

Ordinary Politics:



Race and Opportunity in
Contemporary South Africa

AN INTRODUCTION
BY

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Ordinary Politics: the background



- Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS):
 - The qualitative data (2006-2007): probing in-depth on the ‘*why*’ and ‘*how*’ behind the statistics, in collaboration with Princeton University
 - ✦ Sub sample, random selection, 60 young adults who were part of wave I and III, different backgrounds;
 - ✦ 2-3 hour in-depth interviews, with various modules:
 - Education
 - Employment history
 - Transitions to adulthood
 - One specifically on “perceptions of the opportunity structure”
 - ...

Ordinary Politics: the background



- CAPS qualitative – perceptions of opportunity structure:

Resp: Yes, **because I'm black, you always think you're in the worst position. But yeah, I think so because maybe I don't know there's still like issues of racism** especially in the Western Cape and what not. Apparently it's run by white people and coloured people will get jobs like in supermarkets and stuff more than black people.

Resp: And I got a bursary to come study.

Inter: Ok. Oh, who was your bursary from?

Resp: NFCF. National Formal [can't catch word] Foundation. (Inter: ok) And I started out my application letter as "I'm a young, black, female student" Yeah. I think that works.

Inter: And how does that make you feel like having that advantage?

Resp: I don't know... (laughs) I don't know. **I just feel like I have an advantage and I'm using it. You know.** (Inter: mmhmm) Yeah. I don't feel like ooh, I'm this. I feel like oh, wait a minute... maybe I can use this.

Ordinary Politics: the background



- CAPS qualitative – perceptions of opportunity structure:

Interv: And in terms of like job prospects here in South Africa, do you think it makes a difference how much education you have?

Resp: **Not as much as your skin color** does but... to a point ja.

Interv: Ok. (Resp: ja) Explain? (Resp: Explain that?) Yeah.

Resp: Well... ok, let's say if it's three people, you've got two white people and an African person, the African person will get the first job and out of the two white people, the person with the university degree will get the next job (Interv: ok) Ja, that's what my view is, ja.

Interv: Ok, so would the African person, they need to have an education as well or how does that work?

Resp: **Well they need to have an education but it doesn't really matter as much as the white person's does, according to BEE.**

Ordinary Politics: the background



- CAPS qualitative – perceptions of opportunity structure:

Resp: Like go and segregate the races again, things like that, um, yeah, I think there are some who are taking more than they should be getting back, not all of them, I mean in general they are doing the right thing, but there are some who I think... **I mean the majority of us now, like me, I don't remember apartheid and I'm sort of being punished sometimes,** you know, they'll only give it to a non-white person even though we're equally qualified, where as you know we both grew up without it really, without apartheid, so why, you know, I think...

Interv: Sorry, 'giving it', meaning?

Resp: Like a job or an opportunity for something, um...I mean I don't mind. **I understand their parents were affected and some young people too but I mean like children being born now, I mean they're born in an equal opportunity world. I think it's a bit unfair to sometimes give them priority in a way because I mean they are equal now,** can understand people from the past, but that's just how I feel. (Interv: yeah) Yeah.

Ordinary Politics: the background



- CAPS qualitative – perceptions of opportunity structure:

“ Well, to me I see it as of Coloured people don't feature.

[...]

... but most of the Blacks I've notices are in the police force and so forth, **what about us Coloureds**, when we would like to apply for the same position, then it will take us fairly longer, because one would need this, plus additional complications... but just ask one of them to produce what is needed for the same position, then, one could draw the comparisons of requirements immediately and notice the unfair favouring of the system

[...]

They should also grant some coloureds with an opportunity [...] **because previously the whites had a chance, now the blacks have their chance but never the coloureds**, they should also get to experience an opportunity”

Ordinary Politics: the background



- **2008 Events:**

- February 2008: Racist video showing white, male students at the University of the Free State (UFS) tricking Black residence workers into eating stew containing urine.
 - “That, at the end of the day, is what we think of integration”.
- October 2008: facebook group sharing racist ideas of White students at the University of the North West (UNW).
 - Press described the website as “indicative of the racist attitude still prevalent at some formerly white institutions of higher learning” (Tromp 2008).

Ordinary Politics: the background



- Yes, we don't actually agree with what the ANC is doing with the country but **we cannot say that it's the fault of all black people!** I can guarantee that for everyone of us here there's at least 10 black people in this country who are busy making this a better place and all you can do... f****all!" (Denzil Engelbrecht, quoted in Tromp, 2008)
- I think more needs to be done towards uniting South Africans and **for people to see that there is more that unites us than that which divides us.** I think we should start perceiving each as individuals not stereotyping every group. **Integration needs to be a top priority.** It goes beyond just racism, there's also Xenophobia and violent crime that's hurting South Africa but with great leadership and love, we can make South Africa a great nation. (Cadrepablo posted on the IOL website)
- **Our government is partly to blame for all this racism.** Our government has failed us black people in the manner which they deal with these hooligans. How many times do we read about racist attacks? It is shameful how even our black policemen are frightened to confront these criminals! I was attacked at some point inside a Pick n Pay Store in Witpoortjie (Roodepoort) by white Afrikaaners, and not even the store manager came to my rescue, instead I was thrown out the store. The management even refused to assist me with CCTV footage when I wanted to press charges. Now imagine if it was a white person who was attacked.... (kg on IOL)

