

Radical Practice and “Real Hustle”:
Neoliberalism from Below in a
South African Township

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Abstract

More than twenty years after the end of apartheid, many of the promises of popular democracy and liberation remain unfulfilled for black South Africans. The continuing economic and social inequalities in the cities of South Africa demonstrate that, even after apartheid, many of the oppressive power structures from colonial rule have remained in place. These structures have been augmented by increasingly dominant governing technologies of neoliberalism, which mandate that members of society regulate themselves in order to maximize their economic output, while also holding “market growth” as the dominant principle for managing populations. Neoliberalism operates through particular discourses of self and society: according to neoliberal logics in South Africa, free markets hold the promise of freedom and equality, which individual citizens can realize through practicing an entrepreneurial work ethic.

In this thesis, I explore the ways that young adults in Langa, a black township of Cape Town, related to the neoliberal discourses of contemporary South Africa. Through interviews with young people and through observations of a grassroots youth organization in Langa, I asked how their aspirations – their ideas of success, their visions of themselves in the future, and the practices they were currently engaging in to realize these visions – drew upon and reacted to dominant neoliberal discourse. I argue that the respondents brought their experiences of marginalization to bear in their performance of neoliberal narratives, reformulating a set of ideas that substantiates hegemonic power relations into transgressive visions of their own actualization. Black youth in Langa created new ways of understanding the economy, the city, and the workings of

governance, which centered the collective support and creative abilities of marginalized people. Through a youth organization called “Real Phandaz”, they put these understandings into radical practice within a seemingly neoliberal setting. This study, I argue, works towards an understanding of “neoliberalism from below” by exploring how a group of young people in Langa practiced new understandings of liberation from their marginalized position.

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Introduction

This project stems from my experience living in Langa, a township of Cape Town. The term “township” in South Africa denotes urban residential areas to which black residents were restricted during apartheid: only those designated as “black” were permitted to reside in townships, and townships were the only spaces in the city where any black person could legally live. Today, Langa remains one of the only distinctly black areas of Cape Town – 99% of its residents identify as black – and, like most other townships, Langa is often constructed as a place of poverty, disorder, and unregulated blackness, in contrast to the “modern” spaces of Cape Town proper. Though townships are home to residents with a wide range of occupations, living situations, and social backgrounds, as a population these residents are routinely stigmatized and homogenized by governing discourses, just as the “ghetto” is Othered in popular American imagination.

The marginalization and oppression surrounding townships in South Africa have continued into the post-apartheid era, raising questions about the promise of liberation that, in the eyes of many, was offered by the beginning of popular democratic rule in 1994. As I came into Langa and got to know fellow young adults there, I was interested in how these young people, the first generation to grow up under democracy, navigated their position in the “new South Africa.” Specifically, I wanted to understand more about the ways that individual young people interact with a specific set of discourses and governing technologies that has become increasingly powerful in post-apartheid society: neoliberalism.

Neoliberal discourses construct certain meanings and values around the individual self, economic markets, government, and space. In general, neoliberalism holds economic optimization to be the goal of both the behaviors of individuals and the political management of populations and social spaces. “Freedom” for citizens becomes the ability to compete in the free market, an atomizing structure that is meant to reward the skills and abilities of discrete individuals. The management of people and spaces becomes characterized by a drive for optimal productivity; as a result, societal dynamics of power are concealed by the purported benefit of “economic growth.”

As I describe in the first chapter, these discourses have become deeply embedded in South African society as neoliberal technologies of governance were used to shape the transition from apartheid and to create new relationships between citizens, the state, and the economy. A ruling coalition of national and international business interests along with ANC elites has become dominant after apartheid. This coalition kept oppressive colonial structures intact, leaving black residents of townships in a continually marginalized and stigmatized position.

Neoliberalism and Youth Aspiration

Growing up in Langa today, young people are surrounded by discourses of success that reflect and reify neoliberalism. These include an emphasis on individual entrepreneurship, self-regulation, and good worth ethic as solutions to social problems they confront; a definition of black spaces like Langa as “deviant”, “backwards”, and “un-modern”, whose residents should work to propel themselves into more “global”, market-driven urban spaces; and a rejection of “reliance” on government assistance in the

name of to taking responsibility for bettering one's position. Each of these narratives seeks to create subjects who are amenable to the current arrangement of power in South Africa. Since the success of neoliberal discourses in crafting docile subjects is constantly challenged, I explored how young people in Langa internalized or resisted these discourses at the personal, meaning-making level.

I found that personal aspirations – as they were articulated, communicated, and acted upon by young people – constituted a central site of interaction with neoliberal discourse. Young people in Langa seemed to constantly bring of the question of aspiration and success, whether during church services or in casual conversations with friends. Moreover, it quickly became clear to me that the young people I came to know were not simply parroting pre-fixed notions of “success” – *i.e.* a high-paying job, a university education, an exciting social life – and evaluating their chances of achieving them. Rather, conversations about their aspirations were deeply involved in the realm of discourse and subjecthood. The aspirations that they described were very much a projects of the self: by holding particular visions of themselves in the future, they defined and asserted specific values, beliefs, and identities. Thus, articulations of aspiration served to perform and communicate the self, in ways revealed the significance of neoliberal narratives in young people's lives. By closely reading these aspirational practices, I draw out the ways that young Langa residents interacted with, internalized, and reformulated neoliberal discourses.

Based on interviews and participant observations in Langa, I argue that young people powerfully reformulated the potentially oppressive discourses of neoliberalism, envisioning and enacting a future characterized by black youth's collective transgression

of stigma and marginalization rather than individual competition on the free market. I show how the respondents brought their experiences “on the margins” of South African society to bear in neoliberal discourses of self, co-opting these discourses to create new meanings and practices of liberation. Specifically, I discuss the aspirations of young Langa residents as they relate to three central realms of neoliberal discourse: markets and economic participation; meanings of urban space; and relations of governance. In each of these realms, respondents seemed to reproduce neoliberal understandings, but they crucially re-centered these understandings on the collective transgression and self-actualization of marginalized subjects.

When discussing the role of economic markets in their personal aspirations, the respondents characterized “hustle” through the market as an unbounded process of realizing potential, recasting economic participation as a social project achieved through collective support and success with other young people.

Regarding discourses of space, the respondents understood globally-linked spaces, such as Johannesburg, as embodying the absence of barriers and restrictions they encountered from Langa. Rather than constructing movement from Langa as a remaking of the self or realization of untethered “freedom”, they reacted against discursive boundaries and sought to realize their own value by putting their experiences in Langa into movement across South Africa.

Finally, young people in Langa contested the sovereignty of the state by casting governmental structures as distant, controlling, and fundamentally uninvolved in the creative capacities of youth. Especially through youth organizations, they challenged the

relations of governance by positing themselves as the state's replacement, imagining a governmental process that is characterized by their own self-actualization.

Taken together, the respondents' articulations of aspiration in these realms constitute a radical reformulation of neoliberal discourses. Young people's interaction with narratives of opportunity and success was characterized by a common desire for self-actualization which reacted against the mechanisms of oppression that township residents experience. Rooted in this need for self-actualization, young people devised futures within and beyond current neoliberal structures, co-opting seemingly hegemonic narratives into radical perspective and practice. As I especially witnessed in a grassroots organization of Langa youth called *Real Phandaz*, young people practiced these aspirations by creating forms of economy and governance that are characterized by radical support, participation, and empowerment.

Destabilizing Discourse, Devising Liberation

To build a framework for understanding how young people's aspirational practices are related to dominant neoliberal contexts in South Africa, I draw upon anthropological theories of discourse. By "discourse", I mean a set of representations, codes, and articulations that ascribe truth and create knowledge as dictated by hegemonic power (see Foucault 1972).

I argue that the respondents for this project reformulated neoliberal discourses through their experiences as marginalized black youth. In exploring these young people's ability to affect discourse, I follow especially Gillian Cowlishaw's work to combine Judith Butler's theories of performativity with an ethnographic interest in the

inventiveness of human subjects, as seen in her book *Blackfellas, Whitefellas, and the Hidden Injuries of Race* (Cowlshaw 2004). Butler theorizes the self as fundamentally performative; gender, race, and other categories of identity are not internal qualities of gendered and raced people, but rather are solely manifest through recognized performances of particular gendered and raced positions. For Butler, the individual operates in a world of already established languages – discourses – by which subjects are “called into being”, interpreted, and categorized (Cowlshaw 2004:19).

Cowlshaw explores what it means for subjects to destabilize these languages by arguing that black Aboriginal people’s performances of race reformulate racial discourse itself. She writes particularly about the disjunctures that occur when subjects reproduce discursive images: “In re-enacting the complex and heterogeneous images we are presented with, we inevitably change them, as no mimicry reproduces exactly what it copies...It is in the constant and impossible replication that there is a space of agency or will, albeit unconscious or impulsive, where the categories we are living in can be destabilized, altered, and partially reformulated” (Cowlshaw 2004:19). Though I do not claim to investigate the process of interpellation ethnographically, it is in this area of destabilization and counter-action *into* dominant discourse, rooted in practice and experience, that my argument operates. The respondents for this project encountered and reproduced neoliberal discourses of economy, space, and governance; at the same time, because of their contradictory position on the margins of South African society and the specific goals and aspirations that they hoped to enact from this position, they significantly destabilized these discourses.

Indeed, the respondents encountered a variety of seemingly contradictory discourses of self. In chapter two I begin to describe some of these, from the free-wheeling optimism of neoliberal “freedom” to the pressures of enclosure and stigma felt by black township dwellers as marginal subjects and the fuller identities recognized within Langa as a black Xhosa community. The disjuncture between competing discourses, I argue, is characteristic of experience “on the margins” for Langa youth. Cowlshaw, writing about the contradictory racial discourses offered to Aboriginal Australians, asks about the consequences of such a situation: “The question that thus arises for me is this: in conditions where more than one language calls the social self into being, is there a doubling of possibilities of freedom?” (Cowlshaw 2004:20). I don’t know what construct of “freedom” is offered by either discourse, but I do hold that there is a productive tension or gap between the competing calls of these languages of the self, which the respondents in Langa are filling in. As the words and practices of the respondents demonstrate, the result of such tension is not a simple “subversion” or “reproduction” of the neoliberal order. Rather, from the tensions of experience in Langa, radical subjectivities and possibilities emerge – of economic markets as radically empowering, of the transgression of spatial boundaries, and of structures of governance characterized by self-actualization of citizens – from reformulations of dominant discourse.

Following the approach of Nigel Gibson, who used theories of Frantz Fanon to interrogate neoliberal South Africa, I hold that the discursive interventions I describe here are essential to developing a dynamic understanding of liberation. Scholarship interested in decolonization and oppression cannot only focus on the ways in which dominant power affects people and determines situations; the ways that marginalized populations

move forward in imagination and practice are equally central and, as Gibson argues in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*, they constitute an essential starting point for historically-grounded concepts of liberation (Gibson 2011).

Gibson's work provides much of the theoretical orientation of this thesis. He applies Frantz Fanon's theories on radical democracy and movements from below to contemporary South Africa, arguing that the transition from apartheid resulted in a "neocolonial" state and economic apparatus that continues to oppress the majority of South Africans in a neoliberal era. Ideas of liberation from this reality, Gibson holds, cannot be formed *a priori* by the intellectual or the activist, but must dialectically emerge from the experience of the oppressed (Gibson 2011:14). He discusses *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, a shack-dwellers movement in Durban, as an example of a "movement from below" that produces new, decolonized forms of sociality, community, and democratic existence. This movement, Gibson argues, creates "a politics that does not begin from the art of the possible" (Gibson 2011:27), and thus begins to provide an answer for how to stop repeating neocolonial/postcolonial history.

This framework of movements from below is crucial for understanding the significance of the aspirations of young people in Langa. The reformulation of discourse that I describe is a concrete example of marginalized youth creating a "politics that does not begin with the art of the possible", because they envision radical potentialities for neoliberal constructs of economy, space, and governance. Moreover, these discursive dynamics are not restricted to the realm of abstraction; just as the shack dwellers' movement put ideas into practice, the activities of *Real Phandaz* in Langa create a new

relationship to economy – one that is collective rather than individual and founded in mutual development and support rather than competition – and new forms of governance that serve to actualize young people’s creative potential. The fact that these aspirational practices draw upon neoliberal narratives does not diminish their significance. To the contrary, this indicates that young people are finding ways forward for themselves within and beyond neoliberalism, reformulating discourses to serve themselves rather than simply reacting against the current reality. This close look at the aspirations and visions of themselves in the future that young people in Langa articulate provides an opportunity to better understand the changing forms and practices of liberation in contemporary South Africa.

