"What would they do if you greeted?" The Potentiality of Greetings in the New South Africa

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Nelson Mandela's death in December 2013 and the twentieth anniversary of South African democracy that followed shortly thereafter in 2014 prompted numerous public discussions about how the South African present compares with that of 1994. As South Africans and South Africanists reflected on the country's changes during this time, their questions inevitably veered towards evaluations about whether life had improved for most since the end of apartheid. Public discussions and debates often centred on trends regarding economic classes, unemployment rates, violence, governance, resource distribution, development measures, integration or education. Put another way, it was most often government policies that are being evaluated, as though it was only the change in government and its policies from which two decades of life experiences stem. Certainly, there are other kinds of evaluations circulating in particular spaces and moments. For instance, at an academic conference I attended in early 2014 that focused on this twenty year anniversary, the themes that arose across papers included consumption and neoliberalism on one hand and failure, futurelessness, despair and precarity on the other. Sporadic iterations of spectacular racism have also sometimes made their way into the public sphere and prompted reflections about how much people's understandings of race and privilege have changed in the new South Africa. The trend in all these evaluations is clear. It seems that at this moment almost anyone other than the ANC or South African government is likely to declare South Africa to be at best a society rife with problems and at worst, a sinking ship.

At the same time, nostalgic discourse circulates among South Africans of a well-ordered, predictable and secure world before a tragic fall. This past was reputably a time when residential walls were mere wire fences to contain dogs, children played freely in the streets without risk of their bikes being stolen, trams criss-crossed the urban landscape without risk of disruption due to stolen cables, children went to schools with desks and textbooks for all, consumerism didn't entrap people in debt, different people resided together in a world of Ubuntu and neighbours helped one another.

Jacob Dlamini interprets the coincidence of present despair and nostalgic reminiscing about the past to reflect South Africans' sense of being "adrift in a world seemingly out of control" (2009:16). This nostalgic constitutes a yearning "…for order in an uncertain world" (Dlamini 2009:14). Or as Svetlana Boym describes it, "modern nostalgia is a mourning for…the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values" (2001:8). This lack of moorings experienced now is anxiously projected into future lives as well.

Of course there are problems today and aspects of the past that were better by comparison, but neither of these dominant narratives about contemporary South Africa defines or describes lives as wholly as the rhetoric would suggest. Most South Africans' experiences are not only of hopelessness; and, indeed, others refuse these narratives and actively work towards creating other kinds of futures.

When these two discourses are taken together, it is an indeterminacy or the unknown of the present that underlies both and, I suggest, significantly shapes life experiences at present. Understanding the South African present as one of flux and uncertainty offers a more productive lens for making sense of the dominant narratives that circulate within and beyond the country's borders as well as the contradictions seemingly apparent in discourses and the kinds of choices people make in daily life. This framing makes space for capturing the

dynamism of life experience as well as the fears and anxieties that motivate people's everyday behaviour and long-term decisions, alongside hope. Most important to my interest in trying to identify and describe the ways through which positive social change might proceed is that this framing encourages theorising that is open, that analytically allows for change, rather than crystallizing South African experience in one teleological direction or another.

It is particularly scholars working on questions pertaining to societies in transition or crisis, post-conflict areas or globalisation who have advocated for the benefits of approaching people's practices through a lens of uncertainty because this offers a more honest depiction of life experiences.[1] The challenge for scholars studying lives amidst crisis, propose Biehl and Locke, is "whether our analytics remain attuned to the intricacy, openness, and unpredictability of individual and collective lives" (Biehl and Locke 2010:318). It is by intensive attention to "people's everyday struggles and interpersonal dynamics" that they suggest scholars might understand how change actually happens. (Biehl and Locke 2010:318). Similarly, a focus on the regularities of social life leaves aside (and trivializes) unusual, temporary phenomenon which might instead offer glimpses of innovation and resistance (Niehaus 2013:652; Malkki 1997:92; Moore 1987).

This paper is situated in this context of uncertainty and starts to attend to the scholarly call for analytical approaches that highlight uncertainty. Rather than evaluate social change in South Africa today, I posit that South Africa now is in flux and I instead aim to understand how ordinary South Africans not only negotiate landscapes of uncertainty but also how individuals enact new possibilities in this context. As I've insinuated above, doing so necessitates accounting for, but looking beyond dominant discourses and people's explicit reports about what their lives now look like. Instead I analyse how people talk about everyday experiences of their neighbourhood, a seemingly innocuous space of banality. More specifically, I analyse the greeting practices of neighbours in Sophiatown as I found that they constituted a meaningful, everyday trope for both describing relationships with others and for experimenting with new notions of self and other.[2] With this framework I broadly aim to describe how social change is happening in urban South Africa today.

In what follows I will first argue for the significance of approaching complex worlds of uncertainty through the everyday. I will then contextualise the discussion of greeting practices within a description of how individuals described their experiences with change in their suburb. Next I will discuss greetings and their meanings for individuals. In the last section, I describe the role of greeting practices in the formation of subjectivities to argue that greetings constitute moments of possibility, comprising both potential innovation and risk of the reproduction of past social structurings.

The material I draw from in this paper was selected from a large body of qualitative research conducted by myself and other social researchers at the University of Johannesburg between 2009 and 2012 in a nearby Johannesburg suburb, Sophiatown. This larger project aimed to foster community building in Sophiatown by creating opportunities for residents of

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1 Kay Warren makes this point for anthropologists in her contribution to a special issue on transitional justice. "Communities, whatever their scale, continue in heterogeneous ways to reconstitute themselves as they make the world their own, inevitably in the face of tremendous economic and political constraints on their action. As a result, anthropology has increasingly become the study of instability and fragmentation, of systems caught in contradictory currents of change." (Warren 2002:380). See also (Biehl and Locke 2010; Niehaus 2013; Vigh 2011).

