Nostalgia, Collective Memory, and Forgetting After Apartheid: Contemporary South Africa in Focus

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Abstract

In 1994, the apartheid regime fell and South Africa held its first democratic elections. The country quickly came to be characterized in the terms of democracy, truth, reconciliation, freedom, human rights, and racial harmony. Pre-eminent amongst such lofty concepts, both locally and globally, claims to racial reconciliation and equality lent weight to the notion of South Africa as a “Rainbow Nation.” This thesis ventures beneath these grand narratives of post-colonial triumph and explores the complexities, contradictions and shifts within the discursive framing of a harmonious, post-apartheid South Africa. In particular, the thesis is concerned with how “Born Frees,” young South Africans born just before or after the political transition who became eligible to vote for the first time in 2014, have caused a shift in the dominant post-apartheid discourse. The thesis analyzes their status as political subjects and the socioeconomic realities they face in order to understand their political incentives and motivations. Ultimately, the thesis argues that, in response to the socioeconomic inequalities that have become too glaring to ignore, and a shifting, younger electorate both aware of these inequalities and disengaged from history, South Africa is moving away from the triumphalist discourse that dominated the early post-1994 era and towards notions that challenge the illusion of post-apartheid racial and class equality. The thesis focuses on a number of key sites including national school curricula, political advertising, and public memory to show that political discourse is also shifting from history-based or race-based campaigning to issue-based campaigning focused on economic inequality.
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Introduction

After Nelson Mandela’s death on the 5th of December 2013, people and organizations from all over the world made countless tributes reflecting on his legacy as a global icon of peace, human rights and democracy. One tribute that stood out was an ad commissioned by Woolworths, an upscale South African grocery store chain mostly frequented by people in the upper-middle and upper class income category. Woolworth’s stores are mostly found in affluent suburbs across South Africa. The hidden-camera-style Woolworth’s tribute ad opens with shots of apparently normal operations in a store: workers, all Black South Africans, are cleaning and stocking shelves, and shoppers, mostly white, are filling their baskets. One of the Black workers starts singing a classic apartheid-era anthem, and the other workers join in, flash mob-style. For many, this ad typified South Africa’s global reputation as a rainbow nation that achieved racial reconciliation after apartheid; the ad showed South Africans of all races in the same space, united in tribute to an apartheid hero. The ad went viral around the world—as of today, it has almost 5 million views on YouTube.

Even though ads are not created to visualize critically complex social dynamics, the fact that they are circulated for public consumption means that they hold substantial discursive power. Because the Woolworths ad was also produced within the specific political context of Mandela’s passing, it was part of the meaning-making project surrounding Mandela’s legacy, South Africa’s history, and present reality when the world’s eyes were on South Africa in December 2013.

When I watched this ad, the first thing that struck me is the simple way in which it constructs South Africa’s reality in terms of race relations. It offers a benign and
celebratory view of the relationship between the predominantly white shoppers and the Black store workers, in which the workers melodically recall the national hero, and the shoppers appreciate their performance. The song is a soothing gospel, call-and-response style. The voices rise in gorgeous unison and descant; the workers are actually members of the Soweto Gospel Choir in disguise.

The song in the ad is *Asimbonanga* ("We Have Not Seen Him"), a 1987 anti-apartheid song by English/Zimbabwean musician Johnny Clegg and his band *Savuka* calling for the release of Mandela and other activists. The chorus of the song translates: “we have not seen him/we have not seen Mandela/in the place where he is/in the place where he is kept” (Dr. Y 2013). While *Asimbonanga* was originally composed as a song of hope during Mandela’s stay in prison, it is still being sung in his death, in a vastly different political context, indicating that Mandela is still looked to as a symbol of unification in South Africa. To me, such deployment of Mandela’s image seems antithetical to South Africa’s claims to being a “rainbow nation” that has achieved racial unification. If, indeed, unification has been achieved, why are these singers “looking for” Mandela symbolically? What does he symbolize within this context?

The use of *Asimbonanga* to memorialize Mandela gives the workers a form of agency that would have been otherwise impossible or limited. During the apartheid era, singing or broadcasting freedom songs was banned, punishable by prison sentence or, in some extreme cases, death (Hirsh 2003). However, within the commercial framework of post-apartheid South Africa, where these uniformed workers are, in a purportedly non-racial state, supposedly de-racialized and de-politicized, they are singing a political anti-apartheid
song, not only asserting their identity as Black South Africans but also politicizing a commercial space by singing a previously banned song.

The ad also assimilates the white South African shoppers into a context—a group of Black South Africans singing anti-apartheid freedom songs—that they would have been excluded from during the apartheid era. By including these white South Africans in this political conversation as the impromptu audience of this song, one could argue a critical exchange is taking place here, in which white South Africans are being engaged with the historical politics of freedom songs by these Black South African singers.

However, the choice of song complicates or troubles this meaning because not only was the song composed by a white man, it also is not as explicitly radical as other anti-apartheid freedom songs such as *Thina Sizwe* (which calls for white people to return the land to Black South Africans) or *Watch Out Verwoerd!* (with lyrics that state: “here comes the Black man, Verwoerd! 1 Watch out for the Black man, Verwoerd!”). Compared to these other songs, *Asimbonanga* is a safe choice because it pays homage to history without directly implicating anybody. For instance, in such lines as “we have not seen him in the place where he is kept,” the lyric uses distancing, abstract language and passive voice to avoid pointing direct fingers at who exactly is keeping Mandela. In contrast, *Thina Sizwe* is a direct message to white people while *Watch Out Verwoerd!* is a direct message to the apartheid government. All this is to say that even within the political performance of this tribute ad, the supposedly radical message is anaesthetized for the consumption of a predominantly white audience.

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1 Hendrik Verwoerd was an apartheid-era Prime Minister and one of the foremost proponents of the racial segregation laws that led to the tribal homeland system (Hirsh 2003)
All these meanings related to race came to me as I read against the grain of the ad. And then, another register of the ad and a further dimension of its meanings struck me. Even though South Africans of all races are present within the same geographical space of this store, I do not believe such a gathering indicates equality and reconciliation in South Africa. Having spent two years in South Africa, I know that this is not the complete picture; even though all South Africans have access to the same spaces, they don’t necessarily engage with these spaces in the same way.

In contemporary South Africa, dynamics of inequality have been reconstituted as class-based rather than raced-based inequality. As a result, there is an emerging class struggle (as opposed to an explicit race struggle in the apartheid era), exacerbated by the fact that South Africa has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the world. As one would expect, this class struggle is not highlighted in major national events such as the global spectacle that was Mandela’s funeral. Through this ad, I became interested in how this class struggle plays out within public contexts and especially within discursive spaces.
The ad highlights the fact of economic inequality through the clear distinction between the shoppers at this upper-class store and its uniformed workers. The uniformed workers can represent the working class in South Africa, increasingly distanced in terms of income level from the affluent. As the ad unfolds, the affluent shoppers and singing workers never actually mix: figure 0.1 shows a clear physical gap between the two groups. This demarcation is a symbolic representation of class relations in present-day South Africa where upper- and middle-class South Africans in urban areas live geographically separated from lower-class South Africans living in rural areas. Furthermore, while the workers sing the tribute song, many shoppers are hardly engaged; they whip out their smartphones and observe the performance through these phones, which further distances them from the workers, even though they are all supposedly involved in the same process of mourning and memorialization.
At the end of the ad, the workers put up their fists in the air (figure 0.2), a classic sign of anti-apartheid struggle. To many, this gesture is a tribute to Mandela, the icon of the apartheid struggle. However, the moment seemed more complicated to me; I read this sign within the context of recent working-class protests in South Africa, one of which, in 2012, culminated in the cold-blooded murder of approximately 34 protesters by the South African police force (England 2014).

The contradictions within this ad mirror the hagiography surrounding Mandela on the global stage. During his memorial, many of the tributes portrayed a carefully curated image of Mandela; according to them, he was a father of peace and forgiveness and a beacon of racial reconciliation. These simplified whitewashed depictions failed to present the Mandela vilified because of his radical politics during the anti-apartheid struggle and his close associations with “dictators” like Fidel Castro and “terrorists” like Yasser Arafat (Thompson 1990). Because Mandela is often erroneously held solely responsible for South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy, and has therefore become synonymous with South Africa within the global consciousness, his memorialization made me reflect on South Africa’s legacy and image as a post-apartheid nation.

Having observed how Mandela’s legacy had been repackaged for the purpose of global appeal, I have become interested in South Africa’s representation as the global gold standard of an African country, due to its relatively non-violent transition and its claims to be committed to freedom, democracy, equality and racial unification. I am particularly interested in the fissures and tensions between South Africa’s post-apartheid image and its reality as a post-conflict nation that is still healing from the wounds of apartheid. More specifically, I am interested in the sociopolitical discourse of the post-apartheid era,
especially how this discourse is constructed, who constructs it, what audience this discourse is constructed for, and what purpose(s) it serves. In this thesis I investigate the role class plays in South Africa’s national discourse. Since class is a major social classification through which inequality manifests in contemporary South Africa, I investigate how social class shapes and challenges the discursive questions that have dominated contemporary South Africa.

Literature Review

This thesis is informed by the work of historians and political theorists who have analyzed the sociopolitical dynamics of post-apartheid discursive questions by tracing their complications to the apartheid era and analyzing the global and local influences that shaped their construction.

In the post-apartheid era, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) helped shape national discourse in South Africa. In *Truth ... or Reconciliation* (1999), historian Colin Bundy analyzes the political and economic complexities that underpinned the TRC process. Bundy argues the TRC’s approach to testimony and its focus on human rights, as opposed to reparative justice, were poorly conceived. I especially agree with Bundy’s view that the TRC’s focus on human rights distracted from the core structural agenda at the time, which should have been about deconstructing the economics of white power and providing structural economic redress to previously oppressed groups.

In *Reconciliation as Ideology and Politics* (2005), political scientist Alex Schaap troubles the question of racial reconciliation, another major discursive theme in the post-apartheid era. Schaap conceptualizes racial reconciliation as political in its construction, in
that the idea of reconciliation merely symbolizes a political project of unification rather than achieving true racial reconciliation. Ultimately, Schaap argues, reconciliation is paradoxical in terms of what it claims to achieve versus the complexities that underpin the very definition of reconciliation. I found Schaap’s work a useful frame of reference for the other discursive questions I analyze in Chapter 1.

Gail Weldon’s study, *A Comparative Study of the Construction of Memory and Identity in the Curriculum in Societies Emerging from Conflict: Rwanda and South Africa* (2009), which compares the construction of memory and identity in the history curricula of transitional societies, was crucial in shaping my understanding of the relationship between education and political discourse. Using South Africa’s curricular reforms as a case study, Weldon shows how the three curricular revisions in the post-apartheid era were largely influenced by the dominant political discourse during the period in which each revision took place. Weldon also analyzes how history education was designed to shape the national identity of South African school children and their political values. Ultimately, I found Weldon’s work did not include a forward-looking projection of these schoolchildren when they grow older and become active political subjects as voters: what their values become, and what their relevance is to the political dynamics in South Africa.

In *The Impact of Role Reversal in Representational Practices in History Textbooks after Apartheid* (2008), historian Alta Engelbrecht also looks at South African history textbooks as a site of analysis in order to argue that African nationalist views are supplanting the Afrikaner nationalist views that dominated historical discourse during the apartheid era. Engelbrecht argues that textbooks have a particularly powerful pedagogic influence on the minds of young learners, and so should be rid of skewed perspectives that
only serve to reinforce the African National Congress’ political agenda. While Engelbrecht’s research excels at looking at racial representations within these textbooks, I am not satisfied with the idea that the discourse analysis of these textbooks can be distilled to numerical percentages of the frequency with which different races are pictorially represented in textbooks. Instead, my analysis looks at textbooks as implicit sites of national meaning making. I pay attention to what they say about citizenship, the nation, race and the ANC (as the political party in power since the end of the apartheid era).

Because I’m interested in the question of how class fits into the political discourse in South Africa, Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa (2005), by political scientists and economists Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, is a valuable resource in understanding income inequality in South Africa today, and how this social issue has been shaped by apartheid legacy. Seekings and Nattrass argue that the dynamics of inequality institutionally created and maintained through the apartheid era’s distributional model have endured in the post-apartheid era because the successive post-apartheid governments maintained this apartheid-era “distributional regime.” The continued structural existence of this apartheid distributional regime—created for the sole purpose of maintaining racial inequality—has led to the growing class inequality in contemporary South Africa, despite the government’s attempts to devise reparative policies. While this book isn’t necessarily concerned with how class and income inequality fit into discourse, I make this connection between class and political discourse in South Africa through my argument about the shifting trajectory of discourse.

2 The African National Congress (ANC) was one of the major actors in the anti-apartheid struggle and has held democratic power since the apartheid regime ended in 1994.
The “Born Frees”: The Prospects for Generational Change in Post-apartheid South Africa (2011), by political scientist Robert Mattes, is a central resource in helping me understand the economic pressures the “Born Frees” currently face. Born Frees is a term used to describe young South Africans who have little to no direct recollection of the apartheid years because they were born in 1994 or after, when the apartheid regime ended. While many works, including that of Seekings and Nattrass, that examine the issue of economic inequality in South Africa focus on the general South African population, Mattes’ work focuses specifically on how young South Africans fit into the equation of economic inequality.

Currently, the Born Frees constitute 40% of South Africa’s population (Mabry 2013), which means that as more of them become old enough to vote, they will make up a key demographic in the electorate. Mattes argues the Born Frees are predominantly Black and live in rural areas, and are therefore more likely to be unemployed and poor. This analysis of the economic pressures typical of the Born Frees helped me understand their political motivations and incentives and shaped my analysis of how political parties are redefining their political messaging in order to appeal to this increasingly important group of South African voters.

In my analysis of political ads, South Africa: Election 2014, The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects (2014), by Collette Schulz-Herzenberg and Roger Southall, provides an overview of the political campaigns of each major political party, as well as analysis of who the target constituencies of each party were in the 2014 elections. This information guided my analysis of each party’s campaign ad and my cross reading of these ads with public discourse in South Africa.
My main project within this thesis is to synthesize these seemingly disparate pieces of scholarship into one analysis of national discourse in South Africa. My argument is that this discourse is shifting because of a key change in the make-up of South Africa’s electorate: the Born Frees entered into the electorate for the first time in 2014, when they became old enough to vote. Since this group of voters is most likely to be unemployed, impoverished, and disengaged with history, they care less about the discursive questions that were relevant immediately after 1994 and more about what political parties are going to do to address their own current economic hardships. For this reason, the national discourse is shifting towards class-based issues. Ultimately, I will show that this movement in national discourse has now caused the major political parties in South Africa to shift from campaigns based on universalizing ideals conceptualized in the post-1994 era to purely class-based campaigns.

**Methodology**

My research in this thesis focused on three sources of data. In the first chapter, I used the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation’s 10-year longitudinal study of South Africans’ perception of racial reconciliation—the South African Reconciliation Barometer 2014—as a focal source for data that introduces the complications and tensions within the dominant discursive questions in the post-apartheid era. I use the graphs and tables within this study as complements to my analysis of each discursive question. Because this study was carried out over a 10-year period, I also note the changes and trends over the period.

In Chapter 2, I use five history textbooks in South African schools as points of analysis. I code each textbook according to three main analytical concerns: how these
textbooks reflect the political zeitgeist of the years in which they were produced; what these textbooks implicitly and explicitly tell students about South Africa past and present; and what images their pictorial contents portray about South Africa. Because I’m interested in how political values have been instilled into the Born Frees, my main aim in analyzing these textbooks is to understand what values and conceptions of the nation are being institutionally passed on to students who grow up to become voters.

I used print and TV political ads as my points of analysis in Chapter 3. I argue that ads are a valid site of sociological inquiry and should be investigated in my analysis of discourse. In reading these ads, I’m interested in what messages are being passed across to voters, and how these messages have shifted between 1994 and 2014. I used 1994 and 2014 as my focal points of inquiry because these were key years in the South Africa’s recent political history. One major shortfall with this form of research was that I didn’t consider radio ads. Since radio is the most popular medium of communication in many parts of Africa, these ads would have enriched my analysis. However, sources available restricted me to print and TV ads.

**Thesis Overview**

The three chapters of this thesis trace the changing trajectory of public discourse in South Africa, showing that national discourse is shifting from universalizing ideals such as non-racialism, human rights, and freedom to class-based notions such as job creation and the increasing gulf between the working class and the elites.

Chapter 1 begins by laying out the overview of the major discursive questions in South Africa, the global and local focus that shaped their formation, and the contradictions
that complicate the simplistic grand-narratives that underpin their construction. I analyze discursive questions such as democracy, freedom, truth, reconciliation, human rights and the “rainbow nation,” all of which dominated the narrative in post-apartheid South Africa, and were prioritized by the government as the official narrative of the new South Africa. I will show how these notions and their associated narratives are not necessarily reflective of the current South African reality.

In Chapter 2, I will examine how the main discursive questions that I’ve outlined in Chapter 1 were introduced into the history curriculum. Because a central investigation within this thesis is the question of how the Born Frees influence political discourse, I use this chapter to investigate where these Born Frees get their political values. Because these young South Africans did not grow up in the post-apartheid era, I will argue that history was supposed to be the subject that instilled a sense of historical consciousness in them. Instead, in the newly democratic South Africa, history education was politicized such that teaching about the past was deprioritized in favor of instilling the dominant discursive notions into the students. I will end this chapter by showing how this chapter shaped students as future political subjects.

