BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOODS
IN HEALTH AND AFFLICTION

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CHAPTER 4

'GROWING KIDS IN GOD'S WAY': AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL POLITICS OF CHILD-CENTRED HUMANITARIAN CARE AND RESCUE IN THE CONTEXT OF A CARE PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY SWAZILAND

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Introduction

This chapter draws on ethnographic research conducted in 2011 and 2012 in an abandoned asbestos mining town in Northern Swaziland. In 2001 the isolated 'ghost town' was bought by a Faith Based Organization (FBO) and transformed into what the FBO now terms a vibrant "sustainable orphan village". The research from which this chapter is drawn explores one aspect of the politics and practices of childcare and rescue in contemporary Swaziland. The argument is best understood against a backdrop of political uncertainty; economic crisis-related poverty; increasing numbers of children in need of extra familial care; and the parallel proliferation of humanitarian organisations set up to manage these systemic vulnerabilities. The broader study forms part of anthropological theory critically exploring the logics of humanitarian government, and particularly the philanthropic preoccupation with the project of child saving (Fassin, 2011).

Here I focus on the organisation's attempt to forge relational ties between the children under their care and the women employed to take care of them. This chapter focuses on the ideological forces behind the organisation's goals of re-

creating families and the ways these aspirations materialise at a ground level. I examine the ethics and impacts of the organisation's attempts to cultivate a particular kind of Christ conscious personhood among the young people under their care. The idea of 'growing kids in God's way' forms the moral foundations of the organisation's intention to raise Swaziland's "new leaders of tomorrow". As part of my broader research, I explored the question of *where* 'parentless' children should be placed. This chapter focuses on the lived realities of the organisation's ideas about *how* children, in the absence of close kinship circles 'should' grow.

Although a few informal and formal care options exist for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Swaziland, emerging in response to the profound demographic shifts brought about by AIDS-related mortality and widespread socioeconomic precarity, is a particular internationally sanctioned model of family-based care. Standing in opposition to the widely criticised institutional or 'dormitory style' form of OVC care, this model responds to the 'pressing need' to ensure that 'family-based care' is available for children (Chirwa, 2002:107; Meintjes, Moses & Berry, 2007; UNICEF, 2004:15). The childcare model utilised by the organisation under study responds to this need. It involves an attempt to provide in situ care to the increasing number of Swazi children left without psychosocial and economic support from their parents and extended families (Meintjes et al., 2007; Murtaugh, 2010:18). Each child is allocated to a separate household (or unit) along with two or three 'siblings' (if possible, biogenetically related) and under the care of a full time 'house-auntie'. The organisation upholds the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) ideal of emulating a 'traditional' network of familial care in a homelike, supposedly culturally appropriate community environment (UNICEF:2004:15; Meintjes et al., 2007). Like the iconic SOS children's village model, these units make up a village and includes its own school, clinic, dining facilities, and a church.

Re-birth

The village, 18 kilometers on untarred road from the nearest town, created a deeply isolated island-like feeling for the children that lived there. Yet, the village is of course, materially, ideologically and indeed emotionally, connected to the outside world. The village is reliant on a willing workforce beyond its borders, to the necessary 'stuff' that is donated and bought and brought in from elsewhere and

more generally, to the global circulation of humanitarian ideals and evangelical imaginings – or what Piot (2012:11) describes as the “Christian Global” (Laterza, 2012:31). Deeply interwoven into the village’s socio-economic and spiritual philosophy is the notion of rebirth. Since 2001, the village’s population has grown from 100 to over 1 000 residents. The organisation’s vision of sustainability manifests in the development of a number of business ventures (a mineral water plant and honey and milk production). Here, like Erica Bornstein describes in *The Spirit of Development* (2005) her institutional ethnography of Protestant non-governmental organisations in Zimbabwe, spirituality and economic development are inseparable. It is this inseparability of faith and finance that leads Laterza (2012) to refer to the village missionaries as ‘Business missionaries’. The director of childcare expressed:

Nothing we do is separated from faith, faith is the driver of change. If I am working in the lodge I could still do that for God. I can do that wherever I am...God has called me to this place to raise leaders, to look after orphans. Serving God and Christ, you do it everyday. It is interwoven into everyday. Its an individual relationship.

In this statement the director reveals how religious ideas, and particularly those attached to being a born-again Christian, a term associated with spiritual rebirth, salvation and a personal relationship with Christ, inform and intersect with “the moral dynamics of economic development” (Bornstein, 2005:1, 2; Fore, 2012:1).