2 In the context of this paper and the research on which it is based, I and the other researchers typically used "neighbour" very imprecisely to refer to individuals who resided in the suburb so as to allow residents to determine the meaning of the term. In practice, most residents used "neighbour" to talk about those who lived in closed proximity to them – within a few houses, on the same street or block – and whom they recognized.

this more recently diverse suburb to share and discuss their experiences in the suburb and elsewhere.[3]

The Everyday

As many scholars argue, this complexity and dynamism is better apprehended through a focus on everyday life.. By everyday I mean the rhythms of a typical day, including usual sights, sounds, rituals that one comes to expect, as well as the unanticipated situations, people, and objects one encounters in these daily rhythms or those that disturb them. Individuals experience the everyday both as social being and as individual subjects. Everyday life has tended to evade the focus of evaluations like those above perhaps because it is a sphere that's often considered unmarked and unremarkable.

Everyday life is not separate from, but also not wholly determined by larger scale changes and people usually do not experience life in the abrupt, seemingly bounded shifts that large scale changes appear to be. Despite larger scale changes of government or economy, everyday life proceeds, even if amidst tremendous disruptions (Ghodsee 2011:xiv; Dlamini 2009).[4] In this realm, change is often both more subtle and more extensive. Somehow, people find ways to negotiate changing terrain. Indeed, everyday life is part of "dynamic and changing material, sensory and social environments, and shifting ways of perceiving, knowing and being" (Pink 2012:14).

For example, in the following excerpt several Triomf-era residents of Sophiatown compare the old and new governments via the everyday.[5]

Dave: Do you have more or less faith that elected officials will listen to people?

Cora: I think this government in power now is starting to wake up now.

Nellie: It seems so.

Cora: Too much corruption and they let it go before. I think the tide is turning now. Either we do something or more people will leave the country.

Cora: I have hope. I am not leaving.

Nellie: I am a born optimist.

Dave: Was it any different when the National Party was in power? Were they more responsive?

Cora: You would not see so much poverty on the street. I know a black guy in Langlaagte who is completely cuckoo. Now he has shoes, now he hasn't. He's just walking up and down in the street. No shoes. In the old days the social workers would pick him up and put him in a home.

Cora They looked after people better.

Jan: Control them.

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[3] For a more detailed picture of Sophiatown see both my description later in this paper and the introduction to this special issue.

[4] See, for example, Ghodsee's ethnography about the continuation of everyday life in post-communist Eastern Europe (2011).

[5] I use the label "Triomf-era" residents to refer to those who lived in the suburb prior to desegration and continue to live here.

Cora: Now there are no services. That should come right. They should look after people better. One pension for a granny of 90 looking after eight children. She is a black lady. That is ridiculous! You can't get a grant [for guardians] if you don't have birth certificates. Ridiculous. My girl lives here in Westdene and she wants an RDP house where she comes from, but they say, "No you don't live there." Why can't she have one if it's for everyone? It's her future.[6]

This excerpt illustrates that even an explicit discussion about the old and new governments, it is in very everyday kinds of ways that this shift is observed and evaluated. The old government is lauded for its social welfare policies through the example of a man Cora regularly sees on the street. And her critique of the new government's policies are set in her understandings of her domestic worker's experiences. As Cora sees it, the government – which she implicitly suggests would minimally be expected to take care of "its own people": blacks – is not providing the social support to her black domestic worker that it claims.

Focusing study on everyday life, Brown contends, permits both better opportunities for documenting conflict and change as well as for seeing the complexity and context of change in transitional societies (Brown 2012). It constitutes the actual terrain in which transitional justice tools or government policies can do their work and thus a thorough understanding of the complexities of everyday life is essential for any program's success. It also makes visible the "zones of engagement" and the ongoing or emergent networks of social solidarity that may influence political mobilization on a larger scale (Brown 2012:446–450). It unveils everyday contexts and facets of conflict as well as the "ambiguities, contradictions, and counterintuitive understandings of a divided society" that might otherwise remain trivialized (Brown 2012:447–457). By investigating "agnostic everyday engagement," Brown proposes, we might better understand "ways in which communities are experimenting with living together" (Brown 2012:466).

Similarly, to better envisage interventions for societies undergoing transition, Eastmond and Selimovic, advocate for focusing on people's daily practices, the means by which they build and re-build their lives after a time of significant change. This approach also serves to make visible practices that pose a challenge to dominant narratives of divisiveness, or rather, the enactment of affinities, and better describe the complexity of such societies (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012:523).

In particular, Eastmond and Selimovice propose that "ideas or practices that despite the devastation remain recognizable and trusted templates for interaction" -- like what Mary Kaldor terms "islands of civility" -- are particularly productive for the creation of new forms of sociality after conflict (2012:523; 2007:117). In this paper, I focus on one such everyday practice – greeting – that stood out as significant to me as I listened to Sophiatown residents talk about daily life in a number of different contexts. In one sense, greetings are universal to polite encounters with others in South Africa. In another, however, the rules of greeting are far more nuanced. As Josephides lightheartedly concludes for politeness practices more generally, "though politeness is concerned with face-saving, cultural norms determine which faces will be saved, how, and on what occasion" (Josephides 1999:142).

Experienced Change

In Sophiatown, many residents noted that life today is very different from what they remember experiencing in the past. Certainly, in the context of the life in the suburb, the most talked about marker of this shift was the changing demographics of neighbours and others visible in public spaces. Many residents readily described Sophiatown as "mixed culture,"

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[6] Cora is referring to the government's income-based, free housing allocation program and its eligibility rules.

