Clark University
Clark Digital Commons

International Development, Community and Environment (IDCE)

5-2018

Contesting the Normalization of Violence through Counter-storytelling: How a grassroots youth organization subverts the perpetuation of interpersonal and structural violence in Cape Town, South Africa

Nicole le Roux
nleroux@clarku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.clarku.edu/idce_masters_papers

Part of the International and Area Studies Commons, and the Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons

CONTESTING THE NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

THROUGH COUNTER-STORYTELLING:

How a grassroots youth organization subverts the perpetuation of interpersonal and

structural violence in Cape Town, South Africa

Nicole le Roux

MAY 2018

A Master's Paper

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in the department of International Development, Community, and Environment

And accepted on the recommendation of

Nigel O. M. Brissett, Chief Instructor

Abstract

CONTESTING THE NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE THROUGH COUNTER-STORYTELLING: How a grassroots youth organization subverts the perpetuation of interpersonal and structural violence in Cape Town, South Africa

Nicole le Roux

The purpose of this study is to describe the knowledge shared by youth development staff in an NGO in Cape Town about the impact of violence on youth development work. Through five open ended interviews and review of organizational materials, the study uses a narrative and feminist intersectionality analytic to asks how Educo has and could use the critical race theory method of counter-storytelling to subvert the normalization and perpetuation of interpersonal and structural violence. The paper demonstrates how the knowledge and expertise of the people in the organization, as they respond violence youth face, is not valued by funders and the South African government in defining and responding to violence. It also shows how Educo staff can and are working with counter-storytelling as a means of subverting development and strengthening their ability to serve youth.

Nigel O. M. Brissett, Ed.D.
Chief Instructor

David I. Bell Ed.D.
Associate Professor of International Development and Social Change

Academic History

Name: Nicole le Roux   **Date:** May 2018

Baccalaureate Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Storytelling as a Methodology for Community-building and International Development

Source: Hampshire College   **Date:** May 2009

Occupation and Academic Connection since date of baccalaureate degree:

Youth development work in Cape Town, South Africa

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this project to Sandile Mhi for being the bringer of hope, joy, and change with such humility, courage, and love of life. You live on in the stories we are inspired to tell and seek to live.

I also wish to dedicate this project to Linda Mtshibe for the legacy of your work with young people and all the laughter you brought to the circles we shared. Thank you for your warmth, kindness, and authenticity.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

Every month a group of activists in Cape Town, South African get together in someone's living room to talk about the challenges they face in their various institutions. These are people who have committed their lives to support young people who are often in crisis, and as they navigate the challenges of significant and repeated exposure to violence. They do this from within organizations that are also often scrambling to keep afloat. Two people who regularly attend these informal gatherings are Executive Leaders from Educo Africa (Educo), the twenty-one-year old non-profit organization discussed in this paper. Both leaders, Sphesh and Tembisa, were once, themselves, participants in Educo Programs and members of the very communities that Educo serves. Educo acts to connect youth with nature-based personal development and leadership programs.

For some time these meetings have been returning to a metaphorical story that captures what they are experiencing in the work and what they feel they must do. Sphesh explained:

> *So most of us in the NGO sector are just the moppers. Every day the tap is leaking, right? We go and mop, we go and mop. We are tired. We are exhausted. We are running out of funding. The administration is so hard. And then [we] just mop. But none of us have ever said, "why don't we just come together and close the tap?" Then there won't be any need for mopping…We all are looking down with our mops. Mopping. Mopping. But whenever do we ever say where does this water come from? Why is there so much violence? Why is there so much poverty? Why is there so much unemployment? Yes, we will teach you about opening your own business, [but] that is mopping. We will teach you about how to get your own education. That is still mopping. But the tap is still leaking all the time. And that tap is mainly leaking because of our dysfunctional policies.*

Sphesh felt that it is time for civil society in South Africa to come together - as they had in years past, in the struggle to end apartheid - this time to claim the power back from funders and government - who dictate the development agenda. As youth workers they may not be able to turn the tap off, she says emphatically, but they *can* tell people it is open. They *can tell the story*.

As Sphesh told me this in a group interview, Tembisa nodded in agreement. After she was done, however, Tembisa added, equally passionately, that while organizing civil society is very important, being strategic is also an unavoidable and necessary act of agency. This was the first in a series of five open ended interviews, further informed through a review of organizational documentation. The findings of the case study describe the experience of Educo staff and their use of storytelling methodologies to respond to violence in Cape Town, South Africa. While I listened to their conversation, I was aware that Educo was in the midst of a financial crisis and had been trying in the weeks prior, to plan a way back to stable financial ground. I wondered if the interview was resurfacing conversations they'd had about the crossroad they faced. In times of crisis, Tembisa reiterated, decisions need to primarily be based on what an organization has to do to try to stay alive.

As will have become clear to you as a reader, this paper has not been written in the expected academic international development style. Given the topic of storytelling, and that I choose to center the voices of the interviewees, the paper takes a less linear and more fluid approach. This is a choice informed by my feminist standpoint and knowledge of the ways Educo uses non-linear storytelling. The traditional terminology and form, in this instance, would erode the possibility of highlighting alternative means of telling and knowing. [1]

---

[1] For those readers seeking further description to anchor them in reading this different format, the first few pages of the paper provide context for the study, including the development of the core question, the intent, concepts and analytics used. The remainder of the paper maps the way Educo staff spoke in interviews about the challenge of violence in young people's lives and how they use counter-storytelling

From my feminist standpoint, I also consider my own positionality within the research process. I understand their financial challenges and these early discussions all too well as co-founder of a small grassroots youth development organization, *I Am Somebody!*, that closed its doors after six years. We operated in the same sector and geographic region, using comparable wilderness youth development methodologies. In this time in the field I had also experienced what systemic pressures do to alter and re-direct the purposes of the programs that an organization is able to implement. This paper, and the case study of Educo, emerged as a result of these experiences and out of the urge they bore in me - to understand why the tap was leaking – to understand why so many organizations are struggling to fund and implement their visions - and why, no matter what they do, it never feels like enough to meet the urgent needs of the youth living in an unequal society.

Initially my central question was about the impact of violence, a major challenge that I had noticed and which undermines the efficacy of the work. Through my research I realized that patterns of violence in youth lives were connected to patterns of structural violence faced by organizations. "It is not safe for youth", staff said, "to challenge violence in their communities or to live out their personal goals. It is not safe for youth development organizations, the leadership explained, to ask too many questions, engage too directly or to challenge government or donors."

As I listened to the interviewees, I also began to see how, intertwined within every discussion of the vulnerability of youth, there was also a narrative of the ways in which sharing and witnessing stories in programs - redressed generational violence. It gave people a platform, I was told, that was simultaneously humanizing and healing. Woven through the aching

---

to subvert it. Then, the reader will learn about the way Educo as an organization grapples with the consequences of funders and government not legitimizing their experiential knowledge of the challenges youth face.

descriptions of not being able to do and be enough as an organization, interviewees excitedly offered examples of strong relationships within the organizations where dialogic and non-hierarchical approaches were used to make calculated strategic decisions in response to challenging circumstances. While the problem they faced seemed enormous, they were in no way overrun by it.

The concept of intersectionality and a critical race framework was missing from my initial question. These illuminated how agency is deeply imbedded within responses to convergent experiences of oppression. Interviewees always discussed not only challenges but also their responses to these challenges. At the heart of their responses to challenges was the method of storytelling Their agency was located in the stories of interviewees, and in the way they were working with stories to counter the discourses that protect the opener of the tap. The stories, both real and metaphoric, that staff told in the interviews led me instead to consider what Educo's experience offered by way of an example for responding to violence using the critical race method of counter-storytelling. While resistance operates as a concept used in development, subversion appeared a more appropriate to characterize the way that Educo and the youth they worked with exercised agency[2]. Thus, the question that now guides this research project is: How has and could Educo use counter-storytelling to subvert the normalization and perpetuation of interpersonal and structural violence?

