

Photovoice as a Practice of Re-presentation and Social Solidarity: Experiences from a Youth Empowerment Project in Dar es Salaam and Soweto

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This article observes the role of social solidarity in resisting stigmatizing representations of development and as the basis upon which to mobilize social changes in the community. Through the use of Photovoice methods, in a community-based initiative, young people from Tanzania and South Africa participated in activities to build social solidarity and to re-present themselves and their communities. The findings, analyzed through the lens of social representations theory (SRT), demonstrate how young people produced conflicting images of community life. On the one hand, they colluded with stigmatizing representations of development through a gendered and racialized discourse of postcoloniality and, on the other hand, they resisted this discourse through alternative images that recognize community agency. The discussion establishes the role of social identity in determining the levels of social solidarity that are possible in communities characterized by low levels of material and symbolic resources and challenges the assumption of self-protection that SRT suggests. To conclude, I contend that it is in the act of social re-presentation that young people are able to recognize the perspective of others, resist stigma and develop alternative conceptualizations of community life, all of which promote networks of social solidarity in the community.

In this paper, I propose that social solidarity, in certain contexts, constitutes a driving force for enacting social changes that can benefit some of the most marginalized groups in society. However, in contemporary settings, where cultural encounters give rise to many competing ideas and values (Jovchelovitch, 2008) and where vast differences in material assets between individuals and groups give rise to competition for living resources (Campbell, 2003), social solidarity is a complex phenomenon. This is particularly significant amongst under-resourced communities in contemporary urban settings in sub-Saharan Africa, hereby investigated through the findings of a community development initiative involving young people from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Soweto, South Africa.

The role of social solidarity is explored in these settings through the framework of development discourse and practice. Development is associated with pervasive alterations in the ways of life of ordinary people and is often the basis upon which social change in Africa is instigated and explained (see Marglin, 1990). In practical terms, development policies and practices are articulated by governments and international organizations to provide a framework upon which the institutions of society plan and direct their efforts to respond to the changing needs of individuals and communities. However, development policies and practices also constitute an area of much debate and critics have exposed the development paradigm in Africa as one that undermines and excludes those who it professes to assist (Baaz, 2005; Banuri et al., 1997; Bebbington, 2005, 2006; Dogra, 2007; Escobar, 1991, 1995, 2000; Kothari, 2006a, 2006b; Mosse & Lewis, 2005; Yanacopoulos 2006). Hence, if we consider social solidarity as a process whereby individuals and communities can enact social change, it is worth exploring its potential role in the development context. But first, we need to understand what we mean by social solidarity.

DEFINING SOCIAL SOLIDARITY: COLLECTIVE VERSUS SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The notion of social solidarity is often associated with Durkheim's work on the development of societies (see Durkheim, 1984 and Hawkins, 1979). Durkheim theorized social solidarity through the concept of collective representations and as the premise upon which individuals form and maintain communities around common beliefs, values and customs (Jovchelovitch, 1997; Moscovici, 1984; Duveen, 2000). In other words, for Durkheim, it was the collective representations shared by a society that determined the behavioral patterns of interaction and

communication in a community. Such a conceptualization of social solidarity implies that the processes of social change are constrained by the same conditions that bind people together, thus leaving little room to explain the shortcomings of development discourse and practice beyond the relatively static nature of community norms and beliefs. On the other hand, viewing social solidarity through the lens of SRT expands new avenues through which the complexity of contemporary life, characterized by multiple identities and rationalities and competition for material and symbolic resources, can be examined. A social representations framework implies that social change is a dynamic and discontinuous process (Jovchelovitch, 2007), whereby the beliefs and practices of individuals are constantly subject to change through social interactions in their communities (Moscovici, 1984). Furthermore, Moscovici's premise in developing the theory of social representations was to articulate a theory that not only understood the production of knowledge in society but also the mechanisms to change society (Moscovici, 1972; Howarth, 2003). This principle is important as it allows social scientists not only to describe but also criticize the social order and seek social justice in the research process (Moscovici, 1972; Howarth, 2003). Therefore, the social representations approach to development and social solidarity presented here explores the contradictions and complexities in mobilizing individuals in communities around common development agendas, with a focus on resisting and overcoming some of the social psychological factors that undermine them, and, through practical research methods, to foster social solidarity in the community.