"multi-racial," or "lot of different people."[7] And some perceive a wider trend: whites have moved out while coloureds have moved in. They also usually identified those living around them using national, ethnic, or racial terms such as Afrikaner, Black, Zimbabwean, or Portuguese. Overtly, then, they perceived these changes primarily in terms of race and ethnicity. However, most don't expressly comment on the suburb in these abstract terms about demographic change. In more extensive conversations, change was much more personal, invasive, and nuanced and was most visible in residents' everyday challenges, decisions and experiences.

For most residents, this shift was largely about a change of community – either a different physical space or ways of interacting with neighbours. Some experienced this change in rather abrupt terms. They moved to Sophiatown from a place in which there was more noise or more worries about dangerous influences on your children, a place where you could borrow sugar from your neighbour or where you looked out for others' children and they did the same for you. Others described an ongoing transition that began shortly before 1994 and that was not a marked leap between "old" and "new", as discourse suggests.

Two newer residents of Sophiatown both agreed that the greatest difference that 1994 made in their lives was that "it gave us choice." Indeed, for some residents, this was what brought them to reside in Sophiatown.

> Jackey: But even with those changes came challenges.... My mother had no choice. She had to move over the street from Sophiatown to "Western Native Township" — that's what it was called. But in 1998 when I wanted to leave the environment of Westbury and move to Triomf I had a choice: Do I want to raise my children in that environment or do I want a better life for my children? And then I made a choice. I said to myself, "I will buy in Triomf." Triomf looked like a beautiful place from outside, from Westbury where I was staying. It was quiet. There will be room. You will have breathing space. That's what you tell yourself.

Jackey explained that the problems of Triomf only became visible once she'd moved in. It was then that she recognized that her choice to live in a seemingly better place also came with challenges, one aspect of which was discerning the unspoken rules of the suburb.

> So coming into this new environment I obviously needed to adjust because what people actually do and think in Triomf is totally different from the environment that I came from. So at first you will keep to yourself and feel the place around. Some of the stuff I bring from Westbury to Triomf people might not see as good. There are certain things you do in Triomf and certain things you're not supposed to do. I could pick up something from the Triomf environment that I can embrace and learn from.

While the democratic transition was ostensibly about the opening up of possibilities for the majority of the South African population, these possibilities still came with certain constraints. And moving into a new neighbourhood didn't mean you immediately became part of a new neighbourhood. From the perspective of a new resident, one did not feel a sense of belonging and instead felt pressure to conform to the imagined behavioural norms of one's neighbours. Jackey had to figure out how to compromise the ways of Westbury, or coloureds, with those of (white) Triomf. Yet these expectations aren't explicitly stated anywhere so, as a new resident, Jackey felt compelled to "feel the place around". This choice heralded a sense of precarity in daily life as one wondered when you might cross an invisible line or violate a silent rule. Jackey's experience reflects the ways in which many new residents of Sophiatown

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[7] Desegregated neighbourhoods have been fairly uncommon in South Africa. Seekings highlights work by A. Christopher on desegregation rates up to 2001 to argue that segregation rates have changed little since the democratic transition in South Africa (2008:11-12).

described the transition – largely as one of new opportunities, new responsibilities and new constraints that had to be sought out and tested in practice. Negotiating these new experiences proved to be a nearly unending source of uncertainty.

For those who lived in Triomf at the time of the transition, changes were experienced differently. Most people described nuanced and extensive changes – blurring between changes attributed to 1994 and those merely attributed to "modern times". The following excerpt from a conversation among several older Triomf-era residents and two UJ researchers exemplifies the texture of change as many older residents seem to have perceived it.

Dave (UJ): You were saying you hoped people can live together peacefully? Is that happening now? Is there progress?

Cora: I don't think we are progressing, not at all. The lady on the corner — she works for SABC — and I had our first fight. She said "You are a racist." I replied: "No, that's not true. The noise is so great I can't sleep right through the night." Not one of the neighbours would take a stand. They were scared of her. I came back Sunday afternoon. Boy oh boy, it was such noise, and I had had a big operation that week. I phoned the guy next door and asked "What do you think of this?" He was really sick with pneumonia. He said, "I am listening to Pavarotti." I said "Why don't you do something?" "No, I can't," he said. So I phoned Cathy Seefort and she came immediately with the police and stopped them. But as soon as they left and turned the corner, they started the noise again. I called Cathy again and held up the phone and said "Listen!" They came back. Then we phoned the owners. It was me.

Nellie: So it was you!

Excelda: They said, "It must be that white b**** again."

Cora: I feel what's right is right. If my dogs make a noise, I lock the gate and bring them in the house. I don't want my dogs to disturb the people. They are here for my protection. But I won't allow them to make a noise.

Nellie: You must give them a reasonable amount of time. They say you've got to give them till midnight because some people have parties.

Cora: My coloured neighbours also have parties. When they are there, they have a braai often. I don't know how they afford it. I only get the smell, their parties stop at 10 or 11 at night. That's reasonable. I can't complain.

On one hand this excerpt is quite trivial; it is simply about noise in one's everyday home life. Differing expectations among neighbours about what is appropriate are clearly being contested and adjusted with changing neighbours. On the other hand, while they see their own normative expectations about noise as simply given --unmarked, they read the behaviour of others as racially specific such that conflict over noise might swiftly mutate into a racial conflict. Thus, there's clearly a precarity underlying the ways in which neighbours choose to interact with another – one might rather elect to simply drown out the offending noise with Pavarotti than to risk this kind of conflict. As was made visible above with Jackey's reflections on moving in, the other neighbours may be just as concerned about figuring out Cora's expectations so as not to create a conflict.

