

Spring 2016

## Sanctioned Silencing, Symbolic Resistance: Race, Space, and Dispossession in a Marginalized South African Community

Killian Richard Miller  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2016](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2016)

 Part of the [African History Commons](#), [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [Human Geography Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), [Legal Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), [Political Theory Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), [Spatial Science Commons](#), [Theory, Knowledge and Science Commons](#), [Tourism Commons](#), [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Miller, Killian Richard, "Sanctioned Silencing, Symbolic Resistance: Race, Space, and Dispossession in a Marginalized South African Community" (2016). *Senior Projects Spring 2016*. 158.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2016/158](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2016/158)

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

Sanctioned Silencing, Symbolic Resistance:  
Race, Space, and Dispossession in a Marginalized South African Community



Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Killian Miller

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2016



## Acknowledgements

*I want to thank Yuka Suzuki and Jane Smith for your amazing support and constructive criticism. You opened new and different angles to my thinking and writing and kept me going along the way. You two are dear friends. I want to thank friends and family for your love, laughter, stories, conversation, and the many escapades and moments of absurdity. You helped create such a formative time in my life, were always there for an embrace, and provided inspiration during the hard times and good times.*



## **Dedication**

*I want to dedicate my project to the people of Hangberg. I learned so much from my experiences with you. You forged durable memories that continue to transform my perspective of the world. Your power and sensitivity will always have an impact in my life. The souls of Hangberg live on as an echo in my heart. All the respect, Irie!*



## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	<i>1</i>
Chapter 1: A History of “Coloredness”: Occupying the Borderlands.....	<i>19</i>
Chapter 2: Empowering a Labor of Uncertainty: Fishing as Subsistence and Subversion...	<i>49</i>
Chapter 3: Politicizing the Home: Material Life and Dispossession.....	<i>69</i>
Conclusion.....	<i>93</i>
Bibliography.....	<i>103</i>





## Introduction



A view of the western peninsula of Hout Bay. Hangberg is at the bottom of the chain of mountains, falling on the downward slope opposite to the rocky crag descending into the waters below. The charted name of the peak is Sentinel Mountain, but to the community of Hangberg the mountain is colloquially known as the “Rhino’s Horn,” a reassertion of Khoi indigenous presence.

The Gatsby stand, an industrial freight container repurposed into a street vending commons, makes “Gatsbies,” monumental sub rolls with hot, freshly fried “chips,” fries in the South African vernacular. On top of the fries is a mouth-watering barbeque spice known simply as “spice” to the people of Hangberg. I walked with a woman and her son down one of only a few streets in Hangberg. Holding onto our hands, her son swung between us until we arrived at one of the stands. There were no signs, just the same bare metal visible in ports around the world. In order to make the container into a food dispensary, there is a small window inlaid with rusted iron fencing and a small entry for transaction. While the people were making our food, the woman’s child took my hand and gestured our arms toward the magnificent bay and surrounding mountains. He did not know any English and spoke a dialect of Afrikaans. He kept raising his arm trying to redirect my attention toward the harbor and clamor of boats and fishermen preparing for sea or porting from out at sea. I imitated the noise of a deep, hoarse boat horn, and he mimicked me with exuberance. Then he pointed down at the police and pronounced what he imagined to be the sound of their alarm, jumping up and down while fixating on the police vehicle’s tactical movements. He and I had a moment of solidarity through the world of sound, creatively contorting our mouths as we cried out through our own vocal interpretations of the sounds echoing from the movement of people and things in the bay. His relationship with the social and physical landscapes of Hout Bay became an understanding with colloquial sounds, a way for him to make sense of where he lived. After the Gatsby was prepared, he, his mother, and I began to walk back to their home, weaving in and out of the many disruptions in the middle of the street: children chasing each other, dogs roaming, or people headed to work or into town via someone’s personal vehicle transformed into a taxi.

The life of the street produced a public space where families came together, conversing and congregating around the children, dogs, and vehicles moving in and out of the street. The street was not what would be perceived to be a “route” communicating travel, or a reference point on a map, because the people occupying the street disrupted its function by slowing down a singular stream of movement: standing in the street, hovering around its fringes, or running around a specific area breaking the linear design of the street. The woman, child, and I walked over the street, through a gap in the tenement housing, and toward the stairs leading up to their home. As we came up the stairs from the street I looked to my left and right and saw continuous concrete form the backyards to the tenement flats, a crude, infinite gray. After ascending the steps, we were walking toward their home when a woman, coming from the other direction, picked up a used brick and smashed it over the head of a drunk man making his way through the community, greeting people as he meandered. He struck the ground immediately and the woman trudged by us with a psychotic look, her friend grasping her arm and pulling her away from the incident. Time went still momentarily, all was silent. No one reacted to the attack, life continued. One person walked over to him and he was unconscious. We had to walk by him because he lay in the narrow division between two homes that led to where we were going. As I walked by him, I looked down and saw a flow of blood flooding from a gash in his skull. The woman encouraged me to keep walking and the child seemed unaffected by such a happening. When we returned to their home, I was still flabbergasted and expressed it to the group of people inside. There was a unanimous response, everyone similarly informing me that it happens all the time and he should have seen it coming. It was at that moment that an act of violence became banal, as though such an egregious strike to the head was an “order of the day” and quickly became forgotten.