---

[2] In development literature, shifting choices required to exercise agency, is frequently termed resistance. Subversion, although less frequently used, offers a term that encompasses the specific ways in which people exercise agency, especially when overt resistance is not a safe option. For use of the term resistance, see for example: Pugh, Jonathan, and Pamela Richardson. "Playing the Donor's Anxious Game: Physical Development Planning Legislative Systems in the Eastern Caribbean." *International Development Planning Review* 27, no. 4 (2005): 385–402. See also: Hall, Ruth, Ian Scoones, and Dzodzi Tsikata, eds. *Africa's Land Rush*. NED-New edition. Boydell and Brewer, 2015.

In this paper, I consider these conditions of vulnerability and the role of storytelling as a means to respond to the normalization of violence, by making it more visible. To facilitate this approach in the discussion itself, I integrate a storytelling format into the presentation of the paper. In this way, the paper unfolds in a conversational manner while teasing out the various themes that emerge during the interviews, culminating in my core findings. What the stories show is that on the one hand, the very thing that keeps Educo fiscally alive is also the thing that silences the organization. The context of funding stipulations and monitoring of measurements determined by international policy and positivist donor trends have served to uphold hierarchal, patriarchal, and white supremacist power structures. The organization operates within a hostile, structurally violent system that does not recognize the knowledge that people living and working within conditions of violence have about the problem and solutions to the problem.

This case study provides an example of how the political and socioeconomic system within which the grassroots organization operates can serve to prevent effective responses to violence and gender based violence on the ground by redirecting the work they do and normalizing the silencing of their voices. This organization's experience is a reflection of the way violence operates on the inter-personal level. By this I mean that the analysis that Educo staff have of violence on the ground, mirrors the structural violence they experience as an organization. Both are a product of the silencing of voices of people of color. Also, conversely, in both instances, stories offer an opportunity to subvert[3] and/or overtly challenge that oppressive reality.

---

[3] The system may be overthrown from within, or turned upside down, but it is not done through visible protest. Rather, it is done through careful use of the system itself because subversion is not possible without considering things exactly as they are and it cannot occur when individuals are oblivious to how power operates. From: Brissett, private communication, 2017.

Making Power Visible Through the Analytic

"That was like - Cool - that there is this thing of like "us" and "them" you know?" – Keegan

As invoked in the introduction, the mode of analysis for this paper is centered on the critical orientation of making power visible through the knowledge production process. The effect of this is to consider the stages of methodology and analysis as a fluid continuum or feedback loop. To this end, I apply the Black feminist concept of intersectionality[4] and critical race theory methodology of counter-storytelling[5]. Both inform choices that I make throughout the research as well as the process of making meaning from it. I posit that objectivity and neutrality are violent because they serve as a means by which an invisible "master narrative" is maintained and that the notion of insider/outsider, researcher/subject, when void of intersectional consideration, can serve to reinforce power even as it purports to challenge it. The dialogic product of the paper, which picks up following this explanatory section, challenges the development discourse through construction of a counter-story that subverts hegemonic means of knowledge production by centering the approach, methods, experiences, and strengths of the people interviewed. It both considers the way things are, as openly as possible, as an act of collaborative storytelling. Part of this approach means, in the writing, that I am privileging the voices, quotes, and style of speaking of my informants.

---

[4]Recent critiques of the use of intersectionality is the way in a way that people have used it to re-center whiteness, ignores the activist/action component and is manipulated to critique anti-oppression efforts. Discussions about how it has been "gentrified" (as described by Patricia Collins, 2015) and transnational critiques about its application to other fields and geographic contexts are relevant to the use of the concept in this paper as primarily intending to center the voices of participants and requiring careful consideration for the history of the term as well as the varied context of people in this study. See Meredith Gamble. *Patricia Hill Collins Keynote at 2015 Social Theory Forum @ UMass Boston.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqToqQCZtvg.

[5] Solórzano, Daniel G., and Tara J. Yosso. "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 23–44.

Keegan, who facilitates in Educo, explained how Andrew[6] (a white man living in the Southern Suburbs) worked with Tembisa and Sphesh (a black man and woman living in Khayelitsha, respectively) as a three-person executive leadership team. From his contrasting positionality (a colored man living in Mitchell's Plain), Keegan told me about Andrew's story of growing up. He said, "[inequality], that was *normal* hey, to not have struggles or to be in a family that um you know has a person who comes and cleans their house. That was his *World*. That was like – Cool. - that there is this thing of like "us" and "them" you know?" Critical race theory identifies the kind of story that Andrew grew up with as a "majoritarian" story, a narrative that positions privilege as natural[7]. Intersectionality conceptualizes how this normalization of violence occurs on multiple levels.

As a white, South African woman my upbringing is very similar to Andrew's[8]. My positionality has been further amplified by my access as a Masters student within an academic institution in the United States. While my whiteness may be my greatest point of access, the compounding result of my interlocked identities have collectively privileged my voice to those of my fellow South Africans, even as I have less experience and expertise with the challenges at hand. While most of the youth workers I've met in Cape Town question and theorize about why the youth we've worked with still struggle at the hands of such violence, my position gives me access to time and research as well as the space to construct development knowledge that could influence policy making. Furthermore, my privileged identity protects me from many of the risks

---

[6] Some of the pseudonyms of interviewees determined by individuals unless they asked me to identify the pseudonym for them. The pseudonym of this individual was determined by author as they were not interviewed for the study.

[7] Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p.27

[8] There are, of course, many cultural differences among people with different racial identities or labels in South Africa. I chose to omit this nuance to ensure readability and because these are arguably not the primary identities of oppression or at least not constructs emergent from the more recent apartheid implementation of white supremacy and patriarchal systems.

that patriarchal power structures may play and it also protected me while I was doing the work on the ground. When I speak, then, I also take fewer risks and experience less consequences.

Keegan explained that he found it hopeful in Educo that Tembisa, Sphesh and Andrew have openly shared their conflicting stories. This, he says, is how they have been able to "hold it *all* and be with each other." In "holding it all" they are exposing the white constructed narrative as false and developing a strengths-based alternative. This is an example of what Crenshaw calls the process of unveiling "subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them.[9]"

In practice, I applied this perspective through using storytelling and counter-storytelling as both a methodology and an analytical tool[10]. This is appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, Educo works with storytelling methodologies within the organization and within its programs. Founded in 1994 with the idea of bringing people from different racial and class identities together, across the divides left by the legacy of apartheid. The emphasis they place on life storytelling as a core methodology emerged from this initial aim. They now use it within both their programs and their organizational development processes. Therefore, using storytelling mirrors their approach and the value they place in voice as a form of agency. Secondly, storytelling as a research method can partly shift power in the research process. Using the form of communication chosen by people whose voices have not been given an equitable platform or heard as equally valuable re-centers the power of people to choose to be represented in the way they see fit.

---

[9] Crenshaw, 1991 p. 1297.
[10] While I do apply core elements of the counter-storytelling method as described by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), I do not construct representative characters but rather use pseudonyms for individuals interviewed and include their exact language. Carrying awareness of the appropriation of critical race theory and Intersectionlity by white feminists, I felt it more appropriate that I do not myself construct new characters but rather allow the stories to speak for themselves, as they were told by the Educo Staff.

Storytelling was thus incorporated at every stage of the research planning, implementation, synthesis, and writing stages of this paper. As a method, I completed five semi-structured in depth interviews that incorporated ritual storytelling methodologies that are implemented in Educo programs (e.g. lighting candles, burning herb bundles, and telling life stories while sitting in nature). The findings of the interviews were paired with organizational data such as grants and annual reports. During the interviews I shared how I came to the questions I wanted to ask and presented them as suggestions for guiding an open-ended conversation. When asked, I openly shared my opinion, pretending I didn't have any in the service of appearing "objective" would have denied the relationships and trust I had with interviewees after years of peripheral participation in Educo activities.

The questions I asked, both in the interviews and in the analysis of the case study, considered intersectionality by looking at how the power of an individual or institution, as well as the type of agency they may exert, are deeply affected by the congruence of identities[11] (e.g. race, gender, class, institutions, roles within institutions and global locations). I approached the interview transcripts by considering what shared threads emerged from the stories themselves, those of the individuals, the organization as well as the sector at large. Separating issues of violence, or separating experiences of youth from, say, staff in the organization, limits the possibility to identify how various forms of oppression and agency are interlocked.