Chapter One

Liberation Deferred: Racialized Citizenship in South Africa, Past and Present

In this chapter, I lay out an overview of major aspects of present-day South African society for the benefit of the reader unfamiliar with the country. Following this snapshot, I provide a brief history of racialized citizenship and technologies of governance in South Africa, including the development of neoliberalism in the post-apartheid era. This history elaborates the dominant discourses of South African citizenship and specifies some of the challenges that the respondents still face as black township youth.

Demographics, Economy, and Politics – a Contemporary Snapshot

Race and ethnicity are extremely salient in South African society; despite the fact that the large majority of South Africans are black, centuries of colonization intense entrenchment of the political and economic power of the colonizers have resulted in a continuingly racialized and anti-black society. Racial categorization was a core part of the colonial process, and racial categories were cemented by state intervention during apartheid. 80% of South Africans identify as black; 8.9% identify as “coloured,” a racial group that includes descendants of white settlers and their slaves/servants, Malaysian and East African slaves, and more recent children of “mixed” parentage; 8.9% are white, primarily descended from Dutch or English colonizers; and 2.5% are Indian or Asian.

Though the white people are by far a minority in South Africa, they continue to receive almost half of the country's income.¹

South Africa has one of the most industrialized economies on the African continent. The process of industrialization began with the rapid growth of mining in the late nineteenth century, and continued with the development of manufacturing before World War I (Worden 2007:41-48). Though strong, large-scale farming keeps the country agriculturally self sufficient, the industries of mining, manufacturing, construction, and power make up 30% of the nation's GDP.² This industrialization catalyzed rapid urbanization. After a century of urban population growth, cities are home to 48% of the black population and 90% of the white population in South Africa.³ For Cape Town in particular, industrialization was a major factor for a dramatic increase in the black population: between 1951 and 1977, the number of black residents in Cape Town increased 225% (Western 1996:59).

South Africa's relationship to the global capitalist economy has significantly shifted in the last thirty years, becoming increasingly focused on attracting international investment. One major milestone of this process was the ratification of a free trade

¹ Statistics South Africa. "Statistical Release (revised) P0301.4: Census 2011." Pg. 42. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03014/P030142011.pdf> (accessed April 4 2016).

² South Africa, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. Swarthmore College (Tri-Colleges Library Consortium). <http://www.europaworld.com.proxy.swarthmore.edu/entry/za> (accessed December 28 2015).

³ Statistics South Africa. "Migration and Urbanization in South Africa." Pg. 19. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-04-02/Report-03-04-02.pdf> (accessed April 19 2016).

agreement with the EU in 2000.⁴ The World Bank reports that the increased weight of US monetary policy in South Africa has resulted in more volatility, risk aversion, and sensitivity to changing investor sentiment for the national economy.⁵

In the current moment, the South African government faces challenges similar to other countries in the global South that participate in global capitalism as post-colonies. Redistribution of material wealth in South Africa was quickly ruled out during negotiations with business and government leaders during the transition from apartheid (Worden 2007:152, 161), but inequality and unequal economic growth continue to be cited as hindering the country's economy.⁶ Since 1994, the working-age population (ages 18-65) has increased by 11 million, but only a third of this population surge has been absorbed into the labor market, leaving just 40% of working-age South Africans with employment.⁷

Currently, the South African government is attempting to decrease its debt while the also addressing slow economic "growth" (Worden 2007: 161-2). Over the past two years,

⁴ "South Africa." In *Political Handbook of the World 2015*, edited by Thomas Lansford, 1336-50. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2015.
http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.swarthmore.edu/phw/phw2015_SouthAfrica (accessed December 28 2015).

⁵ The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. "South Africa Economic Update: Jobs and South Africa's Changing Demographics." 2015.
http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/08/14/090224b08307421f/1_0/Rendered/PDF/South0Africa0e0hanging0demographics.pdf (accessed April 5, 2016).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Statistics South Africa. "Statistical Release (revised) P0301.4: Census 2011."
<http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03014/P030142011.pdf> (accessed April 4 2016).

organized labor has called many strikes for increased wages and benefits. As labor and other popular organizations agitate for more resources and better conditions, the World Bank cites labor unrest as a major disruption of economic growth and recommends more collaboration between government and private sector, less interference from public policy, and a refusal to let labor gains “outstrip” inflation and productivity.⁸ The World Bank’s condemnation of “counterproductive” labor organizing is a clear example of the tension between the international pressure for “development” and the struggles of South African workers and citizens.

Politically, South Africa is governed by a highly centralized, parliamentary, party-based democracy. The national government, rather than local provincial governments, holds the vast majority of power in policy-making and spending. The African National Party (ANC) has had dominance over parliament since the end of apartheid, and operates through a highly developed and hierarchical party structure.⁹ When elections occur, voters cast their ballots only for their preferred party – there are no individual candidates on the ballot, and none of the members of parliament have a constituency. As a result,

⁸ The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. “South Africa Economic Update: Jobs and South Africa’s Changing Demographics.” 2015. http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/08/14/090224b08307421f/1_0/Rendered/PDF/South0Africa0e0hanging0demographics.pdf (accessed April 5, 2016).

⁹ Pg 1345 in “South Africa.” In *Political Handbook of the World 2015*, edited by Thomas Lansford, 1336-50. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2015. http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.swarthmore.edu/phw/phw2015_SouthAfrica (accessed December 28 2015).

internal ANC politics are primary determinants of national governance, because factions within the ANC decide who holds what position.¹⁰

The other major branch of government is the judiciary. The judicial system is tasked with upholding the new South African constitution, often dubbed “one of the most liberal in the world” (Worden 2007:160). As other authors have noted, judicial activism since apartheid has affected the performance of citizenship and strategies for social inclusion by encouraging marginalized groups to find recourse in the law (see Von Schnitzler 2014).

Histories of Racialized Citizenship

The snapshot above, while useful for an outsider to South Africa, is inadequate for motivating questions about the aspirations of black youth in Langa. We need to look at the historical processes of colonization and resistance in South Africa to gain perspectives on constructions of power, subjecthood, and liberation that are present today. These processes are highly relevant to young people’s visions of the future because they are expressed in the social and material conditions of life in Cape Town and because they are a part of the intergenerational knowledges of communities such as Langa.

The colonial process in South Africa bears many similarities to the colonization of other areas on the African continent. The first recorded European settlement in South Africa was founded in 1652, when Dutch merchants established a trading post near

¹⁰ Education and Training Unit for Democracy and Development. “Elections in South Africa.” <<http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/govern/elections.html>> (accessed April 21 2016).

modern-day Cape Town. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, various Dutch and British settlements were established along the coast of South Africa to serve as trading outposts on the route to India and East Asia. (Ross 1997:23-24).

Colonialism proper began with the spread of colonists across the region and the corresponding extension of British and Dutch state over the land, its people, and its resources. This period saw numerous violent conflicts between native African populations and British and Dutch colonists, as the latter used military power to establish their ability to execute authority across South Africa (Ross 1997:26-33).

The extension and brutal enforcement of colonial sovereignty over South Africa was combined with the incorporation of native Africans into capitalist modes of production (Worden 2007:40-41). In addition, the explosively expanding mining industry, beginning in the 1880s, dramatically restructured the economic activities of many native Africans. Through a cheap migrant labor system controlled by European companies, thousands of African men were forced to travel to massive mines, dwell in ready-made workers barracks, and rely on waged labor to support themselves and their families (Worden 43-45). Thus, the proletarianization of African workers rapidly gained momentum in the late nineteenth century. The appropriation of land was an essential aspect of this process.

In *Of Revelation and Revolution*, an extensive historical work on early colonial encounters in Southern Africa, Jean and John Comaroff describe some of the responses to colonization that native Africans activated through political organizations and mass movements. They analyze core logics and discourses of the colonial project, arguing that, given the dominance of colonial governmental and legal structures in nineteenth-century South Africa, African political action necessarily became situated in colonial discourses.

Specifically, they show that colonization was caught between two contradictory ways of formulating African subjects. Colonial legal structures in South Africa often recognized native societies as having “ethnic sovereignty” – i.e., being made of up uncivilized Africans, separate from the colony, who were relegated to certain fixed territories and interacted with as separate nations, much like Native American tribes in United States history. On the other hand, the creation of rights-bearing subjects was meant to be the ultimate payoff of colonialism for native peoples. The colonial powers offered formal equality and incorporation into full citizenship under the crown as the goal for colonized peoples (Comaroff and Comaroff:396-8).

As the Comaroffs argue, native Africans’ responses to colonial power navigated between these conflicting discourses of ethnic sovereignty and European citizenship. Many Africans, especially in the emerging middle-class, advocated for full citizenship and equal rights under the law. Others supported a reinforcement of pre-contact political structures to push for territorial rights and rights of African self-governance. And in fact, many African political leaders utilized both strategies in different contexts, calculating which approach was most likely to result in African political gain (Comaroff and Comaroff:400). The opportunities for any form of negotiation and gain, however, were dramatically curtailed by the entrenchment of a white colonial government in the early twentieth century.

Two central political events – the creation of the Union of South Africa and the passage of the Land Act of 1913 – solidified the power of white colonists across South Africa. The Union of South Africa, established in 1908, formalized the borders and governmental structure of the colony. The Union was a pact between Great Britain,

which was interested in maintaining South Africa as a colony even though the British settler population was relatively small, and Afrikaners, settlers of Dutch descent, who were primarily land-owning farmers. The formation of this Union clearly demonstrated that neither British nor Afrikaners were interested in including native Africans in South African government. For the first time, non-whites were explicitly disenfranchised from the political process (Ross 1997:87-90). The new government held that native Africans participated in their own separate tribal systems, and therefore should not yet be forced into the European political community. According to the white coalition government, native tribal structures were the appropriate place for black South Africans to participate in self-governance; they claimed that these two governmental systems were meant to operate independently, and negotiate with each other on behalf of their constituents (Molteno 1977: 22-24). This logic of separate sovereignties would continue for the entirety of the 20th century.

At the time the Union of South Africa was created, however, the black population was anything but “separate” from colonial society. There were already a substantial number of native Africans living and working in European settlements – usually as manual laborers or domestic workers – as well as a very large population of farmers, both land-owning and tenant. Moreover, as discussed above, an African “middle class” pushing for fully recognized political and legal rights under colonial rule was already well established. Where previously there had been ambiguity in the nature of native Africans’ participation in colonial rule, the new coalition of English and Afrikaner interests definitively selected ethnic sovereignty as the formal framework for the Union of South Africa (Lodge 1983:1-2). The subsequent Land Act of 1913 shows how the

white government, acting on this framework, dispossessed native Africans across the country.

The European coalition government intended the Land Act of 1913 to be the final settlement of disputes and ambiguities over land ownership between black and white South Africans. Under this act, 7% of South Africa's land was set aside for "reserves" – territories that would be self-governed by native Africans through their own political structures. In the remaining 93% of South Africa, native Africans were forbidden from purchasing land of any kind (Worden 2007:54-56). This piece of legislation was an extreme extension of the principle of ethnic sovereignty, and also a clear example of the power of European colonizers to protect their own interests. From the time of forced removal to the reserves, black South Africans were permitted to occupy barely enough land for subsistence, and thus had no alternative but to participate in the exploitative economic systems of the white colony.

After the formation of the South African Republic and the Land Act of 1913, hegemonic discourses about the native African population and their relationship to structures of governance became increasingly entrenched. While some historians view racial *apartheid*, which formally began in 1949, as an aberrant expression of white Afrikaner racism, more recent studies have argued that this phenomenon was in fact a continuous extension of discourses on race and citizenship that began to coalesce in the early twentieth century (see Wolpe 1972; Worden 2007:103-104).

Discourses of racial citizenship were clearly written into urban spaces. Cities in South Africa were constructed as white European spaces, to which black populations could only be visitors (Western 1996:139-140). This was the given logic for the creation of

townships, which were meant to house all of the black workers who migrated into the city for jobs. Even though townships first came into being as a result of forced removals of black families already dwelling in the “European” city, they came to be discursively constructed as spaces for migrant laborers to stay while they worked in city industries (Western 1996:46). As such, the townships were laid out to ensure easy surveillance and control of an African worker population, and by the 1950s almost all new structures that the government built in townships were essentially massive barracks for male laborers (Western 1996:287-308).