In chapter 3, I will look at how national discourse has shifted by using political ads as my point of analysis. I will argue that the pressing issue of economic inequality in South Africa, disproportionately felt by young, Black South Africans has forced political parties to move away from race- and history-based campaigns and towards issue-based campaigning focused on markers of class disparities and economic inequality. I will show that young South Africans make up almost 50% of the electorate, and a generational shift means that the electorate will continue to get younger in the years to come. Because young voters
respond best to recent political and socio-economic events, they are less swayed by the political parties’ anti-apartheid legacy, and this has forced political parties to campaign based on how they plan to create material benefits for these voters. I end by looking at how the economic inequality in South Africa can be attributed to an ANC-led distributional method that has privileged a select few over others in the post-apartheid years, leading to a rising class-consciousness that has become increasingly impossible to ignore within public and political discursive spaces.
Chapter 1 – National Discourse

“The truth of our past is being airbrushed out of our minds for the sake of nation-building”
—Liepello Lebogang Pheko

The hyphen in the term “post-colony” could be misleading because it suggests the completion of the colonial era, which implies that a post-colonial state is completely rid of the oppressive dynamics of the colonial power (Ashcroft 2001, 10). This assumption of colonial completion gives rise to a “language of historical disjuncture,” a before/after framing of the post-colonial state through which the discourse surrounding the post-colony is framed with signifiers that combine elements of renaissance and after-effect (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 2). In terms of renaissance, the post-colony is framed in neo- terms, a recognition of the supposed rebirth in terms of power and organization within the post-colony. Hence, words that indicate this new order (such as neoliberalism) are introduced into the discursive space. In terms of aftereffect, the post-colony is framed in post- terms that signify the end of colonial rule. Consequently, words such as post-colonial, post-war, and post-dictatorship come to define the discursive space as well (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 2). The combined use of both renaissance and aftereffect terms work together to create grand narratives of rebirth that indicate the new era within the post-colony.

The key problem with these grand-narratives is the fact that they are often simplistic in nature; they conceal and distract from the complexities and contradictions that characterize transitional societies. This concealment then leads to a “politics of avoidance” (Weldon 2009, 154); there is an almost purposeful disengagement with the sociopolitical and economic legacies of colonization due to the preoccupation with grand

3 Liepello Lebogang Pheko is a South African activist and social commentator
narratives of triumph over colonial oppression. This preoccupation with narratives of disjuncture often fails to recognize the multiple ways in which the colonial past can haunt the post-colonial present. Specifically, how the institutional and systemic frameworks that reinforced oppression in the colonial era remain present in the post-colony, despite the change in political dispensation.

Discourses, including grand narratives, don’t occur naturally; sociopolitical global and local forces shape the ways discourses are constructed and aim to normalize them by ascribing fixity to their construction. From this understanding of discourse, three central questions arise: what are the discursive formations that define post-apartheid South Africa? Who wields the power within South Africa to authorize these discourses? What purposes do these discourses serve?

Immediately after the transition in 1994, national conversation was focused on homogenizing tenets such as non-racialism, human rights, nation building, and democracy. These themes were necessary at the time, given the deeply fractured state of affairs among different racial groups and between many South Africans and the South African state itself. However, the trouble with universalizing ideals is that they can erase markers of difference so that any conversations about these differences are, at best, unconstructive and, at worst, evasive. In the 20+ years since apartheid ended, South Africans have tried to come to terms with the harsh realities of the country’s apartheid past. Given the realities in contemporary South Africa, these themes, conceived in the early transition period, have been strongly contested. Questions such as what inter-racial reconciliation and nation-building really entail, what freedom really means and the power differentials that define what it means to
be a white, Black, coloured or Indian South African within South Africa’s non-racial
dispensation have come to define South Africa’s public discursive space.

This chapter analyzes various discursive questions dominating the discursive space
in the post-apartheid era by tracing how these questions first emerged and how their
normative construction has been complicated by South Africa’s present-day reality. My
ultimate goal is to go beneath the surface level at which these discursive questions are
often discussed and uncover the contradictions and complexities within them.

Global Influences on Post-Apartheid Discourse

In order to understand South Africa’s post-1994 focus on democracy and consensus-
building notions such as universal human rights and non-racialism, these focal areas must
be contextualized within the framework of the global political landscape of the 80s and
early 90s. Due to political events such as the delegitimization of the former Soviet Bloc and
the end of the Cold War, liberal democracy took hold as the global standard of political
organization in the post-Cold War modern state. Central to this notion of liberal democracy
was the idea that homogenizing principles such as human rights, equality and non-
racialism were required in order to form a true democratic state. In 1993, Michael Ignatieff,
a Canadian politician, articulated this liberal political ideology when he said that “nations
must not be constituted on the basis of race, ethnicity, language or religion but should be
founded instead on a community of equal rights, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic
attachment to a shared set of political values” (Wilson 2001, 1). This definition of the
country relies on homogenizing, yet largely ambiguous ideologies—rights, patriotism, and
political values—which, in practice, are supposed to bind formerly disparate people into a collective group sharing the same ideals about the nation.

For South Africa, aligning with this globalized set of political values was especially important in 1994, given the fact that international sanctions used to pressure the South African government into ending the apartheid regime had recently excluded South Africa from the global political and economic framework. For instance, in November 1974, due to its opposition to apartheid policies, the UN General Assembly suspended South Africa. In 1977, the UN also passed a resolution to ban arms and petroleum trade, and to suspend “cultural, educational, sporting and other exchanges” with the apartheid regime in South Africa (South African History Online n.d.). These sanctions were not purely political; many of the global economic giants such as the United States and the International Monetary Fund also put economic sanctions in place to force the apartheid government to end its regime. In 1986, after popular anti-apartheid and disinvestment protests from American “clergy members, union members and college students,” President Ronald Reagan signed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAAA). This move resulted in many American companies divesting from South Africa, a move that cost the South African economy about $11 billion between 1985 and 1990 (Miller n.d., 6).

As a result of these sanctions, South Africa was a pariah state for a large part of the 70s and 80s, excluded from the global political and economic framework and shunned by the world powers. Thus, as a newly democratic state, South Africa’s reinsertion into the global economic and political framework was contingent on its adoption of these globalized liberal doctrines of universalism and democracy. We can then see why, in post-apartheid South Africa, the dominant discursive questions (human rights, non-racialism, democracy,
equality and racial reconciliation) closely mirrored the global standard for political organization in democratic states.

**Democracy and Freedom**

Nelson Mandela declared 1994 “the Year of Liberation for all South Africans” (Mandela 1994). Indeed, this declaration captured global and local congratulatory discourse surrounding South Africa in 1994, the year in which South Africa had its first general democratic elections. For many, the elections marked a shift in the political foundations of the South African state, a transition to a democratic order that would indeed guarantee freedom for all. For South Africa, the elections marked its grand re-entrance into the global political framework. For the Washington consensus (global political and economic powers such as the United States, the IMF and the World Bank), the elections marked another win for the global—arguably coercive—promotion of liberal democracy (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 4).

Due to the relatively non-violent way in which South African democracy manifested itself, South Africa is often defined as a triumph of post-colonial transition. However, this democracy didn't come as freely or easily as many would like to believe; it was a product of protracted political negotiations between the apartheid government and anti-apartheid organizations (spearheaded by the ANC). These negotiations led to a power-sharing agreement—The Government of National Unity (GNU)—between the ANC, the NP (the ruling party at the time apartheid ended) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (South African History Online n.d.). The GNU governed South Africa for the first five years of its democracy.
Colin Bundy, a South African historian, argues that these political negotiations arose from a stalemate in which the “apartheid state was unable to maintain its power from above—due, in major part, to mounting international economic and political pressure—and the anti-apartheid movements were unable to seize power from below, due to the apartheid state’s control of armed and security forces” (Bundy 1999). Thus, democracy didn’t arise as a natural by-product of the transition and it didn’t come freely; the price of democracy was that the former colonial power was not completely stripped of its power. Instead of a complete seizure and upstaging of power from the former colonial regime, the post-apartheid government incorporated the apartheid government into the democratic framework of the new South Africa in a coerced power-sharing agreement that conceded to shielding apartheid era-politicians from civil and criminal prosecution on the condition that they would confess to their crimes (Bundy 1999).

Another price paid for democracy to become a reality was that the post-apartheid government had to give up its initial economic and social reparative policies. One key element of transitions that include previous regimes is that although these transitions might involve political reform, they often do not include economic reforms that address “income redistribution, employment and living conditions” (Bundy 1999). In South Africa, a result of the political negotiations was that there was an agreement—whether this was implicit or explicit is still up for debate—to leave the apartheid “structures of production, property and wealth intact.” As a result, the ANC dropped its demands for economic reparation through policies such as nationalization of mines, progressive taxations and restructuring the financial sector (Bundy 1999). The price of democracy, then, was an economic concession that maintained apartheid-built structures of ‘white’ capital.
accumulation to the detriment of material reparations for the majority of South Africans that had been systematically dispossessed by the apartheid system.

South Africa’s landmark elections led many to conflate democracy with true freedom. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, post-colonial theorists, attribute this false equivalency to the fetishization of the ballot box as a panacea in the post-colonial state. According to the Comaroffs, the very definition of democracy in post-colonies should be an object of scrutiny. This is because, more often than not, this definition of democracy “involves a very thin distillation of the concept—a minimalist, procedural version that equates freedom with the occasional exercise of choice among competing, often indistinguishable alternatives” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 3). In other words, a minimizing idea of democracy sets a very low definitional threshold for democracy within post-colonies—indeed anywhere. Consequently, the mere existence of the ballot box has become a signifier that leads people to equate political choice with freedom.

Within the post-apartheid context, the conflation of democracy with freedom masked pertinent structural issues needing to be addressed if, indeed, freedom and equality for all were ever to exist in the new South Africa. In The Problem of Freedom, historian Thomas C. Holt argues that true post-colonial freedom is contingent on material reparations as only such measures can provide the emancipation that democracy and liberalism purport to guarantee within the post-colony or, in Holt’s case, in post-emancipation societies like Jamaica. In South Africa, this material and structural aspect of freedom was glossed over with the rationalization that political freedom was the most legitimate form in which freedom could manifest itself. In the definition of freedom in South Africa, this de-legitimization of the material in favor of the political can be attributed
to the globalized definition of freedom in the early 90s. This definition “disguised the conflation of freedom and free markets, leaving little room for the discussion of matters related to historical entitlement, such as substantive citizenship and socioeconomic rights” (Makhulu 2010, 132-3). Within this definitional framework, freedom becomes a “formal proceduralism of democracy,” a symbolic promise veiling the need to address the structural and economic legacies of colonization that leave many deeply impoverished within the post-colony, despite illusions of freedom and equality (Makhulu 2010, 145).

As a result of this problematic relationship between freedom and democracy, South Africa failed to address the fact that many victims of apartheid needed some form of material reparations. In order to even begin to level the economic and social playing field that had been skewed by decades of population-level systemic economic dispossession; in order to provide “a better life for all,” South Africa needed to deal with the fact that a large majority of its population didn’t have access to housing, food, running water or, in the grander scheme of things, economic opportunities. Consequently, although South Africans now had political freedom and could participate in the performance of democracy by heading to the polls in April 1994, their “lack of control over basic material resources meant that these recently enfranchised citizens still didn’t have access to the full scope of freedom” (Makhulu 2010, 132).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Human Rights

The post-apartheid event most influential in shaping public consciousness was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), started in 1995. The TRC was a court of sorts,

4 “A better life for all” was the ANC’s campaign slogan in the 1994 general elections. The party has maintained this slogan since then.
through which South Africans could give accounts of human rights abuses they suffered during apartheid. The perpetrators of these abuses could also testify to their wrongdoing, after which a decision was made to grant amnesty, on condition that perpetrators prove their actions were politically motivated and sanctioned by others in command. Over the course of the TRC process, over 22,000 victims testified and over 7000 perpetrators filed for amnesty (Tutu 2014).

The TRC’s principal mandate was to promote national unity and reconciliation. One of its goals to achieve this mandate was:

establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature, and extents of the gross violations of human rights from 1960 to 1993, including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations, as well as the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the perpetrators (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998, 55).

This goal reveals two fundamental flaws of the TRC process: its erroneous temporal definition and its investigative focus. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report (Volume 1) states that the TRC aimed to deal with “contemporary history, which began in 1960 when the Sharpeville disaster took place and ended with the wonderful inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically-elected President of the Republic of South Africa” (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998, 1). This narrow temporal definition assumes that apartheid can be compressed into 33 years of human rights violations. In reality, apartheid and settler colonialism was a system of dispossession and racialized subjugation that lasted almost 400 years, and systematically distributed resources, civil rights and political legitimacy along racial lines (Bundy 1999).

This periodization of history by distilling it into 33 years of violation also promoted the idea that apartheid was an event, not an institutional enterprise with core structural
issues needing to be investigated and addressed. Furthermore, the idea that apartheid ended with the inauguration of Mandela, also led to a collective refusal to confront the legacies of apartheid that still had real material consequences within the new South Africa. This refusal led to a failure to address key socio-economic issues such as housing, jobs, employment and welfare for communities that had been historically disenfranchised by apartheid (Bundy 1999).

The second flaw was the TRC’s focus on human rights as the exclusive investigative lens with which to view the crimes of the past. Again, this focus led to a limited engagement with South Africa’s apartheid past, through the nebulous definitional boundaries of human rights (Bundy 1999). This focus on human rights starts to make sense when one considers the global neoliberal political framework that South Africa was trying to re-insert itself into at the time, which prized universalizing tenets like human rights as the ideal political values of the modern nation-state.

Given this definitional framework—the distillation of apartheid into “human rights violations”—the TRC focused on symptomatic manifestations of apartheid and not its root cause. The TRC focused on human rights violations caused by “pass laws, migrant labor, forced removals, Bantu Education and police brutality” (Bundy 1999). While these focal areas were definitely worth investigating due to the horrors and injustices they caused, the TRC failed to examine the very institution that engineered, actualized, and codified these systems in law—apartheid. By doing so, the TRC further contributed to the cycle of measured avoidance of critical engagement with the institution of apartheid.

In the end, the TRC proved to be more symbolic than realistic in its claims to uncover the past. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the head the Commission, especially
reinforced a theological angle to the TRC’s execution. The biblical quote “the truth will set you free” – the TRC slogan – (du Plessis 2004, 169) also led to the idea that uncovering the truth was all that was required to engage with the past. Truth-telling was promoted as the medium through which the nation could heal the scars of its past and move forward with its present and future.

Consequently, the TRC wasn’t an institution that served victims and perpetrators alone; it played a key role in the post-apartheid meaning-making exercise for the entire nation. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) broadcast television and radio programs in a “Special Report” series about TRC proceedings (Verdoolaege 2008, 35). The TRC became a national spectacle all South Africans were invited to watch and encouraged to uncover collectively the gruesome truths of apartheid. As a result of this collective engagement, the TRC became a spectacle, a dramatic performance wielding significant “emotional, cultural and symbolic power.” The TRC came to define the discursive terrain of the new South Africa (Bundy 1999).

Truth

Since the TRC’s main objective was to reveal the truth about the past, this conception of truth must be investigated. Key questions to ask here are: what is defined as truth? In what way is this truth told? Whose truth is being told? How is this truth translated into historical narrative?

The first thing that brings the TRC’s idea of truth into question is the narrow lens with which this truth was revealed. What was supposed to be a collective process of reckoning with the past was carried out through the declaration of individual testimonies
from a relatively small subset of the victims. This individualized mode of truth telling, this “narrow lens through which the truth was crafted” promoted a misleading conception of apartheid (Mamdani 2000, 59). Despite what these individual testimonies implied, apartheid wasn’t a system designed for the witch-hunt of individuals; it was designed for the purpose of dispossessing and subjugating entire groups of people (Bundy 1999).

Thus, the TRC’s use of individualized truth through personal anecdotal evidence only served to further disconnect the truth about the past from systems and structures that might be implicated in apartheid. For instance, due to its focus on individual grievances, the TRC didn’t address population-level human rights violations such as mass forced removals. “Between 1960 and 1982 an estimated 3.5 million people were forcibly removed from their homes by state agents.” However, within the framework of the TRC, these 3.5 million people were a faceless community, and could therefore not be represented unless they came forward as individuals (Mamdani 2000, 59). Instead of dealing with this population-level case of human rights violations that could have led to legitimate redress, the TRC chose to focus on another scale of truth revelation: individual testimonies against apartheid state agents.

The mode of truth telling through individual accusations also led to the singular and individual focusing of blame. Even though apartheid was a system that was designed and elaborately carried out for the protection of white privilege, many white South Africans refuse to acknowledge this fact, and would be quick to point out that they personally had no direct involvement in the atrocities and therefore should not be implicated. The TRC perpetuated a focus on individual guilt through the individual accusations with which it revealed its truth.
A perfect example of this focusing of blame on individuals is the case of Eugene de Kock, an apartheid-era colonel who confessed to “more than 100 acts of murder, torture and fraud” (Smith 2015). Eugene de Kock’s trial came to characterize this type of apportionment of guilt; through de Kock’s trial, apartheid was again de-contextualized, framed not as decades of systematic and institutionalized oppression, but as arbitrary human rights violations by a couple of rogue state agents (Bundy 1999). For white South Africans, it became easy then to distance themselves from the enormous violations carried out in order to protect their privilege because, after all, not they but rogue cops like Eugene de Kock were on trial. Ultimately, the TRC’s uncovering of truth was jarring and gruesome to many white South Africans who claimed to have had no idea of these atrocities during the apartheid era. However, despite the cathartic effect of these revelations, the individualization of these truths did not encourage white South Africans to critically analyze apartheid as a system that built, protected and killed in the name of their sociopolitical and economic privilege.