Ordinary Politics: the background



- When government has policies such as "BLACK empowerment" and "Affirmative action" **who are they to shout racist?** Remember the masses follow the leaders! (Anonymous on IOL)
- I hate all forms of discrimination. No matter your colour, religion or sexual preference, we are all part of the human race. We should learn to respect one another. This respect is seriously missing today. I think **our government is to blame for the outburst of our so called white students.** From our tertiary institutions and schools, many of them will start a new career, but because they're a particular colour **they are victimised for a crime against humanity they had no part of.** Many of these people have started the same school with equal opportunities, but are now victims. Victims like so many black people experienced in the days of apartheid. Suddenly white people are at the receiving end of discrimination. I am sorry to say that laws that were put in to place to protect previously disadvantaged people are now widening the divide between our youth. I would think after 14 years it is enough. (Anonymous on IOL)

Ordinary Politics: the background



- The reactions point at a mix of factors that characterize today's young lives in South Africa, consisting of racial relationships, a discourse around and (attempted) practices of integration and tolerance, restorative justice, perceptions of present and future opportunities, ... (see also Soudien, 2007). → **Structure**
- They point at, among other things, a potential loss of belief in or increasing doubts about the process of social transformation and restorative justice in the country.

Ordinary Politics: the background



- In this context, the Institute for Security Studies points at the importance of positive feelings of “**Human Security**”, comprising security not only on a physical, but also on a political, social and cultural level: any feelings of insecurity may manifest itself in frictions between the previously advantaged and the previously disadvantaged in a racialised way, for example on issues as BEE (Hofmeyr 2008).

Ordinary Politics: the questions



- Who views policies of BEE and AA as racist acts against them, or as justified? What causes the difference?
- Does the past matter to “ordinary” people today? Do they remember and carry the consequences of, for example, the pass laws; the Soweto riots; the psychology of separation; Mandela’s release; The ANC’s promises; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Who does and who does not remember, or know? How (or by whom) is such memory, or lack thereof shaped?
- How do traces of the past manifest themselves today? What incidents, events or settings remind people of the past? In fact, do they remind people of the past, or does the past not feature in their lives?
- What about the recognition of past wrongs and current inequalities?
- What about the ability of those previously disadvantaged to remain patient and forgiving?

Ordinary Politics: methodology

- Longitudinal, ethnographic research:
 - 6 young adults in their mid/late twenties: people who are still young enough not to feel that the old Apartheid system was of their making, but who are already old enough to think that they can see the shape of their own futures.
 - The aim of this research was also to gather very extensive, detailed information, not only on perceptions that one is willing to voice, but also on actions and daily reactions one might perhaps not readily want to express in a once off interview.

Ordinary Politics: methodology

- **In-depth interviews** to cover extensively participants' perceptions of past and present "political histories," their memories and understandings of the apartheid era, the transition to democracy, and the contemporary state of the country's political system.
- What are the issues that shape their daily lives? How much of those are related to the past? Which of those influence their outlook on the future? Why?
- To what extent does race matter in their daily lives? Are they able to forget about what group they belong to now and just go about their daily lives, or do they bump up against hostility? And if they do not experience racial injustice, why do they think so many fellow citizens see the matter differently?

Ordinary Politics: methodology



- Family history mapping
- Employment (or unemployment) diaries
- Photographic work to help illustrate today's "community forces" shaping young adults' every day lives (gang life, alcoholism, violence, jealousy, but also support, encouragement, role models, beliefs, aspired places, ...).
- Neighbourhood tours
- Discussion work
- Participant observation
- In-depth work with "broader community circle": recreating the memories of space and opportunity

Ordinary Politics: the participants

Participant 1 (Mona)

- 27, female, African, City Bowl/Strand
- Educated in former model C school
- Dropped out of tertiary education due to lack of funding
- Project management position in national NGO
- “Trial and error” attempts to climb the educational and socio-economic ladder
- Search for identity in “New South Africa”: tradition versus modernity
- Extended family care, reciprocity
- Loss of faith in politicians; disillusionment with ANC, COPE, ...

Participant 2 (Victoria)

- 28, female, African, Khayelitsha
- Educated in township school
- No money for higher education
- Piece jobs; Attempts to maintain employment /gather further training
- Sense of “being stuck”, depression, hopelessness
- “Tradition will not do anything for me”
- Extended family, reciprocity
- Continued ANC support

Ordinary Politics: the participants

Participant 3 (Anke)

- 24, female, white, German-Namibian heritage; S Suburbs/town/Kalk Bay

- University of Cape Town architect graduate; supported by father

- Piece student jobs in architect and designer firms

- Traveling the world

- Belief in the “new South African experiment”, open to bridge racial and class differences

- Grounded in German/South African identity

- “Not sure what I think about politics” / “is this our government”?