At the same time, the fears and anxieties about the transition are not long past and may continue to inform the way Triomf-era residents, in particular, approach new residents. Fears of a "race war" reportedly circulated powerfully among some white South Africans. A

number of Triomf-era residents spoke about how they had prepared for such possibilities. When Clement and his family sought a home in Sophiatown after the transition, they found a vivid monument to this fear in the form of a room beneath their garage. Here Clement discusses the room and the context of its making with a Triomf-era resident.

> Clement: It was intended as a hiding place or shelter just before Madiba was released in 1990 and during the transition of the old South Africa into the new South Africa. There were rumours that there was going to be hunger, people might fight and kill, white against black. You know what I'm saying? What I understand was that people were told to stash food, you know.

> Susan: Yes, I lived like that too. We were even told to stash toilet paper.

> Clement: Everything, yes.

> Susan: And candles.

> Clement: So this is where this room is coming from. It would also be a place so that if there is a war and there is a blood-bath then you can take your family and hide away because everything is reinforced.

While the initial stimuli of fear have passed, similar anxieties persist for many South Africans. More particular to this example, many Triomf-era residents continue to feel a sense of insecurity and uncertainty, both about how to live the lives they want in an unfamiliar world and what to anticipate about the future. While they may have chosen (or not had the resources to do otherwise) to remain in their homes to the present, the world around them seems to have transformed. Some seemingly choose to seek refuge in the security of a self-contained life, as though living in Clement's bunker, and others are trying to make out a new order or at least how to get by on a daily basis.

What I also hope to have illustrated with these brief glimpses of how some current Sophiatown residents have experienced the South African democratic transition is that much of what all of these individuals have felt as a precarious present has been experienced through everyday engagements with (or purposeful avoidance) neighbours. As is evident in the examples above, residents very often described their neighbours or other residents as doing things differently, disrespectfully, or incorrectly. These differences were often discussed in the context of describing their relationships with neighbours so these differences in values, expectations, or practices emerged as problems or tensions with neighbours. Negotiating such differences is difficult, particularly when these differences seem to impinge on your enjoyment of your home space, as can be the case for neighbours. While these observations may also serve as a language for talking about imagined racial or ethnic difference, that people so persistently remarked about differences in the spaces of everyday life remains significant for noticing where and how changes of the South African transition are actualised.[8]

Of course, the suburb wasn't the only place in which individuals experienced and responded to change or even the only place in which difference infused everyday experiences.[9] The location in which people see difference, however, certainly matters to their

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[8] To, M'charek's piece on race as an effect of relationships between differences, in which he examines how race is enacted in practice, would be useful to further consider how these noted differences may overlap with imagined racial differences (2013)

[9] See (Seekings 2008:16) for a brief review of studies on inter-racial interaction in the workplace.

experience of it (Ruddick 2004:26).[10] In a similar way, rules and obligations of interaction vary according to context (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002:353). A shop manager and a customer will likely interact very differently from a two co-workers. What differentiates experiences with neighbours from others like encounters in public spaces is that neighbours' everyday routines may intersect with those of others in more regularized and even intimate ways. Adjacent neighbours, for example, become familiar with the routines of neighbours through the sounds and smells that cross the high walls physically separating then. One comes to recognize the other's dogs after passing by their gate on daily returns from work. Or, once one has had a difficult exchange with a neighbour, that experience may be relived each time one passes the other in daily routines.

At the same time, residents of Sophiatown described a lifestyle in which neighbours don't know one another. And, indeed, some urbanists have claimed this as an inescapable reality of atomism: "While [urbanism] unites separate fragments and integrates the population, it unites and integrates them only in their separateness" (Pinder 2004:111). However, scholars working on issues related to neighbouring reinforce what seems implicitly so in Sophiatown, as is apparent in the examples above: While there are unspoken rules guiding neighbours' interactions, neighbours do not live in the world as utterly disconnected strangers (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002:353). First, in their edited volume about the making of cities as places, Field et al find a common desire among city dwellers to sustain a materially and emotionally secure sense of place and identity that requires social practices that allow interaction with neighbours (2007:6–7). Secondly, there are numerous situations that arise within the shared neighbourhood or street space, such as malfunctioning electrical substation or criminal activities, that stand to constitute moments of interaction, potential "integrative events" (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002:354). Like Lauerier, Whyte and Buckner's interest in "how the approaching is done by one neighbour and how other neighbours allow themselves to be approached," I have also sought out such everyday forms of interaction (2002:353). In the following section, I turn to a discussion about greeting practices, as one regular and meaningful means of engagement with neighbours.

Greeting Neighbours

Social scientists have long argued that relationships among neighbours are necessary to create functional neighbourhoods, which include a sense of community(Warren 1977; Farrell, Aubry, and Coulombe 2004).[11] Questions about what constitutes these relationships or how they should be evaluated often leads to the treatment of normative relationships between neighbours as universal and idealized, rather than particular to a given context or set of actors (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002:364). In this framing, the practice of greeting neighbours is often identified as an important component of these relationships, and yet, the role of greetings is delimited in these studies. They are treated as mere indicators to be analysed by social scientists in measuring community, neighbouring (behaviour), neighbourly relationships (e.g., disengaged or friends) or social integration.[12] Certainly, as Sophiatown residents described, greetings may have led to friendly relationships or to animosity and yet I suggest there are many good reasons to see greeting practices as substantive, meaningful and productive neighbouring.

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[10] Notions of how difference is perceived in others also intersects with a large body of work coming out of social psychology on the "contact hypothesis" – the idea that contact between groups improves their relations, particularly in everyday life. For discussions of this hypothesis in a South African context see the 2010 special issue of the Journal of Social Issues 66:2 (Dixon et al. 2010; Durrheim and Dixon 2010; Erasmus 2010).

