

NEOLIBERALISM, EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTH IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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Dedicated to the memory of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

ABSTRACT

Via the evocation of two personal narratives of lived experiences of/with youth in South Africa, the paper addresses issues relating to youth, unemployment, education and structural injustice. These narrative vignettes reflect events of injustice that occur within the human sphere and fall within the interstices between competing discourses as sites of struggle for meaning and supremacy. It is here where the lived effects of unjust political structures can be witnessed as violent assaults on individual and collective bodies, psyches and souls, while the indomitability of the human spirit rallies to rise above such adversity. Both experiences, while specific, nevertheless articulate a difficult 'glocalising' relationship with 'the general' and 'universal' in the global interconnectedness of injustice and the effects of a dehumanising ideology. They are underscored by a historical legacy of apartheid and authoritarianism, but advanced through a newer discourse of neoliberal, globalising modernism. Both ideologies converge in untroubled alignment through similarly operational codes of control and the endemic forms and frames of (in)difference. The paper argues that racialised unemployed youth in South Africa carry the burden of structural political dysfunctionality and state ineptitude, and they are pathologised and differentially constructed as 'failed' citizens as a consequence. Not only are South African youth expected to carry the burden of unemployment, but also the flag of the nation's political transformation as well, in a context of contradiction and maladministration overlaid by the debilitating effects of neoliberal governmentality. Youth identity is framed in nationalist economic terms, justified and advanced through the contemporary, global, modernist condition, supported by neoliberal capitalist relations. The historical, embodied and material injustices shape what is possible for youth, specifically unemployed youth, in South Africa today.

KEY WORDS

South Africa; Youth; Unemployment; Authoritarianism; Injustice; Nationalisms; Neoliberalism.



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I have the right to be angry and to express that anger, to hold it as my motivation to fight, just as I have the right to love and to express my love for the world, to hold it as my motivation to fight, because while a historical being, I live history as a time of possibility, not of predetermination.

PAULO FREIRE, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, 2004

INTRODUCTION: A NARRATIVE OF INDIGNATION

My experiences of living in or visiting my homeland of South Africa have always exacted the most opposite and extreme of emotions in me: anger and love, despair and inspiration, indignation and hope. This last occasion was no different. Recently returning to South Africa to take up an academic position in a university in one of the country's most impoverished, rural provinces, an area I have not lived in before, produced its share of profoundly heart-wrenching experiences. These experiences reflected events of injustice that occur within the human sphere, events that fall within the interstices between competing discourses as sites of struggle for meaning and supremacy. It is here where the lived effects of unjust political structures can be witnessed as violent assaults on individual and collective bodies, psyches

and souls, while the indomitability of the human spirit rallies to rise above such adversity.

There are two specific incidences amongst many that haunt me. They are distinct yet connected via discursive traces of injustice. While specific, they articulate in a difficult 'glocalising' relationship with 'the general' and 'universal' in the global interconnectedness of injustice and the effects of a dehumanising ideology, underscored by a legacy of apartheid and authoritarianism, but advanced through a newer discourse of neoliberal globalising modernism. Both converge in untroubled alignment through similarly operational codes of control and the endemic forms and frames (Butler, 2008) of (in)difference¹.

I had not been teaching for more than a week at this 'newly transformed' university when an *isiXhosa* student in my class, I will call Xoliswe, came to speak to me privately in my office. He was from the previous 'Bantustan' (or 'separate homeland state') of the so-called *Transkei*, an impoverished region of the Eastern Cape that had been devastated by forced segregation under apartheid. He approached me because reading into my critical, social justice approach to teaching, he recognised that I was someone who was likely to be empathetic and disposed to assisting him, as he explained to me at the time. He was in despair after having approached many others for help.

Carefully, Xoliswe relayed the details of his desperate situation to me and asked for advice: Until that day, he had been sleeping on the floor of a science laboratory some nights or on the dormitory room floors of some

1 A highly visible example of the untroubled alignment of the *modus operandi* of the apartheid regime and the newly neoliberalised South African post-apartheid state in respect of levels of authoritarianism, entrenched codes of control, and indeed the extent of the brutality of the violence was the incident at Marikana platinum mine in 2012.