Truth and Nation-Building

One of the TRC’s central premises was this: by revealing the truth, and creating a collective agreement about this truth, South Africans could unite in their understanding of the past and come together as a nation. While this universalizing assumption was a workable narrative for South Africa’s transition period, it is debatable whether or not all South Africans indeed collectively agreed upon this so-called truth; further, one might question whether they hold these beliefs today.

In 2014, the South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) published the
South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB). The SARB is a report that aggregates the results of a 10-year (2003-2013) public opinion poll to measure South Africans’ perceptions of racial reconciliation. One of the central revelations from this study is that from 2003 to 2013, the number of South Africans who agreed with the statement “apartheid was a crime against humanity” dropped by 10.1%. While 86.5% of South Africans agreed with this statement in 2003, only 76.4% agreed with it in 2012 (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 7).

Such a drop may suggest that in the 20+ years since apartheid ended, the gravity of its criminality has waned in South Africans’ collective consciousness; the further away in time a social trauma is, the more benign it may begin to seem. Another way to read this statistic is to put it in the context of the TRC, the event that was supposed to create a collective understanding of the past. As presented above, the TRC’s use of individual testimony undercuts this question of whether or not apartheid was a crime towards a collective group. According to TRC proceedings, apartheid was a crime against specific individuals who came forward with their personal stories, not entire communities that could be characterized by a collective word like “humanity.” It therefore follows that, almost 20 years later, many South Africans would struggle to conceptualize apartheid as crime against a collective group.

The data become even more interesting when disaggregated by race. Figure 1.1 shows that white South Africans are the least likely to agree with this statement, followed by Asian/Indian South Africans, coloured South Africans, and then Black South Africans, about 80% of whom are likely to agree with the statement (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 30).
This breakdown reveals a glaring disparity between the ends of the spectrum of belief that apartheid was a crime against humanity. The responses from whites are particularly interesting. One might expect high levels of “white guilt” from this group, especially because apartheid was designed for their racial advantage and protection. The low acceptance level of the statement by white South Africans can be attributed to “white privilege,” which shields them from having to confront the realities of apartheid even in the post-apartheid era. In support of this interpretation, we can look to a 1996 survey carried out by the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (cited by the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Report), which found that many white South Africans “romanticize the memory of apartheid, and that the majority did not feel responsible for apartheid abuses and did not support redress processes” (Institute for Justice and
Reconciliation 2014, 29). This distancing from the injustices of apartheid helps white South Africans mentally absolve themselves to the extent of denying apartheid’s painful history. Furthermore, such denials also protect white South Africans from having to confront the fact that their privilege (especially economic privilege) in present-day South Africa was built and protected by decades of systematic and institutional oppression during the apartheid era (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 29).

It is also curious that no racial group recorded a 100% agreement with the fact that apartheid was a crime against humanity. Even among Black South Africans, who suffered the majority of apartheid’s injustices, only eight out of ten people agreed with the idea that apartheid was a crime. This finding could be attributed to a feature of the focus group make-up in this study: a number of the Black South African focus groups comprised respondents between age 15-24 (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 39), a demographic group generally understood to be dismissive of South Africa’s past. This group of South Africans, as noted earlier, are usually referred to as “Born Frees” because they were born right before or in the years after apartheid ended, and therefore have no direct recollection of it. For this reason, these respondents might not explicitly agree that apartheid was a crime against humanity.

Another contributing factor to this response is the fact that South Africans don’t necessarily actively engage with their history. Instead, they relegate such engagement to public performances of commemoration and symbolic days such as Heritage Day and the Day of Reconciliation (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 35). Furthermore, this disengagement with history can be exacerbated by a lack of access to or interest in visiting historical sites and museums. While I was in South Africa, I went to museums multiple
times, and my fellow visitors were mostly foreign tourists and South African school children; I rarely saw any South African adults in these spaces. Thus, the relegation of active historical engagement to a few days in the year and the low levels of engagement with memorial sites by South Africans citizens could lead some South Africans, regardless of race, to forget about the injustices of the apartheid era.

Because the idea of what constitutes the truth about apartheid is so different among South Africans, their memories of the past are also multiple and contradictory. These discrepancies in historical memory pose a threat to the nation-building aim of the TRC. Because memory and national identity are closely connected, a collective understanding of the past is critical to creating the kind of communion that leads to a collective national identity (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014,35). In the absence of this shared memory, one can expect the sense of national identity would be, at best, tenuous and, at worst, nonexistent. Results from the SARB show that this problem is in fact the case in present-day South Africa. Figure 1.2 shows that, over the 10-year period of the SARB study the desire for a united South Africa fell by 17.9%, such that in 2013 only one half of South Africans felt a desire for a united South Africa, compared to about 73% in 2003. Additionally, the idea that a united South Africa is possible also lost traction and generally fell between 2007 and 2013.

If the TRC set out to uncover truths that would ultimately put South Africans on a path to nation building, its approach to this goal only served to distance South Africans from mutually agreeing upon the truth about apartheid. The TRC’s use of individual testimony, its focus on human rights violations, and its individualized focusing of blame further decontextualized apartheid.
If this truth that every South African is supposed to know and understand was compromised in its construction in the first place, how much more compromised was the understanding of this truth? In the end, the TRC framed apartheid as an event that was not only not completely finished but also one that could be transcended and overcome through symbolic gestures as opposed to critical engagement with the complexities of both the apartheid and post-apartheid period.

Reconciliation

In his inauguration speech in May 1994, Nelson Mandela described himself as the president of a “united, democratic, non-racial government.” Mandela went on to state that
the people of South Africa must act together for national reconciliation (Mandela 1994).

This declaration, on this monumental day in South African history, cemented reconciliation as a key discursive question in post-apartheid South Africa.

By concurrently calling for non-racialism as well as racial reconciliation, Mandela set up a contradictory project. True racial reconciliation requires both an acknowledgement of racial difference and action in order to mediate and ease the tensions caused by these differences. However, the idea of non-racialism is predicated on a racial blindness that diminishes racial difference in favor of more universal markers that bind all races into a homogenous subjectivity (in the case of South Africa, non-racialized citizens of the newly democratic South African state). This self-cancelling process in which South Africans were meant to be both unaware of their racial differences through being non-racial, and aware of these same differences by trying to bridge the gaps between people of other races has made race and, by extension, racial reconciliation deeply contested subjects in contemporary South Africa.

Political theorist Andrew Schaap critically defines this process of reconciliation as:

*question-begging* since it aims to restore a prior state of harmony that never actually existed; *assimilative* in that it represents the political claims of the ruled only in terms commensurate with the interests of the rulers; *quietist* insofar as it demands resignation to the injustices of the past and forgoing resentment of their continuing legacy; and *exculpatory* in that it provides an opportunity to redeem the good conscience of the nation primarily through symbolic gestures (Schaap 2008, 249).

Reconciliation in South Africa was *question-begging* because, taken literally, *reconciliation* implies that the racial groups being reconciled have undergone some kind of estrangement after previously co-existing in a state of harmony. However, the history of settler colonialism in South Africa suggests the relationship between European settlers and Black
South Africans has always been contentious. Thus, the post-apartheid reconciliation mandate skipped a crucial reality in not acknowledging that there was no past harmony that previously bound the people of South Africa together.

Furthermore, Schaap points to another aspect of reconciliation: it demands “resignation to the injustices of the past” (quietism) and provides an escape for some to “redeem their good conscience” (exculpation). In the post-apartheid context, reconciliation was quietist and exculpatory because it created two sets of people— the aggrieved, upon whom the responsibility of forgiveness and “moving on from the past” was invariably laid; and the aggressor, who was granted the opportunity to be absolved of individual sins based on the collective exculpation of the group to which the aggressor belonged. Thus, reconciliation creates two different groups: the forgivers/aggrieved and the forgiven/aggressors. Although reconciliation is supposed to be an equalizing process, it inadvertently separates people into two groups, which, in the case of South Africa, were both implicitly and explicitly created along racial lines.

Due to such a problematic nature, racial reconciliation in South Africa has been less successful than Mandela envisioned it to be in 1994. Within the SARB study, one measure of how South Africans perceive racial reconciliation is interracial mistrust, which measures how many people think people of other races are untrustworthy.
According to figure 1.3, interracial mistrust actually decreased by 12.5% over the ten-year period (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 16). However, when these results are parsed according to socio-economic class, a more complicated picture of reconciliation in South Africa emerges. Since interracial mistrust can be abated through decreased isolation and increased socialization across racial groups, we can look to these metrics as contributors to racial reconciliation within South Africa. The SARB also measured the socio-economic class of respondents by measuring their Living Standard Measure (LSM). The LSM is “a composite measure of the living standards of the household that each respondent belongs to” (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 21). The SARB grouped respondents into ten distinct class categorizations (1 being the lowest, and 10 being the highest) according to LSM.
The categorizations of all respondents are shown in figure 1.4:

![LSM category by race](image.png)

Figure 1.4. LSM category by race. Source: Data from Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, figure 11.

The most striking thing about this graph is the racialized income inequality; while 60% of the Black respondents fall in the low LSM range (1-5) while 75% of the white respondents fall in the highest LSM range (9-10). Almost no white South Africans are represented in the low-income category and very few Black South Africans are in the high-income category. This wide gulf alone is enough to undercut any attempt to equalize both races. Despite calls for non-racialism and the erasure of difference, this extreme income inequality cannot be ignored. The fact that income inequality is also manifested along racial lines means that the very idea of racial reconciliation is threatened by racially polarized class differences in South Africa.
As figure 1.5 shows, less than 15% of the respondents in the low LSM group (LSM 1-5) agreed that they often or always socialize with people of other races. Compared to 40% of respondents in the high LSM group (LSM 9-10), it is evident that racial socialization is very dependent on class. These figures imply that the decrease in racial mistrust as a result of increased contact might be class-specific within the high-income class of South Africans.

As the majority of Black South Africans fall into the low-income category, a large number of South Africans are being excluded from this national reconciliation process by virtue of their low-income status. A major determinant of interracial socialization and, by extension, racial reconciliation is geographical proximity. Many people in the low LSM groups—the majority of whom are Black—are still confined to the townships on the
outskirts of cities where they were required to live by law during the apartheid era. Their low-income status means that they cannot afford the high living costs of living in the cities where they would be closer to people of other races. As a result, they live on the outskirts, close enough to be able to work in the city during the day and return home at night, a migrant labor system that functioned as the bedrock of the apartheid economic framework and still persists in contemporary South Africa.

Whereas racial segregation is supposed to be a thing of the past, class segregation and its inadvertent effect on racialized spatial separation is still very much present. Because class in South Africa is so racially-coded, such that the majority of the people in the low-income categories are Black while those in the high income categories are white, an argument can be made that de facto racial segregation still exists in South Africa, even if outlawed by the national constitution.

Additionally, we must be critical of this 40% rate of socialization reported in the high LSM groups. Although this group—mostly white—reports interacting with people of other races, the conditions under which these interactions occur should be investigated. From my experience in South Africa, I noticed that many affluent, white South Africans interacted with working class Black South Africans on very transactional terms, in which Black South Africans were offering a service to white South Africans. This service could be cleaning, gardening, or even checking out goods bought at a store. In Johannesburg’s megamalls, Black and white South Africans seldom shop together; the general pattern was that white people were shopping, while Black people were cleaning or working in the shops. This phenomenon is depicted in the Woolworths Mandela tribute ad, where the workers are exclusively Black and the shoppers are predominantly white. Just because
both parties occupy the same space does not mean a power dynamic does not separate the
groups, as ironically highlighted by the Woolworths ad. All this is to say that “socialization”
is a loose term with which to measure racial reconciliation, and that merely engaging with
people of other races does not necessarily translate into racial reconciliation. In the
transactional exchanges outlined above, where there is a clear economic power dynamic
that favors affluent, predominantly white South Africans, can it really be said that both
races are “socializing” and are therefore being reconciled?

Admittedly, some of the interactions between South Africans of different races in the
9-10 LSM groups might actually be genuine and non-transactional because class
similarities mean that people within this group are likely to be part of the same social and
professional circles. A number of Black South Africans have entered into this high-income
group in recent years, due to a rising middle class and “Black elite.” However, these Black
South Africans are basically statistically insignificant in number, when compared to the
majority of Black South Africans who remain impoverished. Consequently, these “Black
elites” cannot be held up as examples of racial reconciliation due to increased socialization
in upper class income categories. If a vast majority of South Africans rarely mix with people
of other races due to their geographical confinement to the townships, can it really be
argued that South Africa has successfully undergone a process of national reconciliation?
Also, if the majority of South Africans that do socialize with other races do so within
contexts where configurations of power mean that they are not on equal footing with those
of other races, then the legitimacy of this reconciliation is questionable.
**The Rainbow Nation**

During his inauguration speech, Mandela’s declaration of South Africa as ‘non-racial’ quickly earned South Africa the moniker “Rainbow Nation,” both locally and globally. Archbishop Desmond Tutu had earlier coined the term “rainbow nation” in 1991 when he described South Africans as “rainbow people of God” (BBC News 2010). Although Tutu and Mandela both deployed the idea of rainbow nation to promote racial harmony in South Africa, the term has taken on a new meaning in present day South Africa: today the phrase is widely believed to promote a culture of racial blindness that obscures glaring racial differences and inequalities. Is the rainbow an illusion manifested only through visual motifs, symbolic days, and public performance (as shown in figure 1.6), or is the rainbow an inspiring symbol, guiding the new South Africa toward a moment where diverse racial groups can be equally included in its social, political, and economic agenda?

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 1.6.** Rainbow flyover demonstration at President Thabo Mbeki’s inauguration ceremony. Photograph by Alexander Joe.
South African literary scholar Pumla Gqola, of the University of the Witwatersrand, argues “systems of dominance inscribe themselves primarily through language because systems of power are constructed, resisted, subverted and mediated in and through linguistic agency” (Gqola 2001, 95). For this reason, Gqola is skeptical about South African “Rainbowism.” She claims that Rainbowism has become an authorizing grand narrative creating the illusion of racial harmony in South Africa, while leading to a discursive culture that “stifles rigorous discussions of power differentials and fosters the denial of difference” (Gqola 2001, 98-99).

Rainbowism does two things to shape South African discourse. First, it promotes an erasure of race, whereby South Africans are supposed to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity. Thus, in the rainbow nation, the idea is that “we are all South Africans” and not that “I am [insert ethnic/racial group identifier].” Secondly, Rainbowism is an equalizing discursive notion: in a rainbow, all colors in the spectrum are present in one plane. This metaphor implies that all members of all races have equality of access and opportunity. However, the institutional legacy of apartheid means that the majority of Black South Africans remain systematically excluded from economic opportunities in the new South Africa. South Africa has a 65.0 GINI index

5 (on a 0-100 scale, where 0 indicates perfect income equality and 100 indicates perfect income inequality). With this index level, South Africa has the second highest rate of economic inequality in the world, second only to the Seychelles (World Bank 2011). Given this reality, the false notion that all South Africans are equal within this rainbow is spurious at best. Contrary to what the rainbow suggests, all South Africans are not all on the same plane; a serious problem of economic inequality

5 The GINI Index “measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly normal distribution” (World Bank 2011)
exists in this society, which is invariably racially coded. Consequently, the allusion of equality the rainbow symbolizes only serves to distract from the fundamental differences between the different racial groups.

Today, South Africans seem to be eschewing this much-peddled notion of Rainbowism. The SARB asked respondents to identify their primary identity association. As figure 1.7 shows, racially specific markers of identity such as language, race, and ethnicity outstrip national identity when South Africans conceive of themselves within the new South Africa. In fact, the sense of nationality as a primary identifier has been on a steady decline since 2009. Instead, race-related identity markers such as language and race generally increased in relevance between 2007 and 2009 (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 16).

![Figure 1.7. Respondents' primary identity associations. Source: Data from Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, figure 2.](image)
The implication of these various self-conceptions is that the fabric of South Africa’s rainbow nation is starting to fray; people are starting to reject universalizing, racial erasers like nationality and are become increasingly aware of markers of difference such as language, ethnicity and race.

The image of a rainbow vanishing always seems to connote a sense of loss. However, I would proffer that this increasing awareness of difference introduces a much-needed complexity to the simplistic meta-narrative of the rainbow nation by encouraging critical conversations about power differentials and racial inequalities, the effects of which have visible material consequences in contemporary South Africa. These conversations, if followed to their logical conclusion, could lead to the interrogation of existing power structures in South Africa that put certain ethnic groups, especially white South Africans, at an inherent advantage over others.

*Zebra Nation?*

Another layer to this image of the rainbow nation is the sentiment that the sociopolitical agenda in the new South Africa is racially dichotomized, creating a “zebra nation” focused exclusively on Black and white South Africans. In an SARB focus group, one of the respondents, a coloured South African, said “the Blacks are running the country and the whites own the country” (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014, 36).

The coloureds, a group that makes up about 9% of South Africa’s total population, have a complex place in the history of South African racial politics. Coloured South Africans were previously understood as the product of “miscegenation” between colonial Dutch settlers and native South African women in the 17th century. During the apartheid era, the
government used laws such as the Population Registration Act to codify “coloured” as a distinct racial classification, along with laws such as the Group Areas Act to geographically separate different racial groups, including coloured South Africans (McKaiser 2012).

As a result of their racial mixture, “coloured South Africans” as a social category have always been “in-between.” During the apartheid era, coloured South Africans were not white enough to enjoy the liberties and privileges of whiteness, but not Black enough to suffer the gross injustices of apartheid to the extent that Black South Africans did. Nevertheless, coloured South Africans were victims of the apartheid era’s racist policies. While they enjoyed a slightly elevated financial and economic status compared with Black South Africans, they were also systematically subjugated by policies such as the Group Areas act (which legalized racialized geographical segregation) and economically dispossessed by the apartheid regime, albeit to a lesser degree (arguably).