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY STARTS IN THE COMMUNITY: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES

The community is a useful point of departure for investigating social solidarity. Community represents a place or feeling of belonging, as “[it] is something that arises out of our need to locate ourselves in the social worlds in which we live” (Howarth, 2001, p. 230). However, as previously alluded to, this does not preclude the community from also being a site of conflict when there are vast differences in access to material and symbolic resources amongst its members (Campbell & Murray, 2004). Therefore, a useful definition of social solidarity in communities would take into account the extent to which “heterogeneous individuals or groups who share common interests and needs... are able to mobilize and organize themselves towards social and political change” (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001, p. 183), and,

the dimension of social influence that constrains or enables the transformation of power relations amongst community members (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001). These differences in access to resources and power are often theorized through critical perspectives on the concept of social capital (Baum et al., 2000; Campbell, 2003). Furthermore, central to the social capital debate is the role of social identities in fostering community networks and relationships. Differences in social identities, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status can lead to exclusionary practices in the community (Campbell et al., 2002; Campbell & Gillies, 2001; Campbell & McLean, 2002). Individuals may also stigmatize members of their own community when there are negative representations associated with belonging to that community (Sammut, this issue). Hence, social solidarity in contemporary and under-resourced settings relates to a range of intricate phenomena amongst which identity takes on a central space and constitutes the main concern in this paper to explain the contradictions between development and social solidarity.

DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY: CONTRADICTIONS

The Popularization of Poverty and Underdevelopment

Having established development and social solidarity as processes that promote social change, I propose that these mechanisms do not always occur in tandem. Notwithstanding the positive role of development in fostering social solidarity in transnational settings (Park, this issue), development representations can have stigmatizing attributes that adversely impact on social identities at community-level and constitute a barrier to social solidarity. Critics of development discourses argue that global efforts at tackling poverty and underdevelopment fuel the continuous portrayal of Africa as ‘the problem’ (Yanacopulos, 2005). Images of disease, destitution, violence and corruption (Benthall, 1993; Dyck and Coldevin, 1992; Lidchi, 1999; Hall, 2000; Dogra, 2007), which remain largely unchallenged, continue to be used to define Africa. Dogra’s (2007) article on visual images of INGOs is an example of the complicity of international development institutions in producing stigmatizing images of poverty in Africa, portraying Africans as “helpless passive victims”, where images of “starving babies trivialized the complex issue of famine by equating it with money and food” (2007, p. 162). These images became widespread through the practices of post-colonial and post-WWII international institutions intervening in African countries to address the problem

of poverty, notably, the establishment of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods institutions in 1945, followed by a flurry of INGOs in the second half of the 20th century, focusing on development aid and humanitarian assistance (Bebbington et al., 2008; Edwards & Hulme, 1992). This period also marked a new era of differences between Western and African nations, as “two-thirds of the world’s peoples were transformed into poor subjects in 1948 when the World Bank defined as poor those countries with an annual per capita income below \$100” (Escobar, 1995, p. 23), and through the classification of southern countries as ‘underdeveloped’ in the North-South divide based on macroeconomic benchmarks (Sachs, 1990, Rahnema, 1997). Hence, through the institutionalization and normalization of poverty, people in Africa have come to be represented as the *victims* of poverty, often through stigmatizing representations of what it means to be *poor* and *underdeveloped* as opposed to actors who enact changes in society. Our concern in this paper is how this stigmatization impacts on the social identities of communities as one of the key mechanisms underlying social solidarity.