Significant metaphors or examples therefore informed the themes emerged. I wove these together to create a coherent story by using direct quotes in conversation with my perspective and the academic literature. This partially served to expose the means towards conclusions and assumptions that I made and it also considered the co-creative aspect of the counter-story of this

---

[11] See Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991).

paper; however, my power in choosing to include or exclude, tell the narrative in this way and even ask and change the initial questions, also shaped what emerged. Power imbalance is already inherent in the process, but perhaps by trying to "hold it *all*" more openly, however imperfectly, more space can be made in development literature for counter-discourse and redressing the far too easily accepted imbalances of knowledge production and access.

Whenever do we ask where does the water come from?

*"We all are looking down with our mops. Mopping. Mopping. But whenever do we ever say where does this water come from. Why is there so much violence? Why is there so much poverty? Why is there so much unemployment?" –*Sphesh

One of the first questions I asked in the interview was: "What are the stories teaching you about what is needed, possible, broken?[12]" The first interview foreshadowed the conversations to follow. After I had lit a candle, turned on the recorder and asked the question, Tembisa took a deep breath and said, "Jo I think for um, I think that the topic of violence for me it is a huge one, and I guess in some ways, I guess as a country, one could say we don't even know what to do. And on the other side, there is a lot to do." Following the conversation with him, one by one, the other interviewees also spoke about the vastness of the problem. They each explained how they

---

[12] This initial question was informed by my experience with Educo's youth development methodology. I had worked with them for a year as a fundraising consultant and I had also been trained by a former Educo employee in wilderness-based youth development processes that we incorporated into the work of *I Am Somebody!* I could picture the many times I had sat with young people, using these methods. I knew that Educo staff had witnessed thousands of stories from youth as well and I wondered how these stories informed the reason the organization does the work in this way. Because I had personally seen young people struggle to sustain their goals, I also wondered how violence might be affecting whether the youth could achieve what they spoke about in the stories they told.

had witnessed young people in their programs talk about breaking cycles of violence – such as leaving a gang or getting out of a domestic violence situation – only to find that when they returned home they could not do so. They discussed how the communities and the families of the young people were reeling from the same problems the young people spoke about in their stories. Each of the staff members paused, sighed and admitted that sometimes they feel that what they are doing is just not enough. Tanya (a white woman who lives in the Southern Peninsula) is one of the facilitators. She spoke with overwhelm, "God, where to start? [laughing nervously] Ummmm [pausing]. Ja, I find it such a difficult question – actually – because it's so vast. It's like, which thread do you pull on? It makes every other thread vibrate…I almost hit a paralysis of not knowing where to begin." For several minutes she struggled through long pauses and changing thoughts to find a way to talk about the problem.

But when she told the mopping story, Sphesh challenged the premise of the question I had asked. Sure, she seemed to me to be saying, we know what the problem is but why does it exist in the first place? It is not the impact of the water that mattered – this youth workers were already exhaustively addressing with mopping - but the problem that the water is still flowing enough to keep drowning the youth. I will now explore how this shed light on what Educo experienced the problem to be, as well as what Educo staff began to describe "enough" might look like. Stories not only show us what the problems and possibilities are, as I had originally asked, they also point the way to why platforms of voice are so incredibly important in dismantling the systems that are causing the problems in the first place.

We live in fear.

"The communities are living - we live in fear basically. We live in fear. And that fear is quite scary because you don't know, you're not living fully, because you're scared of the perpetrator is doing something and come back and still part of the community and the community itself has kind of accepted that as some form of an, its ok, it is normal."- Tembisa

The interviewees said that people, depending on who they are and where they live, are fighting to stay alive within a system that has failed them. Keegan explained, "It is just falling apart – or has fallen apart and ja, people [are] living in quite a a survival mode, just like every day you get up and it is just about having to survive." This reality is the confluence of multiple forms of oppression, resulting from the history of the country. Young people in Educo programs reside predominantly in historically black African and colored districts that are more likely to be impoverished and to experience high rates of violent crime.[13] Four of the interviewees who work in the organization live in these communities. The young woman who does not is white.

Survival is about more than food on the table without an income; it is also, according to the interviewees, about a criminal justice system that was historically designed to silence rather than serve those affected by inequality. Tembisa explained, "I ask this question a lot. I wonder if the justice - if we have got two - if the justice within South Africa is different based on the color of your skin…because if you have done something in the white community as a black person the justice system becomes very strong…and if it is a black person kills another black person" –

---

[13] E.g. South Africans living in low income settlements have an 80% higher likelihood of being directly affected by violent crime and 73% of murders take place in just 25% of the police districts
[See: Snodgrass, Lyn, and Anja Bodisch. "Why Are We Such a Violent Nation?-The Legacy of Humiliation in South Africa." *Africa Insight* 45, no. 3 (2015): p. 68,
and see: Super, Gail Jennifer. "Punishment, Violence, and Grassroots Democracy in South Africa—The Politics of Populist Punitiveness." *Punishment & Society* 18, no. 3 (July 2016): p. 326.]

Sphesh interjected mid-sentence in agreement, "It is just a normal day!" - Tembisa nodded and continued, "you go to the office, you go home, and are released and kill more."

Criminal justice in South Africa had historically served white capitol interests. In the days before apartheid, many gangs were born out of white-owned mines where white employers separated workers of color by ethnic groups. Fighting amongst workers was not only condoned, but also encouraged. Black men, regularly attacked by white male bosses in these mines, would be killed if they responded violently in self-defense to their employers. Yet if they attacked another black man, there would likely be no significant repercussion[14].

The such as described in the early mines, followed with apartheid government regulations such as pass laws restricting the movements of people deemed "not white," solidified a relationship of mistrust with the police. During the height of apartheid, white police actively armed people in racially segregated townships to encourage black-on-black violence[15]. Following the end of apartheid, the African National Congress promises to their supporters showed intent for significant criminal justice reform; however, equitable access to safety and security remains an equity issue. For example, recent studies show that nine out of ten of the precincts with the highest rates of violence have at least 20% fewer police per individual.[16] Arguably, albeit out of the scope of this paper, this was in part a result of capacity challenges and political pressures as well as international pressures for specific development agendas.

The interviewees also established the compounding experience that prejudice related to gender and sexual orientation offer towards increasing vulnerability to violence. This is

---

[14] Kynoch, Gary. "Urban Violence in Colonial Africa: A Case for South African Exceptionalism." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 629–45.
[15] Kynoch, 2008.
[16] Nine out of ten of the precincts with the highest rates of violence have ratios of more than 1:450 (police officers per individuals) as compared to the national average of 1:358. See "Policing Needs and Priorities Report." Department of Community Safety, 2016.

supported by the academic and grey literature, and by the media. Young women and female

children are at higher risk of exposure to violence than other women[17] and when women are

killed they are often also raped and tortured.[18] Furthermore, lesbian activists and transgender

men and women in settlements in the Western Cape are frequently targeted and brutally maimed

when murdered.[19] The prevalence of press stories about specific incidents of rape and/or sexual

homicide of young women and girls reflect the descriptions the three women from Educo gave of

the scope of the problem.[20] Some stories reported in 2017, for example, detail the gang rape by

teachers and a principal, the gang rape of an eight-year-old girl by three boys between ages

twelve and fourteen, the gang rape and murder of a fourteen-year-old girl, the rape of a four-

year-old girl.

Tanya said, "there are some stories of rape and abuse and violence that that jo just just

like kind of haunt me for quite a long time afterwards." Sphesh described how for her it was,

"even more painful to listen to stories of sexual violence and women and children not being

protected." I remembered feeling this way myself when I heard stories of horrific abuse and

murder. Totelwa, (a black woman who lives in Khayelitsha) is an intern at Educo. She told me,

---

[17] E.g. A national study of mortuary data of child homicides found that 8.7% were found to be sexual homicides and 92% targeted girls [See Abrahams, Naeemah, Shanaaz Mathews, Carl Lombard, Lorna J. Martin, and Rachel Jewkes. "Sexual Homicides in South Africa: A National Cross-Sectional Epidemiological Study of Adult Women and Children." Edited by Soraya Seedat. *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 10 (October 17, 2017): e0186432.

[18] Snodgrass & Bodisch, p. 68.