- Crime, violence and ways of dealing with those

Participant 4 (Adam)

- 26, male, White, Dutch/Irish/Afrikaans heritage; N and S suburbs/town

- Grade 12 education; at the time not interested in higher schooling

- Left SA, only to return realising “things are not that bad here”

- Entrepreneur, successful time, disillusioned times

- Questions around the “new South Africa”/ chameleon behaviour around racial issues

- New Afrikaner identity

- “This is not our government”

- Crime

Ordinary Politics: the participants

Participant 5 (Kyle)

- 26, Coloured, male, Manenberg flats
- Grade 10 education in Manenberg school; drugs, smoking, expelled.
- unemployed; gang involvement; drug addiction;
- crime, violence, imprisonment
- “Coloured people are thrown away people”
- Complete sense of isolation; lack of social capital; lack of sense of citizenship
- Racism; Apartheid years were better.

Participant 6 (Tyler)

- 26, Coloured, male, City Bowl/Paarl
- Paarl Boys High; tertiary education
- Co-owns 50% of dad’s construction company; owns 2 properties.
- Cosmopolitan: married to German girl; travels the world
- Coloured people may be “stuck in the middle”, but individual agency makes for success
- “This is not really our government”

PS: all participants’ names used here are temporary pseudonyms!

Ordinary Politics: common themes



- Apart from participant 5, all acknowledged that “the past” was wrong;
- Some form of restorative justice is necessary, but:
 - White youth struggle with seeing how this would NOT put them in a victimized position:
 - ✦ *My generation... I feel like our generation rather resents being saddled with all this horseshit...I'm pissed off that I've passively inherited all of these hang ups – all these hang ups and these sort of half formed racial instincts... yet having to pay the price or having to take the backseat because your dad had the front seat before, doesn't feel fair. (FGD pre-elections; Afrikaans-English; N suburbs)*

Ordinary Politics: common themes



- African youth question whether measures are going far enough and whether they really benefit them or just the chosen few;
 - ✦ *Politicians throw million rand parties, live in fancy houses and drive fast cars; everywhere there are just, just... these parties! [upset] Why? With whose money? What gives them the right? What do their parties have to do with my life? We still live in townships, we still don't know where to go from here. I will not vote for them. (participant 1)*
- Many Coloured people feel “overlooked” in policies as Black Economic Empowerment; disempowered in this new South Africa.
- Questions of identity, belonging and citizenship in this new South Africa.

Ordinary Politics: common themes



- “Remaining positive”: balancing act = in being aware of the realities of remaining inequalities, poverty, crime etc, but also remaining positive about the beauties of this country, and the “democratic experiment”:
 - ✦ *I feel positive about the country. It’s just, I don’t like watching the news, because it’s very depressing really, because they put all the stories of death and burglaries and everything. So I don’t like watching it, it’s almost like I’m just keeping to myself. If I don’t know about it, then it won’t bother me (participant 4’s sister)*
 - ✦ *We still have open drains, and no toilets, and people are dying, but the government is trying. Maybe tomorrow, I will get a house (FGD Khayelitsha)*

Ordinary Politics: common themes



- Fear/ crime/ violence
 - All participants had been victims of crime, some more violent than others; all had lost assets and some had lost relatives in one or other act of crime. Thinking about security permeated every aspect of life, in the townships, in the suburbs, in the city centre.
 - ✦ *“Tsotsis are everywhere, they never seem to sleep”. (Khayelitsha)*
 - ✦ *“At what point does it get too much? What has to happen to make people leave SA?” (S Suburbs)*
 - ✦ *“In our communities, going to jail, is like an initiation, like going to the bush for Black people” (Manenberg)*
- Fear, not only of crime, but of one another: who can be trusted? *“Do they really all hate us?”*

South African Reconciliation Barometer – 2009/2010



- 84% of South Africans believe that apartheid was a crime against humanity
- BUT:
- In 2009, only 29% of South Africans indicated that their satisfaction with their own life had improved;
- Perceptions about the chances of finding a job declined, with only 22% of respondents agreeing that the likelihood that they would find a job had improved in the previous 12 months.

South African Reconciliation Barometer – 2009/2010



- Since 2003, the SARB has found consistently high levels of agreement with the statement that “the people running the country are not really concerned with what happens to people like me.”
 - In 2009, 58% of all respondents agreed with the statement
 - 50% of South Africans agree with the statement that they can “trust the country’s leaders to do what is right”
- Only 49% of South Africans believe that race relations in the country have improved since 1994;
- Only 43% believe there has been an increased hope for the future