Increasing state interventions in black economic activity continued to enact oppressive racial discourses. According to the nation’s ruling interests, the only legitimate reason for black people to exist in the city was in order to provide formally waged labor. Thus, apartheid’s notorious pass system was developed as a method for controlling black South Africans’ movement into urban spaces. All passes for black residents had to include proof of current employment in the city. Without a formal employer, there was no way to legally obtain a pass, and therefore no way to lawfully exist in the city. Black residents without passes were imprisoned and fined if they could not produce proof of employment. Thus, passes provided enforceability of a governing logic in South African cities: black residents could only be temporary, migrant workers, who existed in the city solely in the necessity of their labor (Worden 2007:108-109).

One final element of the dominant discourses around black South Africans in the nineteenth century is ethnicity. Black South Africans’ encounters and experiences with ethnicity are diverse and nuanced, and represent perhaps a serious gap in historical and ethnographic literature on South Africa. I speak here not about ethnicity as experienced

by black people, but rather about the way that white governing power constructed and utilized ethnic discourses in its dominating apparatus.

As several authors have shown, the colonizing encounter constructed “ethnicity” as a meaningful social category. Before Europeans arrived in South Africa, there were many Bantu African social organizations, which interacted through dynamic trade, social ties, and changing structures of alliance, incorporation, and identification. While large scale “tribal” or ethnic structures did exist, the population of Southern African was not split among discrete “ethnic groups.” Instead, there existed a spectrum of changing regional affiliations and linguistic dialects and differentiations. Colonists, especially social scientists such as anthropologists bent on understanding these “primitive” civilizations, largely constructed discrete, mutually exclusive ethnic categories (Worden 2007:86-87). By recording languages and customs and “creating knowledge” about them, they defined particular ethnic identities: “Xhosas” were constructed as a discrete group with certain practices, beliefs, and as concrete language; “Zulus” were a contrasted social group with different characteristics (See Dubow 1987).

Before and during apartheid, the white government used the constructs of native ethnicity to make the domination of black South Africans more legitimate and effective. The government promoted reserves – the seven percent of South Africa’s land that was designated for black self-governance – as spaces where each ethnicity could have its own sovereignty and live by its own structures. Though the populations of the reserves came from multiple geographic areas and communities, the reserves themselves were treated as ethnically homogeneous– there was a Xhosa reserve, a Zulu one, a Sotho, and so on. The government promoted the power of chiefs and kings in these homelands, claiming that

these “tribal” governance structures reflected the natural state of ethnic African society. In reality, these structures bore little resemblance to pre-colonial reality, and the ethnic “leadership” was under constant threat of deposition by the white government if they did not remain consistent with the government’s interests. Steve Biko, an essential activist and theorist for black liberation, harshly condemned the tribal leaders who took up the positions offered to them by the apartheid government, writing that these apartheid institutions for natives “are modern-type laagers behind which the whites in this country are going to hide themselves for a long time to come. Slowly the ground is being swept off from under our feet and soon we blacks will believe completely that our political rights are in fact in our ‘own’ areas” (Biko 1971:36).

The discourses and techniques of white governance described above obscured the reality of black South Africans’ role in urban spaces. For one thing, black South Africans were integrated with and in many cases formed the very core of national capitalist economic production. During apartheid, the white ruling class portrayed the reserves as self-sufficient nations whose male inhabitants had the option of becoming migrant laborers in the European cities. As Harold Wolpe argued, this discourse obscured the true economic relations in the South African economy: the reserves, which the government itself created, were never meant to be economically self-sufficient, and their poor conditions compelled black Africans to continue to engage in wage labor (Wolpe 1971).

Black city-dwellers also experienced spatial constraints that affected individuals, families, and whole communities. Government forces tightly restricted the expansion of townships, resulting in increasingly densely packed residential areas (Western 1996:48-52). The pass system conspired to break up families by limiting the entry of women and

children into European cities, and even the domestic employment achieved by black women generally required them to live alone at their employer's house (Lodge 1983:139-142). These constraints were constantly and often effectively challenged by black urban residents. Black women were often the most visible and active protesters against the pass system, sometimes refusing to obtain or carry passes, and even organizing pass-burning campaigns. (Lodge 1983:139) And illegal settlements of temporary shelters grew in the interstices of urban space, challenging the government's ability to enforce its rigid vision of the city (Western 1996: 287-308).

Liberation Deferred: Neoliberalism in the Post-Apartheid Era

South Africa's much-heralded transition away from the *apartheid* regime was formally achieved in 1994, when the African National Congress (ANC) received a landslide victory in the first popular election. This transition was in many ways propelled by increasing mass protests and resistance from black South Africans throughout the 70s and 80s. Indeed, the transference of government power to the ANC in 1994 was celebrated as a moment of national liberation, bearing the promise of freedom and equality, by many black South Africans. The respondents for this project were born just as apartheid was ending; they are thus the first generation in South African to grow up after apartheid, and they are often seen as signifying the success and failures of post-apartheid South Africa.

In this thesis, I am interested in the vastly increasing influence of certain technologies of governance – referred to by many scholars as “neoliberalism” – that coincided with the transition from apartheid and the changing dynamics of contemporary South Africa.

Following scholars such as Aihwa Ong, I do not conceptualize neoliberalism as a single set of narratives or economic policies that were imposed onto South Africa “from above.” As Ong writes, “Rather than taking neoliberalism as a tidal wave of market-driven phenomena that sweeps from dominant countries to smaller ones, we could more fruitfully break neoliberalism down into various technologies” (Ong 2003:12). These technologies of governing, to Ong, are characterized by their orientation towards economic optimization of both the self-regulation of citizens and the biopolitical management of populations and social spaces (Ong 2003:6). In countries in the global South, neoliberalism develops and is selectively mobilized by dominant power in a way that elaborates and mutates existing histories of citizenship, resulting in “reconfigur[ed] relationships between governing and governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality” (Ong 2003:3). By exploring the aspirations of young people in Langa, I highlight marginalized township youth and the communities they create as sites of interaction, contestation, and radical reformulation of these technologies of neoliberalism in South Africa. Because neoliberalism develops and is expressed uniquely in different national contexts, however, I will now briefly describe some major aspects of its growth in South Africa and its significance for black youth today.

Several authors point out that, in addition to popular protest movements, the transition from apartheid was motivated by international political and economic forces that continue to affect South Africa into the twenty-first century. Revenues from mining and extractive industries sank significantly in the second half of the twentieth century and technological changes undermined the usefulness of a large unskilled workforce, pressuring business and government interests to transition to a more “high capital”

consumer economy (Worden 2007:151). In many cases, the necessities for growing such an economy came into friction with the system of apartheid, which was designed to maintain and regulate migrant black labor. In short, apartheid South Africa was becoming “bad for business” (Ross 2008:177). It is significant to note that the white government only began the transition from apartheid after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the “threat” of international Communism. With this change in global context, the socialist elements of the ANC and other liberation movements were significantly weakened, clearing the way for international capitalist interests to significantly influence the new government (Worden 2007:152).

The entrenchment of these international economic interests, which included heavy IMF and World Bank involvement, combined with the ascendancy of conservative forces in the ANC hierarchy to carry out neoliberal technologies in post-apartheid South Africa (Hart 2008:687-8). As Gillian Hart writes, the resulting policies oriented towards optimization in the global market “installed a new political rationality of rule that can contrast itself with apartheid precisely because it takes the market as its model, to which it can articulate freedom, democracy, and flexibility as opposed to apartheid state repression and rigidity” (Hart 2008:689).

The increasing power of neoliberal technologies have resulted in reformulated discourses of citizenship, space, and economy. Neoliberal discourses are characterized by their construction of freedom and success and atomized, individual attributes achieved by self-management and entrepreneurial work ethic, as well as a broader ideology that holds free markets and national economic optimization to be the solutions to social problems. As Franco Barchiesi writes, “wage labor, ‘job creation,’ rhetoric, and work ethic...have

been used to foster among the poorest sections of the population meanings of citizenship that revolve around individual responsibility, moderation of demands, and a stigmatization of ‘dependence’ on state expenditure” (Barchiesi 2007:40). The technocratic, neoliberal aspects of governance in post-apartheid South Africa continue to “present the poor as undifferentiated, unwilling carriers of a social disease that...requires targeted policies, morals, knowledge, and forms of self-discipline” (Barchiesi 2007:46). Neoliberal technologies mark black people and black spaces as “deviant” or “marginal,” always in need of absorption into the “modern” city with its free market dynamics (Gibson 2011:150).

In the following chapters, I argue that young people in Langa encounter and powerfully reformulate these dominant neoliberal discourses. Coming from experiences of marginalization and exclusion, they alter neoliberal narratives in order to articulate their own aspirations for transgression in the realms of economy, space, and governance. With these discursive reformulations, they create and enact new practices of liberation “from below” for township youth.

Chapter Two

Constriction and Contradiction in Urban Space:

Introducing Langa

Young people interact with the structures of politics and discourse through their particular places of living, growing, and dreaming. In this chapter, I describe some essential elements of Langa as I encountered the township. I focus in particular on the complex dynamics of marginalization and stigma which young people must encounter and respond to in their aspirational practices. I argue that neoliberal discourses construct a continuing racialized social geography between the township and the broader city.

My representation of Langa and the young people I met there will necessarily be flawed and incomplete; it reflects the township as encountered by me, a white American college student interested in cultural anthropology. I lived with a family in the township for two months: for three weeks in January of 2015 I stayed with my host family while attending classes for a study abroad program in town; for five weeks in the spring of 2015 I stayed with the same family full-time, with the explicit aim of carrying out research for this thesis. I was connected to the host family by my study abroad program – though it was also the family’s first time hosting an American student – and I got to know other young people in Langa primarily through friends of the family and through the church

they attended. All of the young people I talked to were fluent in both English and *isiXhosa*, a language which I acquired very basic proficiency in during my stay.

Gaze of Mutuality, Gaze of Surveillance

The first aspect of Langa I will discuss, which certainly the first way the most residents would describe the township to a white outsider such as myself, is Langa as a space of Xhosa community and sociality. As noted above, the Xhosa people are a black ethnic group in South Africa, whose delineation as a cohesive group was largely constructed by colonial rule and especially apartheid. Xhosa people account for 16%¹¹ of the population of South Africa, and their native language is *isiXhosa*, often simply anglicized to “Xhosa.”

Xhosa people are the supermajority in Langa – more than 97% of Langa’s residents report Xhosa as their first language.¹² Young people in the township continue to enact Xhosa practices: around the age of 18, young men live for several weeks “in the bush” for a traditional circumcision ceremony that completes the transition to adulthood; many women marry through Xhosa ceremonies, which include the payment of a *lobola*, or bride-price. Extended family networks continue to gather for large ceremonies – weddings, funerals, or other celebrations – that are always held on the weekends to allow

¹¹ Statistics South Africa. “Census 2011: Census in Brief.” Pg. 24. Pretoria, South Africa: 2012.
<http://www.statssa.gov.za/census/census_2011/census_products/Census_2011_Census_in_brief.pdf> (accessed April 21 2016).

¹² Strategic Development Information and GIS Department, City of Cape Town. “City of Cape Town – 2011 Census Suburb Langa.”
https://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2011CensusSuburbs/2011_Census_CT_Suburb_Langa_Profile.pdf (accessed 4 April 2016).

for travel. At the daily level, I noticed that strangers passing each other on the street in Langa often exchange a greeting, a practice my host family described as being part of Xhosa etiquette. In my three months in the township, I also sat through countless unplanned visits from friends and family. Every home I entered featured a sitting area in the front with comfortable couches and chairs, often grouped around a television, for receiving and talking with guests. This practice of frequent visitation is a necessary part of staying connected with people in Langa; according to my host mother, it's what distinguishes Langa people from those who "live only for themselves."

Langa itself is a densely populated residential area of fifty thousand people. On weekends and at the end of workdays, the streets are lively with children playing, teenagers lounging on corners or walking around in groups, and adults running errands or chatting in the open air. The bulk of Langa's space is taken up by residential structures – houses, apartment buildings, and simple "shack" housing constructed from sheets of plastic or wood – save the busy center of Langa, which houses various shops. Here, small-scale vendors operate in booths, in permanent shops, or out on the street. Whether selling barbecued meat, whole chickens, produce, upholstery, medicine, clothes, school supplies, appliances, electronics, or alcohol, almost all of the shop owners and operators live in Langa, and most are very social.

Even outside of the central district, small shops abound; most of the writing and art on display throughout the township take the form of advertisements for these local establishments. Informal bars, called *shebeens*, are very popular at night and on weekends. Walking around Langa, I saw signs advertising the services of barbers, tailors, seamstresses, mechanics, window cleaners, hair-stylists, bakers, and caterers. Most of

these businesses were operated out of apartments or out of metal the shipping crates ubiquitous in the township; almost all of them were advertised by intricate, colorful painted decorations.