### **Walking the Geographies of Hangberg:**

Hangberg, meaning “overhanging rock” in Afrikaans, emerged as a place-name when white factory and company owners exploited a strictly colored labor force in the harbor of Hout Bay. Under the early distributions of wealth and racial division under Apartheid, white businesses used the labor influx to cities and the economic immobilization of people of color as a strategic way of alienating the colored workers to that economic servitude under white ownership in the harbor. The area below the west side of the bay, at the end of the peninsula, became a labor camp where people lived and then were subjected daily to the degradations of being mere objects in a broader economic expansion of white ownership. Historically the land comprising today’s community of Hangberg has been a symbol of colonial subordination. The Dutch enslaved the Khoi in an expendable position, where the Dutch used Hout Bay for rooting empire and commercial capitalism on what later became “South Africa,” a name and identification imposed upon the Khoi people.

The way Hangberg is geographically located exposes the land to “convenient” occupation. Hangberg is the first area of land confronted by ships and people entering Hout Bay. On the furthest point of land meeting with the sea in Hout Bay, Hangberg is bordered by the bay on one side of the mountain, and the other side, by the Atlantic Ocean. Besides accessing Hangberg over the mountain from the Atlantic Ocean, the community lies at the deepest point of a peninsula. Hangberg is a cornered community, marginalized within the physical geography of Hout Bay, regulated on the sea by state and industrial profiteering. Yet, being in a place where there is only one way in and out, has also empowered the community’s defenses against state-led displacement and “discovery”. Technically, Hangberg is a “township” and “informal settlement,” but I am not going to deploy technical, administrative, and racialized terms that

exclude impoverished communities from the political discussions that legitimize such bureaucratic terminology. Hangberg cannot be reduced to the people's visible despair of inadequate homes made of collaged metal and wood, nonexistent infrastructure resulting in trash littered everywhere, human and dog waste forming obstacles preventing access to one's home, because to reduce the community to a human and material wasteland is to conform to ideas of their "victimhood." The social space of Hangberg is not a dumping ground denoted by land stolen under Apartheid, or necessarily a byproduct of centralized sections of nearby Cape Town. Rather, Hangberg is a community that challenges the myopic notion, through their living bodies and historical practice and knowledge passed through generations, that they are just a relic of colonization, a product of Apartheid forced removals, and today a space characterized by abandonment. While the power struggles throughout history impose a recognizable reality upon the people of Hangberg, the people respond to that disempowerment and "negative" relationship with an actively changing community that collectively seeks to challenge the notion that they are represented in opposition to people and institutions of power.

### **Methods/An Art of Ethnographic Practice:**

My methodological process in conducting field work had little concrete dimension when I began and took on a more free, malleable form. I found out about Hangberg through one of my anthropology professors at the University of Cape Town, Divine Fuh. After discussing my general interests: resistance, the production of space, marginalization, the formation of community, and state power and interests, he put me in touch with a doctoral anthropology student, Andreas Buhler, who wrote his master's thesis on Hangberg. I took the train a few stops east toward False Bay, the other major body of water defining Cape Town's development east to

west, and had coffee one morning with Andreas. We discussed his project and my vague direction, and then he left me with Brent's number, a person from Hout Bay who was his main interlocutor and progressively became the mediator and translator (most people spoke Afrikaans) for the majority of my interactions in the community. A week later I called Brent and he happily welcomed me over to Hangberg. There was no discussion about what we would do, or what my field work meant. Nor did Andreas notify Brent of my meeting with Andreas and discussing the possibility of doing field work in Hangberg. My field work was spontaneous and unstructured to begin with. The beginning to my commutes and subsequent stays in the community of Hangberg were predominately spent in people's homes. My presence as a white American was not the only defining feature of my relationships with people in the community, instead almost everyone opened up their feelings, political stances, and opinions revolving around issues pertinent to everyday life in Hangberg. There were still moments like when I visited a group of Rastafarians who were smoking marijuana and discussing the history of struggle embodied by generations of people from Hangberg and Hout Bay, and my whiteness aroused suspicion among the Rastafarians, inquiring whether or not I was a reporter or some figure representing the law and government.

I went into field work without any pretext and relinquished myself to the rhythms of everyday life in order to find a relevant topic that emerged from the community's actions and values. I wanted to listen to the community to empower the narrative, direction, argument, and shifts in thought that my ethnography would possibly take. The connections and social capital produced by my pursuit of a college education, and specifically utilizing people at the University of Cape Town, enabled me to gain entry into the community. I walked into the community, appeared one day, and that ability to show up in Hangberg is tied to broader systematic issues of

white foreigners willfully marrying into or building homes in Hangberg, because they see “glamour” in being poor. John and Jean Comaroff make a cogent argument about how ethnographic practice can expose its own inherent contradiction of reproducing power dynamics surrounding authorship. Ethnography has the potential, as a collaborative practice, to complicate the tensions of representation implicit to relationships forged between ethnographer and the context of study, for example, by looking at how my whiteness can be interpreted as a racial identity that symbolizes an ongoing power struggle with white foreigners taking homes in the community. They write,