In present-day South Africa, most of the remedial policies designed to redress the adverse effects of the apartheid era have been very racially specific, almost exclusively aimed at Black South Africans. For instance, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies, designed to extend to non-white South Africans (Black, coloured, Asian/Indian etc.) economic opportunities unavailable to them during the apartheid era, have mostly benefitted a small, select group of Black South Africans. This almost exclusively Black application of a more wide-ranging policy is just one of many examples of realities in the new South Africa that make coloured South Africans feel alienated from the country’s agenda.

This regression to Black and white as the dominant racial categories harkens back to apartheid, when the sociopolitical discursive space pitted Black South Africans against
white South Africans. Such racially dichotomized policies excluding certain groups and privileging others calls into question the legitimacy of the rainbow nation image.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the many complexities and contradictions within the major discursive questions conceptualized in the post-apartheid era. Although these questions were formed as grand-narratives about and symbolic descriptors of the new South Africa, they were translated into national and political discourse, distracting from the core structural changes that needed to take place if, indeed, South Africa was ever going to live up to these discursive questions. In present-day South Africa, racially coded, class-based power differentials have replaced explicitly race-based power differentials from the apartheid era. As a result of the huge gap between different economic classes, these universalizing discursive notions will continue to be undercut and threatened by class-specific markers of difference.

The next chapter looks at how these discursive questions have been normalized and institutionalized within the South African history curriculum, in order to understand how school children are formed as political subjects in South Africa: what values are emphasized in the curriculum, and how this process serves the agenda of existing political structures in South Africa.
Chapter 2 – The Politics of Historical Narratives in the Post-Apartheid History Curriculum

“Who controls the past,” ran the Party Slogan, “controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”

—George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four

Literary theorist Bill Ashcroft expounds a four-pronged theory to explain the progression of historical discourse in post-colonial societies. According to Ashcroft, the first way in which historical discourse in the post-colony plays out is through acquiescence, an acceptance of history exactly as it was conceptualized by the colonial powers without asking any questions about the historical method or constitution of this history. The second type of historical discourse involves a rejection of colonial history due to the realization that it is a “fabrication of order” created to rationalize and legitimize colonial power structures. The third form of historical discourse is interjection, a presentation of an alternative form of history deemed more representative of post-colonial life and the people’s history: the history of those that were excluded from colonial history. The fourth type of historical discourse is interpolation, a form of “writing back to the imposed historical narrative by interrupting the very forms through which this narrative is produced, consumed, and exchanged” (Ashcroft 2001, 100-102; Weldon 2009, 146-7).

The trajectory of the history curriculum revision in South Africa has successively followed all four forms of historical engagement. From the involuntary acceptance of the colonial history curriculum during the apartheid era; to the rejection of this curriculum after the transition through the creation of an interim curriculum that stripped the apartheid curriculum of its colonial ideologies; to the interjection of new histories in the
subsequent curricular revisions. The last type of historical discourse, *interpolation*, can be observed today in many South African classrooms, where some teachers challenge the normativity of the official post-apartheid historical narrative by deviating from the stipulations of the imposed history curriculum and teaching their own version of history.

I became particularly interested in the history curriculum when I visited the principal history museums in South Africa: Robben Island, the Apartheid Museum, and the Hector Pieterson Museum.\(^6\) On my multiple visits, representatives of two key demographics were present: foreign tourists and schoolchildren. On all of my visits, children from at least two schools were visiting at the same time, usually in large droves. A conversation with a tour guide who has worked at Robben Island for over eight years confirmed my observation: after tourists, South African schoolchildren make up the second largest group of visitors to South Africa’s history museums. This fact led me to question how the past is conceived and taught to these children.

Schoolchildren, the “Born Frees,” are a key demographic in South Africa’s post-apartheid meaning-making project. These children, as mentioned above, are the generation of South Africans born either right before or in the period following 1994, the year when the apartheid regime fell. I analyze changes in the history curricula in South African schools because I am interested in how the apartheid narrative is assembled and disseminated for the Born Frees. Because this group of South Africans has little or no direct recollection of the apartheid years, history is a crucial subject for shaping their memory of the past. More importantly, history has direct implications for who these children become

\(^6\) Robben Island is the prison-turned-museum where Nelson Mandela and other famous anti-apartheid activists were imprisoned by the apartheid regime; the Apartheid Museum memorializes multiple aspects of life under apartheid; and the Hector Pieterson Museum memorializes the students who died during the 1976 Soweto Uprising.
as political subjects; in South Africa, it is the school subject tasked with instilling
democratic values such as human rights and citizenship, and molding the youth into
patriotic citizens within the new South Africa (South African Department of Education 2008, 10).

The Born Frees who are old enough to vote make up a key constituent of the
electorate. Currently, this demographic group makes up about 24% of the electorate, and is
projected to increase in years to come. In the 2014 general elections, the oldest persons in
the youth demographic (18-29 years old) were only 9 years old in 1994. Because the Born
Frees were so young in 1994, their political values and ideals were most likely shaped by
the post-apartheid education system.

Given the discursive atmosphere of the early post-apartheid period in South Africa,
primarily focused on national projects such as nation-building, reconciliation, human rights
and democracy, it is important to look at how the history curriculum has been adapted to
suit the needs of a newly liberated South Africa. Linda Chisholm, a historian who played an
active role in the post-apartheid curriculum revision process, argues that the revision of
history textbooks and curricula is a core part of the educational trajectory of transitional
societies, as this process of revision helps us understand how these societies use the past to
negotiate the present (Chisholm 2004, 1).

In post-conflict societies, telling history serves as a way for people not only to
remember but also to pass down these memories and lessons learned to the next
generation. For societies such as South Africa, where the colonial past and the apartheid
era are recent, as South African education scholar Gail Weldon notes, “the explanations of
the past are often fraught with issues of the oppressor and oppressed; superiority and
inferiority; of internalized oppression; of former dominant narratives; and of the legacy of trauma and pain” (Weldon 2009, 11). Therefore, by looking at successive history curriculum revisions in post-apartheid South Africa, we can get a glimpse into the ways in which South African education officials understand and attempt to construct the narrative of apartheid history to suit different national needs at different times.

Linguistics scholar Norman Fairclough developed a well-known analytical framework for analyzing the relationship among language, power and ideology. This analytical framework, called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), integrates “text analysis; an analysis of the processes of text production, consumption and distribution; and a sociocultural analysis of the discursive events surrounding the production of this text” (Fairclough 1995, 23). One of the central assumptions in Critical Discourse Analysis is that there exists a “dialectical relationship between discourse and the situations, institutions and social structures in which it is embedded” (Wodak et al. 2009, 8). Thus, just as institutions and sociopolitical events shape discourse, discourse in (re)turn shapes social and political dynamics (Wodak et al. 2009, 8).

An investigation of how power is expressed through language is central to Critical Discourse Analysis, and such an inquiry frames my analysis of the production and dissemination of knowledge in South African history curricula. In looking at the discursive constitution of the history curricula, I am specifically concerned with how power influences the normalization of ideologies and such normalization leads to rationalization of social order within post-apartheid South Africa. Because the Born Frees are a key future demographic in South African politics, this analysis also has political implications. I wish to inquire whether the meanings in the history curriculum are structured to prime this
generation of young South Africans to hold certain conceptions about South Africa’s history and its present. How do resulting mental images of South Africa uphold or challenge existing power structures?

More specifically, I will address the following questions: what are the factors that influence the formation of a history curriculum? How do power dynamics come into play in the construction of different phases of the South African history curriculum? Whose version of post-apartheid history does South Africa’s curriculum support, and why? In examining these questions, I hope to achieve a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics that inform post-apartheid narratives.

**Sociopolitical Dynamics of Curricular Revisions**

For South Africa, a country in the throes of negotiating its past, defining its present position within the global framework, and setting the groundwork for the future through nation-building, history pedagogy was crucial to how the past would be memorialized in the post-apartheid era. Because the teaching of history is so closely tied to the official narrative of a nation, we must investigate the power structure and the agenda of those in power when considering the evolutions of the secondary school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa.

Jonathan Jansen, first Black dean of education at South Africa’s University of the Free State, and one of the country’s leading intellectuals, posits that curricula are political statements because their construction is influenced by the varying interests of different actors and social factions, which then creates tension when some facts, issues, discussions are included and others are left out (Jansen 2001a). Beyond this political clash of opinion
over course content, curricula are inherently political in that both “curriculum and social change are interwoven into a dialectical process through which both curricula and ideas of the society are simultaneously reproduced and transformed” (Carr 1993, 8). This double action characterizes education in any society: not only are curricula shaped by social ideas of what should be taught; they also serve as a medium that shapes ideas about collective and individual social experience.

An examination of the role of education in South Africa’s experience shows how subjects such as history have been politicized in school curricula. During the apartheid era, history was used as a medium through which the state rationalized and reinforced apartheid ideals, especially in Black schools. The apartheid history curriculum was designed to extoll white history while rationalizing Black inferiority and legitimizing the need to separate the two races. The white “right-to-rule,” the glorification of white nationalism, and the exclusion of Black history were ingrained into the South African history curricula (Jansen 1990, 202). Many apartheid-era history textbooks also contained themes that rationalized and reinforced ideals of racial superiority by teaching students lessons such as the following: “South Africa rightfully belongs to the Afrikaner; legal authority is not to be questioned; the Afrikaner has a God-given task to fulfill in Africa” (Engelbrecht 2006, 71-2). This contrasting representation of Blacks and whites in history courses also shaped social identities because they established racialized ideals concerning social and political inclusion and exclusion (Chisholm 2004, 1). As such examples richly suggest, history pedagogy is a particularly contested subject in South Africa because its reputation as being politicized, both in its constitution and use in classrooms, dates back to
the apartheid era. Even today, history remains a particularly contested subject and the politicization of history as a school subject still persists in post-apartheid South Africa.

The most revolutionary curricular reforms in schools took place between 1994 and 2000, a period during which South Africa was dealing with major social projects such as nation-building and reinserting itself into the global framework from which it had been alienated in the period of calls for divestment and other global economic and political sanctions. These new curricula, like the previous apartheid era ones, were “products of the time and context during which they occurred, of the social struggles around them, [as well as the] people who ultimately produced them” (Chisholm 2004, 3). While the original intention of curricular review was not consciously to create a curriculum that supported nationalist or triumphalist ideals (Chisholm 2004, 2-3), that is in fact what happened.

In late 1994, the National Education and Training Forum (NETF), a group made up many different education stakeholders, worked with the South African Ministry of Education to cleanse the existing curriculum of subject areas that promoted apartheid ideology. The aim was to provide a revised interim syllabus that would last until the real curriculum overhaul was carried out. Based on the newly democratic dispensation that South Africa was in, the revision process was largely democratized; it adopted a multi-participatory model, creating sub-committees for each subject area and allowing for input from an array of stakeholders. In history, for instance, the sub-committee consisted of “a national departmental official who had served on apartheid-era syllabus committees as well as five representatives of teacher organizations, a high school and a university student” (Weldon 2009, 124). Somewhat surprisingly, no academic historians or experts served on this committee; at the time, history practitioners weren’t officially recognized as
stakeholders because they didn’t have a unified body or organization that could represent them (Weldon 2009, 123-4). This inadvertent democratization of the review process at the expense of expertise and factual accuracy laid the groundwork for later curriculum reforms. By choosing to align with the political zeitgeist of democracy and multi-participatory policy-making that dominated the political discursive space in 1994, the Ministry of Education set a precedent whereby later curricular reforms would be explicitly entangled with, and subject to the influence of, political discourse in South Africa.

In 1996, as a part of the ANC’s attempt to deliver on its education promises, the more comprehensive curriculum review process began. Just a year before the review process started, the government published a White Paper on Education and Training, which outlined the government’s “core values and vision for education in South Africa.” The document stated that the central aim of a post-apartheid education was to mold students into “well-informed citizens that imbibed the ideals of a free, democratic, equal, just and peaceful society.” The secondary goal, according to the document, was to shape students into “effective economic citizens.” Importantly, this document never outlined the promotion of a critical understanding of the past as a priority for education in South Africa (Weldon 2009, 132-133).

The new curriculum instituted in 1997, referred to futuristically as Curriculum 2005 or c2005, mirrored the government’s conceptions of post-apartheid education. For one, history was de-emphasized to the extent that it disappeared completely from the curriculum as a subject area; instead, it was grouped with Geography in a new subject called Human & Social Sciences (HSS), which focused on teaching democracy and citizenship, not South Africa’s past (Weldon 2009, 135). The new curriculum focused on
subject areas that would promote patriotism and indoctrinate the students in the government’s values. The state’s influence in shaping the curriculum was further symbolized when the curriculum was formally announced in Cape Town, during which balloons with colors that mirrored the colors of the South African national flag were displayed; a move that implicitly “linked patriotism with the new curriculum” (Weldon 2009, 134).

In addition to aligning with the state’s values, the c2005 review process was influenced by the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) process going on at the same time. Weldon argues that the new curriculum was involved in a dialectical process with the TRC: whereas the c2005 called for a collective amnesia concerning the past, the TRC was predicated upon the collective exposure of the past (Weldon 2009, 149).

However, the TRC and c2005 weren’t necessarily in opposition to each other. The problem with c2005 wasn’t that the past was completely excluded from the curriculum; it was that on the occasional instance where the past was mentioned, it was used as a contextual basis for the analysis of other issues. For instance, apartheid was mentioned only in relation to how it affected the post-apartheid South African economy. Thus, c2005 didn’t encourage a critical engagement with apartheid itself as a system of dispossession and suppression, and how this shaped the post-apartheid reality of Black South Africans (Weldon 2009, 137). Similarly, although the TRC was predicated on the uncovering of the past and the exposure of truth, the engagement with the past served as a medium through which the TRC’s promotion of human rights as a value system could be emphasized. There was no attempt to critically investigate the past in terms of how South Africans had been systematically oppressed and stripped of resources, or how the victims of apartheid could
be materially compensated for decades of dispossession. The same “politics of historical avoidance” that led to the TRC’s refusal to critically engage with the past can be seen in c2005’s omission of history as a subject area (Weldon 2009, 156).

There was serious backlash against c2005, because of the difficulty of its implementation and its omission of history from its curriculum. This criticism resulted in new curricular revision processes in 2001 and 2004, which led to the creation of new curricula called the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Grades R-9 and National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Grades 10-12 (Weldon 2009, 172). These revisions happened during a new political dispensation: in 1999, under a new government administration with Thabo Mbeki as president, a new Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, was appointed. Asmal believed that “the society cannot reconcile itself on the grounds of a divided memory because since memory is identity, this would result in a divided identity” (Weldon 2009, 167). Consequently, he commissioned a new curricular review process that would re-emphasize the study of the past by introducing history and geography as the core elements of the social studies subject area (Weldon 2009, 167-8).

Asmal also believed in the amplification of Black history. In a speech given in 2004, he said that for South Africa to become a cohesive society, it needed an “inclusive memory, a memory that can find home for both the Boer Nationalist Paul Kruger and the African nationalist Anton Lembede.” However, despite his calls for an inclusive historical representation in education as a way to achieve a more unified society, Asmal then went on to say: “in Africa, in the struggle between the hunter and the lion, the hunter has written the history... We now want to hear the lion’s story. We now want to hear the lion’s roar” (Asmal 2004). Here, the hunter’s story refers to the Afrikaner history reinforced through
apartheid school curricula as the dominant South African history, while the lion’s story, the
history of Black South Africans, was systematically eroded from school curricula
(Engelbrecht 2008, 7).

Asmal’s views on the need for “hearing the lion’s story” mirrored President Thabo
Mbeki’s emphasis on ‘African Renaissance’: a philosophy of pride in African heritage and
the South African identity, focused on an Africanizing discourse that privileged Black
history and heritage over all other ethnicities in South Africa. Consequently, in addition to
embodying the staple values of the post-apartheid South African state (human rights,
democracy, and patriotism), the new curricula also reflected and helped construct the
popular socio-political discourse of the time: Africanization. These curricula (RNCS and
NCS) are still being used in South African schools today.

Textbooks and the History Curriculum

Just as curricula were being reformed, textbooks were also revised to reflect the
changes in each curricular revision (Engelbrecht 2008, 1). Textbooks are an important
aspect of the historical narrative within the curriculum because they serve as a medium
through which past events are reified and presented as history. Textbooks are also one of
the main channels through which knowledge is controlled, transmitted, and through which
“cultural values are instilled in learners” (Engelbrecht 2006, 71). Furthermore, the pictorial
element of textbooks enhances their discursive power because visual cues help to form a
vivid imagination of what is being taught. As we have seen, the socio-political zeitgeist
influences history curricula, so we would expect textbooks, as central curricular elements,
to convey ideas about not only the past but also the present.
This section presents a close reading of history textbooks across different South African class grades. I am particularly interested in what these textbooks say about South Africa, its history, the ANC, and the ideals they promote about citizenship and the citizenry within the new South African state.

**Methodology**

**Sampling**

I collected and examined five South African history textbooks published between 1999 and 2006. As Table 2.1 shows, these textbooks represent both different class grades and different stages in curricular reforms.