[19] E.g. "Lesbian Killed in Driftsands | IOL News." https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/lesbian-killed-in-driftsands-7100544, and Julies, Deur Angelo. "Haatmoord Skok." Netwerk24, May 1, 2017. https://www.netwerk24.com/ZA/Worcester-Standard/Nuus/haatmoord-skok-20170426-2.

[20] "Arrest after Young Boys and Girls Raped at Children's Home | South Africa Today", "Girl,14, Detailed Her Rape and Murder in Poems, Letters | IOL News." Accessed February 27, 2018, Phakgadi, Pelane. "'Shock & Disgust': Video of KZN Principal, 2 Teachers Gang Raping Pupil Emerges." Accessed February 27, 2018, "'Prophet' Arrested for Rape of Four Young Girls | News24." Accessed February 27, 2018, "SA Rape Crisis: Horror as 8 Year Old Girl Raped at Local Primary School.", "Student Found 'raped and Strangled' in South Africa | Daily Mail Online.", "Suspect in Court for Alleged Rape of Four-Year-Old Girl."

"In our communities now, we don't – literally – trust our brothers. Because in South Africa you will find out there is high rates of murders and rape not because of strangers but because of people who are staying under the same roof. Your brother. Our father. Your uncle. [they are the ones] who do those bad things to us."

We will be with you now now

"He is BLEEDING! At least, they should have tried to get Something." - Totelwa
    * 'now now' is South African jargon for 'in a while/at some point'

The interviewees, without prompting, all transitioned from talking about the stories and violence to discussing why people, particularly men, are not stopping its tide. In addition to the gendered impact of the problem, they pointed to a lack of response and a normalization of violence. The gender and race of interviewees, interlocked in their interaction with other sites of oppression such as class and location, shaped their standpoint and the focus of the solutions that they proposed. For example, both men, who are men of color, spoke about the role masculinity plays in the violence and how men needed places to speak about how to respond as well as acknowledge what they may have done. Their exposure to these types of situations is inherently connected to their own oppression as men from historically disadvantaged race and socioeconomic groups in Cape Town. Tembisa grappled, to be specific, with the consequences of being a black man and the resulting effect that a lack of police presence has on the safety of men to speak out when they see gender-based violence occurring. Further, from a historical lens, I add that the normalization of black-on-black violence prior to and during apartheid has contributed to dulling political responses by silencing opposition.

Several interviewees brought up #menaretrash, a controversial movement from 2017 (somewhat comparable to the United States #metoo) that sought to problematize the silence of men in the face of increasing gender based violence in South Africa. Sphesh says that following #menaretrash, she has been trying to explain to men struggling with the language of the movement that they need to stand up for women: "you sit in circles of your friends who is an abuser and he comes and smokes a cigarette and talks about it and you do *nothing* about it." Tembisa attempted a response, "in your heart you know this is wrong but you also know that those people will return to the community... it might sound easy to say people need to stand up, people need to stand up and show up and say this is wrong but if you know that you are not protected or even know that if I say this my life could be in danger or I could be killed let alone being in danger.." He trailed off mid-sentence as if to highlight that no solution really presented itself, at least on an individual level[21]. There are no easy answers here.

Totelwa explained that the police also don't react anymore, they seem to think of the situation as hopeless. I wonder to myself as she said this why: Is it capacity? Is it vicarious trauma? Is it prejudice or patriarchy? When she spoke Totelwa paused, took a deep breath in and then slowly shook her head and said, "I don't want to lie, Nicole, in Nyanga the cops are getting killed by the gangs." She described an incident demonstrating the effects of what I identify as trauma. She was at a police station when a man came in and asked for help. He had been stabbed and was bleeding profusely. The police officer, a woman, asked him "Buthi [brother] can you

---

[21] There is another side to this challenge which I think is worth mentioning. In addition to the difficulty of standing up against violence, people who are targets of violence have limited options for recourse and continue to be at risk. The Western Cape online reporting resource discouragingly states that one may file a case, and although you should have a woman on staff at a police station to report to, the government tells you this is likely to be impossible. Then, on the web site, they list the many reasons cases are usually not successful.[21] It is no wonder rape is highly unreported[21] and it follows that women and girls, LGBTQI persons, and others who are already more likely to be targeted also have few places to turn.

please go stand there? We will be with you now now [a South African expression meaning, in a while or at some point]. He is *BLEEDING*. At least, they should have *tried* to get something! You know what I mean?" She looked at me directly and said, "It is just something else."

People cannot even voice what they feel.

"People have been oppressed in such a way that they cannot even voice what they feel and sometimes when you cannot voice what you feel you find other ways to show or seek expression and sometimes that comes in a violent way." – Tembisa

The stories clearly taught about the problem of violence - how immense it is and how few opportunities there are for vulnerable people to challenge perpetration. In talking about this; however, interviewees also began to uncover why they believed in the work Educo is doing and how it is helping individuals break the accepting silence reflective of the normalization of oppression. Unprompted, several of the interviewees moved from discussing why men don't act to discussing the pressing question of why men are perpetrating these acts in the first place. Layer by layer the stories turned to why the tap is open. The way that the white supremacist government controlled and diminished people's platform to speak and to challenge injustice emerged as an important theme in the stories the interviewees told. Agency today, the interviewees indirectly explained, is not only in preventing violence (something which seems to the interviewees to be a nearly impossible task). It also exists in the naming of injustice through breaking the silence that permits the normalization of violence. Speaking is an act of resistance and doing so rebuilds trust among people who have historically been divided from one another.

Tanya says, "It was such a deliberately effective system that broke people down…so effective really. Because it has left in its wake generations of people… who believe so much that they are not a valuable human being." Being heard, she said, seems to make people who still live within a highly unequal society and inhumane system see that what they experienced matters and that they intrinsically have value. She explained that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – where stories of the apartheid era violence were told in the transition to the new government – needs to happen on a broader scale. Tembisa also steered the course of the conversation straight to the TRC, "I want to talk a bit about the reconciliation because that is something I feel is hugely needed in South Africa when you look at what was done." He said that what was done seemed "just [to have been] done for the face…" for those few who were most powerful. Yet, referring again now to the stories, he said "a mother who lost her son is still asking why no one is ever talking about it?"

While not overt, the liberatory and humanizing[22] power of telling stories can challenge systemic oppression directly. Storytelling is a way, Tembisa explained, "to give people a space to grieve a little bit, to share some of the stories, some of the hurt, some of the truth that has never been spoken to." For those who could gain no recourse for violence committed, perhaps sharing stories in Educo's programs is one of the only ways they can at the very least safely acknowledge what has been done. Totelwa said that, "you will find that sometimes it really helps" just to speak and be heard. For men who contributed to violence or allowed it to happen, Keegan explains, storytelling processes offer a place for "speaking hard truths. And also naming challenges [as men]." The speaking of these truths implied that they would also affect discussing new ways forward. Finally, Tanya explained that seeing the problem changes the system, "just

---

[22] These terms are used as discussed in Critical Pedagogy. See Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition*. 30th Anniversary edition. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000.

witnessing and acknowledging that this is the situation and feeling whatever emotion that brings up – to stay with it – allows the system to change."

Critiques of the TRC in academic literature are plentiful and the TRC also offered a model that organizations like Educo and *I Am Somebody!* continued to implement.[23] I think that perhaps the problem is not so much the limitations of the TRC but the limitations of continuing its mission after the public process had been completed. Tembisa says that the platform to speak, to voice disagreement with systemic problems, was taken from people by the apartheid system and never fully restored to them in the aftermath.

According to the interviewees, the absence of opportunity to tell the stories is not only preventing people from healing, it is also causing a desperation in the face of chronic and growing injustice. This desperation has led to more violence. Muting people's responses to injustice, to systemic oppression, was facilitated by stripping communication from their coping mechanisms. Tembisa said, "In in in many communities that is all they've known that's all they've *lived* for many years and many generations." People are so angry at what they are experiencing, Sphesh elaborated, and they "don't know what to do with the anger." If they don't know what to do, Tembisa and Sphesh add, the hopelessness, trauma and anger leads to violence simply continues to devastate communities where people and their forefathers, who were deemed less worthy by the apartheid government, still reside.