Ethnography, in any case, does not speak *for* others, but *about* them. Neither imaginatively nor empirically can it ever “capture” their reality. Ethnography, to extend the point, is not a vain attempt at literal translation, in which we take over the mantle of an-other’s being, conceived as somehow commensurate with our own. It is a historically situated mode of understanding historically situated contexts, each with its own, perhaps radically different, kinds of subjects and subjectivities, objects and objectives. Also, it has hitherto been an inescapably *Western* discourse. In it, we tell of the unfamiliar—again, the paradox, the parody of doxa—to confront the limits of our own epistemology, our own visions of personhood, agency, and history. Such critiques can never be full or final, of course, for they remain embedded in forms of thought and practice not fully conscious or innocent of constraint. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 9-10)

I had the privilege to tread a space within the community and I wanted to question that privilege through the lens and voices of the people of Hangberg. Me and the community confronted the differences between us, but at the same time acknowledged our cultural, racial, and socio-economic differences as a point from which the community and I could work toward creating a space where our conversation could cross lines of identity and difference. The people of Hangberg did not want the important distinctions between my life and the community’s respective life to go unacknowledged though. We, me and the community, wanted to denaturalize the categories of difference separating us, for example, white-colored and American-South African, and see how those identifiers could be redefined within the experiences



we had. In the spirit of Kim Fortun, in her piece “Ethnography in Late Industrialism,” the community and I constructed and deconstructed experiences that did not “resolve difference nor merely celebrate diversity, but provoked encounters across difference that produced new articulations” (Fortun 2012: 455) of coexistence.

When writing ethnography there are “discursive gaps, conditions to deal with for which there is no available idiom, no way of thinking that can grasp what is at hand,” (Fortun 2012: 450), for example, the limitations of extending sympathy, such as the ability for me to mourn with people over a family member’s death out at sea. I did not have the words that would console or exhume the spirit of the “disappeared.” I did not know that feeling, I could only pretend to know, so instead I listened and comforted. At the same time, the community of Hangberg and I created our own discourse and commentary on their situation, where the conversations and experiences held between the people of Hangberg and I, forged a body of knowledge and intellectual discourse rooted in the particular space and time we occupied together. In that collectively-wrought space of becoming, “ethnography thus became creative, producing something that didn’t exist before. Something beyond codified expert formulas” (Fortun 2012: 452). In order to break down hegemonic repositories of understanding a particular community’s everyday life, I want the community to have authority and voice in speaking *as not for* my ethnography. The way the community saw “social worlds not just as a collection of persons and things but rather as a project of mutual creation, as something collectively made and remade” (Graeber 2013: 222), has been an organizing principle in writing my ethnography. Histories of ethnographic practice as colonial documentation and anthropological studies of the “distinctive” Other, have to be considered with historical importance as relationships formed between the people of Hangberg and I.

When the ethnography is an embodiment of “rethinking difference *through* connection” (Ferguson and Gupta 1992: 8), the people of Hangberg are not subjects of my personal and intellectual pursuits, but enter a broader field of discourse and discussion that equally problematizes the position of both me and the people of Hangberg. I wanted to create a historically-inflected situation where “the effects of the extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living in their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words” (Abu-Lughod 2006: 474). I wanted to undermine procedures, analyses, and techniques of Othering projected on the people of Hangberg, while complicating the reasoning reflected by processes of Othering, such as the racial profiling by the state in labeling the fishermen of Hangberg “poachers.” I wrote sparse field notes while I was in Hangberg, instead leaving that for a reflective time and space spent on a two-hour city bus trip back to Cape Town every visit. Until the last few weeks I did not have any proposed interview questions, or even a layout to what I was trying to discuss. Most interviews took place within the last few weeks of my time in Hangberg. Brent set up meetings with almost everyone I interviewed, but I tried not to let that guidance necessarily control who I listened to outside the interview space, or how the interviewee was introduced to me by Brent beforehand. I did not want Brent’s voice to become representative of the whole community. I wanted to one, limit the authority of any presiding interpretation, and two, experience interactions around and with people who expressed aspects of their life that were specific to their lives and unconnected to a life characterized from Brent’s ideas about them or relationships with them. In the process of constructing an ethnographic narrative, I wanted to highlight that the people of Hangberg pronounced not just their lives, but my position in reflection to theirs, challenging the community and me to think together about broader historical problems of

exploitation and domination created by the hegemonic discourses and realities of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. Even though particular and different systems of oppression are rooted in the community's contemporary context of marginality, the people of Hangberg extended their historical struggle into a space we exposed as a collective human problem, we, diverse and disparate, must confront and embrace with collective conviction and doubt, the belief that change is possible, while remaining critical of how that change is realized, and whose change is it.

### **Theses on State-Marginal Community Relations:**

Power dynamics between the state, provincial and national, and the people of Hangberg, produced and organized the material and social space of Hangberg, creating a community exhausted by, yet unified against, acts of state violence and neglect. Intensifications of state control intersect with the community's engagement and reconstitution of that power over their lives through symbolic forms of protest: building a home on state-owned land enshrined by the law, fishing as "poachers," and speaking out against a denial of their own perspective in dominant narratives and representations that make up the historical landscape of contemporary Hangberg. This project will explore how the people of Hangberg make and rearrange a meaningful social life in the face of marginalization, oppression, a precarious present, an uncertain future, and an erased, yet influential past. Marginality is an instrument of opposition to the people of Hangberg's self-made agency, where the state tries to actively situate Hangberg in a precarious position in relation to the rest of Hout Bay, excluding the community from up-and-coming development projects, legitimate forms of economic production, and reconstructions of Apartheid spatial segregation. The people of Hangberg are subjected to "state apparatuses"

(Althusser 2006: 90) where the relationship of Hangberg to the state forms an example of how “places that have been imagined at a distance become lived spaces” (Ferguson and Gupta 1992: 11). In other words, Hangberg becomes an intelligible community through the state’s imagination of what Hangberg “should” be as an idealization of what the land could mean, without confronting the real and visible broken life embodied and vocalized by the people of Hangberg. Meaning, for example, “land could be registered and titled from a distance by someone who possessed virtually no local knowledge” (Scott 1998: 51) of the everyday realities of people in Hangberg.