Table 2.1. South African history textbooks across multiple curricular reforms and class grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook (organized by date)</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avery, Burton, Gear, Maytham, Nuttal, Sabela, and Nkosi. 1999. <em>Shuter's Human &amp; Social Sciences.</em></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>C2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranby, P., B. Johannesson, and M. Friedman. 2006. <em>Focus on Social Sciences.</em></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NCS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coding/Analysis**

Three major analytical concerns figure in my examination of these textbooks. First, I periodize my analysis of each textbook by reading it against the political discourse dominating the year it was produced. For instance, the material in *Social Studies: Human, Social, Economic and Management Sciences* (Nattrass and Justus 2001) closely mirrors the dominant discourse in South Africa in 2001: promoted by then President Thabo Mbeki,
African Renaissance (as previously mentioned) was a post-apartheid intellectual mandate calling for South Africans to embrace African pride, democracy, unity and economic growth as a path to restore dignity to the state (Mbeki 2000, 76-8). This textbook’s history section echoes this discourse in its three major sections: Our Road to Democracy, Our Heritage, and Children’s Rights.

My second analytic concern is what these textbooks tell students about both South Africa’s history and its present. I pay special attention to how the apartheid years are depicted in these books, especially in terms of the construction of heroes and villains, and who is left out of the book completely. The silences are just as important as the included elements, drawing attention to gaps within the story and prompting the question why some aspects of South African history are amplified while others are rendered mute.

Lastly, I analyze each textbook for its pictorial content (sketches, cartoons, tables and charts, etc.), because textbook images enable students to visualize and then conceptualize the material being taught. Specific to history as a discipline, textbook images enable students to form an image of the country’s past, its present, and its potential or hoped-for future. Consequently, I read each textbook for potential implicit and explicit meanings contained in its images.

Findings

Shuter’s Human & Social Sciences, (Avery et al. 1999) was published under c2005, when thematic areas replaced traditional school subjects: for instance, as noted above, history and geography were subsumed under human and social sciences. Consequently,
this textbook makes no explicit attempt to teach South Africa’s past: for instance, the Table of Contents includes no references South Africa’s history.

Three years before this book was published, the new South African constitution went into effect. Even though the textbook doesn't directly address South Africa’s past, it emphasizes its present strongly by focusing on the recently amended constitution and the ANC’s Bill of Rights for a New South Africa. Furthermore, throughout the textbook, there are sidebars titled “What the Constitution says” (sample shown in figure 2.1), which link the textbook material to the stipulations of the constitution. This textbook thus directly mirrors the major political discursive question in South Africa at the time: the amended constitution and, through it, the ANC’s promotion of a “united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society” (African National Congress n.d.). By reflecting the main political priorities at the time, the textbook introduces the students to a politically sanctioned value system; this pedagogical emphasis prepares these students to be the ideal citizens within the democratic South African state.

In its attempt to teach democracy, the sidebar shown in figure 2.1 draws parallels between South Africa and other countries and organizations. For one, it lists the United Nations as an example of a potentially democratic organization, even though for 20 years before the transition, South Africa was suspended from the UN in response to its apartheid policies (South African History Online n.d.). It also asks students to debate whether the United States and several American mega-corporations (McDonald’s, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and Nike) can be described as democratic. Again, the textbook encourages students to draw parallels with a country that economically withdrew from South Africa due to its apartheid policies. It makes this connection by identifying American commodity giants as
democratic, even though one wouldn't ordinarily make such a connection because, for the most part, these corporations are apparently de-politicized spaces.

Figure 2.1. "What the Constitution says" sample textbook exercise.
*Source: Shuter’s Human & Social Sciences textbook.*

The pedagogical method in this textbook encourages students not only to learn about democracy but also to enact democracy in their engagement with the material. As opposed to the apartheid-era education system where authoritative teachers passed down information to students limited in the degree to which they could question their instruction, this new curriculum democratizes the learning process by encouraging students to debate the meaning and morality of democracy means, as well as what makes
countries or institutions democratic. In this way, the democratization process taking place in the country at the time also extended into the classroom; unlike the apartheid era, students’ opinions mattered and they could engage with educational material through a more open system of information exchange and educational processes among students and between teachers and students.

Even though this textbook is intended for African students, no African countries, with which the students are likely to be more familiar, are listed for analysis in this exercise. This omission implies that the aim of this activity was to teach democracy through an alignment with global political powers (such as the United Nations and the United States) that had previously distanced themselves from South Africa. Thus, this textbook is not solely about the South African constitution and democracy; it is also about re-orienting South Africa from a pariah nation to a nation included in the global political and economic framework, a major foreign affairs agenda of the ruling government at the time (Pfister 2000, 2).

*Understanding Human & Social Sciences* (Morare et al. 2001) and *Social Studies: Human, Social, Economic and Management Science* (Nattrass and Justus 2001) were published under the RNCS/NCS curricular system. These textbooks were published under a new political administration in South Africa; Thabo Mbeki was president of South Africa at the time. Mbeki’s presidency, as noted above, marked a shift in discourse from democracy, human rights and universalism to African Renaissance and the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP): an economic policy aimed at addressing the socioeconomic inequalities caused by the apartheid regime.
Upon analysis of *Social Studies: Human, Social, Economic and Management Sciences* (Nattrass and Justus 2001), the concept of African Renaissance—although defined by President Thabo Mbeki as pride in African heritage and South African identity (Mbeki 2000, 76-8)—appears to privilege Black history and heritage over that of all other ethnicities in South Africa. Here, there is little attempt to be non-racial or universalizing. Instead, textbook sections on African art, writers, music and dance mostly profile Black South Africans and only marginally mention white, coloured and Indian South Africans.

This emphasis on Africanization also extends to the textbooks’ narration of South Africa’s apartheid history. In a section titled “Opposition Movements,” *Social Studies: Human, Social, Economic and Management Sciences* (Nattrass and Justus 2001) profiles liberation movements dominated by Black South Africans. The textbook makes no attempt to profile non-Black South African actors in the liberation struggle, such as the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD), an ANC-affiliated, white anti-apartheid organization; the textbook does not focus on either Helen Suzman or Beyers Naude, both white, anti-apartheid activists who spoke out publicly against apartheid.

In a cartoon included in another textbook published in 2001 (figure 2.2), *People in Place and Time Grade 6*, the Dutch are described as ‘the visitors who didn’t go home’ (Engelbrecht 2009, 17-18). This characterization of the Dutch has direct implications for how students are taught to view South Africans with Dutch ancestry (many white and coloured South Africans). The othering of the Dutch as “unwanted visitors” primes students to hold racialized conceptions of legitimate South African citizenship, instilling ideas about differential belonging, and creating dynamics of exclusion and inclusion. This narrative
focus on the history of Black South Africans indicates that, as Minister of Education Asmal requested, the 'lion's roar' is indeed heard within the history curriculum.

Figure 2.2. A comic from a textbook describing the Dutch as "visitors who didn't go home"

*Source: Engelbrecht 2009, figure 9.*
This historical narrative in *Social Studies: Human, Social, Economic and Management Sciences* (Nattrass and Justus 2001) also leans towards depicting ANC-affiliated figures as heroes of the past. The book disproportionately represents ANC members like Anton Lembede, the founding president of the ANC Youth League; Lillian Ngoyi, an executive member of the ANC; Winnie Mandela, the former leader of the ANC Youth League; Chris Hani, the former leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe (the ANC’s armed wing); and the famous Rivonia Eight, the ANC leaders (including Nelson Mandela) sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island. This representation furthered the ANC’s attempted monopoly on South Africa’s liberation story, through which it positioned itself as the political party that single-handedly brought about the post-apartheid political transformation and all its associated achievements (Bojabotseha and Moloi 2014, 132).

These images and narratives are disseminated in a primary school (Grade 6) history textbook, to young children, impressionable and uncritical in their reception of information. The normative message is that the ANC should be given all the credit for South Africa’s liberation story. Such a message solidified the ANC’s place as a political party worthy of complete loyalty and reverence through the erroneous idea that its members were solely responsible for bringing freedom to South Africa. This false representation of the ANC was firmly ingrained in the minds of impressionable children through an exclusionary depiction of historical facts.
The Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), the government’s main socioeconomic agenda at the time, is extensively detailed in *Understanding Human & Social Sciences* (Morare et al. 2001). This textbook outlines the basic principles of RDP, and then describes what the government has done to address the development challenges since 1994. This textbook’s use of images to illustrate text betrays some tension. The section about RDP offers a visual disjunction between the captions and the images (as shown in figure 2.3); although the captions use words such as “the people,” “everybody,” and “our people,” the race of the characters in the cartoon images is either clearly Black or hardly discernable: the characters’ skin is subtly darkened enough to make them appear African (Engelbrecht 2008, 9).

![Figure 2.3](on preceding page). One of the RDP examples in Understanding Human & Social Sciences. *Source: Understanding Human & Social Sciences textbook.*
The use of collective terms like “the people” and “our people” doesn’t match up with the clearly racial skewing of the images. One has to question what idea of the people—the “typical” South African populace—is indicated by these images. This Africanization creates the conception of a homogenously Black citizenry, introducing an autochtonous element to the book’s presentation of what it means to be South African. In this way Black South Africans are presented as more “legitimate” than other races within South Africa.

This focus on Black history can best be described with Bill Ashcroft’s schema of historical discourse in post-colonial societies: specifically, interjection, the presentation of an alternative form of history that is more representative of the people’s history. Interestingly, the “people’s history” wasn’t formulated in the wake of a newly democratic South Africa; the construction of the people’s history started in 1977, when the South African History Workshop was formed in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising as a way to research and curate stories about ordinary Black South Africans (Saunders 2006, 856). Despite the workshop’s existence, there was no space for this kind of history within the apartheid school curriculum. However, within the post-colonial context, which involves a subversion of colonial power structures and institutions, this interjection of colonial historical discourse with a history that is focused on a previously excluded group—Black South Africans—is a reclamation of a space previously monopolized by the colonial power and an attempt to speak back to this colonial power by supplanting its historical narrative with one more representative of the formerly oppressed.

This Africanization may have been more emphatic in light of the negotiated settlement that ended apartheid: the post-colonial transition did not follow the “expected trajectory of post-colonial states in destroying the official monuments and memorials of the
previous oppressive regime” (Weldon 2009, 184). Typical examples of these colonial markers still extant in contemporary South Africa include Pretoria’s Voortrekker Monument, a major road recently named after FW de Klerk (the last president of the apartheid regime), and a statue of Cecil Rhodes (one of the most brutal colonialists in Southern African history) on the University of Cape Town campus. Thus, the emphasis on Black history within the history curriculum in this phase may be seen as a “political attempt to claim an ideological space in the current landscape that still includes geographical markers of white domination” (Weldon 2009, 184).

According to Ashcroft, the fourth type of historical engagement in the post-colony is interpolation, a form of writing back to history by interrupting the forms through which the narrative is produced and exchanged (Ashcroft 2001, 102). A key difference between interjection and interpolation is that the former seeks a wholesale replacement of colonial history with the people’s history, while the latter attempts to rewrite this history by introducing alternative discourses into the existing history. Some might argue that this interpolation is more nuanced than other forms of post-colonial history that explicitly replace colonial history with other versions. Some history textbooks achieve interpolation by providing a historical account that includes multiple racial perspectives of history. One such textbook is Looking into the Past (Dyer et al. 2005), published in 2005 during Mbeki’s presidency. Even though this text clearly reflects themes of the African Renaissance like

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7 The Voortrekker Monument is an edifice of white triumphalism that was built to commemorate The Great Trek, a historical account that rationalized and theologized Afrikaner superiority, which served as an ideological basis to justify the need for apartheid.

8 In March 2015, the University of Cape Town students lobbied the university administration to remove this statue because of its strong colonial associations. After weeks of protest, the statue was removed in April.
other histories produced during the time period, it presents this reflection in a manner that doesn’t explicitly show a trend of Africanization.

Looking into the Past (Dyer et al. 2005), like other textbooks from this period, places a very strong emphasis on African/South African history by describing the grand civilizations and histories of the people within South Africa. However, as opposed to Social Studies: Human, Social, Economic and Management Sciences (Nattrass and Justus 2001), which does this recounting through an Africanizing lens that almost exclusively privileges Black history, Looking into the Past (Dyer et al. 2005) depicts the ancient civilizations of all major racial groups within South Africa by including sections about the West African Songhay Empire, the Indian Moghul dynasty, the Chinese Ming dynasty, European empires, and the Great Trek. This acknowledgement of the history and heritage of the major racial groups in South Africa (Black, Asian/Indian, and white) creates a multi-perspectival pedagogical experience for the students, through which they learn multiple histories of the diverse groups that make up South Africa, rather than the history of one group of people.

This multi-perspective theme also extends to the pictorial content within Looking into the Past (Dyer et al. 2005). Figure 2.4 presents an image in a textbook section about the conflicts between Dutch settlers and the Khoikhoi (native South Africans) in the 18th century. As opposed to telling the story from either the Dutch or Khoikhoi viewpoint, this image depicts three different perspectives on the story. This presentation offers the students a more complex account of history and leaves it up to them to read and draw conclusions from all three accounts, instead of feeding them a one-sided narrative.
Another textbook, *Focus on Social Sciences* (Ranby et al. 2006), provides students with a conceptual framework for reading and analyzing multiple sources. The textbook recounts the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre through five conflicting perspectives, and provides an exercise (figure 2.5) for students to analyze these perspectives. Again, we see an attempt to complicate history by providing students with multiple individual recollections of the past, as opposed to imposing a neatly packaged, simplified meta-narrative onto the students.
Complicating the Historical Narrative

Stuart Hall argues that, when it comes to representation, power aims to fix meaning so that this meaning is the only one that an idea or concept can possibly carry. Apart from fixing meaning, power also aims to close meaning by ascribing a static nature to it, attempting to foreclose the possibility that this meaning could possibly change. Hall also goes further to point out that the trouble with fixing meaning is that meaning is bound to fray, as its constitution is always in flux (Sanjay and Patierno 1997). In the case of the history curriculum, designing and fixing narratives within the curriculum is one thing, the actual implementation of this curriculum is another. In reality, the successful implementation of the mandated history curriculum does not depend on the ANC or the South African Ministry of Education, but on the teachers themselves.

The implementation of the curriculum in classrooms takes us back to Ashcroft’s fourth type of post-colonial historical discourse, interpolation. Despite the attempt to
impose an official version of apartheid history or post-apartheid history on South Africans, counter-narratives in classrooms interrupt the dominant discourse and challenge the naturalization of this fixed/imposed meaning. These interruptions also take place through the channel in which these imposed narratives are “produced, consumed, and exchanged” (Weldon 2009, 147): the History curriculum itself. The end result is a continued contestation between different histories and different narratives within the curriculum, and a simultaneous attempt by power to mediate these contestations in favor of the narrative that best serves its interests.

As a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), verbal testimony became formalized as a medium of oral history. The TRC’s use of personal testimony as a means through which apartheid history could be revealed to a general audience created a relationship between personal accounts and factual representations of history (thereby introducing a tenuous equation, since all such accounts are subjective). As a result of this relationship, within the formal history curriculum, personal testimony could also serve as a supplement to, or a replacement of, official history as dictated by the syllabus and class plan imposed by the teacher. Many teachers today contribute importantly to the formation of apartheid era memory because they serve as first-hand records through which the narratives of the past are brought to life within the classroom. This dual role as teacher and historical witness means that the history curriculum depends on the teacher’s adherence to the mandated curriculum (Dryden-Peterson and Sieborger 2006, 395).

This relationship between teachers, the curriculum and the classroom further contributes to the propensity for this sanctioned history curriculum to continue to be challenged, and introduces a fluidity to the fixity of imposed meaning, guaranteeing that
contestations will continue to exist between the mandated South African history
curriculum and its implementation in South African classrooms.

Henning Hues’ case study of new curriculum implementation in Afrikaans schools in
Gauteng and the Western Cape province in South Africa looks at how some Afrikaans
teachers teach the mandated revised history curriculum to their students. Hues’ study
provides evidence of the presentation in these contexts of counter-narratives about the
past, despite curricular attempts to fix accounts of history.

In teaching about Nelson Mandela and his role during the anti-apartheid struggle, the
curriculum and the history textbook require the teacher to open a discussion with students
about why Mandela should be regarded a hero. One of the teachers in Hues’ study ignored
this instruction and instead showed the students photos of assassinations and insurrection.
The teacher then explained to the students: “This was the work of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the
work of Mandela and the other boys” (Hues 2011, 86). Umkhonto we Sizwe was the armed
wing of the ANC, momentarily led by Nelson Mandela and generally understood as a
terrorist organization amongst white South Africans. Furthermore, in teaching students
about the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, when the South African police shot into a crowd of
Black protesters, killing 69 people, the same teacher framed this event as a guerrilla war
orchestrated by “Mandela and the other boys” (Hues 2011, 86). After showing gruesome
photos of the event, the teacher concludes, “there you have your Mandela hero!” (Hues
2011, 87).

This example from the classroom highlights the tensions between what is regarded as
official apartheid history and what actually transpires in classrooms. This teacher’s
depiction of Mandela as a violent terrorist and insurrectionist is antithetical to the post-
apartheid canonization of Mandela as a pacifist, who brought harmony to South Africa.
Furthermore, the teacher’s infantilization of the ANC—by describing them as “Mandela and the other boys”—is directly oppositional to the post-apartheid construction of the ANC as a group to be revered not only as the ruling party, but also as a liberation movement. Such deviation from the mandated curriculum shows the limits of fixing meaning: although powerful factions in the South Africa educational system can exert top-down control in fixing a certain historical narrative, these same powers cannot control the implementation of curriculum on the ground, in the classroom.

Some teachers go to the opposite extreme in glorifying Mandela and the ANC, whitewashing their legacies and enhancing the misconception that the ANC/Mandela are single-handedly responsible for South Africa’s freedom. Michelle Friedman, a South African historian and author of multiple South African history textbooks, has thought deeply about the implementation of history education in classrooms. Although Freidman advocates a multi-perspective depiction of the past, as evidenced through her books *Looking into the Past* and *Focus on Social Science* (both analyzed above), she acknowledges that many teachers are likely to skew their depiction of history in favor of the ANC because of their own personal involvement in the liberation struggle. According to Freidman, “they (the teachers) are unable to dissociate themselves from their own experiences, and thus their storytelling of their involvement becomes the history.”