Faith is seen here as the driving force of developmental change, infiltrating into every aspect of life and the sole foundation upon which all the businesses are built. Bornstein (2005:50) refers to this intention to live life in the manner and motivation of Christ in such a way that belief becomes inseparable from practice as ‘lifestyle evangelism’. Many of the staff in different business sectors told me that if you work in the village, no matter what you do whether in the dairy or the water plant, you are ‘doing it for the children’ – to raise money for *their* futures. Similarly, yet perhaps more transparently, the house aunties often spoke about how helping orphans was the *Christian thing to do*, but also something that would ensure their own place in the afterlife’s ‘Kingdom of God’. Faith in this sense was seen by many of the organisation’s employees as the rubric through which the logic of development was interpreted (Bornstein, 2005:65). And as the director indicates, it is through the care of the orphaned child, a task to which the director and most of staff testified to have been ‘called’ – that one’s faith is given ‘pure’ dimension. When I asked ‘why children?’ without a moments hesitation he responded:

God gave us a vision to raise leaders. That vision is of God. In the bible there is a verse (James I verse 27) that says in God's eyes pure religion is taking care of orphans and widows. Pure religion. It's because of their helplessness.

Organisational visions of rescuing these children from their 'helplessness' and 'raising leaders' is not merely a question of the physical removal of children from their destructive/neglectful/abusive/absent homes and providing them with food, shelter and education. The notion of 'raising leaders' and 'remaking' lives is deeply embedded in a spiritual-moral framework that involves the nurturing of a particular Christ conscious personhood. Asking the director what the statement 'raising leaders of tomorrow' personally meant to him, he clarified:

A leader is somebody you can follow. We want to raise someone who can be a responsible, productive and respectable citizen. What we want to do is give the kids the tools they need to become that way, a leader. The core of that is Christianity, Christian morality, following Jesus's cause. Taking Christ as their leader their own chances of being successful leaders are higher...you're a leader in your community. It's a natural process. To become Christ-like is first, the other things will follow.

Here, as demonstrated above, the organisation's preoccupation with the future of these children and *through* these children, their broader visions of the 're-birth' of a nation are grounded in Christian evangelism, the cycles of salvation, and End Times narrative and altogether the transformative power of faith (Piot, 2012:4). Rebirth in this sense is not seen only as the rejuvenation of a town, but the rejuvenation of spirit too. One of the key ways in which the organisation foresees the materialisation of this process is through the envisioned power of maternal care. The relationship between the house aunties and the children 'assigned' to their care lies at the very heart of the organisation's humanitarian intervention.

Labored love

It was a Monday morning and I was sitting in the offices at the back of the administrative building waiting to see a social worker so she could 'prep' me on the day's activities. There was a bustle in the offices and I learnt that it was interview day for the hiring of new house aunties. It is important to note that even though the organisation saw the house aunties as mothers and hoped that the children would in turn view them as their mothers, they were referred to as 'auntie', a

kind of paradoxical semantic distancing that they trusted would not 'confuse' or 'upset' the children, who knew or would come to know that they were not their 'real' mothers, but rather 'like' their mothers. I was told that it was not always this way and that in the past the house aunties were referred to as 'house mothers'. Emphasising the perceived power that a name holds, I learnt that this semantic shift was driven by the fact that, as Justine¹ put it, "there is permanency in the word mother". Where there is no permanency in care given the constant turnover of house aunties and the expected trauma attached to the loss of another mother, the organisation saw this as a necessary title change. On this day, there were eight women seated on the couches in the corner of the room. They were the few that had passed the initial screening test – the telephone interview.

The live interview was the next step in the application process. They were waiting expectantly to prove their worth as mothers to children they had never met. They were each holding a pink-bound siSwati bible, comparing notes, and awaiting their turn behind the closed door. On inquiring into the selection process, Thobile, another of the organisation's social workers, explained that they first ask the women "why they want to work with kids". She said that this was the most important question because "most of them just want to do it for the money" and that they need to see that they "have love for the children". She also said that a lot of the questions were discipline-focused. For example, the women were given a scenario, such as, "what would you do if a 13-year-old spoke back to you?" Thobile explained that they wanted to find out what "forms of punishment they know. All Swazi's hit their children but we at least want to see that they can change, we teach them about 'time out' and if they do not want to learn, they are out".

I remember the childcare director telling me on my very first day in the village that, "finding mothers is the hardest part". Reiterating Thobile's sentiment, he exclaimed, "most of the women we get in for the interviews are desperately in need of jobs and we just can't hire them". He also explained that most of the women "only stay for a short time while they find another job, because they can't bring all their children to the village with them". He said that the younger women usually leave to get married and even though they would prefer older women, they have trouble communicating with the children as they "don't speak English and struggle

1 Pseudonyms used throughout.

to help them with their homework". According to the director, another problem with hiring older women is that they also have their own 'extended families' and are 'too communized' – a statement that I understood to mean 'too traditional' or 'too settled in their ways' to adapt to the type of care the organisation envisions. Overall, he said that "it's not an easy situation especially in a time of HIV, very few women live over the age of 35".

