on the vernacular systems of care that have, to an extraordinary extent, accommodated the needs of the sick and the care of the orphaned children left behind. A place to go when one is sick is not just a place to live but a place to access care and social support in one's time of need, and it is crucial to recognize the often unspoken solidarities that have enabled the vital but unwaged work of care, nursing, and support (see Henderson 2012). This is a reminder that it is not only wealth that is "distributed" across social bonds; so too is suffering. The same social relationships that underlie the practices of distribution of such things as income also do the essential work of distributing the burden of illness and suffering.

Work and Business

In addition to the remuneration of wages, employment in the region has characteristically involved other sorts of transfers of goods and services, often under the ideology of a paternalistic or kin-like relation of dependence and obligation. The best known example comes from farm labor, where an informal compact governed relations between farmer and farmworker, according to which very low wages were balanced with a range of other goods and services provided in terms that glossed such obligations in quasi-familial or "paternalistic" terms (see Van Onselen 1992; du Toit 1993; Rutherford 2008). But such distributive flows are hardly confined to the farm; while such practices have come under pressure in recent years, they remain widespread, and constitute another arena of distributive practice, albeit under starkly unequal and sometimes humiliating terms. Regular gifts of clothes and other goods, for instance, are widely understood to come with the job for the huge number of domestic and household workers in the region. These goods are themselves distributed within the social networks of the employee, generating an even larger penumbra of distributed goods (see Cock 1990; Ally 2009). Even outside of the home, employers are often still expected to help out with a range of needs (for an account of the long history of such relations of dependence via labor, see chapter 5). Such practices are presumably reflected in the finding (cited above) that fully 45 percent of South Africans reported having given food, goods, or clothes to a poor person or "someone asking for help" within the previous month (Everatt and Solanki 2008, 60).

Similar distributive pressures are at work even among the "self-employed" purveyors of "business," such as small retail traders. Such trade is itself a form of distributive labor, insofar as it provides a means of engineering tiny diversions of value from those with at least some resources to those who lack them (this is often the case when "survivalist" traders eke out livings by selling tiny quantities of basic goods to neighbors or passers-by). But even more-successful "informal" traders are bound up with reciprocal distributive circuits and not just the "business-like" pursuit of profits. As Neves and du Toit (2012, 139) have observed, a key requirement in such pursuits is the need to negotiate a complex landscape of social claims and expectations of fairness and non-exploitation, "keeping them at bay while nonetheless engaging with them." Skillful management of such claims and expectations is necessary to ward off the theft or violence that might be visited upon a merchant considered to be "stingy," indifferent to people's needs, or overaggressive in the pursuit of profit—and to maintain a client base among people with whom one has a social relationship, and for whom reputation and social loyalty may be more important than price. Indeed, Neves and du Toit noted in their field-sites something that is commonly observed across the region: that petty traders refused to consider competing on price. This is, of course, at odds with the usual economics textbook understanding of trade, but it is explicable in the light of the sort of social pressures reviewed here. Traders, like others who negotiate the region's elaborate distributional

economy, need to pay close attention not only to such things as prices and profits but also to (as Neves and du Toit put it) "managing socially redistributive claims and practices" (2012, 145).

Sex and Love

Across the region, policy papers and tabloid newspapers alike appear fascinated with a sensational figure: the "sugar daddy." The term refers, of course, to a wealthy older man who seeks out, and generously rewards, much younger partners in sexual relationships. The offender is usually depicted, in popular accounts, as a powerful government official or businessman, while the underage victim is figured as a young (often underage) girl (stereotypically a schoolgirl) seeking money to buy desired consumer goods. Press coverage inevitably combines prurient fascination with the erotics of the situation with themes of moral outrage and humanitarian and/or medical concern both for the girl and for society at large.

There is no doubt that empirical examples of the "sugar daddy" phenomenon are easily located in ethnographic reality, some of which are every bit as outrageous as anything in the popular press might suggest. Yet the much-rehearsed figure of the "sugar daddy" is in the end a caricature that conceals more than it reveals. The elaboration of such a plainly pathological figure, after all, enables both universal disapproval of a moral breach and the rendering of that which lies on the near side of that figure as normal and approved. What is obscured is the fact that social and economic dynamics quite similar to those denounced in the "sugar daddy" relations in fact characterize a much broader range of relationships than are generally reckoned to be captured in that phrase. Indeed, the uncomfortable truth is that it is not only in the disapproved "sugar daddy" relationships that quite direct economic transfers from men to women are understood to be a normal and proper part of intimate sexual relations. As has often been noted, a discrete "prostitution" category is often difficult to locate in poor and working-class communities, and a range of short- and longer-term sexual relationships typically involve regular, undisguised transfers of cash and other gifts to the woman in ways that are regarded as normal and even proper.[8] (The relations between money and sexual intimacy are discussed at greater length in chapter 4.) But it is not only a matter of money for sex. Well-resourced men are understood to have a proper moral duty to provide for, and to provision, those under their care and protection. In such circumstances, a deep material dependence in the context of sexual intimacy may be understood, as Hunter (2010) has suggested, not as contradicting or compromising a relation of "real" love but on the contrary as a key attribute of a certain form of love—what he terms "provider love." Similar dynamics have often been observed to be at work within the marriage relation. At the same time, reciprocities of the economic and the sexual are linked with the deeply conflictual gender relations that are also well documented in the regional ethnography. In my own work on the Zambian Copperbelt, I found that profound economic asymmetries (in which men controlled both wage labor and housing) accounted for deeply conflictual relations between men and their wives and girlfriends, relations within which distributive questions were central. Women found themselves, I noted, "obliged—by the economic rules of the game that they encountered as given—to work tirelessly at extracting favors, gifts, and payments from the men they were attached to," while men, suffering from a contracting economy and declining earning power, and beset by demands from all sides, were "bound to resent it fiercely" (Ferguson 1999, 194).