---

[23] The TRC, for example, made visible the feminist emphasis listening within narratives. [Kashyap, Rina. "Narrative and Truth: A Feminist Critique of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Contemporary Justice Review* 12, no. 4 (December 2009): 449–67.}]

Is it influencing the bigger scale?

"You've impacted young people. That we don't doubt at all. We do that all the time. But is that influencing the bigger scale?" – Sphesh

For solutions to be enough, the interviewees explained, the stories have to lead to sustained action in the lives of the young people and in the policies around them. But even though many of the young people leave the processes in the mountain with a clear vision and a plan to implement it, they often do not succeed because they have little to no support system to help them realize their goals.

Sphesh explained in the voice of the young person, "If I leave a gang, who is going to *receive* me? Two hours after they are dropped from the wilderness process someone puts a gun in their hands and says let's go: I look back, I look sideways. There is no one to remind me about the magic that happened in the mountains. What can I do? *What do I do?* I need to put food on the table. I need to provide." Storytelling change the youth, she said, "of this we have no doubt" but the cycles of violence are not broken because the young people do not have what they need to succeed. Storytelling with individuals sheds light on the need for systemic change.

Totelwa talked about the courses the organization runs with first-generation college students as they enter the four-year program. "You would find out that in some of the courses [Educo programs] that people comes with the problems from home…they don't get enough of a support structure from the communities and also families." Sphesh described returning from the same courses Totelwa was referring to, when they reintroduce the young people to their parents. The parents don't know what to do with them, "Yes he is amazing. He looks shiny he is bright. But my story [that of the parent] is so heavy I can't even see what to do with him." Tanya says there is a, "Lack of parental figures, particularly fathers, who - my interpretation is - who are

mature enough to support their child's development…. A child who has children, really."
Keegan talks about the anxiety youth experience when heading home. He says that it takes
"beyond courage I would say to, you know, live *into* that story." Totelwa's features and voice
changed as she heavily explained that many of the young people, who at first had seemed so
likely to succeed, end up dropping out months after they start their studies.

The interviewees did not blame the communities for being unable to support the young
people, after all they were facing the same challenges and experiencing trauma as well. Sharing
stories mattered, and the stories themselves taught facilitators what is needed, but for the
program to be "enough" the scale makes all the difference. Sphesh said, "Because if we heal a
young man – what about his dad? What about his grand dad? That are still living there? If you
work with a young woman – what about her mother? Her ancestors violence that is passed on
through birth? We [still] have it." To try to do more, to try to be enough, Totelwa imagined more
workshops in communities and Keegan spoke about working with the fathers of the youth as
well.

Sphesh then identified the underlying issue: she said the problem is the old story of the
star fish[24]. The story just doesn't make any sense, "We can't live on the star fish story anymore,
we need to find a way to take them all back to the sea." We cannot continue to do it in silos, she
explained, because they just end up washing up again and again. The star fish story supports a
"master narrative" because it is a story about the kind of mopping that supports the hegemonic
discourse of development. As long as we are running along the sand trying to throw back

---

[24] This is a reference to a well-known story about a man who walks along the beach, throwing star fish
back into the water one at a time. Someone asks him why he throws them back when there are so many
star fish and the problem is hopeless. He says, well it makes a difference to that one.

individual star fish we might not look up to see the tide, or ask why no one is funding us to heal

the ocean or at least to build a net.

Mopping to make sure the person who opened the tap is happy.

"You are mopping to make sure that the person who opened the tap is happy. You are not mopping because of your people… Discard everything that you are about."- Sphesh

Mopping hinges on the willingness of the people, the acceptance of the "master

narrative," or willingness to go along with it for the sake of survival. The star fish will keep

washing out of the sea if all the focus is placed on throwing them back, one by one. Educo uses

counter-storytelling as a subversion to try to help individuals keep from getting washed up again.

They help youth reclaim that they have dreams, that they have longings, and that their experience

of the world matters. This use of storytelling unravels the apartheid reliance on dehumanization

because it exposes oppression while reclaiming the right to authentic desires and livelihoods.[25]

This is subversion because telling the story makes visible the circumstances they experience and

challenges normalization of inequality[26].

---

[25] Authentic, as used here, refers to Critical Pedagogy and the praxis inherent in true reflection and action within the system as well as within individual lives. Young people in Educo's programs are experiencing increased awareness about what is happening in their lives through telling stories, they are also attempting individual action based on this experience. See Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th Anniversary edition. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000.
[26] Educo is not necessarily attempting to be subversive. Instead, the simple act of supporting young people to fulfill their longing in the highly unequal society becomes a threat to capitalist and supremacist needs for a subdued populace

The problem is, however, that international and government funding does not support this counter hegemonic work on any scale of significance.[27] Because the organization needs funding to survive it is forced to redirect its capacity to provide systemic functions for donor agendas. The violence of this process is in negating the knowledge of people and limiting their ability to affect change. People's knowledge of violence is deemed less valuable because of who they are and thus how they know what they know. For Educo this means that staff are exposed to risk in compounding ways: the financial crisis of the organization affects the livelihood of staff, who already experience poverty.

In the discussions, I asked interviewees to consider where the individual feeling of wanting to do more might meet organizational and policy challenges. I wanted to know how they see the immensity of the challenge youth face – and the feeling of not being able to do enough - in relation to the sustainability of the organization and the sector. The staff spoke more readily about the relation to government and their perspective appeared to be heavily influenced by their positionality and portfolio within the organization. To this end, the executive leaders had a distinctly different, and very systemic, analysis of the challenges they faced which was only peripherally discussed by the other staff.

I now will consider the challenge of sustainability experienced by the organization as it relates to what interviewees said about the role of government and other funders in the financial crisis faced by Educo. What emerges from this conversation is the possibility of a second counter-storytelling project that subverts development discourse by confronting the narrative that the organization and the people within it are at fault for the lack of financial sustainability. The

---

[27] As discussed by Freiri (2000), false generosity in the form of charity does not support this humanizing and liberatory process but instead reinforces dependency.

normalization of the "B.S" in the sector is part of the problem, Sphesh explains. Sharing the story internally, I argue, might help unravel this.

Government is doing what they usually do.

"Are we being invited to the table as small NGOs? There's no way. [The government would say:] You take most of our time you talk too much …Government is doing what they usually do: we are just going to open the tap you guys just mop."- Sphesh

The relationship with government, considered in the context of larger inequities in the country, was experienced by staff as disappointingly harmful to the efforts of the organization. The post-apartheid government had for some time been viewed as a potential source of support for addressing the problems. Tembisa began, "before I actually became in the position in the organization where I am at I guess…[I felt] an excitement before of wanting to work with uh with government…" But in working with government it had quickly become evident that this was not the case, "it was maybe an illusion then that if you work with government, government was going to support" the financial and capacity needs of its partners.

To illustrate his point, Tembisa used the example of the small settlement of Manenberg; in one night alone there may be seven people shot. He spoke about misguided efforts: "Who sits with the authority and says 'you know in Manenberg we know there is a lot of violence, there is a lot of gang violence, [but] scrap that because we want to build a mall?'" It doesn't make any sense, he said, people will use that mall to hide from the violence and the building will quickly be destroyed. There must be youth organizations in Manenberg trying to address the problem. "Why don't we support those before we are even trying to build something?" he asked. But the

reality, he explained, is that those who sit in the fancy hotels making decisions are more interested in making money and "getting a piece of the pie" and that they just "don't really care."

Keegan said, "the white government *and* the black government in so many ways it is quite similar." He paused before continuing, with a raised voice, "that is scary. Like Oh. My. God. We have fought for freedom and the freedom fighters have in so many ways become the oppressors." He discussed the critical role inequality plays in this, "it's just business as usual and you know – that story of the minority and the majority." Their comments reflected the normalization of inequality, the "master narrative" that justifies us and them. The impact of this was not an abstraction, conversations about inequities led to conversations about programs in the organization.

Educo's partnerships with government are not addressing what is needed. For example, for several years now Educo has been implementing the Extended Public Works Program (EPWP). This government-funded initiative is a jobs creation project most recently identified in the National Development Plan. Tembisa – who manages the EPWP program – calls it "an exploitation of the organization." Tembisa said the organization has become dependent on government funding and, they want to do the work because they believe in it. It has become very hard to say no. For example, when government asked Educo to double the number of young people in the program they also said they would not significantly increase the operational funding.[28] Most of the funding goes to stipends for the interns, which are also not nearly enough.

