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Inkululeko:

Youth, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Discourses of Democracy
in Post-Apartheid South Africa

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Amber Rose Reed

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Inkululeko:

Youth, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Discourses of Democracy
in Post-Apartheid South Africa

by

Amber Rose Reed

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles 2014

Professor Sondra Hale, Chair

For Xhosa-speaking South Africans, the word *Inkululeko* means “democracy,” as no word for this idea previously existed in the language. The direct translation, however, is “freedom” – a gloss for the end of apartheid and a marker of the great hopes for equality that accompanied the country’s transition in 1994. This dissertation demonstrates that a plethora of educational programs espousing the merits of democracy exist alongside an undercurrent of disappointment with democratic values and nostalgia for apartheid within historically oppressed communities. I examine the influx of democratic ideologies through local practices in the predominantly Xhosa-speaking Eastern Cape, particularly in schools and in non-governmental organization (NGO) interventions. I focus specifically on youth as a site of both political agency and subjectivity, asking how local cultural forms act as a filter for Western-based notions of democracy and human rights. My research data, based on a year of participant observation and

semi-structured interviews, demonstrate significant backlash to the tenets of democracy as well as widespread nostalgia for elements of the apartheid regime. I understand these phenomena in part through a materialist perspective on the global turn towards neoliberal capitalism, which exacerbates wealth inequality and privatization in ways that my research participants often conflate with the principles of democracy. I illuminate that negative reactions to Western-based rights discourses are deeply rooted in Xhosa cultural ideologies on social reproduction, leading to locally-situated negotiations of democracy that differ from official state discourses and have the potential to radically transform citizenship production into the next generation.

The dissertation of Amber Rose Reed is approved.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin

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2014

To Aphiwe

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“I don’t care who wins anymore. Zuma, Motlanthe....neither of them are going to build me an indoor bathroom.” –Xhosa woman, when questioned about the 2012 ANC primary campaigns for President

Research Questions

In 2012, the international news highlighted two current events in South Africa that get at the heart of this nation’s continued struggle to define its own version of democracy. In May, protesters defaced artist Brett Murray’s painting of Jacob Zuma, “The Spear,” calling it an abuse of the right to artistic expression. Protests erupted around the country, and where I lived, in the rural Xhosa homelands of the Eastern Cape, people said things like: “Human rights are important, but they must not be abused to the point of insulting someone’s dignity.” In August, violence erupted at a platinum mine when workers struck over wage disputes. Miners protested the failure of African National Congress (ANC) leaders to act on their pre-1994 promise to redistribute the country’s wealth and, in some cases, their subsequent rise to multimillionaire status as CEOs of the same companies they once lambasted. These events expose deep discontent among many South African citizens with the way democracy has been enacted in the country. But where and how does the state inculcate its youth with ideas about democracy and human rights?

In this dissertation, I expose a conceptual and discursive problem within the post-apartheid state: educators teaching youth about democracy and associated Western-based human rights are at the same moment increasingly disappointed with this political system. Along these lines, I use a year of in-depth ethnographic data to respond to the following research questions:

- How does the state teach rural Xhosa youth about democracy and human rights, and how do Xhosa cultural worldviews act as filters for these larger state discourses?

- How do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute to youth socialization into democracy in ways that vary from the state?
- How do post-apartheid discourses from the previous generation impact youth encounters with democracy today?
- How does the larger global turn towards neoliberal capitalism impact rural experiences of democracy?

In answering these questions, I develop a theory to explain the presence of a significant connection between youth encounters with democracy, the previous generation's nostalgia for apartheid, and neoliberal capitalism; these connections can all be seen in classroom discourses on the state that intersect with cultural processes. Specifically, I contend that widespread disappointment with democracy among rural Xhosa South Africans should be understood by examining local confluences of democracy with neoliberal capitalism. Further, Xhosa educators filter democratic socialization of youth through the lens of these negative reactions, creating a future citizenry that is deeply ambivalent about South African democracy and the role of cultural diversity within it. This ambivalence, I argue, stems from intergenerational divides and multiple perspectives on the intersections of culture and politics.

Theoretical Framework

In order to grapple with the research questions presented above, I use Marxist ideas in order to provide a materialist perspective on how neoliberal capitalism contributes to Xhosa understandings of democracy and nostalgia for apartheid. In my ethnographic analysis, I pay close attention to how historical and economic forces of colonialism and capitalism inform present-day South African attitudes on democracy (Wolf 1982).

Further, I use theories on the shifting nature of childhood as a cultural and historical construction to examine the dynamics of youth roles in the democratic state and local social organization. I understand the concept of a child as the joint product of historical, cultural, political, and economic influences in ways that make this social category highly dynamic and unstable. Here anthropological writings on practice theory provide useful insight into the ways in which cultural forms are the outcome of constant intersections of structure and agency (Ortner 1984).

This theoretical framework has broad implications beyond the case of rural South Africa. Specifically, I suggest a link between democratic teachings and neoliberal capitalism that offers an explanation for political resistance and nostalgia for the past in many nascent democracies. Thus, through this discussion of South African politics I hope to shed light on how young people are negotiating concepts of democracy around the world.

Literature Review

The primary bodies of literature used for this dissertation center around studies of childhood and youth, democracy, and neoliberal capitalism in Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Within these theoretical perspectives, I interweave concepts from classic Africanist literature that shed light on processes of social change and reproduction (Eisenstadt 1954; Turner 1957; Wilson 1951) with new examinations of globalization, democracy, and capitalism on the continent (Ashforth 2005; Weiss 2004; West 2005). My work ties these seemingly disparate theoretical perspectives together; I argue that we can understand local resistance to democratic values and nostalgia for apartheid-era infrastructure by taking a closer look at processes of neoliberal capitalism in the South African state and beyond.

Anthropology of Childhood and Youth

Anthropologists have explored extensively how young people reproduce social and cultural life across the globe. While most early ethnographies did not focus specifically on youth (with few exceptions, e.g. Mead 1928), in recent decades anthropologists have advanced studies solely pertaining to childhood and young people (Bucholtz 2002; Cole and Durham 2008). While earlier discussions on youth centered on their positioning within processes of social and cultural reproduction (e.g. Eisenstadt 1954), more recent work has challenged assumptions that cultural beliefs are simply passed down from generation to generation, showing how youth actively contest such ideas (Nyamnjoh 2002). These scholars have shown how the home, kinship networks, religious groups, and schools all act as sites in which the next generation learns about and also renegotiates local beliefs and practices.

Perhaps the most problematic element in the study of youth is the impossibility in fixing a definition for the term that is appropriate cross-culturally. What ages constitute youth? When does a child become an adult? What defines adolescence, and is it a distinct and separate life stage? In 1985, the United Nations defined youth as 15-25 years of age during its International Year of the Youth (Tyyska 2005). In reality, however, conceptions of childhood are culturally constructed and dependent upon different factors (Bucholtz 2002; Campbell, Miers, and Miller 2009). Thus, childhood is a locally specific term defined on a case-by-case basis; though there are without doubt biological universals to physical maturation, the social meanings assigned to such growth are dependent on the cultural and historical environment in which an individual is raised and socialized (Montgomery 2009).

Because of substantial cross-cultural differences, many anthropologists are now steering away from Western definitions of youth in their research, working to incorporate cross-cultural

perspectives on the term in their methodology (Tyyska 2005). Anthropological literature on childhood and youth has stressed the fact that such periods of life are liminal and transitory, making them an inherently problematic object of study in that they are constantly shifting in relation to other age groups. In my work, I use the definitions provided by NGOs targeting youth for various projects; in the case of the Sonke Gender Justice Network, this is 14-25 years of age. Notably, this contrasts from the South African state's definition of youth, which ranges from 14 to 35 and is largely a product of apartheid-era resistance that was composed of people in their twenties and thirties. A more narrow focus, however, makes sense for NGOs targeting school-aged children, particularly those in high school. Though it may be culturally significant, I do not use the South African definition of youth in an attempt to focus on a more specific demographic – generally those still living at home and in grade school.

Many societies and cultural groups use the concept of generation, rather than numerical age, as a central principle for structuring society. Such communities recognize individuals as part of a particular generation rather than age. While numerical age classifies people based on biological aging, generational divisions are based on life stages that are often culturally dependent. These stages are socially marked through the recognition of different milestones as the person matures. In this way, societies that use generation as a structuring principle see age as a relational term rather than an absolute number. This has far-reaching consequences, in that individuals may reach certain milestones at different numerical ages and yet be considered part of the same age grouping (Alber, Geest, and Whyte 2008). Theorists have advocated paying attention to the relationship between generations as a way to structure sociological and anthropological research on children (Alanen 2009; Bucholtz 2002). Furthermore, how a society or culture defines childhood (or whether it actually recognizes this as a separate stage at all) can

give insight into societal values, beliefs and practices. As anthropologists Tom Hall and Heather Montgomery explain, even the terminology we use to describe young people (children, youth, teenager, etc.) is indicative of cultural perceptions and beliefs about this demographic (2000). Xhosa kinship terminology reflects this reality, as certain titles indicate relative levels of respect based on rigid age and gender hierarchies.

In 1975, anthropologists Beatrice and John Whiting published the results of a then-groundbreaking study which followed individual children in six locations: Mexico, India, Kenya, New England, Okinawa, and the Philippines (Whiting, Whiting, and Longabaugh 1975). They set out to test the hypothesis that childhood and its stages were universal, and found great differences between the roles, responsibilities, and social behavior of children cross-culturally. For instance, they found that in non-Western societies children were given a greater number of tasks within the family that were directly related to their own survival, such as gathering water or farming. In contrast, they found that Western, “complex” societies gave children much more ego-centered, individualized tasks, such as academic work. Their conclusion was that the type of task has a much greater effect on the later social behavior of a child than the amount or type of reinforcement of that task (1975:180). Though this study was not without flaws, the general idea that arose from this book – that the formulas for appropriate adult behavior, and by extension, childrearing, are reflective of the value systems of that culture, rather than universals – have remained highly influential among studies of childhood and have inspired further research on youth (Condon 1987). Studies of language socialization have mirrored such results, showing that the ways in which children acquire and use language are highly context-dependent and reflect cultural norms within their communities (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984).

Early Africanist ethnographies demonstrated ways that societies have used generational divisions to structure their communities. In Monica Wilson's 1951 text on Nyakyusa age villages in what was then Nyasaland and Tanganyika, she explains how people were separated into groups of age mates rather than kinship groups. In this system, boys of about ten or eleven years old would leave their biological families to live in a separate village with each other. This group would then progress through different life stages together as they moved toward adulthood. These age villages protected against incest and early sexual relations while encouraging cooperation and creating a system of land redistribution with every newly emerging generation of adults (Wilson 1951). Thus, examples of societies that use generational systems of relation rather than numerical age abound in the anthropological literature. In such societies, rites of passage usually define the boundary between childhood and adulthood, such as circumcision rituals, puberty rites, marriage, etc. (Eisenstadt 1954; Genep 1960). These rituals often involve both physical changes to the initiate as well as important psychological changes that transfer the individual from one life stage to the next (Montgomery 2009). Arnold van Genep's pioneering work, *The Rites of Passage*, outlines the various phases of such rituals and focuses on the liminal stage in which one is caught between two periods in life (1960). In my own work, I contend that Xhosa adolescents (particularly pre-circumcision for males) occupy this liminal space in which they are not yet initiated into the world of adults but at the same time have taken on some adult rights and responsibilities. Victor Turner later built upon van Genep's ideas of liminality, discussing how social dramas rupture village continuity and reshape communities in new ways - often by either uniting or dividing groups of people (Turner 1957). My own work explores whether NGO and public school ideological interventions are one such type of social rupture in rural South Africa, and what the resulting societal changes might look like.

In the specific case of South Africa, the Xhosa people historically have used male circumcision ceremonies as a marker between boyhood and adulthood (see Chapter 2 for more details). Before circumcision, boys played games that included fighting each other to negotiate status in their age groups. After circumcision, however, their prestige ranking in the village changed, and they became involved in community-wide political and judicial processes (Mayer and Mayer 1970). Though many Xhosa speakers still adhere to these measures of maturation, the larger South African state now recognizes childhood based on numerical age for legal purposes (Skelton and Tshehla 2008). In contrast, childhood among the Native American Arapaho tribe was defined as the stage from birth to the point at which one no longer had to rely on parents for protection and direction; tribal members virtually ignored numerical age in favor of a series of developmental markers (Hilger 1952).

Contemporary theorizing on youth has discussed the ways in which young people are represented in the popular imagination as either social deviants who threaten to undermine civil society, the future hope for a better world, or some combination of the two (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; De Waal and Argenti 2002; Durham 2000). While the media often represents youth as dangerous rebels, anthropologists have shown that this resistance can at the same time include creative actions that propel social change (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2009; Cole and Durham 2008). Furthermore, anthropologists have argued that youths' actions are critical to an understanding of community formation and nation building (Cheney 2007). For instance, linguistic anthropologist H. Samy Alim demonstrates that young people creatively use hip hop culture as a way to resist dominant ideologies and construct new identities that are empowering in their ability to “rearticulate their race, class, and gender positions” (Alim 2011:129).

Much social theory has portrayed young people as inherently rebellious and deviant; a massive force that society has feared and continues to fear will be its undoing (Helve and Holm 2005). Evidence of youth revolts in recent history and across cultures has fueled such fears: the apartheid-era violence in South Africa, the U.S. civil rights and hippie movements in the 1960s, and the Arab Spring of 2011 are just a few such examples. Today, the media often portrays youth as violent sociopaths (Strickland 2002). Because of such portrayals and the ambiguous nature of the category of youth, many are unsympathetic to their cause and fear young people's potential to unravel social stability. Yet it is this very potential to wreak havoc on the status quo that makes youth important agents of social change.

Theorists have also debated not only whether a distinct period of youth deviancy exists, but also where it may come from. Though her methods and conclusions remain controversial, Margaret Mead was one of the first anthropologists to make adolescence a central research focus through ethnographic fieldwork. Her 1928 classic, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, posits youth rebellion as a Western phenomenon, explaining that the strife, anxiety, depression, and angst many Westerners associate with teenagers did not exist in Samoa and is therefore not a biological inevitability. Instead, Mead characterizes adolescence in Samoa as a smooth transition from one life stage to the next, and attributes this to the fact that young people did not have to choose from a variety of conflicting values as American teenagers did (Mead 1928). Despite the fact that her presentation of Samoan adolescence is critiqued for its ethnocentrism and oversimplification, her work remains useful in that it shows how the experiences of youth vary greatly among different cultures.

In the 1950s, sociologist Shmuel N. Eisenstadt argued that adolescent rebellion was a phenomenon solely of "universalistic" societies – or those that do not structure themselves on

kinship categories. He explained that in societies organized around kinship relations age groups were not an important concept, and thus in non-kinship based societies the emphasis on age groups created tensions surrounding these different segments of the population (Eisenstadt 1954). Thus, Eisenstadt's work suggests that the root cause of youth deviancy is the division of society based on age groups rather than other defining characteristics. In rural South Africa, families use kinship categories as a structuring principle to different degrees, and the influences of changing political regimes, migratory labor, higher education, and human rights work have had different impacts among various families and individuals. What remains influential in Eisenstadt's work is his explanation of how youth propagate the social system into the next generation; he attributed social transmission of values and behaviors to the fact that youth attach to and identify with certain types of learning and then reproduce these lessons in the next generation (1954:26). Different age groups must interact in order for the social system to continue: youth both learn from their elders as well as teach their descendants the cultural and social norms of their society.

Philip and Iona Mayer's 1970 study of the South African Xhosa found little rebellion among adolescents, and their explanation for this was due not to kinship relations but instead to a strong sense of nationalistic identity. They stressed that cultural "radicalism" was not imported from outside of the community, but rather that adults heavily inculcated Xhosa youth with cultural pride and a desire to propagate an insular, homogenous society (Mayer and Mayer 1970). Here, youth are only threatening to the fabric of society when they have access to outside ideas and values – an argument that negates the earlier psychological and biological theories of youth as inherently rebellious and deviant. Although their 1970 study looked at Xhosa communities as insular and bounded, my own work takes into account the fluid boundaries

between rural Xhosa life and the values of the surrounding post-apartheid nation and larger globalized world.

On the other end of this debate on youth is the idea that this demographic is innocent, malleable, and a panacea for society's ills. In this portrayal, youth are in need of public sympathy, concern, and extensive social services. Such theories should not be mistaken for a portrait of youth agency; instead, this argument discusses youth as the object of cultural lessons rather than agents of change or upheaval. Within such discussions, theorists frame youth as victims of society's weaknesses. Indeed, childhood is often a concept that adults strategically deploy to garner public support for a cause, such as hunger or violence (Hall and Montgomery 2000). Very often, images of children as victims persuade people to donate money or support a cause they might otherwise dismiss.

Furthermore, theorists often represent youth as passive recipients of culture, rather than contributors to its continual remaking, as others have suggested (Amit and Wulff 1995). Taking postcolonial Africa as an example, many have portrayed today's youth as a lost generation, one in crisis, silent, and helpless to create meaningful change (Honwana and de Boeck 2005). Theorists attribute a perceived lack of agency among children to the fact that they are often disenfranchised citizens, not yet possessing the full range of rights and responsibilities necessary to participate in society (Cheney 2007). News headlines on child abuse, human trafficking, child soldiers, etc. continue to reaffirm this perception that children are helpless victims in need of adult saviors.

In response to previous discourses on youth as victims and passive recipients of cultural transmission, writings have emerged that promote the idea of youth as potential sources of agency and social change. In Kristen E. Cheney's work with Ugandan children, she discusses

how politicians and activists market childhood as a site for future prosperity and hope for the nation. These child citizens are particularly valuable to the state, she theorizes, because they lack social memory and can start anew, unburdened by past traumas/histories (2007). In Cheney's discussion of Ugandan youth as vehicles for social change, however, she notes that their lack of adult status as full citizens puts them in a precarious position to actually enact such change. Thus, she theorizes, states both disenfranchise youth as partial citizens and also expect them to be the civic leaders of tomorrow. My own research investigates this seeming dichotomy between structure and agency in the context of South African youth, asking both how young people have explicit agency in creating social change and also how they might unintentionally adopt new values that restructure their communities.

Social theorists Helve and Holm, in an edited volume on youth research, also strove to show how young people might be a positive force for societal change rather than a threat (2005). Though historic examples of youth rebellion and strife abound, the theorists in this volume focus on the ways that youth can become civically engaged members of society. New trends toward qualitative research have focused on the complex and varied experiences of youth in different cultural settings, which has provided support for theories of youth agency and political participation (Helve and Holm 2005). Methods such as interviewing youth directly have allowed for consideration of a youth-centered viewpoint rather than relying on adult perspectives to understand young people (Cheney 2007; Katz 2004; Lightfoot 1997; Montgomery 2009). Other theorists have also done research with youth demonstrating that they can critically analyze their surroundings and offer creative solutions to which developers and politicians ought to pay attention (Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010). I used such child-centered methodologies as models

for my own research, examining youths' perceptions of their own lives and communities as a meaningful source of ethnographic data.

Some theorists have looked at the role of youth within non-governmental organizations, a research strand highly relevant to this dissertation. Michael Bourdillon, in his study on child-led NGOs in eastern and southern Africa, illuminates both the potential for youth agency as well as its limitations. He shows how adults encouraging youth agency have been found to create positive social and psychological benefits for children. Furthermore, treating children as full citizens has enabled them to take responsibility for and initiative in community development. Children often resent their disempowerment and thus rebel against adults, and models such as child-led organizations work to reverse these patterns and incorporate young people more fully into society as citizens. Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where youth comprise over half the population and many are orphaned by HIV/AIDS or migrant labor, there is great incentive to mobilize young people as activists and community leaders (Alber, Geest, and Whyte 2008).

On the other hand, Bourdillon shows through his work that although adults in such institutions strive to encourage and facilitate youth leadership, they often push young people beyond their levels of competency and in the process demonstrate the difficulties in such community models. The problem here, as he sees it, is that adults' mediation of youth agency often means channeling it into preconceived notions of how to lead and organize. While youth are on the forefront of these organizations, adults often run things behind the scenes. Youth empowerment also runs the risk of inciting tensions between generations and traditional power hierarchies, and for this reason it is important that project leaders pay attention not just to youth, but to the broader social structure already in place in local communities. My own work rejects previous dichotomous views of youth in favor of models that explore the ways in which

resistance, social upheaval, and even criminality and violence can be creative actions that propel social change. Importantly, however, I adopt models for understanding childhood that acknowledge the ways in which previous generations filter ideological lessons before they reach young people. Furthermore, social and political institutions play a role in channeling youth into certain roles, as Hylton White shows in the example of unemployed young South African men who are unable to marry and start new homes (White 2001). Thus, social reproduction is a dialectical interplay between the pre-existing social structure and innovative forms of youth agency through both words and actions.

The Anthropology of Democracy

In recent years, anthropologists across the globe have become increasingly interested in the ways that national democratic systems, in all their varying forms, impact the everyday lives of citizens on a local scale as well as contribute to larger international discourses. As Julia Paley maintained in her 2002 article calling for an “anthropology of democracy”:

Anthropologists’ ethnographic method, their relationships with people outside of formal and elite political institutions, and their attention to alternative worldviews have led them to look beyond official political transitions to the local meanings, circulating discourses, multiple contestations, and changing forms of power accompanying the installation of new political regimes (2002:469–470).

For Paley, anthropology’s strength in studying democracies is its examination of alternate perspectives and interest in multiple ways of understanding the world. When viewed in this light, official rhetoric on democracy breaks down and changes shape in local contexts. In this dissertation, I approach the complexities of South African democracy in much the same vein, examining how local actors reconstitute official discourses on democratic values and human rights once enacted in rural contexts far from the seat of legislative power. Since Paley’s 2002

call for an “anthropology of democracy,” many anthropologists have taken up this cause through theoretical and ethnographic engagement with new democracies across the globe.

A major contribution from the field of anthropology has been debunking popular uses of the term democracy as a monolithic and easily definable concept (Paley 2008 et al.). As Mukulika Banerjee points out: “*Democracy* is one of those big words, like *freedom* and *terrorism*, that in common currency is more often used than analyzed” (Paley 2008:92, emphasis in original). Looking specifically at the African continent, Maxwell Owusu, in his article “Domesticating Democracy,” explains that there has been great difficulty in Sub-Saharan Africa in “adjusting traditional institutions to modern democracy” (1997:125). Nonetheless, he is careful to point out that many pre-colonial African social systems were a form of what he calls “primitive democracy” (137), with direct input of citizens to leaders whose power was subject to systems of checks and balances. Therefore, democratic values may not necessarily be novel despite the new situations and circumstances under which they arise through national projects. We see this idea reflected in linguistic practices surrounding democracy: Mikael Karlstrom discusses how local language choices have demonstrated varying conceptions of democracy as a political system (Karlström 1996). My own fieldwork reflects this idea, as evidenced in the ways that research participants use a Xhosa word directly translated as “freedom” to stand in for democracy. Importantly, I examine conceptions of the term “democracy” with a critical eye, as it shifts meanings depending on social actors and historical contexts.¹

Theorists have examined resistance to democratic ideology, exploring how local value systems often contradict national political projects. Wendy Brown relies upon philosopher Spinoza’s analysis of democracy, saying that “Democracy’s lack of a principle of its own means

¹ When referring to Western democracy, I point to a system of equal political representation through elected officials.

that any principles to which democracy attaches will be inherently antidemocratic” (Brown 1998:427). Here, she argues that democracy’s broad recognition of equality and multiculturalism makes it appear to not have a unifying, cohesive value system, leading many people to reject it as amoral. For some, this leads to nostalgic feelings of loss surrounding pre-democratic systems, which thus implicitly get labeled as antidemocratic because they rely on a specific set of values that can be viewed as exclusionary. As Jessica Greenberg explains in a discussion of shifting youth roles in Serbian life, democracy has led to widespread economic and social destabilization in the region, which has created a sense of loss when looking back to previous generations (2011). South African theorist Bernard Dubbeld echoes this sentiment, showing how local resistance to government in that nation evidences the failed expectations placed on the democratic state (2013).

Adam Ashforth’s study of democracy and youth in South Africa provides a useful analysis of the ways in which competing epistemologies intersect with political projects in the post-apartheid state. He demonstrates how the national rhetoric of multiculturalism and equality becomes highly problematic on the ground when dealing with instances of witchcraft and resulting spiritual insecurity. As Ashforth argues, the South African state “faces difficulties in devising ways of responding to the problem of witchcraft without compromising the elemental democratic ideals of human rights and the rule of law” (2005:15).

Furthermore, Jean and John Comaroff have taken a critical eye to democracy on the African continent, demonstrating that it has become bundled with capitalism and free market trade in a way that portrays this connection as natural:

The reason that world politics is presently so fixated on democratization follows directly from this. It lies precisely in the hegemonic, indeed ontological, association in the West of freedom and self-expression with choice. Democracy has become to Homo politicus what shopping has long been to Homo economicus: a sacred, cosmic fusion of free will

and righteous human satisfaction. They are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin, two regimes of consumption underpinned by the same mode of ideological and material production. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:125–126)

Here we see an explanation for democracy's world expansion that rests upon dominant narratives of freedom and individual consumption driving the capitalist system. Using the Comaroffs' analysis as a jumping off point, I illustrate through ethnographic data that current confluences of democracy and neoliberal capitalism in the contemporary South African state are part of a larger narrative of dominant Western values in ways that have serious ramifications for the politics of culture and the everyday lives of youth.

The Anthropology of Neoliberal Capitalism

At the heart of NGO proliferation in South Africa is the post-apartheid nation's turn to neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism, defined in this context as a set of economic policies focused on decentralized government, free market trade, and capitalist individualism (Ferguson 2006; Fisher 1997 et al.), has led to reforms in many countries that have been accompanied by a surge in NGO interventions (e.g. Edelman and Haugerud 2005). These organizations often address social and economic needs that increasingly privatized governments have neglected. Theorists have shown the importance of anthropological research on NGOs, as it touches upon issues of power, dependency, and transnational processes that affect both state governments as well as local residents (Markowitz 2001). As of 1993, one in every eight people categorized as poor by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were assisted in some way by NGO interventions – a figure likely greater today as the number of NGOs have only increased (Riddell and Robinson 1995). Anthropologists have argued that social welfare programs have become decoupled from the state and led to a rise in nongovernmental bodies

taking over this realm (Ferguson 2010; Fisher 1997; Richard 2009). For example, Gupta and Ferguson have shown how NGOs contest state sovereignty, creating new structures of authority based on transnational connections outside the realm of democratic control (2002). This radical restructuring of authority can, in the case of this research, give greater power to global social and political discourses than to state bureaucracy.

Broad sweeps of neoliberal economic reforms have accompanied the rise of democracy across the entire African continent. In economic terms, this has meant an opening up of global trade and free markets, a focus on individual economic gain, and the shrinking of governmental control in favor of corporate management of what used to be the public sector. Through international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, structural adjustment policies based on these neoliberal tenets have wreaked havoc on African economies and societies (Goldman 2005). By the accounts of anthropologists such as James Ferguson, these policies have failed, increasing financial dependency on foreign nations and internal state corruption rather than stabilizing African economies (Ferguson 2006). Some of the more dramatic consequences of these neoliberal reforms on the continent have been a disintegration of state social services, an increase in striking wealth inequalities, the rise of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights discourses, and a participation in the global economy that seems to benefit outside investors to the detriment of ordinary citizens of African nations. South Africa is no exception to this discussion, as evidenced in the sharp class differences between the very rich and the very poor (Besteman 2008).

Several theorists have investigated the political, social, and economic effects of neoliberal policies in Africa. Brenda Chalfin's ethnography of the Ghana Customs Service (2010) shows how economic reforms have not dissolved national borders, but actually created a

revival of customs enforcement as the state works to negotiate its own sovereignty and place in the world as a modern nation. The salient point here is that state power does not disappear as neoliberal ideals of decreased government interference sweep the continent, but rather is restructured through privatization of former government sectors and the involvement of international institutions in state affairs. Though postcolonial nations such as Ghana strive for economic independence and state sovereignty, Chalfin points out that such sovereignty is “never fully the state’s to give away” (2010:130). Instead, sovereignty is defined through international policies, global trade, and foreign investments. In the lives of everyday Ghanaians, these interactions have diminished state services and eclipsed hopes of a self-sustaining economic order. Instead of the state as a protector of the public, the state now acts as regulator of private property and individualism. Chalfin demonstrates this through an explanation of the Ghana Customs Service privatization, which she uses as a case study of sovereign restructuring under neoliberal reform. In Ghana, neoliberalism has led to minimized governmental centrality through international economic relations while at the same time increasing state control over the movement of highly desired goods and allegations of corruption. When looking at the case of NGOs in South Africa, it is imperative to acknowledge the ways in which state authority has not dissolved but rather been restructured through privatization of various social and political services. How does this shift to privatized services impact young people and their experiences of democratic ideology?

In Cameroon, one of the consequences of neoliberal reform and a pro-democracy movement has been what Janet Roitman has labeled “fiscal disobedience,” or forms of economic gain through unconventional and often illegal pathways that the culture of the modern state has normalized and rationalized (Roitman 2005). As neoliberalism has brought about an increase in

economic regulatory authorities both inside and outside of the state, it has diminished the centrality of government control over illegal trade and clandestine means of profit making. Roitman describes these profits as “unsanctioned wealth” that escapes regulatory authorities, citing examples such as seizure of goods, highway robbery, banditry, and smuggling in Cameroon’s hinterlands (2005:96) – all in an attempt to participate in the creation of wealth that neoliberal reform has promised. As the postcolonial state did not redistribute national wealth to ordinary citizens, new pathways to material accumulation have arisen on the margins. Furthermore, wealth accumulated in these ways remains untaxed, having larger economic consequences for the state as an entire “shadow economy” exists that escapes regulation. Within her discussion of fiscal disobedience, Roitman shows how the larger state of Cameroon has survived on international and bilateral debt as a form of wealth throughout the last two decades, a hallmark of economic reforms in Africa. Though debt has always existed as a form of social relations – people exchange goods for money or other goods, often paid back at a later date based on trust relationships – Cameroonians now describe prices as inherently unstable and fluctuating due to multiple sources of regulation. These economic shifts are seen throughout the African continent, further indebting nations and making the poor increasingly poorer. In South Africa, the turn towards neoliberalism has also seen an increase in destitution. Young South Africans raised in this economic and political climate are accustomed to NGOs that provide essential and nonessential services - education, health care, job training, rights empowerment – to make up for a government seemingly less focused on public welfare and more interested in capitalist accumulation and participation in global trade markets.

One of James Ferguson’s major criticisms of neoliberal reforms in Africa is that it is based on ideas of individual economic progress without taking into account the legacies of

colonialism and deep-seated structural inequalities. Nowhere is this more salient than in post-apartheid South Africa, where entrenched racial inequality still exists in the form of sharp class divisions. In Ferguson's discussion of the international discourse on poverty, "Africans are responsible for African problems" (2006:17), a perspective that leads to decrease in official aid. The ironic twist to these reforms is that while they emphasize free market trade and international connections, the postcolonial state must stand on its own and take responsibility for the problems these international financial relations and their resulting debt have created. As Harri Englund explains, neoliberalism has blamed poor Africans for their own poverty, and there is now a great need to "reclaim freedom from its abuse in neoliberal projects, which carry, in many parts of Africa, uncanny similarities to the late-colonial orders of exclusion and exploitation" (2006:200). Rather than acting equally upon all nations, globalization and its recent wave of neoliberalism has seen capital move between wealthy nations, and what investments are made in poorer countries are usually in forms that do not bolster employment rates or desperately needed social services (Ferguson 2006). South Africa's staggeringly high rate of unemployment - roughly one quarter of the population as of 2013 - certainly attests to this trend. These realities have widespread implications for youth, who face a lack of job opportunities that often continue along the racial lines imposed under apartheid.

Englund's in-depth study of the transition to a liberal democracy in Malawi shows how those in positions of economic and political power in that nation defined human rights in very specific terminology. Often they used such language to attract Western development aid and foreign investments. Similar to post-apartheid South Africa, the transition to democracy in Malawi in the 1990s was not met with significant improvements in the living conditions of the majority of its citizens (Englund 2006). Ferguson explains how the democratization of many

African states in the 1990s included widespread optimism for economic growth that has not been realized. Meanwhile, the neoliberal policies of a free market economy and privatization have disintegrated government social services in many places and seen the rise of NGO interventions. Since these organizations operate outside of the governmental sphere, they are outside the realm of representative democracy and voter control (Ferguson 2006). Such theorizing has led me to question how people in local communities perceive of and are influenced by human rights discourses in newly democratic states, with a particular emphasis on youth that these theorists have not previously explored.