Hence, the director meant that finding what the organisation understood to be *suitable* mothers; Christian, well-intentioned, adaptable and English-speaking mothers was difficult. Given an increased economic responsibility, deep-seated gender inequality and the current depressed financial climate, there is no shortage of women in search of jobs (Daly, 2001). The ways in which these women 'willingly' left families of their own to 'adopt' the role of a maternal caregiver to up to nine children, is illustrative of the workings of what anthropologists have documented extensively (particularly in relation to the institution of domestic work) and referred to as 'stratified reproduction', or in this instance, stratified reproductive care (Cock, 1980; Colen, 1990; Davis, 1987; Murray, 1998; Rapp, 1999). Stratified reproduction refers to the ways in which physical and social reproductive tasks, the taken for granted 'labors of love' are accomplished differently and inseparably from inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, gender and ethnicity and are structured by social, economic and political forces (Rose, 2003:98; Morreira, 2008). Furthermore, although the HIV epidemic is a window onto an array of well-documented interlocking structural inequalities, its gendered underpinnings are most prominent here. Even beyond the scope of their immediate or extended families it is women who are called upon to fill the gaps of care, who "shoulder the burden of care for those who are sick, dying or orphaned by AIDS" (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001:535; Van Blerk & Ansell, 2006:452). Hence, although concealed by the organisation's goal to normalise the children's childhoods by reproducing 'traditional' family-like structures of care, the outsourcing of motherhood and the remunerated 'gift' of care are both socioeconomically and epidemiologically produced.

During my fieldwork I was granted permission to attend a single day of house auntie training workshops, entitled 'Growing kids in God's way' and conducted by Elaine, the kitchen manager and part-time social worker. The workshop was fundamental to deepening my understanding of what the organisation

understood to be appropriate forms of childcare. It provided observational and conversational data concerning the parameters of parenting and the expected operation of households.

I learnt that on hiring, the house aunties are placed on a probation programme for six months. They are paid a reduced salary and expected to adhere to organisational rules. After successfully completing the probation period they are accepted as full-time house aunties. The house aunties are given time off every three weeks and a 'rotating house aunty' steps in for the week they are away. In the training workshop it was emphasised that the house aunties were to take on the role of both parents, that they were to be responsible for keeping a watchful eye over their respective children at all times, ensuring their physical and psychological well-being and for "shaping the conscience of the child". They were to remind their children that God is the provider, but simultaneously foster a sense of individuality and make them take responsibility for themselves. Prayer and chores (such as washing their own clothes, making their beds and cleaning their rooms) were essential daily activities for the children. Passages from the New Testament were drawn upon to illustrate, support, inspire and justify these teachings. Scripture was used to demonstrate how the house aunties should "set the moral standards", to teach their children the difference between right and wrong. For example, Elaine drew on the story of David who hid the word of God in his heart in order to illustrate the importance of viewing one's heart as a 'warehouse' to be filled with 'the values of God'. It was emphasised that the house aunties must not 'remove scripture' and give their own interpretations, but rather "always put God's word first".

In a focus group that I conducted with a group of house aunties, I asked them what the most important lesson they had learnt in the training workshop contained. They reported that it had taught them how to interact with their children using 'love language'. Expanding on this concept, Fikile one of the most vocal and forthcoming of the house aunties said:

To me it's the love language. Sometimes you don't notice a child when it's acting with love, like when a child is playing next to you, you chase them out but they are showing that they love you. We give them hugs it comes naturally but we used to ignore them. Maybe it's because we grew up in a different way. We used to say, "mummy mum" and our mothers would say "Go and play! Or go and wash the dishes!" When we look at it now we find that we were abusing them somehow by not noticing so

here we learn how to do this differently. It opens our eyes to a different way. We have encouraging words, we say 'good boy keep it on my boy, that's good' we didn't know before that we had to do this. We learnt the opposite of love language from our parents.

Fikile's statement was met with hums of agreement. Similarly, Janice expressed, it is important because, "the children come from all over the place, with different backgrounds". She said that it was their responsibility to 'encourage them'; to plant the seed of love and make them behave well, to heal them and make them 'one'. Another house-auntie, Julie said that the most important lesson was "the discipline, I didn't know that I could take a child and put it in time out, I just smacked them. I've learnt a lot about disciplining a child and it helps me discipline my own children better".

I then asked the focus group how they undertake the difficult task of remaking a family – of making them 'one'. They agreed that there were various 'ingredients' for this. Sharing daily prayers in the home and sharing a house table in the dining hall were seen as essential components to creating a familial bond. Fikile said, "we treat them the same, we give them love and make them feel secure. We tell them that this is their family and this is their home and these are their brothers and sisters" and that "this is the one to help you now when you have a problem".

Throughout the focus group it became clear that the house aunties saw their job as challenging but also as a moral priority. Having faith and 'being a Christian' in this context was seen as essential. Lindie, a house auntie that I worked closely with emphasised this notion by stating "because these are not our children...if you are not a Christian you can't do this job. If you have a problem you must tell God and he will help you". The sense that the house aunties' had a moral obligation towards these children was echoed in my discussions with them about the reasons for undertaking the job. The economic necessities of job seeking were largely occluded by their declarations of the need to help 'the orphans', by their desires, like those of the organisation and 'the project' of contemporary child focused humanitarianism more generally – to 'save them' (Hart, 2006:6). Janice's reasoning was exemplary. In a conversation that we had overlooking the sports field and watching her boys ride bicycles she said, "Even though it's like volunteer work, I do it because I like kids and the orphans need our help". Lindie held a similar opinion, yet hers was grounded in a personal identification with children in the absence of close familial care:

I grew up like these kids, that's why I am here. My father took me to grow up with his mother when my mother died. Life was hard and I never had a mother, that is why I am here. I have three of my own children at home. They are staying with my husband and my mother-in-law. But there is stress at home with the husband and with the kids taking other girls.