This is the environment that the respondents grew up in. Most of the respondents attended school outside the township – this is seen by many as preferable to Langa schooling because outside schools encourage more English-speaking and are though have higher graduation rates. When not at school, the respondents usually spent time around home, watching television, meeting friends, attending one of Langa’s many churches, and occasionally traveling in downtown Cape Town for fun, or attending family gatherings in other townships. LoveLife, a youth center funded by the government and originally intended as an anti-AIDS initiative,¹³ hosts after-school programs for high-school aged youth in drama, media, and sports. There are also many informal sports leagues that use soccer fields and basketball courts within the township.

In general, Langa presents itself as a place of shared Xhosa sociality. When young people move within Langa, they do so largely under the gaze of other Xhosa people: a gaze of mutuality. There is a shared potential for connection among residents even if an actual connection doesn’t exist; they can generally strike up a conversation with anyone they meet in the township, because there is an established way of relating to each other and a mutual understanding of the way things work in this black Xhosa township.

Langa as a social space stands in stark contrast to other areas of Cape Town, which are not designated as specifically black or Xhosa. Outside the township, young adults can

¹³ loveLife Corporate. “About Us.” 2016. <<http://www.lovelife.org.za/corporate/about-lovelife/>> (accessed April 21 2016).

expect to be seen and judged as “Other” because they operate under a gaze that is distinctly non-black: a gaze of white surveillance. My friends in Langa often told me of times when they were accused of shoplifting or had to overhear snide remarks as they shopped for groceries “in Town.” These experiences of surveillance are connected to the deeply entrenched discourses that define townships as spaces of poverty, disorder, and rampant blackness, in contrast to the functional, modern, and globally-oriented city proper.

It is through these discursive constructions that the context of Langa becomes extremely relevant to young people’s aspirations. As social geographers remind us, arrangements and meanings of spaces are always also arrangements and characterizations of people – and this is especially the case in Cape Town, with its legacy of segregation and spatial apartheid (Western 1996). The narratives of Langa as disordered and marginal to the true city is also a characterization of Langa’s inhabitants and a delimitation of social citizenship. In the case of young people in Langa, the discursive relationship between township and wider city is structured by race, stigma, and marginality, along the binaries of white/black, order/disorder, modern/backwards, centrality/marginality, and global/local. Because these ever-present formulations of space are also formulations of personhood and positionality, the respondents situated themselves with reference to them as they formed and articulated their aspirations, their visions of themselves in the future.

The distinctions between Langa and the “global city” of Cape Town take the form of physical distinctions in infrastructure, demographic distinctions of racial composition and socioeconomic status, and distinctions in the dominant gaze over the two spaces. Even to the unfamiliar observer, Langa’s built environment is clearly distinct from the other

neighborhoods of Cape Town. The township's formal layout was designed by the white South African government in the 1920s, and was meant to be an easily-monitored residential space for Cape Town's black workers (Powell 2014:79-80). As a result, Langa remains geographically isolated from the rest of the city. The neighborhood is tightly bounded on all four sides – by railroad tracks to the west and north, and by major highways to the south and east. There are no overpasses or connections to the surrounding neighborhoods, making it next to impossible to walk from Langa to the adjacent neighborhoods. There are only two motor entrances, both emptying directly onto busy highways. Some residents own cars, but most use informal mini-buses for transport outside the township. A large train station at Langa's north end provides the other public connection to the rest of Cape Town.

Even without its physical separation from the surrounding area, Langa's built environment is very distinct from non-township Cape Town. Most of the formal housing in Langa was designed and built by the white government during apartheid; instead of the detached homes with lawns, the tree-lined streets of most other neighborhoods in Cape Town, Langa's buildings are generally packed together, attached, cement structures. Even the layout of the streets was intentionally designed to maximize the utilization of space, and pack as much housing as possible into each block.

This is not to say that Langa's residents have not altered or lived into their environment over the years. The infrastructure is constantly being used and reused creatively: residents decorate and build additions onto their homes, small business owners turn apartments or dwellings into shops and the municipal government replaces old structures with new community or art centers. The growing number of shack dwellings in

Langa continue to use space in unplanned ways and force the township to change in the face of new activity and new residents. Even these inventions, however, reinforce the differentiations between Langa, as a space, and the rest of Cape Town.

The physical and racial differences between Langa and the outside city reinforce discursive definitions of townships and township residents. These discourses can be seen in the way that township-dwellers and non-township dwellers alike speak of the three townships of Cape Town as one group. Langa, Gugulethu, and Khayelitsha are recognized as sister spaces because they are the distinct sites of black township life. The young people I spoke with used the phrase “township youth” to signify a sensible social category: one respondent started a youth arts collective that would serve “all young artists in the townships”, while others spoke of township youth as a population facing similar challenges and setbacks. Because of their similar experiences in social space, young township residents in Cape Town were brought together as an imagined community, a community distinct from other youth in Cape Town, even other black youth.

While the discursive construction of township space was a real part of young Langa residents’ experiences, and often recognized as such, many of the respondents voiced tension with the way that outsiders viewed their homes; they talked about the “bad rap” that Langa gets as a place characterized by violence and poverty. Like residents of other marginalized and stigmatized neighborhoods, young people in Langa had to reconcile two ways of viewing the township: one from growing up within the township and being a part of its complexity; and the “Othering” perspective that is reflected back at them by the rest of Cape Town and South African society in general. To the residents of “modern” Cape Town, townships are characterized by crime, poverty, and disorder. The townships

are not generally considered a part of the city; they exist in the absence of modernity and urbanity. They are the holding grounds for the masses of people who have not yet been absorbed into the city, or cannot be absorbed, or will not be absorbed.

Liminal Subjects

So what does coming from Langa have to do with aspiration? In the next chapter, I will argue that the discourses described above played a role in how Langa youth communicate their visions for the future. The respondents reacted to and reformulated the constructions of space and personhood that they encountered from Langa. Given the sharp distinctions described above, it would be easy to view Langa as a cohesive and bounded community; that the township's marginalization creates a self-contained black Xhosa society which produces a certain type of young people.

Under closer examination, however, this idea of Langa as an enclosed cultural pocket of pre-European peoples breaks down and reveals itself as part of the discourse of neoliberal urbanity. As Abdou-Maliq Simone writes, informal "African" cities or pockets of urban space are never distinct or separate from "modern" urbanity, but rather constitute an integral part of economic and social processes in the city. He writes, "Far from being marginal to contemporary processes...African cities can be seen as a frontier for a wide range of diffuse experimentation with the reconfiguration of bodies, territories, and social arrangements necessary to recalibrate technologies of control" (Simone 2004:2). Applying Simone's vision, it becomes clear that Langa participates intimately with the city of Cape Town – the black township and whiter "global" city have constantly interpenetrated each other.

These interpenetrations take too many forms to fully enumerate. As discussed in the history chapter, black residents in general have long been fundamental to colonial cities in South Africa. Cape Town is no exception: much of Langa's history has been shaped by government intervention to ensure the successful cohesion of Langa's residents into the industrial urban economy. As Wilson and Mafeje demonstrate in their study of social groups in Langa in the 1950s, life in the township has always been structured by economic, political, and social trends of the broader city and nation, and Langa residents have historically enacted diverse orientations to and contestations of these trends (Wilson and Mafeje 1963). For young people today, these interpenetrations between city and township take the form of national and international media, especially television; through primary and secondary education outside the township; through constant travel within Cape Town for both commerce and entertainment; and through friends' and family members' employment in and outside the city, which the respondents themselves were preparing for.

The significance of young people's aspirations, therefore, is not characterized by a simple question of black Xhosa subjects coming to terms with the "modern," white neoliberal city. Nor is it fully described by the tension between Langa residents' view of themselves and the way that dominant discourses construct and objectify them as marginal citizens. Rather, it is a question of what subjectivities young people elaborate and enact given the contradictory discursive landscape of township, city, and self.

Introducing the Respondents

The main content of this thesis comes from long-form interviews with five respondents, which lasted for one hour each. In these interviews, I asked the respondents about what “success” meant to them, how they hoped to achieve it, and how success was talked about in the social spaces they are a part of. I also participated in a shorter, half-hour interview with Phumelele, a member of Real Phandaz, in which we discussed the group in-depth. In addition, I make reference to the observations I recorded of seven Real Phandaz meetings, as well as numerous conversations with Real Phandaz leaders and with friends and acquaintances in Langa.

I interviewed five key respondents – Viwe, Tabisa, Sandile, Thembeke, and Siphon – all of whom grew up in one of the more socioeconomically advantaged areas of Langa.

The first respondent, Viwe, was in fact one of the first people I met in Langa. He was a close friend to my host family, and my host mother encouraged me to talk with him and let him show me around during my first couple of weeks in the township. At the time of the interview, Viwe was in his first year of a four-year degree program in tourism and business; he stayed in his family’s home in Langa and commuted to class. He prided himself on being a leader for fellow young people – he was elected by the student body of his college to be the chairperson of students. In the future, he told me he hopes to travel to different countries through tourism and business, and continue talking to young people and helping them overcome the problems they face.

I met Tabisa through mutual friends who were active in her church. Tabisa had attended high school outside Langa, commuting every day to a relatively prestigious school that was reserved for white students during apartheid. At the time of the interview, she had matriculated from high school but was spending a year of study to improve her

test scores before applying to university. She hoped to study environmental science as a researcher, and someday move to Johannesburg. In our interview, she talked extensively about movement through social space: she described what she hoped to gain by traveling the world and incorporating herself into Johannesburg, South Africa's most cosmopolitan city.

Like Tabisa, Sandile attended high school outside of Langa and, at the time of the interview, was improving his test scores before applying to universities. Also like Tabisa, Sandile wanted to pursue a professional career – business and commercial law – and move to Johannesburg after his education. In our interview, Sandile articulated a powerful idea of “positivity” in young people's lives, which he defined as support and encouragement for young people like himself to “think big,” come up with their own ideas, and discover their unique interests and abilities in order to realize their creative potential. These ideas, reinforced by the words of other respondents, elaborated a common desire for actualization among young people in Langa, which was active in their encounters with discourses of space, economy, and governance.

Thembeke was my next-door neighbor in Langa; we met spontaneously, after she greeted me on the street and struck up a conversation. Thembeke identifies as an artist – she sings and writes poetry and short stories. She matriculated from Langa High School and, when I interviewed her, was taking a break from school and thinking about how she wanted to move forward with her interest in art. Several close friends of hers that I met were also artists – dancers, aspiring visual artists and fashion designers – and together with them she started a youth organization to bring township artists together to support

and encourage each other. She told me that she aspired to pursue her passion for art and help other young people do the same.

Lastly, Siphso aspired to “hustle” in the business world, in addition to organizing other young people to support each other in business success. While I was staying in Langa, Siphso was living in a detached structure in the backyard of my host mother’s house, paying her a monthly rent. He worked at an athletic store in a mall outside Langa, was a founding member and organizer of Real Phandaz, and actively attended business seminars and made entrepreneurial plans with friends. In our interview, he talked extensively about business ventures, markets, and their role in his aspirations for success and change in South Africa.

Siphso also introduced me Real Phandaz, a group of young people in Langa whose activities are a central part of this thesis. The idea for Real Phandaz, as it was described to me, originated from Siphso and two of his close friends. They wanted to create an organization for young people to discuss and implement solutions to problems that confronted them across South Africa. They also wanted this organization to help “build a platform” for young people to develop their talents and succeed in business ventures.

By the time I became involved with Real Phandaz, the group had expanded from this initial collection of friends. The leaders of the group told me that they went to Langa High School to talk to students about Real Phandaz and also hosted visible events in Langa to attract new members and explain what the group was about. I observed seven group meetings, in which attendance ranged from seven people to over 30; in all I observed more than fifty young people actively engaging in the group. The membership seemed to be roughly equal parts high school students and young adults who had

matriculated from high school and were living in Langa, and by gender the members were roughly eighty percent men and twenty percent women. There were three generally recognized leaders of the group, all men, who consistently coordinated projects and organized discussion. The group met at a community center in Langa almost every weekday evening, depending on the leaders' availability. These meetings sometimes consisted solely of informal conversation, but usually included formal discussions and planning of Real Phandaz activities.

Chapter Three

Radical Practices in Youth Aspiration

Self-Actualization

The respondents' articulations of aspirations and the ways that they put these aspirations into practice, I argue, powerfully reformulated neoliberal discourses of economy, space, and governance. A central theme in all of the respondents' ideas of success, which I discuss briefly here, is the desire for self-actualization. "Self-actualization" is my own term, which I will elaborate below; I use it to refer to the respondents' shared ideas of "thinking freely," defining oneself apart from the expectations of others, and recognizing and utilizing one's own talents and passions despite discouragement.