In South Africa, the transition from apartheid to democratic rule has, like the rest of the continent, seen a rise in neoliberal economic policies and NGO interventions. The African National Congress (ANC), the ruling political party that is largely responsible for overthrowing apartheid, espoused the rhetoric of revolution and Marxist uprising but has come under fire for embracing neoliberal capitalism in the post-apartheid era (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004a:521). Indeed, ethnographers have revealed the widespread inequality that remains in South Africa after reconciliation, which did not include a redistribution of resources that would have benefited the poor (Besteman 2008). Steven L. Robins examines the partnerships between NGOs and social movements in his 2008 text, *From Revolution to Rights in South Africa: Social Movements, NGOs and Popular Politics after Apartheid*. He shows how, despite the good intentions of many NGOs working to alleviate social and economic problems, these organizations often run counter to indigenous conceptions of society. Robins states: “for most South Africans, claiming rights is not necessarily compatible with claiming communitarian identities and cultural and group rights” (2008:16). Thus, democratic-based rights discourses, which emphasize individual agency, do not always fit within local African frameworks of communalism. As liberal democratic theory is

meant to create individual citizens and abolish communitarian hierarchies, Robins calls for activists to develop new ways of meeting the complexities of postcolonial situations such as those in South Africa, which include different types of governmental authority at the national and local levels (2008:83). He qualifies, however, that we must recognize the variation among NGOs as well as the complex multilinear direction of agency between NGO staff and community members with whom they work. The rise of non-governmental sources of authority and social services in neoliberal states brings with it new conceptions of civil society, citizenship, and human rights discourses. What Robins has not explored, however, is how such interventions and reforms are targeting youth and might be altering generational relationships and processes of social reproduction in local communities.

Anthropological analysis of the neoliberal state and political economy has changed a great deal in recent years. Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud state that widespread acceptance and little challenging of neoliberal ideals within the discipline characterized the 1990s. Though this has changed, Edelman and Haugerud still see problems in more current anthropological analyses of neoliberalism: there is a tendency to de-historicize globalization, to downplay the role of nation-states as still existing actors, to naturalize neoliberalism, and to portray economic globalization as inevitable rather than a cultural construction (Edelman and Haugerud 2005:22). The historical and cultural understanding that they call for is certainly warranted, though more recent anthropological works such as those discussed previously (e.g. Robins 2008; Roitman 2005) have now connected legacies of colonialism and apartheid to current political economy. Rather than assume neoliberal reforms and democratic movements have completely overhauled state and local systems, my research pays attention to ways that existing traditions, social structures, and post-apartheid realities are intersecting with new

economic and political policies and what consequences such interactions have on the ground. The little work that has addressed how neoliberalism affects youth has characterized the consequences as “youth in crisis,” without access to critical social services from the state (Weiss 2004). But how might youth actually be part of the process of social reproduction of neoliberal values, rather than just simply marginalized by poverty and inequality? As Brad Weiss has shown in more recent work, local instantiations of popular culture in Tanzania (as seen in everyday settings such as barbershops) evidence the proliferation of neoliberal norms of commodification and consumption (Weiss 2009).

Anthropologists writing on NGOs in neoliberal states have critically analyzed these institutions, asking how well-meaning intentions might lead to harmful and unexpected consequences, while acknowledging NGO diversity (Fisher 1997; Riddell and Robinson 1995). For instance, theorists have shown how in some cases NGOs have simply transposed democratic models of individualism and empowerment onto the communities with whom they work, thus conflicting with local authority structures and exacerbating conflict (Bornstein 2001). Theorists have also argued that humanitarianism, through its categorization of those receiving aid as “victims,” can have unintended negative political effects (Feldman 2009; Ticktin 2006). Others show how the desires of funding institutions often place limits on NGO work, forcing them to address the concerns of government bodies, donors, and local institutions in ways that might compromise their intentions (Timmer 2010). Furthermore, theorists have argued that transnational, global processes such as NGO discourses contribute heavily to the shaping of cultures and everyday lives, even in seemingly isolated communities (Ferguson 1999; Piot 1999; Weiss 2004).

My own research challenges previous mainstream models of neoliberal economic reforms that highlight a top-down approach and portray norms of privatization, debt, and movement of capital as equally impacting entire societies and cultural groups. Instead, I examine the ways in which political subjects, such as youth and educators, selectively reproduce – and sometimes transform – specific aspects of these relations depending on their own historical, cultural, and political subjectivity. Through an analysis of not just narrative practices but also embodied and quotidian acts, I demonstrate that the implications of neoliberal capitalism and democracy depend upon their intimate interactions and negotiations with local cultural forms and social processes of reproduction.

Methodology

In this work I relied upon semi-structured interviews, casual conversations and participant observation. I conducted interviews with a total of 77 research participants, including NGO employees, parents, teachers, Department of Education employees in Mhlontlo Municipality and youth. Informants were semi-random, in that they were picked for their alignment with a set of criteria (age, locale, etc.), but within such parameters were selected randomly. Interview questions included information on topics such as family life, roles in the home, reactions to NGO programs and school classes, and opinions on a selection of the South African Constitution's Bill of Rights.

The first six weeks of research involved participant observation in the Sonke Gender Justice Network's Cape Town office, where I served as an intern in order to gain an inside perspective on the organization and speak with informants. During this period, I interviewed 14

staff members,² including the Executive Director, on a wide variety of issues, but focused primarily on their strategies for working with youth in cross-cultural contexts. These interviews shed light on the challenges of working in diverse communities and promoting Western-based democratic messages and human rights discourses that often contradict local ideologies. My presence in the Sonke office during this period allowed me to record everyday dialogue in staff meetings and public spaces that reflected varying perspectives on youth programming and working among a highly diverse staff.

The remainder of the research period was spent in rural Mhlontlo, living with a local Xhosa family and spending approximately 9 months conducting participant observation in schools, homes, and more generally around the community. I observed classes, recess periods, school festivals and staff conversations at six public schools in the area and became a regular fixture of daily life at these institutions. Observations allowed me to capture naturally occurring interactions and practices in the community in meaningful ways that supplemented interview data.

² At the time of this research, the Cape Town Sonke staff totaled 30 individuals. Currently, they have a staff of approximately 100.



Figure 1.1 – Town in Mhlontlo Municipality (Photo by author)

A potential flaw in this research methodology worth mentioning is the small sample size. Due to the in-depth nature of my interviews and interpersonal relationships in the Eastern Cape, I only gathered data from a small cross-section of the population. While there are clear trends in the research data that support my theoretical arguments, more work is needed in order to make a larger argument about what it means to be a resident of the Eastern Cape today, let alone about the broader concept of South African citizenship. This is a task I intend to take up in future research endeavors.

An important element of this research project was my own positioning within a rural, lower income black South African community that is part of a historically marginalized and oppressed population. As an American, white, young female, my race, class, nationality and gender presentations were constant realities of which I remained highly conscious. The Mhlontlo

community treated me as an outsider, particularly in the beginning months of my research when I had yet to earn the trust of my informants and neighbors. One of the most critical aspects of my research methodology, in light of these facts, was my living situation with a local Xhosa family that was already deeply interwoven in the community and had been for generations. This family both answered my constant questions about daily life and beliefs and also served as an entrée into the larger fabric of society, giving an element of legitimacy to my presence there. While my family was extremely protective of me in the beginning of the year, by the end of my research period I came to feel like a regular part of the Mhlontlo community, traversing the streets in relative comfort and engaging in casual conversations with a wide cross-section of the population. This I attribute far more to the warm, welcoming attitude embedded within Xhosa cultural values than I do to any of my own methodological decisions or research skills.

Lastly, my research employs a person-centered ethnographic approach to see how young people articulate their own political agency and identification processes (Cheney 2007; Katz 2004), which is directly tied to the theoretical positioning I assume in this dissertation. As childhood is a culturally dynamic and historically shifting category, it is critical that anthropologists use first-hand accounts in order to understand the experiences of young people within pre-existing generational structures. I acknowledge youth agency as a significant force of social change that deserves theoretical attention, which is partly achieved by paying close attention to larger structural forces and institutions that set the conditions for young people's actions and beliefs.

Outline of Chapters

I have organized the chapters based upon the above research questions. Following this introduction, in Chapter 2 I lay out the relevant historical background for my work, explaining the role of youth in apartheid-era resistance and the nature of South African rights discourses in the post-apartheid state. I then move on to a discussion of Xhosa history, making use of early colonial-era anthropological accounts of everyday life in the rural Eastern Cape. I interweave this discussion with more recent understandings of Xhosa cultural practices and ideologies, particularly those most relevant to the daily lives and experiences of young people. I give this history a critical gendered dimension, addressing the ways in which Xhosa notions of masculinity and femininity play a defining role in social, political, and economic organization. Within all of these areas of history, I pay particular attention to the long-term impacts of colonialism on South African citizens.

In chapter 3 I launch into the heart of this research project, examining the ways in which local Xhosa educators teach democracy to youth in the Eastern Cape. I begin with a description and history of the “Life Orientation” curriculum in South African public schools, discussing its objectives, strategies, and the logic behind its mandate. I then link the ideals of this initiative to the everyday realities in which the course is taught in Eastern Cape schools, showing the ways in which educators filter information on democracy and human rights through Xhosa worldviews – particularly those concerning gender norms, definitions of childhood, and rigid social hierarchies. Thus, I link the cultural practices of the Eastern Cape to pedagogical strategies, demonstrating how Xhosa youth are often forced to reconcile seemingly opposed political and social perspectives in their lives.

While South African public schools are a major battleground for political socialization, NGOs like the Sonke Gender Justice Network also take up the mantle of democratic education in many communities around the country (and beyond). In Chapter 4, I use data from participant observation at the Sonke offices in Cape Town to examine the social norms of this NGO, paying close attention to linguistic choices on cultural change and rights discourses. My interest here is especially focused on the assumptions behind educational interventions that advance Western-based democracy and notions of freedom as a universal human goal. Because Sonke's central mission is the promotion of gender equality, my analysis includes a particular focus on cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity and how the organization deals with differing gendered worldviews in their educational programming. Rather than treat Sonke as an isolated case, I situate it in the larger scheme of South African politics, showing its connections to state and municipal government as well as its place in the history of NGOs within the country. I then move to Sonke's work specifically in the Eastern Cape during the period from approximately 2008-2011, showing how they trained local Xhosa educators from an HIV/AIDS support group to lead youth interventions. Here I argue that a similar kind of ideological filtering as that with public school teachers occurred, and that Sonke programs led by these local actors were re-cast in light of Xhosa cultural and political perspectives in ways unintended by NGO staff. My discussion leads to larger questions on the long-term sustainability of NGO programs, asking what their role *should* be in youth political socialization to democracy.

In chapter 5 I diverge slightly from the focus on youth to account for intergenerational relationships and their role in processes of socialization. Here I examine adult reactions to democracy, given their socialization and schooling primarily during the apartheid era. Extensive interview data demonstrated widespread disappointments with democracy, particularly around

issues of children's rights and educational practices. Participants connected this with an intense nostalgia for certain policies and practices under apartheid, such as the legality of corporal punishment and much higher rates of employment in state services. I argue that this nostalgia for apartheid and rejection of democracy shows a competing epistemology to most Western political analyses; Eastern Cape residents connect today's societal ills with specific incarnations of democracy.

Carrying on the analysis of reactions to democracy in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 takes up a materialist framework to question how neoliberal capitalism has impacted local negotiations with and reactions to democracy and Western-based human rights. The type of capitalism currently at play in South Africa ties into larger global trends of neoliberalism, characterized by individualism, free market trade, and privatization of social services and industry. This economic system leads to vastly increased wealth inequality in ways that greatly impact Xhosa residents in the Eastern Cape. Research participants often conflated democracy with capitalism, explaining that daily problems such as the lack of unemployment, rising rates of teenage pregnancy, alcoholism, and HIV/AIDS were the results of democratic ideology. Further, my research demonstrates local expectations of democracy pre-1994, showing through Xhosa linguistic practices that people equated this new political system with a concept of freedom in ways that did not translate neatly into Western political views.

Lastly, in my conclusion I recapitulate the major theoretical contributions of this dissertation, showing how I not only build upon previous anthropological theories but also offer a new way to understand local educational practices and political sentiments through the lens of neoliberal capitalism. I then look towards the future of South African rural youth, extrapolating to broader global issues of citizenship and NGO interventions in democratic states. What might it

mean to have a generation of rural youth taught about democracy by those who are most dissatisfied with it as a political and ideological system?

Chapter 2: Historical Background

“History is interred in the shallowest of graves.”
–Jelani Cobb (*The New Yorker*, 7/12/2013)

Introduction

While the above quote by Jelani Cobb refers not to South Africa but to the racial landscape of the United States as highlighted by the 2013 George Zimmerman/Trayvon Martin trial, it neatly encapsulates a sentiment to which this chapter attends: the ways in which apartheid and its widespread implications continue to haunt South African citizens today. More broadly, South African history has featured prominently in larger discussions on the history of colonialism and racism on the continent, making it an important focus of anthropological analysis. Unequal power relations between race and class lines have played a central role in the shaping of this history and remain central to an understanding of Sub-Saharan Africa. Many theorists have written extensively on apartheid history both within anthropology and related disciplines (Bozzoli 2004; Clark and Worger 2004; Posel 1991; to name a few). Therefore, this will be a brief account highlighting only the aspects of apartheid that are relevant to my research questions and pertain to rural, South African youth. I provide a general discussion of the apartheid regime’s long-lasting political, economic, and ideological implications for rural South Africans.

I first review apartheid-era history and its ramifications for children and youth and then move on to a discussion of the Eastern Cape Xhosa in order to lay the groundwork for the later ethnographic chapters on this region. Lastly, I address the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in recent South African history. More specifically, I examine their involvement in civil society and their relationships to local and national government. Throughout

this historical framework, I focus specifically on how neoliberal capitalism has shaped cultural formations in the apartheid and post-apartheid period through labor unions, unemployment, social movements, and ideological notions of civil society as seen in various non-governmental bodies. The following historical background focuses primarily on areas of recent history that most clearly relate to questions of youth identification practices, political socialization, socioeconomic inequality, and conceptions of citizenship and human rights in 21st century South Africa.

Apartheid and its Aftermath

South Africa's long struggle with racist apartheid policy and its aftermath continues to permeate the social, political, and economic lives of South Africans on a daily basis. This policy of separation based on racial characteristics codified discrimination through a legal framework, affecting virtually all facets of life for South Africans during the period from 1948 to 1994. Today's young people are the first and second generation born to the new democratic³ South Africa, but their immediate predecessors grew up during the last decades of apartheid and were greatly influenced by the fight to dismantle this system of discrimination.

Apartheid, an Afrikaans word directly translated as "apartness," was introduced to the country in 1948 by the National Party government after winning elections that year. This party's electoral victory can be attributed, at least in part, to economic relations and class struggles handed down from previous administrations. As Deborah Posel explains, the 1940s saw many

³ As previously discussed, notions of what constitutes a "democracy" are culturally and historically constructed, changing dynamically over time and space (e.g. Brown 1998; Paley 2002). Here, I use the term as most South African politicians, media outlets, and scholars understand it: a political and ideological system based on the tenets of equality, political representation, and elected leaders.

white farmers complaining of labor shortages and competition in larger capitalist markets. Thus, apartheid designs appealed to those wishing to alleviate the labor needs of commercial agriculture and decrease wage competition through strict control of non-whites' physical movement within the country. Rather than abruptly altering life in South Africa, this government built on an earlier history of racial hierarchy and gradually passed a series of laws separating people according to clusters of physical characteristics. These laws eventually built up to an intolerable level for those classified as non-white by the 1970s (Posel 1991).

Laws enacted during this period governed virtually every arena of daily life. One of the National Party's first legislative acts was to separate races according to a hierarchical classification scheme. Under the Population Registration Act of 1950, South African residents were deemed "white," "coloured," or "Native" (in 1959, Indians became included under the category of "Asian") (Clark and Worger 2004). Native populations were denied equal education under the 1953 Bantu Education Act, which consolidated control of schools under the government, isolating African students from their white counterparts and teaching them only the skills deemed necessary for vocational labor. Blacks under apartheid were forced to use separate facilities in public spaces, relocated to undesirable areas, and required to carry passes that identified their racial status. A series of legislative acts designed to control influx to cities, colloquially deemed "pass laws," were especially oppressive, as they restricted movement and separated people from their families (Clark and Worger 2004). In 1952, the Native Laws Amendment Bill was passed, which required all black South Africans to carry a reference book that authorized them for working and living in a specific area (Posel 1991).

Furthermore, the government capitalized on the British colonial administration's establishment of African "reserves" from the Natives' Land Act of 1913, using legislation to

forcibly remove non-whites from desirable urban areas. In 1959, then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd announced plans to set up areas colloquially called “Bantustans” (homeland regions that in many ways resembled Native American reservations in the U.S.) that were specifically for black residents. Bantustans were meant in theory to act as separate African “chiefdoms” with their own ruling bodies removed from the South African state, and starting in 1976 the various homelands were declared independent (Clark and Worger 2004:65–66). Though in rhetoric this was to be “separate but equal,” the effect was to relocate blacks to some of the least arable land in the country and gave them almost no access to viable education or employment. Bantustan residents were stripped of South African citizenship rights and were only able to enter adjacent regions if they carried state-issued work permits, which required frequent renewal and did not extend to spouses (Clark and Worger 2004). Young people migrated to cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg for employment, effectively splintering families and subjecting them to the harsh stipulations of pass laws and resulting police brutality. In particular, many young men during this period traveled from the Eastern Cape primarily to work in mines, which involved extremely dangerous labor practices and poor pay. Consequently, this system of labor left many rural women and children behind as men migrated towards employment centers.

I conducted my research in Mhlontlo Municipality in the Eastern Cape, a region which was previously part of one such Bantustan, the Transkei (which literally translates to across the Kei [River]). In the post-apartheid period this region continues to suffer from extremely high rates of unemployment⁴ and a lack of adequate government support. These problems can be traced back to pre-democracy political and economic structures. Figure 1.1 shows the Transkei in

⁴ 37.4% of the population aged 15-64 as of 2011, compared to 29.8% for the national average.

1979, just south of independent Lesotho on the Indian Ocean coast. Figure 1.2 highlights Mhlontlo Municipality within the Eastern Cape Province.

Racial Concentrations and Homelands

Racial concentrations of 30% or more by magisterial district

NOTE: Portions of Colored, Indian, and white areas may also have an equal or slightly larger percentage of other racial groups. Black areas have no other racial groups as high as 30%. Homelands are traditional areas set aside by the South African government for specific black ethnic groups. All have a black population in excess of 90%. Bophuthatswana, Transkei, and Venda have been granted nominal independence by South Africa.

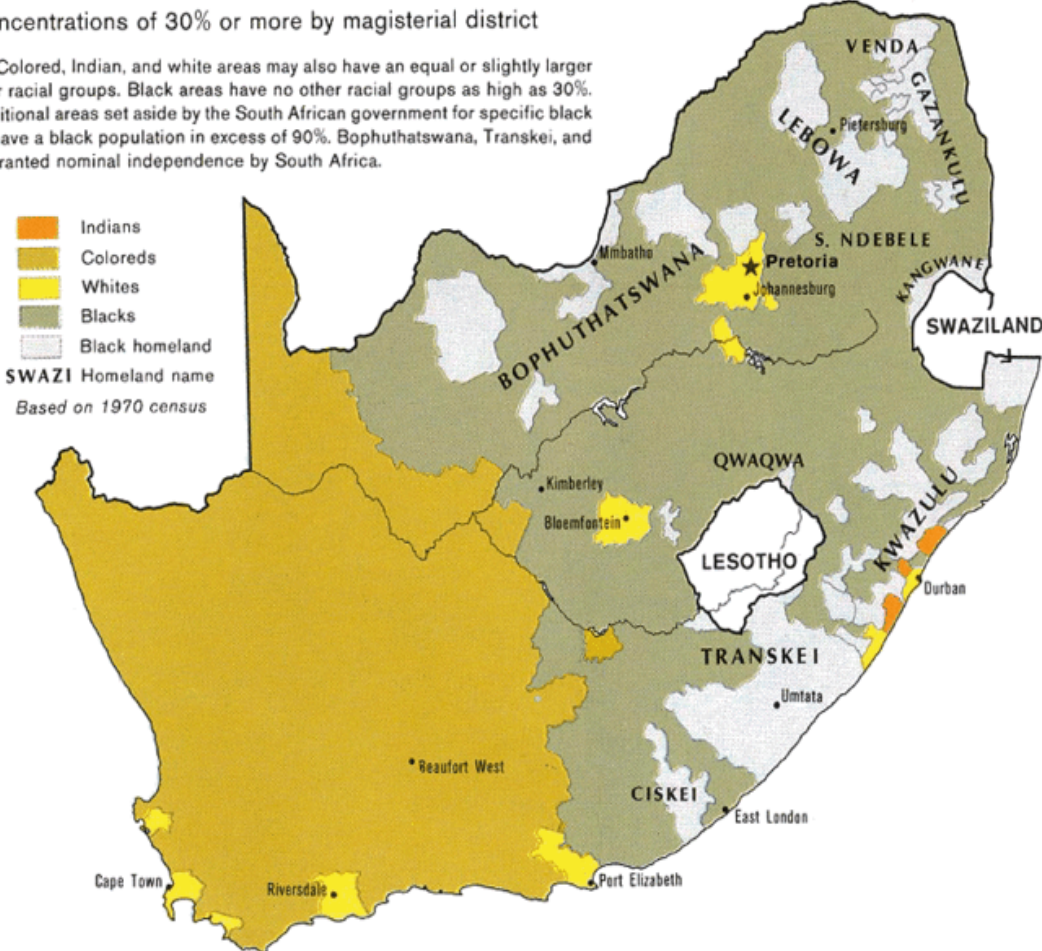


Figure 2.1 – Map of South Africa from 1979, with former homelands indicated (CIA World Factbook)



Figure 2.2 Map of the Eastern Cape Province, with Mhlontlo Municipality highlighted (wikipedia.org)

Though racist ideologies obviously acted as a justification for the apartheid policies outlined here, materialist perspectives have illustrated how economic relations and an emerging capitalist economy drove many decisions of the previous regime. Racial segregation allowed a white minority to stay in power through the exploitation of cheap labor, profit maximization, and maintenance of ownership over the means of production. Dissolution of the black family unit through the migrant labor and pass systems ensured an ample work force, and “Bantu education” (which only prepared students for unskilled wage labor and eventually outlawed native languages in schools, replacing it with Afrikaans) was, for many years, a highly effective system of curbing social upheaval and rebellion. The anti-apartheid movement of the 1970s and 80s relied heavily on socialist perspectives of worker unionizing, societal rebellion against the ruling class, and calls to seize modes of production that had previously been in the hands of the very few (Chipkin 2007). As in many other countries, the conflation of race and class has had serious

consequences for South Africans, creating an internally coherent rationale that justified oppression and has perpetuated dependency relationships that in many ways continue into the present era.

Young people⁵ made up a substantial portion of the resistance against the apartheid government in later years of the regime, often through membership in the African National Congress Party (ANC) and its associated Youth League (ANCYL). The latter was founded in 1944 and then banned by the government in 1960 along with its mother organization. The ANCYL served as a radical faction of educated young black people who constantly challenged the larger ANC political party to align their protests with the “grievances and interests of the masses” (Posel 2013). In this sense, the Youth League retained decision-making autonomy while existing under the political umbrella of the larger ANC (de Beer 1991). During the anti-apartheid movement, protest activity was increasingly carried out by young men with violent force, constructing a politics of aggression and hyper-masculinity as a method of resisting oppression and entrenched racism.

One of the most iconic moments in apartheid’s youth resistance occurred on June 16, 1976. Black students protesting the use of Afrikaans in the Bantu education system boycotted classes and organized a protest in Soweto, a large township outside of Johannesburg. Though the student protests began peacefully, police opened fire on children as young as 13 years old, killing hundreds and injuring many more. The resulting riots and burning of government buildings that followed escalated white South Africans’ fear of black youth while also greatly increasing international condemnation of the apartheid government. During this period many young ANC and Youth League members went abroad to Communist countries such as the Soviet Union, East

⁵ While a controversial term to define (e.g. Bucholtz 2002; Lancy 2008), in this dissertation I rely upon NGO definitions of youth as aged 14-25. Note that this contrasts with South African legal definitions of youth as up to age 35.

Germany, and Cuba to receive military and ideological training (de Beer 1991). Mounting external pressures from other nations, including the United States, played a critical role in toppling the apartheid regime for good in the 1990s. For instance, in 1986 the U.S. Congress passed legislation that mandated a boycott of new South African investments, bank loans, air links, and many imports (Clark and Worger 2004). After years of violent resistance to the apartheid government, the transition to democracy in 1994 was by most accounts remarkably peaceful (Clark and Worger 2004). It included the drafting of a new constitution with wide protections for all citizens. This document includes such extensive and thorough human rights legislation that it is often considered the most liberal and inclusive constitution in the world (Robins 2008).

Despite the fact that official apartheid legislation was abolished in 1994, its enduring legacy is ubiquitous. Pervasive inequality and de facto segregation along previously established racial classification schemes have carried over into the 21st century democratic state. Nonetheless, many theorists have suggested that class segregation appears to be in the process of superseding previous racial segregation lines (Ashforth 2005). As a black meritocracy emerges and non-white people rise to leadership positions in the corporate sector, previous notions of socialist wealth redistribution have been replaced by socialization to global neoliberal ideals of individual accumulation, free market trade, and ever-increasing consumer desires (Chalfin 2010; Robins 2008). Jean and John Comaroff have addressed this, arguing that

perhaps the most notable feature of the emergence of the ‘new’ South Africa is the way it reversed the teleology of the anti-apartheid struggle. That struggle was grounded in a vision of African socialism...And yet, from the moment it took office, the ANC, constrained by its perception of global economic realities, has committed itself unequivocally to neoliberal capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004a:521).

Along with norms of capitalist consumption in the post-apartheid state have come widespread claims of corruption that contribute heavily to current dissatisfaction with the ANC and its leadership.⁶ Anthropologists have explored this phenomenon in other neoliberal African states, revealing how nationwide turns to individualism and privatization often result in normalizing corruption practices that exacerbate wealth inequality on multiple societal levels (Apter 1999).

Along these lines, the privatization of many social services has led to an influx of NGOs that are working to fill in the gaps left by neoliberal decentralization of the state. For instance, private contracting companies now increasingly provide services such as indoor plumbing, road maintenance, and housing construction. This shift in norms of governmentality has significant implications for the lives of South African youth (Strickland 2002) and has led to questions on the roles and responsibilities of private organizations such as NGOs in processes of political socialization and constructions of civil society (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

As mentioned earlier, on August 16, 2012 violence erupted at a platinum mine in Marikana, a small town in the North West Province of the country. Police opened fire on a group of striking mineworkers, killing 34 unarmed individuals protesting for higher wages and improved working conditions. Footage of the event was broadcast across the world, and journalists compared it to the police brutality and systematic violence seen under apartheid. Sociologist Peter Alexander of the University of Johannesburg has critically examined this event, causally tying it to neoliberal capitalism: “Increased unemployment, stagnant real wages and heightened inequality arise from the government’s pro-capitalist economic policies...Its general approach has been neoliberal and there has been no significant attempt to restructure the economy” (Alexander 2013). Thus, such recent events in the labor history of South Africa

⁶ Consider the 2014 political and media scandal over Jacob Zuma’s Nkandla estate in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, which included the spending of R206 million on “security upgrades” and has led to a legal investigation (<http://mg.co.za/article/2014-03-19-nkandla-report-zuma-unduly-benefitted-from-upgrades>).

demonstrate the increasing dissatisfaction and disappointment with the current ruling party, the ANC, particularly in light of its socialist agenda pre-1994, promises of wealth redistribution, and the rise of a privatized, capitalist system that favors the few at the expense of many. Robins further elucidated this political and economic shift in the party:

Radical keywords and concepts such as socialism, national liberation, class struggle, peoples' revolution, resistance to racial capitalism and colonialism-of-a-special type, were replaced with tamer words such as rights, citizenship, liberal democracy, nation building, transformation, black economic empowerment (BEE) and so on (Robins 2008:3).

This ideological change has larger structural ties to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies that have created severe dependency relationships in the global South and have naturalized capitalism not just as an economic system, but as a superior ideological framework for nationhood (Goldman 2005). Many political analysts and journalists see the economic tensions in South Africa as foreboding - a tinderbox ready to catch fire at any moment (Mufson and Raghavan 2014). Indeed, during fieldwork some Eastern Cape residents went so far as to tell me that once Mandela dies (he was still alive at the time of this research), the people would riot against the ANC and break their longstanding ties of allegiance with the party. As later chapters indicate, the previous era's political engagement has been replaced with a combination of apathy and political resistance due to perceived failings of the ruling party and its allegedly corrupt leaders as well as calls for change from labor unions and new, offshoot political parties. Many local Eastern Cape discourses suggest a causal relationship between economic disappointments and the fundamental tenets of liberal, Western democracy.

Understanding the Eastern Cape Xhosa

The word Xhosa, as used today, refers to a group of people sharing a common linguistic and cultural heritage. Falling into the broader Nguni language group, the Xhosa people are part

of the African category of “Bantu” or “Nguni” people who are spread across Sub-Saharan Africa (Meintjes 1998; Soga 1931). The label Xhosa refers to a broad category of previously differentiated clan groupings, many of which remain salient today. For instance, my research site is situated in an area of the Eastern Cape that was settled in the 1800s through the interaction of various migrant groups from neighboring regions (Beinart and Bundy 1987).

This research project focuses on the youth of the Eastern Cape Province, specifically within Mhlontlo Municipality. The Eastern Cape region has its own unique history that can in many ways be read as the history of the Xhosa people. Originally an independent chiefdom, Xhosa contact with European settlers in the Eastern Cape first occurred when Afrikaners reached this area in the early 19th century and eventually overpowered the local people through a series of violent interactions. They created factions among them, reduced chiefly powers, spread disease and took control of farmland (Thompson 1990). Since Xhosa society relied on cattle herding and farming, the transition to a capitalist economy and loss of land ownership was devastating to local barter economies and sparked the early stages of dependency on Western capital and commodities. Though they occurred nearly 200 years ago, these events remain relevant in a province characterized by extreme poverty due to lack of employment and ceding of the most arable land during apartheid. Post-apartheid, the Eastern Cape struggles with one of the country’s lowest provincial life expectancies,⁷ a reality that goes hand-in-hand with the continued presence of one of the world’s worst HIV/AIDS transmission and death rates.⁸

⁷ During 2006-2011, 50.2 years for males and 54.4 years for females (as compared to the national average of 52.1 years for males and 56.2 years for females).

⁸ According to the CDC website in 2012, HIV/AIDS related deaths were responsible for 52% of all deaths in South Africa.

Xhosa speakers historically divide themselves into successively smaller kinship units, a system still largely in use today and significant for discussions on youth positioning (Mtuzi 2004; Soga 1931):

*Nation → Tribe → Clan → Lineage → Umzi (Household)*⁹

While marriage restrictions have relaxed over time and families have spread out geographically, the patrilineal clan unit remains a central concept in Xhosa identity practices and marriage is still largely exogamous (with the clan as the basic unit). Historically, the clan was defined as “a group all members of which trace patrilineal descent from a common ancestor” (Wilson 1936:52). At my field site, clan names were used affectionately in daily greetings and those within your clan expected a great deal of hospitality, kindness, and loyalty as compared with others outside the clan. Xhosa people often refer to those within their clan as “bhuti” or “sisi” – brother or sister – to indicate the closeness of this relationship and the mutual obligation of assistance and support. This points to ways in which rural Xhosa identity practices continue to largely rely upon a communal, non-Western view of family that has ramifications for child-rearing, material property arrangements, and social obligations. Previous studies of African kinship relations provide a framework for understanding the ways in which Xhosa family life differs from Western notions of the nuclear family (e.g. Hammond-Tooke 1985).

The modern transition to neoliberal capitalism has indirect impacts on social relationships (Weiss 2004). Thus we see in the Eastern Cape increasing shifts to the nuclear family, rather than the *umzi*, as the basic social unit. Previous generations of Xhosa sons would have been expected to marry and build a second structure on the family property. Today, many young couples move to homesteads away from kin or to urban centers and start new households. Polygyny was an

⁹ While the *umzi* is the basic family unit, it should not be confused with Western notions of the nuclear family. A typical *umzi* consists of not just parents and children, but uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents. Furthermore, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has left many children to be raised by grandparents or other extended relatives.

ubiquitous practice until relatively recently, and co-wives supported each other in the raising of children and in household tasks (Wilson 1936). Contemporary shifts in residence patterns impact social and economic realities, removing wage earners from the *umzi* and taking the power of social control over youth out of the hands of grandparents and great-grandparents. In many cases, the *umzi* today is a place children visit with their parents on school holidays, where they learn about cultural practices before returning to urban life.



Figure 2.3 – *Umzi* in Mhlontlo Municipality (photo by author)

Despite immense historical shifts and political changes, many centuries-old Xhosa practices are alive and well today, albeit in new formations. As much anthropological theory on globalization and development has demonstrated, “traditional” practices often do not simply dissipate, but instead take on new meanings in relation to socioeconomic and political changes over time (Ashforth 2005; Piot 1999). For instance, Adam Ashforth’s ethnography on witchcraft

in democratic South Africa demonstrates the ways in which spiritual insecurities were transferred onto previously unknown terrains. In his analysis, witchcraft becomes a consequential epistemological tool for understanding the HIV/AIDS epidemic that contrasts with Western scientific discourse. Along similar lines, Hylton White argues that the wealth inequalities and high rates of unemployment resulting from neoliberal capitalism have kept young men in Zulu households within seemingly “traditional” family arrangements (White 2001).