I want to look at the schemes of “state simplification” (Scott 1998: 4) that make Hangberg more “legible—and hence manipulable from above and from the center” (Scott 1998: 2), but I want think of that state power as a social process and lateral relation, not a top-down, straightforward application of authority and control. For example, I want to look at the ways in which the “fire break,” a water channel dividing state land from the community’s, regulates a division between where the community is and where the community is disallowed from moving to. The symbolic significance of restricting the people of Hangberg’s fundamental ways of living must be grounded as the actual effects produced by such a “fire break,” for example, fire that is not just a symbol, but a force of reckoning that haunts the community throughout the day and night. The possibility of fire is an ungovernable one for the community because of the inadequate housing materials that only contribute to a fire’s rampage. I want to invoke Timothy Mitchell’s idea of the state as a “structural effect” (Mitchell 2006: 180), where a function of a state apparatus operating in Hangberg is to

construct a world that appears to consist not of a complex of social practices but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert “structure” that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and

gives a framework to their lives. Indeed the very notion of an institution, as an abstract framework separate from the particular practices it enframes, can be seen as the product of these techniques. Such techniques have given rise to the peculiar, apparently binary world we inhabit, where reality seems to take the two-dimensional form of individual versus apparatus, practice versus institution, social life and its structure – or society versus state. (Mitchell 2006: 180)

The idea of the state as a “structure,” in Hangberg’s case, the “fire break,” operates as an ideological and coercive instrument for the state in one, directing the origin of fire in the community and then the community consequently “burning” state-conserved land, and two, to disguise the material destruction of fire that the “fire break” never prevents.

The people of Hangberg try to subvert spatial and social orders of the state, for example by disobeying court orders mandating that they cannot build a home. The community reappropriates that jurisdiction of the state, because while the law may be in place, often enforcing the law means for the state to neglect the community and make their impoverishment grow more rooted. Therefore, finding the materials and capital to invest in constructing a home is an arduous task, but the community strengthens that provisional support by creating a viable home with the limited infrastructure in place. That being said, the state does not just let the community of Hangberg suffer, but disrupts the people’s hardship through police violence, intervention, and dispossession. People are regularly evicted without a warrant, a violation of their constitutional rights, because the provincial state and their reproduction of Apartheid rule, positions the colored community as a “wretched” people. The people of Hangberg are blamed for their disenfranchisement and poverty. Paradoxically, blame becomes a tool of state power, when in actuality the source of that blame, the bare life of the community, emerges out of a history of state domination asserted over the people of Hangberg. The state cares about “the formation of a disciplinary society, a sort of social ‘quarantine,’ to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of ‘panopticism’” (Foucault 1984: 206). The “corrective” logic of punishment meted

out on the people of Hangberg is not just an unbiased enforcement of the law, but exhibits how the very law and court order is designed to imprison and displace the people of Hangberg. A disciplinary role implies some “disorder,” but that disorder is not the community, but the state fabricating disorder, so that the community is interpreted as “radical” and “out-of-line.”

Conversely, the state is not always an obvious authoritarian force in relation to the people of Hangberg. The state also activates surveillance and constraint over Hangberg by internalizing its power within the population of Hangberg, ruling through consensus made by the people of Hangberg “selected” as leaders and mediators of conversations happening between the state and the community of Hangberg. The state plays an “educative role” (Gramsci 1971: 242) to “win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci 1971: 244). State officials and representatives—for example, agents of the Reconstruction Development Program, a housing initiative purportedly addressing the residual violence of Apartheid—manipulate political collectives in Hangberg, such as the Peace and Mediation Forum established after the state-sponsored police brutality in Hangberg in 2010, producing a ruse of community leadership.

Leadership, in Brent’s words, often means a situation where “the community leaders only get for their own. Only community leaders receive contracts and payouts for helping us, they do not show or teach people how to access these provisions, such as housing and land. If you are friends then you will receive access sometimes. They are puppets to the government.” Brent’s frustration over the cronyism tying community politics to a state-driven politics, shown in Gramsci’s discussion of the state, reveals how the state mitigates its active role in Hangberg, by displacing itself to the “voice” of a few construed as the community. Gramsci writes, “The State is an instrument of ‘rationalization’. It operates according to a plan, urges, incites, solicits, and ‘punishes’; is ‘possible’, then ‘criminal action or omission’ must have a punitive sanction, with