The desire for self-actualization that young people articulated constitutes a discursive transgression of their ascribed position in South African society. In enacting their own ideas of self-actualization, the respondents sought to unlearn internalized stigma and assert the value of their as-yet unrealized potential. I argue that these aspirational projects were grounded in young people's experiences of marginalization and exclusion. The desire for self-actualization was manifest in the respondents' interpretation of economy,

space and governance, in ways that brought their experiences “on the margins” to bear in the reformulation of neoliberal discourses.

As one would expect in a mixed group of young people, the five respondents for this thesis aspired to a range of careers and future activities, including professional callings, the creative arts, organizing young people, and entrepreneurial “hustle.” In asking them to explain these aspirations, I sought to go beyond the particularities of careers and discuss the underlying motivations, understandings of agency, and visions of self in the future. The most powerful interactions with dominant discourses of economy, space, and governance that these young people express through their aspirations, I will argue, take the form of a common desire for self-actualization. While the articulation of self-actualization differs among the respondents, a focus on these three realms highlights a common orientation to dominant discourses that finds voice in the stated need for young people to self-actualize. Before discussing these interactions with neoliberal space, economy, and governance, I will sketch out the ways that the respondents defined and related to “self-actualization.” “Self-actualization” is my own term, which I use to describe the common desire that respondents expressed to discover one’s own talents and values and be able to externalize these features in the social world. A better understanding of what is meant by this concept provides essential context for the respondents’ reformulations of neoliberal discourse.

Defining “Self-Actualization”

In our conversations about personal aspiration, all of the respondents talked at great length about the importance of defining oneself – identifying your own skills, capacities,

and ability to create instead of accepting what others expect of you. As Thembeke puts it, “So as long as you do not, you haven’t discovered your gift and what you’re really passionate about, then there’s no possible way of you living a peaceful life.”

This self-definition was often framed as a counter-measure to stigma that respondents encountered. They all identified aspects of their experience where they felt intruded upon by existing definitions of themselves and what they could do. Thembeke, an aspiring artist, felt pressured to study for an occupation that was considered more financially secure. Though much of this pressure came from her mother, Thembeke recognized that job opportunities and structures were ultimately to blame: she’s ambivalent about returning to school, but thinks she will because “I guess everything now is all about qualification. To even work in the kitchen you need to have a [high school diploma], nowadays.” She feels that the system of qualification is defining what she can do, and she feels the need to assert her own passion in the face to this system.

Even the respondents who aspired for more “secure” careers, like commercial law, often felt discouraged from what they really wanted to do. Sandile talked extensively about “positivity” versus “negativity” in Langa. In his view, most young people in Langa had learned to be negative. Negativity meant displaying scorn for peers who tried to do something new or achieve long-term goals; it meant trying to be “cool” by partying, drinking, and idolizing the excess and consumption of American celebrities. Viwe expressed very similar understandings of popular youth behavior: he saw many friends “wanting to fit in, in a group that was wrong” because “You want to be a king, a hero, a prince, in that place where you live. I mean, we have a guy here, he is a real gangster. So

he is known by a wrong thing. So he is attracting other young guys of ‘Yo, I want to also be known in a wrong term.’”

These characterizations of other Langa youth likely contain a class component. The respondents for this thesis were all relatively advantaged in socioeconomic standing within Langa, and the “positive” or “negative” behavior that Sandile and Viwe observe may reflect responses to different levels of opportunity and mobility. Their characterizations are not relevant the question of aspiration; instead, the “negativity” of certain behaviors suggests the positive qualities and experiences that the respondents aspire to.

For Viwe and Sandile, the “negativity” of many of their peers threatened aspiration because it produced pressure to live and act a certain way, discouraging the practice of thinking differently. Sandile recounted times that friends of his laughed at him for working an extra job over summer holiday and were dismissive of his project of writing poetry; to him, a negative person was someone who “say[s] you’re stupid for coming up with an idea.” Viwe similarly talked about being scorned for writing his self-help book. The feeling that these respondents are describing is a common one: it describes discouragement and low self-esteem. It’s triggered by encountering people who think it is laughable that you are trying to do what you set out to do, who declare that the skills and abilities you saw as valuable will amount to nothing. In essence, it is a constriction of the self through the denial of possibilities for what one can successfully do and be.

These experiences of denial and constriction are especially resonant for the respondents in large part because of the profound internalized stigma and doubt that comes with being socialized as black in a racist society, and especially as low-income

township residents in contemporary South Africa. Indeed, even though Viwe and Sandile experience discouragement from peers in Langa, they rarely blame their friends for being “negative,” but talk about negativity as itself produced by low self-esteem and insecurity. Viwe, amazingly, sees deep insecurities are at the core of the hyper-masculinity of friends of his that join gangs; he told me he has started an organization “where we help young men, especially men, because I mean men are the weakest person you can every find in the world.” It is not difficult to see how the discouragement and lack of support for self-definition that Viwe and Sandile feel from peers in Langa can be, in part, related back to the stigma of blackness and township life.

Given these feelings of restriction and discouragement from negativity, the young people I emphasized finding value in oneself as a central part of their aspirations. Sandile told me he was trying to “build positivity around myself” by spending time with people who shared his ideas. When I asked him what he liked about hanging out with positive people, he replied:

The conversations we have are always fruitful, you know? You come up with an idea just out of the blue, because you’re with this positive person who keeps on feeding ideas. And then you’ll be, what can I say, in that spirit as well, of being innovative, being positive, you know that’s how you are. If you’re with negative people, you’ll end up negative. If you’re with positive people, you’ll end up positive.

This is vivid description of Sandile’s vision of positivity. Positivity is the embodiments of “yes.” The most positive act, for Sandile, is coming up with ideas – it entails both thinking expansively, almost unboundedly, about possibilities and potentials, and also

externalizing these thoughts, bringing them out into conversation and dialogue. Indeed, from what Sandile says about positivity versus negativity, creating an environment that supports this externalization is central to Sandile's goal of building positivity around himself. The goal of this environment is not only to support Sandile's ideas, but also to make Sandile himself more "positive", in the spirit of innovation, as opposed to remaining negative and discouraging of himself. In this way, building positivity seems to be a practice against internalized stigma and inferiority. By spending time with peers who view you and gaze upon you as someone who can invent yourself and achieve things that you say, you can learn to look upon yourself that way. It's a process of creating space away from internalized stigma and doubt by imagining an outside viewer that is not disparaging or dismissive. For Sandile, this positivity allows both formulation of new ideas and externalizing these ideas through a supportive environment.

All the respondents expressed a parallel emphasis on creating space away from discouragement and pre-established possibilities – whether these limitations were external, through friends and family members, or internal, through self-doubt and negativity. Such space allows young people to come to "know themselves": as Tabisa said, "Sometimes at school, if there are programs at school that help them to find themselves. And that can actually inspire the child, 'Oh, ok this is how I can be.'" With discouragement and negativity held back, they can discover what interests them, what motivates them, and what skill or talent they might have.

This is not necessarily an essentialist idea of "passion" or "talent." As I discuss later in relation to discourses on space, the centrality of positivity that young people express does not imply that they believe themselves to have innate qualities which their social

environment obstructs, or that they are hoping to remove themselves from Langa in order to participate in the truly “free” neoliberal city. Rather, these respondents are speaking against the discursive boundedness of themselves and their possibilities that they encounter regularly. A crucial theme in the respondents’ words is the idea that a person’s value does not only come from what is “possible” or “realistic” in the current situation. Instead of constricting their self-worth to value or usefulness under current material conditions – conditions that instantiate racism and neocolonialism – these young people allow themselves to be recognized by potentialities.

Given this context of positivity and potentiality, much of the respondents’ aspirations were directed towards self-actualization, the realization of their potential value. Their aspirations reflect an insistence that their talents and passions be externalized in the world. They sought to be permitted to act on the value they felt, to develop creative ability and put it in motion.

In the following sections, I will describe how this idea of self-actualization was specifically defined and manifest in the realms of economic participation, travel through social space, and structures of governance. Through the framework of youth self-actualization, respondents formulated new understandings of the three realms of discourse. The respondents engaged in a radical “neoliberalism from below” centered on collective transgressions and actualizations of township youth.

The “Hustle” as Liberating Economy

In describing their goals of discovering and externalizing their talents, ideas, or personal value, the respondents often made reference to the economic markets and economic structures that confronted them from their position in Langa. They elaborated the role that they hoped economic systems would play in achieving their aspirations. In doing so, they articulated particular understandings of and relationships to South Africa’s capitalist economy – constructing knowledge of what this economy is, what it does, what its possibilities are for someone in their position – that inevitably participated in discourses of economy, markets, and neoliberalism

Specifically, I argue that the respondents reformulated dominant economic discourses by equating success in the market with the realization of the collective, transgressive potential of young people’s ideas and talents. The respondents rejected formal merit systems that channel Langa residents into particular professions; they saw most of the employment options available to them as constraining and alienating, and instead sought to create futures that activated their own passions and interests.

In the place of pre-established employment, many respondents articulated and acted upon a common discourse of “hustling” in economic markets. This discourse was especially prevalent in the activities of Real Phandaz, the youth organization. Though the respondents’ understanding of “hustle” echoes neoliberal narratives of an ever-expanding market through which success and freedom are realized, “hustling” radically re-casted participation in the market as a process of collective support and mutual realization of agentive potential. Instead of starting from an atomizing discourse of individual worth, the respondents enacted a concept of the economy that was characterized by collaborative

relationships intent on transgressing the boundaries placed on marginalized subjects. As evidenced by the entrepreneurial practices of Real Phandaz, the concept of “hustling” from below reformulated neoliberal ideas of the economy, transforming “entrepreneurship” into a socially expansive process that demands the radical self-actualization of communities of youth.

Rejecting Merit Structures

Several respondents explicitly rejected static systems of merit in Langa. Thembeke, who felt pressure from her family to study law or business after matriculating from high school, ended up pursuing a career in art instead. In her view, a career in law, though financially secure, wouldn’t express her passion. She insisted that her employment be an expression of herself: she wanted “a way to expose [or] to practice, yeah to practice whatever gift which I knew I had.” A pre-determined career in business did not align with Thembeke’s aspirations precisely because she did not see it as part of her process of self-actualization.

Phumelele, a central member of Real Phandaz, expressed an extensive critique of pre-established employment structures. She saw a stark contrast between young people’s skills – the talent and ideas that stem from their own interests – and the subjects that they are permitted to study in school in order to get a bursary for a professional degree. She says, “In education in South Africa, if a person has skills, it’s like nothing. They *classify* you by having those diplomas and degrees.” For Phumelele, this system of classification and employment is fundamentally negative because it discourages young people from integrating their interests and creativity into what they do as adults. The system provides

a role in the workforce that is anonymous rather than participatory. Phumelele wanted to see an system that activated young people more: “I believe that the potential of studying and of gaining knowledge is gained when you open up your mind and see other things and do, when you do what you like there’s nothing that can stop you.” Through remaining active in Real Phandaz, she hoped to augment young Langa residents’ formal education with a more participatory development of their real interests.

These orientations away from pre-determined paths of study and employment reflect a general rejection by the respondents of discourses of meritocracy. Most respondents did not view schooling as an arena in which the most capable people earned the highest marks and proceeded to appropriate universities. Nor did they view job markets as reflecting or indicating some individual’s level of merit over others. Instead, static systems of qualification and employment were understood to be impersonal, often recognizing only anonymous labor that was alienated from the self. Much more central to the respondents’ aspirations was the process of identifying and externalizing their own interests and ideas. The respondents who were pursuing professional employment – Sandile, Tabisa, and Viwe – saw themselves as doing so because of their passion for their subject of study. But for Thembeke, Sipho, Phumelele, and most members of Real Phandaz, existing professional tracks did not allow for self-expression and self-actualization. Which leads to a second fundamental formulation of economic discourse: the role of free markets and entrepreneurship as modes of self-actualization.

The Hustle

In contrast to pre-formed, impersonal structures of employment, the young people I talked to referred to a type of economic activity that was based in creative, original ideas or talents. Carrying out this activity meant externalizing these qualities, putting them in movement, and allowing young people to develop and benefit from them. “Entrepreneurship”, “micro-business”, or “informal economic activity” are outside terms that loosely describe this economic practice; but no term captures the sense of devising, inventing, and assembling creative ways forward as the descriptor used by young people – “hustle.” This concept is a central part of Real Phandaz; *phanda* is a Xhosa word that was always translated to me as “hustler.” To “hustle” is to find ways to make money and make connections within ever-shifting conditions. The respondents also described hustling as “positive” practice because it harnessed young people’s creative abilities.