What we think of as “traditional” has never been static and its form is always dependent upon constantly changing contexts (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The word “tradition” historically has been used as a gloss for a variety of practices that might appear on the surface identical over time and space, but take on different meanings and constructions based on varying realities (Hodgson 1999). As Eric Hobsbawm states, “ ‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (1983:1). Closely related to this analysis are anthropological writings on the problematic nature of discourses on “authenticity” and how these are culturally constructed, locally situated, and highly subjective. (e.g. Myers 2002) As I demonstrate later in this dissertation, many of the calls for traditionalism and framing of cultural practices as “authentic” in rural South Africa are based on highly politicized, manipulated views of the past. Nonetheless, the notion of “tradition” remains centrally relevant to many Eastern Cape residents today as many strive to maintain identity practices perceived as under threat from larger state ideologies.

A clear example of the difficulties of using “tradition” as a linguistic concept lies in Xhosa kinship practices, which still play a considerable role in the formations of family, structuring of roles and responsibilities and reckoning of descent. Kinship remains largely patrilineal when tracing lineages and implementing rules of inheritance, though families often

live in extended kin groups based on the maternal line – primarily a result of contemporary social realities such as absent fathers and a rise in out-of-wedlock, teenage births. In most Xhosa households, the mother's brother ranks highest in the dominance hierarchy when a father is absent. He is the authority responsible for decision-making, a practice that has deep historical roots (Soga 1931). However, previous incarnations of the family would have seen the children's genitor as household head: 21st century sexual, reproductive, residence and labor practices have altered the way this cultural schema manifests itself. Today, a brother or grandparent often stands in for the role of a father who is working in the mines in Gauteng Province, who has died of HIV/AIDS, or who never took financial or social responsibility for the child because he or she was the product of an extramarital teenage sexual encounter.

In studies of poverty, other writers have suggested, the change in family arrangements and residence patterns among Xhosa-identifying South Africans may have much to do with the transition to a capitalist economy and the resultant lack of property among those living in poverty (Bourgois 1995; Goode and Maskovsky 2001). Social scientists have suggested that, worldwide, marriage historically has served to combine property and shore up family alliances (Engels 1972[1885]). Anthropologist Zolani Ngwane, in discussing the rural Eastern Cape town of Cancele, describes the shift to a neoliberal capitalist economy and its subsequent impact on social organization for young people:

The generational impacts I observed at Cancele in 1996 reflected shifts in power relations within local institutions of social reproduction precipitated by nation-wide labor cutbacks that peaked in the mid-1980s, leaving a lot of older men from Cancele unemployed and young men of school-leaving age with no job prospects (Ngwane 2001:405).

Thus, in Cancele, a rise in unemployment radically altered the social structure of domestic spaces. Men were no longer able to maintain social and economic dominance over their families through labor, which had serious consequences for notions of masculinity and gender relations.

In this dissertation I focus in particular on how young people are treated and on the roles they occupy in rural Eastern Cape communities. Hierarchies based on age and gender remain central concepts to most Xhosa identity practices, though again the exact formation of these hierarchies is constantly shifting. *Hlonipa*, which can be loosely translated as “respect,” is a linguistic marker for this hierarchical arrangement that remains extremely relevant today. The word is multivalent, signifying both the actual words that youth are expected to use when addressing elders (or wives when addressing men of their husband’s *umzi*) as well as concurrent practices and behaviors that mark respect and label familial hierarchical placement. As South African anthropologist Monica Wilson noted during her ethnographic fieldwork in the Eastern Cape, “Respect for elders is a fundamental law of the Pondo¹⁰ social system.” (Wilson 1936).

Xhosa social structure and kinship, historically, has been based upon a rigid age and gender hierarchy both within the home and among the wider clan grouping. Wilson, in her 1936 publication *Reaction to Conquest*, outlined a kinship structure (at the time of early contact with colonizers) that was highly patriarchal, with a man marrying several women and maintaining them and their children under a single *umzi* (homestead). Political power was concentrated in the hands of elders, and ancestor worship reinforced this rigidity in the age and gender hierarchy of the community. Within the ranks of children, older brothers would command the respect of younger brothers – something I consistently saw among Xhosa families in Mhlontlo in 2012. As Wilson explained, children are meant to be quiet, obedient and deferential to elders.

The role of the *magoti*, or daughter-in-law, exemplifies the importance of hierarchy in Xhosa ideologies. While I lived in the Eastern Cape with a Xhosa family, the eldest brother was negotiating *lobola* (bride-price) with his future in-laws and finalizing his marriage to the

¹⁰ Pondo refers to a specific subgroup of the larger Xhosa ethnicity.

daughter of a neighboring family in the village. At the time, Buhle¹¹ (the soon-to-be bride) lived in the nearby city of East London, where she worked as a medical laboratory technician. Buhle embodied the plural identities many Eastern Cape residents negotiate in the 21st century, which became increasingly evident as she took up the role of magoti in our home. On the weekends or holidays when she visited, she dressed in traditional clothes reserved exclusively for this role, including a headdress, apron and long skirt. She responded to a new first name chosen by her husband's mother, the matriarch of our household. Her days were perhaps the busiest of anyone's in the household: during visits she cooked all the meals, served her future mother-in-law in bed and cleaned the house constantly. While we talked as she stirred a pot of *isidudu* (a traditional maize porridge), she would tell me in whispers that she wore spaghetti-strap dresses in East London (clandestinely showing me photos on her mobile phone), worked out at a nearby luxury gym and was altering her diet to include low-fat items in an attempt to lose weight ("When I cook boneless, skinless chicken breasts, [my husband] says 'this is not meat!'").

In this particular instance, the role of magoti exemplifies the ways in which identity practices shift based on varying cultural fields, a concept I borrow from Kathleen Hall in her discussion of British-Sikh teenagers (1995). As Hall demonstrates, multiple identity practices do not necessarily signify internal conflict, but rather show the complex ways social actors emphasize different parts of their identities depending on the context – albeit in internally coherent ways. While such practices of identification are nothing new, recent forms of globalization necessitate new types of identity shifts (traditional, modern, technologically savvy, obedient, etc.) among rural Xhosa youth. Here, practice theory provides a useful tool for understanding how identity is a constant process carried out through everyday actions and

¹¹ All names and identifying characteristics in this dissertation have been changed to protect informants.

linguistic choices (Bucholtz 1999; Kulick 2003). These multiple influences on youth identity practices highlight the importance of reconciling previous anthropological debates on structure and agency (Bourgois 1995; Ortner 1984).

Xhosa age hierarchies and life stages are mediated through various rites of passage, as seen in other cultures across the globe. While such rites are ubiquitous and frequent, they have shifted form and meaning through the decades. Male children, around the ages of 15 to 25, continue to attend traditional “initiation schools” where they are ritually circumcised and learn cultural concepts of masculinity, patriarchy, and respect for elders. However, these schools have undergone many changes throughout history and are not uniform across the geographical range of Xhosa speakers. Though many of the ritual practices at these schools are highly secretive, they always include circumcision. The schools may last anywhere from several weeks to several months as the initiate heals. During the healing process, traditional healers treat the initiates and socialize them into Xhosa ideologies of manhood. After attending an initiation school the boy is recognized as a full adult in Xhosa society. This transition is not merely rhetorical: the initiate is now able to marry, own property, and participate in community meetings meant exclusively for men. However, some scholars argue that the primary driver of this ritual has shifted in recent decades, in that demonstrations of masculinity among peer groups have superseded the importance of gaining adult community rights and responsibilities (Meintjes 1998:101). As Louise Vincent of Rhodes University explains:

Traditional and community leaders are in wide agreement that historical mechanisms for the sexual socialisation of youth have largely broken down. The role that circumcision schools once played in this regard has been eroded, to be replaced by the emergence of a norm in which circumcision is regarded as a gateway to sex rather than as marking the point at which responsible sexual behaviour begins (2008:433).

While previous incarnations of the ritual's purpose focused on property inheritance and participation in local political structures, today it primarily centers around the demonstration of a specific form of masculinity. As more youth move to urban areas upon marriage or shift to a nuclear family model, property inheritance loses much of its cultural significance. Furthermore, traditional Xhosa political structures have lost substantial powers of social control in the face of national democracy and municipal government structures. At the same time, youth face strong social pressure from peers to attend initiation schools: although most Xhosa families have converted to Christianity, I have yet to encounter a young Xhosa man who did not participate in this rite of passage. Boys who are not circumcised, particularly if they wait until a later-than-normal age to do so, are taunted and treated as inferior within peer groups. *Inkwenkwe* (boy) is a frequent taunt levelled at age mates that are still uncircumcised.

In the Xhosa family with whom I lived, the youngest boy (at the time, 15-16 years old) had yet to undergo circumcision and was frequently ordered around by his older, circumcised brothers (in Western kinship terminology, cousins) and treated as a child rather than an adult. The circumcised brothers, only a few years older, were given freedom to move around the village without adult permission and were considered beyond the control of family members. Their grandmother was constantly annoyed at these two young men for what she considered their disrespectful behavior (arriving home late at night, getting drunk in local taverns, and being relatively unhelpful around the house), yet rarely took pains to discipline them, explaining to me that they were "grown" and mostly beyond such punitive measures. Such examples demonstrate Xhosa conceptions of childhood, which are not bound to numerical age but instead to rites of passage and age groups. Xhosa boys are expected to prove their ability to act as men and command respect by bearing the pain of circumcision without so much as a grimace. Xhosa

masculinity is therefore primarily based upon values of stoicism, strength, and independence - characteristics that become particularly challenging obstacles for NGOs like Sonke that strive to overcome entrenched gender hierarchies and norms of sexism and misogyny (a topic I address in Chapter 4).

Recent government and NGO efforts to promote medical circumcision, where a doctor conducts the procedure at a hospital using Western medicine to prevent infection, have highlighted the difficulties in translating Western-oriented values onto rural South African communities. Media reports of deaths or mutilations resulting from initiation school circumcisions have sparked nationwide interventions to encourage boys and their families to select medical circumcision as a more appropriate alternative (Venter 2011). In addition, recent scientific studies demonstrate that circumcision confers some HIV protection, and this has provided an impetus to roll out nationwide medical interventions (Vincent 2008). However, boys often resist medical circumcision as an alternative, teasing those who seek it out as weaker and less able to endure pain, which many consider an essential aspect of the ritual. Many young Xhosa boys have described feelings of extreme rejection and social isolation when perceived to have “failed” the circumcision ritual by seeking medical attention (Mavundla et al. 2010). As Ms. Andiswa, a Sonke-trained educator in Mhlontlo, explained to me, peer pressure plays a tremendous role in resistance to medical circumcision; boys laugh at those who choose hospitals instead of the “bush” (Interview, 10/15/12). Moreover, performing the ritual under culturally-accepted norms has historically been considered a prerequisite for property inheritance from fathers to their sons (Mills 1992). Despite the fact that inheritance often moves along less traditionally gendered lines today, these unconscious historical connections to the ritual remain important to many Xhosa people.

As Mtuze explains, another reason medical circumcision is often rejected is because the physical risk inherent in circumcision is actually central to the ritual: those that don't survive are sometimes said to have been rejected by the ancestors as unfit for manhood. Medical circumcision, under this logic, denies the ancestors their right to oversee the construction of adulthood and dissolves entrenched methods of social control central to Xhosa kinship ideology, creating significant spiritual insecurity (Mtuze 2004).

Girls, on the other hand, have less tangible markers of age transition today; traditionally the *intonjane* ritual would signify a girl's entrance into womanhood. This ritual occurred at first menstruation, and required seclusion, skin bleaching, animal sacrifice, a feast, and the drinking of homemade beer (*utywala*); it was meant to prepare the girl for marriage (Wilson 1936). Though the practice has largely died out, some diviners will still attribute problems such as infertility to omission of the ritual (Mills 1992). Today marriage is both less common than in previous eras and also delayed until a later age among Eastern Cape residents. Girls gradually become women as they take on more adult responsibilities, such as child-rearing, which often happens as a result of teenage (usually non-monogamous) sexual encounters. As many villagers explained to me, the fact that girls are engaging in sexual relations at earlier ages today obviates both the need and the ability to conduct the *intonjane* ritual and provides further evidence in the changes to normative processes of social reproduction.

The intervention of Christian missionaries, primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries, played a significant role in transforming and re-negotiating Xhosa cultural practices and social norms. For instance, missionaries were strongly opposed to the circumcision ritual because it was part of a pagan belief system. Many historians suggest that this opposition was a major factor in the shortening of initiation rituals from months to weeks during the modern era (Mills 1992).

Missionaries also rejected previously widespread practices of domestic violence and polygyny, effectively transforming household relations and family structure through religious conversion (Wilson 1936). While different Christian missionaries varied in their positions toward Xhosa customs, many pre-colonial practices were challenged and thus either dissolved or reformed drastically (Mills 1992). As I discuss in later chapters, such historical shifts are often obscured in the present day, leading to misrepresentations of cultural forms as timeless and “traditional” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Pre-Colonial Xhosa Politics

Many Eastern Cape residents continue to rely on tribal chiefs for governance in the absence of easy access to direct democratic participation through political meetings and communication with provincial and national representatives. Historically, the clan chief is the senior male of the royal bloodline and inherits the position from his father. The role of Xhosa chiefs has changed dramatically through colonialism and subsequent political regime changes. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Eastern Cape, the chief facilitated direct democracy, rather than acting as a single, autocratic ruler (Mtuzze 2004; Soga 1931). The community maintained a system of checks and balances through an inherited “Court of Councillors” that safeguarded against chiefly abuse of power. This is particularly interesting in contrast to present-day Mhlontlo residents’ vocal disappointments with democracy as a political system. In many ways, pre-apartheid Xhosa society may have been closer to the ideals of democracy (depending on the definition of the term) than current political incarnations. As Chapter 5 will explain, we can read this apparent contradiction through a materialist lens that shows dissatisfaction with

neoliberal capitalism as the primary cause of present-day Xhosa discourses on democracy and its perceived failings.

In the democratic state, a chief's position has become much more ambiguous than in the pre-colonial era. While the Constitution explicitly states the "right to traditional leaders," the rest of the document circumscribes such leaders' powers. Thus, a Xhosa chief cannot overrule the state's legal decisions in ways that violate the Constitution. Importantly, the egalitarian emphasis in pre-colonial Xhosa political structure emphasized the cultural concept of *ubuntu*, which loosely translates to "humanity." Thus, the chief acted to facilitate equal representation rather than to wield total social control. Today, Xhosa chiefs maintain their titles and settle local disputes through a "traditional court," and earn salaries for their appointment via the municipal government – a way to recognize and respect local cultural systems.

Though conceptions of what it means to be Xhosa continue to shift with historical eras and political changes, many persistent cultural values such as patriarchy, respect for elders, and belief in witchcraft remain widespread throughout the Eastern Cape. My focus here is the ways in which these practices are intertwined with historical realities; a ritual may look the same as it did centuries ago, but ethnographic research can reveal how motivations, social pressures, and perspectives are dynamic (Ashforth 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2006 et al.). In the post-apartheid climate of multiculturalism and ostensible tolerance for diversity, Xhosa identity is a source of great pride for millions of people, and yet closer analysis reveals shifting social norms surrounding its expression and how these norms are tied to the material processes of the capitalist state. As I have discussed, new material conditions of late capitalism impact domestic spaces and notions of masculinity through the increase in unemployment (White 2001) and ritual practices take on new forms as they interact with the politics of the democratic state (Ashforth

2005). Next, I turn to the ways in which NGOs have played a role in the construction of a South African democratic society, and why these organizations matter when investigating rural youth socialization to new ideologies.

NGOs and Civil Society in South Africa

NGOs play a formative role in the economic, political, and social fabric of the post-apartheid state as well as in the individual lives of both urban and rural citizens. After the transition to democracy and rise of neoliberal capitalism, a great number of NGOs, both international and domestic, rallied around equal rights discourses central to South African conceptions of democracy and reflective of larger transnational ideologies from the Western world. Notions of what constitutes civil society and how it should be enacted have dominated much of the political and ideological discourse in the “New” South Africa (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Robins 2008; Van Driel and Van Haren 2003). As Jean and John Comaroff pointed out in 1999, “Civil society, it appears, is known principally by its absence or incompleteness. More aspiration than accomplishment, and an ill-defined one at that, it recedes rapidly before the scrutinizing gaze” (1999:vii). Thus, we can think of the project of constructing a civil society as a never-ending quest not just to reach national ideals, but also to determine what those ideals should look like. NGOs often play a critical role in this mission— particularly as heightened neoliberal forms of privatization push access to politics and representation beyond official state institutions. Individual South African citizens have become increasingly dependent on nongovernmental channels for everything from basic social services to political representation to ideological models.

Many NGOs in South Africa have found larger discussions on the ideals of a civil society useful when accessing state resources for historically disadvantaged populations, particularly in the face of decreasing government social services (Robins 2008). I focus here on the Sonke Gender Justice Network - a South African NGO that strives to shift local ideologies primarily around gender - as a case study. However, the nation is home to a diverse array of both domestic and international organizations. Social theorists have cautioned against generalizing with regard to NGOs' missions and activities, as well as about their ideological foundations (Robins 2008; Van Driel and Van Haren 2003). As Steven Robins identified, we need to look beyond dichotomous understandings of NGOs as either "handmaidens of Empire" (Robins 2008:23) or benevolent, neutral conduits for democracy, instead opting for more nuanced and complex representations of these institutions in South Africa and across the globe.

Conclusion

This chapter has foregrounded the ways in which historical processes impact the specific instantiations of democracy in present-day South Africa, both in terms of ideology and also everyday practices. Through a discussion of apartheid-era legislation, I have demonstrated that entrenched systems of racial classification and economic inequality continue to interact through rural household reorganization, the naturalization of capitalist accumulation, and the privatization of social services. Furthermore, I evidence the significant role of youth both as subjects and social actors in processes of social reproduction in the neoliberal state. As changes in gender relations, normative birth practices, and perspectives on masculinity through circumcision demonstrate, political shifts and changing lines along which economic capital moves have important ramifications for the everyday lives of young people in rural South Africa.

Chapter 3: Teaching Democracy in Rural Schools

“Today we are half-African and half-Western. You must be one. Know where you belong. You belong to the era of asking why. Don’t ask why.” –Xhosa Teacher, at the school’s annual Heritage Day celebration

Setting the Scene

The focal point of my research in Mhlontlo was an arid, rural South African town that most people experience as a blur through their car window on the N2, a national highway. It is not a place travelers usually stop unless they need to refuel. The town center is comprised of one main street along the N2, and a few side streets branching out from it. The commercial center includes a few large supermarket chains, a chain furniture store, a chain clothing store, a few banks, a municipal government building, a pharmacy and several family-owned shops containing everything from cell phones to shoes to haircuts all in one room. Along the side streets, lines of caravans offer hot meals, the local equivalent of a restaurant being one small room with a table, a few chairs, and a woman cooking on a hot plate in the corner. Trash is everywhere, lining the edges of green cans asking residents to “Keep Mhlontlo Municipality Clean.” The taxi stand, with its fleet of minivans that are characteristic of South African cheap public transportation, doubles as a meeting place where gossip is exchanged. The downtown streets are constantly thronged with people – in an area with staggering rates of unemployment, the crowds are

relentless.



Figure 3.1 – Main street of a Mhlontlo town (photo by Noah Burg)

Beyond the town center, there are numerous small villages where most area residents live¹². I spent the year living with a family in one such village about 2 kilometers outside of town. These are the suburbs, in a sense, of the typical Eastern Cape town, characterized by central outdoor taps but almost no indoor plumbing, small homesteads with vegetable and fruit gardens, and family-owned taverns where men and teenage boys buy and drink cheap beer. Schools in the area are numerous, ranging from parochial fee-based education to public schools where the fees are waived based on high poverty rates. Schools tend to be overcrowded, underfunded, and greatly lacking in basic necessities: in some, shiny new computer labs donated by various NGOs sit locked up and unused because of the absence of qualified instructors. It is

¹² In 2011, the total population of Mhlontlo Municipality was 188,288 people (2012 Statistics South Africa).

not uncommon to find upwards of 70 students in a classroom accompanied by a single teacher. In this chapter, I enter the space of such schools in order to illuminate negotiations with democracy in the rural Eastern Cape.

Introduction

The production of a democratic state, particularly one that follows in quick succession a police state as seen under apartheid, relies upon the socialization of youth into notions of citizenship, political agency and the ideals of equality. Thus, my examination of how educational systems aim to socialize children and youth into the nascent South African democracy provides insights into the types of citizens being produced for the next generation of leadership and voting bodies. Importantly, however, processes of socialization are always heavily context-dependent, relying upon cultural constructions, existing social norms and historical settings (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984). Thus, youth political subjectivity arises as part of a dynamic process in which culture, history and individual agency play essential roles.

In this chapter, I ask both how the state teaches rural Xhosa youth about democracy and human rights and also how Xhosa cultural worldviews act as filters for these larger state discourses. In addressing this question, I demonstrate how many Eastern Cape youth learn about democracy and its attendant liberal, Western-based human rights agenda through public school curricula that aim to create civically engaged citizens of the post-apartheid state. Through in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, I illuminate the fact that local Xhosa educators act as filters on the information youth receive about democracy in ways that reflect local political and moral ideologies. As the opening quote illustrates, the presence of Western-based values is counterbalanced by a tide of resistance on the grounds of cultural traditionalism; this binary

perspective pitting modern against traditional is not my own but rather a reflection of the ways in which many Xhosa residents understand and articulate the changing tides of history in a local context.

Maxwell Owusu's analysis of African democratic states provides a useful framework for my discussion in this chapter. In "Domesticating Democracy," he points out that widespread ideological divisions between tradition and Western liberalism is actually a false dichotomy:

The major problem of contemporary African democracy is not, I insist, the absence, or the problem, of the nearly universal spread of democratic values and principles. It is, rather, the discovery of workable institutional structures...suited to contemporary African circumstances that embody pre-existent democratic values, ideals, and principles (Owusu 1997).

Thus, much of "traditional" African cultures already incorporated what many theorists consider the ideals of democracy pre-colonization, such as equal representation through central leaders and a focus on egalitarianism (Wilson 1982). The challenge for many states today is not so much in spreading the basic political ideals of democracy as it is in crafting local institutions that fit the realities of contemporary circumstances and take into account "pre-democratic" value systems.

Though state discourses on topics such as children's rights, gender equality, and freedom are embedded throughout the curriculum across provincial and cultural lines, teachers always present such topics through their own pre-existing cultural worldviews and local perspectives. Thus, having a nationwide policy on teaching democracy hardly leads to the production of one type of democratic citizen throughout the country. Rarely a conscious exercise or strategy, teaching practices in the classroom are a part of the embedded *habitus* (or "system of dispositions," as Bourdieu defines it) of local actors that impacts how and what information is presented, and to what ends (Bourdieu 1984:6). In many cases, habitus practices in the classroom conflict with rhetorical and discursive strategies, evidencing disjunctures between unconscious

actions and conscious narratives. Thus, in this chapter my examination of in-class practices, discursive strategies and historical understandings of Xhosa cultural ideologies will illuminate the ways in which democratic values are locally negotiated in the classroom between teachers and students.

By using Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, I employ a larger practice theory framework to understand classroom negotiations, asking how daily actions and behaviors unconsciously create, sustain, and re-orient value structures, hierarchies, and political ideologies in local communities (Bucholtz 1999; Ortner 1984). Sherry Ortner (2006:3) explains how practice theory overcame previous constraint-based understandings of social organization by acknowledging the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. "It restored the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action." Thus, I understand Xhosa resistance to democratic ideologies on children's rights as both a reaffirmation of previously existing social structures (such as rigid age hierarchies and discourses on respect) as well as evidence of local actors' agency in creating new societal formations and value systems. Within this discussion, I show how my ethnographic data points to a rejection of Western-based children's rights discourses primarily on the basis of cultural traditionalism. At the closing of this chapter, I discuss the potential implications that these educational practices and embedded cultural discourses might have on youth and their political subjectivities. What might it mean for the future of South Africa that youth are learning about democracy from those most dissatisfied with it? And how can we situate these practices among larger global networks of democratic and capitalist systems?

Life Orientation Class

In 2002, in alignment with the nascent democratic state, the South African Department of Education pioneered a course mandatory to all students in grades 7 through 12¹³ called “Life Orientation.” This subject covers a wide breadth of topics, from nutrition and physical education to gender equality and child abuse (Prinsloo 2007). During my time conducting fieldwork in the Eastern Cape, I saw Life Orientation lessons that trained children to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods, encouraged them to exercise by doing jumping jacks in class, and informed them of their basic human rights as enshrined in the South African Constitution, to name only a few examples.

This chapter relies upon an examination of the Life Orientation classroom as a microcosm of larger state discourses on democracy, since one of the primary goals of this class is producing citizens that participate fully in the democratic process on both local and national levels (South African Department of Education 2011). This educational priority directly reflects post-apartheid national rhetoric of an inclusive state based on equality and universal civic participation. This perspective is grounded in an assumption that youth should inherently possess specific rights and responsibilities in the democratic state, and that they have the capacity to act as engaged members of civil society even before reaching what the law defines as adulthood¹⁴.

The implementation of Life Orientation as a mandatory part of the national curriculum is a product of several iterations in South African educational design over approximately the past two decades. In 1996, the Department of Education instituted Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), maligned by many teachers for its emphasis on mandatory progress reports and learner

¹³ Roughly, ages 13-18.

¹⁴ In South Africa, 18 years of age.

assessments that purportedly took time away from actual teaching. Because of extensive teacher backlash, this program was further refined into the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in 2010 (Cobban 2010). As Ms. Legodi, a Department of Education employee in Mhlontlo, explained:

With the introduction of this OBE, there were a lot of terms that were confusing to teachers. Then it was streamlined to NCS. Still, the teachers complained that there's a lot of written work. This makes it so they don't have enough time to teach. They are always busy writing, preparing for us departmental officials...so they are busy writing instead of doing their actual job of teaching (Interview, 9/10/12).

Local critiques leveled against the South African Department of Education in part reflect cultural differences in pedagogical strategy and classroom norms. In order to address such teacher frustrations, in 2011 the Department of Education issued the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which mandates less learner projects and written assessment tasks for educators. CAPS is meant to amend – rather than replace – the previous NCS (Jones 2013). Under this new system, Life Orientation class takes up 2 instructional hours per week in both the Senior phase (grades 7-9) and Further Education and Training phase (grades 10-12) (National Curriculum Statement 2011).

Life Orientation class provides a counterpoint to the types of democracy and human rights education that occur in NGO interventions outside of school and through youth socialization in the larger Xhosa community. Ms. Yandani, a Life Orientation teacher, told me that this class involves activities such as “case studies about teenage pregnancy or a child-headed family. The real issues they are dealing with, the social issues. You just bring up the scenario, and then you have to check their decision-making skills” (Interview, 5/30/12). Thus, the class serves as a counterpoint to academic subjects, taking a holistic approach to children's lived realities and experiences beyond the classroom. Nonetheless, it differs from extracurricular and

informal learning because it includes national standards, objectives, protocols, and assessments.

Ms. Yandani continued by describing her affinity to the Life Orientation curriculum: “To me, the introduction of L.O. has been a dream come true. Because I’ve always wanted a platform where one can speak freely to the learners. Especially at the high school level. Because they are the ones who are most affected by teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, and all those issues.”

In official documentation, the South African Department of Education defines the purpose of Life Orientation in the following terms:

Life Orientation equips learners to engage on personal, psychological, neuro-cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural, socio-economic and constitutional levels, to respond positively to the demands of the world, to assume responsibilities, and to make the most of life’s opportunities. It enables learners to know how to exercise their constitutional rights and responsibilities, to respect the rights of others, and to value diversity, health and well-being. Life Orientation promotes knowledge, values, attitudes and skills that prepare learners to respond effectively to the challenges that confront them as well as the challenges they will have to deal with as adults, and to play a meaningful role in society and the economy (Department of Education 2003).

The ambiguity of rhetoric advocating learners to “respond positively to the demands of the world” and “make the most of life’s opportunities” leaves a wide margin of interpretation for individual educators, and is of particular interest to this dissertation. Within the Life Orientation general goals, a portion of the curriculum more specifically addresses “citizenship education,” saying “it is important for learners to be politically literate, that is, to know and understand democratic processes. The importance of volunteerism, social service, and involvement in a democratic society are emphasized” (Department of Education 2003). Thus, a close and critical examination of the South African constitution and the rights contained therein are a primary objective of Life Orientation class. Beyond creating politically conscious youth, however, this educational objective prizes socialization to primarily those values understood by the state as

“democratic.” As I will show in this and further chapters, this aim is met with varying results and teaching strategies in local contexts.

Thus, the curriculum’s national rhetoric is challenging for local educators to enact, as many terms are not clearly defined and are open to multiple interpretations depending on the cultural context. For instance, “rights and responsibilities” in the above official policy are alluded to without the provision of universal definitions for these terms. In presenting my ethnographic data, I show that people have very different viewpoints of what this should entail, especially when it comes to youth. To make matters more complicated, another portion of the same document acknowledges the need to “value indigenous knowledge systems:”

In the 1960s, the theory of multiple-intelligences forced educationists to recognise that there were many ways of processing information to make sense of the world, and that, if one were to define intelligence anew, one would have to take these different approaches into account. Up until then the Western world had only valued logical, mathematical and specific linguistic abilities, and rated people as ‘intelligent’ only if they were adept in these ways. Now people recognise the wide diversity of knowledge systems through which people make sense of and attach meaning to the world in which they live. Indigenous knowledge systems in the South African context refer to a body of knowledge embedded in African philosophical thinking and social practices that have evolved over thousands of years. The National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 – 12 (General) has infused indigenous knowledge systems into the Subject Statements. It acknowledges the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution (Department of Education 2003).

As this statement suggests, how do you teach students about “rights and responsibilities” as part of a national curriculum while simultaneously attending to the varying worldviews of different cultural groups? How do individual teachers prioritize the “rich history and heritage” of a multicultural, pluralistic nation while attending to state demands for the production of democratic citizens?

The above curricular statements illustrate one of the central tenets and challenges of South African democracy writ large, which is a constitution that retains legal primacy yet exists

concurrently with multicultural perspectives and ways of understanding the world. In attempting to redress the horrors and injustices of apartheid, South African legislation works to promote recognition of cultural diversity on many levels. However, this venerable goal of equality across cultures is highly problematic to enact on the ground. For instance, the above statement doesn't explain what exactly should constitute "responsibilities." Further, while it pays lip service to multiple ways of knowing, it ultimately prioritizes one official rhetoric – that of the South African constitution. When local ideas of right and wrong conflict with the Life Orientation curriculum, and how do individual teachers deal with such moments of cultural tension?

Others have addressed elements of cultural tension within the South African state, albeit in very different contexts. For instance, Jean and John Comaroff have explored democracy's limit in accommodating cultural difference, showing how South African legislation and rhetoric has encouraged citizens and policymakers alike to celebrate indigenous beliefs as equally valid to Western scientific ones. They have demonstrated, however, that such ideas are far more controversial when it comes to the legality of practicing beliefs considered to be fundamentally at odds with democracy. A dramatic example in their writings is the killing of those thought to practice witchcraft according to certain cultural groups:

Of [cultural practices deemed 'dangerous'], the killing of witches is perhaps the most acute affront to governance. Not only does it subvert the state monopoly over legitimate violence, but it also calls into question the extent of cultural recognition actually afforded by the South African Bill of Rights...under the new South African Constitution, traditional African practices cannot simply be criminalized (Comaroff & Comaroff 2004:189)

To South Africans victimized by the spiritual insecurity and violence of witchcraft practices, the government's inability to protect its citizens from the evils of witches is seen as a significant state failure and a major limitation of democracy's call for universal equality. The state may

allow South Africans to ascribe to indigenous belief systems, but violence that results from such ideas are potential felonies, creating a hierarchy of epistemologies within the diverse “Rainbow Nation.”

Despite the seemingly black and white nature of laws such as that described above, individual trials involving witchcraft in the South African courts are controversial in practice. In these instances, the politics of cultural difference and democratic reform play out in complex ways. The Comaroffs cite one such example: in 1995, a judge convicted five Tswana youths for the killing of a 52-year-old man, whom the young people claimed had killed their fathers and made them into zombie workers through witchcraft. The court found them guilty, but treated their belief in witchcraft as a type of extenuating circumstance. In this sense, we see how the court both recognizes witchcraft beliefs as significant evidence (at least rhetorically) while still upholding and prioritizing Western models of law enforcement and criminality (Comaroff & Comaroff 2004:533).

Such murky waters of governance and legality in the South African state make the teaching of democracy to youth highly context-dependent, and impact the production of a future generation of citizens in a culturally diverse nation. While the state promotes a specific version of democratic ideals and human rights principles through teachers to young people, Xhosa cultural ideologies act as filters through which these concepts inevitably pass. In the following section, I use ethnographic data to demonstrate how local worldviews in the rural Eastern Cape play a significant role in the construction of democracy at school.