Today, with wage labor both less available (in many cases) and less likely to be restricted to men, and with women enjoying more possibilities for supporting themselves in more autonomous ways, the situation is significantly transformed. The improvised livelihoods discussed in this chapter (such as petty trade) are often more open to women than the stereotypically male forms of labor such as mining that once dominated the labor market, while social grants (especially child care grants) have given millions of women independent sources of income. Under these transformed conditions, more women are able to live independently of a male "head of household," and rates of marriage have declined sharply (Hunter 2010; Kumchulesi 2011). But recent ethnographic accounts such as those by Hunter (2010) and Swider and Watkins (2007) make it very clear that sex and love continue to be tightly bound up with distributive flows (even if the sources of the resources so distributed have changed). And as the moral panic over "sugar daddies" shows, there is both a widespread public awareness of, and a considerable amount of anxiety over, the extent to which distributional considerations permeate intimate relations today.

Finally, it is important to remember that a transfer of resources from a man to his lover is not the end of the distributive story. Just as the distributive flows that are social grants themselves enable a host of subsidiary distributive practices (so that pension recipients can take in orphans or buy clothes for a struggling adult child), so too do the recipients of various forms of "provider love" often put a portion of the resources they receive into their own channels of distribution and social obligation. Through the distributive genius that is so characteristic of the region, a "sugar daddy" may thus end up supporting not only his several mistresses but also each of those mistress's own network of dependents as well.

Death and Funerals

Death has long provided a key occasion for distributive practices, via both inheritance and the range of practices surrounding funerals. The importance of funerals is a striking characteristic of the region. Historically, it has long been noted that even migrants living many hundreds of miles from their regions of origins have felt the need to be buried "at home"—an often-enormous cost willingly borne by even the poorest families. Hylton White (2010) has recently described the durable and highly valued cluster of practices surrounding burial in ancestral ground as a "necrocultural complex" that has long linked lineages to land via practices surrounding death, burial, and the care of ancestors. As Henderson (2012) has noted, illness and death are occasions for the activation of the most profound commitments of care and kinship within rural communities, commitments that are as powerfully material as they are emotional.

Today, urban burial has become more accepted (Lee 2011). But the funeral continues to be a strikingly important social and economic institution, and the nexus of a host of important distributive practices. As anyone familiar with the region cannot have failed to notice, a vast funeral economy looms large in the economic life of poor and working-class people, a long-standing social reality that acquired a whole new level of visibility and importance with the surge of deaths that has accompanied the regional HIV/AIDS epidemic. And, as has long struck observers across Africa, surprisingly large sums are mobilized for funerals, even by what appear to be very poor people. Given how important funerals are to local political economies in the age of AIDS, it is remarkable that we do not have a better ethnographic understanding of the distributive issues they raise.[9] Erik Bähre's rich study of migrants in Cape Town, however, gives us valuable insights into the kinds of processes that occur in such settings (Bähre 2007a, 2007b). He demonstrates that funeral expenditures rely on a vast social infrastructure in which a vital role is played by mutual associations that provide for an insurance-like pooling of funds.[10] As he emphasizes, it is such vernacular practices of distribution and mutuality that enable the staging of what are often, in local terms, almost unbelievably expensive events. Against romantic depictions of "communities" that unproblematically care for all, Bähre shows that practices of financial mutuality are always embedded in complex and often conflictual fields of sociality. The solidarities that are expressed in marking deaths are for this reason riven by the strains of bad reputations and broken relationships that inevitably loom large in poor communities, meaning that quarrels and ill-will are quite as much a part of the social dynamic as are respectful love and generosity. Yet as ambivalent as these solidarities undoubtedly are, there is no doubt that funerals provide key points of collection and reallocation of substantial amounts of money. One recent study of a district in northern KwaZulu-Natal (Case et al. 2008) found that households spend the equivalent of a year's income for an adult's funeral, while also noting that some 45 percent of those enormous costs were covered by gifts from other households (2008, 5). It is evident that very important distributive dynamics occur at funerals, even if we do not as yet have a very complete picture of what they are and how they work.