I asked Lindie if it was difficult to leave her children and she responded, "it is not difficult to leave them because I identify more with these children, with their lives... and the job is not difficult because I know these kids, how I can say, because I understand these kids". She went on, "I feel angry when my kids are crying but with these kids, I understand and I remember when I used to sit alone and feel pain". However, adding another layer of intent to these perspectives, yet similarly pointing to very fine line between choice and coercion in conditions of structural constraint, it was also emphasised by Lindie and by a number of other house aunties, that if they 'helped the orphans' God would in turn, help them. This justification was particularly striking given the reality that the job could not secure their own children's futures. Following on from our conversation, Lindie candidly said, "they do not pay us enough for my own children's school fees but it is okay because in the end God will help us".

Altogether from the perspectives above, it is clear that the house aunties viewed their responsibility toward their 'assigned' children as a rehabilitative one. Mirroring organisational intention, the house aunties saw themselves as the central and transformative channel through which the tangible 'substance' of care, and the 'language of love', was to be transferred to the children and through which they too, would be transformed. Family-like care and a maternal bond in particular, were seen, in materialist terms as the affective 'glue' that would bind a family, that came 'from all over the place', together, normalise previously disruptive childhoods and in essence foster the 'growth of a moral body' (Fife, 2001). In conjunction with the education the children received regular meals and medical check-ups. The (carefully monitored) practices of care are provided by the house aunties. These children are expected to be transformed into morally-upstanding child citizens in possession of the qualities to transition into the adult role of Swaziland's 'leaders of tomorrow' and 'pillars of hope'.

Moral pioneers

With its oddities, passionate visions and contradictions, the village is a true frontier.

Missionaries and workers of a different kind from the concessionaires and missionaries that flooded Swaziland in the 1800s, but pioneers none the less (Laterza, 2012:31).

The organisational desire to 'Grow kids in God's way' can be interpreted in a number of ways. Where the 'reach for theory' often involves tangential approaches to analyzing raw ethnographic data, I have found Rayna Rapp's (1999) work around new reproductive technologies and the scientifically mediated production of 'moral pioneers' *conceptually* useful for thinking through the subjectification processes at work here. Faced with complex decisions opened up by new reproductive technologies and the possibilities of mapping out unborn lives, Rapp refers to men and women having to engage new ways of understanding, judging and acting on themselves as "moral pioneers of a new kind of active biomedical citizenship" (Rose, 2003:23). Rapp's work is part of a growing corpus of anthropological engagement with what has been described as 'biological citizenship'. According to Rose and Novas (2003:3) biological citizenship signifies a new kind of citizenship made possible by the emergence of contemporary biotechnology. However, such 'citizenship projects' – "the ways that authorities thought/think about individuals as citizens and potential citizens and the ways they tried to act upon them", are deeply rooted in history and have for centuries radically redefined the relationship between politics, identity and biology. The authors argue that citizenship has been 'in evolution' since the emergence of the civil rights movement that "necessitated the extension of political citizenship in the nineteenth century and of social citizenship in the twentieth century" (Rose & Novas, 2003:1).

Although my own research falls outside the purview of biotechnology, it is possible to borrow, significantly reformulate and apply Rapp's term to the ethnographic context under study. Here, the term 'moral pioneering' can be used to describe the organisation's own 'citizen project', with their own concern over the importance of identity embedded in their long-term vision of shaping, through various transformative channels, the growth of a moral generation – a new form of being in the world. It can be argued that the organisation's project is biological in the

sense that it mimics the Swazi government's fundamentally national concern over 'citizenship building', over the need to preserve Swazi nationhood and thus the 'need' to limit a child's growth to the nation space.

Furthermore, it is possible to take the pioneering metaphor, in its more historical, definitional sense, a step further. Although, as discussed further below, I am by no means assuming that the organisation's 'children' simply 'embodied' these organisational intentions but from the Foucauldian perspective of the body as a tool for social discourse and the iconic location of/for technologies of power, it is difficult to ignore the echoes of a colonialist kind of (govern)mentality at work here. To treat the body, and particularly the child's body, as a somewhat empty 'warehouse' to be filled with good and proper 'ingredients', has unmistakable colonial, principally Christian evangelical antecedents (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; Sen, 2005; Piot, 2012). In Fife's, *Creating the Moral Body: Missionaries and the Technology of Power in early Papua New Guinea* (2001), he examines the technologies of power embedded in the colonial encounter and its 'civilizing mission'. Fife (2001:266) argues that formalised schooling, a physically encompassing environment and extensive church activity were central forces, executed by missionaries in an attempt to "capture and change the consciousness of young people", inculcate moral habits and hygiene "with the goal of creating Christian and civilized villagers".