Development, Stigmatization and Identification

Social representations studies have already discussed how stigmatization impacts on the identities of individuals who take on particular identity positions as a result (Duveen, 2001; Howarth 2002a, 2002b, 2004). In her work with adolescents from a deprived community in London (UK), Howarth (2002a, 2002b, 2004) shows the impact of stigmatizing representations on the self-esteem and sense of belonging of young people. Many respondents in her study used discursive tactics to distance themselves from the stigma of being *from Brixton* as a ‘self-protective strategy’ (see also Wagner et al., 2000; Joffe, 2003). A strategy of dissociation meant that the stigma went unchallenged and was reinforced through young people’s own stigmatizing and self-negating beliefs. Howarth (2002b) further demonstrates that “stigmatizing representations actually produce the realities they symbolize” (p. 250). Thus, the stigmatizing discourse not only created knowledge about the young people in her study but also controlled their responses to those same representations. What this discussion confirms is that individuals seek positive self-identity through their actions, however, whether this translates into positive practices leading to social change is not yet evident. The stigma of development representations can further marginalize individuals from belonging to solidarity networks as they adopt self-protective strategies to distance themselves from being regarded as poor and underdeveloped and, in so doing, reinforce particular stigmatizing representations

about themselves and their communities. Furthermore, the imagery of violence and corruption or passivity and helplessness can reproduce fatalistic attitudes and behaviours in individuals and communities who re-enact these expectations. The identity impacts of representations are therefore central to understanding the complicity of development thinking and practice in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of individuals in communities and the activities around which they form networks of social solidarity.

The following section presents the methodological design of a community-based initiative called Shooting Horizons that was set up to address the theoretical concerns outlined up to this point. It describes how young people from urban African communities were mobilized around a common agenda of social change through activities to re-present themselves and their communities.

THE SHOOTING HORIZONS METHOD

Shooting Horizons is a community development project that I set up in collaboration with already established youth centres in Dar es Salaam and Soweto. The project was designed to engage young people in a series of activities using Photovoice methodology that would enable them to get involved in social change efforts, to represent themselves, and to challenge the negative and victim-blaming discourses of development. Over a period of 22 months, 39 young people, between the ages of 12 and 19, acquired photography skills and participated in critical discussion groups about development and social change. Through this process, the participants produced photo-stories (a series of photographs accompanied by written stories) about their lives, their communities, their beliefs and aspirations, and the social changes needed in their communities. The project took place through six workshops with six different groups from three youth centres. The timing of each workshop was very different depending on the situation of the participants and the youth centre environment. In Soweto, the sessions took place for several hours per week over a six-month period. In Dar es Salaam, intensive sessions took place over one to two weeks. The workshops were designed to include a series of scheduled activities including basic training in photography and writing skills; photo-novella and photo-elicitation exercises to develop participants understandings of the role of photography in conveying messages; focus group sessions on development and social change; and, critical discussion sessions about specific challenges that participants faced in their lives, their causes and possible alternatives. These sessions also included activities to develop

critical thinking, such as competitions and analytical games. At the end of the workshops, all participants had chosen an idea for their photo-story and cameras were handed over to them to develop their photo-stories on their own. The only requirements were that their topics should cover something they wanted to change in their community and participants were encouraged to interact with community members to gather information and different perspectives about their story idea. Once the photo-stories had been developed and edited, these were showcased in a series of three exhibitions open to the public and in magazines and newspapers. Hence, the methodology sought to provide representations of social change in African contexts through the eyes of the young people themselves and through activities that exposed the level of social solidarity in their communities.

Photovoice was chosen as the main technique, because it has been described as a method by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community (Wang and Burris, 1997), induce change, develop personal and social identities and build social competency (Strack et al., 2004). By combining Photovoice with the other methods described above, the Shooting Horizons project was the context in which alternative understandings of community life were to be constructed through the production of narratives of social change. Narratives are useful for understanding identity processes because they seek to establish coherence between human intention and action and the consequences thereof (Laszlo, 1997). Through storytelling and representation, narratives also create emotional understandings (Rappaport, 1995, Laszlo, 1997) that challenge the non-conscious feelings in social relations (Laszlo, 1997). Hence, narratives not only describe situations but also expose the consciousness and affect of the respondents that constitute different sides of their identities.