Filtering Democracy

While in the rural Eastern Cape, I attended hundreds of hours of Life Orientation classes, both observing from the back of the room in a student role as well as speaking to the class alongside the teacher for various lessons and activities as a participant. I circulated between several different primary and secondary public schools in the Mhlontlo area. Rural South African schools in the Eastern Cape suffer from comparatively large student class sizes, severe underfunding and poor teacher training. Furthermore, the varying school fees associated with different institutions (as well as the presence of some “no fee” schools) have the effect of segregating students along local socioeconomic lines. These social and economic factors are salient for an examination of teaching practices within Life Orientation classes. For instance, schools with a higher percentage of employed, financially solvent parents tend to see greater parental involvement in youth education. Teachers at these institutions cited a greater ability to wield social control over their students, as they could streamline practices occurring at school and at home.

One of the more salient features for my discussion of democracy was the primarily rote educational practices employed by local teachers in the classroom. For instance, lessons that the Department of Education might have originally meant to foster discussion and creativity often, in my experience, became lectures that were parroted back in unison by students without dialogue or critical thinking. While teachers often asked students if there were any questions after or during a lesson, the answer almost every time was an immediate “no, teacher” said together and clearly well rehearsed. As Ms. Fodo, the principal of a local school who had taught for many years pre-1994, explained to me: “We used what we call traditional teaching [before democracy]. Where we stand in front of the class and teach, give classwork, mark - with very little activity

from the learners” (Interview, 4/20/12). By using both my own ethnographic data as well as historical accounts, I argue these educational practices are deeply connected to Xhosa cultural ideologies on the positioning of children and youth in the larger social hierarchy. Liberal, Western-oriented classroom norms do not neatly map onto Xhosa cultural practices, creating dissonance between curricular ideals and classroom realities. Bourdieu’s theory of heterodoxy, or the idea of competing agentive possibilities within a single space, is useful in illuminating the ways that local actors can challenge and subvert dominant political structures (Bourdieu 1977:170).

To provide a concrete example of such pedagogical strategies at my field site, I witnessed many lessons on the human rights portion of the Life Orientation curriculum that evidenced specific teaching perspectives. The goal of these teachings was to make students aware of their constitutional rights as citizens of a young democracy. In one particular instance, the teacher gave students a matching exercise in which they had to pair the appropriate “right” with an example of its violation from a given list. While I found that many of the violations fit multiple rights definitions from my perspective – for example, a rape case could be considered a violation of the “right to freedom and security of the person” as well as the “right to human dignity” (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996) – the teacher scolded students who chose an answer that didn’t exactly match the singular one provided in the curriculum answer key. Throughout my time in the Eastern Cape, I came to recognize that such common practices reflected Xhosa ideologies of education and the relatively low position of children in the social hierarchy. Thus, embedded social structures inform teacher choices on presenting curricula, which then further reinforce and shape value systems among youth.

In another instance, I observed a grade 7 Life Orientation class covering the topic of *Ubuntu*, a uniquely South African concept which roughly translates to “humanity.” The teacher had the students recite the definition in unison, discussing how it allows room for different cultures and all races under one nation. She reminded students that “the good of the group is more important than the good of the individual” – a positioning I argue is more reflective of Xhosa communal identification practices than the current incarnation of South African neoliberal capitalism and constitutional democracy. Thus, discursive strategies emphasizing preferred cultural values are paired with embodied practices such as recitation and group activities. Along the lines of this particular example, Steven L. Robins has examined the reception of communal value systems in partnerships between NGOs and social movements in his 2008 text, *From Revolution to Rights in South Africa: Social Movements, NGOs and Popular Politics after Apartheid*. He shows how, despite the good intentions of many NGOs working to alleviate social and economic problems, these organizations often run counter to local conceptions of society. Robins states: “for most South Africans, claiming rights is not necessarily compatible with claiming communitarian identities and cultural and group rights” (2008:16). Thus, democratic-based rights discourses, which emphasize individual agency, do not always fit within local South African frameworks of communalism. As liberal democratic theory is meant to create individual citizens rather than emphasize communitarian hierarchies, Robins has called for activists to develop new ways of meeting the complexities of postcolonial situations such as those in South Africa, which include different types of governmental authority at the national and local levels (2008:83). Therefore, the everyday practices and linguistic choices of educators, as well as NGO employees (see Chapter 4), can be seen to demonstrate the ways in which Xhosa social actors

focused on aspects of the Life Orientation curriculum they saw as most relevant within a specific local context.

A huge part of present-day South African rhetoric on democracy is the push for a more gender equitable society. This comes into play during Life Orientation classes, where curriculum encourages teachers to interrogate students' notions of gender roles and teach them about equality and feminism. As Ms. Yandani stated in her interview:

With the learners, it starts with them. In fact, I've just done a chapter with them on relationships and gender stereotypes. And the way they are brought up at home, how it affects their thinking of men and their thinking of women. And I find out that the boys think they are superior to girls...in fact, you even notice it because when they call girls, they call them "*abantwana*" (children).

This example highlights the difficult intersections of Xhosa cultural and linguistic practices with democratic values of the post-apartheid state. Depending on the teacher, students are either presented with lessons that challenge gender inequality within their communities or reinforce these norms under the justification of Xhosa culture. In the opening quote of this chapter, the teacher at this Heritage Day celebration continued her speech to an auditorium of children:

"Remember that a girl does not move around. She is the flower of the home. A girl that does not wish to get married is not speaking the honest truth. She must get married to belong somewhere."

(Field notes, 9/25/12). This statement demonstrates the deeply ambivalent and mixed messages Mhlontlo students receive when it comes to the topic of gender relations, despite the alleged unifying presence of a central curriculum.

In contrast, I found that teachers who had worked with Sonke's community interventions in Mhlontlo were more likely to feel disillusioned with the Life Orientation curriculum by comparison, especially around the issue of gender equality. Sonke takes a different – and arguably, deeper – approach to the topic of gender in its workshops, as this reflects the

organization's primary objective (see Chapter 4 for more information). A young woman who was trained by Sonke and facilitated their workshops in Mhlontlo, Ms. Zinhle said that "Gender equality is part of Life Orientation, but [the learners] take it lightly. They don't go deep...in a classroom situation, you cannot say everything...and it's important, because our culture is still discriminating as far as gender is concerned" (Interview, 9/17/12). She later continued, discussing an example of the challenges in teaching gender equality:

The students – especially the boys – will say no. I tell them what is said in the Life Orientation subject syllabus. That according to this subject, there should be no roles that are for men and no roles that are for ladies. I even told them that I went to a certain home where there is a young couple, and they have a two-year-old girl. And the father – the *father!* – it's a Xhosa man – he took the child to change her. And I told them in class, and the boys were saying "no no no no, we cannot change nappies"...The challenge in teaching Life Orientation is that the learners take it as a joke" (emphasis in original).

Thus, teachers encounter tremendous resistance to the liberal, democratic messages of the national curriculum from students (in addition to internal resistance) – and reported to me varying degrees of success and failure in convincing their students.

As in any community, teaching practices in the Eastern Cape varied markedly from person to person. Ms. Yandani explained her approach to teaching Life Orientation: "With Life Orientation, we take it as one is unique. And what you believe in, I don't have to believe in. So we don't have to indoctrinate them." Here, we see a more discussion-based, non-dogmatic approach to education. What is interesting about such rhetoric, however, is that it rarely matched up with the actions I observed in classrooms. This again evidences the disjunctures between actions and words that can exist within a single space.

Mr. Hackula, the long-time principal at a local elementary school, told me that the goal of Life Orientation is to tell students "what you should do, what you should not do" (Interview, 6/6/12). Interestingly, in this interview he initially presented his approach as dogmatic, and then

shifted slightly as he continued speaking: “You must differentiate between what is good and what is not good...*I’m deciding for them*. The learners decide for themselves as well. To take what is good for them” (emphasis mine). This quote implies a clear notion of objective morality that adults wish to impart forcefully on youth, and at the same time a seeming awareness that the post-apartheid state curricula encourages a culturally relative, subjective approach to the discussion of values and morals. Such teaching practices make for lessons that often switch ambivalently between dogmatic indoctrination and attention to cultural and individual difference.

Many teachers expressed to me deep dissatisfaction with a curriculum that encouraged discussion-based learning, as it presented to them ambiguous learning objectives and an educational strategy foreign to previous modes of teaching in the community. Ms. Zinhle complained about these shifts: “With the change of the curriculum, first it says you must teach the learners. Then they come with a curriculum that says ‘Don’t teach. Facilitate.’ You just facilitate, you just give them the topic and let them discuss.” Despite this explanation that the 2011 curriculum changes mandated student-led discussion, in my hundreds of hours of classroom observation I did not witness a single instance of this kind of learning environment.

Some educators were so dissatisfied with the current national curriculum that they expressed longing for the previous apartheid-led educational system in our interviews. Mr. Hackula, the principal mentioned previously, said that “Before the white regime was gone...although we were having great problems then, their education was up to standard. The education system was better under apartheid.” Though such sentiments might seem shocking coming from black residents of the former rural homelands of apartheid, I argue that an examination of Xhosa cultural ideologies create a framework for understanding resistance to Western-based educational models that emphasize democracy and equality in the classroom. In

many ways, the racist educational system of the apartheid regime contained pedagogical structures that many educators found compatible with Xhosa cultural age hierarchies and perspectives on youth, something I discuss further in Chapter 5.

In order to understand the classroom interactions and dynamics in the rural Eastern Cape, it is necessary to briefly return to the ways in which Xhosa society defines childhood and the positions of young people in the broader social hierarchy. As discussed in Chapter 2, the importance placed upon *hlonipa* (respect) towards elders plays a huge role in classroom behavior among young people. Children are taught from an early age that talking back to an elder is forbidden and severely punished, and that decision-making is exclusively the purview of adults (and within that category, primarily, men). Not only is this demonstrated through youth compliance in the classroom, but it also helps to explain how teachers conceive of their role as to guide youth on how and what they should think in terms of morality and political views. Seen through such a lens, a discussion-based classroom environment becomes understandably alien.

Though rebellious youth behavior is certainly not absent in the Eastern Cape, it surfaces in ways that tend to fit within prescribed cultural frameworks. For example, throughout my year living among Xhosa youth and their families I never saw an instance of “back talk” to a parent or teacher. However, teenagers often rebel indirectly through late-night drinking, inattention to school studying, and a desire to distance themselves in later childhood and adulthood from rural, “traditional” lifestyles that they associate with the older generation. Thus, youth rebellion is almost never exercised through direct confrontation with adults – making classroom debate and discussion highly unlikely in this cultural context. In this sense, there is a major oversight in curricula design at the national level: it does not account for how cultural norms play a critical

role in the process of teaching and learning, despite paying lip service to such diversity in official publications.

In order to make sense of the ostensibly subversive practices Xhosa teachers often employ in the teaching of democracy, I turn to Jean Comaroff's understanding of practices of resistance elaborated in the context of the Tshidi people of South Africa and their negotiations with a new colonial and religious order. Relying heavily on Bourdieu's understanding of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, she argues: "Typically neither an all-or-nothing phenomenon nor an act in and of itself, [resistance] is frequently part and parcel of practices of subjective and collective reconstruction" (Comaroff 1985:195). For example, she examines Tshidi puberty initiation rituals, demonstrating that surface-level aspects of the rituals have remained the same over time while deeper meanings have shifted in the postcolonial world. Rites of passage that previously functioned to create adult members of society became "a symbol of a lost world of order and control" (Comaroff 1985:119). Here, Comaroff understands acts of resistance as constant, daily negotiations and practices filled with ambivalence and subjectivity. We can think of Eastern Cape teachers' presentation of democratic curricula as similarly complex, containing seeds of rebellion through subtle, quotidian practices informed by ideological beliefs and a desire to maintain the established social order.

Democracy and Traditionalism

While the state mandates teaching rights discourses and democratic principles, many Mhlontlo teachers stressed to me the importance of keeping Xhosa cultural values intact in ways that sometimes conflict with democratic ideology. Eastern Cape residents revealed a great deal of anxiety over the threat of cultural loss. Adults frequently cited the areas in which today's youth

are culturally inadequate: their inability to farm; their lack of knowledge on areas of “traditional” dance, basketry, and beadwork; their adoption of non-Xhosa musical preferences – to name a few. I argue that this emphasis on traditionalism reflects a growing fear of the incursion of democracy and capitalism on what is seen as essential Xhosa practices and beliefs (a discussion I continue in Chapter 5). Mr. Gabela, a Mhlontlo high school principal and older man, heavily emphasized the importance of tradition and Xhosa identity in his discussions with me. “You’ll find our people have moved away from their cultural backgrounds. We used to make use of land. If you can see around now, there’s not much farming. We used to make a lot out of grain...things that are used by these whites, you’ll find that they are not nutritious” (Interview, 9/17/12). This quote, interestingly, pinpoints the source of cultural impurity as “white” culture – and yet, in other interviews, similar sentiments were paired with a nostalgic discussion of the “white government” of the apartheid regime as one that had more capacity to run a country than the current ANC administration.

The influx of non-Xhosa value systems were a constant strand of conversation – laden with fear – in my interviews and discussions with educators. In one instance, a local teacher told me about a young girl who was called into the principal’s office for “worshipping Lucifer.” The girl admitted she got this idea from an internet search on her phone, which led her teacher to lecture me on the problems associated with 21st century technologies: they bring unwanted worldviews into rural communities in ways that interfere with Xhosa processes of cultural transmission from adult to child. Here, we see an example of the ways in which neoliberal capitalist embodied norms, such as the use of cell phones and religious practices, incite spiritual insecurity – something discussed in other African contexts (e.g. West 2005; Ashforth 2005). Such instances stand in direct contrast to Life Orientation curriculum, based on the South

African Constitution, that emphasizes religious freedom and open discussion on multicultural systems of belief. Rather than see these instances as evidence of a rejection of the Life Orientation curriculum, however, educators find ways to blend varying ideological perspectives into an internally consistent positioning in the classroom. Life Orientation class, in many cases, turns into a celebration of Xhosa cultural values justified through a curriculum that encourages attention to multiculturalism and diversity.

One particular arena in which my research demonstrates a strong resurgence of traditionalism and fears of cultural loss is in discourses that specifically focus on children's rights, as elaborated on in the next section. Teachers complained frequently about the problematic nature of such rights, even as these same teachers promoted them through the national Life Orientation curriculum. In any cultural context, state discourses are presented through the lens of local cultural practices, and yet there are specific Xhosa ideologies that make discussions on children's rights unique in the rural Eastern Cape as compared to other arenas.

Parents and teachers at my field site largely blame democracy for promoting rights discourses that they saw as undermining Xhosa cultural practices and ideologies, a connection I elaborate on further in subsequent chapters. One of the more frequent things said to me by teachers, parents, and school administrators in the Eastern Cape was that "children don't know that when they have rights, they also have responsibilities" (Mr. Gabela, 9/17/12). This idea has several implicit values worth examining: beyond the surface-level discussion of democracy, it is embedded with "traditional" Xhosa conceptions of what childhood should be and what is an acceptable role for the child. More broadly, it calls into question the essential elements of Xhosa identification practices.

Anthropologist Monica Wilson's ethnographic work in the Eastern Cape in the 1930s echoes the same sentiment, albeit many decades earlier. In her field notes on the impact of contact with white colonists, she wrote: "Everywhere there are complaints of the growing disobedience of children" (Wilson 1936:60). If this was indeed the case many decades ago, what – if anything - is different about the generational divides of the post-apartheid era? I argue that democratic values in the classroom play the role of a type of neocolonialism, one in which youth are once again indoctrinated with cultural values that are often at odds with local cultural worldviews. The next section of this chapter discusses in detail how local educators resist this incursion of democratic values through the emphasis of culturally situated understandings of the role of children. This resistance does not take the form of flat out rejection of democracy. Instead it involves daily, often unconscious practices in which local Xhosa residents negotiate their own versions of political subjectivities and moral standards.

Rights and Responsibilities

While nationwide discourses of democracy emphasize the rights of children in the post-apartheid state, Xhosa teachers make sure to balance these discussions with the need to inculcate young people with the concept of *responsibility*. As Mr. Hackula phrased it:

Students don't know what this word means, democracy. They are concerned mainly with their rights and not their responsibilities. I used to say to them: 'please learners, it's quite obvious that this is a democratic type of government. But this democratic type of government must not mean you only rely on your rights. These rights of yours are fine and good, but they must be accompanied by responsibilities.

And Mr. Radebe, a Mhlontlo Department of Education employee who runs youth extracurricular programs, explained to me:

Normally we make sure before we go [to a school] for an event, we need to educate people of the entire community on the rights of children. But we actually make sure that

we do not say these are the rights. When we talk of the rights, we also mean responsibilities. We have to educate them specifically on rights and the responsibilities. When we go, we say what is right and what is wrong” (Interview, 5/3/12).

Such statements on rights and responsibilities were so prevalent among interviews with Xhosa adults that I began to wonder if media sources or local officials were feeding people a catch phrase of sorts (multiple people assured me this was not the case). Ms. Zinhle echoed this discourse on rights and responsibilities, showing how it has created problems for processes of social control:

Learners, they like this thing of rights. Most of the time, the learners, they don't know their rights. In such a way that they don't know that when they are having rights, they are also having responsibilities. They don't even know the meaning of human rights. They will say that, for instance, they cannot go to school. And you say 'why are you not going to school?' 'It's my right.' You see such things...and it's not even a right.

Thus, many teachers and parents felt unable to maintain control and authority over young people, understanding this phenomenon as the result of youths' misinterpretation of democratic rights discourses imported from outside cultural contexts. In this sense, adults perceive youths' invoking of rights discourses as a way to empower themselves and challenge normative processes of social reproduction.

This emphasis on youth responsibility was a pervasive theme in my research, especially in the frequent discussion of teenage pregnancy in the Eastern Cape. When asked about life challenges, many teachers and parents cited this issue as the most significant one facing young people today. Research participants often causally tied teen pregnancy with democracy, explaining that the increase in children's rights through the democratic government has eroded mechanisms of parental control and led to young people acting out sexually. Mr. Xaba, an educational director at the local Department of Education, discussed this issue:

One of the biggest challenges today is teen pregnancy...some people say they are being motivated by the grants (government support per child). Another reason is just that

learners are no longer being controlled a lot by parents...we seem to take a lot of things that we do from outside. (Interview, 6/1/12).

This statement suggests that parents can no longer rely upon “traditional” Xhosa teachings to rein in unwanted youth behavior, such as unprotected, pre-marital sexual activity.

To reiterate from an earlier discussion, notions of youth versus elder are highly relative and context-dependent, and do not rely on numerical age as a marker of status in the Xhosa kinship system. Only through understanding the concept of *hlonipa* and its persistent importance in rural Xhosa settings can we illuminate the pervasive emphasis on responsibilities and their balancing role in children’s rights. However, the cultural ideal of *hlonipa* does not translate to the state’s education curriculum or to its explicit focus on numerical age as the basis for conferring rights and responsibilities on citizens. While the state reiterates 18 as a marker of adulthood, rural Xhosa life histories (which include rites of passages such as ritual male circumcision, as discussed in Chapter 2) are built upon a very different understanding of what makes a child into an adult (Gwata 2009). Much of the discourse surrounding children’s rights in Mhlontlo was highly gendered and reflected patriarchal, deeply-entrenched social norms in Xhosa communities – as seen in the opening quote of this chapter. Again from Mr. Xaba: “girls used to know there are certain things they cannot do.”

The nightly television-watching ritual with my Xhosa family sometimes demonstrated the persistence of *hlonipa* and age hierarchies in the contemporary Eastern Cape. For a few months, Kentucky Fried Chicken (or KFC, which is immensely popular in South Africa) ran a commercial that was clearly geared towards Xhosa speakers (in fact, the majority of the ad was in Xhosa with no subtitles). The advertisement featured a little boy constantly being called upon to offer his bald head to an elderly male as a napkin after they ate chicken. The family explained to me that this was a traditional practice from an older generation, and that it rested upon

conceptions of children as placed firmly below adults in terms of respect and subservience. At the end of the ad, the child decides to buy his elder KFC, and because of its apparent deliciousness, the man ends up licking his fingers instead of calling upon the boy to wipe his hands. The ad shows a happy adult and an even happier child. The joke works for a Xhosa audience because it plays on a “traditional” stereotype of childhood in Xhosa culture and creates humor from the very anti-democratic sentiments the practice represents.

Corporal Punishment

One of the most common ways many Eastern Cape residents inculcate youth with a sense of responsibility and discipline is through the use of corporal punishment, both in schools and at home. The practice, usually accomplished through the use of a switch, is one of the most common arenas through which anti-democratic sentiments were expressed to me in interviews and during observation periods. Thus, beatings combine both rhetorical and embodied practices that arise within the habitus of a community member.

Though illegal in South Africa, corporal punishment remains ubiquitous – particularly in rural schools away from the constant watch of the Department of Education representatives. Many participants reported to me that teachers know to hide their switches whenever government officials are nearby, but based on my observations the practice occurs on a daily basis at almost every rural school. In some cases both students and teachers told me that no beating occurred at their school while I simultaneously saw teachers carrying around sticks to be used as switches.

While at one high school, I watched a teacher (known in the community for his more violent use of the switch) beat several students in class for not completing their homework.

While I sat in the back of the class he addressed me directly, informing me with pride that what I was witnessing constituted “African love.” The logic underlying this statement implies a pan-African unity of values and practices that contrasts sharply with the South African state, and is meant to call explicit attention to racial and cultural differences. His theatrical display of the switch combined with his rhetorical strategies challenged dominant power structures and subverted hegemonic political ideologies seen as infringing on notions of “culture.”

As this teacher’s words imply, multiculturalism in the minds of many South Africans may mean the ability to exist side-by-side peacefully, but not necessarily any likelihood for increased integration. Imitha, a precocious and studious female high school student, discussed physical discipline with me: “children today don’t mind whether it’s painful or what. They’re Westernized most of the time....they’re watching TV. They don’t care” (Interview, 11/12/12). In my interviews, corporal punishment repeatedly became a makeshift battleground between national laws (frequently framed as “Western”) and Xhosa cultural practices.

Many teachers said they felt as though the laws against corporal punishment stifled their ability to control their classrooms and mold student behavior. Ms. Smith, the mother of one of my research participants and local teacher, told me that “[Students] are not supposed to be punished, and as a result you can’t teach them” (Interview, 10/18/12). My research participants explicitly labeled corporal punishment, in many cases, as an integral part of Xhosa socialization practices. Ms. Tyrone, a younger teacher on the staff of a Mhlontlo elementary school, demonstrated this: “In our culture, Xhosas, we knew that if you did something wrong, your mother and your father are going to beat you. But children of today, they don’t do that. Once you beat him or her, they’ll go to the police station. So in that, they are free to do anything. They think they are free to do anything” (Interview, 9/7/12). Ms. Zinhle also stated: “If you don’t

punish a child, he will never take you seriously. Imagine at home if a child is not beaten. What kind of a home is that? What kind of children are you going to raise?" In this way, educators often tied students' success in life to the teachers' use of systematic corporal punishment during childhood as a form of social control. Students such as Imitha echoed this: "If you go to parliament, all those men – for them to be there – were beaten." Evidently, research participants saw this practice not just as culturally justified, but also as a necessary and critical element of social reproduction and youth socialization.

In contrast to much of the apartheid-era protest rhetoric calling for justice, "freedom" in these discussions of rights and responsibilities was frequently used as a negative signifier. People believed that when freedom is taken too far, cultural methods for social control unravel. Lila Abu-Lughod, in her discussion of "saving" Muslim women from the practice of veiling after 9/11, similarly interrogates cross-cultural notions of freedom and what it signifies in different contexts (Abu-Lughod 2002). The extension of this logic of corporal punishment was that current social ills plaguing rural South Africa – teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse problems – were formerly prevented through physical punishment, which provided a superior method of social control within the family and larger community. As Mr. Hackula, a local principal, told me:

Before 1994, everything went well. That white government was so strict, especially with students. A student was there to learn and nothing else. But now this government of ours says 'never touch any person.' But that is our culture. If my child doesn't want to learn, I used to use switches. But nowadays, our government doesn't want to use them...they are trying to change our culture (Interview, 6/6/12).

This exemplifies how many Xhosa citizens frame democracy as an invasive, outside threat to cultural practices. Ms. Mbodi, a child psychologist at the Department of Education in Mhlontlo opposed the use of corporal punishment, explaining that culture became a scapegoat justifying

the practice. “They really base [corporal punishment] on culture. They say it’s a cultural thing.” (Interview, 9/6/2012).

Since all South African educators today grew up at least in part under apartheid, educational practices from that era clearly influence their perspectives on teaching and classroom practices. Ms. Tyrone reflected on her own experience from childhood: “[Beating] was good for us, because when I was a student I’d never get a 20 out of 200 [points]. Because of the discipline.” Interestingly, she also told me that she has had many parents actually request that teachers continue beating their children, in order to keep them in line – despite knowledge of the law.

Teachers often expressed fear around the illegality of their use of the switch, despite the fact that it did not seem to change their willingness to use it. Ms. Andiswa demonstrated this perspective: “These days, you’re afraid when you punish a learner, because they go outside to the police station.” Interestingly, when I questioned her about her views on corporal punishment she then shifted her position, emphasizing her opposition: “It is not good for solving problems. To solve problems you must speak.” My contention in such instances, though it is impossible to know for certain, is that interviewees often told me what I wanted to hear when pressed on their *personal* track record in using corporal punishment. Even those teachers who seemed committed to a non-physical view on punishment seemed at a loss to create alternative systems of social control. Ms. Cele, an elementary school teacher, felt as though her hands were tied when it came to classroom management: “Discipline is a very big problem here, because with our government you can’t use a switch” (Interview, 10/11/2012). Here, she traces her anti-corporal punishment stance to her position as part of a younger generation: “Some people might not understand me,

because I'm a child of democracy." Ms. Mbodi reflected a similar attitude: "[Corporal punishment] must be used as a last resort. And it must be used with love."

In addition, educators' identification with corporal punishment can act as a form of symbolic capital, in that it obscures economic relations and ties into notions of prestige and social value (Bourdieu 1977). Teachers wield the switch not just as a way to control the classroom, but also as a method that carries social weight in the community. The teacher punishing his students through "African Love" has significantly increased graduation rates at the school since joining the staff, a statistic many of his colleagues attribute to his notorious beatings.

Through interviewing students about their knowledge of and reactions to the South African Bill of Rights, I found that most had no idea corporal punishment was illegal, and had been since the 1996 National Education Policy Act and the South African Schools Act. I argue that this is further evidence of information filtering in democratic socialization: those practices deemed culturally necessary are upheld, regardless of their portrayal in the national curriculum. Zinzi, a 19-year old girl in her junior year of high school, said that she is beaten often at school. I asked if she had learned about children's rights in class, and she said yes: "The child has a right to education, the right to a roof over her head, she has the right to have what she needs" (Interview, 10/9/2012). Nowhere did she mention the right to freedom from physical violence, such as beatings. These ethnographic examples call into question the fundamental democratic idea that the nation's policies actually represent the majority of its citizens, or the idea that Life Orientation curriculum is able to transparently reveal to children their constitutional human rights. Even students were often proponents of corporal punishment, recognizing it as a critically important method of social control, cohesion, and learning. Some students generally were against

the practice, but in these cases they maintained that physical punishment must be upheld as a last resort. Zinzi continued: “First you have to talk to the child. Explain that this is wrong, this is right. If the child continues to do what he or she is doing, then you may scold her by beating.” Ciko, an 18-year-old boy, concurred: “Beating helps me; it encourages me not to do it again. It’s necessary” (Interview, 9/19/12).

Again, views on corporal punishment tie directly into broader Xhosa conceptions on the definitions and roles of children and youth in the community. State discourses that advocate discussion-based learning and positive feedback over punitive social control is understandably alien to many Xhosa educators and parents. As previous theorists of children’s rights contend, what many might consider violence against children is not only sanctioned by “adults who perform and perpetuate the rights, but also children who are subjected to them [and] view these rites, however painful and terrifying, as having a positive long-term value” (Korbin 2003).

I found support for this through interviews with youth, especially when discussing the South African Bill of Rights’ emphasis on children. Upon learning during our interview that corporal punishment in schools is illegal, Lonwabo – a male high school student - said to me “if the children don’t get beaten, the school will just be chaotic” (Interview, 10/24/12). And Noluvo, a female university student with whom I’d worked in 2009 reflected on her childhood at home in a follow-up interview: “I think it was right for me, being beaten. I don’t do a lot of stuff – for example I don’t drink, I’m not wild...I’m very disciplined” (11/17/12). Even those who are most likely to be subjected to corporal punishment often valorize it as a positive and necessary practice upon which state laws are infringing.

Youth Political Subjectivities

What does this cultural and historical filtering of educational content mean for young South African citizens? As my conversations with Mhlontlo youth demonstrated, many students who go through the Life Orientation program are still relatively unaware of their rights as outlined in the written curriculum. Taking this fact together with educators' perspectives on the emphasis of children's rights in democratic South Africa, I conclude that materials are presented in ways that have a long-term potential impact on youth political knowledge and worldviews. I plan to continue ethnographic work that will focus on longitudinal data in the Mhlontlo community to understand better this impact.

On the one hand, exposure to democratic education affords youth a perspective that often differs from the one they receive at home. As Zolani Ngwane explains in his discussion of social reproduction in rural South Africa: "Education meant both physical and potential ideological departure from the community" (Ngwane 2001). School life and its attendant national curricula provide new and often competing ideologies to the next generation of citizens that challenge youth to re-negotiate and transform existing social structures. Though educators might not present information in exactly the ways intended by curricula architects, Life Orientation class often covers topics not discussed elsewhere. At the same time, I have argued in this chapter that citizenship education and its democratic ideals in the South African classroom are constantly filtered through the gaze of local actors, thereby impacting the learning experiences and content for youth. The version of democracy most Eastern Cape students receive in the classroom has already been transformed into one deemed culturally appropriate by elders seeking to maintain social norms and cultural practices.

These tensions between differing cultural fields, as anthropologist Kathleen Hall deems them (1995), leads many young Xhosa people to live what seems to be a double life, in which they maintain notions of cultural propriety and traditionalism while simultaneously participating in the democratic, capitalist system. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Buhle's role as *magoti* in a rural Xhosa family exemplifies the ways in which youth make sense of seemingly incompatible social norms and expectations.

Conclusion

The opening quote of this chapter captures the ostensible incursion of Western-based, democratic values on rural South African life, and the ambivalence and fears it has opened up among much of the older generation. Spoken to an audience full of schoolchildren and teachers on the national holiday Heritage Day, this teacher guides children – particularly girls – away from the evils of Western values and reminds them of the importance of Xhosa cultural practices. The idea of being “half” of anything is explicitly unacceptable to this teacher – but why? What is so threatening about a generation that asks “why,” and what does this fear say about Xhosa conceptions of childhood and youth? I have demonstrated that classroom practices can be understood through embedded, often unconscious perspectives that include social reproduction as well as innovation and agency among new generations of youth. Thus, asking “why” is deeply threatening to previous modes of social control in Xhosa communities, because it reveals youth incorporation of cultural influences from the larger state deemed incompatible with communal identity practices. As I will argue in the following chapters, much of this suspicion of democratic values, as they are defined in the West, and their associations with cultural impurity can be understood through a materialist lens that evaluates the recent historical shifts in the

political economy of the South African state. In Chapter 5, I will illuminate the ways in which Mhlontlo residents conflate democracy with neoliberal capitalism and its resulting increase in socioeconomic inequality and structural poverty. But first, I turn to the ways in which NGOs act as yet another site at which youth socialization to democracy occurs.

Chapter 4: NGOs and Democracy

*“Culture isn’t static, it’s very fluid, and we get to shape culture. That’s what our work is about.”
– Sonke Director, interview, 2/16/12*

Introduction

Every Monday, the Sonke Gender Justice Network staff in Cape Town gathers in their boardroom, overlooking a main thoroughfare of the Central Business District. These weekly gatherings alternate between trainings led by external facilitators, reports on internal programs, and general all-staff meetings. During one such Monday meeting in February 2012, an employee (who also happens to be a Christian preacher) led the group of about 30 people in singing the religious song “Fishers of Men,” meant to serve as an icebreaker in the midst of a heated discussion of the rape epidemic in South African prisons. While no objections were raised during the song, Nora (a non-religious employee) complained about its use during the meeting wrap-up, which includes creating a list of positive and negative reactions to the conversation for future improvement. The preacher maintained the song had been reconstituted from its original Christian framework and does not explicitly reference Jesus, but Nora insisted that the words have not changed and thus it has no place in a professional environment. Rather than declaring a resolution on the issue, Sonke’s director reminded everyone that “we need flexibility” around the religion issue, and encouraged his staff to continue being honest with each other about how such instances make them feel. Indeed, some religious employees defended the song’s positive message, saying that they use tactics such as religious singing in program outreach to local communities, many of which are devoutly Christian. This incident highlights both the way in which Sonke approaches cultural diversity and the inherent, unresolved problems in trying to

find a bottom line amidst a group of people with extremely different backgrounds and ways of life. This perspective on diversity parallels Sonke's work with youth in different cultural contexts across South Africa.