On 16 August 2012, police in South Africa opened fire on striking miners in Marikana killing 44 and wounding many more. This constituted the single biggest act of violence against civilians by the police since the end of the apartheid era, and the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 (Satgar, 2012b). The action received international condemnation and was deemed a seminal event in modern South African history amidst wide-spread industrial action that impacted much of the mining sector in 2012. Indeed, 2012 saw more labour discord and socio-political unrest in the country than any other previous year since the end of apartheid in 1994. More broadly, some media observers have wondered whether the strike over wages and working conditions and resulting violence at Marikana did not represent an extreme expression of anger and resentment at the growing wealth gap in South African society. With unemployment hovering around almost 50% of the workforce, and increasing disparities in living standards between the upwardly mobile black middle class, political elite and the society at large, discord is evident through much of the South African social formation. The ANC led government is a frequent target of heated criticism at its failure to address basic economic inequalities and delivery of services, from sanitation in townships to school textbooks, and political opponents are seizing on these sentiments in an effort to exploit this weakness ahead of the national elections scheduled for 2014.

students who had been kind enough to let him stay with them. Having no money whatsoever, he was completely dependent on hand-outs from other students for food. Sleeping on the floor of university premises or in other students' residence rooms was strictly forbidden, yet he had no choice. He ran the risk of being expelled if found out.

His financial situation was beyond his control, yet he was criminalised for it. He had been waiting to receive his government-funded *Funza Lushaka*² bursary to be able to pay for outstanding tuition fees from the previous academic year and thus be able to register for the new academic year. He had already missed an online test for a course, attaining a zero for it because the university's course website would not allow him access as he was not a registered student. Being economically disadvantaged placed him in a vulnerable position so that he was also epistemologically disadvantaged in ways that perpetuate economic and social disadvantage.

Xoliswe had been assigned a room in the residence, but the university would not release it to him until he had registered. He could not register until he had paid his fees. He could not pay his fees until the government bursary had been paid to him. He could not borrow from a bank in the interim as he had no collateral. I was soon to learn that literally hundreds of impoverished students, (perhaps thousands across the country), were in the same situation of being forced to pay fees and register before their *Funza Lushaka* bursaries had been paid out. And this happened year after year. They are in effect punished for being poor. He had gone to the secretary of the director of residences and appealed to her to allow him to have a meeting with the director. She refused. He was just a lowly student who could not waste the director's time. He went to the bursaries office to see if he could elicit help that way and they would not see him either. Too many students were in a similar situation and the unit's institutional claim to modernist efficiencies superseded empathy. In the same way, he had gone to see if he could receive assistance from the student affairs office, also to no avail. Keeping to rules was posed as the reason for indifference.

After nearly a month of trying to get help from every quarter, Xoliswe was no further than when he had started. The indifference to his plight was

2 This is a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary available to students in financial need that meet the academic criteria. It was instituted in the post-apartheid injunction to provide access to education for economically disadvantaged South African youth.



consistent and ubiquitous. I looked at his transcript from the previous year to seek ammunition for why this student was ‘worthy’ of assistance. How did I know that I would need this information as ammunition? I had learnt fairly quickly that South African youths’ citizenship was constructed in terms of access to the labour market via educational ‘learning outcomes’, ‘competencies’, ‘skills’, ‘attributes’ and ‘educational attainment’, language ubiquitous in policy documents within this Higher Education institution and others. His results had been very good. There was no ‘good reason’ not to assist him. His only ‘fault’ was poverty and the failure of governing systems around him³.

I picked up the telephone receiver. Xoliswe’s situation was intolerably unjust! Within an hour after a few phone calls demanding a response and emails sent under my title as professor to the very people who would not entertain seeing him, Xoliswe had a place in residence with immediate effect and he was able to register, even though the *Funza Lushaka* bursary had not come through yet. Also, his outstanding fees from the year before had been covered by another bursary that was released to him. The play in the performance of power was clearly revealed. It only took my title and one hour to turn the tide on his desperate situation. How many Xoliswes were out there, and how much stress must students like Xoliswe have to endure in having to carry the burden of constructed disadvantage? Why was it acceptable to treat him and his fellow *Funza Lushaka* bursary peers that way? The dire failure of systems of support and enablement, and the multiple and