[11] See, for example (Warren 1977; Farrell, Aubry, and Coulombe 2004; Unger and Wandersman 1985)

[12] See, for example, (Kleit 2005; Putnam 2007; Hoogendoorn and Visser 2007)

From the perspective of anthropologists, linguists or primatologists, greetings constitute significant social behaviour. Indeed a few decades ago, greetings fell within a broad concern among anthropologists: how do humans use semiotic systems to create meaning? Linguistic anthropologist Alessandro Duranti has worked extensively on greetings and provides a succinct overview of the ways in which scholars have worked with greetings. Ethnologists study greetings – usually nonverbal features – to understand evolutionary bases of human behaviour (Duranti 1997:64). Conversation analysts have shown that greetings consist of sequential pairs of acts (Duranti 1997:65). Speech act theorists have particularly looked at how greetings function as "acknowledgment of another person's presence" (Duranti 1997:66). Ethnographic studies tended to focus on the cultural specificity of greeting behaviour, but have also highlighted some more widespread aspects such as the importance of status, manipulation and identity formation (Duranti 1997:65). It is the latter two areas of enquiry that resonate with what I heard in Sophiatown.

While at first read it may seem as though Sophiatown residents noted greetings in passing as they described relationships with neighbours, I suggest with Duranti that greetings are not merely formulaic indicators of something else, an interpretation with which many social scientists seem to be content (Duranti 1997:63–64). If one listens carefully to residents as they talk about greetings, it's apparent that there is more going on than simply assessing neighbourly relations. In the following example, workshop participants were asked to map their relationships with neighbours, using the thickness of lines to signify the extent of relationships. It appears as though Collin dismissively described insignificant relationships with people residing in a neighbouring apartment block:

> So I've indicated that with Oliander, they're just neighbours. We just greet them in passing, that is why there is a thin line…line to say we just greet each other, meet each other, but there's no definite friendships there.

And yet when this comment is situated in more extensive conversations with him, it is apparent to me that what Collin is describing here are intentional acts of negotiating an uncertain social environment. He is careful not to offend anyone and yet also to exclude most people from his social networks in a determined attempt to protect his family from negative influences. To simply equate greetings with weak neighbourly relationships misses the purposeful behaviour underlying Collin's report. This also reveals much about his past interpersonal experiences and sense of uncertainty about the social landscape in which he now lives. In this example, greeting practices are about creating safe networks in which to raise his son and blocking harmful forms of sociality.

At first glance, greetings may also seem to be merely a component of polite behaviour. Indeed, some residents took the offering or return of greetings as an indicator of something about the character of that neighbour or her/his regard for the other. Many studies have also found that individuals used greeting practices to measure friendliness, approachability, politeness or respectability.[13] As in many places, greetings are broadly a fundamental aspect of polite, public behaviour in South Africa. Nazeem, for example, asserted that "It is just common courtesy to greet." Teacher similarly explained:

> My children, I teach them good morals. Respect is the key to everything. In the morning greet everybody, in the afternoon when you come back greet everybody.

Similarly, as an older, Triomf-era resident described his neighbours, he highlighted a neighbour's disregard for the norms of this practice – impolite behaviour: "The guy across the street… [he is] rubbish! He has a jungle in front of his house. He doesn't even greet! [The house is] dirty." Here the resident compared a lack of greeting with a home that wasn't cared

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[13] See, for example, (Ross 2005; Tessonneau 2005; Poindexter et al. 2013)

for to depict his neighbour in very poor terms. The lack of greeting was not interpreted as a personal affront, but rather as evidence to characterise his neighbour as a particular type of person. Indeed, the lack of greeting created a particular sort of meaning. Josephides's claims for practices of politeness are useful for thinking about greetings in these terms. Politeness, she says, is commonly understood as a "system of interactional face-saving devices in accordance with local conventions [and] is basic to the production of social order"(1999:139). These sorts of "agnostic interactions," she argues, "should be seen as cultural attempts to create meaning" rather than empty rituals (1999:141). Although originating from a different perspective than Duranti, using Josephides's approach to practices like greetings suggests that they should be approached as meaning-making practices. I take this as my starting point. I will describe a number of ways in which Sophiatown residents use and interpret meanings of greetings in order to then further theorise this practice.

To this point, residents also spoke about greetings as a means of recognizing others. For instance, another older, Triomf-era resident described his own greeting philosophy: "You know when a stranger passes through, you greet them, and he feels he is 100%. I greet everybody." He had clearly made a conscious, ethical choice about his own behaviour towards others. Further, greeting for him doesn't just demonstrate a friendly affect, but actually alters the stranger's sense of worth. In this sense, understanding greetings as an acknowledgement of another person's presence –one theoretical approach -- doesn't quite capture the fullness of meanings of greetings in Sophiatown.[14] (Duranti 1997:66). For others, greeting practices are connected with feelings of belonging.

> Father Neo: [For] us South Africans, that concept of Ubuntu - you belong to that, Ubuntu, even if you don't know a person, [he] says hi, you greet someone, that is when you start to share. You feel you are being accepted. You are part and parcel of that community.

Father Neo suggests that for many, and he's implicitly speaking of black South Africans here although he advocates for Ubuntu as a goal for all, greetings are mechanisms for constituting individuals as members of a shared community.

Like other social practices, greetings aren't ahistorical or closed and certainly don't proceed in isolation, although they may at first appear formulaic or routinized (Duranti 1997). Indeed, a number of ethnologists have emphasized the inextricable connections between meanings of greetings and the cultural context in which they proceed.[15] Caton, for example, argues that "a certain type of public person is being created in the speech event of greeting," via the speakers' particular uses of signs (1986:305). It is then "the interpretation of the meanings speech events create that are central to social interaction" (Caton 1986:305) (1986:305). Similarly, in Sophiatown, like any South African context, greetings, always intersected with the making (or unmaking) of social divisions imagined to be connected with the apartheid past. Whether and how another greeted you was understood to reflect relations of difference or similarity. One resident estimated that about half her neighbours greet, which she identified as a problem. She explained this as evidence that "apartheid is still here", suggesting something about a negative way that people treat each other. Shawn described greeting behaviours as embedded in culturally or racially specific notions of politeness and as tools of reproducing racial differences and hierarchies.