"I Live on Handouts": Distributive Livelihoods at the Top of the Heap

The reliance upon distributive channels for accessing resources is not unique to the poor. This was recently illustrated by the remarkable way that the populist politician Julius Malema responded to critics of his accumulation of wealth. Such critics, he said to interviewers, failed to understand that (in a phrase that was instantly taken up by his many detractors across the country) "I live on handouts most of the time." He went on to reflect:

> If I don't have food to eat, I can call Cassel Mathale [Premiere of Limpopo province] and say: "Chief, can you help me? I've got nothing here." I can call Thaba Mufamadi, I can call Pule Mabe [ANCYL treasurer general] or Mbalula. They all do the same with me. That's how we have come to relate to each other. That's why at times you can't even see our poverty because we cover each other's back. As comrades, we have always supported each other like that.[11]

For many, this was simply a ridiculous statement from a corrupt and clownlike politician—a "tenderpreneur"[12] playing poor while looting the public treasury. But upon reading more carefully, an important sociological truth emerges, and it is a very serious one. For the fact is that many of South Africa's emergent new elites are like Malema in owing their new economic standing to political appointments. These appointments bring relatively high incomes, but they also come with new lifestyles that entail high demands for consumption and high expenses. Money sometimes runs out for a while. Those in such new circumstances can quickly find themselves on both the giving and the receiving ends of requests that take the form, "Chief, can you help me?" Indeed, it is a common observation that it is not only newly enriched elites but a huge range of ordinary salary-earners who are besieged with such demands. As one university-trained activist in Namibia recently told me, "I have three children. I pay school fees for eight. Every Namibian with a decent job will tell you the same story."

Then, too, anthropologists have long known that there is a fine line between "corruption" and things like friendship and loyalty (see, e.g., Smith 2008). The new forms of accumulation that have been facilitated by political connections with the ruling party (sometimes under the cover of state programs promoting "Black Economic Empowerment") are like many other forms of accumulation in that they occur via networks and connections, which bring with them both the opportunity to make distributive withdrawals from resource flows as well as a host of reciprocal obligations. The tenderpreneur, too, is a seeker of distributive flows, and Malema was probably right that such a life entails no simple luxury but a quite demanding and more or less continuous social performance that entails both the giving and getting of a complex range of "handouts." This is to say only that distributive livelihood strategies are not simply a product of poverty and deprivation but instead rest upon a deep social logic that finds application at all social levels.

This kinship between the vernacular distributive practices of elite and subaltern may help explain the appeal of Malema-ism (this is a topic that is discussed at greater length in chapter 6). Many have wondered why township youth seem attracted to Malema's political program, which critics see as a more or less undisguised program for black elite enrichment that would seem, on its face, to have little to offer to the poor and unemployed.[13] Are not the class interests of Malema and those of his township youth followers sharply divergent—even diametrically opposed? But as documented in chapter 6, Malema begins his political analysis with fundamentally *distributive* questions that connect in a very visceral way with the life conditions of the poor. South Africa is a rich country, he says. To whom does it belong? Is the right answer to this question not, he asks, that it belongs (or ought to belong) to us, the (South) Africans?[14] And if it's ours, then why do we not see any of the benefits? In the existing system, benefits are not properly divided and shared, and the few (especially, the whites) are taking far more than their share. Thus the familiar call for such things as land reform and nationalization of major industries, understood not as *taking* by the state but as *restoring* what was stolen to its rightful owners.

The appeal of this sort of argument does not derive from any clear demonstration that such policy measures would in fact benefit the unemployed youth of the townships (a point on which critics have sound reasons for doubt). It is instead rooted in the attraction of a moral language of ownership and rightful shares (see chapter 6) that speaks to those excluded from the world of production in a way that languages of civic rights and fair wages do not. Such arguments respond to a palpable hunger for distributive economic demands—a hunger, in effect, to be cut in on the deal. Given the analysis provided in this chapter, it should also be clear that such political sensibilities fit well with the actual livelihood practices of unemployed young people, which rest so fundamentally on getting a cut, a piece, a crumb, or a share. And while Malema's reactionary chauvinism is rightly deplored by South Africa's polite political society, the power of a politics that starts with the promise of directly sharing wealth with those unjustly excluded from it is evident. Whether such a politics can transcend the sort of spoils system that Malema-ism at its worst seems to promise is an issue that is taken up in a later chapter (chapter 6). For now, it is enough to have demonstrated that livelihoods based on practices of distribution are not some sort of scheme waiting to be introduced by social policy experts but are the mundane and established reality for vast numbers of southern Africans today, rich and poor alike.

Distributive Policy in a Distributive World

In the context of this book's larger purpose, this chapter has meant to demonstrate that state programs of distribution are inserted into a world in which distribution is already both a pervasive process and a concrete set of activities. Distribution, that is to say, is and long has been a key foundation for livelihoods—both for those who receive grants and for those who do not. It is not a question of "dependence" for those who receive state payments versus "independence" for those who do not. Poor southern Africans have long secured their livelihoods by accessing a multitude of channels through which distributive flows water the social field. And today, as has long been the case, those who receive distributive allocations are themselves subject to claims from their own dependents. Distributive flows, that is, are themselves distributed. The implications of this for thinking about state programs of distribution are pursued in the following chapter, which explores how the distributions and dependencies associated with social protection transfers are articulated with the other distributions and dependencies that are so vital to the actual livelihoods of the southern African poor.