3 Breier (2010) in a study, using the University of The Western Cape (UWC) as a case, examines the impact of lack of finances on student access to higher education and student retention. Her comments provide insight into the ubiquitous nature of the difficulties students face in South Africa, the way in which disadvantage begets disadvantage, and how poverty is sustained and reproduced. She notes: “All the 21 UWC academics and administrators who were interviewed for the Student Pathways Study mentioned poverty as a major reason why students leave UWC prematurely. For some it was the single greatest issue. Administrators pointed out that although many students receive funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), a number of factors make that funding insufficient to cover all their needs. Firstly, although NSFAS allocations are announced at the end of the preceding year [academic year and calendar year are synonymous in Southern hemisphere universities], the first tranche to institutions is only released on 1 April, which is the beginning of the government’s fiscal year. Many institutions, particularly the HBUs [historically black universities], experience cash flow problems in the first quarter of the year and consequently demand an upfront payment from students (DoE, 2005). At UWC, non-resident students were required to pay R3,000 and resident students R3,500, at the time of the interviews, which equates to the monthly income of the greatest proportion of the leavers’ parents/guardians. Staff in the financial aid office also reported that this payment caused a great deal of distress for some students. Although there was a (NSFAS defined) means test to establish whether a student qualifies for NSFAS funding, there was no test to determine whether a student had the means to pay the upfront amount. Some students genuinely did not have the money to pay even the R580 portion of this amount, which was for registration” (p. 98).

interconnected systems of oppression that reproduced structural inequality instantiated themselves and were embodied in Xoliswe's struggles and the stress and suffering he was forced to endure as a normalised, racialised, classist condition of the quotidian.

This incident provides a window into the plight of South African youth in their struggle for opportunity and wellbeing, despite the ongoing diversity and transformation discourses that were to herald greater democratic rights, equal opportunity, and a more intentional humanisation. Despite an ongoing post-apartheid policy of 'black economic empowerment' and affirmative action, poor youth in South Africa still have little access to opportunities and wellbeing in a context where your worth as citizen is determined by your potential contribution to the labour market. If the labour market cannot meet the needs of these youth in the context of the nation state's so-called lack of competitiveness within global markets as a developing economy, then the fault lies with youth 'lack' – deficit discourses constituted in terms of lack of ability, lack of skills, lack of competencies and requisite attributes. The individual youth carries the burden of such political representation, deflecting blame away from unjust societal structures and oppressive social institutions and relations. Youth identity is framed in nationalist economic terms, justified and advanced through the contemporary global modernist condition, and supported by neoliberal, capitalist relations. Such citizenship criteria construct hierarchies of access and acceptance outside the control of impoverished youth in ways that replicate (in)difference and (re)define (in)human(e)ness.

YOUTH, EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

YOUTH UNDER PRESSURE AND CONTRADICTING IMPERATIVES

In 2005, South African Labour Minister Mdladlana described youth unemployment as "a powder keg waiting to explode unless something drastic is done to address it" (Department of Labour, 2005, in Marock, 2008, p. 5)⁴. The

⁴ Some reports reflect youth unemployment in South Africa as up to 55% (Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/25361741>).



pressures placed on South African youth post-apartheid, the so-called ‘born frees’⁵, has been extensive and has emanated from several quarters. Not only has this generation of youth been expected to absorb the consequences of the failure of apartheid, but also the failure of the utopianisms created through a highly-vaunted new democracy. They have been expected to take up the standard of social transformation and undo the legacy of apartheid in a single generation⁶, tasks demanding of them the requisite knowledge and advanced critical thinking capabilities on which to execute.

At the same time, they have had to bear the brunt of economic hardship borne out of post-sanction, debilitated, economic circumstances; the trials and tribulations of a conflict-ridden developing economy in a colonised African context; and, more recently, the economic consequences to South Africa of the 2008 global economic crisis and its ongoing social and economic disorder, fomented by the globalising grip of capitalism in an ever-interconnected, neoliberal world. The pressures to be better educated are not tempered by the promise of employment, as rising unemployment reflects the developing economy of South Africa in stress.⁷ In addition, structural changes in the post-1994 labour market have, ironically, and despite affirmative action policy initiatives, resulted in continued unequal access to jobs, particularly for new black graduates with generalist, non-professional degrees in the Arts, Commerce, and Management. These graduates have not enjoyed the same access to the labour market as their white counterparts who have had greater access to existing capital and been able to utilise ties to family, friends and networked contacts to find formal employment (Kraak, 2010).