Totelwa, who is an EPWP intern, says the stipend does not meet even her most basic financial needs. She works forty hours a week and earns 2000 ZAR (200 USD) a month. For

---

[28] Government gives only 7.5% for operational costs in the grant. Seven staff members are now managing and training twenty interns for a cost of $90 a day. This includes staff time and other resources such as internet, phone and office fees.

context, I estimate that at least half of this income is likely used by interns just to cover transportation to and from the office. She said, "as a person who is at the moment [she paused to breath in slowly before continuing] responsible for the family. It it it really crushes my mothers heart because I've been with the organization for almost two and a half years now and I'm earning the same amount." When the interns brought this complaint to the executive leaders she says the leadership had admitted, "there is nothing we can do about it."

Tanya said that it "just feels like where Educo really gives a shit about real people, government does not, it is just about ticking boxes." These boxes range from jobs created to skills developed – numbers of workshops held to people employed. They appear in stark contrast with Educo's other monitoring and evaluation tools which focus rather on qualitative assessments and stories of change.[29] Referring to the internship program she says, they don't seem to understand "the time it actually takes to develop a skill set. The soft skills. The capacity in terms of time and finances to actually invest in somebody who will require time and finances to develop soft skills." Their funding, she implies, is just not enough.

Yet even getting funding in the first place is also extremely hard, Sphesh explained that "for you to get funding in South Africa you have to know someone who knows someone that can make it happen for you." Tembisa called it "the red tape and also the privilege" and on several occasions reiterated that the importance of corruption should not be underestimated. Sphesh elaborated, "If you don't carry a certain political party card, you don't have influence." She was

---

[29] What is measured in Educo programs funded by government, such as number of jobs created and skills workshops completed, closely aligns with the Sustainable Development Plan and formerly with the Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction and eradication, among others. South Africa's National Development Plan has aligned with these global strategies and government funding, including the internship program with Educo, is driven by the need to report on numbers. This does not necessarily lead to effective or sustainable work and puts enormous capacity pressure on an organization like Educo. The problem, from my perspective, may be much larger than the government and may have more to do with the international apparatus.

even more concerned; however, that even the little funding available is becoming less as government strategies change points of access. She said that she would like to know why government is now funding itself to implement work that non-profit organizations do. She exclaimed, "How can you be your own client?! And where does that leave civil society?!" Not only does government seem to set the agenda, they now do the work themselves "without much capacity or skill" because they are not experienced service providers. This affects the Educo's ability to realize their programs, she says, and it forces organizations to seek other funding sources.

Yet policy making spaces, where these kinds of decisions are made, were not experienced by the executive leaders as being open for engagement from youth workers or the youth themselves. Tembisa illustrated, "you don't have young people in those sectors because if you do have young people they will say what they actually need." Sphesh further pointed out that when people in the sector are consulted it is only for show. She offered the example of when she contributed to the National Youth Policy. It was published just two weeks after they were asked for feedback, she said, and none of their feedback was incorporated. She said, "it felt that the policy was [already] done…the public participation was just a show." The result was that "the policy is beautiful but the policy is not really speaking to what is needed in the community." If direct challenges to government are not possible, then Sphesh' idea of telling the story of the tap, as a form of subversion begins to make more sense.

On a personal level, as leaders of the organization, Sphesh and Tembisa spoke about how they also felt that they could not ask too many questions when they did manage policy related settings. Tembisa said that as a result, "there is no support.. nothing going to the organization, which is actually killing the organization because those partnerships are not serving the

organization." Their interlocked identities, and the public identity[30] they held within the

organization, affects their ability to engage in the political activism they identify as necessary.

No matter the specific role, the financial stability of every person in the organization was being

affected by this challenge. The vulnerability of the organization is thus also a vulnerability of the

people.

Just give us what we need.

*"Actually that is what we are funding. Dead people with functioning hands. If your brain and
your hands can still take this piece and make it meet with that other piece that is all we need
from you. Nobody cares where you come from and what are your challenges - just give us what
we need."* – Sphesh

To lessen the financial pressures experienced by the organization resulting from the

shortage of government and local funding, Educo has sought out international funders.[31] Sphesh

holds the fundraising portfolio in the organization and has facilitated this strategic effort. The

experience has left her angry. She said, "you cannot change young people's lives because you

have to go in that direction and that direction [different funding paths] to try to keep the

organization in existence." The pressure to conform to their agenda becomes enormous, she

explained, because there are sometimes 3000 nonprofits applying for a single grant.

She called it dependency, and described donor site visits with exasperation, "They are

western[ers] here to check if these black people are handling the money right. Yea?" She looked

---

[30] Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust* (New York: NYU Press, 2004), p. 21 As referenced by
Monreau, 2015, p.500
[31] e.g. USAID, Open Society and Ford Foundation

at me directly. "That is the only time you find someone coming down. Not to see what you really do. *Not* to learn. Not to learn and not to really understand fully." Struck by Sphesh's articulation in the quote opening this section, how donors want "dead people with functioning hands," I argue here that donors treat the organization in the same way that they treat the dreams of the youth. I speculate that not caring about the longing of youth may not be accidental, because the longing itself may be threatening to hegemonic development discourse.

My view is informed by the literature on violence and intersectionality wherein Collins suggests that the elite define violence to "legitimate their own power."[32] Applied to development practice, this indicates the role of power and vulnerability in who determines the parameters of projects and programs.[33] Neither the relationship with government nor the efforts with international funders provide Educo with access to funds that do not stifle the knowledge they have of the problem, or their ability to speak about it. As Sphesh says, "you have people that are dedicated and *love* doing the work that they do and also need to sustain themselves in their lives and you can't do that when there is no funding so the work gets less." Either they sacrifice doing the work or they sacrifice how they do it. This is the recurring contradictory decision that Educo experiences within the implication of the frequently used concept of sustainability.

---

[32] Collins, Patricia Hill. "The Tie That Binds: Race, Gender and US Violence." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 5 (September 1998), p. 920.

[33] There are many layers to international policy making and participatory methods are used in, for example, the setting of the Sustainable Development Goals which affect donor trends. Some of these processes, at least in their intent, come a little closer to the possibility of what Collins describes as the ideal definition of violence, a "dynamic concept whose complexity lies in its socially embedded nature." The problem is that Educo, as a case, is not experiencing any of this. Instead, their experience and knowledge with the problem is not being valued and they are operating within hostile conditions.

What we are doing organizationally is not sustainable

"We cannot protect the stories of the young people and give them great communities and whole communities if we sit the way that we are sitting right now. What we are doing organizationally is not sustainable for the big work that needs to come." – Sphesh

The development language of sustainability has thus become an organizational aim for Educo, and a means of talking about getting out of the persisting cycle of financial crisis which rears its head every three or so years. Nearing the end of the interview, as we discussed why the organization was struggling to become sustainable, Tanya compared the challenge to a feeling of scarcity.[34] She explicitly said, multiple times, that she does not feel that she has any expertise on the problem but it was one she had thought a lot about. Struggling primarily to understand why financial challenges persisted in Educo, she explained, "I don't understand what blocks it from thriving when it is *such* valuable work. And I know there is plenty of money out there." Tanya lamented, "What *is* going on here? What *is that?* And and all that they've done beautifully…yet I still have the same feeling of it is Still. Stuck." She continued, "Like I want to pin it on someone so we can just *fix it,* like I want to say to someone: oh no actually I think I should leave. But I know it isn't one particular - or maybe it is?" She asked: how we can vision working differently when we cannot see the way?

Totelwa, on the other hand, said that she wished she and the other interns were more forthcoming with what they did see. She used herself as an example, explaining that a "lack of self-esteem and confidence" kept her from offering her input, "I have got this mentality that everything I am going to say – ah – is it going to be right? Is it going to be fine? Is it going to be

---

[34] Scarcity, as I experienced it used during my time in the sector, implies that abundance is possible if individuals change their way of thinking about money. The argument that is colloquially, is that more funding will be available if the perception of scarcity is altered.

good input? So I decide to keep shut up. I decide to keep quiet." The pressures on the executive leadership are too great, she felt, and they were expected to do and know everything, "Because they executive members we think they know everything and sometimes they would love our input…. And because they the executive doesn't mean they doing everything right." It became clear to me as I listened that while many things were spoken of, fundraising had become a hard topic.