The data presented below includes testimonies from the six focus groups on development and social change and extracts of the photo-stories from two of the youth centers. The data was coded and organized into thematic areas. Furthermore, I kept a diary of the discussion groups, as well as the daily occurrences and perspectives shared by the participants during the course of the project, which constitutes an integral part of the findings and discussion that follow. In the forthcoming paragraphs, I present the findings into two broad areas. Firstly, young people's representations of development that colluded with a stigmatizing discourse through an analysis of the focus group data, and, secondly, the representations that showed resistance and solidarity in the community, through an analysis of the photo-stories. Due to the vast amount of data collected in the Shooting Horizons project, only a few of the photo-stories are discussed here. Furthermore, the differences between the

Tanzanian and South African participants are out of the scope of this paper but have been discussed elsewhere (see Kessi, 2010).

FINDINGS

The narratives of the young Africans in the Shooting Horizons initiative expose many contradictions in their representations of self and community. These are most apparent through the differences between the data collected from the focus groups and the data from the photo-stories. The analysis of the focus groups reveals that young people referred to three key factors to define development: material resources, education, and identity, each of which are considered below.

Under the rubric of material resources, the following quotes illustrate the importance of the economy, individual wealth and infrastructure as signifiers of development:

“A country with a poor economy is not developed” (Naima, 16).

“I think developing people are those who are wealthy, yes, wealthy people” (Lerato, 16).

“A developed country is one with industries, good roads...” (Biubwa, 16).

Participants also associated development with education. The quotes below were responding to the opening question of the focus groups on development, which was: “If you had the choice, where in the world would you live?”

“Mina (me), I would like to live in the United States of America because it’s a developed country and the education that they get there overseas is better education than South Africa and... ya [yes]... it’s a nice country... ya [yes]” (Ntombifuthi, 15).

“In America, because they are developed and educated” (Eline, 16).

“I want to live in London, because in London, there’s everything and a place where you can find yourself and where you can learn, from school...” (Siphiwe, 14).

Participants sometimes explicitly equated Western education and language as the determining elements of development (responding to the question: What is development?):

“[Development is] people who have a Western education” (Aisha, 16).

“[Development is] people who speak English” (Rose, 15).

They reinforced these views by illustrating the higher levels of respect accorded to Europeans or Africans who had lived elsewhere:

“...there is this girl, she went to study in Europe, when she came back, everybody respected her” (Aisha, 16).

“If you are from the outside, you are respected” (Rose, 15).

This perceived superiority of the West matches the devaluation of their own knowledge and capabilities. Further testimonies revealed that participants made reference to a stigmatizing discourse of ignorance, laziness and irresponsibility to explain poverty and underdevelopment in their communities. There are two distinguishable levels at which participants used this discourse. Firstly, in relation to the attitudes and behaviours of individuals in the community or of Africans in general:

“Poverty is ignorance, laziness and lack of education” (Esta, 12).

“...the problem is laziness, people want money but they don't want to work” (Linda, 18).

“South Africans are ignorant because they don't want to work...” (Tandani, 16).

Secondly, it was used in relation to gender, whereby participants described young women as lazy and irresponsible, and finding easy ways to make a living through prostitution. Young women were also accused of getting pregnant so that they could access the social grant instead of going to work, and were further depicted as irresponsible by using the grant money on themselves instead of looking after their children:

“Most people, they create their own problems because of their laziness, though they are strong enough they don't want to work. Look at those girls who sell their bodies, it's not that they have nothing to do, they don't want to work because even the young ones continue to be lazy because they copy from the adults”(Peter, 18).

“South Africans most of us we love mahala [free] things you know... grants... many people especially, they use pregnancy because they want this money” (Tandani, 16).

“...and some of the people don’t buy things for their babies, they go and gamble with the grant money and some of them drink up with that money” (Ntombifuthi, 15).

These testimonies demonstrate how levels of development and poverty were associated with identity factors based on race and gender. Stigmatizing beliefs in the ignorance, laziness and irresponsibility of Africans were re-enacted through community beliefs and largely directed towards young women. These beliefs impact on the social capital and social identities of communities through a language of blame and victimisation, thereby undermining the possibilities in finding points of solidarity.