> But when you come into areas like Sophiatown, it doesn't bother me if I don't greet a white person. That is how they are, they don't respect, don't greet you, just passing

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[14] Duranti critiques this understanding for somewhat different reasons. If, by corollary, what is said during greetings is deemed formulaic or socially insignificant, then culture is made irrelevant (1997:66-67).
[15] See, for example, Duranti 1992 and Caton 1986.

by. It is like rude if you don't greet each other in our community. It does not bother me if I don't greet the white people, that is how they are, they don't respect you, they don't greet you. You don't have to greet them.

Indeed, some residents explicitly considered how social differences feature in making decisions about whether and how to greet another neighbour. Clement, for example, reflected on changes he'd experienced in his lifetime about who he (or members of his coloured family) could greet.

> We grew up in a time where we were told that the whites are the best. If I look at my grandparents in those days, they won't just go and introduce themselves [to a white person]. But now I can go to Oom Sarel and just ask him a question. My children can go to any white person and talk. In our time it was difficult, it's almost like a respect thing. You can't just talk, you understand.

For Clement, this shift in the etiquette of greeting practices wasn't just about someone acknowledging his presence in the new South Africa. It has to do with how he sees his subjectivity relative to others', indeed his value relative to others. He sees his changed experiences with greeting as part of a broader flattening of a violent social hierarchy, even if not (yet) wholly achieved. Greetings, then, are a site in which social change is both experienced and legible as such to those practicing greetings.

Thus, I find that philosopher Louis Althusser comes closer to a fuller conceptualization of greetings in his theorising about the relationship between material practices, like greetings, and ideology. He argues that it is through such practices that subjects are recognized, called into being, interpellated and at the same time that subjects constitute ideology through material practices (Althusser 1993:44–45).

By linking greeting practices with the formation of subjectivities and larger scale processes, greetings can surely not be written off as predictable rituals of interacting with neighbours. With careful observation, this is also evident in residents' narratives. One way in which this sense of greetings came up in narratives was individuals noting changes in who greeted whom. As Shawn reflected about moving into Sophiatown from a coloured township, he described such an experience with greetings:

I asked: What helped you feel more comfortable around white people? Is it something about living next to people that's different or just encountering them in a shop?

Shawn: Over time you get used to white people. You go to Shoprite and you buy your bread. It was a surprise to me to see a white lady and she becomes friendly to me. "Hi good morning, how are you?"

Shawn: When you meet it was like a culture shock, or reality shock. You say okay…

Shawn: We came to see what white people are like. They don't bother to greet people when they pass them on the street. Even when we lived only two doors away we didn't greet each other for one year. But when you come into areas like Sophiatown, it doesn't bother me if I don't greet a white person. I just think that is how they are. They don't respect, don't greet you. In our community, in Westbury, it is like rude if you don't greet each other. But now it doesn't bother me. They don't have to greet me and I don't have to greet them. That is why I was so shocked! This is something new, a white person greeting me!

That a white person greeted him was an astounding experience for Shawn because it broke with previous (and lingering) social conventions about the racialized structuring of greeting. Like Clement, he referred to a past in which an absence of such greeting experiences was part of a larger social hierarchy that measured human worth in racial terms.

Alluding to this same shift in greeting practices from the perspective of a white Triomf-era couple, Marie and Leon asserted that nothing has changed in the transition from Triomf to Sophiatown.

Leon: There is honestly no racism. Nothing as far as I know.

Marie: No racism.

Leon: We greet each other, talk to each other, help each other.

They clearly assumed that when my colleague, an (white) Afrikaans student, and I (white, American) asked about how the area had changed in the time they'd resided in their home we wanted to know how they experienced the change in the suburb from a white neighbourhood to a racially diverse area. But they cited greeting as evidence that race hadn't caused tensions among neighbours or a declining quality of neighbourliness. When contextualized both in the previous social conventions around greeting that Clement and Shawn describe and in the longer conversation with Leon and Marie in which they described several examples of how their social relationships had become less racially organized over time, Leon's remark above is clearly a reflection on social change. More specifically, it's also a remark about how Leon and Marie's own subjectivities have changed with the democratic transition, evidenced partially in their practice of greeting neighbours. You "have to move on", they explained.

A second way in which residents reference greeting practices in connection with social change has to do with changes in the language of greetings. Erica, a young black woman grew up in Triomf as a (twin) daughter of a domestic worker and they stayed with (in a room behind the house) the white family for whom she worked. Erica described a phone call she received after a number of years had passed without contact with this family:

Erica: … On our birthday two weeks ago … I got this phone call and I answered the phone; she is like "*Hello Erica, do you remember me, it is Christa?*" I was so shocked….And she just said "I just called to tell you it has been 12 years since the last time you found me, and it has been four years since I last saw you but I have never forgotten the day you were born". Oh that was so sweet….That was like the best birthday present ever. She said she is going to come and visit us during November….It is going to be her 60th birthday, so she is having a big bash, and my mother is invited and everything. So the thing is, when she called, she said, "*Tannie Christa*", but I remember; when we were small, in her house, we called her Missus. My mother called her Missus, so we called her Missus. So she has gotten along with the ages, and she said we should call her *Tannie Christa* now, no longer *Missus; Tannie Christa.*

Karie: So you see that as her having changed?
Erica: But she wasn't racist. My mother said she wasn't racist…

In a second example, Cora, an older white woman residing in the suburb since the Triomf era, described an occasion when she was walking home from the shops and saw a black child throwing a tantrum while her mother struggled to control her. Cora felt sorry for the mother and scolded the child for being naughty to her mother. After that day Cora reported that the little girl always greeted her: "Hello, Gogo!" Cora explained the significance to my American colleague: the girl used "Gogo", which she described as

meaning "grandmother", rather than "Tannie", as is expected among Afrikaans-speakers. She described this as a change in greeting conventions. Indeed, Cora recognized this expression as respectful, albeit in a different form from that to which she was accustomed. This was not good or bad, but just a result of things changing, Cora thought. Post-structuralists would agree with Erica and Cora that these small changes in language are indicators and constructors of social change.[16]

A group of older, white Triomf-era women talked about the kinds of social relationships with neighbours they remembered from Triomf and which neighbours they know now.