moral implications, and not merely be judged generically as ‘dangerous’” (Gramsci 1971: 247). Not providing housing becomes a question of “educating” the people of Hangberg about their options, ignoring how the people of Hangberg have been historically subjected to the myth that they are incapable of self-governance. In actuality, the people of Hangberg fashion their own everyday lives according to what they find meaningful, but also in response to the prescribed ideas about the community that continue to marginalize their representation. The state tries to depoliticize conflict over the land lived on by the community of Hangberg, such as the physical limit of the community’s life demarcated by the “fire break,” by representing fire as a product of “reckless” behavior emerging out of the community and “tainting” the conservation of “natural” beauty. In that mode of understanding, the state operates as an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 2006: 280) where “development’ may effectively squash political challenges to the system – not only by enhancing powers of administration and repression, but insistently reposing political questions of land, resources, jobs, or wages as technical ‘problems’ responsible to the technical ‘development’ intervention” (Ferguson 2006: 280). Preserving “nature” for the expansion of tourism, commercialism, and white wealthy landowners is a rationale presented as though the people of Hangberg are the villainous force of destruction, a misrepresentation used to assimilate land into meaning and purpose assigned by the state. The state imagines the land in a fantasy of wealth, materialism, and governability. In contrast, the community of Hangberg lives on the land as an embodiment of struggling through modes of everyday subsistence, respecting the ecological balance, where the people of Hangberg and the natural environment are equal partners in holding life in opposition to the state’s superimposed models of the land’s mythical “reserve” for a future in which the people of Hangberg are but a symbolic ruin.

The people of Hangberg challenge that ideological state apparatus (Althusser 2006: 95) that pins their community as a mere ruin of their own depredations, by forming a lived and discursive space that “addresses anybody, commits itself in principle to the possible participation of any stranger, and therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given condition of possibility” (Warner 2002: 81). People in Hangberg organize themselves around a public idea of community that recognizes each other’s own space, but understands the power in solidarity and opening up one’s home and more communal areas to an ethos of interaction and collaboration. The community does not see individuals as living an exceptional struggle, but rather strengthens the collective agency of the people in Hangberg, building a public that is reflective of the community and not partitioned individuals and property owners. Standing with the community is not a homogenous position for everyone in Hangberg; self-interest is a problem where internal social hierarchies and political differences within Hangberg, such as the community civic representatives’ self-absorbed thinking in relation to the community’s needs, diffuses that ability for everyone in the community to unite on a front that pushes for changes in their living situation. There is a “stranger-sociability” fostered by the people of Hangberg that speaks to the divide between community “leaders” and residents of Hangberg. By stranger-sociability I mean how, for example, people in Hangberg see the land as a public domain, a place that I could enter as a key beneficiary in conducting research. The role of beneficiary was complicated by treating me as a participant in the community’s life. I was not perceived as an outsider, positioned by the people of Hangberg as an ethnographer, but I was another person who, from the perspective of people in Hangberg, needed to understand, appreciate, and listen to what the people of Hangberg live and speak, but while remaining conscious of the lasting love and friendship imparted by my ephemeral experiences in Hangberg.



### **Outline of Chapters:**

The chapters that follow all begin with an ethnographic vignette, situating the reader within the setting, and then intertwine theoretical ideas about the community of Hangberg with ethnographic dialogue and narratives of the cultural experiences I had with the people of Hangberg. Besides the thick description at the beginning of every chapter, there is no standard unfolding: I simply want to reveal how the field work and people of Hangberg's voices complicate the understandings I came to through my exposure to theory and discourse within my classes. Over the course of writing the ethnography of Hangberg, my memories of being in Hangberg faded and still feel increasingly displaced from something I can recollect clearly through the community's immediate presence in my research. I think one of my struggles with writing ethnography is that I formed an intimate and profound bond with the people of Hangberg, but then that bond became more tenuous as I composed my project and our relationship became one isolated to my time at Bard. As an anthropologist, I want to emphasize that the power of ethnography extends beyond the scope of academia and has the transformative ability to change perspectives, make one more perceptive and sensitive, and allow one to better critically understand their positionality in the world. The people of Hangberg opened up the sensitivities in one, positioning myself in relation to the community of Hangberg, and two, writing within the context of "academic performance" in order to obtain an undergraduate degree.

The first chapter looks at how the people of Hangberg contest the making of their identity by exposing the silences they have faced throughout histories of colonization, British and Dutch colonialists creating a "South African" nation, and Apartheid's regime of codifying claims to living in South Africa as a nation of "white belonging." The people of Hangberg are trying to

reclaim Khoi indigeneity, because the Khoi lived on the land occupied by the people of Hangberg, and historically the Khoi have been lumped into narratives of British and Dutch colonialism. In relation to Apartheid and the slotting of colored people into the spatial and social schemes of a “white” South Africa, the community seeks to clarify that the identification, “colored,” was not sudden, but happened through a brutal and violent manufacture imposed upon the families of people in Hangberg.

The second chapter has to do with the practice of fishing in the community and how the state perceives the community as “poachers,” making fishing an unpredictable and potentially fatal pursuit because the state actively regulates the coastline pushing the fishermen of Hangberg further out to sea with inadequate equipment. Industrial fishing has endangered the fish in Hout Bay, but the blame is put on the fishermen of Hangberg. Disappearance of fishermen from Hangberg becomes a normalized problem for the community. The fishermen subvert the state’s attempts to exercise a panoptic vision upon their movement by going where the state assumes the fishermen would not think of going and forming ungovernable spaces in the sea and on state-owned “conservation” land.