5 This is a popular term for South African youth who were born approximately after 1994, the date of South Africa’s first democratic elections and the transition to a new democracy. These youth have never lived under apartheid, have theoretically gone to ‘integrated schools’, but will nonetheless be living out the ongoing legacy and consequences of the destructiveness of apartheid doctrine and policies.

6 Apartheid affected every aspect of life in South Africa, and took at least 5 decades to entrench itself in various forms and degrees as normalised within political and social structures, ideological ways of knowing and being, and the quotidian.

7 Joyce Banda, President of Malawi, referenced the issue of the need for “decent jobs” for “millions of young people” in the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) region as a priority not only for South Africa but Africa at large in her eulogy to Nelson Mandela at his funeral in Qunu (Retrieved December 15, 2013, from <http://www.sapeople.com/2013/12/15/transcript-president-joyca-banda-inspiring-eulogy-nelson-mandela-523/>).

As South Africa has embraced global capitalism within neoliberal tenets⁸, an emphasis on science and technology as the disciples of ‘economic growth’ and prosperity have reshaped what counts as important to know within the New Knowledge Economy. This reshaping has deflated the importance of the Arts and a robust Social Science⁹ that would provide the intellectual domain for young South Africans to think through plausible, workable, and critical alternatives to a social and economic *status quo* that repulses possibilities and limits opportunities.

Despite ongoing transformation discourses, the intensification of economic rationalism that finds ideological and epistemic expression in narrow instrumentalism, economic pragmatism and scientism has also served to diminish the democratic capacities and necessary ontologies of agency that would provide the epistemic capabilities and commensurate socio-political traction for South African youth to challenge and change their circumstance and that of their communities. Instead, the individualistic and group capacity-leaching effects of the new neoliberal, economic order is controlled through rhetorical manoeuvres and powerful, hegemonic discourses that not only dehumanise already alienated, disadvantaged, unemployed or racialised youth, but actively seek to further subjectify and marginalise them as ‘failed’ citizens of the state.

8 As Satgar (2012a) aptly explains: “Post-apartheid South Africa had two choices in this context: to continue the struggle in the context of transition to realize historical aspirations and the non-racial South African dream, or to capitulate to the neoliberal onslaught. The latter option was far from inevitable, as some ‘realist’ critics would suggest” (www.globalresearch.org).

9 CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) is an example of a pan-African initiative that fosters robust and context-specific African research. The organisation recognises that it is only in having coherent and robust African-focussed Social Sciences that African problems and concerns can be addressed with the requisite sensitivities to gender, power and context. A few noteworthy objectives in the mission statement of the organisation are listed as:

- Promote and facilitate research and knowledge production in Africa using a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach. The Council is committed to combating the fragmentation of knowledge production, and the African community of scholars along various disciplinary and linguistic/geographical lines;
- Promote and defend the principle of independent thought and the academic freedom of researchers in the production and dissemination of knowledge;
- Encourage and support the development of African comparative research with a continental perspective and a sensitivity to the specificity of the development process in Africa;
- Strengthen the institutional basis of knowledge production in Africa by proactively engaging and supporting other research institutions and their networks of scholars within its programmes of activities. As part of this goal, the Council also actively encourages cooperation and collaboration among African universities, research organisations and other training institutions;
- Encourage inter-generational and gender-sensitive dialogues in the African academy as a further investment of effort in the promotion of awareness and capacity for the use of different perspectives for knowledge production (Retrieved September 14, 2013, from www.codesria.org).



Kraak (2010) notes that in policy discourses on ‘employability’ and the various ways in which this term is deployed in the South African national context, individuals carry the ‘fault’ of unemployability through being constituted in terms of deficit – lack of ‘skills’, ‘inappropriate’ education or training, or insufficient effective ‘competencies’. Thus it is ‘individual attributes’ that determine employability and the individual that carries the responsibility for the labour relationship and the ‘success’ of the enterprise. This viewpoint is enabled by the prevalence of a particular language of employability in the South African policy arena. Patel (1995, in Marock, 2008) states that employability skills are those “skills that are required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions” (p. 9).

The way in which the individual bears the burden of representation for employability is also captured in the language of the South African Federation for Mental Health (2006), which states that, “employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required. For the individual, employability depends on their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess; the way they use and deploy those assets; the way they present themselves to employers; and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) in which they seek employment” (in Marock, 2008, p. 8).