In many ways, the daily negotiations Sonke staff deals with in a diverse work environment mirrors the challenges it encounters working in community programs across South Africa and beyond. In this chapter, I ask how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Sonke contribute to youth socialization into democracy in ways that vary from the state. I first provide a brief background on the organization, and then discuss the types of cross-cultural encounters this NGO faces in its programming, how it navigates such encounters, and what this says about larger issues of power, dependency, and cultural change in South African communities. By examining previous theories on rhetorical strategy in religious conversion narratives, I illuminate how Sonke relies upon linguistic practices and unconscious behaviors, such as emotionally charged speech and personal stories, to achieve its goals. Much like a religious experience, Sonke aims to convert program participants to a specific ideological perspective. For most employees, however, this process begins with a personal transformation that facilitates their future programmatic work and becomes unconsciously embodied in their everyday speech and practices.

In the second half of the chapter, I connect this inner glimpse of the NGO climate with its work in rural Eastern Cape communities such as Mhlontlo, examining how the organization has local Xhosa residents implement program with young people. I demonstrate that Sonke represents part of a larger trend in South Africa towards Western models of equality, citizenship, and democracy, while at the same time differing from government institutions, such as public schools, in notable ways. Furthermore, I show how Sonke relies upon complex notions of

cultural authenticity in order to convince individuals to discontinue practices the organization deems undemocratic and harmful.

My primary argument in this chapter is that Sonke's messages are particularly challenging for rural Xhosa residents to adopt mainly because they insist upon a shift from local to national identity practices. Democratic ideologies, presented either through NGOs or other conduits, compel individuals to shift their alignment from local cultural modes of belonging to a framework of nationalism and South African citizenship. Extending this discussion, I examine the ways in which – much like Life Orientation classes in public schools – social actors make both conscious and unconscious choices to filter NGO content through the lens of Xhosa cultural ideologies. This allows individuals to maintain and uphold specific identities that renegotiate views of citizenship and national belonging. Thus, Sonke challenges the status quo and works to transform the habitus, as Bourdieu would say, of rural Xhosa people (Bourdieu 1977). As I illuminate, the habitus implicit within South African nationalism and democratic citizenship often contrasts greatly to that of local Xhosa identification practices.

Organizational Background

The Sonke Gender Justice Network was founded in 2006 and is a nonpartisan NGO that “works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and citizen capacity to support men and boys in taking action to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS” (www.genderjustice.org.za). Sonke maintains two primary offices, one in Johannesburg and the other in Cape Town. The airy and light Cape Town office in which I did this research plays a role in constructing a particular image for the organization: the diverse staff composed of different ethnicities, races, genders, and social

classes implicitly references the tone of multiculturalism within the organization. Large color photographs lining the walls capture community participants in moments of ostensible empowerment: a raised fist, a smiling face, a marching line of men wearing the NGO's signature t-shirts, "One Man Can." The professional environment encourages a specific vision of civil society – one in which a diverse citizenry challenges its elected leaders and actively participates in the construction of democracy.

Though the organization has an explicit focus on gender inequities, it tackles a broad array of related human rights injustices in its programs. My research examines Sonke's emphasis on gender as a case study on larger discussions of human rights violations and the production of civil society in the newly democratic South Africa. Sonke is different from many women's rights and feminist organizations in that it promotes gender equality by working specifically with men and boys. Its values are closely aligned with the South African Bill of Rights, as a Xhosa staff member named Luke explained to me. He articulated the organization's goals as working "to build a movement of men who uphold other men, and make sure we create a society and homes where women and men and children can live safely and free. And enjoy their rights that the constitution of this country promised them" (2/27/12). This statement contains an underlying message, prevalent not just at Sonke but also among much of South African society, that the human rights protections of the constitution are not adequately distributed and protected in reality (Robins 2005). Theorists have explored this phenomenon within various neoliberal capitalist states, showing how the privatization of social services has led to a proliferation of NGOs working to end inequality and injustice. Citing Dicklitch (1998) and Edwards and Hulme (1996), an article on NGOs in South Africa explained the ideological tie between such organizations and youth socialization into democracy: "In the era of democratization which has

swept across Africa, NGOs are perceived as vehicles of this process, contributing to good governance, which is seen as a key pre-requisite for a healthy economy and increasingly a condition for receiving external assistance” (Nel, Binns, and Motteux 2001:5). Thus, organizations like Sonke see themselves as playing a crucial role in spreading democratic ideals and keeping the government in check.

Sonke works with a variety of other organizations and often partners with national, provincial, and municipal government to work toward the NGO’s goal of creating an equal and just society. At the same time, Sonke staff members explicitly see their jobs, at least in part, as holding government accountable for its actions and policies. “We have hopefully conveyed the message to politicians, and male politicians [in particular], that if they say things that are sexist, misogynistic, or demeaning, we’re likely to come after them. I would be surprised if people in public positions don’t know about Sonke.” (Director, 2/16/12)

As a case in point, in 2010 Sonke successfully sued Julius Malema, the former African National Congress (ANC) Youth League president, for his sexist remarks concerning president Jacob Zuma’s rape accuser. The case was tried in South Africa’s Equality Court, and Malema was found guilty of hate speech and discrimination. The court ordered him to issue a public apology and pay a 50,000 Rand fine (at the time of this writing, approximately 5,000 USD) to a women’s rights organization. This case remains an important victory in Sonke’s national advocacy work for gender equality (Mokhudu 2011, www.genderjustice.co.za). Such highly visible events help to construct Sonke’s public identity as champion of democracy and equality. My ethnographic research on the ground, however, shows the hidden ideological contradictions contained within work that both promotes equal recognition of cultural forms and also works to radically transform “culture” in definitively subjective ways.

Sonke funding comes from a diverse array of partnering organizations, corporations, private donors and governmental bodies, such as: the MacArthur Foundation, the South Africa Development Fund, Save the Children, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), and the First National Bank of South Africa. The organization’s main philosophy is based upon a “of Change” model that depends upon ideals of participatory democracy, community education, and government partnerships - as seen in this diagram from the Sonke website (www.genderjustice.co.za):

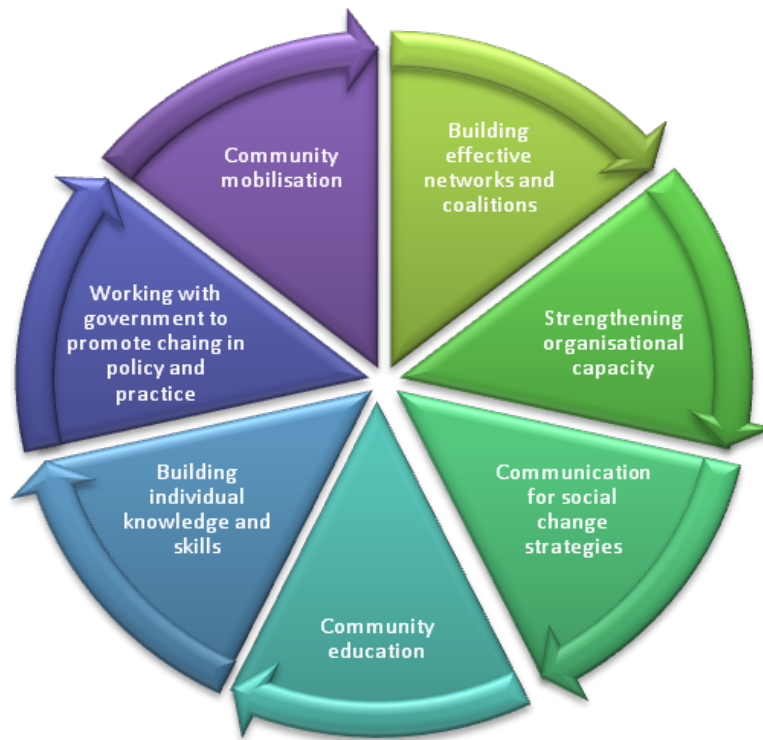


Figure 4.1 Sonke’s “Spectrum of Change” model (www.genderjustice.org.za)

This model, which emphasizes community involvement paired with government accountability, plays out in a variety of programs at local, national, and international levels. Some examples of recent Sonke programs include: One Man Can, in which men and boys are trained in issues of gender equality and HIV/AIDS prevention; Brothers for Life, a program for men over 30 years

old aimed at discussing the risks associated with multiple sexual partners and the importance of “responsible” fatherhood; MenEngage, an international alliance seeking to involve men in gender equality efforts, of which Sonke is a prominent member; projects combating recent waves of xenophobia in South Africa; and various policy advocacy projects, such as addressing the high incidence of sexual violence and HIV/AIDS rates in South African prisons. Sonke’s methods are very diverse, ranging from more traditional NGO tactics, such as pamphlets and condom distribution, to less common approaches, such as training children in video production in order to profile issues such as sexism, child abuse, and HIV/AIDS in rural South African communities (Reed and Hill 2010; Reed 2011). Sonke’s ability to capture the attention of a broad public audience through divergent methods means its discursive and embodied practices are potentially transformative and far-reaching throughout the nation. Indeed, Sonke and other similar NGOs may be playing a crucial role in defining and transforming South African conceptions of citizenship and democracy.

One particularly interesting recent project for Sonke began in 2012 and highlighted the organization’s commitment to a liberal, democratic version of civil society, as well as the difficulties of balancing legal frameworks in a multicultural state. Sonke partnered with several other human rights organizations in South Africa in order to fight against the proposed Traditional Courts Bill (TCB). As a Sonke employee stated, the TCB was “set to severely limit the rights of rural people to seek legal justice in the formal courts of South Africa, a right enshrined in our nation’s Constitution” (Alexander 2012, www.genderjustice.co.za). Sonke worked closely with the Alliance for Rural Democracy, which was specifically created to combat this bill proposal.

The original version of the bill, if enacted, would have placed much greater power in the hands of Traditional Courts, which are local institutions headed by chiefs serving rural populations across South Africa. In the pre-colonial era, Traditional Courts were meant as communal platforms for justice where community members would discuss and debate the issue at hand in order to reach a verdict. In many ways, these institutions were very democratic, in that they allowed for equal representation among community members that was then taken into consideration by a central authority (Mtuze 2004; Owusu 1997; see chapter 2 for more). The 2012 bill, however, would have only recognized one leader at the courts – and that leader would almost always be male, because of the existing structure of local chiefdoms. Within this new configuration, women would not be allowed to represent themselves, putting them at a serious disadvantage and further entrenching gender inequality in rural communities. For instance, a woman seeking justice for domestic abuse might have to be represented by the same husband who is her alleged abuser. In its original form, the bill would have also made it impossible for people to opt out of Traditional Courts and seek justice in the South African legal system. This would mean that even those just passing through a tribal area but not necessarily ascribing to local cultural ideologies would be subject to Traditional Court laws, akin to a tourist visiting a foreign country. For these reasons, Sonke and other NGOs viewed the bill as deeply threatening to liberal, Western-oriented versions of civil society.

The bill was originally proposed in 2008, but met with great resistance and was soon abandoned. In 2012, however, the bill was revived through amendments and negotiations at public hearings around the country. Despite the fact that the majority of South Africa's provinces rejected the bill through local government meetings, Parliament sent it back to provincial legislatures for a third time (Media Release, Center for Law and Society, University of Cape

Town). Ultimately, in February 2014, Parliament dropped the bill when it became clear that most provinces would be voting against it. NGOs such as Sonke as well as other civil society organizations played a huge role in raising awareness and rallying public support to oppose this piece of proposed legislation.

Sonke's involvement in the fight against the TCB exemplifies the type of advocacy work it prioritizes and its commitment to a specific vision of civil society based upon liberal, Western democratic values. At the same time, efforts such as this presuppose that such values and associated practices are ideals for which every individual and society should strive (Abu-Lughod 2002). This example also illustrates the challenges inherent in spreading democratic ideas in a highly diverse, multicultural state. Indeed, much of the activists' language around thwarting the bill hinged on the importance of promoting and maintaining democracy as a way of life, and also illuminated the importance of gender rights in larger contestations between provincial and national jurisdictions.

Why Sonke?

There are a plethora of NGOs operating in South Africa that work with youth in various community settings and use a variety of methods to achieve their goals. I chose to focus my research on this particular organization because it tackles human rights issues central to the social lives of young South Africans today and also works to promote the tenets of South African democracy more broadly. While many NGOs that work with youth focus on providing basic social services (e.g., food, medicine, and textbooks), Sonke strives to inform youth of their constitutional rights and empowers them to take up leadership roles in their communities and among peers in order to create long-term ideological change. In this sense, Sonke plays a pivotal

role in the lives of many young people, shaping their views on human rights protections and enactments of democracy in ways that might be compared to other hegemonic projects of subjectivity production. By extension, Sonke has a potentially transformative role in social organization, particularly in terms of the dynamic between genders and generations.

Furthermore, Sonke cultivates an attitude of self-critique and intellectual discourse that made my ethnographic examination not only possible, but also often welcome. Nonetheless, and as I discuss later in this chapter, the NGO still operates within a system of assumptions about democracy and multiculturalism that can be problematic on the ground level.

The organization uses tactics to achieve its goals that are often considered novel within the NGO field. For instance, workshops such as the One Man Can program tackle sexism and misogyny by working primarily with men and boys to transform ideas about gender. The rationale behind this program is that focusing on perpetrators is more effective in eradicating inequality and injustice than focusing solely on victims. Sonke also approaches social injustices on multiple societal levels, both working on the ground with community members and also advocating at national and international levels for legal reform and increased recognition of constitutional protections across the country. Furthermore, the organization conducts research on topics such as condom use and gender-based violence in order to identify gaps in policy and make future recommendations, and thus supports its efforts with a scientific understanding of the issues it confronts.

Unlike many smaller scale organizations, Sonke has a visible impact on South African politics and activist movements, making it especially worthy of critical scholarly attention. In recent years, it has expanded its gender equality and civil society interventions to other countries on the African continent, including Rwanda, Uganda, and Sierra Leone. Thus, Sonke plays a role

in larger social movements on human rights education and promotion in South Africa and beyond. My examination of Sonke looks at both what makes it unique in South African civil society building projects as well as how it represents a larger movement of Western-oriented NGOs educating youth within nascent democracies. My critical examination of Sonke's work offers a new theoretical perspective: I argue that an analysis of both embodied practices and rhetorical displays within the NGO reveal connections between democracy, neoliberal capitalism, and Western rights discourses in the post-apartheid state in ways that mirror the colonialist hegemonic projects of the past.

Conversion Narratives

In ethnographic interviews, many Sonke employees cited their own experiences of personal transformation as reasons they wanted to join or partner with the organization. These stories, in which individuals related the ways in which they changed their views on issues such as gender equality, masculinity, HIV/AIDS stigma, and violence read much like religious conversion narratives, in the sense that individuals have taken on new beliefs and values that now guide their lives and their interactions with others. Furthermore, the presentation of such narratives constantly asserts and reaffirms a specific sense of self. Thus, individuals use these narratives in order to align themselves with specific identification practices that re-orient their sense of belonging and community, a process which anthropologists have shown often hinges on specific linguistic choices and behaviors (e.g. Baquedano-Lopez 1997; Hanks 2010; Harding 1987).

Along such lines, Peter Stromberg has argued that identity transformation through ideological language is not limited to the sphere of religious experience alone. Referencing

Bourdieu's practice theory, he states: "Behavioral change wrought by ideology is not due to a one-time transformation of some aspect of psychological structure, but is rather the result of an ongoing practice that allows one to act consistently in a certain manner" (Stromberg 1990:43). Thus, frequent rhetorical practices that reference a moment of conversion work to construct identities and consequently behavioral changes.

Using this theoretical framework, I demonstrate how Sonke and its employees rely heavily upon conversion to democratic perspectives in order to achieve their programmatic and advocacy goals. Embedded in this process, rhetorical choices and behaviors work to create citizens more aligned with the ideals of the nation and a specific vision of democracy. For some employees, this ideological shift arose directly from Sonke involvement, while for others it had earlier origins that then led them to NGO work. As Luke, a young employee originally from the Eastern Cape whom I discussed previously, explained:

I used to be violent. I am not a person who talks too much. [In the past] if you disagreed with me, you would expect to be punished. And that's the community I grew up with. The mere fact that I cannot remember the last time I committed violence means that I am indeed that change agent.

Such experiences with personal change bolster optimism and perseverance among the staff during Sonke programs, reminding them that their goals are, in fact, achievable. Luke elaborated on this idea: "This work is not highly paid. It really requires a personal journey of the individual. In the process of doing this work, you realize that you are on this journey on purpose."

Another young staff member, Pierre described his own personal transformation, which occurred after moving from the Congo to South Africa and becoming involved in Sonke workshops with immigrant communities as a participant. Pierre befriended an HIV-positive woman who lived alone, was being ostracized by her community for her viral status, and was close to death. The woman had contracted HIV while escaping the Congo as a refugee; the man

leading the group of refugees raped her repeatedly along the journey. Pierre defended her when community members stigmatized her, and began taking her to hospital appointments and checking that she took her medicine regularly. In large part because of his dedication and support, her viral load became undetectable within a couple of years, and the community ostracism stopped. “I said from the experience with that woman, I *must* engage myself in this community. After you receive a Sonke training, you won’t feel comfortable [witnessing ostracism and stigma]. You take it personally” (emphasis in original, 3/5/12). Sonke has hired many people who were participants in their community programs, relying on the fact that their personal transformations will make them more empathetic and effective facilitators. Beyond their ability to help others, this transformation is mutually beneficial in that it aligns the individual’s identity with a desired moral framework. Garai, a young man from Zimbabwe, stated: “[In workshops] we reflect on our personal issues, our personal failings, and so forth. Then that’s how we start to see a little bit of shift in terms of thinking and attitudes, and in terms of certain practices....A behavior is learned, so it can also be unlearned” (3/9/12). Thus, Sonke aims to re-shape social norms such that they fall in line with a specific version of civil society and democracy.

This realignment of unconscious social norms occurs not just through narrative practices but also through actions, such as a fist raised in solidarity at a Sonke rally (meant to encourage participation and also reference the gestures once characteristic of anti-apartheid protests). For instance, the Monday meetings described above always begin with a “check-in” during which employees are encouraged to bring up any personal news or issues in their lives outside of work. At times these appear to depart significantly from the realm of Sonke’s mission, such as when I heard a woman tell the staff about reuniting with a long lost friend over the weekend. Though

these social norms may appear trivial, they are a crucial part of how Sonke creates an atmosphere of personal commitment and community beyond the economic transaction of a salary for labor. In this sense, staff members learn to strategically use their personal lives to craft particular narratives and conversations that aid their work. Even seemingly quotidian practices, such as dress, play a role in this project: the staff comes to work in a brightly colored and sometimes jarring mix of “traditional” dress from various tribal areas across Sub-Saharan Africa, jeans, Sonke t-shirts, and formal business wear. For Sonke, then, identity is defined precisely by its multivocality and commitment to cultural pluralism – at least on the surface. By fusing the intimate and professional space, the organization encourages staff to see their role as an ideological mission rather than simply a job to pay the bills. These verbal and nonverbal tactics create loyal subjects who then proselytize the same message they once received in local communities.



Figure 4.2 – Visibility through dress at a Sonke rally in Gugulethu, Cape Town (photo by author)

In his personal story of conversion, Garai cited his childhood experience with domestic violence as the motivation to get involved in gender activism.

I was touched quite a lot in terms of domestic violence. The way my father used to treat my mom, I wasn't comfortable with that. He used to just buy all these [messages], saying its culture, I'm the head of the family, I'm the father, you have to listen. So many excuses! So I had a personal passion to at least start to talk to men.

This quote highlights the way many Sonke employees retrospectively re-code previous experiences as sexist, homophobic, or violent behaviors, now viewing them as unfairly justified in the name of culture ("So many excuses!"). If a particular behavior's cultural authenticity is questioned, it often becomes easier for Sonke to justify demands that it be stopped. Thus, the NGO often takes the role of re-categorizing what it sees as mythical beliefs on the origins of certain behaviors and ideologies. I elaborate on this issue of cultural authenticity later in the chapter.

Some employees also more explicitly described their experiences in, and work with, Sonke programs as a type of conversion. They spoke of such instances as similar to a religious experience in which the NGO enters a local community and plays a role akin to missionary, working to convert the masses to a new worldview. Speaking to this issue, a young Xhosa man named Lwazi said: "We have those people who are extremely difficult. These are the kind of people that we want to work with. We don't want to work with [someone] who has already been converted, you know? We like to work with people who are not converted; people who understand women as sub-human" (2/24/12). Thus, the "unenlightened" become the primary target of Sonke programs in ways that mirror past colonialist imaginings of the "savage" or "primitive" body and mind.

Both within the organization and outside its walls, employees repeatedly described their goal as conversion to a more gender equitable perspective on society, which they say begins with

individuals undergoing “gender transformation”. To paraphrase Sonke employees, this term refers to a process in which an individual shifts his thinking to not just see problems with the treatment of women in society, but to completely reorient how he understands women and men in relation to each other, and all the associated behaviors and practices. Staff members, therefore, want to see more than a man who just stops beating his wife. They want to see this man view his wife as his equal and partner in all ways. Some Sonke staff members openly identify as former misogynists and/or abusers themselves, and have gone through this process of gender transformation. They use their own experiences and backgrounds as a parable from which workshop participants can learn and model their own behavior. Much like a religious experience, Sonke’s message often has to be taken – at least at first – on faith. While the foregrounding issue in such conversions centers around gender, the larger context for this work is the advancing of democracy as a political system and way of life for South Africans. Beyond discursive alignment with democratic values of gender equality, Sonke employees work to reorient bodily practices in much the way a religious conversion uses prayer to direct the body towards God. For instance, Sonke expects men to take up physical labor around the house as a way of actively displaying gender transformation – not just talking about it.

Sonke strives to appropriately pair facilitators with the cultural settings of the programs they are running as much as possible: if a program is held in the Xhosa homelands of the rural Eastern Cape, Sonke will most likely send a Xhosa-speaking staff member who has an intimate understanding of that community but has, at the same time, adopted the organization’s rhetoric and beliefs. When a news article emerged in 2012 profiling a white supremacist-oriented camp for Afrikaner boys, they assigned Harry, the only Afrikaans man on the staff at the time. “I feel as an Afrikaans white man I want to speak out against racism and for a less violent masculinity”

(2/28/12). Of course, one can easily argue that such facilitators may not be very representative of the communities in which they work. While a Xhosa staff member may have grown up in the rural Eastern Cape, his personal transformation into activist and feminist often greatly sets him apart from the perspectives of many in this region. Harry explicitly acknowledged this problem, saying he often feels pressure to represent an entire culture for the organization – an obviously impossible task. My own ethnographic fieldwork in the rural Eastern Cape exposed some of the discrepancies between workshop facilitators and local youth, even when facilitators also identified as Xhosa; particularly among boys, there was often great difficulty in accepting the idea of men and women as equals regardless of who conveyed this message to them.

Changing “Culture”

In many interviews with Sonke employees, I was told that their job involves changing cultural beliefs and practices, or at the very least making people more aware of the origins of such practices rather than blindly following “tradition.” Observations during Sonke meetings also reiterated the idea that Sonke is in the business of “changing cultural norms” (staff meeting, 2/13/12). As the opening quote of this chapter exemplifies, staff continually communicated to me the idea that many practices labeled as “traditional” actually have much more recent histories than people believe. Speaking specifically about gender, Sonke’s director explained that:

[Often] what we think of as cultural practices are quite recently established. Its not as though we lived in some romanticized past where there wasn’t gender inequality, but that colonial systems shut down spaces for contestation between men and women. Pre-colonial systems did not centralize leadership in a figure in the ways that colonialism did. So spaces that were available for women to challenge misogyny and sexism shut down under colonialism. What many people view as culture and cultural practices now are relatively recent adaptations. There’s a real reification of culture in some quarters. There’s a quite sophisticated saying that you can’t use culture as a traditional weapon...and I think we’re reasonably unabashed that even if something IS a cultural

practice, if its anti-democratic, if its oppressive, then we challenge it (emphasis in original, 2/16/12).

Here, he illustrated the idea that people often are unaware of how recent the histories of some of their cultural practices actually are. He highlighted the example of gender equality under colonialism, saying that colonists had a large role in concentrating power into male hands in rural South Africa, and that many South Africans do not realize the historical root of their sexist attitudes and practices. Nonetheless, he emphasized the fact that even if something *does* have a long history as “cultural,” Sonke will not hesitate to challenge it if they deem it anti-democratic.

Mary, a young female employee, reiterated this idea:

Sonke is sensitive, in certain ways, but they also challenge. They work very closely with traditional leaders and with the local people, but I think Sonke’s not scared to challenge either. And I think that that’s good and healthy, because if you’re too okay with everything, then you’re not really going to change any cultural norms (2/14/12).

As evidenced here, Sonke explicitly sees its role as changing social norms such that they fall in line with the tenets of South African democracy and its associated human rights discourses.

In this sense, Sonke works to transform the habitus of social actors so that they align more closely with a specific vision of civil society – one largely based upon Western-oriented human rights ideals and norms. Beyond just changing the language individuals use around gender, Sonke expects behavioral transformations within domestic spaces: a man who cooks dinner for his family and washes dishes, for instance. Thus, it is not enough to hope for discursive shifts; the idea of transformation rests upon behavioral changes that reorient household gender relations through daily practices. Sonke programs strive to make conscious those embedded, unconscious parts of a person’s habitus as they relate to gender norms.

Sonke’s questioning of cultural authenticity is echoed in many Africanist anthropologists’ writings, which have explored the concept of “false” historical narratives and their resulting

practices. As previously mentioned, Charles Piot's work in rural Togo illuminated the many ways in which the rural Kabre people were in fact not as isolated as they seemed at first glance, but rather were continually shaped by forces of colonialism and post-colonialism (Piot 1999). Further, anthropologists have shown how pre-colonial ideologies have been adapted to fit the realities of democratic states (Ashforth 2005). Jean and John Comaroff, for example, have interrogated how the notion of cultural authenticity impacts neoliberal capital exchanges, showing that the illusion of an "authentic" practice or artifact becomes central to its production as a commodity for purchase (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

Based upon this questioning of historical authenticity, Sonke's community workshops often revolve around discussing where ideas came from, not just what should be changed for the future. The reasoning is that if "false histories" can be exposed, then it will be easier to convince individuals to discontinue allegedly harmful cultural practices. According to Garai, "[People] take advantage of certain cultural practices to justify abuse, or to justify certain imbalances between genders." Such ideas have deep resonance in the discipline of anthropology, asking theoretically grounded questions about what constitutes authenticity and how to define tradition when cultures are dynamic and constantly changing. As discussed earlier, scholars have posed questions about the very usefulness of the concept of authenticity, asking if anything can really be considered "authentic" when culture itself is an ever-shifting set of ideas and practices (e.g. Myers 2002).

Sonke employees also expressed the opinion that practices are often mislabeled as cultural when they should be recognized to have individual, psychological explanations. I encountered this viewpoint when telling Sonke employees about a specific youth interview from my research. In 2009, while conducting preliminary research for this project in Mhlontlo, I first

encountered a teenage Xhosa girl named Noluvo who was vehemently pro-life and homophobic. She again defended her views to me in a follow-up interview in 2012, relying heavily on her concept of culture. Noluvo emphasized that what she deemed “un-Xhosa” practices are destructive to traditional values and beliefs. She also tied the emergence of such practices explicitly to the rise of the democratic state (a phenomenon I address more fully in chapter 5).

Democracy gives too much equality to children. They said that abortion should be legal. I just think abortion was not supposed to be made legal...I was raised under a Xhosa tradition. When you are raised under the Xhosa tradition, you follow the rules and the principles of it...this democracy has destroyed the coming generation.

Noluvo felt strongly that “new” practices, such as abortion and same-sex marriage, were ruining Xhosa society in ways that deeply disturbed her. Using Bourdieu, we can understand how the shifting roles in domestic spaces (as suggested by a same-sex household, for instance) transform the unconscious social norms of a community in irrevocable ways. “Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” (Bourdieu 1977:164) For Noluvo, then, specific ideas of motherhood, gender roles, and marriage practices are embedded in her identity as natural, regardless of their actual origins. Contradicting ideologies therefore challenge the established order in deeply threatening ways.

When I relayed this story to Sonke staff during interviews, they were almost universally skeptical of whether or not practices such as abortion and homosexual relationships were new at all. As a female staff member named Susan explained: “I would be interested to know what’s going on behind [her views]. There’s something that’s triggering that...something about identity, or insecurity, or something else” (2/27/12). Thus, Sonke socializes its employees to find ways to unravel those ideas many consider cultural, and often encourages people to re-categorize them as the product of other life experiences. Many Sonke employees were insistent that this girl must

have had a more personal connection to the issues of abortion and same-sex marriage - such as a past traumatic experience - in order to make her feel this way. Whether or not this is true, it demonstrates how unpacking the entire concept of culture and convincing people that culture is not static or neutral is central to the Sonke philosophy and methodology. Within practice theory, Bourdieu argues that culture is an unconscious and naturalized map directing individuals through social life (Bourdieu 1977:2): Sonke challenges individuals to read this map from a new perspective, or perhaps rewrite the map completely.

One of my primary research aims has been to explore how organizations like Sonke and its community participants deal with instances such as the one above, which I will label here as “cultural friction,” or a moment in which cultural values and beliefs are seen to be in conflict with Sonke goals. Jean and John Comaroff refer to this problem of “heterodoxy” in their own analyses of post-apartheid South Africa, albeit in different contexts, to demonstrate the limits of the liberal, democratic state in accommodating cultural differences (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004b). Sonke walks a delicate line between both challenging these heterodox systems as well as working to respect their legitimacy in the post-apartheid, democratic state that promotes equality and diversity. Much like the rhetoric previously discussed in the Life Orientation curriculum (see Chapter 3), NGOs have to find a way to both recognize multiple worldviews while promoting what they see as the best course towards a specific version of civil society. As Lwazi explained:

Culture plays a big role. We have to respect the culture of the people [we work with]. If they're saying we don't talk about this man, see the benefits of not talking about him. If it's important to talk about, you have to show them why it is important, even though their culture doesn't allow that. But let them say their opinions and say your view too. And at the end of the day, they will benefit.

Thus, workshops ostensibly try to create a safe space in which participants' ideas are valued and explored rather than simply discredited. John, a Xhosa male staff member, told me “you've got

to acknowledge what they're saying. But try and engage them to see the other side as well" (3/1/12).

Nonetheless, in discussing moments of resistance to Sonke ideas, Lwazi explained:

We ask, who told you about this culture? I'm saying that the culture is playing a big role in destroying our future too! Because as a man [in Xhosa society] you are expected to have a wife at the age of 25. You don't have money, you don't have anything, but you should have a wife. How are you going to support that wife? Because they say after you came from the [traditional circumcision ritual] you must take a wife. And if you have a wife, they are expecting you to have children. How are you going to support these children? Some people say we are disrespecting their culture, but they are the ones who disrespect their culture.

Interestingly, here he referenced the fact that people have resisted Sonke's messages on cultural grounds, saying the workshop teachings "are disrespecting their culture." In such instances, staff works to explain why certain practices labeled as cultural should be discontinued. Sonke both deals with debunking what they see as false cultural histories, and also deciding when and where they must advocate against things they legitimately understand as part of a people's culture. As Luke explained: "Culture is an idea that is shared by a group of people, and it's changing. It's dynamic. And to an extent that what might be practiced as cultural, as long as it is not toxic and harmful to the next person, we'll continue to do that. But once some of the cultural elements are toxic and harmful, they definitely need to be challenged." Thus, Sonke sees its role as altering social norms in local contexts in ways that lead to a particular vision of civil society and democracy. Though in rhetoric liberal organizations like Sonke stress that democracy is characterized by the freedom to follow multiple ideological pathways, my examples expose cognitive dissonances that also see certain ideologies as unacceptable choices.

Of course, this begs the question: how does Sonke, or anyone else, define what is harmful within a culture or society? Such questions get at the heart of anthropology's long and contentious engagement with the concept of cultural relativism and the difficulties in its

application (Abu-Lughod 2002). Luke's answer to the question on how to categorize cultural practices as either innocuous or harmful was: "[As for] the traditional customs and cultural practices in the country...as long as they uphold the constitution, which is supreme and above all cultures, then that should be fine." But what if the markers of a "harmful" practice are subtle and vary depending on individual opinions within a culture, and are not addressed explicitly in the South African constitution? When we look at cultural practices across the globe such as female genital mutilation, honor killings, or infant rape, it is easy for many people to label them as harmful. However, Sonke also deals with everyday practices that are less clear cut and more difficult to define as simply good or bad. Who decides whether or not it is harmful to a family if the girls start herding cattle, which is a job reserved strictly for males in virtually all Xhosa families? How do communities decide on whether or not it is culturally appropriate and beneficial to encourage boys to cook? As I suggest in this research, such gender role transformations can create friction among peer groups and generational hierarchies that often go unnoticed by NGO programs. This is not out of a lack of concern on the part of organizations like Sonke, but rather a dearth of longitudinal follow-up and in-depth assessment of past programming.

These observations contribute to larger theoretical questions concerning the consequences of outside organizations seeking to change cultural norms and/or economic realities, something discussed previously by other scholars in different settings (Fisher 1997; Markowitz 2001; Timmer 2010). For instance, Erica Bornstein's research on World Vision Zimbabwe illustrated how seemingly benign child sponsorship efforts have contributed to wealth inequality, provoked witchcraft accusations, and promoted individualism over communal identity practices (Bornstein 2001). What my analysis adds to these discussions is how young

people are impacted by NGO interventions that focus specifically on ideological training rather than social service provisions. I ask how these organizations attempt to socialize youth into specific incarnations of democracy and civil society by challenging Xhosa conceptions of culture and tradition. More broadly, I interrogate how a commitment to freedom and equality can coexist with clear constraints on the options one is actually free to choose.