Both depictions of Mandela, either exclusively as a hero or as a villain, bring up questions about the whitewashing of Mandela’s legacy and post-1994 image. Breyten Breytenbach, a South African writer, argues that the authorized representation of Mandela

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9 Michelle Friedman (South African historian) in discussion with author, December 2014.
and South Africa’s past, the simplistic canonization of Mandela, serves to distract people from the grim realities of the new South Africa: crime, economic inequality, government corruption (Breytenbach 2008). Thus, official accounts distort facts and present an unbalanced historical view that glamorizes the ANC and distracts people from critically engaging with the past and present. Counter-narratives, such as the version of history presented by the anti-Mandela teacher (cited above), pose a direct challenge to the simplified nature of mandated narratives and introduce a multi-perspective dimension, albeit unauthorized, to the discursive composition of these narratives.

**Conclusion**

Because the teaching of history provides a frame of reference through which the past and present can be understood, it is crucial to the development of young South Africans as political actors in post-apartheid South Africa. The Born Free generation is generally characterized by a disengagement from apartheid history. However, this disinterest in South Africa is a function of the education system shaping the formative years of these young people, which refused to critically engage with the past as a point of analysis. Critical pedagogy theorist Henry Giroux refers to this disengagement with the past as a “crisis in historical consciousness, which impairs one’s ability to remember the lessons of the past that illuminate the developmental preconditions of individual liberty and social freedom” (Weldon 2009, 159). Because history provides a framework through which students can understand their social positioning within the society and learn the sociopolitical origins of present-day dynamics, the initial omission of history from the curriculum explains this lack of “historical consciousness” within the Born Free generation.
While one can argue that this lack of historical consciousness is a bad thing—Weldon describes it as a “re-victimization of victims” (Weldon 2009, 160)—a case can be made for how this disengagement with the past contributes to democracy in present-day South Africa. In the political atmosphere of post-apartheid South Africa, the ANC attempts to monopolize the liberation narrative by skewing historical accounts in its favor and normalizing these biased representations of history in order to justify its quasi-monopoly of power (Bojabotseha and Moloi 2014, 132). A lack of historical consciousness among the Born Frees, coupled with a subsequent curriculum that indoctrinated students in democratic values, means that they are likely to be more critical of the ANC and judge it based on its present-day performance as the ruling government, not based on its credentials as a liberation movement. Consequently, where many older South Africans have a blind loyalty to the ANC because they lived through the liberation struggle, the Born Frees are more likely to exercise political choice, a core democratic activity, by exploring other political parties because they don’t feel indebted to the ANC. This lack of loyalty to the ANC has become more prominent in recent years; with the rise of political parties that appeal to young, Black voters, the ANC has seen many of its young voters decamp to other parties that campaign based on pertinent economic issues, not on anti-apartheid struggle credentials.

The next chapter analyzes the discursive shift between the 1994 and 2014 political campaigns in order to show how young voters have played a key role in this shift. As shown in this chapter, young voters have not been trained to a historical consciousness that would engender loyalty to the ANC. Instead, these voters are more attuned to present socio-economic and political realities. In response, the dominant political parties in South Africa
are adapting their political messaging to appeal to these voters, poised to become a dominant part of the electorate.
Chapter 3 – Discourse in South African Political Ads

“Perhaps what we needed was someone to remind us that we have new wounds to tend to, and that our pain lies not only in the past, but also in the present.”
— Sisonke Msimang

So far, this thesis has unpacked the major discursive questions that defined the early post-apartheid era, showing how the complications within these themes have ensured their continued contestation in present-day South Africa. This thesis has investigated how these earlier discursive questions were infused into the history curriculum and how such inflections could instill certain political values and conceptions of nationhood. This chapter will use political campaigns as a prism to reflect current themes in national discourse.

In an investigation of public discourse and its shifts, political ads may be sociological points of inquiry because they are “complex sites of articulation between social, cultural and political sign systems” (Bertelsen 1996, 226). I am particularly interested in unpacking the multilayered facets of political advertising and how they contribute to meaning-making frameworks in contemporary South Africa. Effective political ads prime the target audience to hold certain political beliefs, which then influence them to exhibit the desired behavior by voting for certain parties at the expense of others. Like commercial advertisements, political ads involve a transaction of some sort. The target consumer is the citizen, the electoral participant; the item of consumption is the citizen’s electoral choice; the point of sale is the polling booth; and the marketing strategy is the advertisers’ use of explicit and implicit cues in order to influence the beliefs and behavior of the citizen.

10 Sisonke Msimang is a South African writer and activist that writes on issues concerning race, gender, democracy and politics
South African political parties have pursued this advertising through political rallies, speeches, and advertisements (print, radio, TV etc.). Even though radios are the most ubiquitous communication medium in many African countries, the sources available to me have led me to investigate print and TV ads. While not as popular as radio communication, print and TV are still quite dominant in their reach. For instance, due to rising average income levels, at least 82% of South African households own a TV set (Berger and Masala 2012, 13). More specifically, I will juxtapose print and TV ads in the 1994 and 2014 elections. These two periods are momentous in South African history: 1994 was the year South Africa held its first general democratic elections, and 2014 was the year in which the “Born Frees,” that crucial first group of South Africans born after apartheid, became eligible to vote.

Because discourse is an assemblage of signs and meanings that both expresses and forms collectively held beliefs about particular subject areas, political ads—as the media through which these signs and meanings are disseminated—are directly and closely intertwined with the public discourse in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Critical Discourse Analysis (introduced in Chapter 2), discourse should be analyzed within the context of the sociocultural events that surround its production (Fairclough 1995, 23). I will therefore, as above, analyze the discourse in political ads against the sociocultural, economic and political events that surround the production of these ads.
Political Parties, the Meaning Makers

Since the democratization of South Africa, numerous political parties have competed in the country’s elections. For instance, in the most recent national elections in 2014, 29 parties contested in the national elections, while 140 parties contested in the provincial elections. Despite the high number of parties in each election, only a small number of parties actually succeed in getting enough votes to win the major governmental positions (Southall 2014, 4). For this reason, a few parties have risen to prominence as the dominant parties in South Africa, despite new opposition parties being formed during each election round.

African National Congress (ANC)

The ruling party since 1994, the ANC describes itself as “South Africa’s national liberation party” due to the key historical role it played in dismantling the apartheid regime. Despite internal factionalization (which has led to the defection of key members to other political parties); a failure to deliver to deliver on some key promises, especially jobs; President Thabo Mbeki’s denial of the scope and seriousness of HIV, which led to the death of over 3.5 million people between 1997 and 2004 (AVERT n.d.); and widespread allegations of President Jacob Zuma’s corruption and mismanagement, the ANC has maintained its place as the major political party (in terms of votes) in South Africa. A large proportion of ANC voters are Black. The ANC’s proportion of votes in national elections is proof of its dominance: since 1994, it has won at least 63% of the national vote (Butler 2014, 43).
The Democratic Alliance (DA)

Formed in June 2000, this party has risen to become the major opposition to ANC’s political hegemony. Lead by Helen Zille, the former mayor of Cape Town, the party is known for targeting middle and upper class South Africans. In recent years, the DA has tried to attract the Black vote through several tactics, one of which is the promotion of young Black South Africans within the party to prominent political positions (Jolobe 2014, 58-9).

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)

The EFF came onto the political scene in 2013, led by Julius Malema, the former president of the ANC Youth League. Malema, an ebullient politician, marketed the EFF to South Africans (particularly young Black South Africans) as the party that would bring “economic freedom in their lifetime” (Economic Freedom Fighters n.d.). Many young Black South Africans who felt disenfranchised by the ANC-led government trooped en-masse to the EFF, a move that built the EFF’s political positioning as a major contender against the ANC. These EFF supporters are also more likely to be unemployed; according to IPSOS South Africa’s Pulse of the People survey, 45% of EFF supporters are unemployed (IPSOS n.d.). While the ANC could be assured that it wouldn’t lose many voters to the DA due to the DA’s inability to significantly capture the Black vote, EFF posed a major threat to the ANC’s near monopoly on the Black vote due to its mandate of economic freedom.
**The Electorate**

Robert Mattes, Political Scientist and Director of the Africa Research Unit, theorizes that the South African electorate comprises five types of voters, each belonging to a different political generation. Mattes defines the members of each political generation according to the era during which they reached their “politically formative years” (which he defines as starting at age 16). The first group is the *Pre-Apartheid Generation*, comprising people who reached their politically formative years around 1948, when the National Party came into power and started its imposition of racial segregation and the creation of an apartheid state. As expected, death due to old age means there are very few voters left in this demographic; they only make up about 2% of the current electorate.

Mattes’ second group, the *Early Apartheid Generation*, includes members who reached their politically formative years between 1948 and 1960, during the rise of the apartheid state and its segregation laws. The Freedom Charter, which outlined the “freedom demands” of Black South Africans, was also written during this era. Developed by the ANC and its political allies, the Freedom Charter went on to define the anti-apartheid liberation struggle.

The third group, the *Grand Apartheid Generation*, contains voters whose memories were shaped by major Black resistance movements of the 60s and 70s, such as the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 or the Soweto Uprising of 1976. This generation reached their political formative years when the apartheid government banned anti-apartheid movements and imprisoned the leaders of these movements, most notably Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe.
Mattes’ fourth group, the *Struggle Generation*, consists of voters whose memories are strongly shaped by the years between 1976 and 1996, during the brutal, protracted anti-apartheid struggle that left many anti-apartheid figures dead or imprisoned and finally culminated in the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, and the fall of the apartheid regime in 1994.

The final group of voters, what Mattes defines as the watershed generation, is the *Born Free Generation*. This group is made up of voters who reached their politically formative years after 1996 and entered the political space with little to no direct experience of the country’s brutal apartheid past. As a result, their political sensibilities are shaped by post-apartheid events such as the ratification of the new Constitution in 1996, voting for the first time in the 1999 democratic elections, and other political and economic events that have defined the state of affairs in contemporary South Africa. This group of young South Africans currently makes up 40% of South Africa’s general population (Mabry 2013) and about 25% of the current electorate. Furthermore, because, unlike the other four political generations, the Born Free Generation does not have direct memories of South Africa’s apartheid past, voters in this generation are more likely to respond to recent political and economic events, and not historical precedents as older generations of voters do (Mattes 2011, 3-4).

**The Political Relevance of the Born Free Generation**

As figure 3.1 shows, the “Born Frees” make up about a third of the electorate. When this group is combined with voters in the ‘30-39’ age group (the oldest of whom were 9 years old in 1994 when the apartheid regime fell, thus having little recollection of the
apartheid years), about 50% of the South African electorate comprises voters with sparse to no recollection of the apartheid years at all.

For this group of voters, there is no direct memory of race classification, passes, segregation, or the armed resistance and popular struggle against apartheid. There is no experiential memory of F.W. de Klerk’s historic release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of liberation movements, the searing violence of the transition period, the momentous 1994 election, or of the conclusive 1996 passage of the country’s Constitution (Mattes 2011, 135).

This lack of historical consciousness is further worsened, as Chapter 2 shows, by a post-apartheid history curriculum that de-emphasized educating students about the past, and instead used the education system as a medium of indoctrinating students into the state’s new values (such as democracy, human rights, freedom, and African Renaissance). As a result of this distancing from history, these voters respond more to short-term political

Figure 3.1. Age groups as a proportion of registered voters in the 2014 national elections. Source: Data from Schulz-Herzenberg 2014, figure 6.
events than older voters, who have a historical grasp that allows them to see broad patterns in events (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014, 12).

A media organization interviewed a group of Born Frees during the 2014 election in order to understand their sentiments concerning different political parties. One of the respondents said, “One party has so many people driving around in fancy cars, why can’t we have supporters of different parties driving those cars?” (GlobalGirlMedia 2014). In a New York Times documentary on the Born Frees, Miles Maabane, an 18 year old says, “all they care about is fancy cars...they don’t care about us as long as they get the money.” Nokuthale Magubane, another 18 year old, observes, “I think it’s time for change. I mean, the ANC has been in power for so long and yet people are still crying of unfulfilled promises” (Mayers and Laffin 2014). These statements witness to concerns about class discrepancies and suggest a lack of identification on the part of young South Africans with political parties.

Furthermore, there seems to be a gap between political freedom and economic freedom among the Born Frees. Another young South African, Sideli, who supports the EFF, said “As a Born Free, I am free politically because I can wear whatever, I can move everywhere that I can, I can learn where I want to learn now...which, from what I learn was not possible [in the apartheid era]. So now I can say I am politically free...but economically, I am not free” (NTDTV 2014). Such views imply that these young voters cannot be swayed by the “we fought to end apartheid and brought political freedom” narrative that has characterized past political campaigns. While these voters recognize that political freedom is important, they are also interested in the economic manifestation of freedom.
The Born Frees have a unique demographic profile that makes them the key constituency for future elections. First, due to declining birth rates in white, coloured and Indian families, 83% of the Born Frees are Black South Africans. As most of the Born Frees are Black, and therefore economically disadvantaged in present-day South Africa, 53% of them live in rural, impoverished areas (Mattes 2011, 141). These young voters also have a significantly higher likelihood of being unemployed than any other age group in South Africa. While the 2014 general unemployment rate in South Africa was 34.6%, the unemployment rate was 39% for Black South Africans and 63.6% for South Africans aged 15-24 (Chelwa 2015). Thus, Born Frees are almost doubly disadvantaged in terms of employment prospects in contemporary South Africa. Due to the harsh economic realities they face, and the increasing class distance between the parties and these constituents, it makes sense that class and its enablers (such as employment, access to opportunities, state welfare) would become a core concern for these voters.

In the state in which these young people have grown up, unemployment levels have hardly improved since the apartheid era, and the measure of economic inequality has grown to one of the highest in the world. While the wealth gap between white and Black South Africans has widened significantly, the gap between rich Black South Africans and poor Black South Africans has also widened to the point that a bigger income gap exists between rich and poor Black South Africans than between white and Black South Africans in general. While race segregation has been eliminated, extreme economic class disparities mean that many poor and working-class Black people are still segregated in the townships and Bantustans that they were restricted to during the apartheid era because they cannot afford to live anywhere else (Mattes 2011, 140).
This economic nightmare has happened under the ANC’s watch, a party that has continually promised to deliver “a better life for all” and continues to insist that its leaders know the plight of the average South African. In light of the ANC’s failure to provide significant recourse to the vast majority of young, poor South Africans, it is unsurprising that these voters don’t feel the same loyalty to the ANC that older generations do.

Table 3.2 presents data regarding the demographic profiles of the three major South African parties in the 2014 national elections. While about 30% of ANC supporters fall within the 17-24 age group, the DA has 14% of its supporters within this group, and the EFF has about 50%. EFF’s demographic skew towards South African youth, coupled with the fact that its supporters are 99% Black, explains why the party became a major threat to ANC’s monopoly on the Black vote.

Table 3.2. Party supporter profile broken down by age group (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>ANC</th>
<th>DA</th>
<th>EFF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Created by author with data from the IPSOS website.
The EFF’s mandate is predicated on the idea of economic liberation for Black people by giving them back the resources “stolen” by the apartheid regime and unfairly distributed in the post-apartheid era in order to privilege a few. EFF brands itself as socialist and aligns with Marxist and Leninist ideals. The party’s leader, Julius Malema, often points to Venezuela’s nationalization of extractive industries and Zimbabwe’s land grabs as ideal models for post-apartheid South Africa. Malema, a former president of the ANC Youth League, also points to Nelson Mandela as his inspiration. However, he is quick to distinguish which version of Mandela he refers to: “not the artificial one you guys have made up for yourself; the Mandela who was ready to take up arms and kill,” he claims, referring to Mandela’s history as leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC’s armed wing. The EFF’s manifesto promises to “nationalize banks and mines, expropriate land without compensation, increase the minimum wage and double all social welfare grants” (Smith 2014). With these kinds of revolutionary ideals, young South Africans angry with the ANC government’s performance have trooped to EFF en masse as this party’s mandate is centered around issues that affect them most: class and economic inequality in South Africa.

As more and more disillusioned young South Africans become eligible to vote, more political parties find it expedient to frame their discourses to appeal specifically to the concerns of young South Africans. An Afrobarometer survey in 2014 showed that jobs and unemployment were most pressing concerns to 70% of South Africans (Duncan 2014, 139). While this survey polled South Africans in general, young South Africans are the most likely to be unemployed, and so this statistic particularly applies to them.
**Methodology**

In order to analyze political ads, I chose two key electoral years, 1994 and 2014. As noted above, 1994 was the year of the first democratic national elections, when Mandela ascended to the presidency. 2014 saw a shift in ANC and DA discourse, along with the disruptive introduction of the EFF into the political sphere and the entry of the Born Frees into the electorate.

**The 1994 Political Campaigns**

1994 was a particularly interesting year for then dominant political parties: the New National Party (NNP) and the ANC. The National Party, which controlled the government up to the end of apartheid, rechristened itself “The New National Party” under South Africa’s post-1994 democratic dispensation. For the NNP, this election offered the chance to transition from being a “white” party with associations tied to the apartheid regime to a post-apartheid political party with a multi-racial constituency. For the ANC, this election was the chance to transition from an anti-apartheid struggle movement to a legitimate political party (Bertelsen 1996, 228).