Similarly, writing about the 'production' of orphaning in British colonial India, Sen (2005:464) states, "In India during the mid-19th Century, the colonial state began a long and intimate relationship with the children of diverse others". With the perception of children as 'plastic entities' that may be "stamped with a lasting impression from the contamination of culture, language...and savage repression", parents were "deliberately removed from the lives of children". In this way, Sen argues that, as an act of and facilitation of power, orphanages became a "patchwork of spaces, nodes of control that enabled experts to illuminate the dark interior of native society" (Sen, 2005:463, 466). Similar to what Fife reveals, subjectification was therefore facilitated through a number of means, i.e. "through physical removal, through materiality, and through indoctrination" (Sen, 2005:436).

Although now thoroughly located in the post-colonial moment where the vertical sovereignties of the philanthropic moralising mission of the 19th century colonial era appears a distant, unwelcome memory, the authors' descriptions above of the technologies of power rooted in colonial encounter and their slow, dialectical

evolution into technologies of the self, are arguably at work here (Stoler, 1995:166; Hart & Negri, 2001; 2005; Foucault, 1989:134). Fife's notion of "disciplining the body in order to convert the soul" still holds weight today and relates to the underlying spiritual intent of the organisation's Christian based model of childcare. In fact, as Bornstein declares (2005:46), a fundamental aspect of Christian development or what Fassin (2011:1) calls "moral sentiment" today remains the goal of reaching the unreached, of directing evangelical attentions "to the suffering of others" as a means of alleviating spiritual and material impoverishment. As Piot (2010; 2012:8) writes in relation to the growing presence of the Pentecostal church movement in contemporary Togo, "these communities of believers instill codes of conduct and orientations toward the everyday that provide a virtual blueprint for disciplining the post-Cold war subject into the neoliberal economy". I would argue that the children's removal from their faraway homes, their relocation in an isolated environment and community of born-again believers, their enrolment in a Christian based education system, the socialising "codes of conduct" they are reminded of daily and the extensive presence of the church in their lives, all work together toward the establishment of a disciplinary biblical blueprint for being. These factors all worked towards (or at least, the hope of) establishing an implicit utopian realm or Eden-like circumstances for the intended manifestation of greater good (Bornstein, 2005:3).

In conjunction with the house aunties' statements about coming to learn how to grow kids God's way, the children in my sample groups' arrival narratives provide insight into the slow materialisation of these organisational intentions. In a statement that encapsulates the very beginning of this process, Jeremiah had said "On our first night here, they taught us how to eat properly with a knife and fork and not eat with our hands". Lastly, borrowing from Foucault, even though what can be described as the organisation's modes of subjectification in their desire to 'pioneer' new leaders is not overtly, or even consciously geared towards some form of civilising mission, their project remains firmly rooted in a relationship of rescue and the desire to save a portion of the world's quintessential humanitarian subjects.

“They’re not Swazi anymore”

Aside from providing insight into the tightly bound worlds of my young participants, a mapping exercise revealed much about what places figured prominently in their lives. A place present on every map and repeatedly pointed out to me from a high point in the village was what the children referred to as ‘the vault’ located in the Ministry in the administrative block. I am not sure how this room got its name but it captured its purpose perfectly – a secure storeroom housing all of the organisation’s donated nonperishable goods. Described to me by Ayanda as their ‘shopping center’, a rare glance inside the vault revealed shelves overflowing with new and secondhand clothing in every size and color, rows of *Toughees* and multi-colored faux crocs, school bags, toys and every other item a child might need or want. The children in my sample group told me that they went to the vault when they “got too big” for their clothes and/or at the beginning of the school term to get new uniforms and stationery. Looking over my field notes I noticed that I spent a lot of time jotting down the details of conversations about clothes, about what the children were wearing and how they were dressed. I began to be able to distinguish between the ‘village kids’ (the children under the care of the organisation) and the children that lived in the town because their parents worked for the organisation. This distinction was made not only because I would never see the village kids hanging around unsupervised on the roadside or collecting firewood, but because of what kind of visual distinctions and insight into individual and collective identities “the dressed body enables” (Hansen, 2004:372). One of the ways that the children could be distinguished was by the colorful donated clothing like the printed Canadian charity organisation t-shirts that they wore or that flapped in the wind on clotheslines like the flags of faraway places – the markers of the “long chains of charity” that bind the world’s ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in a coincidental intimacy (Norris, 2012:128).

In order to consider the processes of subjectification, or as Povinelli puts it, the ways in which “discourses are hardened into subjects” discussed above, as a way of tracking the micropolitics of the organisation’s mission more fully, I have drawn on a growing body of anthropological literature around material ‘things’ and/or ‘stuff’ (Povinelli, 2006; Hansen, 2004). In his article, *A Praxiological Approach to Subjectification in a Material World*, JP Warnier (2001:6) argues that materiality mediates our being in the world. He points out that, “there is hardly any technique of the body that

does not incorporate a given materiality” and all too often “the body is an object of phenomenological/Foucauldian analysis and not the moving and perceiving subject in a given materiality” (Warnier, 2001:20). Similarly, Daniel Miller in *Stuff* (2010:4) makes the point that “the best way to understand, convey and appreciate our humanity is through our attention to our fundamental materiality”. Hence, from the perspective that objects can indeed come to “construct subjects” (Miller, 2010) in exploring the social consequences of the organisation’s project of ‘growing kids in God’s way’ and viewing materiality as both an effective and affective ‘surface’ in its ability to construct our appearance, constitute social relations and states of being, this section looks at what materiality *does* (Keane, 2004).