An interesting example of an ideological issue that frequently encounters community resistance on the grounds of “culture” is medical circumcision. As discussed in chapter 2, Xhosa males across South Africa almost universally participate in traditional circumcision between the ages of about 17 and 20 in “initiation schools.” Schools are usually held in rural areas removed from boys’ homes, and they stay there anywhere from weeks to months as they are circumcised, heal, and learn ideas of masculinity central to being Xhosa (Gwata 2009; Mtuze 2004). Once a boy returns from initiation school, he is considered a man and others must treat him in accordance with this new status. These schools, however, have come under intense media scrutiny in recent years, as circumcision practitioners often have no medical training (in fact, some have been exposed as con artists looking to make money), no anesthesia is used, and infections are common. A 2010 Los Angeles Times investigation on the topic stated that often the ritual involves a single kitchen knife that is not sterilized between uses, thus spreading HIV infections. Many boys have lost part or all of their penises from complications, such as the tight wrapping of the penis in cloth for weeks after the ritual in order to demonstrate tolerance to pain (Dixon and Pienaar, www.latimes.com, August 2010).

Sonke routinely encounters cultural friction in communities when working to promote medical circumcision, which is a relatively recent alternative that occurs in hospitals and is done by medical practitioners with sterile equipment. Xhosa cultural ideas about masculinity present

obstacles to achieving high rates of participation in medical circumcision programs despite the ways this ritual has changed shape over the centuries (Vincent 2008); many boys told me that medical circumcision is the less “manly” option because it doesn’t involve as much pain or risk. As scholar Louise Vincent points out, “Male circumcision rites are symbolically saturated: the enhancement of masculine virility, the performative enactment of the separation between men and women, preparation for marriage and adult sexuality and the hardening of boys for warfare are typical themes” (2008:434). Thus, cultural capital is lost when circumcision is performed in a hospital setting, devaluing the ritual and removing its most salient social features in creating a particular type of masculine subject (Bourdieu 1984). Research participants vocalized this in interviews with me frequently, explaining that medical circumcision is often interpreted as a sign of weakness. Further, the hospital setting removes the clearly delineated phases of separation, transition, and incorporation from the original ritual – elements of central importance to the completion of a rite of passage across cultures (Gennep 1960; Gwata 2009; Turner 1967). This intersection of biomedicine and cultural authenticity can be compared to efforts combating female circumcision (or female genital mutilation, depending on the context) elsewhere in Africa (Christoffersen-Deb 2005). Western biomedical and activist perspectives often wrongly focus on the physical aspects of these rituals, ignoring the more deeply embedded, invisible work that is involved in these transitions.

The medical circumcision movement has also created tension because such efforts push people to reorient their notions of belonging along the lines of the nation-state rather than the extended family or clan. By succumbing to state interventions in the practice, young men must abandon elements of the ritual seen as central to Xhosa identification, such as social isolation and traditional treatments. As Susan explained: “There’s a big tension between traditional

circumcision and medical circumcision. And it made putting together materials around medical circumcision *really* difficult. You can't say the word 'safer' for example, because people might interpret that as 'safer than traditional.' It's that sensitive" (emphasis in original). Here we see how South Africa's emphasis on respect for cultural diversity complicates the work of NGOs that focus on democracy and human rights; for instance, notions of citizenship and belonging are particularly complex for those who identify as both Xhosa and South African. Although Sonke does consider medical circumcision to be a safer alternative to traditional circumcision, they carefully choose language that is meant to respect cultural practices and not incite anger among community members. Sonke's bottom line on circumcision, according to Susan, is that it can be done in traditional initiation schools but should be "regulated" by trained medical practitioners who use sterile equipment and know how to handle the healing process correctly to prevent infection. In other words, the state should oversee and manage cultural practices in order that they fall in line with national human rights legislation. Sonke also advocates circumcision for all boys as a strategy for reducing HIV transmission rates. They approach this issue in various ways, from pamphlets explaining the scientifically proven benefits of medical circumcision to infusing their messages into the storylines of young adult novels published nationwide in an effort to spread awareness among youth.



Figure 4.3 – Sonke pamphlet promoting medical circumcision (photo by author)

These efforts perhaps miss the point of ritual circumcision in the contemporary era: in an age where many other mechanisms of social reproduction have been eroded through neoliberal norms of the state, the rite of passage serves to socialize young people into Xhosa ideologies. As Hylton White shows among Zulu youth, increased rates of unemployment and estrangement from previous modes of household reproduction make ritual activities and beliefs all the more

important in maintaining some semblance of social continuity (White 2004). Thus, resistance to medical circumcision can be understood as logically consistent with the need for social reproduction into the next generation.

When looking at an NGO such as Sonke, one must examine the power dynamics of a large-scale organization with a multi-million dollar annual budget working in impoverished and under-represented communities. Staff members such as Sara, an American lawyer who has permanently relocated to Cape Town and now works for Sonke's legal team, are not unaware of such issues:

The naïve [me] used these kinds of slogans, like 'culture is dynamic.' And we can change culture, it's not static. And if somebody comes with a cultural legitimization of a certain behavior, that's fine! Because it's dynamic! Let's change your culture! But now I'm much more aware of the power of a white-funded NGO coming into a community saying 'let's change your culture.' I think we do [that], but I think we try to at least have more of a peer relationship in the communication of that kind of change (2/28/12).

This peer relationship is based on pairing facilitators with culturally-appropriate situations and communities, as described earlier in the chapter with examples such as the Afrikaner man writing the piece on Afrikaner white supremacist camps for young boys. As Sara's quote demonstrates, Sonke struggles to address its power imbalance vis-à-vis local communities in its various programs.

As this discussion may lead one to imagine, Sonke frequently encounters resistance to its messages on the grounds of culture. Recently, the organization initiated a program called "One Dad Can," a play on the wording of their long-standing One Man Can program that focuses on gender equality. The program encourages men to act as responsible fathers and play a significant and healthy role in the lives of their children. Susan described the backlash to a concurrent and similarly-themed radio program on the South African broadcasting network, SAFM: "Callers to the show just latched onto this idea of the nuclear family being a Western concept. And they

were *incredibly* defensive! Every single caller to the show spoke about the same thing, saying ‘this is a Western concept that you’re bringing in, this is our cultural norm, and you’re challenging us’” (emphasis in original). Sonke’s response to such criticism has been to emphasize that the “Dad” in “One Dad Can” is a metaphor for any significant person in your life, and is not meant to bolster a single vision of a healthy family or promote the nuclear family as an ideal model. Nonetheless, a variety of cultural norms are often packaged along with Sonke programming regardless of the sensitivity of staff members to such issues – something NGOs working in diverse contexts seemingly cannot avoid. For instance, although the fine print allows for recognition of any significant adult in a child’s life, “One Dad Can” appears on the surface to exclude lesbian households (despite their protection with extensive rights and marriage equality in the South African constitution). As later chapters will demonstrate, many rural Xhosa citizens have felt threatened by the concept of democracy and its concurrent human rights legislation promoted by organizations such as Sonke.

Cultural Norms of the NGO

All these instances of encountering cultural difference, however, really start at home for Sonke – as the opening story about the “Fishers of Men” song implies. As Sara explained to me:

Those issues about cultural translation, it’s even a problem internally. These things really play out not just in the communities we’re working in, but in the way we interact with other organizations. Like are you gonna work with me? Oh no, they’re led by a white woman, they’re gonna participate this way...this means that when we go to this setting, these people aren’t going to listen to us.

The staff must constantly take into account their own backgrounds and identities when working in various community settings, with the understanding that they will be perceived differently depending on the circumstances. Sonke’s staff is comprised of an extremely diverse group of

people from around the country as well as immigrants from other parts of Africa and beyond.

The staff also ranges greatly in age, gender, race, religious backgrounds, language and education levels. Nora, a young South African woman who grew up in Britain, recognized this:

I think [our diversity] is a strength mainly because we're in South Africa, so you have to have it. It would be wrong to just have one race, or one age or one gender. So, yes, it's an asset in that we have people who understand all sorts of different walks of life in South Africa. But I think it's one of Sonke's biggest problems as well. There are certain barriers due to a wide variety of differences that get on my nerves, and I know get on a lot of other people's nerves (3/4/12).

Along these lines, some staff members complained to me in interviews that the gender transformation process Sonke preaches was incomplete among some male employees. Speaking of one experience during a program, Amelia (a young woman relatively new to the Sonke staff at the time) said: "It was a *complete* boys' club. [Staff members] spoke derogatorily towards prostitutes. You just don't do that in a gender organization! You should know better! I feel like there's something wrong with the way members within Sonke interact. I think there needs to be a lot more training" (2/24/12). Though Amelia cushioned her statement with the caveat that only a minority of Sonke employees held such attitudes, she was not alone in her dissatisfaction with the levels of gender transformation within office walls. Thus, diversity within the NGO was seen as both an area of strength and also of potential weakness in reaching civil society goals – something reflected on the broader national level in South Africa.

Sonke Educators in the Eastern Cape

Understanding the Sonke philosophy is essential background for examining how this NGO enacts programs on the ground in rural South Africa. Since the organization implements many projects simultaneously all over the country (as well as in other African countries), it is often stretched thin in terms of staff members and funds. In the rural Eastern Cape, local Xhosa

residents have spearheaded Sonke projects during the last several years. Sonke conducts trainings across the country that teach their organizational philosophy and pedagogical strategies to future program facilitators. For instance, Sonke's 2008-2011 peer educator program involved occasional visits by NGO staff members, but the primary leaders were local Xhosa volunteers from an HIV/AIDS support group in the area. In this section, I discuss how using such Xhosa intermediaries impacts the messages received by youth in ways that tie into larger discussions of cultural forms and attitudes toward Western human rights values.

Some Sonke-trained local educators expressed resentment at the ways in which Sonke imposed their ideas from a different cultural context onto rural areas with different worldviews. Ms. Khumbule, a Mhlontlo teacher who Sonke trained, told me that: "It helped that they were Xhosa like us, but sometimes they were rude to other people. In fact, they did not understand that we are from rural areas and have different backgrounds. They were rude sometimes" (10/17/12). This quote echoes the earlier comparison of Sonke's conversion-like approach to liberal human rights teachings, demonstrating that at times their messages were received as an incursion into local ways of life.

Sonke's peer educator program in the Mhlontlo area focused primarily on children's rights under a democratic state, encouraging young people to recognize violations such as child abuse, sexual crimes and domestic violence. Noluthando, a young Xhosa girl in Mhlontlo, told me that she was taught "how to respect other learners and respect ourselves" (Interview, 5/2/12). Sonke's progressive, Western-oriented stance on gender equality came through in a lot of my interviews with youth. Imitha stated:

They taught about how to be a good father, how to treat your family. That you have to help with household work when you are not working...I used to think men are not equal to women. Men are powerful and I thought that they had more rights, more than women. They taught us that all people are equal. No one has the right to abuse others.

Underlying such liberal, progressive messages are assumptions of what it means to be a “good” father, for instance, or what should qualify as abuse. Due to these differences in definition, Sonke’s human rights agenda was often at odds with larger community gender relations and ideologies, which had the potential to pit youth against their peers and older generations. Some youth complained to me that friends would laugh at their messages of gender equality, which they often recited because the peer educator program encouraged using their skills to teach the larger community. All of the former Sonke participants I interviewed claimed to agree with the concept of gender equality, but then many later would demonstrate evidence of sexism and inequality in discussing specific examples. For instance, Zinzi, the young Xhosa girl discussed in the previous chapter, supported the idea of gender equality she learned through Sonke, but then said that herding cattle was “for boys, not for girls...it’s our culture.” While almost all the youth I interviewed agreed in gender equality as a concept, they rarely accepted the idea that a woman could be the head of a household. Practically in the same breath as his agreement that women and men are equal, a male high school student named Lonwabo told me that: “The man is the head of the house, so the woman should respect the husband” (10/24/12). Thus, though Sonke’s messages of gender equality and other liberal human rights might have been parroted back by youth participants, it is significant that Xhosa cultural ideologies on issues like gender equality seemed to override many of these messages in practice.

A frequent problem cited by Eastern Cape youth was the issue of sustainability for Sonke programs operating through local educators and dependent upon ever-shifting donor funds. Sonke’s work in the Mhlontlo area ended due to funding in 2011, and for many, program discontinuation was abrupt and confusing. Noluthando reflected on this experience: “We were not even notified, it just stopped...I was quite down, because they didn’t tell us what happened.

They just said it came to an end.” As Mr. Wize, a Department of Education employee who worked with Sonke, explained to me about the program discontinuation, “I think the reason might be communication failures...I don’t know who was supposed to go and tell the learners that Sonke is not operating anymore” (6/4/12). Later in this interview, Mr. Wize offered a critique of NGOs more generally:

They need some new strategies. They need to strategize more on the issue of sustainability. Because as soon as they leave, they leave the program with the municipality, and the municipality can’t reach all the areas. So the impact after they leave is not sustained. Many programs do die because of that...it’s a problem in the system.

I argue that such issues with long-term sustainability arise not from a lack of good intentions, but rather a larger system of neoliberal privatization and government corruption that places educators at the mercy of outside organizations to supplement their programs. Thus, the outsourcing of educational prerogatives to NGOs and extracurricular programs means the creation of dependency relationships between the Department of Education and these external bodies. Though in theory Sonke works to create self-sufficiency and community leaders that continue their work after the organization leaves, in reality programs often deteriorate after the NGO exits the community. This leads to variable amounts of ideological change among community members after Sonke interventions.

In one particularly extreme – though ostensibly unusual – instance, a local Sonke-trained educator from the HIV/AIDS support group was convicted of the rape of a minor in the community. His jail sentence marked the end of that branch of the peer educator program for many youth. Noluthando discussed the incident: “The thing I didn’t like about the program is that our peer educator, he’s the one who told us about things that were wrong, see? But then after the program, we heard that he was in jail because he raped someone.” Noluthando used the methods learned in her peer educator program to help a girl in her class who had been raped,

only to later find out it was the very same program's facilitator who had committed the rape. Such harrowing events call attention to the ways in which NGO messages have the propensity to change when enacted in rural settings through local social actors. It also reminds us of the troubling heterodoxy that exists in a multicultural state like South Africa, as certain discourses become widespread and public even if they sharply contrast with embedded, unconscious ideologies on the ground.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated some of the issues around processes of cultural change that NGOs such as Sonke deal with on a daily basis when working in diverse communities. In order to understand how such organizations do their work, it is necessary to first look inside their walls to get a sense of the philosophy behind the work being done and the cultural norms of the NGO itself. From examining the personal narratives and embodied practices of Sonke employees, it is evident that the organization works to convert people to a specific view of society, one in which the basic tenets of South African democracy are upheld regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. By employing a host of rhetorical strategies, Sonke promotes its ideological perspective through personal narratives that encourage empathy and emotional connection. Thus, this conversion process starts with Sonke's own staff, who then enter diverse communities to proselytize the concept of gender transformation.

As the opening anecdote about the "Fishers of Men" song highlighted, Sonke aims to create dialogue, transparency, and respect around cultural differences in ways that can lead to resolution and understanding. Beyond this, however, they constantly challenge the very origins of culture, questioning the histories of different practices and their alleged authenticity. Sonke

workshops, despite the value placed on respect for diversity, are nonetheless fraught with issues of power and dependency between the NGO and local communities. Since NGOs are not required to adhere to government curricula or Department of Education methods in their work with youth, they often differ greatly from state-run programs. The idea of “changing culture” or exposing “false histories” has far-reaching consequences for young people and how they imagine their roles both on local and national levels. Furthermore, such conversations greatly impact how they negotiate what it means to be Xhosa for the next generation. Ultimately, Sonke aims to align identification processes toward notions of citizenship and nationalism even if it means challenging Xhosa worldviews and practices.

Chapter 5: Nostalgia for Apartheid and Disappointments with Democracy

“Awash in a sea of faces, we look back nostalgically to the shore in a sudden memory of a ground already lost.” –Kathleen Stewart, “Nostalgia – A Polemic”

“It’s not that I prefer apartheid, but this democracy has become SO ridiculous.” –Xhosa youth, 11/17/12

Introduction

The opening quote of this chapter, written by anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, reflects a perspective on memory that is highly salient to disappointments with democracy and nostalgia for apartheid in the rural Eastern Cape today (Stewart 1988). While the long-awaited transition to democratic rule was widely celebrated upon its arrival in 1994, today a pervasive discourse of disappointment and anger runs through rural, poor communities in the Eastern Cape such as Mhlontlo. In light of the widespread perception that the ANC has failed to deliver “freedom” and the ideals of equality associated with democracy, many people recall apartheid as a time of stability and control – even if it meant codified oppression and inequality.

Indeed, many of my research participants waxed nostalgically for elements of life under apartheid, such as the ability to use corporal punishment in schools and the ease with which young people could secure employment. In this chapter, I ask how discourses from the previous generation might impact youth encounters with democracy today. How can anthropological engagement make sense of this longing for aspects of an internationally reviled and oppressive police state, in particular when it comes from the very individuals and communities that system most heavily discriminated against? How can ethnographic encounters also shed light on the unlikely epistemological connections made between democracy and a variety of social ills, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and widespread unemployment?

Making use of theoretical frameworks from the anthropology of historical memory and nostalgia, I argue in this chapter that the longing for apartheid-era infrastructure and practices on the part of many rural South Africans is the indirect result of conflated notions of freedom, democracy, and neoliberal capitalism. While surface-level readings of individual accounts suggest that democracy as a political and ideological system has failed rural citizens, my long-term ethnographic data reveal how such negative reactions are in fact the result of pervasive, increasing neoliberal capitalist norms and culturally specific expectations of democracy that the current South African government has not realized.

Within this discussion, I demonstrate the ways in which Xhosa linguistic practices evidence a specific understanding of the word “democracy” as *inkululeko*, or “freedom.” This ideological perspective on democracy greatly differs from many Western definitions of the term, which usually center upon notions of direct participation through voting for elected leaders. I contend, therefore, that this colloquial translation of the term among Xhosa speakers should be understood as consequential, in that it bears testimony to larger conceptual problems below the surface with how individuals envision a democratic government and what they expect one to deliver. Thus, embedded in my argument is a broader discussion on the reality of and problems with competing epistemologies within the cultural diversity of a pluralistic state such as South Africa.

As South African theorist Sipokazi Sambumbu points out, “remembering, forgetting, and telling [are] all culturally mediated” (Sambumbu 2010:7). To the outside observer, Eastern Cape residents’ nostalgia for elements of the apartheid regime may seem counter-intuitive and illogical, especially when remembering that this demographic was systematically oppressed, disenfranchised, and subjected to violence under that government. However, by examining this

phenomenon through ethnographic engagement with Xhosa individuals and an analytical attention to established cultural norms within this community, I reveal larger capitalist wealth inequalities, pre-apartheid expectations of freedom, and local ideologies that paint a more comprehensive picture of today's widespread dissatisfactions with democracy and the structural processes at work behind them.

Towards an Anthropology of Nostalgia

This chapter employs anthropological theories on nostalgia and historical memory that aid in my analysis of post-apartheid reactions to Western-based democracy in the Eastern Cape. Though anthropologists have written extensively on concepts of historical and collective memory as well as its varied uses within political and cultural projects (e.g. Abu El-Haj 2001; Cole 1998; Hale 2013), to date there has been relatively little theoretical engagement within the discipline on nostalgia as a topic distinct from other forms of remembering and one that is fruitful for discussion.¹⁵ In what follows, I present a selection of social scientists that have begun to carve out an “anthropology of nostalgia,” using it as a framework for my subsequent ethnographic data analysis from the Eastern Cape.

How can we understand nostalgia not just as an individual psychological state, but also as it is situated within larger collective cultural and historical processes? Importantly, nostalgia is a concept and linguistic marker for something quite distinct from other avenues of remembering: it suggests a desire to hold onto an idealized past, even if it markedly differs from factual events. In this sense, my primary interest in this chapter is not on the perhaps impossible task of uncovering apartheid-era history as it actually occurred, but instead on social perceptions of the past as a

¹⁵ With exceptions, (Bissell 2005; Dlamini 2009; Klumbyte 2009; Piot 2010; e.g. Stewart 1988), as discussed in this chapter.

reflection of the present. Rather than just recalling something, nostalgia actually longs for it, idealizes it, and desperately seeks to preserve it in the face of change. As Stewart has suggested, we should think of nostalgia as a cultural practice that shifts depending on the context and the social actor (Stewart 1988:227). Within this theoretical perspective, I again make use of theories of practice (Bourdieu 1984; Ortner 1984) that aim to understand and explain how actions and language work to construct and negotiate specific visions of the past, present, and future. By constantly recycling and amending narratives of nostalgia for a bygone era, Mhlontlo residents construct a discourse on apartheid that codes relevant elements and obscures those they wish to forget (Goodwin 1994). As these narratives are transferred to future generations, they become real for participants as a way of structuring experiences and behaviors.

Anthropological analyses of Post-Soviet states have, in recent years, engaged with the concept of nostalgia, showing how many residents of these areas long for various aspects of the Soviet regime and its socialist and/or communist policies. For instance, Neringa Klumbyte's examination of post-Soviet Lithuania analyzes the visceral sensations that evoke nostalgia and recall specific visions of a glorified past, such as heat, absence of hunger, and alcohol use. In discussing the way these feelings conjure up the past, she theorizes that "nostalgia is a restorative discourse, through which an individual reclaims one's own dignity and respect by transposing himself or herself onto an idealized chronotype of the Soviet past. Nostalgia is also a way to claim recognition and inclusion in a post-Soviet public" (Klumbyte 2009:96). Thus, discourses of a fondly remembered past, even those revolving around a police state, can provide a sense of place for the individual in a rapidly changing society that threatens cherished cultural practices. Klumbyte uses ethnographic encounters to show how "themes that dominated narrations of a self and social history were structured in terms of good Soviet times and decline, chaos, and

regression at present” (2009:103). Nostalgia, therefore, becomes a way to carve out identity through a dichotomous opposition to the present; an identity practice formulated through the rejection of dominant narratives (Bucholtz 1999; Hebdige 1979). In this sense, nostalgia for the Soviet era tells us much more about *post*-Soviet life – i.e., the present moment – than anything else.

Klumbyte has connected this phenomenon to economic reforms in post-Soviet states, explaining that rural residents long for the “strong leaders” of the past and “oppose neoliberal reforms and Europeanization” (99). As her research indicates, nostalgic discourses are on the rise in states dealing with rapid economic neoliberalization that drastically alters economic and social norms for individuals. This reality has forged an unlikely theoretical connection between post-Soviet states and post-Apartheid South Africa. For instance, anthropologists have discussed the increased presence of nativism and traditionalism in South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) as forms of nostalgic discourse and practice that connect directly to the neoliberal state and late capitalist conditions.

Indeed, the broader conclusion I draw in this chapter (and elaborate on in the subsequent one) is that nostalgia is an increasingly common discourse among residents of newly democratic states struggling with the devastating reforms of neoliberal economic trends. These realities include structural adjustment policies, increased privatization of social services, and strengthened free trade networks across national borders that largely have been introduced through global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Goldman 2005). In the face of ever-increasing wealth inequalities and corporatization of essential services across the globe, more individuals are turning to nostalgic discourses that uphold a fondly remembered version of the past and maintain preferred identification practices. Where there is widespread

nostalgia from feelings of cultural loss and disappointment with the present, we can likely expect to find the signs of capitalist accumulation and heightened wealth inequality.

In many contexts across the world, the labeling of cultural practices as “traditional” becomes a way for people to hold onto and glorify the past in the face of social, political, and economic upheaval that threatens to permanently alter a community and its cultural forms. By labeling elements of a culture as traditional, individuals mark them as worthy of preservation and intergenerational transmission. Kathleen Stewart has written on the idea of loss and nostalgia as it pertains to culture, which is useful here even though she is referring specifically to the United States:

From one place in the cultural landscape nostalgia is a schizophrenic exhilaration (Jameson 1983) of a pure present that reads images for their own sake; from another place it is a pained, watchful desire to frame the cultural present in relation to an ‘other’ world – to make of the present a cultural object that can be seen, appropriated, refused, disrupted or ‘made something of’ (Stewart 1988:228).

In this analysis, nostalgia reflects the desire to read meaning into various elements of the landscape that demand attention. At the same time, Stewart also refers to the ways that visual signs in the environment produce pain in the present moment, because they are compared to an oppositional and preferred past. In my own ethnographic discussion, Xhosa Eastern Cape residents fall most clearly along the lines of the latter: they express the present as something that can be categorized, and thus rejected, in comparison to a nostalgic and revered past.

Thus, as Stewart explains, things in the world are read through the lens of nostalgia: “A decaying farmhouse surrounded by rusting tractors in the midwestern wheat fields is a sign of the plight of the ‘small farmer’ and ‘the country’s failure to respond to that plight” (230-231). Signs, in this instance, take on meanings that trigger memories in their viewers and evoke nostalgia for something beyond what is physically present. In Stewart’s description, the “small farmer” is

idealized while the decay and devastation wrought by national policies is highlighted through contrast with a morally superior past.

Anthropologist Keith Basso also explores this phenomenon of memory and place in his ethnography of Apache landscapes, showing how individuals connect aspects of their geographical surroundings to nostalgic cultural narratives and mythologies that construct favored identities in the present. “Knowledge of places is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person” (Basso 1996:34). Therefore, nostalgic elements of the landscape become essential for identification practices that connect the past and the present.

William Cunningham Bissell echoes a similar sentiment in his discussion of longings for colonialism among previously colonized states. He describes how nostalgia should be viewed as unique from other types of remembering in that it “critically frames the present” (Bissell 2005:216). As with any case of nostalgia, an idealized Eastern Cape past may never have existed in the formations of which it is spoken today; rather, Xhosa individuals often yearn for a perception of previous eras that has been discursively created through an amalgamation of cultural ideals and varying historical periods. It is this potentially fabricated and highly subjective notion of memory with which I am most interested in this chapter, in that it reflects a particular way of understanding and viewing the present. Nostalgia for *then* does not and cannot exist unless in dialogue with a deeply unsatisfactory *now*.

Jacob Dlamini, in his powerful book *Native Nostalgia*, uses this concept of nostalgia to expose the complexities of township life under apartheid and to reject mainstream portrayals of these predominantly poor neighborhoods as merely “sites of struggle” (Dlamini 2009:153).

Challenging previous understandings of life under apartheid, he employs a variety of personal narratives and sensory experiences to demonstrate how memory is always a matter of perspective and how it shifts depending on the lens through which it is viewed. For instance, Dlamini illuminates the longings for subversive apartheid-era radio stations, such as Radio Zulu, that worked to give oppressed township residents a positive outlet for creative expression in the face of adversity. He explains that post-apartheid nostalgia for the radio station hinged upon its exclusive use of Zulu as a way of “going against the grain” – compared to the mixed-language radio stations of the post-apartheid state that allow for a plurality of voices, and yet do not create the same identities of resistance (Dlamini 2009).

Dlamini contends “To be nostalgic is not to wear rose-tinted glasses but to appreciate township life in its complexity.” (2009:109) Here, remembering is a deeply political and imaginative act: what concerns Dlamini is neither any notion of absolute truth nor a simplistic reading of the past, but rather how memories of apartheid are inextricably tied to reflections of post-apartheid anxieties. As Bissell states, “Nostalgic discourses imaginatively rework time and space, conjuring up the plenitude of the past as a means of measuring the present” (2005:225). Thus, the imagination plays an active role in constructing specific idealizations of the past that are used as a yardstick by which to assess the failures of the present moment.

Theorists exploring the cultural politics of nature and production of concepts of “wilderness” have written extensively on this topic of imagined histories, critiquing conservation projects that uncritically foster nostalgia for a return to some idealized version of the past that often did not exist (e.g. Cronon 1995; West 2006). Though focusing on a very different topic, their theoretical analysis of nostalgia is useful in understanding how Mhlontlo residents framed feelings of cultural loss and desires to return to a previous historical moment. As William

Cronon states in his discussion of the cultural production of the idea of wilderness in the U.S., “This nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life inevitably implied ambivalence, if not downright hostility, toward modernity and all that it represented” (Cronon 1995:14). Here, Cronon also identifies the presence of nostalgia as a signifier of anti-modern sentiments and fears of cultural infringement on revered ways of life. Thus, we must recognize that any claims for a return to the past necessarily rely upon some imaginary point in history as an “origin” to which people desire a return. As Noluvo poignantly defined it, “when I was born, tradition was already there. When my great-grandparents were born, tradition was already there. It has been there a long time.”

Anthropologists have also discussed the ways in which the preservation of cultural practices can provide evidence of nostalgia for a previous era. Jean Comaroff has written on the ways in which ritual practices take on new functions in subsequent historical eras and are thus imaginatively reworked, as she explains in her discussion of Tswana initiation rituals in South Africa. She demonstrates that the meanings and motivations of Tswana rites of passage shifted greatly from the pre-colonial to the colonial period, even if the outward manifestations of the rituals remained the same (Comaroff 1985). While previous incarnations of these rites focused on “reproducing established social structures of inequality and managing tensions,” the pressures and threats of the colonial era “introduced new contradictions and new orders of symbolic mediation, [in which] ‘traditional’ ritual was to serve increasingly as a symbol of a lost world of order and control” (1985:119). Therefore, cultural practices are often preserved, albeit in altered forms, as a manifestation of nostalgia onto which individuals can grasp, especially when faced with threats of loss from outside.

Similarly to Comaroff's Tswana example, many of my research participants in the Eastern Cape conveyed fear and dismay that Xhosa "traditions" were disappearing in the face of contact with neoliberal development and the tenets of Western democracy. In this sense, we can see a parallel between earlier culture clashes arising from colonialism and contemporary indoctrination into a global free market economy ordered around the principles of democracy, equality, and individualism. As Comaroff illuminates, cultural symbols (in her Tswana case, an initiation ritual) may persist over long periods of time, but they often shift meanings and take on new significations as the larger social and political order changes. While it may be tempting to read the enduring presence of a cultural ritual as evidence of longstanding tradition, meanings behind such practices often take on contemporary and altered forms that have become obscured over time (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Therefore, in order to understand the widespread confluences of freedom, capitalism, and democracy in the Eastern Cape it is necessary we pay close attention to local epistemologies and perspectives rather than simply search for hard and fast "facts" about previous eras. As anthropologist Sondra Hale explained in a discussion of Palestinian and Israeli oral history practices, the telling of stories acts as an effective form of reinforcement in codifying particular memories and visions of the past. Sometimes this memory work is an unconscious process, while at other times individuals make deliberate choices of what to highlight and what to downplay. Thus, memory and nostalgia should always be recognized as especially contested, political territory (Hale 2013).

Remembering in Mhlontlo

These theoretical engagements with the concept of nostalgia are particularly helpful in making sense of the pervasive feelings of loss and desire for the past among Eastern Cape residents in my ethnographic encounters. During interviews, participants frequently reminisced about various elements of the apartheid government they saw as beneficial, while they maligned the Westernization of rural, Xhosa values and norms seen as central to cultural identification. Within this discussion, I demonstrate the various ways in which Mhlontlo residents conceive of culture as an ideological concept. People in the rural Eastern Cape often presented culture as a bounded, isolated, and timeless phenomenon – a conceptual framework that has been extensively discussed and debated within anthropology (Geertz 1973; Rosaldo 1989; Wolf 1982, to name a few).

In Mhlontlo, nostalgia was often expressed with regard to practices and beliefs that residents labeled as “traditional” but no longer occupied a prominent role in daily life. These worries of loss were expressed primarily in relation to youth, as adults saw democracy and the incursion of new values as rupturing previous intergenerational systems of Xhosa cultural transmission. Young people, as they reiterated in interviews, were no longer upholding traditional beliefs and practices deemed essential to one’s identification as Xhosa. A male ANC government official in Mhlontlo said, “As Xhosas, we are moving away from our culture” (Interview, 11/21/13). Even within the democratic system itself, then, fears of cultural loss to outside influences abound.

Ms. Tyrone explained to me, in a discussion of cultural practices such as dancing, that “these olden dances, they were performed by our fathers and mothers. Some, they forget about their culture...when we are going to do our traditions they are not interested. Few people [today]

know those dances. So what they see from TV, they think that is their culture.” Here, “traditional” dance becomes a site at which to express fears of cultural loss, nostalgia, and threat from outside value systems (such as television). Ms. Tyrone upholds a specific concept of culture as a bounded and locatable system in ways that differ from larger South African national discourses on multiculturalism, integration, and change. Not only does she separate out what is “Xhosa” and what is not in her assessment of dancing, but she also attaches notions of superiority and inferiority to specific practices based on their perceived origins. Her assessment of a practice’s value hinges in particular on its historical legitimacy, which helps us to understand why organizations like Sonke would choose to heavily focus on debunking “false histories” in its attempt to change social norms around gender (as discussed in Chapter 4).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Mr. Gabela, a principal, lamented the lack of agricultural skills among today’s young people. “We used to make a lot out of grain. Now we’ve moved to things used by these whites. And you’ll find that it’s not nutritious. We are detached then from our original way of learning.” Note his use of the word “original” – much of the dialogue in Mhlontlo waxed nostalgically for an unspecified past that seemed located in a specific time and place. Rather than acknowledging the many historical moments in which traditions emerge and the ways in which practices are constantly renegotiated (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), individuals in these interviews used a static notion of culture as a frame of reference by which to measure the disappointments of the present.