Several of the respondents indicated a close connection between positivity, self-actualization, and hustling. To Sandile, one aspect of being positive was “becoming your own brand,” in the sense of making a name for yourself. One’s personal brand was a result of positivity, because it coalesced the unique ideas and talents that positivity fosters. Positivity manifested as a “brand” could be advertised and recognized on the market, and thus allowed the positive person to capitalize and benefit from their own self.

Likewise, both Sandile and Sipho saw their personal talents and interests to be the starting point for hustle. Sipho was building towards owning a hotel – he said he came up with the idea because he wanted to combine his interests in cooking, traveling, and getting to know different sorts of people. For Sandile, planning to start a business or enterprise was an example of a positive, creative idea that would bring success. Coming

up with plans for “hustling” and carrying out these plans were seen as actions of self-actualization.

The understandings of hustling that Sandile and Siphon describe are essential to the activities of Real Phandaz and the identities of its members. The young people in the group even referred to one another as *phandas*, the colloquial Xhosa word for “hustler.” The fact that Real Phandaz’ emphasis on hustle helped to attract close to a hundred young people suggests that its formulation of economic participation struck a chord with Langa youth.

Time and time again, members of Real Phandaz told me that their goal was to help young people come up with and discuss their own ideas. Phumelele described Real Phandaz as an environment that urges members “to be independent thinkers”; Siphon believed that young people benefitted from Real Phandaz because it lets you “enhance your idea or your drive.” The group’s meetings generally consisted of long discussions with everyone sitting in a circle. During these meetings, the leaders of the group regularly emphasized the need for everyone to participate, sometimes posing a question and refusing to move on until other members spoke up to answer it. For many *phandas* I talked to, supporting one another by listening to and affirming each others’ ideas was the central focus of group meetings; for some, the entire function of Real Phandaz seemed to be subsumed into this process of collective support.

The environment that young people built within Real Phandaz are building clearly reflected the desire for positivity and encouragement described above. The group sought to encourage one another to think expansively about the possibilities for what they could be and do, and then to act on these ideas. Thus, Real Phandaz is largely an aspirational

space. In group meetings, young people performed their aspiration to be “positive” and discover their own value as thinkers and doers; simultaneously, they articulated visions of themselves in the future.

This aspirational work made use of markets and hustling in a distinctive way. The leaders of Real Phandaz saw “hustling” microenterprise as an extension of their goals for self-actualization. I heard many people refer to Real Phandaz as helping to “build a platform” for young people by developing and advertizing their skills. This metaphor refers both to the encouragement that *phandas* provided to each other and to the promise of increased visibility and legitimacy that the youth organization could bestow. Starting from a “platform” of personal growth and confidence in their skills, young people would have a stronger standing from which to propel themselves forward into success on the market.

This conception of markets can be seen in the organization’s project of selling “Peace Bands”, which was ongoing throughout my stay in Langa. The “Peace Bands” were simple white armbands on which the Real Phandaz logo was spray-painted, along with the word “Peace.” *Phandas* occasionally traveled in groups and sell these bands wherever they could – in Langa, in other townships, or in central Cape Town. Customers were meant to buy and wear the bands to demonstrate censure of xenophobia (a prominent topic of conversation while I was in Cape Town), and also to support Real Phandaz as an organization of ambitious young people.

The armbands brought profit to Phandas while increasing awareness of the group and its brand – part of “building the platform.” The Peace Bands, however, were not only important for the fact of bringing surplus capital to Real Phandaz. The project of making

and selling armbands was undertaken because Real Phandaz's members saw themselves as participating in every step of the process. The idea for the project, as I was told, came from the group itself, and every step of the bands' (albeit simple) production, from drawing and cutting the stencils to selling the finished products on the streets, was understood as a chance for the young people to demonstrate their skills. The entire project was characterized by coming up with an original idea, and each step was part of making the idea real. The teleology of the capitalist market – in which the process of production is undertaken for the sole purpose of the sale of commodity for surplus value – was thus at least partially rewritten or overwritten to instead accomplish the realization of an idea born out of talent. Production and sale of the Peace Bands allowed Phandas to externalize their creative value.

A Youth-Centered Economy

With the powerful concept of “hustle,” young people reformulated free market discourses, making economic participation express collective and radical social potential. Young people in Langa saw hustling entrepreneurship as a process that could communicate their creativity, “free-thinking”, and individual passion. Of course, this understanding of entrepreneurship falls into alignment with neoliberal discourses that construct free markets as actualizing free people. The way that young people in Langa understand the market, however, is not through disembodied discourse, but rather is grounded in their experiences of stigma and economic marginalization. From this standpoint, many young people I talked to saw interaction with markets as a collective, radically accumulative endeavor. “Success” in hustling came from mutual and communal

support for each person's subjective potential; it was possible only through collaborative relationships that counteracted the imposed boundaries of neoliberal South Africa.

Moreover, young people in Langa saw "hustling" entrepreneurship as a deeply expansive and accumulative rather than a distributional process. The more young people that joined in the task of developing themselves and supporting the development of others, the farther they could launch themselves into the successes of invention and hustle. For the respondents, this success could not be capped by a finite amount of distributable resources because it stemmed from the creative value of each person. As more young people learned to recognize and motivate this value, they would become their own agents in the market, producing and multiplying opportunities for success.

Sipho made this concept of the market explicit as he explained his interest in economic development in South Africa. He told me, "I want to see this country...I want to see everyone develop in life. And I want to open up opportunities that are going to assist people in whatever they want to achieve, in whatever way that I can. Yeah. So that's what I want to achieve as I sort of follow the market as it changes, as it develops, as it grows, I want to grow with it, I want to develop, I want to influence other people positively." For Sipho, the market is an instrument or a process to let everyone develop in life by achieving what they want to achieve. The market is amenable to this goal of mutual self-actualization because of its supposed capacity to change and grow as it is connected to more people's drive to succeed. A central aspect of this vision of the market is that it is expansive – Sipho aspired not only to success within the market, but to the ability to "open up opportunities" for more people. In this way, self-actualization through

the market is mutually beneficial for youth across South Africa; one person's success contributes to the potential for others to realize their own goals.

The activities of Real Phandaz show how this understanding of the economic potentials of the market is strongly related to social relationships between young "hustlers." The spirit of supporting everyone's ideas and talents, which is such a central part of the group, fused with a collaborative, mutually beneficial conception of economic participation. Taken together, they express a single model for interaction and collective achievement that reconciles the drive for money and profit with the social desire for support and affirmation. For members of Real Phandaz, it is fundamentally best to discuss ideas for hustling and starting businesses *in the open*, with everyone – both so that the ideas can be made stronger by the other members' contributions, and so that everyone in the group can participate in and benefit from new opportunities. This approach to entrepreneurship stands in stark contrast to the principle of competition, in which each individual's ideas are seen as their inalienable property, which determines their value in the market and must be kept secret from possible competitors. The production and sale of Peace Bands is a concrete manifestation of Real Phandaz's approach to entrepreneurship: through collective involvement in every step of the process, the members of Real Phandaz sought to energize the project with the creative potential of each contributor, and allow everyone to benefit from the profits and increased visibility that hustle provides.

Conclusion

By rejecting formal schooling and established careers, many of the young people I talked to dismissed the static merit structures and job opportunities defined for them by the government and other institutions; they aspired to social roles that contributed to self-actualization by reflecting their creative value rather than expressing anonymous, alienated labor. In their visions and practice of “hustling”, these young people reformulated economic participation into a social process of collective support and achievement. Though their relationship to market entrepreneurship seems to reproduce neoliberal discourses of micro-enterprise, the aspirational practices of the respondents, from their marginalized position as township residents, appropriates these discourses into a vision and enactment of economic activity that is defined by their creative value as subjects.

Transgression through the “Global City”

In the second chapter, I discussed at length some of the oppressive spatial components and social geographies of life in a South African township. In this section, I explore how the respondents inhabited and interpreted these geographies in their aspirations for the future. Just as the concept of “hustle” reformulated economic discourses into expressions of transgressive youth potential, the respondents for this project drew upon neoliberal narratives of space and “global cities,” but co-opted these narratives into practices of liberation from boundaries imposed on them.

Most respondents aspired to move to Johannesburg, South Africa’s largest city. They viewed Johannesburg in distinctly neoliberal terms: as a network of business and finance, whose superior markets provided opportunities to all. I argue, however, that the experience of constriction and stigma in Langa was an essential aspect of respondents’ articulations of urban space. Based in their current exclusion from the “modern” city, young people in Langa conceptualized Johannesburg as embodying the absence of constriction. The respondents understood urban networks to be centered on and accessible to young people themselves, radically altering neoliberal discourses of the “global city.” Thus, from their position “on the margins,” the respondents envision spatial structures in which township youth can travel and bring their ambitions and experiences to bear beyond imposed boundaries.

For an understanding of the dominant discourses of urbanity in contemporary South Africa, I rely on other authors – in particular, on Nigel Gibson’s work regarding neoliberalism, post-colonialism, and the city. Gibson argues that dominant powers in South Africa are increasingly pre-occupied with creating “world-class cities.” He argues:

“Every South African city’s vision of becoming a ‘world-class city’ corresponds to notions of the ‘global city,’ as a fully networked financial centre, as places that hold spectacular events with spaces designed for tourists...This is an elite vision, of course, that links to a mainly neo-imperial idea of a global city and obscures vital elements and needs on the ground by creating a vision of the city as hierarchically composed, with the leading sectors – finance, communication, and tourism – at the top, and the benefits from these sectors ‘trickling down’ to all. It is an expression of neoliberal South Africa, in the sense that the vision justifies, for internal consumption, the financial, tourist, and globalised business sectors as the city’s *raison d’etre*” (Gibson 2011:19-20). Gibson highlights the imperial, elitist discourses that construct business sectors as the only vital elements of urbanity, to the exclusion of those left in shack settlements or townships.

In addition to these problematic neoliberal discourses of the city itself, there are also powerful discourses around urban social citizenship. Especially in postcolonial spaces such as South Africa, “global cities” come to be constructed as inherently freeing – allowing individual citizens realize their potential through unconstrained markets. Townships and shack settlements are treated as marginalia or urban disease, waiting to be cured and integrated into market networks; such integration symbolizes freedom of movement and self-determination. Through a transition into the “global city”, subjects are welcomed into a “freer” cosmopolitan sphere, which is concurrently characterized by raced discourses of civilization and modernity.

When respondents talked about their desires to move away from Langa and into more cosmopolitan spaces, they articulated a vision of the city that largely aligned with neoliberal discourses. The most common desired destination was Johannesburg, which

the respondents described in the ideal terms of a global city. However, coming from the stigmatized and highly constricted position of black township youth, the respondents' desire to move to Joburg crucially used this neoliberal construct to perform spatial transgression, resulting in new relationships to space and citizenship.

For all the respondents that discussed moving to the city, Johannesburg represented a metropolis with a wider mix of people, larger networks of business, commerce, finance, and entertainment, and a faster pace of life than the Cape Town that they knew. In Sandile's words, Johannesburg was "the capital, the money capital. I see a lot of successful people in Joburg. Cape Town – there's a lot in Cape Town, but it's a small circle." Similarly, Siphso explained the difference between the two cities: "Cape Town for me is too chill, it's very slow, it's in a very slow lane...if you wanna work, if you wanna get to your prime time and if you want to be rich before you get to your prime time, you need to be in Joburg." Clearly, the promise of success and wealth through Joburg's energized markets was a large part of the city's appeal.

Whenever respondents spoke of Johannesburg, they repeatedly associated the city with opportunities for employment and business. Tabisa related, "In Cape Town you have jobs, but then it's very limited...And Joburg is very big, and Joburg has like a lot of factories, a lot of industries."

This 'fact' of more jobs has significant social ramification for what people can be and do in Joburg. As Tabisa explained:

When [people] come to Joburg they become better peoples. Like they get the thing done immediately...I think that's where, I don't know, life – must I call it

‘life’? – but that’s where people’s life gets improved, and then you get where you want to get, is Joburg.

For Tabisa, people “change drastically” in Joburg. Businessmen become better businessmen, musicians become better musicians, and so on.

Sandile expressed related ideas when I asked him about Johannesburg’s appeal:

You feel positive when you’re in Joburg, you see great things done by great people. It’s not just a small circle of people doing this, it’s many people. A lot of people go there, when they come back they have built a name for themselves, become your own brand, basically. You’re a free thinker in Joburg. There’s no limits, there’s no limits. There’s very few negativity there, I think.