Essentially, employability, in true managerialist parlance, is viewed in the South African context as ‘skill’ and ‘aptitude’, ‘behaviour’ and ‘will’ (ibid.), a psychologising of individuals that, in defining the negation, notably ‘the unemployable’, gives way to a pathologising discourse that dehumanises and constructs the individual as wanting. This lends credence to the stigmatisation of unemployed South African youth who then bear the blame for their own unemployment, a deflective manoeuvre of the neoliberal state.

In contrast, the Education Special Committee of the Japan Federation of Employers’ Association defines employability as both the “skills that enable worker mobility” (ibid.) and the “skills that are demonstrated in a company that enable a worker to be employed on a continuous basis” (ibid. p. 9), thus shifting the burden of responsibility onto the employer. It is a position that is not common currency in South Africa. Further, the endemic efficiencies

and ‘skills’ discourse that surrounds policy on employment in South Africa, such as constant reference to ‘technical skills’, ‘computer skills’, ‘communication skills’ and ‘social skills’ has also served to tie education directly and instrumentally to the labour market. It is a relationship that is ubiquitous in the neoliberal, South African state, and discursively reduces education to an act of ‘training’ and mere skills development.

This places South African youth in a double bind. On the one hand, they must carry the torch of reimagining and enacting the possibilities of a new, transformed, democratic, non-racial South Africa. They must develop the intellectual agency to ensure the sustainability and wellbeing of the South African nation state in the context of global political and ecological imperatives. They must seek as yet-unimagined alternatives that challenge the discourses of change in South Africa that have put the country on a pathway of conformism to the neoliberal capitalist world order without ready alternatives. These mandates and imperatives require deepened senses of critical consciousness and social justice commitments and agency, with the requisite critical, intellectual capacities, knowledge of democracy and history, global awareness, and robust ontologies of agency and social engagement that attend them. On the other hand, the current neoliberal pressures have created the expectation – not of a citizen that might challenge the status quo – but of a *homo economicus*, a subject of capital. After a post-1994 restructuring in line with existing global, neoliberal rationalities, the existing schooling system and Higher Education sector in South Africa is oriented to meet the needs of capital, although it fails even at this¹⁰. Reducing education to managerialist and economic instrumentalities defeats its capability of engendering critical thought and justice-oriented, intellectual engagement and agency. Even the now-popular discourses on ‘responsible citizenship’ in schools (as part of ‘Life Orientation’ skills) and higher education institutions are often marked by ‘how to’ training manuals that are socialising, if not indoctrinating, in their pre-authored prescriptions that do not disturb the structural *status quo* or the particular ethic of change.

10 As Baatjies (2005) notes: “Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), like most other public spaces (in South Africa) cannot escape the onslaught of neoliberal militancy that claims to provide the revolutionary solutions to social problems in a country still heavily stained with the deeply rooted legacies of apartheid” (p. 1).



In the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust open dialogue held in Cape Town in February 2006, a discussion between speakers Haroon Bhorat and Joy Papier, (with respondent Salim Vally and Maureen Robinson as chair), took place that addressed the connection between education and youth unemployment as a crisis in South Africa. In that open dialogue, certain statistics came to the fore that highlighted the particular criteria that reflect racial, age-based and educational differences in rates of unemployment. These statistics clearly connect the unemployment crisis with the country's ongoing educational crisis. Youth unemployment matters, not only due to reasons of human rights and dignity, but also because it impacts the lifetime employment trajectory of the individual, while impacting the family and community as well. Levinsohn (2008, in Rankin & Roberts, 2011) shows, for instance, that once a young person finds a job in the formal sector, retention in formal employment is likely (p. 1).

As noted by Bhorat in that dialogue (Bhorat, Papier, Vally & Robinson, 2006), not surprisingly, the group most vulnerable to unemployment is that of black females in the 15 to 24 age group, both urban and rural. These groups constitute 85% and 84% of the unemployed, respectively. The average unemployment rate for black youths in this same age group is 78%, and the rate of unemployment drops between 25 and 34 years of age. The vast majority of youth between ages 15 to 24 have never held a job, and educational level plays a key role in employment differentiation. Nevertheless, race, gender and location all play a part in determining unemployment in South Africa. The most disadvantaged person in the labour market is likely to be a black female living in a rural area.