On the other hand, through their photo-stories, young people represented their communities in a more positive light. The following stories about street garages and the youth centre in Kliptown, Soweto, are just a few examples of the resourcefulness of individuals in the community and also demonstrate social cohesiveness. Remy describes the initiative of young people who set up their own business and the importance of collaboration in the work place:



Street Garages

Encouraging young people to learn and to get professional skills and to earn an income. They will stop wandering on the streets without professional skills.

This is a mechanic. He works with his fellow mechanics who came together as a group and started a business. Their job is a bit dangerous as they are often at risk

of accidents. They make good profit because they work well together. They don't fight during work and they get a lot of customers. They often rest and eat together while exchanging ideas.

Remy, 16

Gabaza illustrates the important role of community support and networks through the activities available at the youth centre:



Soweto Kliptown Youth (SKY)

At SKY we are doing so many activities like dancing, singing, acting, sports... During the school holidays, we have camp at SKY... At SKY, we have feed the children for kids that are attending school early in the morning before they go to school at 7am. Then after school, they feed the children by 3pm. At SKY, we are safe because in the streets they are abusing children.

Gabaza, 12

Juma's story about Zena challenges the stigmatization of teenage pregnancy and illustrates a young woman's experience of pregnancy in a positive light, in which he described her as happy and cared for:



Zena

I hate seeing young women who get pregnant being abandoned and left suffering.

Zena is resting at her brother in law's business thinking about what her life will be like now that she is pregnant. She is helping to sell fish. Although she is pregnant, she is happy.

Juma, 18

The following stories, about transport in Kliptown, street children and mental illness in Dar es Salaam, demonstrate the knowledge and insight that young people had on the role of the broader institutions of society (in particular the government) and the need to mobilize networks of solidarity around a plurality of struggles in the community:



Transport in Kliptown

... Talking of bad things that we face, we lack social, financial, and strategic support from our local municipality, provincial government and also our national government. The above mentioned teams were supposed to be working hand in hand with us but to my surprise they are not doing that. Our national government is sometimes making life difficult for them and us too by not meeting our needs halfway. This is sometimes a result of unnecessary strikes of which costs some people their lives.

Thabang, 18



The photos show a street child in Ubungo and it's surroundings, buses and people doing business...Many street children live a very tough life because they have nobody to help them. It's everybody's responsibility to help children so I am asking the government to increase the number of orphanages. The truth is, most street children are very capable, the important thing is to give them a chance in life.

Adam, 16

Challenges of Life in the Streets



People with mental illness: The forgotten people

People with mental illness suffer a lot and they have nobody to take care of them. I am asking society to take care of them and give them a decent place to live in order to protect them from various hazards like eating in the dumps. They suffer a lot and some are dying from unknown causes. I met this man at Bunju market. He doesn't have a place to stay. He roams in the streets. Some people beat him and chase him away. He used to be a fisherman. One day his boat got lost because of strong winds. He was with other fishermen but he was the only one who survived. He was rescued after one month at sea and was taken back home. He stopped fishing and because he stayed at home idle for a long time, he got into drugs. This is the cause of his madness. His family rejected him and he is now living in the streets with no help.

Simon, 19

Participants' narratives thus gave rise to contradictory representations between the stigmatization and the resourceful of community members. The focus group results on development tended to collude with the stigmatizing discourses of development introduced previously, whereas in the act of re-presentation, young people found more positive ways of depicting themselves and their communities. The discussion that follows will therefore focus on how these representations were able to coexist and the role that social solidarity can have in the practice of resistance and re-presentation.