For both parties, the unifying mandate was “change” because, for all South Africans, 1994 was the first year the Black majority could vote. Thus, the electorate shifted from being exclusively white to being predominantly Black. Because 1994 was the year of transition from apartheid to democracy, the prime political currency was the offer of change to South African voters, as a majority of them were interested in voting in a government radically different from the oppressive apartheid regime. In this light, the National Party, which held power until the end of the apartheid era, rebranded itself the
New National Party and campaigned for “change” when, in reality, it presided over a
government that bluntly refused any sort of change until global political and economic
forces strong-armed its government into ending the apartheid era.

ANC: “A Better Life for All”

Figure 3.2 shows an ANC print ad from 1994, which includes a letter from Mandela,
its presidential candidate. The letter opens with an acknowledgement of the misery of the
people, followed by an assertion that years of imprisonment and violence suffered by
Mandela have prepared him, and by extension his party, to represent the people. This
language indicates that the ad is directly targeted at previously oppressed South Africans,
most of whom are Black. This paralleled suffering creates a commonality between the ANC
and voters, setting up the ANC as the party that understands the plight of its people.

The ad is thus framed as a personal letter from Nelson Mandela, complete with his
signature. It reifies South Africa’s freedom through the image of its most prominent anti-
apartheid liberation hero. Through this advertising tactic, the ANC is not a faceless
organization but one brought to life through Mandela, the beacon of triumph over
apartheid oppression. If anyone had the political capital to represent not just the South
African people, but also the new nation of South Africa, it was Mandela, who had absorbed
the people’s suffering and lived 27 years behind bars for the sake of their freedom. Thus,
this personalization of the ad lends credibility to the ANC’s legitimacy to lead South Africa
in the post-apartheid era.
Figure 3.2. ANC print ad in the 1994 National Elections. Source: Bertelsen 1996, figure 2.
A sense of commonality between the ANC and the people is further strengthened through ANC’s slogan, “a better life for all,” and the use of inclusive terms such as *us, our, we, together*. Such universalizing elements serve two purposes. First, they draw everyone into one umbrella of belonging, which furthers ANC and Mandela’s immediate post-apartheid agenda of national unification. Secondly, they assimilate the ANC into the populace and create a trust relationship that establishes ANC as a reflection of the people. This mirroring legitimizes the ANC as the party that should lead South Africa through implying that it has the authority to “rule on behalf of and together with the electorate” (Bojabotseha and Moloi 2014, 132). Consequently, the ANC is positioned as the true representative of the populace and legitimized as the party that knows the people’s experiences, concerns, and suffering; it can therefore bring much-needed change to them.

Towards the end of the ad, the letter states, “we will not let a handful of killers steal our democracy.” In describing the opposition as killers, the ad creates a moral dichotomy; demonizing the opposition and canonizing the ANC as the only party that can bring hope and change. This language resonated with many Black South Africans, especially those who had watched their loved ones killed by state agents under the direction of the National Party’s ruling government.

The language in this national ad also mirrored that of regional campaigns for the ANC. In the Western Cape, some campaigns told Black South Africans not to “betray their history” by voting for the NNP; one of the campaigns showed a funeral and was aggressively captioned “DON’T LET THEM STAIN YOUR HANDS WITH THE BLOOD OF OUR CHILDREN” (Bertelsen 1996, 232). The general message from these ads was that to vote against the ANC was to betray one’s history by casting a vote for “killers” who had spent
years oppressing and dehumanizing Black South Africans. This sort of messaging continued in the discourse surrounding the ANC in the post-apartheid era: many voters remained loyal to the ANC in deference to its apartheid legacy and its claims to being responsible for the fall of the apartheid regime, so much so that a vote for any other party was regarded by some as a betrayal of history.

Notably, the ANC ad in question attributes the finger-pointing and accusatory language to Mandela, who had become celebrated around the word as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. Furthermore, the ad’s “us versus them” language was antithetical both to the national reconciliation efforts ongoing at the time and the Government of National Unity (GNU) that would be formed after the election. Mandela’s characterization of the opposition also further personalizes his letter; as someone imprisoned by the opposition for 27 years, he stood on moral high ground and had legitimate rights to lay blame. Thus, this personal demonization of the opposition by a hero of the liberation struggle served only to validate what many Black South Africans knew and rationalized their loyalty to the ANC, a loyalty that would reinforce the ANC’s hold on power in subsequent elections.

The New National Party: “Be Sure of a Better Life for All”

The New National Party followed the ANC’s platform of bringing change, with a slogan—“be sure of a better life for all”—that echoed the ANC’s “a better life for all” campaign. Most striking, given the NNP’s predominantly white membership, is the use of a Black South African woman as the campaign figure. Her presence in the ad fits the changing context of South Africa’s post-apartheid era, where voting was now open to the predominantly Black majority for the first time. The NNP had to rebrand itself in order to
tap into this huge group of previously disenfranchised voters. Thus, the NNP Africanized its image in order to appeal to the Black vote, despite the fact that it had presided over a government that systematically oppressed and dispossessed this same group of people.

For the sake of legibility, the image caption of figure 3.3 is reproduced here:

Yes, we do need laws to ensure women’s rights. But they are of no use if the people are not aware of them. We all need education. Yes, we need laws that protect us from abuse. But they will nothing if people do not understand and appreciate our contribution to society. We all need more education. Yes, we need laws to prevent us from being exploited. But they will mean nothing if people don’t understand they are exploiting us. We all need more education. Yes, we need laws to assist women in things like maternity leave, crèches, equal opportunities and most important of all, jobs. But they will mean nothing if we don’t have a strong, growing economy. To ensure a society that respects our dignity, vote National Party. We are the only party with the experience and the skill to create and manage the economy we all need.

This ad is striking in its focus on women’s rights, which avoids the question of racial inequality propagated under the National Party’s watch in the apartheid regime. The image of a Black woman appears ironically here: the ad neglects to recognize that the rights of Black women within the apartheid era were closely tied to race, with the result that women were doubly oppressed through the intersection of race and gender. Furthermore, by repeatedly insisting that people need political education in order to understand the NNP’s legitimacy, the ad infantilizes its audience: during the apartheid era, there was no education or sensitization needed inform Black South Africans what the National Party was capable of; they were well aware of the police brutality, indiscriminate killings and racially suppressive laws presided over by the National Party’s government. This raises the question: who, then, needed this education?
Figure 3.3. NNP print ad in the 1994 National Elections. Source: Bertelsen 1996, figure 3.
Although the ad also uses inclusive pronouns such as we, it does not manage to establish the same sense of affiliation with the people that the ANC does. Instead, the ad comes across as paternalistic, with a tone of a father figure telling a child what he or she needs. This ad does nothing to demystify the NNP as an authoritarian figure that ruled over Black South Africans during apartheid through paternalistic policies. These policies, such as the Black Homelands Citizenship Act,\textsuperscript{11} told Black South Africans what they needed and enacted laws to follow through on these assumed needs without Black people's consent or input. While the ANC ad gives the voters a sense of autonomy by saying “it is your election, it is your vote that counts,” the NNP ad informs the voters what they need and attempts to legitimize the NNP as the party that can bring this change, without including the people in this legitimization process.

The ad also established the NNP as the only party with the necessary skills to grow the economy. This assertion negates the fact that the South African economy meant little to nothing to almost all the previously disenfranchised voters, who had been systematically excluded from the economy through apartheid laws anyway. The phrase at the bottom of the ad “we’ve made the change” could be read to mean we’ve brought the change that led to this moment of freedom in this country. Since the NNP was the party whose candidate, President FW de Klerk, officially ended the apartheid era, it makes sense that the party would claim responsibility for making the change. However, this change was neither voluntary nor charitable; it came about through global economic and political sanctions.

\textsuperscript{11} The Black Homelands Citizenship Act was an apartheid policy that denaturalized Black South Africans as citizens of South Africa and made them citizens of Black homelands within South Africa (South Africa History Online n.d.). A common pro-apartheid argument for this was that Black South Africans needed distinct homelands in order to preserve their culture.
that forced President FW de Klerk’s government to end apartheid. In this case, is this claim that the NNP brought change legitimate?

Both the ANC and NNP ads reflect this theme of recalling anti-apartheid credentials in order to gain political legitimacy. Having played a role in the anti-apartheid struggle is a currency with which both parties sold their candidacy in 1994. This use of apartheid-era credentials as campaign strategy continued well into all successive elections in the post-apartheid era, with most parties recalling their role in the apartheid era in order to appeal to voters, all of whom had grown up in the apartheid regime and could engage with these appeals on a personal level. For instance, the 2009 DA campaign attempts to appeal to voters by highlighting presidential aspirant Helen Zille’s role in the anti-apartheid struggle. This DA ad and all other campaigns emphasize Zille’s role, as a reporter with the *Rand Daily Mail*, in uncovering the truth about Steve Biko’s death and police brutality in the townships. The campaigns also highlight the fact that the apartheid government arrested her for this work and that she offered her home to ANC activists on the run (Jolobe 2014, 63-4).

As detailed above, in the 1994 elections, the currency of political legitimacy was “change.” How did the conditions of political legitimacy shift in the 2014 elections? How did the issue of class and economic inequality come to shape the tone of political campaigns in 2014? In the following section, I will argue that, with the marked shift in the electorate, the discourse in political campaigns changed from history-based campaigning to issue-based campaigning focused on jobs and unemployment.
The 2014 Political Campaigns

The 2014 election was predicted to be a monumental period in post-apartheid South Africa because the ANC’s hegemony was threatened more than it had ever been. Many political pundits and analysts predicted a tectonic shift of power, wherein the ANC’s quasi-monopoly of power will be severely eaten into both by the DA and a new opposition party called the EFF. The discursive space in South Africa had transitioned from one of political ideologies (rainbow nation, racial reconciliation etc.) to one of economic concerns.

These economic concerns were worsened by labor disputes that culminated in a brutal faceoff between the South African police and striking miners in 2012, which left 34 people dead and about 78 people injured (England 2014). This event, named the “Marikana Massacre” by the media, typified the disillusionment among the South African people, the South African state, and the government. The effect of such events was that by the 2014 national elections, these South Africans who felt disenfranchised by the state weren’t interested in hearing about rainbows and racial reconciliation. In the face of rising unemployment, living costs, and a ruling party that seemed more distant from the people than it had ever been, they were more interested in how the economic situation is South Africa was going to be rectified by whichever government came into power.
ANC: “A Better Life for All”

The ANC ad starts by showing different working class people (all Black) on the phone, on the way to work, reading a newspaper etc. A male voiceover says “so they say this country is going backward. Everyday we hear one negative story or the other. They are always talking, but they never talk about how we have moved forward.” The ad shows a scene of a little Black South African boy staring at TV screens that show footage from Mandela’s release from prison (figure 3.4).

![Screenshot from the ANC’s 2014 National Election ad. Source: ANC 2014 TV Election Campaign English, YouTube.](image)

The next scene shows a white South African woman giving birth to a baby who appears to be either coloured or Black. At this point, the voiceover says “just yesterday, we gave birth to democracy, and though they said we are too young and inexperienced, we kept building.” The ad then cuts to scenes that show a Black young girl and a Black woman, a white family, an Arab man and his son, and a young, mixed race girl. The next scene
shows the different developmental strides that the country has taken under ANC’s watch. The voiceover says, “We will continue to do more. Over the next five years, we will invest more in infrastructure (figure 3.5), give more families free access to healthcare, and create six million more work opportunities. Let us continue to build because together, we move South Africa forward. Vote ANC, a better life for all.”

The first thing that stands out about this ad is the statement “we gave birth to democracy.” To give birth to something is to be responsible for its existence, and therefore to have a parental or caretaking relationship with it. This misleading monopolization of the anti-apartheid narrative on the part of the ANC only reinforces its political hegemony because it established the ANC as the custodians of democracy in South Africa and rationalizes its hold on power despite the lackluster performance of previous ANC
administrations. This statement seems to tell South Africans that they owe a certain debt to ANC because they wouldn’t have the freedom to vote in the first place if the ANC hadn’t “birthed democracy.” This advertising tactic reinforces political party loyalty through which voters remain indebted and refuse to switch parties despite the ANC’s shortcomings.

Despite the recalling of history, this ad isn’t as retrospective and reliant on the ANC’s anti-apartheid credentials as the ads in previous election cycles. Instead, the ad focuses on the future and the concrete socioeconomic plans that the ANC has for South Africa. This shift might be due to the changing demographic of the South African electorate, who mostly care about the economic prospects in South Africa. Thus, in order for the ANC to appeal to this increasingly important demographic, it had to reveal action-oriented, forward-looking plans. Such considerations also explain why the 2014 campaign ad wasn’t as explicitly racialized as the 2009 ad, in which there was an explicit appeal to Black and coloured voters. In present-day South Africa, where economic inequality is so stark and poverty is so rife, exclusively race-based politics has become an ineffective method of reaching out to the masses interested in pressing economic issues. As a result, the ANC has redefined its political message to lean more towards issue-based politics such as the provision of jobs, infrastructure, and educational opportunities.
The DA ad—titled Ayisafani, which means “it is not the same”—starts by showing Mmusi Maimane, the national spokesperson for the DA, standing in front of a mirror. He starts by saying “so they say they took South Africa forward, [that] life today is better than it was 20 years ago. There have been some great leaders, leaders that have taken this country forward; you voted for them. But since 2008, we have seen president Jacob Zuma’s ANC, an ANC that is corrupt [an image of ANC’s figureheads holding glasses of champagne shows up, as shown in figure 3.6], an ANC for the connected few; it’s an ANC that is taking us backwards. 200 million Rands spent on upgrading the president’s private house [an image of the president’s palatial mansion appears], we’ve seen the police force killing our own people [an image of the South African police shooting two Black people who appear defenseless appears], an ANC where 1.4 million more South Africans lost their jobs, where are the jobs?” [an image of DA supporters at a rally, holding DA-branded placards that
promise “6 million REAL jobs” shows up on the screen (figure 3.7)]. Maimane then says, “President Zuma, ANC, Ayisafani (it is not the same).” Another voice cuts in proclaiming, “together, we can bring hope. Together, we can allow an environment that creates jobs. Together, we can bring change for all South Africans.” A caption stating “Vote DA. Together for change, together for jobs” closes out the ad.

This ad was initially banned by South African Broadcasting Corporation, a state-run media enterprise, which cited the potential to incite violence as one of the reasons for its decision. The drama surrounding the banning only served to increase public interest in the DA: the day the ad was uploaded on YouTube, it received almost half a million views (Jolobe 2014, 65). Because young, tech savvy people mainly use YouTube, the ad probably influenced young South Africans, a key audience in the 2014 elections.

One powerful image from the ad appears in figure 3.7, showing a large group of people protesting with DA-branded placards that ask for 6 million real jobs. Protests like the one in this image have strong associations with the anti-apartheid struggle, where mass demonstrations were commonplace. This recalling of apartheid-era imagery signals to viewers that a struggle is still ongoing in contemporary South Africa, and they should rise to the task by joining the DA in its fight against the ANC.
One of the aims of this ad is to create a distance between the average, working class South African and the ANC, the DA’s major opposition. By showing pictures of ANC officials drinking champagne and the President’s mansion, the DA highlights the clear class disparity between the ANC elites and the average South African. This distancing directly contradicts the ANC’s claim that they should be voted in because they are one with all South Africans. Seeing all the markers of luxury associated with the ANC in this ad, the viewer would probably realize how different his or her reality is. Hence, this ad unravels the equalizing illusion that has underpinned ANC’s “a better life for all” discourse since 1994.

The emphasis on this class difference introduces the DA’s campaign focus: jobs. While Maimane highlights the fact that 1.4 million jobs have been lost under the ANC’s watch, the ad shows the DA’s promise to deliver 6 million real jobs, the same number the ANC promised to deliver in its ad. The ad then states the DA’s manifesto: “together for
change, together for jobs,” which is a complete discursive shift from its slogan in the 2009 elections — “One Nation, One Future”— during which the focus was on equalizing ideals such as the rainbow nation and racial reconciliation. This ad is squarely focused on economic class disparity and unemployment, issues that face many South Africans today. The ad uses the ANC as the frame of reference for highlighting class disparity and unemployment by showing how ANC party elites have accumulated wealth while many ordinary South Africans remain poor and jobless. This finger-pointing establishes a correlative relationship between the ANC and the problems that many South Africans face today.

**EFF: “Now is the Time for Economic Freedom”**

The EFF ad starts off by showing a widow of one of the slain Marikana mine protesters. She says, “I was heartbroken when my husband lost his life. He was shot and killed by the police while the world was watching. What has become of this world?” The next shot is a picture from the Marikana massacre, which shows heavily armed police men standing over dead (Black) mineworkers who were protesting for a wage increase (figure 3.8). The next scene [caption: “Give Justice to Marikana”] shows a number of graves, presumably containing the dead Marikana protesters. This is followed with shots of a crying Black child, and three somber Black women.