Sphesh had a systemic interpretation. She returned to the mopping metaphor, "We get swallowed by the begging and the mopping and [don't] say wait, let's look at the bigger picture." She wants to work with other organizations to challenge government and funder agendas, and to find out why the tap is open. She argued that these agendas, and how they keep Educo from focusing on its actual programs, are what make the organization unsustainable. But Tembisa chimed in urgently, "Can I just add – on to that – and say it is a Yes *and* for me? It is not that organizations are not doing that. Organizations have also created networks and really go and try to do that but …if you become an active organization or an active network that is really about challenging government…you also stand a chance of not getting funding." Sphesh agreed, "You talk too much!" [they say], "you bring a lot of burden to us. You are challenging us, scratching us where we don't want to be scratched."

Tembisa added, "an organization is very aware of how do they position themselves," and later reiterated, "of course people are positioning themselves to sustain funding. For me that is a strategy…I am not saying organizations shouldn't position themselves and come together and actually we want to take a stand in be firm in who we are and what we believe in – that is one thing – but I am just saying that in the reality…you need to keep your organization sustainable.

That is a strategy and there is a reality." In other words, challenging the donors might affect the systemic problem but in the short-term organizations need to first stay alive.

The result is, that in relations with donors and government things are accepted when they should not be. Sphesh says, "There's also a level of normalizing B.S. [she laughs ironically] normalizing things that are not normal. We do that." As a country, she says, we are very good at doing that. Subversion is arguably used most often by individuals who are disadvantaged or in threatened positions, people who do not have equal positions of power to those they seek to challenge. In naming the problem at hand, Educo is no longer normalizing this. Instead, while not able to overtly resist the system because of their survival, they are able to tell the story of what is happening in the work itself.

Imbedded in their understanding of the solution to the problem, staff spoke about organizational practices and the use of storytelling in operational methodologies. These strategies had been used in restructuring the organization during financial crisis.[35] Keegan described the way the organization had evolved "and has moved more in this ancient kind of way of council."[36] When speaking about challenges the organization faces he said that they have learned, "I don't have to hold this on my own. I don't have to deal with this on my own in my own corner. We can hold this together." Yet I wondered, as he spoke, about whether they were all really on the same page in how they saw the problem, and thus the solution, and whether

---

[35] In 2014 the organization decided to restructure from having one director to three executive leaders and from having full time staff to consultants and programs that, if funding did not come through, simply did not run. This supported the sustainability of the organization and was described as non-hierarchical; however, it also necessitated the risk of affecting the sustainability of individuals working in the organization by reducing certainty of income.

[36] Council as used in Educo is the process of sitting in circle, using specific group agreements based on listening and speaking from the heart and not the head, and having each person share their thoughts or story one at a time. It is centered around earth-based metaphors and is used in programs as well as organizational practice. In organizational practices it is used for everything from checking in by way of beginning meetings, to debriefing, mitigating conflicts, and/or addressing strategic concerns.

more conversation about the reason the organization was struggling might help deepen this practice of council. Might this become an act of subversion? Tanya described the practice as a sort of non-negotiable, a "deeply rooted ethic of sitting together in a circle and just checking in to see how we are before anything really begins." She spoke about her own resistance to this when the work load seems too much to take time for this and said, "every time I come out of it thinking – Fuck man, I am so glad that's there because…it sets the tone of things happening completely differently."

The conversations highlighted the vulnerability of the organization and how deeply this affected the choices they saw available, the relations within the organization and the means of understanding what is happening and why. They also showed how different the understandings of the problem were, despite the shared ethic of storytelling. Different portfolios and roles in the organization affected what people saw and spoke about. While they speak about and participate in holding it together, in some ways they are each also holding it alone. Sharing the mopping story internally, and discussing the context of the sustainability challenge that the organization faces, may further strengthen the organizations assets of internal storytelling process, strong relationships, and communication.

In Conclusion: We need to let people know

"Maybe we are never going to close it but we want to let people know that the tap is open. We can continue mopping but the tap is still open." – Sphesh

The narrative that emerged from the interviews, through the work of Educo, confirms the need to question why the tap is open and what each of our roles are, from our own positionalities,

in closing it. Telling the mopping story is a dangerous counter-hegemonic act because it directly challenges the "master narrative" and the willingness of people to keep mopping quietly.

Understanding the need to look at the tap begins with considering what the stories themselves teach about violence and Educo's responses to violence. People are in survival mode. Those most at risk are people of color who are young women, girls, and LGBTQ individuals who live in settlements with higher rates of poverty. The problem is cyclical and generational and the trauma has a psychological effect on everyone: from those who are victims of assault to police and the youth workers themselves. The criminal justice system is not adequately serving these communities, which means it is still dangerous for people, and in particular men of color, to speak out against violence because perpetrators often end up back on the streets. In creating a space for people to tell stories of what they are experiencing, Educo is providing a platform for the silence to be broken and for people to reclaim what it means to be alive.

In helping young people rediscover that their lives matter, Educo is facilitating a subversive act of counter-storytelling that. The staff and individuals living in the communities they serve are naming and exposing the effects of violence and in so doing challenging the "master narrative" that justifies the remnants of apartheid and extreme inequality. Yet Educo staff see this is not enough to break the cycles themselves. Scale matters and funding is preventing them from moving too far beyond mopping.

The partnership with government is experienced as an exploitation that is killing the organization as it drains capacity and resources. Financial and political vulnerability make it difficult, if not impossible, to question government in funding relations and within the policy arena that affects funding allocation. To cope with the financial pressures, Educo has tried to expand its funding base to include international donors. This too has felt like a dependency

where so few resources are available that the organization is forced to serve systemic ends that at best result in mopping and at worst channel youth to serve the system that has dehumanized them.

The impact of both relations with government and funders is that Educo does not have the funding it needs to implement its counter-storytelling work with youth on to the necessary scale. Educo's knowledge of the problems causing violence, related to the silencing of populations that have historically been oppressed, is not seriously considered. The elite thus define the problem and enact violence on the organization, the people within it, and the people it serves.

The vulnerability of Educo has direct financial implications for staff and prevents the organization from affecting violence and gender based violence in the communities. People in Educo all have important understandings of parts of the problem but staff interviewed did not appear to have a collective counter-story in the way that they did when they spoke about the challenges youth face and the reason that their work with youth matters. They do know how powerful narratives are in affecting the system and this core knowledge has the potential to become counter-hegemonic as they navigate their organizational financial crisis. They are beginning to share the story of mopping in the organization itself and in expanding this to their council processes they can become subversive.

Storytelling is a platform that re-humanizes and recognizes the innate knowledge of individuals about their own experiences and the needs of their communities. Upending the "master narrative" can only be done in surfacing and beginning to hold *it all*, as Keegan explained. It has to include considering the way power operates through our standpoint and how this power shapes the narrative that emerges. This lesson applies as much to organizations like

Educo as it does to the way we write and think about development itself. In listening to the interviewees I have not discovered an answer so much as the value of the process, and a new layer within the questions. The possibility of academic writing about the subject, then, is not so much about coming up with a new understanding but about building platforms for the voices and understandings that have been silenced by the elite. Writing the counter-narrative will require collective and participatory processes where those of us with access to knowledge production spaces attempt to learn how to step out of the way and let the people and their stories teach us what would really be enough.

Bibliography

Abrahams, Naeemah, Shanaaz Mathews, Carl Lombard, Lorna J. Martin, and Rachel Jewkes. "Sexual Homicides in South Africa: A National Cross-Sectional Epidemiological Study of Adult Women and Children." Edited by Soraya Seedat. *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 10 (October 17, 2017).

Andersen, Nic. "SA Rape Crisis: Horror as 8 Year Old Girl Raped at Local Primary School." The South African, May 17, 2017. https://www.thesouthafrican.com/sa-rape-crisis-horror-as-8-year-old-girl-raped-at-local-primary-school/.