These instances of nostalgia over seemingly lost or fading cultural practices provide evidence of the ways in which individuals in Mhlontlo mentally and emotionally categorize certain facets of life in terms of their “Xhosa-ness.” Many research participants also reduced complex cultural processes to a simplified binary, situating these behaviors and practices within

a perceived dichotomy between tradition and Westernization. According to Ms. Cele: “We’ve got values as a people, and young people tend to forget their values. Our elders still have those expectations of us maintaining and keeping those values. So we clash in a way... It’s important we keep Xhosa culture the same.” Young people sometimes echoed this narrative of cultural loss and the incursion of Western values, a likely result of adult influences. As Imitha explained, “kids today are Westernized most of the time.” Thus, this focus on preserving a specific version of Xhosa culture as contrasted with a perceived “Western” culture was shared among many of my research participants.

Contrary to such perspectives, Xhosa “culture” has in reality never been monolithic and static, a fact to which numerous historical accounts can attest (i.e. McAllister 1989; Mills 1992; Soga 1931; Wilson 1936; Wilson 1982). In fact, recent literature has persuasively argued for the ways in which modernity itself, and the contradictions accruing with it, has been implicated in the invention, construction and imagination of the category of tradition in South Africa (Ngwane 2001). Furthermore, in many cases the ability to uphold traditional practices in fact *depends* on modern outlets for their expression and maintenance. Anthropologists have demonstrated this in other geographical contexts, such as in Terence Turner’s discussion of Amazonian Indians’ appropriation of visual technologies for the archiving of ritual practices (Turner 1992).

Threats to “traditional” practices seem to infiltrate processes of intergenerational education from all directions for many Mhlontlo residents. As Mr. Gabela discussed:

During our time, we used to work hard, we used to be self-driven, because we wanted to improve our families. There were no grants. Life was very hard. And once we relaxed, we were going to feel that hardship, so we were pushed then to be responsible. The country has changed a lot, and young people are more exposed. Especially these people from neighboring countries: they are mixing, whereas during apartheid, the flow of people was strictly controlled. You couldn’t interact with people from countries that were liberated before us. So there is also the inflow of the wrong things.

Here, xenophobia is justified under the ideology of cultural preservation, as with foreigners come foreign ideas that inevitably impact local practices and expose youth to new perspectives that this individual deems threatening. Ms. Dingana, an older Mhlontlo teacher, expressed similar nostalgic sentiments:

During our time, we were not exposed to these [new] things. With kids of today, they are free to everything...when I was a child, we really had no rights in this place. You listened to whatever was said by a parent, and you had no right to ask why. We didn't use that word. It was not allowed (Interview, 11/1/12).

Here, asking "why?" is a signifier of Western cultural influences and their corrupting consequences among youth. Mr. Blose, a Zimbabwean teacher in Mhlontlo, explained to me (while channeling his semi-outsider status in the community): "when people are threatened, they go back to 'our culture says this and that'" (Interview, 9/3/12).

While much of the younger generation embraces the comprehensive and liberal rights discourse of the current era, older generations frequently complained to me that these rights have eroded Xhosa mechanisms of social control and cohesion. A perfunctory examination of this discrepancy might give one the impression that this is more of the usual "kids these days..." complaints prevalent in intergenerational tensions across cultures, but through interviews and observations it became clear that much more was below the surface of these comments. Rather, dissatisfactions with democracy demonstrate major shifts in political, moral, and ideological socialization that often pits generations against one another. As Ms. Cele elaborated:

Democracy has not helped! Because you find that people don't want to do anything! They want to just wake up and sit, do nothing, wait for things to come because they know that the government is going to bring in grant money. They've got kids, they get pregnant, their children are fed by the government...They go and build shacks, they sit, they do nothing, they wait for the government to build houses for them. Even respect has gone down. Nobody respects anybody else...they are abusing this democracy. They think it means since we've got freedom of speech, you can say whatever you want. We've got values as a people, and they tend to forget their values.

Interestingly, Ms. Cele is one of the younger people on staff at her school, and is staunchly opposed to corporal punishment. And yet, despite her agreement with many progressive rights policies, she still maintains that overall democracy is harming youth more than helping them. One of the main ways in which she sees this happening is through the use of social programs that bolster support for youth in ways she sees as enabling. My argument here is that this assessment relies heavily upon how Xhosa see youth roles and what the cultural understandings of childhood are.

Anna Fournier, in her work on youth rights in post-Soviet Ukraine, echoes this seeming discrepancy between agreements with democracy on the one hand, and problems with its enactments in local contexts on the other. She explains: "while most teachers did not perceive democracy as bad or excessive in *itself*, the idea was that it could become so when *appropriated locally* as a practice" (66, emphasis in original). Ukrainian teachers aligned themselves generally with the tenets of the democratic state, but emphasized the problems with its discourses on an individual level. Like my own informants, Fournier shows how teachers in the Ukraine see democracy as eroding previous modes of social control and respect (Fournier 2012). Indeed, teachers perceived students as "unappreciative of their rights" (81) – a complaint I heard often myself in rural South Africa.

Many teachers elaborated on this anti-democratic sentiment during interviews with me. Ms. Mbodi, the municipal psychologist, explained: "people have taken this word democracy in the wrong manner. They have taken it as if a person is just allowed to do anything, anyhow...if you go to the children, they have taken this democracy without the responsibility. They're only concerned with what? The rights. We still have a lot to do." Along these lines, adults such as Mr.

Gabela often expressed nostalgia for the social norms that governed youth and maintained notions of propriety before the democratic era:

We are afraid to exercise our customs, like *intonjane* (the female puberty ritual) in which you are taught how to behave, how to keep yourself correctly. But now, you'll find these values are being undermined, you'll find even some of these young pregnancies and so on...we are trying to fit in with the standards of the world. But on the other hand, they are depriving society of values.

Some young people in Mhlontlo also echoed their elders' fears that democracy was to blame for the erosion of traditional methods of social control. As Noluvo explained to me in a moment of intense emotion:

I just think that [the apartheid] government was better. Because everything was under control! Let me put it that way. In that apartheid, everything was under control. But now, not everything is under control! In apartheid, they controlled crime. You know? In apartheid, they controlled violence, you know, like they controlled everything! And you wouldn't do a thing that you know is wrong. But now, they can't control crime. They can't control pregnancy. You know? Instead of controlling those things, they just introduced gay marriage. They just introduced abortion. Instead of fighting what is there, they add more. That's what I think, that's how I think this apartheid was good and democracy is bad. Now we are moving from better to worse. Despite the fact that they say black people were not wanted by whites. Yes, they were not wanted, but when it comes to living life, they made us live better.

While she acknowledged the racial prejudices of the apartheid era ("Yes, they were not wanted..."), Noluvo's overall portrayal of that period was one of control, structure, and stability.

Historical sources, as previously discussed, verify this emphasis on the importance of social control among Xhosa cultural practices, particularly as they relate to young people. As anthropologist Monica Wilson explains in her ethnographic writings on the Eastern Cape Xhosa from the early nineteenth century: "There is no age at which [a child] is regarded as being free of parental control" (Wilson 1936:25). In light of this historical portrait of Xhosa cultural norms, it makes sense that adults would feel threatened by the freedoms introduced with a democratic state, particularly around the rights of children.

Disappointments with Democracy

As the second opening quote of this chapter illustrates, one of the most common perspectives expressed during my interviews with Mhlontlo educators, municipal employees, and occasionally youth was a distinct and profound feeling that democracy has not delivered what was promised and expected. Instead, many Eastern Cape residents see the increased dependency on social welfare programs, coupled with the lack of viable employment opportunities, as evidence that democracy has failed.

Previous anthropological theories on democracy as a political and social worldview help illuminate the problematic nature of applying such ideologies to rural Xhosa communities. Fournier talks of Ukrainian citizens seeing democracy as a type of “wild” or “natural” state, one in which the allure of freedom is granted, but at devastating costs to previous modes of social control and order (Fournier 2012). Bernard Dubbeld, in his writings on a rural town in KwaZulu-Natal Province, interrogates South Africans’ expectations of democracy, showing how many people tied good governance with visibility of elected leaders and their projects. He discusses one specific informant from his research:

Because she does not see those she considers her leaders, she believes the social circumstances she and those around her experience are invisible to the government. She assumes a reciprocal mode of seeing in which her not seeing leaders of government is an expression of their not seeing her (Dubbeld 2013:495).

Here, Dubbeld shows how expectations of leader visibility and substantial government presence in the community did not match the reality of South African democracy.

Harry G. West provides a fascinating analysis of encounters with democracy among the Muedan people of Mozambique. He details a spate of man-eating lions in 2002 that terrorized

locals of this rural area, and the lack of municipal government response to the incident. Deeply entrenched beliefs in sorcery among the Muedans created an epistemology for understanding the killings: democracy's culture of permissiveness, tolerance and equality led officials to allow sorcery to run rampant in the form of vicious sorcerers-cum-lions. As West explains:

Whereas neoliberal reformers suggested that democracy would rationalize political competition, render power more accountable to the people, and open greater space for individual contribution to a prosperous post-war environment, Muedans experienced democracy as a regime that promoted irresolvable conflict in their midst and provided cover for dominant political actors to forego the responsibilities of authority and to feed themselves at the expense of others. (West: Paley 2008:118).

Through this ethnographic analysis, we see a portrait of democracy that runs counter to official discourses of societal betterment for all. Instead, democracy's emphasis on equality creates an environment in which malicious forms of power – such as sorcery – become unchecked and create spiritual insecurity and widespread fear. For the Muedans, this signaled a breaking down of the social order with life or death consequences.

Much of the discourse surrounding disappointment with democracy is tied closely to the perceived failures of the ruling party, the ANC. As Jonny Steinberg elucidates in his work on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa, *Three Letter Plague*:

When the adults of Ithanga converged on the school to vote for the first time in April 1994, they had been told, on radio, and on election platforms, that their vote would bring them running water, electricity, proper roads, perhaps a clinic. More than a decade later, there isn't a soul here who has forgotten that every one of these promises was broken (Steinberg 2008:187).

In light of these substantial dissatisfactions, many Eastern Cape residents continue to rely upon tribal chiefs for governance in the absence of direct democratic participation. Imitha explained to me “they are the people you approach when you've got problems. The chief knows what is happening in the community. They are playing a big role.” As discussed earlier, the Xhosa clan system remains largely intact even today, when an increasing number of people live in nuclear

family units spread across wide geographical ranges. However, the role of Xhosa chiefs has changed drastically over the years as a result of colonialism and later political regime changes. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the chief maintained a role as facilitator of direct democracy, rather than as a single, autocratic ruler (Mtuze 2004). Along these lines, the egalitarian emphasis in pre-colonial Xhosa political structure emphasized the cultural concept of *ubuntu*, which loosely translates to “humanity,” and stressed communal identity practices over individual ambition.

In the democratic state, a chief’s position has become much more ambiguous; while the Constitution explicitly outlines the “right to traditional leaders,” such leaders’ powers are circumscribed by the rest of this document. Thus, a Xhosa chief cannot overrule the state’s legal decisions or rule in ways that would violate the Constitution. Today, Xhosa chiefs maintain their titles and settle local disputes through what is called a “traditional court,” and earn salaries for their appointment through the municipal government – as a way to recognize and respect local cultural systems. Many residents explained that they would take community problems, such as criminal activity, to their local chief before heading to the police station. When questioned about such decisions, Noluthando responded: “Our police here are not doing enough work. You call them, and they maybe come next week.”

Importantly, historical understandings of political power in the Eastern Cape allow us to see the ways in which popular dichotomous understandings of democracy and tradition are incorrect and oversimplified. As Ida Susser explains in her discussion of South African women: “It would be mistaken to assume that customary law restricted and constrained women while the new constitution liberated them. As might be expected, the picture is murkier. Women did find spaces of autonomy and political influence under customary law” (Susser 2009). Thus, Mhlontlo

residents' rejection of South African democracy clearly is not based upon a disavowal of the concept of direct political participation. Rather, democracy is seen as intimately linked with increased wealth inequality, the erosion of social control, and threats to highly valued cultural practices.

Freedom and Democracy

The word *inkululeko*, which loosely translates to “freedom” in Xhosa, is used in conversational speech as a gloss for democracy. As no pre-colonial word for democracy existed in the Xhosa language, *inkululeko* has come to signify the political system championed by the ANC at the end of apartheid. In this semantic fact lays a larger ideological concept: in the worldview of many Eastern Cape residents, a democratic government is supposed to carry with it a promise of freedom: economic, social, religious, etc. Often, this expectation of freedom was put to me in monetary terms, as many South Africans expected a redistribution of wealth to accompany the transition from apartheid to democracy.¹⁶ Here we see an epistemological divergence between Western political understandings of the concept of democracy and local explanations of what it means to be democratic in the Eastern Cape. Many Xhosa residents understand societal ills through a different framework of causality than Western-oriented political actors, such as Sonke employees. Once we take into account the widespread conflation of democracy and freedom, it becomes clear why Xhosa people often describe South Africa's post-apartheid government as a failure. Buzwe, a male ANC youth league activist in Mhlontlo, discussed this perception: “The ANC was a liberation movement...we thought when the ANC

¹⁶ I delve fully into this topic of economic dissatisfactions and the turn to neoliberalism in the following chapter.

won the election, in 1994, things were going to change. But the change is still far, too far, away.” (Interview, 5/30/12).

At the same time, interestingly, it is this very notion of freedom that becomes the focal point for fear and rejection of the ideologies of democracy. As I have discussed, ethnographic data revealed resistance to certain freedoms that *have* been granted by democracy; freedom itself becomes a locus of destruction and cultural threat. As Noluvo explained:

Now with democracy people don't have respect for each other. If I get married to an Indian, I don't know the traditions of an Indian. I do not respect them, you know? I just think that (apartheid) government was better. Because everything was under control! That's why I think apartheid was good and democracy is bad.

Here, the freedom to marry across racial lines is perceived as threatening and deeply problematic. Many adults also rejected the notion of children's rights because they allegedly are eroding “traditional” methods of social control and giving undeserved and dangerous freedoms to young people who would otherwise exist within rigid, prescribed age hierarchies.

Thus, freedom acts as both a negative and positive signifier depending on the particular context. It represents the great promise of equality contained within a democratic state, while at the same time looming large as a threat to previously established modes of social control. As feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood describes, “the terms people use to order their lives are not simply a gloss for universally shared assumptions about the world and one's place in it, but are actually constitutive of different forms of personhood, knowledge and experience” (Mahmood 2005:16). Freedom is one such term, as it shifts based on the speaker and their individual perspectives.

Research participants in the Eastern Cape often connected social problems that seemingly do not relate to democracy to this political system. According to Ms. Cele, “now the problems of young people are worse. This teenage pregnancy thing is worse since 1994. I don't know what

the cause is, but when I look back, before 1994, now this teenage pregnancy rate has grown high.” This was a common refrain in Mhlontlo: the increased rates of teenage pregnancy in the community were implicitly linked to the changes wrought by democracy.¹⁷ Residents such as Ms. Andiswa also reminisced about the allegedly superior infrastructure under apartheid: “Since democracy, everything is worse...if you go to town, you see there is no toilet. There were toilets under apartheid...everything! Things were safe.”

Mr. Gabela, the principal, connected the dependency on mass produced goods to the failures of democracy: “Though we say in fact that South Africa is liberated, they introduced various things so that people must be dependent. For example, even food...we buy these Long Lives¹⁸ and I don’t know how they are prepared. I don’t feel liberated at all, because there’s a lot of suffering now. Things are worse than before.” Anthropological writings, such as those detailing witchcraft in Sub-Saharan Africa as mentioned previously, have echoed this awareness that differing epistemologies often are at work in the explanations of societal problems (e.g. Ashforth 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2004a; Piot 1999).

Previous anthropologists and other social scientists have extensively discussed and debated the problematic nature of the very concept of freedom (Foucault 1977, for example), showing that what this term means is dependent on local cultural, social, and historical contexts (Abu-Lughod 2002; Laidlaw 2002) and cannot be ascribed a single, fixed meaning. In particular, feminist anthropology has provided a very useful framework within which to critique mainstream understandings of freedom. These scholars have questioned both the assumption that

¹⁷ According to a December 2012 study, the overall rate of adolescent pregnancy (defined here as ages 10-19) in South Africa was 19.2% (Mchunu et al. 2012). Interestingly, as contrasted to attitudes in Mhlontlo, most statistical publications report that these rates have declined in recent decades (Partners in Sexual Health, 2013).

¹⁸ A company that produces Ultra-High Temperature (UHT) processed milk, an extremely popular product in the rural Eastern Cape because it is cheaper than fresh milk and lasts longer.

freedom is a primary and universal goal for all people as well as the idea that notions of freedom are identical across cultures. The field has successfully demonstrated such assumptions to be erroneous and problematic in advancing the cause of gender equality across the globe.

As a case in point, many Western feminists in the 1970s called for the dismantling of the nuclear family, recognizing it as a key source of women's oppression and subjugation within the domestic sphere. Native American and African American feminists rebutted this claim, however, by demonstrating how freedom for them was precisely about the *ability* to form close families after the devastating ruptures that years of slavery and oppression produced (Mahmood 2005:13). Along such lines, in her discussion of the politics of veiling in the Muslim world after 9/11, anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod asks: "Is liberation even a goal for which all women or people strive? Are emancipation, equality, and rights part of a universal language we must use?" (2002:788). Understanding the ways in which Xhosa individuals have conflated *inkululeko* with democracy illuminates the problems in advancing a political agenda within a multicultural state. Furthermore, it unpacks the assumptions of a shared worldview that often lurks behind political and economic agendas in the South African state and beyond.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the daily narrative practices of Eastern Cape residents in constructing subjective visions of the past that align with desired cultural values and social norms. Distinguishing the concept of nostalgia from memory and using it as a theoretical framework, I illuminate how individuals express longing for elements of the apartheid regime in the face of widespread dissatisfactions with South African democracy as introduced by the ANC. While previous anthropologists have already advanced the argument that nostalgia is a practice

meant to critically frame the present more than reflect upon the past (Klumbyte 2009; Stewart 1988 et al.), I add to this discussion a demonstration of how the work of remembering is undergirded by epistemological differences in understanding societal ills of the post-apartheid state.

Furthermore, I have shown how linguistic practices can be used as evidence for different understandings on the concept of freedom. Using the Xhosa word *inkululeko* (“freedom”) as a signifier of democracy has widespread ramifications for perceptions of the post-apartheid government. Finally, and as I address directly and in more depth in the subsequent chapter, I connect pervasive feelings of nostalgia in the rural Eastern Cape with the swelling tides of neoliberal capitalism and the economic discontentment it has brought for the majority of South African citizens. While this chapter has centered upon various narrative encounters with the past and memories of life under apartheid, the theoretical argument contained therein is very much about the deep ambivalence and dissatisfaction of the present moment. While this reading of apartheid-era nostalgia allows for a more nuanced understanding of its existence within the democratic state, it does little to resolve the tensions produced for youth by a democratic education taught by those very same social actors most dissatisfied with this system of government.

Chapter 6: Capitalism and Desire

“We have only gained political freedom, but economically we are not there.” –Department of Education Employee, Mhlontlo, 9/10/12

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” –Audre Lorde¹⁹

Introduction

Nostalgia for elements of the apartheid era in the Eastern Cape exists simultaneously alongside the consumer desires of global neoliberal capitalism. Although this may seem on the surface paradoxical, in reality heightened consumerism provides evidence of exactly the ways in which post-apartheid life is filled with economic inequality and marginalization, producing the conditions in which nostalgia often arises. Nostalgia is, after all, a type of longing – and longing is the fundamental building block of neoliberal capitalism. Desire for commodities and accumulation of capital in a neoliberal state such as South Africa creates both a longing for an imagined future as well as an idealization of a “simpler” past, one free from the burdens of unrealized wealth and the tumult of a market economy that privileges only the very few.

In this chapter, I ask how the global turn towards neoliberal capitalism contributes to rural experiences of democracy. I advance the argument that many Eastern Cape residents’ dissatisfaction with and anger towards democracy as an ideological and political system is, in reality, a commentary on the economic and social norms that accompany a neoliberal capitalist economy. In other words, when individuals malign “democracy” as a system that has brought disappointment and destruction to the rural Eastern Cape, this should be viewed as more of a commentary on capitalism than the concept of equal political representation through elected

¹⁹ 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

officials. As present-day South Africans have never experienced first-hand a democratic state previous to its current incarnation, their views of democracy as a political system are largely informed by the ways in which it has been paired with the global turn towards capitalism and increased wealth inequality.

Through a combination of historical accounts of the pre-colonial period, theoretical background on neoliberalism in the 21st century, and ethnographic interviews and observations from my research in Mhlontlo, I demonstrate in the following discussion how individual residents conflate democracy with capitalism and its associated economic consequences on social life. The impact of neoliberal capitalism is particularly devastating in rural areas of the Eastern Cape that continue to suffer from extremely high rates of poverty,²⁰ and wealth inequality still largely persists along color lines that mimic apartheid's insidious racial hierarchies. These persisting social problems give many Mhlontlo residents the impression that democracy has yet to deliver on its pre-1994 promises for a non-racial, classless society.

In other words, in this chapter I discuss how both complaints about daily life that centered upon the evils of "democracy" and embodied, unconscious practices in my ethnographic encounters can actually be understood as the expression of serious dissatisfactions with the fundamental tenets of the neoliberal capitalist system. Such perspectives on and narratives of disappointment and anger likely will have widespread ramifications for the next generation of political actors and voting bodies, making this intersection of political subjectivity and economic norms a significant area of study as it pertains to youth in newly democratic states such as South Africa.

²⁰ In 2011, 45.5% of the South African population was considered poor, a measure determined by Statistics South Africa based on several variables, including ability to afford adequate food. Of this figure, 0.8% were white South Africans, while 54% were black South Africans. Within the Eastern Cape, 60.8% of all residents were living below the poverty line in 2011. Notably, the percentage of *all* people living in poverty in South Africa has decreased significantly from 2006 (Statistics South Africa 2014).

Pre-Colonial Economic Life

An examination of the economic norms that existed within Xhosa communities of the rural Eastern Cape prior to colonial encounters in the 1800s helps to further explain the disjunctures between established social norms in rural Mhlonlo and the changes wrought by the turn towards neoliberal capitalism. Prior to colonial contact, Xhosa communities in the Eastern Cape generally reckoned wealth not just through the amount of cattle owned, but also through its quality, using a type of barter economy that made the turn towards a market-based, monetary economy wholly alien for most people (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990). Despite cattle being a familial marker of personal wealth, Xhosa chiefs acted as stewards of communally shared land and any uninhabited tracts acted as public grazing ground rather than private property. Furthermore, according to early ethnographic accounts by anthropologist Monica Wilson, an owner's personal possessions were allegedly destroyed upon their death, and significant differences in inheritance practices caused widespread resistance to the colonial inheritance laws instituted in the early 1900s (Wilson 1936).

Such historical information provides evidence of the contrasting perspectives of ownership that existed between Xhosa and European settler communities (Wilson 1936), and suggests the ways in which the introduction of a market economy and later capitalist economic formations extensively transformed rural societies. So great were these differences, in fact, that anthropologist Monica Wilson suggested in 1936 that the increasing rift she observed growing between generations of Xhosa males was due to these drastic economic changes; she saw young boys gaining new forms of economic independence that she hypothesized were eroding traditional mechanisms of social control within the household and larger community (1936:178),

an observation that has clear parallels to my own descriptions of the ways in which new rights discourses are challenging established social hierarchies (see Chapter 3).

Colonial interventions in the economic life of the Eastern Cape, as in the rest of the colonized world, had drastic effects upon the daily lives of Xhosa individuals as well as their larger community structures. An oft-cited example of this phenomenon lays in the dramatic and devastating “Xhosa cattle killings” of 1857, where firmly rooted epistemologies of witchcraft coincided with the impact of a recently introduced market economy. As historians such as Leonard Thompson have described, contact with white settlers during this particular year brought about a lethal and widespread cattle lung disease. Several Xhosa prophets during the time understood this event to be the work of witchcraft plaguing the community, and outspokenly insisted upon killing all of the remaining cattle in order to appease their ancestors and start anew. Interestingly, these prophets combined pre-colonial witchcraft epistemologies with recently introduced concepts from Christian missionaries in the area, determining that the evils wrought upon the community were punishment for sinful behavior. A huge slaughter of livestock soon followed these prophecies, and Thompson estimates that approximately 400,000 cattle were killed intentionally, leading to widespread starvation among the population that led to the death of about 40,000 Xhosa individuals (Thompson 1990; Peires 1989). One of the interesting long-term implications of this event was an increased economic dependency on the nearby white settler communities for trading of goods, which further catapulted rural villages into a market-based, cash economy.

Despite these massive changes to economic life, some of the pre-colonial forms of ownership and wealth accumulation persist into the present day in places like Mhlontlo. The example of *lobola*, or bride price, is particularly visible and common in the rural Eastern Cape.

Despite the fact that many families no longer own cattle, and the fact that missionaries worked hard to outlaw this practice altogether as an alleged example of paganism and subjugation of women (Mtuze 2004), the amount of *lobola* owed to a bride's family is almost always still negotiated in terms of the value of cows. During negotiations, families discuss how many "cows" must be given – a practice still common even in urban Xhosa families far removed both geographically and historically from pastoralist traditions.

Other pre-colonial systems of social organization continue into the contemporary era. For instance, In Mhlontlo and other rural areas of the Eastern Cape many women have economic support networks within small village settlements that provide assistance to fellow members when they are in need, such as helping to pay for a funeral or giving extra crops to a hungry family. These women's groups meet frequently, discussing internal solutions to community challenges and collecting funds for future use. These practices create a sense of community beyond nuclear family models, and support previously established clan divisions that emphasize communalism over individual accumulation. Thus, we can read in these seemingly small, daily acts the persistence of communal identification practices and resistance to forms of 21st century individualism that stand in stark contrast to the movement of capital and naturalization of private property in the neoliberal capitalist state.

Neoliberalism in 21st Century South Africa

Understanding the ways in which neoliberal capitalism has become naturalized as part of South African democracy is critical for this discussion of Mhlontlo residents' frustrations with aspects of the current nation-state. Within anthropological analyses, an abundance of ink has been spilled on the topic of neoliberalism's role in economic, social, and political processes

across the world, demonstrating that recent global reforms in the movement of capital and international debt structures are driving the poor ever deeper into poverty at alarming rates, especially in the global South, while a tiny fraction of the world population becomes increasingly wealthy (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Edelman and Haugerud 2005; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Ferguson 2006, to name but a few).

Furthermore, theorists have asked specifically about the implications for such phenomena within the 21st century South African context (Ashforth 2005; e.g. Ferguson 2010; Robins 2008). Neoliberal economic policies in the post-apartheid state have increased privatization of social services, emphasized individual accumulation over communal identity practices, and prioritized international, free market trade over public ownership of the modes of production. These trends have meant that upper class and wealthy citizens from the apartheid era often retained their socioeconomic standing at the expense of their fellow citizens. As Catherine Besteman writes in her study of poor townships on the outskirts of Cape Town, “Today, South Africans are deeply involved in the struggle to bring the promise of South Africa’s miracle to fruition. It is an uphill battle” (Besteman 2008:2). My ethnographic encounters in the Eastern Cape explicitly and implicitly reflected this continued class struggle. Through an analysis of their experiences and actions, it becomes clear that Xhosa speakers who reference democracy using the language of freedom expected economic liberation along with social and cultural equality. As Deborah Posel suggests, for the current incarnation of ANC Youth League members, for instance, freedom means a “freedom to consume” (Posel 2013:58).

As Mr. Gabela told me: “This country is a rich country. Why then do the indigenous groups of this country suffer so much? Poor, illiterate, living in shacks...that alone is questionable. It’s a shameful thing.” Here, he questions how widespread poverty can continue to

exist primarily along racial lines amidst a country with vast and abundant wealth in various forms, even after the revolutionary actions that overturned apartheid. Indeed, the huge profits from the natural resources and material wealth of South Africa, such as diamonds, gold, and platinum, still remain largely inaccessible for the majority of black South Africans, especially in rural areas like Mhlontlo. Huge multinational corporations, such as Anglo American,²¹ have retained ownership over the vast majority of the means of production while continuing to employ native South Africans as laborers in dangerous and poorly paid positions that perpetuate longstanding dependency relationships that can be traced back to the colonial era. In this sense, and as the opening quote calling for economic freedom suggests, the vast wealth inequalities that existed under apartheid largely have carried over into the nascent democratic state, albeit spurred on by new forms of global neoliberalism and no longer exclusively falling along racial lines.

One of the many consequences of these stark economic realities is the rise in nongovernmental bodies taking over various roles of community service and aid provision in the absence of state interventions. The Sonke Gender Justice Network, as described earlier, is one such case in point, especially as the organization's employees explicitly see their role as holding government institutions accountable for preserving the promised tenets of democratic equality. Indeed, many Mhlontlo educators stressed to me the importance of NGOs such as Sonke, saying how crucial they are in supporting school programs and providing much-needed equipment. As theorist James Ferguson pointed out in 2009, "social policy and nation-state are, to a very significant degree, decoupled, and we are only beginning to find ways to think about this" (Ferguson 2010:168). Thus, many social services that were once intimately linked to the nation-state are being re-routed to other channels, such as NGOs and corporate bodies – and not just in

²¹ A British multinational mining company with extensive operations in South Africa.

South Africa, but also across the globe in countries dealing with neoliberal economic policies that emphasize privatization.

Importantly, the nation-state is not merely dissolving in the face of such economic globalization (Roitman 2005), but rather is reformulating its relationship to the private sector in ways history has not previously seen. For instance, industries and services that once were under the realm of the state have now become corporatized, creating a sort of incorporated state model that aligns with global neoliberal norms of privatization, and yet continues to uphold national borders and state regulatory structures. These larger structural processes, though often invisible on a local level, impact the everyday lives of Eastern Cape residents in important ways, the majority of whom expected democracy to bring with it increased government accountability and transparency. High levels of corruption, scandal, and greed among politicians have led such individuals to be sorely disappointed with the young South African democracy.

Much of this dissatisfaction with the current incarnation of South African democratic politics can be better understood when examining the pre-1994 ANC election platform that promised a socialist-based redistribution of wealth along non-racial lines as well as direct participation in government that was not possible for the majority under apartheid. As Steven Robins explains:

During the anti-apartheid struggle, scholars on the left had described apartheid as a system of racial capitalism whose overthrow would require more than simply taking racially-based legislation off the statute books. Addressing the raw facts of deeply entrenched race and class inequality, it was argued, would require nothing less than a socialist revolution. However, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the former Soviet Union, socialism was no longer on the cards for a liberated South Africa. These constraints became increasingly visible as the ANC took over the mantle of political power (Robins 2008:3).

Thus, as Robins points out, much of the ANC struggle to dismantle apartheid relied upon a Marxist analysis of capitalism, which advocated seizing the modes of production and

overthrowing an economic system that used racism as a justification for massive wealth inequality and structural poverty. Along these lines, ANC activists in their early days held close ties to Communist organizations and labor unions, championing redistribution of wealth and worker unionizing in South Africa as the only answer to widespread racial and class oppression. As suggested in this chapter's opening quote, feminist writer and activist Audre Lorde eloquently explains that freedom from oppression will never succeed unless it completely deconstructs and challenges the system under which it arose. Since the apartheid era relied upon capitalist politics as a method of economic and racial exclusion, the ANC saw the overthrow of this system as the only way forward.

Historical events in Europe and the former Soviet Union during the latter part of the 20th century, however, shifted the formerly growing tides of socialism such that today's ANC has largely abandoned its platform of economic revolution²² in all but rhetoric. As historians Nancy Clark and William Worger explain, since 1994 the ANC has adopted a "pro-business" approach to economics that has continued the privatization of state corporations began in the last administration of apartheid (2004). Thus, global shifts in political and economic ideology have altered the landscape in which the ANC exercises power, and has led to further entrenching of class inequality and systemic poverty across the South African state. Posel describes this shift in bleak terms:

Sadly, South Africa's democratization to date has seen the highly unequal society bequeathed by apartheid become one of the most unequal societies on the planet. While relatively small – albeit growing – numbers of black people have become spectacularly rich, the new social order has delivered the majority of black South Africans, particularly young adults with little prospect of employment, a vexing mix of rising expectations and declining prospects (2013:60).

²² Interestingly, Julius Malema, former ANC Youth League president, has taken up this cause through his relatively new Economic Freedom Fighters political party.

In this sense, South African democracy has become intertwined with the norms of global neoliberalism, creating quotidian identification practices that can be recognized to embody capitalist norms of material expectations coupled with the reality of widespread poverty. In light of this tenuous situation, it is understandable that many Mhlontlo residents would perceive the project of democracy as a failure.