DISCUSSION

The Legitimation of Racialized and Gendered Development

The above findings reveal that imbued in participants' explanations of poverty and underdevelopment is a stigmatizing discourse directed at themselves and their communities. Participants made reference to a repertoire of familiar beliefs anchored in the images of laziness, irresponsibility and ignorance of Africans (Hall, 2000; Dogra, 2007; Baaz, 2005), which I describe as a racialized and gendered discourse of postcoloniality. A historical perspective can identify the roots of such beliefs to the scientific claims that were made about Africans as far back as the 19th century. This body of knowledge is often referred to as 'scientific racism' (Richards, 1997), which has institutionalized racialized representations into the current era of development and serves to justify the 'white man's burden' (Easterly, 2006). Central to this is the race and IQ debate, which is emblematic in identifying the racial dimension to stigmatizing representations of Africa. As recently as 2006, Kanazawa used IQ testing to argue that there is a correlation between low IQ in sub-Saharan Africa and low levels of health. Despite his claims being subsequently discredited (Ellison, 2007), it is still an area that underpins so many of the stereotypes about black people, as evidenced in Howarth's (2004), Phoenix's (2009), Mirza & Reay's (2000), and Troyna's (1984) papers on race and educational achievement; and also Baaz's (2005) and Kothari's (2006a, 2006b) writings on race and expertise in the development context. In addition to ignorance and IQ, images of Africans as irresponsible and unreliable (see Hall, 2000) can also be associated with widespread depictions of corruption and poor morals in African people and leadership, views that underlie development discourses and programming through the current focus on building 'good governance' and 'leadership' (Mosse & Lewis, 2005).

Social representations studies confirm that representations are "underpinned by various motivations" (Joffe, 2003, p. 66) and that knowledge is never disinterested (Howarth, 2003). Bauer and Gaskell (1999) further argue that "a representation may be classified as ideological if its anchors and objectifications can be shown to contradict the project of a particular milieu and thus to sustain a relationship of dominance" (p. 173). Development theory and policy is a universalising type of knowledge communicated by powerful bilateral and multilateral institutions and INGOs that are able to define and influence the conditions of everyday people on a massive scale thus facilitating legitimation processes, whereby all other

forms of knowing and living are assessed against it (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Therefore, I argue that development has an ideological function that excludes and maintains relationships of dominance between different groups in society. As a 'hegemonic' form of knowledge, it induces people to shift their ideological perspectives and echo dominant ideas (Ledwith, 2001). This partly explains why, as a result, participants in this project often colluded with a stigmatizing discourse of development. Furthermore, in order to distance themselves and protect their self-identity, the stigmatizing discourse was most often directed at others in the community, especially young women, through a language of 'horizontal violence' (Freire, 1970).

Re-presenting Community in Networks of Social Solidarity: Resistance and Alternatives

Nevertheless, the self-protective aspect of SRT also presents the possibility that young people would refute the stigmatization attributed to them, which they often did, through alternative representations of self and community. This is visible through Adam's story presented above about a street child, Abdul. As a street child himself, Adam understands the stigma associated with being part of that group. He thus chose to contest the language of blame and victimization and recognized the agency of street children by saying that:

“(...) The truth is, most street children are very capable, the important thing is to give them a chance in life.”

Hence, Adam, in the photographer-photographee relationship, was able to take on the perspective of the 'other', and recognize it as legitimate (Jovchelovitch, 2008). However, in most cases, the connection between the identity of the photographer and the photographee was less pronounced and the ability of the young photographers to take on other perspectives necessitates additional clarifications. One observable factor was the identity positions that the young photographers adopted through the social act of representation. Equipped with a camera and a mandate, the participants took on the role of the researcher, 'gazing' into other people's lives. Involved in that process is what Gillespie (2006) has defined in a different context as the 'reverse gaze', during which the photographer reflects on the intrusiveness of the practice of ascribing meaning and develops a particular consciousness as a result. Juxtaposing the focus group findings and the photo-story findings demonstrates different

depictions resulting from the social act of representation. Ntombifuthi's testimonies illustrate this well. In her early statements about teenage pregnancy, during the focus group discussion, she described the irresponsibility of young women who fall pregnant to access the social grant and thereafter spend those resources on drink and gambling (see findings above). In doing so, she maintains a distance between herself and the young women she refers to. At another point in that same discussion, she used a similar stigmatizing discourse of laziness and irresponsibility and stated the following:

“I think people in our community they don't want to work you know they are always just dependent on those who are working you know, they always ask for things, they always want things to be done for them, they don't want to do anything, they just sit in the morning outside and sit in the sun, that's what they do” (Ntombifuthi, 15).