Many of the organisation’s workers that I had conversations with about the childcare programme emphasised that they felt somewhat materially cut-off from ‘the orphans’, the people involved in childcare and the people in managerial positions. The question of why they, the people who made the town work lived in comparative poverty without effective sanitation and electricity and had to pay “R100 for firewood”, whilst ‘the orphans’ lived in renovated homes and had access to free ‘lights’, clothes and education, was repeatedly raised. This deep-felt sense of inequality chiseling lines through the town across age, race and profession also surfaces strongly in Laterza’s (2012) dissertation exploring “labor relations, epistemology and the body” among the village’s timber workers. Zandile, working at the community center went so far as to describe it as ‘apartheid’. She went on, “There are no orphans in Swaziland, but there are in this village. They don’t care about the other children here...the other children are always punished for the orphan’s mistakes.” It was due to these discrepancies that Leigh, a woman who had headed a number of different child focused projects during her time in Swaziland took it upon herself to open *Eduduzweni*, ‘the place of comfort’ – a community center where the workers’ children could learn, play and be taken care of during the day. In a conversation with Leigh she said:

When I arrived here there was very little attention paid to the children in the town in the community, the workers’ children – the ones living here. There is a fear on part of the organization that there are too many community children. It’s the irony really because children are brought in by social welfare to live in a smartie box – whilst there are needy children here. But I am here because it’s a calling. *Eduduzeni* is Christ centered humanitarian organization with biblical direction at the center of every day at the center of everything. My idea was to work with the children

that are not a part of the organization's programme, to provide a place of care for the children. We started it up when we realized a lot of the children were hanging out in the dumpster in the day with nothing to do.

What is more, although the house aunties were wary of speaking to me about their personal gripes, the sense of material alienation they experienced from the children they cared for was frequently raised in the informal conversations we had. A single sentence uttered by Lindie in hushed tones of disengaged acceptance is exemplary; "That's the way it is, everything is for the children, that is their song". The notion of the material discrepancies between themselves and their children was furthered in the focus group where, to my surprise given the difficult circumstances the children had come from, the aunties spoke about how the children they cared for "were the lucky ones", how they had "much better" childhoods than they had and how more orphanages like this one should be opened up. Furthermore, the discrepancies in the distribution and consumption of these 'things' had a very specific social life when it came to how many of the people in the larger village viewed the organisation's kids' identities. Whilst being taken on a tour of the neighboring village, *Malanda*, incidentally translated as 'dumping-site', my tour-guide, Tony explained to me some of the subterranean social politics existent in the town. Contrary to the organisation's vision of providing Swazi children with care that mimicked 'traditional' forms he said; "one of the main things is, these kids, they're not Swazi anymore. They don't even speak good SiSwati". He continued, "Who are they going to lead? Black Americans?" Similarly, Zandile said to me, "When you grow up you need to know your land. It's bad when you take a child away. Here they take them away and now they are like black Americans".

These perspectives are resoundingly and somewhat ironically similar to both the anxieties around intercountry adoption promulgated by the Swazi government. In these perspectives, the children 'rescued', educated, clothed and cared for by the organisation are seen to have undergone a transformation, dislocated from place, and irrevocably detached from their 'Swazi' personhood. In the minds of my informants, these children may well have been adopted and flown off to "grow up among the world's wealthiest with more material possessions" than they would have ever had access to. These opinions further mirror the problems of privilege raised in an interview in Mbabane by the director of NERCHA (National Emergency

Response Council on HIV and AIDS). He expressed that residential care privileges some and not others and hence is antithetical to an 'equity' model of care and NERCHA's goal to foster "community commitment to the welfare of children".

In this way, whether or not the children under the organisation's care came to or would come to fully embody the organisation's vision of growing into tomorrow's leaders, their personal transformation was marked and made meaningful by a perceived difference on the part of many of the town's residents not directly involved in childcare. The gift of care and the necessary objects attached to this care, particularly clothing which as Turner (1993) suggests produces a "social skin" through its dual possibility "of touching the body and facing outwards", was central to the organisation's children's 'conversion'. In the minds of my informants the objects attached to the interventionist gift ironically came to construct the child subject as somewhat dislocated from an essential/authentic Swazi self and henceforth separate them from the rest of the townspeople (Hansen, 2004:372; Miller, 2010). The children under the organisation's care can also be seen to have attained what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) calls "social/cultural" capital, an embodiment of privilege that works to separate them from the village's other residents (Cheney, 2007:14). Furthermore, although not all the children under the organisation's care were not categorically 'orphans' in the sense that, as Justine put it, "there is always someone out there", these perspectives point to the ways in which the social category of 'the orphan' was *produced*. The emergence of the children as 'the orphans' who prior to their arrival in the village were unlikely to have been considered so, was shaped by their bounded and sheltered categorisation as children separate from 'the other' and in need of preferential treatment and special protection (Meintjes & Giese, 2006:407). Here, alongside the processes of the children's removal and subsequent subjectification through the organisational model of care, the act of *orphaning* emerged as both literal and discursive (Sen, 2005:463).