The third chapter addresses how the home—the dispossessed home, everyday home, burnt-down home—symbolize the porous infrastructure and precarious life in the community of Hangberg. The homes also symbolize the abandonment of the state until the court order preventing the community from building beyond the “fire break” came into play. Even if the home is somewhat near the “fire break,” the state commits egregious violence and scare tactics through the police’s abuse of authority in evicting people. Many times the people are arrogated from their homes without a warrant. In opposition to the state’s assertions of control and punishment, the people of Hangberg resist state-funded tenement housing projects, or manipulate

the project housing by refusing to pay rent or finding alternative ways to get electricity for free.

The home is a site of protest, but not in direct response to the state's formation of the spaces they inhabit, but rather by taking advantage of the taken-for-granted interpretations of poverty held by the state, turning what is believed to be a "lack" of resources into a vibrant, meaningful personal and public living space.

## A History of “Coloredness”



A visual topography of the community. The community cohesively forms a congested labyrinth one could never conceivably map.

## Occupying the Borderlands

## Ghost Police

I am the progenitor of value  
 I am a superimposed history and lived social reality  
 I am another's personal experience  
 I am the belief in crime  
 I am the stigma of a weapon  
 I am an active deprivation  
 I am security  
 I am fear  
 I am what is possible  
 I am the imagination  
 I am cruelty  
 I am the invisible haunting of a sidewalk  
 I am that corner of a street that knows no other  
 I am a forest that utters no name  
 I am weathered driftwood  
 I am a projector  
 I am an auspicious camera  
 I am alienation  
 I am freedom  
 I am what tries  
 I am what expresses  
 I am speech closure  
 I am a written asphyxiation  
 I am a language that walks in infinitude  
 I am an absent public  
 I am private isolation  
 I am an embodiment  
 I am what disembodies  
 I am legitimate  
 I am the illegitimate  
 I am consolation  
 I am force  
 I am the pavement that divides  
 I am the tree that breathes  
 I am the silence of desire suspended  
 I am convenience  
 I am the mind apparatus  
 I am an "I" implant  
 I am white<sup>2</sup>

white man  
 we shall have our land  
 we so foolishly allowed you to take  
 turning us into strangers to places  
 we roamed before you came

you have placed us in  
 desert land with thorn tree  
 while your cattle grow fat  
 feasting on grass grown high  
 as ours are left to die

white man  
 you have left us to taste  
 the bitter fruit of oppression  
 have seen man subjugate man  
 chaining him to the soil

those long years of pain  
 and torment are over  
 no longer do we accept  
 the role of the beast  
 toiling at your command

white man  
 still your voice  
 you cannot speak for us  
 we have listened for too long  
 to hollow promises made

put away your blueprint  
 the future's our to shape  
 white man  
 remove the markers from your map  
 we know which road to take<sup>1</sup> (Matthews  
 2005: 204)

---

<sup>1</sup> James Matthews is a dissident colored poet who wrote and collaborated extensively in solidarity with radical race movements under Apartheid, such as black consciousness with the movements and philosophies of Steve Biko. More generally, he actively contested the notion of a racial regime, a white imperial power that violently extracted, exploited, and massacred the souls and bodies of people of color. He emphasizes the systematic nature of not only Apartheid, but Apartheid through a recreation of colonial memory. Through insidious laws, dispossession became an institutionalized form of violence.

<sup>2</sup> A poem I wrote while studying in South Africa, reflecting upon the haunting unconscious domain of my white privilege and the feeling of my mere presence as always presupposing an alternative "way", a spatial emptying and blinding of what lay in front of me. My whiteness serves as a mirroring effect to some racial "Other", an accusatory perception. It does not matter whether or not I am articulating or disagreeing with my positionality as a white man, my own body feels like a mechanism of violence, because of the historical meaning and polar division imbued within racial dichotomies. I chose a repetitive assertion of "I", because I am a totalizing force through my whiteness, not just skin color, but structural advantage. I feel like everything and everyone at once.

**Note to the reader:**

**Chapter 1** (*A discussion surrounding the historical production, context, (dis)continuity, and erasure underlying the politics of race and indigeneity in Hangberg*).

**Historical Presence of Hangberg**

I was listening to Louis, Rastafarian and part-time fisherman, as he vocalized his psychological pain and militant spirit around the construction of a Khoi, colored self. The Khoi are a people indigenous to South Africa. In conversation about the people of Hangberg's historical perspective, I raised the troubling question in response to his reading of silence as a representation of the people of Hangberg's muted voice in writing and responding to histories of South Africa. I asked, "What are you really being taught, how is education molding who you are?"

Louis responded indignantly, "Bullshit...Jan van Riebeeck came here in 1652...bullshit! We lived before the Dutch invaded our territory and claimed our lives." Jan van Riebeeck was one of the main administrative figures facilitating a Dutch colony in South Africa. Louis historicizes the coercive forces, political, social, and historical that situate him in Hangberg. Importantly, Louis speaks directly to the history of Apartheid and colonialism, provoking an invisible "you" as to bring the contingencies of his and the people of Hangberg's history, out of the shadows and into doubt. Through Louis' interpellation of repressive historical agents, the word "keep" questions the possibility of an expectation that the people of Hangberg will be deferential while they struggle within the constricting confines of white domination and exploitation. Invented caricatures surrounding Louis persist in contemporary Hangberg such as

Sara Baartman's captive "Hottentot" Other<sup>3</sup> and the "predestined" colored gangster.<sup>4</sup> Louis' critique of Jan van Riebeeck's ghostly control of Hangberg relates to the people of Hangberg's verbal and social attempts<sup>5</sup> to identify themselves with a lineage of Khoi indigenous peoples. The myth that Khoi people only enter history as "loyal servants," "savage non-humans," and subordinate subjects contributes to the Apartheid ideology.