Capital in Rural South Africa

Signs of material wealth – or, at the very least, its potential - are everywhere in rural South Africa. Whether it be in the form of a luxury automobile speeding along the National Highway past poor hilltop villages or newly-built modern houses with indoor toilets and two-car garages (funded by the inflated salaries of young doctors and building contractors in the community), these symbols stand in stark contrast to the impoverished surrounds of the majority of the Eastern Cape. Though class mobility has become a possibility for black South Africans in a way it certainly never was under apartheid, it remains tantalizingly out of reach for most people due to a variety of historical and economic factors as previously discussed.

My ethnographic interviews often included discussions on the ways in which democracy was perceived as a failure because the ANC has not made good on its promise to redistribute wealth along non-racial lines and deliver financial security to the masses. Instead, many Mhlontlo residents view ANC party politics as serving a select few in power at the expense of their majority supporters. As the Xhosa woman's quote on political apathy that opened this dissertation illuminated, many Mhlontlo residents are disenchanted with their choices in political representation because none of the elected leaders seem to deliver on their promises of economic equality and financial stability. Regardless of which party an individual votes for, they all are

seen as handmaidens of capitalism unwilling or unable to uproot the structures of entrenched wealth inequality across the country.

For the elderly Xhosa woman with whom I lived for a year during fieldwork, political leaders were clearly disconnected from the obstacles life presented her on a daily basis – such as the lack of indoor plumbing that she constantly maligned. She frequently told me how all she wanted was to retire to an apartment in a nearby city, where she could watch urban life pass by from the windows and decrease her domestic burdens, such as cleaning, gardening, and cooking for her large extended family. “I like the city. I prefer it to this location. I just like to watch the people going back and forth. Even the sea – I would like to look at the sea. I like to watch the people going in the water.” In fact, she had already obtained brochures from several retirement centers, and spoke of them longingly and often. Furthermore, she also tied her lack of indoor plumbing to the changing intergenerational relationships in present-day rural South Africa, constantly complaining that her adult son should be buying her a new bathroom with a portion of his teacher’s salary. This young man, however, clearly saw himself as part of a new generation that primarily focused on nuclear family relations and individual accumulation practices. Instead of saving for a new bathroom, he was interested in moving to the city with his wife and her young child, and spoke of a newfound interest in leisure travel to “exotic” destinations.

In a seemingly paradoxical way, this same Xhosa woman often waxed nostalgically for her childhood, which was in an area even more remote than her present village in Mhlontlo and at the time had no electricity, running water, or nearby grocery stores.

In the past, we never worried about money. Our mothers never carried around this money. Now I worry because I need to buy more milk. The walls in the house need to be painted, and the boys no longer know how to do it. In the past, our fathers would go to the *kraal* (corral) and milk the cows and we would use that milk for everything. We never went to stores to buy food. The only thing we bought was sugar.

Particularly for the older generation of Mhlontlo residents, then, the turn towards capitalism has meant a simultaneous yearning both for previous economic norms perceived as “simpler” as well as the material pleasures of the neoliberal age. Such discrepancies expose the ways in which media and politics have naturalized capital accumulation while largely keeping it out of reach for most individuals. People either *want*, or they want a time when *want* was not their primary frame of reference.

Beyond explicit articulations of material desires and hopes for economic equality, Mhlontlo residents’ embodied practices and unconscious norms evidence the ways in which the global turn towards neoliberal capitalism has become entrenched in rural South Africa. For instance, Tando, a 16-year-old boy with whom I lived all year, constantly obsessed over expensive sports cars, regardless of the fact that he did not have a driver’s license or belong to a wealthy family. Through the constant display of knowledge about different models and brands of cars, Tando negotiated an identity that projected a preferred sense of self as capitalist subject and citizen.

As Bourdieu explains in his discussion of taste and distinction, “the ‘pure’ gaze is a historical invention linked to the emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production, that is, a field capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and the consumption of its products” (1984:4) Thus, Tando prided himself on his ability to recognize the norms of cultural capital in the newest Mercedes-Benz or Range Rover as it came zooming past on the national highway, even though he had never been inside one. Despite his inability to personally consume these products, he “consumed” them in the form of advertisements, magazines, and television programs on a daily basis. In an act that almost seemed a parody of capitalism itself, he took a car magazine I purchased for him and cut out images of expensive vehicles, pasted them to

cardboard, and sold them to his classmates for pocket change – an amusing instance of youth creativity that evidences the power of the simulacrum to go beyond the meanings of the original object and take on new forms (Baudrillard 1994).

In the example of Tando, the self becomes composed of a collection of material objects that are fetishized far beyond their use value, evidencing the importance of social and cultural capital derived through physical objects: “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu 1984:6). Useful to this analysis is anthropologist Michael Taussig’s adaptation of Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism. Taussig argues that in a capitalist society “essential qualities of human beings and their products are converted into commodities, into things for buying and selling on the market” (1980:4). Therefore, through Tando’s ability to control the distribution of images in the classroom, he elevated his social standing among peers while earning enough money to buy more magazines.

Another interesting example of embodied capitalist norms lays in the emerging architectural trends of the rural Eastern Cape. In these physical constructions we can recognize the turn towards capitalist notions of individualism, personal accumulation, and privacy. In Mhlontlo, those steadily employed families with sufficient discretionary income are building modern homes with high walls surrounding them on all sides. These brick or concrete structures often stand so high that they impede the view into a neighbor’s property, discouraging casual social encounters that are otherwise common in the area. As a friend in Mhlontlo said to me in a conversation on these new structures, “I think they are trying to do like those rich people do, to keep everything in that yard inside and everything else out. So that you can’t see what is happening behind the wall.” Such physical barriers lead to social and psychological ones as well,

eroding longstanding communal identification practices and encouraging nuclear family arrangements dependent upon personal property and the accumulation of capital.

Joblessness

A close friend of mine in Mhlontlo, Lulama had her only child as a teenager and was compelled to discontinue her plans for higher education to stay at home and take care of him. She now lives in a single room attached to the HIV/AIDS support group where her mother works, sharing the small space with her mom and young son. During my year in the Eastern Cape, Lulama constantly struggled with the search for viable and stable employment. She did odd jobs, such as government contractual work fixing nearby roads, but nothing seemed to last for more than a brief period of time or offer full-time hours. Towards the end of my stay in Mhlontlo, she traveled alone to Limpopo and Gauteng Province looking for work in the mines – leaving her son behind with his grandmother for months – only to come back more defeated and hopeless than ever. Particularly in these last months of my research, she complained often of depression and crippling boredom.

Unfortunately, Lulama’s story has become one that is relived constantly in rural South Africa. Research participants often cited the staggeringly high rates of unemployment²³, particularly amongst rural Eastern Cape residents, as one of the most prominent and dire challenges facing today’s young people. In an interesting reversal, Ms. Cele explained to me: “When I was young, the jobs were there but there were no people to fill the posts.” In the post-apartheid era, conversely, many people have the educational background and skills to apply for jobs, but few positions exist in comparison to the large numbers of qualified applicants. In my

²³ As of 2013, South African overall unemployment was at a rate of 24.9%. (Statistics South Africa 2013).

interviews, Mhlontlo residents frequently connected the stark reality of joblessness in rural areas to democracy, blaming this political system for the pervasive lack of employment opportunities. Ms. Legodi, the Department of Education employee, explained in an interview, “[Unemployment] is the biggest challenge for youth today. Because we take them to universities, then they stay at home for about seven years without getting a job.” The Mhlontlo mayor cited the scarcity of jobs as the biggest problem facing rural Eastern Cape youth today (Interview, 11/21/12).

Increasing joblessness has a significant impact on domestic life in Mhlontlo, beyond the realm of pure economic relations. As anthropologist Hylton White discusses in his analysis of home life in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, “the neoliberal age has returned to us the specter of family values” (White 2001). Here, White shows how escalating rates of unemployment have forced young South Africans back into the domestic sphere, albeit without the economic capital necessary to form independent households based upon marriage. Thus, young adults like Lulama seem to uphold “traditional” Xhosa family values on the surface, but actually often remain in extended kin arrangements out of economic marginalization and poverty.

Ms. Cele also addressed these problems of economic inequality: “The biggest challenge for young people is lack of employment. They rely on their parents to support them.” Thus, more young adults may remain in extended family household arrangements, but the economic causes undergirding this reality are patently new. Much like Jean Comaroff’s discussion of Tswana initiation rituals, cultural practices may remain visibly continuous over time while significantly altering the meanings upon which they are structured (Comaroff 1985). In the Eastern Cape – as in many other parts of South Africa – the devastating toll of unemployment, coupled with the persistent and widespread HIV/AIDS epidemic, has meant radical restructuring of the domestic

sphere (Steinberg 2008 et al.) and a sharp increase in grandparents and other extended family members acting as the primary breadwinners and childcare providers.

Therefore, the acute rise in unemployment over the past couple decades has led to a multitude of new social and economic norms in rural South Africa. For instance, my research participants frequently linked unemployment to other societal problems plaguing youth, such as teenage pregnancy and drug/alcohol addiction. Adults in Mhlontlo often saw the boredom and idleness brought on by the lack of jobs as the reason that young people were turning so readily to behaviors perceived as destructive. Thus, many people have started to connect democracy with a perception of societal decline that seems to focus squarely on youth as both victims and perpetrators – a contradictory viewpoint on youth agency extensively explored by anthropologists in other ethnographic contexts across the globe (e.g. Bucholtz 2002; Cheney 2007).

Ms. Mbodi, the department psychologist, explained how “prior to 1994, there were many government systems in place. But now, a person with a degree is not working. They are just moving up and down. That’s why they use a lot of drugs.” In a similar sentiment, Noluvo said to me that, according to her knowledge of the Mhlontlo area’s recent history, “[During apartheid] everybody was working. Now not everybody is working. At that time at the age of 20, you’d be getting a job. Now people have degrees, honors, masters, but still they are not employed!” She connected this frustration with joblessness explicitly to democracy, saying that unemployment has increased as a result of the new government. In this sense, Noluvo’s views of democracy as a political system are clearly colored by the challenges presented in a capitalist system that favors the few at the expense of the majority. This perspective will undoubtedly impact her future decisions as a voting political actor.

Many people also implicitly and explicitly linked the increased rate of crime since apartheid with unemployment, arguing that idle youth, in many cases, become criminals. Ms. Andiswa said that “during apartheid, everyone was working, studying...everything was quiet. There was no one who was just walking in the street, doing nothing. No *tsotsis*²⁴. Things were safe.” Educators constantly reminded me of this safety issue in Mhlontlo, saying that they were afraid to be out of the house after 6PM or that they already had experience with muggings and robberies. Individuals often contrasted this with what they described as the relative peace and safety of rural life under the apartheid government, as the police state strictly controlled activities, movement and the social roles of youth. During my 2012 interviews, however, Mhlontlo residents usually characterized the police as slow to take action and unhelpful in combatting crime – cited as yet another example of their disappointment with South African democracy.

Welfare in the Democratic State

Seemingly at odds with the realities of increased privatization in a capitalist state are widespread feelings in Mhlontlo that social welfare programs - such as government grants that support unemployed parents, scholarships for higher education, and pensions for the elderly - have eroded youth ambitions and abilities and created unhealthy dependency relationships with the state. For instance, many adults discussed with me the ways that grants meant to provide funds to single parents of young children have in fact created unhealthy reliance upon state coffers. As Ms. Dingana explained to me, “I’m not 100% sure, but at times I think these grants for the children...I think people are just concerned with getting the money.” Ms. Ivy, a Mhlontlo

²⁴ South African slang term for a gangster or criminal.

high school teacher who grew up in India described it differently: “These government grants are encouraging teenage pregnancies and more diseases” (Interview, 10/19/12).

This was a frequent claim in Mhlontlo: that teenagers were getting pregnant solely to receive government payouts, which they would then allegedly spend on luxury goods, such as cell phones and handbags, rather than their children. Amahle, a female college student who once participated in a Sonke program, addressed this issue: “The mentality of our people has changed. They think that they can just have kids a lot because they’re gonna get 200 bucks...I just feel like it’s made our people very lazy” (Interview, 11/17/12). While it would be virtually impossible to verify such accusations, the mere fact that this idea is rampant among Mhlontlo community members reveals interesting perceptions of post-apartheid politics and economic norms.

Many participants, like the one mentioned above, were worried about the psychological impact this welfare system was having on individuals in the long term. From Ms. Mbodi: “The problem of poverty is worse now, because people don’t want to use the fields. They don’t want to work. They are expecting the government to do *everything* for them! They’re just folding their arms” (emphasis in original). For many of my interviewees, democracy is not only challenging Xhosa cultural values around ambition and labor practices, but also is creating what they view as an unhealthy state dependency that stands in direct contrast to the images of economic liberation and independence promised by the anti-apartheid struggle.

In some cases, it seemed through ethnographic interviews that one result of this entrenched economic inequality was internalized racism among the Xhosa community. Mangaliso, a male college student and another former Sonke participant, was deeply frustrated by the proliferation of welfare under democracy. He elucidated this same idea of government dependency, but in this case specifically along racial lines:

It's not always about the government! That's what I hate about black people. Like, they sit at home, and are like, 'oh, government is not building anything for us! Any houses.' But you are sitting there and you are not doing anything! It's not always about the government. That means the government has to go to each and every house, each and every town, looking – it's not always about that! What I hate about black people - they don't want to work. They want income, but they don't want to work. They don't want to work (Interview, 5/1/12).

Though Mangaliso doesn't explicitly articulate the ways in which capitalism has created this situation, he connects economic realities of the nation with the lack of drive and ambition in his community. Amahle concurred: "That's the thing with us. We don't wanna get educated, so we are always going to have this mentality that white people will always have money. We don't study a lot. We choose being corrupt. If black people get in power, they just abuse their power." Such sentiments contradict media images of an integrated and egalitarian South Africa, in that they reveal the ideological remnants of the apartheid system that structure people's actions and identification practices in negative ways. Rather than recognizing the oppressive structural conditions that lead to widespread corruption and poverty, people blame individuals for poor choices and see them as lacking a moral compass; anthropologists have analyzed this phenomenon in a host of other cultural contexts (e.g. Bourgois 1995; Goode and Maskovsky 2001).

While these narratives blame individual actors for not wanting to work, I argue that such grants actually evidence a naturalization of unemployment and privatization of industry brought on by neoliberal economic institutions. Much like the crippling debt relationships instigated by World Bank structural adjustment policies (Goldman 2005), individuals in rural South Africa are in a cycle of endless dependency on the state for welfare provisions, with no viable alternatives allowing them to opt out.

Though this situation of increased welfare dependency may seem paradoxical in the face of increased government corporatization and decentralization, scholars have shown the ways in which this result is internally consistent with a late capitalist state. As James Ferguson has pointed out, the rise in South African social welfare grants actually reveals an abiding presence of neoliberal economic norms.

The need for assistance is not about being ‘between jobs’ or correcting for dips in the business cycle; it is part of a world in which many, or even most people, for the foreseeable future, will lack formal sector employment. Social assistance is here radically decoupled from expectations of employment, and, indeed, from ‘insurance’ rationality altogether (Ferguson 2010:178).

Here, Ferguson argues that we can actually view increased social support via grants as evidence that a neoliberal economic climate is naturalizing the state of formal sector unemployment. That is, people are beginning to *expect* employment to be inconsistent, informal, or altogether absent for large portions of their lives. As a result, subsistence via government grants is becoming the primary state of affairs for many people in places like the rural Eastern Cape.

Conclusion

The global turn towards neoliberal capitalism impacts the daily realities of Eastern Cape Xhosa residents in a multitude of ways. Serious grievances with the continuance of huge wealth inequalities and class hierarchies carried over from the apartheid era exist simultaneously with the capitalist desires for consumption and commodity fetishism of material goods. Through both explicit articulations and embodied daily practices, individuals create a sense of self that is dependent upon neoliberal economic norms bearing impossible standards for the average South African. Rather than an opposing reality, I have shown how these co-existing norms of both nostalgia and desire actually arise from a single history of marginalization and exclusion from

various forms of economic, social, and cultural capital. The frenzied desires for material accumulation that exist alongside intense longing for a “simpler” past among Mhlontlo residents are understandable in light of most individuals’ continued inability to participate fully in the market economy.

In particular, I have highlighted here how the economic norms of the neoliberal capitalist system have colored people’s understandings of and responses to South African democracy in its present form in significant ways. As I illuminated in earlier chapters, Xhosa educators and parents both in public schools and in NGO programs filter conceptions of democracy and Western-based human rights discourses through their own cultural lenses in ways that both consciously and unconsciously project an internally consistent sense of identity. Thus, the ways in which residents in this region conflate democracy with neoliberal capitalism has great bearing on how youth will evolve as future political citizens and subjects.

Chapter 7: Freedom *FROM* Democracy?

“I also voted ANC, because Mandela is Xhosa and from the Eastern Cape. It’s clear that I will vote for the ANC.” –Mhlontlo Youth, Personal Communication, 5/7/14

In May 2014, South Africa faced the fifth of its national democratic elections since the end of apartheid rule. Though Jacob Zuma’s ANC won the majority once again, media coverage highlighted the way many people, especially “born frees” (those young people born after 1994), have voiced widespread dissatisfaction with the pro-business, pro-capitalist policies of the ruling party (Herskovitz 2013). Even archbishop Desmond Tutu, famous for his role as a social rights activist during the anti-apartheid movement and long-time ANC supporter, officially declared he will not vote for the party (Makinana 2014). Though the ANC still retained the majority of voters, it lost several percentage points in the 2014 election.²⁵ Many people cite loyalty to former president Nelson Mandela, rather than ideological allegiance to the party’s principles, as their reason for continuing to support incumbent president Zuma (Onishi 2014). In the early months of 2014, widespread service delivery protests spread across the country and competing political parties’ propaganda emphasized the need for resource redistribution. These events drew attention to the perceived economic failures of the ANC to make good on its pre-1994 promises of equality for all people, regardless of race or class.

As the opening quote to this chapter from a young Xhosa woman suggests, experiences of both the ANC and the larger political ideals of democracy and Western-based human rights are far more complicated on the ground than what election results might reveal. Numbers of ANC supporters are higher in the Eastern Cape, Mandela’s home province – in 2014, they captured almost 70% of the vote (in Mhlontlo, voters overwhelmingly chose the ANC again, at

²⁵ In 2009, the ANC won approximately 66% of the vote. In 2014, it was down to 62%. The closest competitor, the Democratic Alliance, came in at 22% - up from 17% in 2009 (Grant 2014).

82%). Nonetheless, frequent narratives of disappointment with the party evidence the fact that loyalty to Mandela should not be mistaken for ideological agreement. Individuals negotiate and balance multiple systems of knowledge and competing allegiances in crafting identities as citizens, political subjects, and members of local cultural groups such as the Eastern Cape Xhosa. In this dissertation, I have revealed a problematic reality of democratic socialization projects among rural South African youth: many of the educators – both in public schools and NGO programs - who teach young people about democracy and associated rights discourses are the very same population that is increasingly dissatisfied with this political system. This is evidenced through both discursive and embodied practices that reject and renegotiate elements of democracy, as well as through narratives of nostalgia for apartheid that provide a commentary not only on the past, but also more importantly on the failures and inadequacies of the present day.

In addressing this problem, I have argued that this phenomenon of widespread disappointment among the rural Eastern Cape Xhosa is largely due to people conflating democracy with the norms of neoliberal capitalism. When people speak of the failures of democracy, it should be read at least in part as a commentary on the continued wealth inequality and structural poverty exacerbated by international capitalist relations of production and trade. The local implications of such sentiments are that Xhosa educators filter democratic teachings through the lens of their own disappointments, thus crafting a view of democracy and citizenship in the classroom that takes into account local cultural ideologies such as intergenerational hierarchies and Xhosa processes of social reproduction. In many cases, these perspectives are at odds with state curricula and national rhetoric.

In order to understand better these interconnections between national discourses, economic relationships, and local socialization processes, I have drawn on previous writings within the anthropology of childhood, democracy, and neoliberal capitalism. Within my theoretical framework, I implement a Marxist perspective on the ways in which economic relations undergird narrative practices, daily behaviors, and processes of social reproduction. I also employ a practice theory framework, which integrates structural limitations in society with the abilities of local actors to carve their own paths in the world (Bourdieu 1977; Ortner 2006). I contribute to these bodies of theory by providing a link between democratic socialization of youth, local cultural ideologies and the inequalities of neoliberal capitalism.

I have employed a person-centered ethnographic methodology in order to reveal the complex negotiations that individuals undertake when socializing youth to democratic principles, particularly among a historically oppressed community that continues to suffer from high levels of poverty and discrimination. Situating my research within the rural communities of Mhlontlo Municipality in the former Transkei provided a unique vantage point for analyzing these issues. This area remains critically underserved in the contemporary era, and yet constantly intersects national and international discourses through institutions such as schools, municipal government programs and NGO interventions. Through the voices of local Mhlontlo educators, parents, youth, and municipal employees, as well as the perspectives of Sonke Gender Justice Network staff in Cape Town, I have been able to reveal both the discursive and embodied practices of social actors in young democracies.

A critical examination of the ways in which the apartheid era both structured and continues to inform the present was central to this work. South Africa's notorious and prolonged struggle with codified racism and inequality continues to permeate all areas of life throughout the

rural Eastern Cape in significant ways. Maintaining a materialist perspective on my research questions, I discussed how economic relations provided the foundation for the racist policies of the National Party government from 1948 to 1994; strict controls and regulations around the movement of non-white bodies allowed a white minority to remain in power while securing a large, disempowered labor force (Clark and Worger 2004; Posel 1991).

Indeed, the anti-apartheid struggle focused on these exact economic relations in order to dismantle the National Party government. Much of this movement hinged on youth activities, reaffirming the importance of anthropology's continued focus on the ways in which young people craft political subjectivities of their own while simultaneously negotiating local enactments of cultural reproduction from previous generations (Cheney 2007; Cole and Durham 2008). Rather than adhere to older dichotomous views of youth as either perpetrators of violence and rebellion or a panacea for societal ills, I have provided a complex portrayal of the ways that young people engage with deeply rooted processes of social reproduction but also shape these very relations through their own agency. This model of youth political socialization may be applied to other ethnographic contexts, allowing researchers to ask important questions about the construction of citizenship, identity and the politics of culture in capitalist, democratic states.

I have brought NGOs into this discussion of democracy and youth in order to demonstrate the ways in which neoliberal norms of privatization and decentralization of government have impacted local social and cultural relations. Complaints about the inadequacies of the ANC to reform class relations and redistribute wealth along non-racial lines go hand-in-hand with the proliferation of NGOs in rural South Africa (Robins 2005; 2008). These organizations strive to provide social services seen as missing or incomplete within current political projects. Rather than see such organizations as isolated national endeavors, I have

connected them to the larger global turn to neoliberal capitalism, as seen in the rise of structural adjustment policies and the liberalization of international trade across borders (Goldman 2005).

On the local level, I have discussed Xhosa cultural forms within the rural Eastern Cape as an entrée to understanding resistance to democratic ideals and nostalgia for elements of the apartheid era. For instance, an elucidation of Xhosa kinship norms reveals the dissonance between strict age hierarchies and Western-based principles of children's rights, such as the illegality of corporal punishment in the post-apartheid state. In this sense, I demonstrated that the transition to neoliberal capitalism has had significant impacts on social relations, something discussed previously in other contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa (Weiss 2004; West 2005; White 2001). Drawing on longstanding debates within anthropology on the nature of tradition and notions of cultural authenticity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Myers 2002), I have shown how seemingly continuous Xhosa practices, such as male circumcision rites, have actually taken on new underlying meanings and forms in the context of neoliberalism and democracy, even if they appear the same on the surface (Vincent 2008).

Delving into local classroom practices in rural Mhlontlo, I used ethnographic description and narrative practices to construct an argument on the ways in which individuals filter democracy through Xhosa worldviews and ideologies. Life Orientation, a class pioneered by the democratic government that focuses on constructing engaged and informed citizens, follows a state-mandated curriculum but in reality is negotiated on the local level through conscious and unconscious practices that reflect the habitus of individual actors. While the curriculum emphasizes a commitment to diversity and multiculturalism, it prioritizes Western-based norms of children's rights that often contrast sharply with local perspectives on the proper roles of youth within society. Here is yet another example of the strength of the ethnographic method:

while state language communicates one official message, daily narratives and embodiments offer a nuanced and diverse interpretation of these ideas beyond the bounds of national rhetoric.

Rote educational practices were one striking example of the dissonance between official curricula and local teachings. As I highlighted in Chapter 3, in Mhlontlo classroom lessons written in the curriculum as discussion-based and meant to foster debate and encourage diverse opinions often became lectures framed along the lines of objective right and wrong. I connect these observations with the fact that research participants constantly reiterated the importance of youth comprehension that democratic rights must be paired with an awareness of a citizen's *responsibilities* – a framing that I argue is reflective of Xhosa generational hierarchies and notions of youth positioning in society.

At times, complaints about the lack of emphasis on responsibilities in the national curriculum even led individuals to wax nostalgic for elements of apartheid-era education – despite the fact that legislative acts like the Bantu Education Act of 1953 subjected black South Africans in places like the Transkei to inferior schools that only prepared them for future low-wage jobs in the labor force and outlawed native languages such as Xhosa. I have theorized that alignment with discriminatory educational policies under apartheid makes sense when examining the importance of rigid age hierarchies as a method of social control in Xhosa communities. In other words, some teachers preferred apartheid-era curriculum because it allowed them to exercise control over classrooms that more closely mapped onto local cultural ideologies of intergenerational relationships. These preferences for specific educational practices become clear not just in rhetoric, but also in the embodied practices of individual teachers – such as in forms of bodily policing through the use of corporal punishment, despite its official illegality. Therefore, we can recognize the ways in which forms of social control that rely upon cultural

ideologies and historical relationships have become part of an individual's habitus in the classroom. These deeply embedded unconscious norms are extremely tenacious, even in the face of changes in curricula and political shifts.

Aligned with these sentiments on youth roles within society was the presence of frequent fears around the notion of cultural loss in the contemporary era. Adult community members frequently expressed, through both narratives in interviews and classroom teachings, the importance of keeping Xhosa "traditions" alive into the next generation. Many individuals were also concerned with appropriate labeling of practices as "authentic," a concept that remains problematic for anthropological analysis (e.g. Myers 2002). I have contended that these fears of loss reveal the way many people see democracy as an infringement on rights to cultural diversity. As the example of the girl embracing Satanism through an internet search on her mobile phone illuminated, the "outside" world is often perceived as a threat to the elements of life deemed essential to Xhosa identification practices. Educators also frequently framed corporal punishment as inherently cultural, and thus saw democracy as encroaching on their rights in a state that emphasizes – at least in rhetoric – a commitment to diversity and multiculturalism. In this way, I argue that many people view notions of "freedom" under democracy as actually constraining and oppressive – as the title of this chapter suggests.

Ethnographic research within Sonke's walls demonstrated the contrasting perspectives that exist on culture and democracy among different segments of society in the post-apartheid state. As I have shown, the office climate at Sonke in Cape Town can be viewed as a microcosm of the kinds of cultural negotiations with which they engage on the ground in their programming across the country. Staff members emphasize recognition of cultural diversity and mutual respect, while at the same time insisting that their work revolves around "changing culture"

where it is considered harmful and anti-democratic. I argued here that one of the primary challenges that Sonke faces is competing identities among rural people in the post-apartheid state. The NGO's programming necessitates that participants adopt specific notions of South African citizenship and nationalism that many people in rural Xhosa communities view as incompatible with local identity practices. Staff narratives, which often appear quite similar to earlier missionary conversion stories and narratives of colonial encounters on the African continent, frame individuals' transitions to Sonke's view of gender equality as a type of shift from local to national modes of belonging. Thus, in these narratives employees often cited instances in which they realized elements of their cultures were "harmful" and should be changed, regardless of their local significance in social reproduction and established morality structures. Furthermore, Sonke staff works hard to illuminate the origins of specific cultural practices, aiming to debunk what they see as myths on the "authenticity" of many beliefs and behaviors. This work has interesting and significant ties to anthropological debates on the very concept of culture itself and how it ought to be defined (e.g. Geertz 1973; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Rosaldo 1989).

Theoretical engagements with the concept of nostalgia have provided an essential framework for this dissertation (Bissell 2005; Dlamini 2009; Piot 2010; Stewart 1988), supporting my argument that longings for aspects of the apartheid government can be understood as significant commentary on the disappointments of the present moment. In interviews, research participants fondly recalled specific legislation and social norms under apartheid that they perceived as aligning closely with local cultural ideologies, such as corporal punishment and state employment practices. In my argument, I demonstrated that nostalgic narratives of apartheid within historically oppressed communities are the result of unconscious confluences of

freedom, democracy, and neoliberal capitalism. The title for this dissertation, *Inkululeko*, provides evidence of this phenomenon within a quotidian language practice among Xhosa speakers. This word, as I discussed in Chapter 5, translates directly to “freedom,” despite the fact that it is used as a gloss for democracy in the present day Eastern Cape. Such linguistic practices reveal unconscious conceptions of and expectations for political systems in South Africa.

Importantly, my calling for an anthropology of nostalgia reaches far beyond the case of post-apartheid South Africa. As other writers have demonstrated, nostalgic discourses often exist in areas that have experienced relatively recent political and economic upheaval, such as many of the former Soviet states (Fournier 2012; Klumbyte 2009). Thus, I have argued that the increasing wealth inequality wrought by neoliberal capitalism and its frequent pairing with allegedly democratic ideologies act as predictive measures of nostalgia within national populations. In this sense, it is critical that anthropologists pay close attention to nostalgic discourses as significant commentary on shifting social norms and economic realities, and that they recognize these sentiments as distinct from other types of remembering.

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized the importance of economic shifts - such as the turn towards neoliberal capitalism after apartheid – in constructing a theory to explain why many rural Xhosa individuals are disappointed with current incarnations of democracy, have nostalgia for aspects of life under the previous regime and therefore filter Western-based political discourses through local cultural lenses. Using archival materials from historical sources combined with ethnographic engagement has allowed me to further illuminate the disjunctures between social and economic norms in Mhlontlo and the changes wrought by late capitalist formations. In this sense, I connect the history of colonialism in the region to contemporary economic realities, echoing previous anthropologists’ insistence on the recognition of historical

forces in shaping the face of the globe today (Wolf 1982). For instance, continuing Xhosa cultural practices such as *lobola* reflect local conceptions of ownership and debt relations that differ significantly from modern-day state practices, and yet these “traditions” are never static and are constantly renegotiated over time.

These contrasting economic norms become embodied in local practices and narratives, as I have illuminated through fieldwork accounts. For instance, nostalgic discourses that recall fondly a time before supermarkets, mass-produced goods, and the constant need for paper currency provide evidence of the ways in which individuals differently experience the norms of neoliberal capitalism on the ground, and how these norms contribute to increasing wealth disparities. This nostalgia morphs into dissatisfaction with current South African democracy as led by the ANC, and impacts individuals’ voting practices, party allegiances, and political socialization in significant ways.

Intergenerational tensions arise through these differing experiences of economic relations pre- and post-apartheid. As I illustrated in the example of a young car enthusiast, capitalist norms of consumerism and accumulation have become part of the habitus of many Xhosa youth in the rural Eastern Cape. In this sense, the self becomes constructed through consumer culture and the symbolic capital provided by material possessions that are fetishized far beyond their use value (Taussig 1980). These changing forms of capital have the effect of creating increased ideological differences between generations, as seen in the varying attitudes toward government welfare support among individuals in Mhlontlo. Therefore, discussing the impacts of neoliberal capitalism on rural South Africans along with ethnographic research on discourses of democracy and youth socialization reveals important connections between global economic trends and citizen production in local contexts.

This analysis has broad implications beyond the individual case of rural South African youth or individual NGOs such as the Sonke Gender Justice Network. In the past few decades, the world has seen many countries shift over to some version of “democracy” – though, as one would expect, the specific incarnations and circumstances of these political changes vary wildly (Paley 2002). Indeed, it seems that democracy, at least in rhetoric, is increasingly naturalized as the only morally sound and effective way to govern – as evidenced by U.S. foreign policy, for instance, that “spreads democracy” to nations deemed less fortunate or “uncivilized.”

Concurrently, neoliberal capitalist norms of privatization and decentralization of national governments are quickly supplanting older modes of production – if this has not already occurred. These economic and political changes, as I have illuminated, have been accompanied by a rise in NGOs like Sonke that work to provide social services and ideological training that is beyond current government provisions. Thus, new forms of civil society are emerging in which organizations outside of the state’s control contribute to notions of citizenship and work to hold the government accountable. My research has examined these institutions and their relationships to local communities on the ground in ways that statistical analyses and media outlets often ignore or are unable to capture. Such anthropological engagement has the ability to ask critical questions about the sustainability of NGOs, their (often tenuous) relationship to national governments, and the reception of their ideas among historically marginalized populations.

Young people all over the globe are being socialized into new democracies at this very moment. How might local cultural forms intersect with these national projects in ways that politicians may not anticipate? What kinds of democratic citizens are being produced through these intersections? How can anthropology make sense of seemingly counterintuitive discourses of nostalgia for previous eras that were less “free?” As Lila Abu-Lughod has questioned with

respect to veiling in the Muslim world, how might individual understandings of the concept of freedom vary, and is freedom something for which all people equally strive (2002)? For me, these questions are only the beginning: future ethnographic research will allow an increased and essential understanding of the ways in which youth learn about democracy and human rights in neoliberal, capitalist states.

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