Reinforcing Appadurai's (1998:3) notion that the "commodity is a thoroughly social thing", these opinions demonstrate that the social consequences of the interventionist gift were widespread. As Stirrat & Henkel (1997) point out in their article *The development gift: the problem of reciprocity in the NGO world*, charity gift giving in the form of material objects, advice and in this context, education can indeed "create a series of problematic relations".

From the ethnographic data presented above, it is clear that not only did the childcare programme alter the children's "relationships of belonging", but, like the social effects often produced by child sponsorship programs, it produced unintended (material) disjuncture, and disturbed existing social relationships (Bornstein, 2005:67). The intermingling of the hopeful ideas of Christian humanitarianism and the local (albeit microcosmic) political economy had the paradoxical effect of reinforcing the very inequalities that they endeavored to transcend. Hence, where Stirrat and Henkel point to the reciprocal problems that occur between donor and receiver in the case of charitable donations/aid, a subject to which much research has been focused, this research importantly highlights both the external and internal politics of gift giving.

As a last point of analytical reflection, I would like to briefly revisit Meintjes and Giese's (2006:305) work on the *Mythologies of orphanhood in the contexts of AIDS*. The authors examine local notions of vulnerability in order to problematise the obsessive (humanitarian) focus on orphanhood in the context of AIDS irrespective of shifts towards "the more inclusive terminology of Orphans and Vulnerable Children". They argue that the narrow labeling of 'the orphan' can obscure the vulnerabilities of children living in poverty more generally. To conclude, I would like to extend this critique.

Conclusion

The exclusive focus on 'the orphans' obscured the vulnerabilities of employees in general and as we have seen, thoroughly contributed to the bifurcation of a single social world.

The limited focus on 'their children', and subsequently the visible unequal dissemination of things, or what Elizabeth Povinelli (2006:68) refers to as the "unequal distribution of hope and despair" is not necessarily an organisational oversight but is rather symptomatic of a broader, almost seamless humanitarian preoccupation with 'saving children'. As Malkki has shown (2011, loc:1055), irrespective of today's widely disseminated image of children as competent active agents in their own right, as promulgated by the CRC, children, particularly those wearing labels of vulnerability are placed on an "ethereal pedestal in the transnational" humanitarian sphere, "intensively commodified...sacralised as priceless" and persistently and artificially "set apart from adults in an infantile utopian dimension" (Hart, 2002:8).

As we have seen above, the affective dimension of the child further draws attention to the paradoxically conditional nature of humanitarian interventionist reason (Ticktin, loc:5238). Altogether it is clear that in the process of directly empowering the youth, the programme significantly detracted from the well-being of adults who facilitated their empowerment, dislodged their responsibility and obscured their own vulnerability in a process that may well undermine the efficacy of the organisation's vision of sustainability (Bornstein, 2006). Although one would expect that new investment and the restoration of the town would better the lives of its inhabitants, relations between residents; employers and employees were fraught, and tensions between the neighboring village of Malanda, were particularly so.² Therefore, where much research emphasises the ways in which children stand as quintessential humanitarian subjects, here I reveal the ways this global preoccupation with the child recipient can more generally work to obscure the invaluable role of adults in their lives – a critique that takes further recent efforts that attempt to deconstruct the rigid binary between 'child' and 'adult' rather than seeing them as reciprocally occupying the same space in the world.

Together this chapter offers an exploration of the intentions behind, and sociological effects of the organisation's model of childcare. It demonstrates the ways that the organisation's model of care, through physically, spiritually and materially separating the children from the rest of the townspeople unexpectedly worked to produce a further set of dislocations. These demarcations created and continue to create tenuous employer-employee relationships, which in turn could inadvertently undermine the organisation's visions of self-sustainability and holistic model of childcare. More broadly, this chapter serves to critically engage with the logics of humanitarian government and the unintended social consequences of the philanthropic preoccupation with the project of child saving (Fassin, 2011).

2 Since the time of my research these tensions have arisen resulting in a number of incidents and staff dismissals/departures.

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POEM 1

YOUNG SPIRITS AND UNCURED SKINS: THE CELEBRATION OF YOUNG MARTYRS AND BRAVED CHILDHOODS

Kathleho Kano Shoro

Young spirits and uncured skins

We were baby spirits
When it was finally our turn to wear human bodies
We sprinted!
Tried them on Organ for limb
Until we felt suited to our hand-me-down skins

We began to itch
Our elders forgot to rub salt and pray when they peeled off these porous
coverings.