These visions of a dynamic, globally-connected city whose economic networks create social freedom and improvement strongly align with neoliberal urban discourses. When respondents thought about Joburg, they did not imagine a political or social milieu constituted by the people who inhabit the city; rather, they saw the disembodied constructs of business and finance, which purportedly create benefits for urban residents. The image of the city that the respondents articulated is largely identical to the image of the city that neoliberal discourses put on display.

I argue, however, that young people’s aspiration for movement was not solely motivated by neoliberal. There is a second central element to the respondents’ ideas of movement through social space, an element that results in an augmentation of neoliberal forms. For the young people I talked to, moving away from Langa was not only about gaining access to the freedom of the global city, but also arose from the experience of constriction and exclusion in South Africa’s current social geography. When they

articulated their aspirations for movement, the respondents re-motivated neoliberal narratives of the city to speak against this constriction.

Nigel Gibson argues that spatial boundaries are an essential aspect of marginalized experience in the postcolony/neocolony. He writes: “Colonialism is a total experience. Built on spatial exclusion and repression, the ‘native’ is restricted and constantly reminded not to move. In this context, liberation consists of the breaking down of these internal and external barriers” (Gibson 2011:14). I posit that the breaking down of barriers is an essential aspect of young Langa residents’ encounters with the neoliberal city.

The experience of spatial exclusion comes visibly into play in the contrast that the respondents draw between Johannesburg, a space in which none of them have lived or worked for a long period of time, and Cape Town, where the respondents *do* have extensive experiences. The movement and opportunity for professional success in Joburg is always put in contrast to Cape Town, which is characterized as “slow”, “small”, and “negative.” When I first heard respondents describe Cape Town in this way, I was surprised and confused. Cape Town is the third largest city in South Africa, and as I got to know the city I was impressed by the scale of its wide urban sprawl, its crowded central business district, and the host of universities, businesses, financial institutions, and government structures that operate in the city. To understand how Cape Town presents itself to young Langa residents, however, it is essential to note that tourism and finance are the largest sectors of the city’s economy. Most of Cape Town’s residents, and the vast majority of residents of townships, are firmly locked out of these networks, excepting low-wage service work. It is hardly surprising, then, that young people in

Langa emphasize Cape Town's dearth of opportunity. Nor, given this context, is it surprising that they imagine Johannesburg, a massive center of South African urbanity, to be a city whose vast networks are actually accessible, usable, and available to the emigrant.

Coming from this experience of exclusion, the respondents' vision of Johannesburg both critiqued the skewed spatial relationships in Cape Town and imagined a way past such boundaries. Tabisa and Sandile articulated specific critiques of Cape Town's social environment: a lack of support in sustaining interests and allowing them to develop, a constant resistance to young township dwellers' "making a name for themselves," and discouragement of their thinking freely and widely about possibilities for the self.

These aspects of constriction are essential to understanding what movement to Johannesburg means to Langa youth. For Tabisa, Joburg allows professionals to "get the thing done immediately"; in Johannesburg, they no longer face restrictions and barriers against the projects they hope to achieve. When Sandile describes Johannesburg as inherently "positive", he characterized the city as supportive of young people's self-actualization. These ideas drew upon the vibrant economic networks that supposedly characterize the city and were echoed by the other young people I talked to.

The concept of the "global city" that arises uses neoliberal discourses of urbanity to signify the self-actualization of constricted youth. For the respondents, Joburg was characterized by movement beyond restriction, in itself; it was the embodiment of unobstructed movement and uncontested access to global resources. The metropolitan convergence of diverse industries, projects, and people allows young people like themselves to realize ambitions that are discouraged by the more restricted environment

of Cape Town. This way of viewing the neoliberal city is significantly connected to the “hustling” encounter with economic markets discussed in the previous chapter. In this case, the relationship between economy and self-actualization takes on a spatial dimension. The respondents viewed the global city in neoliberal terms, but centered themselves within it, making the neoliberal networks participate in and perform their own creative ability, writ large. By articulating their aspirations for movement, young people in Langa positioned themselves as already prepared to manipulate these resources and let their experiences in Langa travel have impact beyond imposed boundaries.

Several respondents talked explicitly about the significance of moving away from Langa; the meaning they ascribed to this exodus from the township further elaborates how their encounter with the neoliberal city is tied up in experiences of constriction.

Thembeke, for example, drew inspiration from her relationship with a mentor who has become successful outside Langa. When I asked her why this relationship was so powerful, Thembeke responded:

It’s the fact that she understands me, right? Whenever I speak to her, automatically she can relate, number one, because she’s from where I’m from, and number two she’s encountered I think the obstacles I have and I’m still to encounter. And the fact that she’s from *kwaLanga*, it motivates me, man. It really pushes me harder that, if she was able to do it, what can possibly stop me from doing it? And succeeding in it?

Here, it’s clear that their shared origin in Langa and shared project of movement from Langa made Thembeke feel connected to her mentor. Thembeke’s words are suggestive of a neoliberal “obstacle course” conception of movement from Langa: the environment

of Langa is simply an obstruction to success, and Thembeke's mentor can tell her how to get around the obstacles that characterize Langa and emerge into the freedom of modern city life.

But her words also expressed the joy and power of transgressing barriers, allowing experiences from the township be in movement. Thembeke first stated that mutual understanding existed "because she's from where I'm from": her mentor knew what it means to be from Langa and understood the difficult process of movement to the city *as someone from Langa encounters it*. Thembeke's motivation came from seeing a fellow Langa-dweller find success and fulfillment through involvement in the "global" city. The emphasis is on moving and making an impact, rather than learning or embodying more worldly ethics of life.

Viwe, too, characterized movement through space in terms of unbounding rather than remaking of the self. He prided himself on talking to other young people about the tensions and difficulties they face in Langa, working to heal the particular problems that often come with growing up in the township. It is in this role of a social healer that he saw himself moving forward to Johannesburg and the world. He explained: "I chose a career in business and tourism, travel and tourism, so that is where I will travel the world and begin to plant a seed to each and every country, and speak, and be open about young people." The openness about young people that Viwe already practices is what he hoped to bring to the world, and what he saw as bringing him success. Movement beyond the physical boundaries of Langa signified an opportunity to bring his knowledge of social tensions and social healing in the township to more people. Through this movement, Viwe asserted that the relevance and impact of his experiences in Langa need not be

restricted to this one township. Rather, he understood his very origins as dynamic – as able to move within national and global spheres, and able to enact change.

Sipho articulated similar ideas of what it means to be in movement from Langa, especially when talking about ‘community development’. While ‘community development’ is not explicitly about movement through space, in a neoliberal urban context it is implicitly implicated with space: personal or community development in a “marginal” space such as Langa either brings people into the “legitimate” economic city or brings the city to them.

Sipho understood development as supporting Langa residents rather than transforming them. He hoped to open up jobs in tourism to Langa residents, “because there’s a lot of people who are interested in stuff like that. There’s a lot of people who do tour guide assistants, and some of them aren’t really that professional. I think some of them still need some sort of guidance or some sort of motivation. So I was thinking I could open up an opportunity to develop people who are interested in such things...I want to open up opportunities that are going to assist people in whatever they want to achieve.”

Sipho’s view of the space of Langa differed significantly from neoliberal discourses in that, to him, the township was full of *people*. Where dominant discourses saw a population needing to be absorbed into the city, Sipho saw residents with interests and aspirations already formed and already being performed, like the amateur tour guides. Looked at in this way, the township quickly revealed itself as a space where, because of its place in the power relations of Cape Town, residents are not supported in achieving their aims.

These discussions of movement *from* Langa elaborate the self-actualizing qualities of Johannesburg and other global spaces that young Langa residents describe. They suggest an encounter with ideas of the “global city” framed by neoliberalism, but augmented by experiences of spatial constriction and marginalization. Similarly to the reformulation of “hustle” as an economic embodiment of self-actualization, this discourse of movement envisioned the networked neoliberal city to be accessible to the subjectivities of the respondents, and ready to be motivated and utilized by young people’s potential.

Towards a Politics of Township Youth

The respondents powerfully reformulated contemporary discourses of governance in South Africa, primarily through self-started youth organizations such as Real Phandaz. The respondents’ experiences as marginal subjects resulted in a sense of alienation from governmental power, and this alienation was central to their understandings of the state and to their visions of new relationships of governance. They clearly recognized how state “assistance” policies were geared toward managing and controlling township residents. Through their demands for self-actualization, young people transgressed the passive role ascribed to them by neoliberal discourses of governance. Such transgressions most prominent in the political activities of Real Phandaz, where members of the group

positioned themselves as replacing of the state in making decisions and solving social problems. Though the respondents' rejection of "reliance" on government could be seen as continuing a neoliberal tendency to reduce the role of the state, I argue that this rejection is part of the enactment of new relationships of governance – relationships that radically oppose a management or self-management of subjects based on the market. Instead of governing themselves to maximize economic productivity, young people in Langa saw themselves as sources of ideas and solutions for South Africa's problems, transgressing the current arrangement of politics and control.

The dominant discourses of governance in South Africa were briefly described in the first chapter; in general, these discourses substantiate an ANC regime in which township residents are continually marginalized and disempowered. Nigel Gibson shows how, in this context, popular movements among South Africa's poorer and more marginalized communities find themselves running up against a distant ANC government invested in their continued exclusion (Gibson 2011: 162-3) – finding out, to quote Fanon, "the ubiquitous fact that exploitation can wear a Black face" (Gibson 2011:6).

Gibson also delineates the role that government "assistance" and welfare play in maintaining control over these communities. Ruling discourses reduce the diverse demands and goals of grassroots movements into questions of "service delivery" and access to government resources, reframing social problems into questions of the efficiency and effectiveness of government assistance. In this context, welfare is a method for the ruling government to "look after" marginalized communities and to undermine their calls for deeper change.

Devising Politics through Youth Organizations

The respondents radically intervened in these oppressive formulations of governance, primarily through collective activity in youth organizations. Youth organizations have a long history in black apartheid and post-apartheid struggles. For young people in Langa, there was a stark contrast between formal schooling and extracurricular youth-oriented groups or activities. The former, as discussed above, was understood to be a static and impersonal process of gaining certification or qualifications, in which young people play an overwhelmingly passive role. In contrast, youth groups were described as spaces shaped by young people themselves, sensitive to their desires and ideas, and oriented towards broader social and political education.

Phumelele spoke explicitly about the broader social thinking that youth organizations encourage: “Those organizations, they open up our minds. I mean I don’t really like watching news and stuff, but if you have a person that is passionate about young people and getting them involved, because of this organization they make us to be interested to get involved in the things of our country...[These organizations] are very helpful in uniting people.” Phumelele repeats the idea of *involvement*: the organizers of these groups help get young people interested and involved in the country, where other modes of political education, like the mainstream news, fail.

Sipho similarly describes how he started “understanding the political world” through a club in high school: “[The club] looked at solving problems that South Africa was facing. We, as the youth in the high school, would debate about things that really affected us.”

Langa youth's participation in student clubs continued a rich history of youth organization during and after apartheid. During the period of protracted unrest and protest in the 1980s, township schools were a central site of activism. Black students "took over" formal schooling, which was dictated by the apartheid government, and instead hosted activities similar to those of student groups today: political discussions and debates, poetry readings, and theatre, to name a few. School teachers, who were generally also black, and the surrounding community were often supportive of these activities because they rejected the racist apartheid curriculum (Bundy 1987). In the post-apartheid context, it is apparent that the landscape of student organization has changed, with teachers and communities often in tension with student groups over the significance of formal schooling.

This tension or rivalry between formal schooling and informal extracurricular organizations points to a key convergence between aspirations of self-actualization and forms of participation in governance. Several respondents, along with the active members of Real Phandaz, critiqued formal schooling using the language of self-actualization: the classroom's rigid structures of qualification and merit did not engage young people's creative value. Just as "hustling" was constructed as an alternative to the static economic and occupational structures that formal certification presented, youth organizations were understood to be spaces that moved past the *educational* limitations of formal schooling. Where the classroom failed to allow young people to participate inventively, participation in youth organizations was characteristically "positive" because it consisted of unbounded "free thinking." These organizations allowed young people to come up with

ideas and let themselves be active in the realm of important social issues, rather than constricted to the set of subjects dealt with in the classroom.

This form of self-actualization is inherently involved in governance. In rejecting the idea that the classroom was the only or the best place to learn, young people in Langa rejected formal education's sovereignty over them as subjects. They contested the school's authority to define legitimate success and knowledge *for* them; this fact of governance by an external body was seen as antithetical to self-actualization. Thus, the "positive" experience of participation in youth organizations was manifest in exploration and active participation in the wider social questions that formal school structures sought to define for young people. By getting involved "in the things of our country," youth organizations encouraged young people to put formal schooling itself under scrutiny, inverting the relationship between governing and governed. In this way, the prominent aspirations for self-actualization reveal themselves to be implicated in critical thinking about encountered forms of governance.