By referring to community members as 'they', Ntombifuthi maintains a certain distance and protects her self-identity. However, in producing her photo-story, *Life in a Shack*, Ntombifuthi asked neighbouring families whether she could take photos of their homes and explained the project to them. In some of these encounters, she experienced resistance from her neighbours, who expressed feelings of shame at the prospect of exposing their living conditions to others. By taking these feelings into account, she acknowledged the impact of her gaze on others. As a result, her story provided an alternative perspective and alluded to community agency in describing the lives of individuals in her community. She also identified with them by using the pronoun 'we':

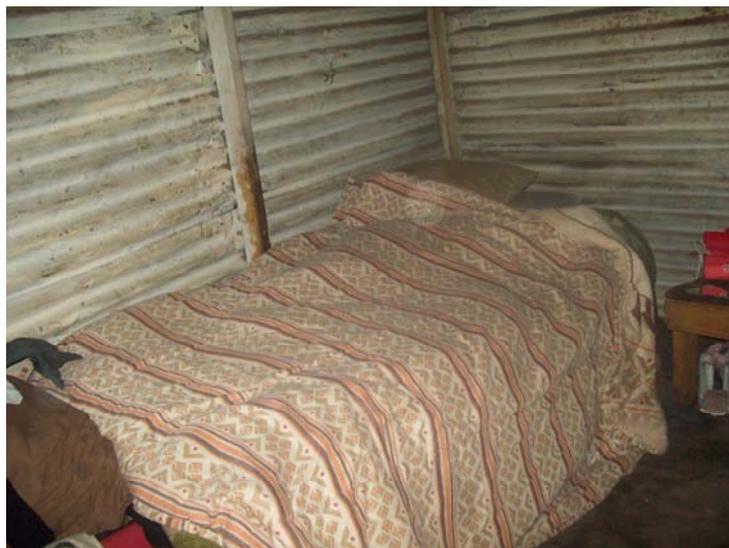


Life in a Shack

“A shack is a form of shelter for many people. It is cold when the weather is cold and hot when it is hot. Without electricity we find a way of doing things, for example we use candles for light and coal for heat”.

Ntombifuthi, 15

Rather than using a victim-blaming language and describing these resources as merely ‘survival skills’ of the poor (Bebbington, 2006), she demonstrates that “...within the limits of the information and resources they have and the uncertainties they face, individuals and social groups are ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘capable’ ... and thus actively engage in constructing their own social worlds...” Burawoy (1985, p. 23). She also related teenage pregnancy to a strategic choice and acknowledged the broader social environment in the decision-making processes of young women:



“...girls fall pregnant because they want the social grant to make a living. Teenage pregnancy is a result of poverty. We live in shacks but we are survivors!”

Ntombifuthi, 15

Hence, in re-presenting her community, Ntombifuthi shifted from a language of ignorance, laziness and irresponsibility to give a more positive account. It is within the social interaction, in this case, that Ntombifuthi was able to recognize community agency and recognize herself as part of the community that she was describing, which led to the production of alternative

representations. Had Ntombifuthi gone on to interact with young mothers and listened to their perspectives of the social grant, her story may have changed even further.

In light of the above, I suggest that when research methods, such as Photovoice, are used as a “gesture of recognition” during social encounters, they can create an alternative set of representations (Gillespie, 2006, p. 358). Furthermore, that it is through the interaction with some of the most intimate aspects of people’s lives (their homes) and within the act of photography as re-presentation that Ntombifuthi began to develop an understanding of her social identity, as a young woman belonging to the community that she was representing. This process echoes the notion of solidarity as a ‘fusion of horizons’, revisited by Tsirogianni and Andreouli (this issue), that results from a consciousness of the “historical contingencies that bind people together in particular contexts under particular circumstances”. Hence, in an act of solidarity, Ntombifuthi changed her narrative in a way that maintained self-protection by not only preserving her individual identity but that of her community as well.