When educational level comes into play, unemployment statistics reflect the educational crisis keenly. As Bhorat noted, in the 15 to 24 age group, a youth with incomplete secondary school education has a 75% chance of being unemployed. If they have a matric (grade twelve graduation), this drops to 66%. Nevertheless, recently this statistic has increased rather than dropped. Those with tertiary education but without a degree, have a 50% chance, while those with a degree have a 17% chance of not having a job. Consequently, youths that leave school early make up the vast majority of the jobless, and, according to Bhorat, there is insufficient support in the system to assist in redirecting them back into what is known in South Africa as Further Education and Training (FET). There is also little available to provide

young people with information about careers and the labour market (Bhorat et al., 2006). One could argue that access to the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996) needed to enable access to knowledge of careers and the labour market is hinged to historical advantages and parental, formal educational qualifications enjoyed by particular racial groups under apartheid, and to the reconfiguration of advantage in the post-apartheid context.

It could be argued that unemployed youth are indirectly supported by the South African government by way of pensions and child grants¹¹, but pathways out of the cycle of poverty and dependence are not readily available, pointing to the failure of policy and a lack of foresight. Even though there have been job-creation programmes since 1994, only two million jobs have been created, while seven million citizens remain jobless in a context where technology is replacing human skills (Bhorat et al., 2006). Arguably, the political will of the neoliberal state in South Africa to address this trend through an ideological shift in policy is not forthcoming.

Later in the open dialogue, Bhorat (ibid.) controversially asked whether one would rather have a job with a low wage or remain unemployed. This conundrum raises a number of critical issues on human rights and the abuse of youth. Many youth in South Africa today accept low-paying jobs or unpaid internships below their qualifications in order to secure any kind of job at all. I argue that the crisis in unemployment performs itself in ways that lend credence to the exploitation of youth, so that the relation of exchange becomes a form of indentured slavery. This too is a mark of the neoliberal world order, where accrued benefits and the human right to prosperity is denied and justified under the modernist auspices of 'efficiencies', 'necessary austerity' and 'economic crisis.' In Marxian terms, there is an exploitative relationship with the labour capital of many South African youth whereby an unfair exchange for labour takes place that is marked by a disinvestment in their wellbeing and that of the families and communities that depend on

11 While typically the neoliberal state tries to devolve responsibility for poverty onto the individual, on the surfaced this example seems to reflect that the South African state still holds a state dependency relationship with the impoverished individual. In reality, the South African state offers very little in terms of state benefits and a social net, much less than other highly neoliberalised Western governments such as the UK. With little help from the state and no offers of guidance in terms of careers and opportunities, poor South Africans have little options open to them. This situation provides the reasons for the high crime rate, which the state does little about to address either. Further, resistance and solidarity initiatives by the disenfranchised have been met with increasing police crack-downs and brute force in recent years. For poor South African youth, the noose gets pulled ever tighter.



them. Youth are placed in the invidious position of requiring ‘work experience’ and the global criterion of employment competition makes them more ready to take on low-paying or unpaid positions in the hope of future employment. This is part of what Harrison (2010) refers to as a “transnational bundle of practices” (p. 98) that cue the “neoliberal international regime” (p. 94). Austerity practices in the EU and the plight of unemployed youth there are connected to the same type of practices in South Africa, operationalised within the ambit of globalising neoliberalism, and hence normalised and rationalised under its efficiencies discourses.

The hyper-pragmatism and ‘future-orientated’ nature of neoliberal capitalism provides the ‘common sense’ for this exploitative relationship. Thus, the hyper-neoliberal South African state and its attendant managerialist discourses work in political contradiction to the justice-oriented criteria of the South African constitution’s transformation agenda, one might argue as being a serious flaw in the fabric of this fledgling democracy.

In the debate, Papier (ibid.) raised further concerns. In her particular choice of language to describe her concerns, it is noteworthy that such language is recruited from a particular linguistic repertoire. The embedded assumptions enacted through this linguistic performance alludes to the purpose of education as being vocational only, and this is ironically justified under the premise of social justice. In effect, this particular parlance constrains conceptions of social justice so that it aligns with neoliberal modernist rationalities. There is an absence of discursive performance to incite any other imaginaries and possibilities for alternative means of engagement. The agenda for dialogue on the relationship of education to employment is posited on these terms and the pre-authored language has become ubiquitous to the national debate amongst communities within development economic politics in South Africa. In the process, voices of parents, students, educationalists, and politicians converge in a ‘common sense’ rationale that is reproduced as an unquestionable, prevailing ‘truth’. As Papier comments:

The learning society sees learning as geared towards the achievement of credentials which are supposed to be relevant to the labour market, and which ensure inclusion in a knowledge-based learning society, and it is herein that lies the rub. New vocational qualifications were intended to meet these twin goals, yet the Working Group on Reform established by the Department for Education and Skills was asked, as recently as 2004, to deal with the com-

plaints from employers and higher education that “young people leave education without the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to function in the workplace or education”. Furthermore, vocational programmes were criticised as being fragmented and confusing, only some having credibility with employers, not being perceived as worthwhile in their own right, and parents and learners being unenthusiastic about the status and quality of the learning on offer (Bhorat et al., 2006, p. 4)

The prevailing performance of ‘relevance’ discourses and the reification of ‘the real’ over ‘the academic’ or ‘intellectual’ perpetuate the hyper-pragmatic pull of the neoliberal zeitgeist, so that only vocational learning counts as ‘real learning’. From the perspective of South Africa in ‘crisis’, it is not difficult to comprehend the dominance of this reconstructed hierarchy of knowledge (which renders indigenous ways of knowing as being equally as irrelevant as that of Western Enlightenment in this new configuration) when we note the contraction of the formal sector labour market and the concomitant ‘skills shortage’ assertions that feed the performances of ‘failure’, cynicism, and ‘crisis’ in South Africa.

The social and formal practices of neoliberalism deepen each time ‘crisis’ is performed creating the necessary vulnerabilities of economic development politics for control to be encoded and entrenched. As Pieterse (2010) reminds us: “Crisis is intrinsic to development [and] that development knowledge is crisis knowledge” (p. 2). It is a notion inherent to economic development in the African context whereby “the ideology of development (is) exploited as a means for reproducing political hegemony” (Aka, 1996, p. 9). This sense of urgency in development discourses on ‘relevance’, ‘the real’ and ‘crisis’ as a pragmatic common-sense response come through clearly in Papier’s words:

Year after year we fail our learners, not only in the classrooms but when they leave schools in the hope of earning a living. The system fails them by offering few viable options for work or learning or both. Learning is either too expensive or too irrelevant and formal employment scarce. Vocational qualifications need to become desirable because they offer real learning and real skills, inspire confidence among employers, are affordable by the masses who need training, and because the learning pathway is clearly sign-posted. This is what the policy has promised, but it seems we are still a long way off from achieving it (Bhorat et al., 2006, p. 6).



Papier's 'the masses who need training' typifies the general attitude toward the broader South African population, which is perceived as illiterate, uneducated and poor. This is the group into which poor youth fall. This does not project a vision of possibility of a structurally-transformed society premised on egalitarianism and justice. It is, instead, a discursive reproduction of the *status quo*, where 'the masses' are recruited into existing relations and where education is not viewed as a powerful intellectualising means of creating and enacting agency and alternatives to that *status quo*. As Harrison (2010) implies, the neoliberal repertoire reconciles itself to existing fragilities of the state and society within those structures. In this way, the social divisions of labour produced by apartheid align well with the neoliberal production of labour pyramid, and the existing intellectual-labour hierarchy is reinforced through similar authoritarian means while holding in place the same racialised, classist and gender inequalities as before, albeit only slightly reconfigured for the 'new South Africa'.

Nevertheless, other analysts argue that creative alternatives lie with 'quality' of education, not an increase in the mass production of vocational training *per se*. Erasmus, Steyn and Mentz (2005) speak of the benefits that education can provide. They posit that South Africa's economy has suffered under low educational standards. In fact, unlike Papier, these authors state that the major challenge lies in the economic shift on the global market away from primary labour to positions that demand a higher level of education (*ibid*, 2005, p. 18) and a different type of 'skill-set'. They profess that as unemployment has become rife, exacerbated by the globalisation of informatics, the criterion to meet employment standards has become dependent upon levels of education. Their outlook is highlighted by their acknowledgement of the diminishing jobs available in the formal sector, leaving only the remaining informal sector to make up for the former's inability to provide employment. They state: "the informal sector is indeed seen as a sector with great potential for creating jobs for people who have not been able to access the mainstream economy" (Schlemmer and Levitz, 1998, p. 78, as cited in Erasmus, Steyn & Mentz, 2005, p. 21). Whilst their view of education carries the same economic instrumentality as Papier's, they differently emphasise the need for higher levels of education. This is as opposed to those that would advocate for an abandonment of the intellectual domain in favour of a purview of education that is reduced to 'training' for 'the masses', while its more robust intellectual manifestation is only available for the privileged few in line with capitalism's Maslowian pyramid.