This powerful critique of contemporary discourses of governance was further elaborated by the respondents' rejection of "reliance" on the government for assistance or solutions to social problems. All of the respondents who talked about the national government did so to explain the "problem" of young people's reliance. They gave two general reasons that relying on government assistance was a bad idea. The first, and most self-explanatory, was simply that the government was not reliable; it failed to deliver. As Thembeke stated, "You know how the government is, right? There's not much support."

The second explanation, which is more nuanced and, I would argue, more central, was that relying on the government for assistance was self-limiting and detrimental to

one's potential. Several respondents referred to this almost psychological effect of receiving government assistance. As Phumelele explained, "You know when something is done by someone else for you, it's not as...it doesn't have as much value as it would have if it was done by you." She wanted to "encourage young people to be independent thinkers, and not only depend on government."

In Phumelele's eyes, a young person relying on the government in some way is missing out on a valuable experience. "The government" is doing some sort of work that should belong to the subject themselves. Continuing this thought, she implied that someone dependent on the government is not able to be an independent *thinker* – suggesting that the government is in fact doing the thinking for you. Just as Phumelele felt limited by formal schooling because of the decisions that the education structure made for her, relying on the government was limiting because it allowed an outside structure to determine what you "deserve." The external "government" becomes an agent that makes decisions on behalf of young people in Langa, negating the potential for young people to think for themselves and bring their own ideas and talents to social questions typically monopolized by government.

The theme of non-reliance on government played a central role in the conversations and activities of Real Phandaz. When describing the group to me or to others in Langa, I heard several of the leaders say it was a place for young people to "build a platform for themselves" and "talk about and come up with solutions for the challenges facing South Africa," instead of simply "relying on the government." The leaders drew a stark contrast between making claims to the government for more support or better conditions – an

approach sometimes described as “complaining” – and working together as young people to discuss and implement solutions.

Moreover, many of the members of Real Phandaz seemed to be attracted to the group because it encouraged young people to come up with their own solutions. Almost everyone in the group expressed pride in taking the problems facing young people into their own hands.

The urge to motivate young people’s ideas and come up with solutions collaboratively was by no means simply rhetoric: as described above, meetings of Real Phandaz were organized explicitly to encourage everyone to share their ideas and contribute to discussion. In the meetings I participated in, group members discussed xenophobia, a charged contemporary topic due to a recent collection of violent attacks in Johannesburg on African immigrants. The discussion was lively, with many members sharing their views on why xenophobia happens and how it could be stopped, and ultimately culminated in the project of selling Peace Bands to start conversations. Significantly, several young people brought up the role of the national government in xenophobia, always insisting that it would be wrong to rely on the government to respond to or dispel xenophobia in South Africa. Countless aspects of young peoples’ experience of Real Phandaz, from the way they described the organization to the discussions and actions that arose from it, pointed to the central significance of activating their own ideas and of participating in national conversations, as a replacement for reliance on government action.

Nowhere was this logic more evident than in one of the central projects of Real Phandaz: the “Peace Box.” Real Phandaz members came up with the “Peace Box” as a

way to address the biggest problems confronting themselves and the nation – problems like (un)employment, housing, education, and xenophobia. The physical “Peace Box” was a large cardboard box wrapped in white construction paper, with *Peace* written on the sides and the Real Phandaz logo emblazoned on the top, as well as a small slot cut out of the box’s top. The idea was for groups of *phandas* to carry the box around Langa, other townships, downtown Cape Town, and eventually across South Africa. Distributing small slips of paper, the *phandas* would ask anyone and everyone to write down concerns or complaints that they wanted to see addressed, or ideas for solving important problems in their lives, placing their responses inside the Peace Box. These responses would be read and discussed by all of Real Phandaz. Using this collection of complaints and ideas, the members of Real Phandaz would then come up with solutions and get into contact with the government to present their findings and start implementing their ideas.

During the two months I was in Langa, Real Phandaz took the Peace Box around Langa and to a larger township outside Cape Town; only a few weeks after I left, one of the leaders of the group went on a “Peace Trip” to several cities across the country. I was able to attend several meetings where members discussed and shared their experiences circulating the Peace Box, and I was struck by the energy and enthusiasm that both the leaders and the other members of the group expressed. Many were thrilled with the number of people – both young and adult – who showed interest in the Peace Box project; one young woman proudly described their progression through a mall in Khayelitsha, where even the security guards wrote down suggestions and people continued to submit concerns for the box even as the Phandas were departing for Langa. Others recounted specific conversations they had about the problems of unemployment,

education, and xenophobia, generally emphasizing the curiosity and approval that fellow Langa residents expressed for this youth-run project.

The narratives expressed at Real Phandaz constituted significant reformulations of discourses of governance in South Africa. One possible interpretation of the recurring theme of “non-reliance” on government is that the respondents simply internalized discourses that stigmatize welfare. Facing ubiquitous depictions of black township residents as lazy, unmotivated, and content to rely on government handouts, the young people I interacted with may have felt compelled to distance themselves from government reliance of any kind. Especially given my position as a white American, the respondents may have felt pressure to portray themselves as fundamentally *not* what I might imagine them to be: passive recipients of government assistance with no drive to better their situation.

This interpretation has some value, but in focusing on the determinative power of stigmatizing discourses it misses important aspects of young Langa residents’ experiences. Phumelele and other members of Real Phandaz related their rejection of reliance on the state to experiences of discursive limitation and boundedness in current relations of governance. The ideational work of Real Phandaz, to them, was an alternative to such limitation. By articulating their aspirations in this way, they voiced a powerful critique of national government. Implicit in their rejection of government reliance was an understanding of government as external, distant, and not involved in the lives of young Langa residents in any meaningful way. The government was named as an inaccessible body that attempts to make decisions for young people, and therefore government action

could not be derived from young people's creative ability or valuable ideas. The respondents felt that they could only encounter government passively, as governed subjects, which meant that the state could not embody the process of self-actualization and participation that they aspired to. Thus, their rejection of government assistance arose from the experience of alienation from decision-making power at least as much as from neoliberal stigmatization of welfare

Indeed, by casting the state in this light, the young people in Real Phandaz fundamentally challenged the state's sovereignty over them. They wanted the national government to have nothing to do with their lives; they sought to deny the government's power to take actions for them and make decisions on their behalf, thus eroding the democratic state's claim to be "representative" of the people; and they hoped to make government bureaucracy obsolete and irrelevant to the process of solving social problems. Built into this challenge of sovereignty was a reworked vision of what sovereignty means – a "should be" of governance and decision-making in South Africa. Members of Real Phandaz gathered together, discussed and developed their own ideas to confront problems such as xenophobia. By contrasting these actions with the inadequacy of government, they positioned themselves as substitutes for the failed state, fulfilling the roles that the state did not or could not execute.

Thus, the governmental processes enacted by Real Phandaz reformulated discourses of governance by centering their own self-actualization as citizens. These young people enacted a narrative of government action as a manifestation of "positivity" – that is, they held that government should be, in its very essence, an externalization of their own potential and creative capacities. Young people's ideas and values should not be external

to or passive in state apparatuses. Rather, the development and realization of these qualities should constitute the acts of governance itself. From this standpoint, it makes sense that many of the respondents sought to change government not by making claims to the state, but rather through the building of collective forums and organizations such as Real Phandaz.

The young people I talked to mapped out contradictions between government action and the popular desire for self-actualization, parsing the managerial, dominating character of government structures. They refused to be satisfied or placated by the prospect of government assistance – and it is worth noting that the frequency with which the respondents condemned reliance on government is likely a response to the social pressures they feel to *accept* and *be grateful* for this assistance. The grounds for this refusal, as discussed above, stemmed from the state’s controlling role and young people’s inability to be active participants or directors of governmental practice.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Langa youth’s aspirations radically reformulated neoliberal discourses of self and society. Negotiating the tensions between their marginalized social status and the dominant narratives and structures confronting them in contemporary South Africa, the respondents developed new ways of

understanding the economy, urban space, and government. Each of these new understandings defined radical practices of transgression and collective actualization that Langa youth could enact from their current position “on the margins.”

Through the concept of “hustle,” the respondents articulated a model for economic participation based on collaborative development of young people’s ideas and talents. The “hustlers” of Real Phandaz carried out their own form of entrepreneurship in which a product’s worth was measured by the level of “free-thinking” that went into it, and the success of a project relied upon allowing all group members to realize their creative potential. Thus, instead of viewing the economy as made up of discrete, competing individuals, the respondents imagined the economic process that mandated collective invention and actualization. They understood economic success to be achievable only by breaking the boundaries of what black township youth are expected to think and do, and to collaborate with others to realize this transgression. In Real Phandaz, young people put these understandings into practice, building relationships and supporting each other to create their “hustling” economy.

In the realm of space, the respondents’ goals of moving to Johannesburg reinterpreted “the global city,” imagining an urban network that is ready to be shaped by young people’s visions and projects. Rather than being oriented towards economic growth, the neoliberal city, to the respondents, existed to allow Langa youth to move and transgress boundaries; it was seen as supporting the respondents in achieving goals that are suppressed in their current marginal position. As a result, the respondents saw movement to Johannesburg as a process of un-bounding their subjectivity letting themselves and their experiences be in movement and power across South Africa. Even though the

respondents were still living in Langa, by viewing themselves as already prepared to carry out their projects in the “global city” they already practiced transgressions of neoliberal discourse. These aspirational practices elaborated experiences of discouragement and constriction in South Africa’s social geography and developed a vision of urban space characterized by transgression and support.

Finally, Langa youth enacted a radically participatory and community-driven understanding of government. In their rejection of current managerial relationships of governance, the respondents demanded that decision-making around social problems in South Africa arise from the ideas and creative potential of young people like themselves. Where neoliberal discourse seeks to instill individual responsibility and self-management as replacements for centralized government, the members of Real Phandaz practiced governance as a collaborative and inventive social process. They developed a concept of governance as an embodiment of collective self-actualization, and of government as constituted by the transgressive ideas and actions of township youth. The members of Real Phandaz put this understanding into radical practice in their “Peace Box” project, which positioned themselves as replacements for the state in their communities.

Through these reformulations of discourse, the respondents performed new subjectivities. Their aspirations for “hustle,” movement, and participation were based in radical understandings of economy, space, government, and the social self. Langa youth drew upon neoliberal concepts to form their aspirations: the limitless potential of the market and the promise of success through entrepreneurship; the freedom provided by the business and financial networks of the global city; and the undesirability of interference from the state. As I have argued, however, the respondents radically reformulated these

concepts. By bringing their experiences of marginalization and oppression to bear on neoliberal discourses, they reformulated dominant “languages of the self” into new, more liberatory visions of society and social relationships.

One possible way of interpreting the aspirations of the respondents and of members of Real Phandaz, very different from my own, is that these aspirational practices reinforce dominant power. There is nothing “radical” about the reformulations I describe, the argument would contend, because they do not result in young people disrupting the oppressive context of neoliberalism. The fact that the respondents appear to place all their hope into entrepreneurialism in the market, that they aspire to move to global cities of bountiful opportunities, and that they reject social change through governmental action seems to reinforce neoliberal dominance. Have young people in Langa “bought in” to dominant narratives, mistakenly perceiving a potential for liberation through fantasies of economic success and self-governance?

I hold that this interpretation does not adequately reflect the experience of young people in Langa. Dismissing the respondents’ aspirational practices as not “subversive” runs the risk of imposing pre-formed ideas of what “subversion” means and looks like. As I have argued, young people in Langa did not simply misinterpret or exaggerate the possibilities of their situation, because they were already practicing new forms of economy, space, and governance with each other – especially in the activities of Real Phandaz. The reformulations of discourse I have described opened up space for the respondents to engage in radical practice from where they were, in their everyday lives with other young people in Langa.

My experiences in Langa can only provide a partial snapshot of one moment in young peoples lives; changing contexts and challenges have certainly reshaped their aspirations and their encounters with neoliberal discourse. Even during my time in Langa, the realities of marginalization and disempowerment were hampering the respondents' efforts to carry out their radical practices. However, the similar reformulations expressed by the respondents and members of Real Phandaz suggest that communities of young people are developing and motivating common understandings of self and society. Other authors have noted that with the suppression of organized social movement after apartheid, processes of contestation and liberation have increasingly taken outside of formal organizations, intensifying within communities and informal collectives (Hart 2008:680). In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate what this "neoliberalism from below" looks like for one group of young people in Langa, highlighting the radical potential of the futures they are creating.

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