> Cora: I find lately people greet more than before. Especially the Black ones.

> Nellie: That is their culture.

> Dave: Black people are more likely to greet?

> Cora: Older people enjoy the garden and the dogs and they always greet.

According to these women, greetings practices that they recognized as "Black culture" have become more of the norm in Sophiatown.

And yet, greetings weren't always a site of new conventions and understandings played out in interpersonal experiences. They were also a site of anxiety, a site for trying out new social possibilities. Clement described just this when he described his earlier experiences in the suburb:

> It took me time to meet my neighbours. Fortunately for me I had very nice neighbours. So far no problems, but you were afraid. You moved into a different territory. You don't know whether you can greet. What would they do if you greeted? You don't want to get dogs because if they bark too loud or too much it might be a problem.

Greetings in this sense were part of a new terrain to be figured out, a social landscape to which many newer residents felt that they distinctly didn't belong. Jacky reflects similarly about her experience moving in:

> There are certain things you do [in Triomf]; certain things you're not supposed to be doing. And you don't know what they are when you move in. So therefore you will keep to yourself to try and feel the place around. Then, the first morning you will greet the person, hi hello. I'm your new neighbour. Hi. That's it. [The other person doesn't respond.] And that will put you off then and there and you will not go to that person any more. You will greet the person and you won't get a response back. And that is what warns you, stay away.

Although described in different terms, Clement's and Jacky's reflections on greetings and belonging echo the way in which Father Neo described the significance of greetings for constituting community above. From his perspective, these challenges that Clement and Jacky narrate aren't simply about territorial belonging but about a willingness or possibility to share "community".

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[16] McKinney takes up this broader argument in her analysis of students' talk about race in "the new" South Africa (McKinney 2007).

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Greetings then are also perceived to constitute one's sense of belonging (or "unbelonging", as one resident put it) or inclusion in a common community. Again, individuals act according to how they imagine themselves in relation to others, using largely paralinguistic cues to gauge and react to another's sense of you and your relative belonging. As previous examples illustrate, distinguishing possible belonging through greetings is overlaid with the apartheid past's baggage of social divisions, indeed hierarchies of humanness. Acts of re-inscribing or opening boundaries of belonging are most certainly moral ones.

Lauerier et al. argue that moral action is constitutive of the kinds of neighbouring practices that creates community. In their research, they sought out the "ordinary, spatially implicated methods neighbours use to display and recognize one another's actions as morally informed" (2002:348). Greetings, I suggest, are certainly one everyday way in which neighbours act or interpret others' actions in a meaningful way. They constitute a kind of moral practice. Similarly, a number of social scholars have also argued for the importance of recognising the formation of moral selves in the everyday, such as Lambeck's notion of "ordinary ethics" and Das' notion of "moral striving" (Lambek 2010; Das 2007; Das 2010). Mattingly's depiction of moral selves sounds very like the kinds of situations that residents report as they experience questions of greetings.

> Moral selves are "complexly motivated creatures who… find themselves befuddled about 'the good' or about who they should become, morally speaking and continue over time to revise and critique their past selves or revise and critique their future hopes in light of the things that have happened to them" (Mattingly 2012:309).

More simply, I suggest that residents' illustrations of greeting practices begin to show how individuals both consider their own moral action and interpret that of others at a historical moment in which the previous rules and predictability of sociality has disappeared, only to be replaced by a number of uncertainties. In these messy encounters with others, individuals form moral selves, or subjectivities. Or, to put it in different terms, subjectivities are made at the intersection of greeting practices and social change.

Making Selves

Before elucidating how subjectivities may be transformed via everyday practices like greetings I want to first clarify the nature of subjectivities that I suggest are at stake in these encounters. Although there's a tremendous body of literature on subjectivity, I will just highlight the meaning I have in mind for this discussion. Subjectivities, argue Kleinman and Fitz-Henry are always formed in intersubjective encounters, within the realm of experience, and are thereby historical, variable, heterogeneous and contingent (2007:53)...

> Experience is intersubjective inasmuch as it involves practices, negotiations, and contestations with other with whom we are connected. It is also the medium within which collective and subjective processes fuse, enter into dialectical relationship, and mutually condition one another. We are born into the flow of palpable experience, where our sense are first patterned by the symbols and social interactions of our local worlds. But our emergent subjectivities also return to those symbols and interactions, reconfiguring, repatterning, and sometimes even completely reinterpreting them. Experience, then, has as much to do with collective realities as it does with individual translations and transformations of those realities (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry 2007:53).

In this way, lived experiences shape and are shaped by processes that intersect but are not limited to a specific space and moment, which are "embedded in shifting exigencies of practical, everyday life as it unfolds in particular sociopolitical spaces" (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry 2007:54) (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007:28–29). Subjectivities, then, form and morph in particular places and moments through engagements with others.