One byproduct of Apartheid as a system of governance is that it fostered hostilities and antagonism between people of color in order to prevent any solidarity and collective mobilization. Thus, white domination not only had an instrumental role in expropriating people of color from their homes and committing violence against their communities, but also engineered tensions between black and colored communities. Louis' next statement provides anecdotal evidence that tensions dividing black and colored people have not changed. Black and colored were made to be distinctive racial categories based purely upon shades of skin. "Black" was homogenized as ethnicities such as the Xhosa and Zulu, so-called "Bantustan"<sup>6</sup> peoples who migrated to South Africa before colonization, but are not indigenous to South Africa, and who have darker skin. "Colored" was homogenized as the Khoi and San, both of whom are indigenous to South Africa, former Malay slaves from Asia, and other groups from Asia and Africa imported for slave labor, generalizing people who had a lighter tone of skin and

---

<sup>3</sup> "Hottentot" is a pejorative, colonial characterization of Khoi people. Sara Baartman, "Hottentot Venus" being her name for entertainment, was shipped to Europe, fetishized for her body. She was exhibited in a cage, representing how she was reduced to not only an object of entertainment for Europeans, but transfigured into an "animal". Sara Baartman's humanity was completely stripped, shamed publicly in shows where she was forced to appease her colonizer.

<sup>4</sup> The gangster figure is a stereotypical association with colored people, especially a male characterization. A colored man is "born" into violence.

<sup>5</sup> There is a person in the community who runs a Khoi language workshop, trying to disseminate its usage more within the community. By verbal, I mean that in 2010 when the police invaded the community, the people of Hangberg said the battle was over identity, identifying with the Khoi rather than subscribing to Apartheid's "colored" racial classification.

<sup>6</sup> A demeaning term invented by white people and used to delegitimize black people of any claim to land in South Africa.

potentially were of “mixed descent.”<sup>7</sup> Louis explains, “See over in Khayelitsha<sup>8</sup> there are taxis operated by black people and they will shout and get angry at colored people over territory, but here in Hout Bay colored people will make the same abusive comments at black people. That is the system, to get races against each other.” Proclaiming the presence of racialized space, Louis challenges the fiction of Apartheid’s end to segregation. Hout Bay embodies the persistence of Apartheid’s aftermath.

Hout Bay is a valley on the other side of Table Mountain and Cape Town, a region bordered by a wall of mountains opening out of a fjord into the Atlantic. Originally Hout Bay was an area only inhabited by Khoi people, but then the Dutch charted the seas beginning in 1652 around Hout Bay, using the area as an imperial outpost and “inexhaustible” source of timber. The Dutch East India Company left a cultural and ecological wasteland in their wake. The emergence of the modern South African nation-state and the Apartheid regime established further land divides along racial lines. Khoi people got pushed out of Hout Bay and white people mostly occupy Hout Bay nowadays.

After Dutch and British colonization and before Apartheid, much of Hout Bay was occupied by colored people, but Apartheid’s forced removals and zonings resulted in pushing colored people to Hangberg. Kevin, a colored man and community lobbyist, told me, pointing over across Hout Bay, “I used to live over there.” Louis informed me of the haunting reoccurrence of dispossession under Apartheid. He said, “There is a common account during Apartheid, a white man with a white paper came to a colored man’s door and the family said

---

<sup>7</sup> I put “mixed descent” in quotations, not to devalue, for example, the rape of Khoi woman by white colonialists, but rather to expose that horrific eugenics project of colonialism, while recognizing that “colored” also functioned as a fiction of mixed descent, because in actuality Malay and Khoi people have lighter skin than the Xhosa, for example.

<sup>8</sup> A black township in the margins of Cape Town’s metropolitan area.



“no, it is my land.” The bulldozer came, the chicken and sheep were frantically running, and they destroyed everything and the family had to take what they could in the process.” Speaking to the ramifications of removal, Louis angry and confused, rhetorically asked, “How can the black post-Apartheid government give us no land claim money? Hout bay was taken.” The words taken and stolen resonate within everyday conversation in Hangberg.