Julius Malema, the presidential aspirant and leader of the EFF then says, “... I know your pain and your suffering, let us vote against empty promises of the past 20 years. Vote for economic freedom in our lifetime. Let us restore the dignity of an African child. Vote for EFF.”
To promote their platform of economic freedom, EFF used the Marikana massacre, an event that is perhaps the most prominent example of economic inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. The miners were protesting against Lonmin PLC, a British global mining giant, because the miners worked in dire economic conditions while Lonmin executives became disproportionately rich. The top three Lonmin executives earned higher salaries than about 3600 workers’ combined salaries (City Press 2012). Importantly, one of the top executives at this mining company is Cyril Rhamaposa, an ANC figurehead and current Vice President of South Africa. The fact that Rhamaposa, an apartheid era trade union leader, is a board member at Lonmin, where these gross economic inequalities were perpetuated, only serves to highlight the ANC’s failure to bring economic prosperity to a large majority of Black South Africans, while privileging a select few.
Male EFF members usually dress in overalls and female members usually dressed as maids (as shown in figure 3.9), in order to signify that they represent the South African working class. The EFF also claims that the red color of these uniforms symbolize “the blood of slain laborers, including the 34 miners who were killed by the police at Marikana, the very site where the EFF announced its formation as a political party” (Goldhammer 2014). This appropriation of the marker of uniform, symbolizing the worker, a group historically politicized and directly affected by inequalities in South Africa, indicates the EFF’s intention to deconstruct the image of the uniformed worker (most likely to be Black) as a figure of oppression and reconstitute him or her as a figure of empowerment. The EFF re-charactersizes this figure under its mantra of economic freedom in order to speak directly to its target demographic: working class South Africans, most of whom are Black and make up the majority of South Africa’s population.

Figure 3.9. EFF members dressed in EFF regalia. Photograph by Agence France-Presse.
Ironically, when he was the president of the ANC Youth League, this same Malema who now dons working class apparel and calls out the ANC for enriching a select few, was a direct beneficiary of this selective enrichment. Then, Malema was famed for “wearing Gucci suits and $24,000 watches, and receiving kickbacks from government contracts,” all of which ran contrary to his populist message of nationalizing mines and spreading wealth for the majority (Goldhammer 2014). It is therefore interesting that, as the leader of the EFF, Malema has distanced himself from indicators of his status as one of the few “Black elite,” by opting for a stripped down appearance that resonates with poor, working class South Africans.

The theme song for this ad (which was also banned by the SABC) is Thina Sizwe, a popular song from the anti-apartheid struggle that demands stolen land be returned to Black people. The lyrics of the song state (translated): “we are crying/we are crying for our land/ which was taken away, taken away by the white people” (City Press 2011). This song contains strong imagery that raises questions about the current state of affairs in South Africa. The EFF ad thus implicitly points to land redistribution as a legitimate post-apartheid question yet to be solved despite numerous promises by the ANC. Even though the 1994 ANC government aimed to redistribute 30% of the land from white to Black South Africans within the first five years, by 2010 only 8% of this land had been distributed (Atuahene 2011). The land question has remained a major ANC shortcoming and has become one of the main grievances many poor Black South Africans have against the party. Aside from economic reasons, many Black South Africans see land as stolen by the apartheid regime and would like it to be redistributed as a post-apartheid reparative measure.
Again, the ad presents exclusively class-driven discourse based on one of the most salient markers of class and enablers of class mobility in South Africa: land. In the face of growing economic inequality and an increasing youth population—many unemployed and poor—in the electorate, political parties have focus on the most pressing issue in South Africa today: economic inequality.

Despite the pressures in the 2014 election, the ANC still won the majority vote with 62%, while the DA won 22% and the EFF won 6% (a major feat for a new party) (Harding 2014). However, as economic concerns continue to worsen under an ANC-led government that shows little commitment to rectifying the situation, the voter loyalty will probably continue to shift to other political parties that seem more committed to the plight of the average, working class South African. The ANC, evidently, can no longer rest on its assumed laurels as the party that brought freedom to South Africa, because this strategy for securing political legitimacy is starting to lose relevance. In contemporary South Africa, the predominant discourse is around jobs and state-driven economic equalizers, not rainbows and apartheid history.

In coming years, there will be a marked generational shift within the electorate, due to the entry of more Born Frees, many of whom respond to recent political and economic events and not historical legacies as other political generations do (Mattes 2011, 4). Such a shift implies that political parties will have to campaign based on their abilities to deliver economic redress to the structural issues that currently face the electorate, not based on more theoretical ideologies emphasizing freedom, equality, human rights and non-racialism. Public discourse in general will shift to these economic issues as people become more aware and outspoken about them. Based on recent trends, one can predict there will
be less hearkening to the past—in terms of who gave South Africa freedom and who deserves to hold power as a result—and more focus on the issues that have become increasingly impossible to ignore in present-day South Africa. For the ANC, which currently holds the majority, it remains to see how it will hold on to this power (or if it will at all) in the face of an electorate increasingly focused on performance-driven campaigning and less sympathetic towards the ANC’s legacy as a key entity in the anti-apartheid struggle.

The Importance of This Shift in Discourse

These economic inequalities now at center stage in public and political discourse can be attributed to changes in the post-apartheid era that have propagated a legacy of inequality started in the apartheid era. However, the primary basis of this inequality has evolved from being purely about race during the apartheid to include social class.

In general, economic inequality is roughly at the same level that it was during the apartheid era. During the apartheid years, the GINI coefficient\(^\text{12}\) was estimated to be between 58.0 and 68.0, depending on the kind of data used to calculate it (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 188). The most recent GINI coefficient is about the same at 68.0 (World Bank 2011). One can interpret this stability to suggest that South Africa is increasingly divided along class lines as well as racial lines, with the following reasoning.

After apartheid ended, the de-racialization of the economy meant that Black, Asian and coloured South Africans had new access to economic opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. However, this access to opportunities was not afforded to

\(^\text{12}\) The GINI Index “measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly normal distribution.” The GINI coefficient is on a scale of 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality) (World Bank 2011)
everyone; some people were better placed to benefit from these new economic opportunities. For instance, Black South Africans living in urban areas at the time apartheid ended had proximal advantage and easier access to opportunities than the majority of Black people who were forced to live in remote rural areas (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 330-1).

Because a relative minority of formerly oppressed South Africans had the social capital necessary to take advantage of economically redressive policies in the post-apartheid era, it was inevitable that inequality would evolve from explicitly race-based to include a class basis as well. After apartheid, there was a “rapid upward mobility into the upper classes and income deciles by Black South Africans” (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 301). Table 3.2 shows the racial composition of the top two income deciles in South Africa between 1975 and 2000.

Table 3.2. Racial composition of the top two income deciles, 1975-2000

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Source: Data from Seekings and Nattrass 2005, table 9.2.
According to table 3.2, there has been a rapid influx of Black South Africans into the top two income deciles especially after the apartheid regime ended. In fact, over half of the South Africans in Decile 9 are Black. This upward mobility of a relatively small group of South Africans has led to the creation of a “Black elite.” At the same time, unemployment has more than doubled from 12.7% in 1993 to 34.6% in 2014 (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 318; Chelwa 2015). This unemployment is also higher for Black South Africans and for people in rural areas, most of whom are also Black (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 317). Thus, while a small fraction of Black South Africans have risen through the class ranks, a vast majority has become worse off due to high unemployment rates, which have created a growing impoverished underclass. Over half of the people affected by poverty and unemployment are in the 15-34 age group and are more likely to be Black: 85% of Black South Africans, around 15 million people, are poor and living on less than $2 per day (Southall 2014, 7). Thus, freedom in the political era has had little or no material benefit for a vast majority of Black South Africans. This fact explains why so many young, Black South Africans are disillusioned with the ANC-led South African government that has created policies allowing such inequalities to thrive.

While the ANC has tried to rectify income inequality, it has done so through policies that mirror the apartheid-era distributional regime and propagate the cycle of inequality (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 341). A distributional regime is the summation of all the economic distribution policies that are shaped by “education, welfare, employment, labor market and growth policies” (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 128). This distributional regime determines the allocation of state welfare prospects for class mobility among different groups of people within the country. During the apartheid era, the distributional regime
was purposely designed to disproportionately benefit white South Africans. However, even though this distributional regime has been deracialized in the post-apartheid era, the foundational aspects of distribution and redistribution that propagated racial inequality in the apartheid era have barely changed and continue to spur intraracial inequality, especially among Black South Africans (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 367). For example, poor people (most of whom are Black) in contemporary South Africans continue to be “disadvantaged by industrial and labor-market policies that weaken the position of unskilled workers and massively contribute to unemployment” (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 367). Even though post-apartheid governments have focused on redistribution via increased spending on education, the value of this education in reducing income inequality is offset by both the poor quality of education and the dismal prospects for employment that school-leavers have due to the high rates of unemployment (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 364).

Another way the ANC government has tried to curb post-apartheid inequality is through redressive policies such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), a form of affirmative action that expedited the economic advancement of previously disadvantaged people (especially Black South Africans). BEE was imagined as a “broad-based empowerment mechanism that gives the ordinary man a chance to participate in the mainstream economy.” In reality, BEE focused on the top of the income classes, and led only to the creation of a small group of Black elites while many South Africans—especially those in rural areas—continued to suffer unemployment and poverty (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 344).
Other redressive policies that have targeted the poor include the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) and Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). While RDP aimed to provide basic welfare (such as housing, food, and healthcare), GEAR aimed to improve unemployment, redistribute income and improve socioeconomic opportunities for poor South Africans. While these policies have definitely been beneficial, they have done little to address the structural foundations of an inherited apartheid-era distribution of income that continues to create a small Black middle/upper class and a growing underclass of poor, unemployed South Africans.

In 1955, the ANC and its allies composed the Freedom Charter, a document that committed to redistribution for all South Africans after the apartheid regime was dismantled. One of the main stipulations of this document is that “The people shall share the country’s wealth,” a principle followed by outlined plans to transfer ownership of extractive industries, banks and other industries to the people so that everyone could share in the nation’s wealth (African National Congress n.d.). However, in the 20 years after the ANC took up the leadership of a democratic South Africa, it has largely abandoned these stipulations.

In 1998, President Thabo Mbeki gave a speech in the South African parliament in which he said South Africa was divided into “two nations: the one Black and the other white.” The white nation, he said, is “relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographical dispersal” while the Black nation “has virtually no possibility of exercising what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, that right being equal within this Black nation only to the extent that is equally incapable of realization” (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 342). 17 years after this speech, this distinction still holds true but
cannot be made in explicitly racial terms because race has become closely tied with class in determining the dynamics of income inequality. It’s no longer just about race, but also about who has access to what economic opportunities within South Africa.

Benjamin Disraeli, former British prime minister, coined the “two nations” imagery in his description of the rich and poor in 19th century England. He described them as “two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they are dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets” (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 342). In contemporary South Africa, these two nations—the poor and rich—are not ignorant of each other; they have constant points of confluence, with the result that extreme inequality is glaringly obvious to all. For instance, the Sandton suburb—popularly described as “the richest square mile in Africa”—is only about three miles from Alexandra township, one of the poorest areas of South Africa. Consequently, class is not a subtlety that can be ignored by poor, Black South Africans: they are constantly faced with markers of these class disparities especially because many of them work in the suburbs and urban areas inhabited by the affluent.

As a result of this pervasive problem of economic inequality, class consciousness grows in today’s South Africa. In the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation’s 2003 Reconciliation Barometer study, one question asked South Africans to identify the biggest division in the country. 30% of the respondents said it was “the division between poor and middle income or wealthy South Africans” (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 371). Alongside this growing class consciousness, racial consciousness has also continued to prevail in South Africa. Within the context of politics, this racial consciousness has been propagated by race-baiting political strategies. For instance, the ANC has often presented its pro-poor
redressive policies (such as RDP and GEAR) as racial redress for years of apartheid suppression. As a result, the ANC has continued to build schools and clinics in poor neighborhoods in order to sustain allegiance in these predominantly Black areas. Even though the core concern should be towards addressing class-based inequalities, race continues to be politicized, such that the effects of class disparities may not be apparent to less discerning voters (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 370-1).

**Conclusion**

Before 2014, the ANC could easily maintain its hold on power because its supporters remained loyal either because of its apartheid credentials or because of a lack of worthy political alternatives. However disillusioned some ANC supporters were, there wasn’t a major contender for the Black vote as most opposition parties were found wanting due to racialized politicking that established ANC as the party for Black South Africans and the DA as the party for white, upper-middle class South Africans. Parties were race-based, not class-based. The entrance of the EFF into the political sphere in 2014 definitely changed this feature of the political landscape, as it was both a race- and class-based party that publicly challenged the ANC’s failure to bring economic redress to the majority of working class, Black South Africans. As a result, political parties have had to shift from race-based campaigns to class-based campaigns and squarely address the problem of class in contemporary South Africa.

While the ANC might hold power for a long time, as many voters still remain loyal, it remains to see how the growing class consciousness, especially among young voters, in
South Africa will reorganize not only the political discursive sphere, but also the configurations of political power in South Africa.
Conclusion

My interest in narratives and their construction initially led me to this thesis topic. My focus on South Africa was due both to my personal experience living in the country and my interest in South Africa as a state still in a state of negotiating its past despite its newly liberated present. These personal and intellectual interests guided my investigation of discourse in South Africa and enabled me to focus on the complexities within South Africa’s post-apartheid liberation narrative. Through this investigation, I was able to conclude that two key introductions to the political sphere are beginning to reconstitute national discourse within South Africa: Born Frees in the electorate and the increasing awareness of class disparities in South Africa, both of which have caused a shift in political discourse towards issue-based campaigning as opposed to race-based or history-based campaigning.

Going forward, it remains to be seen how young voters and their class consciousness will continue to challenge the existing power structures in South Africa, especially the ANC’s hold on power. On the 12th of February 2015, the day that marked 25 years since Nelson Mandela was released from prison, South Africa held its State of the Union address in the national parliament. Before the event, EFF supporters protested outside parliament (shown in figure 4.1), carrying placards that asked President Jacob Zuma to pay back “our money even if it’s via Shoprite transfers.” The money referred to here is the $23 million allegedly used to refurbish President’s Zuma’s private home (Roelf 2015). Shoprite is a mass-market grocery chain in South Africa that sells cheap basic necessities and typically caters to low-income South Africans. The fact that these protesters were asking for such a large sum of money, through Shoprite transfers, so they could purchase basic necessities is telling of the economic reality in South Africa today, under
which people have to watch their leaders spend millions of dollars of state funds renovating homes while they struggle to afford basic necessities.

Figure 4.1. EFF protesters outside the national parliament during the State of the Union address. Photograph by Jerusha Raath.

During this major political address, EFF members of parliament hijacked the president’s speech by challenging him to pay back the state funds used to renovate his home. This was not the first time that such a demonstration happened in the National Assembly; in November 2014, EFF parliament members were suspended from the National Assembly because they interrupted the president’s speech by repeatedly chanting, “pay
back the money!” (SAPA 2014). This previous suspension did not stop the EFF from repeating the interruption most recently, and once again the police forcefully removed EFF members from parliament. Class disparity is increasingly acknowledged within the very framework of the political process in South Africa and this emphasis will only continue to increase as the electorate becomes more class-conscious and opposition parties like the EFF become even more vocal about the government’s failings.

Future research should explore the question of class perception in addition to that of race perception, as both are correlated in influencing the dynamics of economic inequality in South Africa. I would be interested in understanding how South Africans’ perceptions of class are formed and how this perception plays out in their understanding of class disparities both within their own race and between their race and other races. Future research should take up the question of how this perception of class influences South Africans’ understanding of the political situation in the country, especially in their appraisal of the ANC, which is generally perceived to have failed in fulfilling its promises.

Furthermore, because the question of freedom is so central to the narrative of post-apartheid South Africa, research should consider how the trade-offs between political freedom and economic freedom play out in South Africa. I’m interested in this question because the ANC still hold a majority of power in South Africa, despite a general disappointment in its performance. Many of the people who remain loyalists of the ANC still claim that it has the right to lead because it brought freedom to South Africa. However, in the face of a generational shift that will lead to a younger electorate, most of whom are well aware of the lack of material benefits that this freedom has brought because they are
more likely to be economically disadvantaged, I’m interested in how much longer the ANC can hold on to this freedom as a discursive notion that rationalizes its hold on power.

I started off this thesis by analyzing the Woolworth’s ad and hypothesizing that there was a class struggle in South Africa. My research has led me to conclude that the legacies of apartheid, specifically in form of a distributional regime that privileged a few over a majority, have shifted from explicitly racial distribution to include class-specific distribution. While the ANC was a liberation movement that fought against the apartheid regime, it has grown into a government that adopts the same distributional method as the apartheid system, through its policies such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) that have led to a small group of Black elites and a growing underclass of poor, economically disadvantaged predominantly Black South Africans.

This isn’t the only legacy of class-specific, apartheid-reminiscent policy making that still exists in present-day South Africa. In some parts of Cape Town, blue-collar workers have to possess “Green Cards” (shown in figure 4.2) in order to access certain affluent neighborhoods. A gardener, Norman Jooste, said, “I haven’t been asked by the police for a green card, but where I went to ask white people for work, they asked for it and if you don’t have it, they call the police” (du Plessis 2015).
Figure 4.2. An example of a Green Card that gives manual workers access to certain neighborhoods. Photograph by Independent Media.

While one might argue that this sort of class-based policing and restriction of movement is a precautionary measure due to South Africa’s high crime rate, it cannot be ignored that this policy is reminiscent of the Pass Laws that oppressed and jailed thousands of Black people during the apartheid era. During the apartheid era, pass books were not only used to maintain geographical segregation but also to control the agency of the Black migrant laborer. Many South Africans have vivid memories of this demeaning policy, and so it seemed unfathomable that such a policy would reappear in contemporary South Africa, more so under an ANC government. All of this is to say that despite the fact that apartheid is meant to be long gone, the post-apartheid state seems to have inadvertently inherited certain policies from the apartheid regime, de-racialized them, and reconstituted them under class dynamics. In such a context, economical inequality is bound
to become a structural problem in South Africa that will invariably shape public and political discourse for years to come. What is supposed to be a “new” South Africa is, in fact, one straddling the old and the new, re-negotiating the colonial legacies of the past in the present. It remains to be seen how South Africa will actively address these institutional and systemic residues of apartheid that threaten to destroy its façade of post-colonial rebirth just 20 years after 1994.
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