These are the debates in which youth in South Africa are currently enmeshed, their options as racialised and gendered young people falling within the interstices between conflicting debates on employment, the economic and developmental future of the country, postcolonial aspirations, and the various ways in which the framing of the purposes of education conflict with the prevailing realities of contemporary South Africa.

Not only are there socialising practices to attend to via competing discourses on socio-economics and education as sites of struggle for meaning and ideological supremacy, but there are also institutional and structural practices as well. These practices shape what is possible, for whom, and under what conditions, and invoke such considerations as uneven 'access' to means. Consequently, historical legacy, embodiments and materialities of injustice, and neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 1991) as 'political evils' (Hayden, 2009; Swanson, 2012) play a significant role in the production and delimitation of possibility and the (un)viability of alternatives for South African youth today.

FROM INDIGNATION TO HOPE: NARRATING POSSIBILITY

I return to Xoliswe's story. I started out by explaining that there have been two seemingly unrelated but interconnected incidents in my recent experience as an academic in South Africa that haunt me. Xoliswe's experience haunts me like Derrida's (1994) ghosts that mark the absence of possibility and the silence created by what cannot be said. Yet, another incident that deeply affected me was that of a student from another faculty, whom I never knew and who never knew me. I will call the student Anele. Anele broke into my office one weekend and was subsequently arrested for theft of my computer equipment and other valuables. I spent the next three weeks dealing with the local South African police and the inner workings of institutional authority and bureaucracy. It was a discombobulating experience that harkened back, to a small degree, to my experiences of the police while I was a university student during the liberation struggle in the 80s and early 90s. The callousness and indifference to human plight is a mark of that experience, although this issue is understandably complex and not easily generalisable.

What was most troubling was learning about Anele without ever having the opportunity to meet him. Anele was placed in police custody after hav-



ing been searched by campus security when he tried to wheel the equipment off campus in a large luggage case. Theft on campus is rife, so the security personnel are always on heightened alert. After three weeks of dealing with police issues, when I was finally asked to come into the police station to collect my equipment, I had to identify the items in the luggage case.

Amongst my own items and computer equipment lay Anele's personal things: his cap, a student card, his student transcript and one or two other personal items. I felt as if I were intruding on his personal space. The fact that this act of theft had been done to me in the first place did not seem to make the inverse right. Moreover, when Anele broke my office window to enter the room, he cut his arm accidentally in the process. My office had stains everywhere from where the blood had dripped from Anele's arm. It was a gruesome sight indeed and a disturbing experience! It was a material representation of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) on many levels and as a representative of higher education in South Africa, I felt as if I were the symbolic perpetrator.

How had the university and South African community failed Anele, a young South African who seemed to have his whole future ahead of him? How alienated must he have felt to perpetrate this act of theft when the act of going to university in itself is meant to offer the hope of better alternatives? How was Anele's blood left in my office symbolic of the blood of all South African youth who are alienated by educational institutions and the institution of our nation state that has failed them? How might we read from Anele's actions, not the deficit of yet another 'failed citizen' that marks the woes of a developing country in stress, but as an opportunity to challenge the *nature* of the 'change' set in place by the current 'transformation agenda' that has heralded in a future of mass youth unemployment and struggle? How are Xoliswe and Anele's stories connected via discursive traces of injustice, and how might we work to undo the frames of deficit and despair and replace them with a humanising future of opportunity and hope?

Both Xoliswe and Anele's experiences converge in indifference and alienation, even though each student pursued different options. I wonder if I had not been able to intervene, would Xoliswe have resorted to Anele's actions? How can we begin to understand or have the audacity to preside in judgement over those youth who experience such dire poverty? How do we turn the indignation of poor South African youth into situations that embody and breathe hope? How do we reframe (in)difference? Rather than only eco-

conomic instrumentalities and a pre-authored neoliberal modernist future for our youth, are there not better, more just imperatives for change that we should be seeking in South Africa? How do we, in Freirian terms, stand up and fight with anger *and* with love for our youth today, turning this era into one of possibility rather than one of predetermination? ... I can think of no worthier cause, no greater challenge for us all.

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