> Recognizing the multiplicity of human conditions, we affirm that our subjectivities and the moral processes in which we engage are forever in flux – not static, abstract, biologically fixed or divorced from political, social and economic processes, but fluid, contingent, and open to transformation. As our worlds change, so do we. And as transnational trends, such as the latest phases of finance capitalism, remake the conditions of our lives and the parameters of our worlds, so, too, do they remake our most intimate inner processes: emotion, cognitive style, memory, our deepest sense of self (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry 2007:55).

Or, as Pink simply puts it, "[Everyday life] is where we make our worlds and where our worlds make us. Therefore everyday life is a context of human creativity, innovation and change…. (Pink 2012:5).

To further conceptualize how intersubjective experiences intersect with the production of subjectivities, I find the concept of "friction" that Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing develops to describe globalization helpful (Tsing 2005).

> I stress the importance of cross-cultural and long-distance encounters in forming everything we know as culture (e.g., Clifford 1997). Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call "friction": the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference. (Tsing 2005:4)

While the encounters she speaks of may include those beyond the geographic distances of a suburb, her notion of cultures produced in encounters and, more importantly, interconnections across difference, aptly describes the kind of productive capacity that I suggest is embodied in greeting practices. This captures both the unequal senses of belonging, social stutus, power and the uncertainty that underlie these practices. Her metaphorical use of "friction" – "the grip of the encounter" -- nicely evokes the possibilities of such interactions to reproduce past social differences and hierarchies or to create something new (2005:5):

> A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick along is just a stick. As a metaphysical image friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power. (Tsing 2005:5)

Potentiality

In emphasizing the dynamism, connectedness and frictious engagement of greeting practices I want to show how greetings constitute moments of possibility, or potentiality. As sites in which individuals make conscious, moral choices about how to act in response to and to enact wider social changes in unpredictable circumstances, greeting practices become a means of envisioning what is a wider anthropological concern in analysing how societies and phenomena are contested and dynamic as well as "how humans deal with that which is not in existence" (Taussig, Hoeyer, and Helmreich 2013:S6). "The question for us," explain Taussig, Hoeyer and Helmreich in their piece on the anthropology of potentiality, "is how closer attention to potential as an analytic can help us better understand these worlds"

(2013:S6). In other words, by placing the locus of analytics on the "gap between what is and what, might, could, or should be", rather than a mere description of what is or is not, or even crystalizing a world of uncertainty, using potentiality as an analytic opens space for understanding worlds in flux, in the process of becoming (Taussig, Hoeyer, and Helmreich 2013:S5).

From this space of apprehending worlds in process, Biehl and Locke take up Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's reflections on "becoming" to improve ethnographic work, particularly in spaces of volatility and crisis:

> In emphasizing the powers and potentials of desire (both creative and destructive), the ways in which social fields ceaselessly leak and transform (power and knowledge notwithstanding), and the in-between, plastic, and ever-unfinished nature of a life, Deleuze lends himself to inspiring ethnographic efforts to illuminate the dynamism of the everyday and the literality and singularity of human becomings. (Biehl and Locke 2010:318)

This notion of becoming offers analytical space to both take seriously the uncertain, shifting terrain of everyday life, of potentiality, and to examine how individuals manoeuvre through it, embodying dynamic subjectivities. On the individual level, everyday practices like greetings may constitute the kinds of events that Niehaus conceptualises as "critical sites of emergence" and Mattingly argues "serve as experiments in possible futures, small inaugurations into something that might constitute a fleeting experience or might portend a future different than one had envisioned" (Mattingly 2012:318; Niehaus 2013:653). Becoming makes conceptual space to account for humans to behave in such unexpected, even unthinkable ways, that are significant and meaningful to recognizing and understanding lives in flux.

> For in learning to know people, with care and an "empirical lantern" (Hirschman 19998:88), we have a responsibility to think of life in terms of both limits and crossroads—where new intersections of technology, interpersonal relations, desire, and imagination can sometimes, against all odds, propel unexpected futures (Biehl and Locke 2010:318).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to describe the nature of change in South Africa since 1994 but by foregrounding the kinds of everyday uncertainty that also comprise this change. I have explained the significance of the everyday and illustrated how residents of Sophiatown perceived change through this framework. I then focused on greeting practices among neighbours to highlight what I see as a particularly meaningful but ordinary way in which residents experienced change and its manifestation in the precarity of sociality among neighbours. Finally, I described how greetings constitute productive practices that stand to transform both individuals and the society of which they are a part.

I suggest that it is possible futures set against a historical social field of uncertainty and anxieties as well as accompanying affects – anger, hurt, disappointment, surprise, respected, warmth, affirmed, trusting, accepted, hopeful – that greeting practices make possible.[17] As *becoming* points to, potentiality in greetings plays out at an individual level, with each choice an individual makes about how to reconcile desires for community, privacy, self-preservation or moral behaviour with the particular moment of potential sociality – to greet or to ignore, to address in one's own language or the other's. As Mattingly concludes in her examination of

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[17] Of course, the way in which an individual understands the uncertainty of a potential encounter with a neighbor as well as the choices available and made are also informed by the historical subjectivity of that individual. Thus, greeting practices are not just a configuration of a simple matrix of personal desires.

the contexts in which people try to morally transform themselves and the material world around them:

> In Arendt's 'beginnings', Das' 'second chances', and my 'narrative experiments' and 'moral laboratories', we can hear an insistence upon the ordinary as a space in which something new can be created, however fragile and unpredictable its consequences. (2012:324).

One need only listen to how residents of Sophiatown negotiate the very ordinary, daily encounters with neighbours to gain a sense of how South Africa has or may change after the 1994 transition. Larger scale change has and may happen amidst the very uncertain context of everyday life both by individuals making choices about how to relate to neighbours – in the very simple act of greeting – and by the changes they undergo themselves through their experiencing these choices.

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