The Complexity of Social Encounters in Urban African Contexts

The discussion up to this point establishes social solidarity as an important mechanism in the process of resistance and transformation. However, the story ideas chosen by the participants presented both advantages and difficulties in promoting social solidarity, depending on the dialogue established between photographer and photographee. For instance, Simon spent five days interacting with a mentally disabled man and narrated his life story to explain some of the reasons for his disability. As a result, he was able to describe his situation without blame or judgement. This is particularly visible in his accounts of substance abuse. One could argue that Mpho, on the other hand, who did not interact with the subjects of his photo-story, victimized them as substance abusers by using a language that reinforces existing representations of young people as ‘mad’, ‘bad’ or ‘deviant’ (Campbell et al, 2004):



Substance abuse

Some of the children in Kliptown are smoking. They drink and use drugs. They don't go to school because of that. They bully people, some kill people.

They make people afraid and demand people's money and if you refuse they will do bad things to you. When they get money, they buy alcohol and drugs. They don't eat food, they eat drugs and alcohol.

Why do young people take drugs and alcohol?

They think it they will relieve their stress.

They think they will be cool.

They think they will be clever.

They think they will be strong.

They think it's a good lifestyle for them.

Mpho, 16

Mpho maintained a distance between himself and his peers and was fearful of interacting with them and of exposing their activities and identities in his photographs. The 'reverse gaze', in this case, led Mpho to make assumptions about the photographees that reflected his own beliefs and revealed the ambiguity of his claims that these young people 'think they are cool, clever and strong'. If this were the case, they may have welcomed the opportunity to be photographed and exposed. Hence, in the absence of social contact, Mpho predicted the perspectives of his subjects and relied on his own repertoire of stigmatizing meanings. In other cases, stories that were met with excessive resistance sometimes led the young photographers to silence themselves and take on other projects. For example, one participant called Sipiwe, after a hostile encounter with a policeman, abandoned her topic on police services and chose to do a story on community crèches, which was far less threatening. Hence, establishing positive contacts in low resource settings, often characterized by suspicion and competition for resources, is a challenging task.

Overall, the participants in the Shooting Horizons project used a range of strategies and tactics to interact with community members. Some opted to hide themselves to take

photos or parted with money in situations where they faced mistrust, rejection and even violent threats. Others sought assistance from peers or supportive adults to gain the confidence of photographees and to legitimate their actions, or used other insightful tactics in establishing contacts with their subjects. The stories that involved ‘dialogical encounters’ (Jovchelovitch, 2008) between photographer and photographee demonstrated superior results in terms of building solidarity, countering stigma and enabling alternative conceptualisations of community life. For some participants, the social encounters were less positive and led to fatalistic behaviours (through silence) and reproduced the stigmatization of their communities, as young people maintained a strategic distance between themselves and the subjects of their stories, through a language of blame and victimization. In light of these experiences, further research is required to understand how future projects can assist participants in establishing supportive relationships with members of their communities.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed how stigmatizing representations of development impact on the social identities of individuals in contemporary urban African communities in ways that reproduce stigma and contradict the process of social change. Many young people in this study described members of their communities as lazy, ignorant and irresponsible through a racialized and gendered discourse of postcoloniality. In doing so, young people used a language of blame and victimization directed towards others, thereby protecting their self-identities. On the other hand, the findings of the Shooting Horizons project showed that young people also exposed alternative representations of their lived realities. In the practice of re-presentation, activities that established solidarity with community members enabled young people to acknowledge the perspective of others, and, in that process, develop a more critical awareness of their own beliefs. This dialogical and self-reflexive process led them to identify more closely with the community and overcome some of their stigmatizing beliefs. The dynamics of self-protection and social recognition were central elements in creating more cohesive social identities. Hence, in the social representations approach to social change adopted here, “...the practice of re-presentation [became] a potential space for meanings to be contested, negated and transformed” (Howarth, 2003, p. 12). To conclude, I suggest that social solidarity is an important catalyst for development because social change does not emerge from projects to alleviate poverty but rather “in response to social relationships and

dynamics of capital accumulation... sustained by aspirations derived from shared identities” (Bebbington, 2006, p. 2). The challenge remains for social representations research to observe and critique the direction that patterns of identity protective representation can take (Joffe, 2003, p. 67), so that individuals can mobilize around the activities that enhance rather than stigmatize their communities in line with a social justice agenda.

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