"Arrest after Young Boys and Girls Raped at Children's Home | South Africa Today." South Africa Today News, November 3, 2017. https://southafricatoday.net/south-africa-news/mpumalanga/arrest-after-young-boys-and-girls-raped-at-childrens-home/.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 1990.

Collins, Patricia Hill. "The Tie That Binds: Race, Gender and US Violence." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 5 (September 1998).

Cook, Nicolas. "South Africa: Politics, Economy, and U.S. Relations." Report. Digital Library, December 19, 2013.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241.

Freire, Paulo, and Donaldo Macedo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th Anniversary edition. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000.

Hall, Ruth, Ian Scoones, and Dzodzi Tsikata, eds. *Africa's Land Rush*. NED-New edition. Boydell and Brewer, 2015.

Julies, Deur Angelo. "Haatmoord Skok." Netwerk24, May 1, 2017. https://www.netwerk24.com/ZA/Worcester-Standard/Nuus/haatmoord-skok-20170426-2.

Kashyap, Rina. "Narrative and Truth: A Feminist Critique of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Contemporary Justice Review* 12, no. 4 (December 2009): 449–67.

Kynoch, Gary. "Urban Violence in Colonial Africa: A Case for South African Exceptionalism." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 629–45.

Makana, Chester. "'Prophet' Arrested for Rape of Four Young Girls | News24." News24, August 23, 2017. https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/prophet-arrested-for-rape-of-four-young-girls-20170823.

Masweneng, Kgaugelo. "Suspect in Court for Alleged Rape of Four-Year-Old Girl." Sunday Times, October 23, 2017. https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-23-suspect-in-court-for-alleged-rape-of-four-year-old-girl/.

Mclaughlin, Kelly. "Student Found 'raped and Strangled' in South Africa | Daily Mail Online." Daily Mail.com, May 30, 2017. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4554402/Student-21-raped-strangled-South-Africa.html.

Meredith Gamble. *Patricia Hill Collins Keynote at 2015 Social Theory Forum @ UMass Boston*. Accessed February 27, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqToqQCZtvg.

Moreau, Julie. "Intersectional Citizenship, Violence, and Lesbian Resistance in South Africa." *New Political Science* 37, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 494–508.

Mzantsi, Siyavuya. "Lesbian Killed in Driftsands | IOL News." December 5, 2016. https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/lesbian-killed-in-driftsands-7100544.

Phakgadi, Pelane. "'Shock & Disgust': Video of KZN Principal, 2 Teachers Gang Raping Pupil Emerges." Accessed February 27, 2018. http://ewn.co.za/2017/09/11/shock-and-disgust-video-of-kzn-principal-2-teachers-gang-raping-pupil-emerges.

Pugh, Jonathan, and Pamela Richardson. "Playing the Donor's Anxious Game: Physical Development Planning Legislative Systems in the Eastern Caribbean." *International Development Planning Review* 27, no. 4 (2005): 385–402.

Serra, Genevieve. "Girl,14, Detailed Her Rape and Murder in Poems, Letters | IOL News." IOL News, July 4, 2017. https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/girl14-detailed-her-rape-and-murder-in-poems-letters-10120399.

Snodgrass, Lyn, and Anja Bodisch. "Why Are We Such a Violent Nation?-The Legacy of Humiliation in South Africa." *Africa Insight* 45, no. 3 (2015): 63–75.

Solórzano, Daniel G., and Tara J. Yosso. "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 23–44.

Super, Gail Jennifer. "Punishment, Violence, and Grassroots Democracy in South Africa—The Politics of Populist Punitiveness." *Punishment & Society* 18, no. 3 (July 2016): 325–45.

Educo Africa

The following appendix provides background information on the case study including what the organization does, how it functions and whom it serves. Additional information can be obtained by visiting www.educo.org.za.

Background:

Educo Africa (Educo) was founded in 1994 with the idea of bringing people from different racial and class identities – across the apartheid legacy divides – together. The emphasis they place on life storytelling as a core methodology emerged from this initial aim. Given post-apartheid needs and likely also funding trends, the organization now has a localized focus and specializes in providing leadership development, skills and capacity support to young people from vulnerable populations.[37]

There are several Educo entities globally, of which Educo Africa is a member, but its operations and mission are independent and unique. Educo Africa reaches 4000 young people annually. The organization has seven full time staff, twelve contracted facilitators and twenty interns who are funded through a government program described below. Its annual budget is approximately 7 million ZAR (half a million USD). It is compliant with standards and regulations and has all the necessary policies and financial systems in place.

---

[37] To examine the case study I use historical data that draws from grant proposals, marketing materials, databases, budgets and other materials from September 2015 to July 2016 during which I worked as a consultant at Educo. I will also occasionally reference informal communications with staff and participants from the same period.

Funding Portfolio and Sustainability Plan:

Educo works with many of the major South African based youth development funding stakeholders. For example, they receive funding from corporate sponsors (e.g. Nedbank, Cape Union Mart, Grand Gaming), local trusts (e.g. DG Murray Trust, Groundswell Trust), foundations (e.g. Nussbaum Foundation, Davies Foundation, HCI Foundation) and government/national partners (e.g. Department of Social Development, National Lottery). Most of these funders are repeat donors, which demonstrates that Educo could effectively report on the monitoring and evaluation of its work. The scope of these funders and nature of their relationship with Educo shows that the organization is a valued member of the sector and that its practices are well regarded.

In 2015 Educo Africa was faced with a financial crisis and, as a result, developed a new sustainability plan that was shared with all of its funders. This involved financial decisions such as paying off debt on its assets and relocating funds to money mart for increased interest. It also included a significant restructuring of the organization to reduce overhead and staff costs. A three-team executive leadership model, whereby each member had a different portfolio (finance, fund raising and programmatic), was implemented. Further, twelve staff members who facilitated programs were transitioned to consultancy posts where they would be hired should funding for programs be available. In 2017 the Executive team was reduced to two individuals as one member left the organization. Interviews indicated that this model is viewed by many of the staff as less hierarchical but that there are also challenges for consultants who have less reliable income sources.

About their programs:

The organization has four programs, primarily targeted at young people ages 18-25 and the people who serve them who live in or near the Western Cape. Some programs also involve travel to the Eastern Cape. The methodology of most processes incorporated into these programs involves

taking people on courses into the Cederbergmountains, to Educo's base camp, where wilderness exercises such as hiking, rock climbing and nature solos are used to facilitate soft skills development.

Sisonke program: Aimed at supporting organizations serving vulnerable youth, this program involves offering rites of passage, leadership, men's work and caring for care givers courses towards the capacity needs of a range of community based organizations. Partners who are offered courses at highly or fully discounted rates include youth, social workers and families connected with partner organizations such as HIV/AIDS orphanages and youth shelters.

Ukuzazi program: Offers courses in rites of passage and leadership to youth attending programs through institutional partners. This program primarily centers on a partnership with TsiBA University, an institution that primarily trains first generation college students in entrepreneurship and business skills. Courses offered in both these programs includes facilitation of group processes sharing and witnessing stories about experiences about the challenges youth and their caregivers face in the work. Facilitators are adept at using specific tools, such as the nationally recognized circle of courage tool, to safely support groups in navigating traumatic experiences and glean a sense of trust, community, and understanding of their challenges and goals.

Sihambili Phambili program: Provides a platform for a network of youth, who participated in and were affected by Educo courses, to organize ways of giving back to their own communities as activists and social entrepreneurs. Recently this program has been targeted by funders to offer entrepreneurship training and job readiness. It also houses the *Extended Public Works Program* (EPWP) whereby government provides a stipend for youth to intern in the organization. Educo currently has twenty youth enrolled in this government funded initiative who assist courses and the

management of basecamp. This program takes enormous capacity to implement and funding is very limited.

Making Local Government Work: Involves training youth in and around Cape Town in how to participate in local government and how to use these mechanisms to affect issues that matter to them. The program involves a road show to the Eastern Cape to share information about local government in communities. It also includes training of local government officials and mentorship support for youth who are seeking direct ways of engaging with local government.

International Program: Involves bringing students and practitioners from abroad to experience Educo programs and learn from and exchange knowledge with the organization. This program serves mainly to generate additional revenue for Educo's other programs.