Baby spirits, dressed in human bodies, wrapped in unblest skins.
Teenage spirits growing into strained bodies feeding off trauma and other
martyr things. Young spirits fashioning target-backs, skins thirsty for pellet
piercings while running.

Luckily
Human bodies are loaned with stomachs that need salt and prayer to
swallow.
Unlike skins, they don't just swallow lead whole.

Young spirits and uncured skins: the celebration of young martyrs and braved childhoods

Young Spirits in Uncured Skin is primarily a reflection on how some children, from a young age, come to determinedly embody, shoulder and champion generational hurts, political struggles and overt violence and, furthermore, how what they endure is greeted with adulation. The poem is a questioning of what these passed-down traumas do to the energetic, whimsical spirit.

The narrative in the poem has multiple starting points mainly from within the South African socio-political context. The predominant starting point stems from the commemoration of the Soweto Uprisings 16 June 1976 and the subsequent student/youth uprisings within South African history from then on. What is of interest within the poem is how much we – as the population within the South African society that is interested in speaking positively about and commemorating the heroes within our liberation struggle – celebrate the ‘bravery’ of young children who died in 1976 in and beyond Soweto.

The act of children becoming martyrs, of children dying, of children fighting continues to be lauded in current-day South Africa. While there is much contention around the #FeesMustFall movement that began in 2015 and is championed by tertiary students, what remains a fact is that predominantly young students within the movement have been reacted to with violence – physical and institutional. In turn, or perhaps, conversely – those within the movement have expressed their willingness to withstand violence and even death in order to achieve free education for themselves or at least generations that follow. Public, collective expressions of support and admiration for their “bravery” and resilience in the face of violence have been multi-fold across the world. In fact, the movement, its students and their resolute martyrdom are constantly being likened to the 1976 uprisings. The celebration of ‘brave’, young spirits can further be seen with the lauding of those schoolchildren who march for better education and schools – against the government – and are met with violence.¹ What is of concern in the poem is how in every clash between young people and the police or security

1 Students from Philippi who marched to government offices against inadequate school infrastructures and were met with violence from the police are one example amongst many. See: <https://bit.ly/3ydu9QR>

forces, those who watch, hold their breath awaiting imminent tragedy and injury. Tragedy withstood by young people is anticipated. The young people – children – are actively taking on the role of martyrs. Thereafter, they are celebrated for withstanding violence on physical, emotional and psychological levels in the process. There is something warped about young people determinedly marching to their possible deaths and adults of the society killing, supporting, witnessing or applauding the events.

Detailed reading of the poem: themes and tones

The first stanza of the poem uses short lines and immediately introduces overtones of whim, energy and fervour: characteristics commonly associated with childhood. The enthusiasm is projected by the unborn 'baby spirits' who have been anxiously and excitedly waiting to finally be born human, to have the chance to live and to later grow into adult spirits. However, flowing from the last line of the first stanza to the second stanza, the bodies and skins – particularly the skins – within which these baby spirits reside, come with negative complications. The bodies and skins are tainted with the experiences, struggles and traumas of their predecessors. Hence the idea of hand-me-downs; the passing down of already used second-hand, third-hand, etc. skins.

There are several themes introduced. The first and already mentioned theme that of the 'itch' – the traumas – being passed down at birth. The baby spirits are born into socio- political circumstances. The distinguishing of the skin when talking about the body within the poem further points to race politics as one of the traumas and circumstances into which the baby spirits are born. While the poem is not explicitly limited to the experiences of black, African baby spirits, my positionality and experiences as a young black, South African summonses blackness and South Africanness into the poem (for me). In this regard, it is South African narratives of your martyrdom that underpin the poem: Soweto Uprising, #FeesMustFall movement, child-led households etc.

The second theme of the poem is concerned with the spiritual. Namely, but not limited to, ideas of healing, ritual, and prayer. Here "skins" begin taking on another meaning: that of the hides of animal sacrifices within traditional and religious ceremonies that become cured with salt and go on to have various uses. In order to cure the hides successfully, there needs to be method and intention involved.

Otherwise, the skins rot and become of no use. This second theme therefore juxtaposes the preservation of the hides to that of baby spirits within human bodies and skins. Are there methods to preserve the life of baby spirits born into some circumstances? Is it possible for elders to 'cure' themselves of their own traumas and struggles so as not to pass them down as inheritance to their children? Are there rituals, prayers, healings that can prevent baby spirits from becoming celebrated martyrs of their time?

The third theme within the poem is death. Death sits rather closely to life as childhood is killed off by the traumas children consciously take on at a young age. The children themselves are always at the brink of death (literally and metaphorically); their lives almost summon death. Death is also reiterated by the inclusion of ancestors as well as the double meaning of skin. Moreover, when they are celebrated as heroes and martyrs for withstanding pain, suffering, for fighting for justice or dying 'bravely', death becomes glorified.

Overall, the poem seeks to question the meanings of 'childhood' and express discomfort at the idea of some realities of childhood sitting so closely to death, trauma and celebrated martyrdom.