After Apartheid, there were virtually no indemnities given to colored people in Hout Bay. Hangberg was materially and spatially stuck with Apartheid’s consequences. When Louis says black government, the ANC, won’t give the community any monetary reparation, he is referencing the decision in the early 1990’s to allocate land on the other side of Hout Bay for a black township called ImaZamo Yethu. Louis is not bitter about ImaZamo Yethu necessarily attracting more resources and awareness, but his comment reflects the fact that white people from Western countries or within African countries, such as Zimbabwe under Mugabe,<sup>9</sup> penetrated and are penetrating Hout Bay after the transitional time of 1994. ImaZamo Yethu is the only black community in Hout Bay. Hangberg is the only colored community in Hout Bay. Through Louis discussing ImaZamo Yethu, he is talking about that specific project, but also how a larger policy of reconstruction is a lie. Excepting ImaZamo Yethu and Hangberg, white people own the rest of Hout Bay. Hangberg, neglected, is marked as unable to participate in the human and material growth of Hout Bay. Excluding Hangberg from discussions of reconstruction and social change perpetuates the “doubtful” (Reddy 2001: 68) category held by assumptions of “coloredness” lying in a non-descript zone between whiteness and blackness. Louis and Kevin are weary of a racial focus in projects of reconstruction, because since Apartheid that racial focus has left unanswered the question of why colored people in Hout Bay continue to be sequestered

---

<sup>9</sup> The expropriation of white-owned land under Mugabe’s administration.

and detached from political engagements and problems that are impacting Hangberg's continual struggle for recognition.

In contemporary Hout Bay, spaces such as the harbor often reflect the white communities in Hout Bay. I am going to complicate that simplification in my chapter on fishing in Hangberg and at the harbor. Louis elaborates on the space of the harbor and the instrumental power Riebeeck's insertion of white privilege has upon the land. He says, "Our people can't go in the harbor. I am a Rasta man, I like to do business, sell fruit, vegetables, hustling business. All those people selling arts and crafts belong to white people. There are no black people owning businesses there. They use the face of a black man, and not even so called colored people working there. If we want a space there, we have to go to Public Works,<sup>10</sup> but we never get to the right person." Despite the fact that the South African constitution professes an equal right to land, colonialism and Apartheid still restrain certain mobilities people from Hangberg may have or act upon. The continuities from the past for the people of Hangberg stretch back before any European presence, but that historical break where their lives were encroached upon by white people and institutions has a particularly sharp beginning with the Dutch's colonial settlement in South Africa.

---

<sup>10</sup> A Ministry and Departmental branch of the provincial and federal government. Public Works also stands for "Public Works Programme", which was a project initiated through the Minister of Public Works where "Public works form a key component of the current social protection framework in South Africa, constituting the only form of social support for the able-bodied working age population. Public works programmes are centrally placed in the conceptualisation of social policy space and ascribed considerable potential in terms of addressing the central challenges of unemployment and poverty." (<https://www.saldru.uct.ac.za/projects/completed-projects/evaluation-of-public-works-programme>)

## **Dutch Colonization, White Master**

Seeking to “discover” territory, the Dutch East India Company, Holland’s mobile empire and commercial enterprise, settled in South Africa in 1652. According to narratives of “discovery” in South Africa, the Dutch explored a landscape “without” people. Michel-Rolph Trouillot elaborates on how the myth of “nothingness” attributed to African “territory” functions as an active mechanism of exclusion. Language becomes a form of exercising power in the sense of representing an imagined Dutch “frontier”, while diminishing the humanity of Khoi and other indigenous peoples. He writes,

Terminologies demarcate a field, politically and epistemologically. Names set up a field of power. “Discovery” and analogous terms ensure that by just mentioning the event one enters a predetermined lexical field of clichés and predictable categories that foreclose a redefinition of the political and intellectual stakes. Europe becomes the center of “what happened.” Whatever else may have happened *to* other peoples in that process is already reduced to a natural fact: they were discovered. (Trouillot 1995: 15)

The only place for a “discovered” Khoi person was within a colonial perversion of their lived reality. For example, colonialist Johan Nieuhof, writing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, describes Khoi bodies in the following way, “The sex organs of men are large. Yet, they have, it is said, one testicle only...It is said that by this cutting off of the right testicle they are made more agile and better runners. The women have long breasts, especially the married ones: these they have hanging loose and uncovered, and from them give suck to the child hanging on their back” (Hendricks 2001: 33). Nieuhof projects his own insecurities upon the Khoi people. Importantly though, that imagination cements the idea of “Hottentot” as a strange encounter, an “unexpected” terrain in the process of colonial intervention. Nieuhof’s representation was a driving force for colonial intervention, but also revealed how the Khoi came to be known among colonialists as an “abnormality” to their machinations. Nieuhof’s animal imagery of Khoi people is indicative of the way the Dutch and British justified their forceful frontier tactics. Both European empires

created a system of representation where the Khoi were dehumanized, framed in “need” of conversion and “righteousness,” and used as labor reserves, all tactics of the West.

Colonial discourse that rationalized Khoi people as subjects of chattel slavery or in need of a “moral corrective,”<sup>11</sup> do not form a fixed Past, but retain a presence in the contemporary lives of people in Hangberg. I capitalize past, because one must acknowledge how Hangberg is layered by colonial rule, and not encapsulate Khoi colonial history as a time when South Africa was under colonial rule. For example, Louis expressed to me, “The indigenous people are oppressed here, still a dumping ground, but the foreigners (European, English) stay in Hout Bay and private estates continue to be raised with more importance. The government does not want to build homes for indigenous people.” Louis brings the colonial narratives’ distance back into the lives of people in Hout Bay. Hangberg is marooned within Hout Bay by the media and the state as a “scary” place, their discourse laced with racist predispositions surrounding the colored people of Hangberg. Now, the community is subject to homogenization by white social and political forces that emphasize development, privatization, and landscape “preservation.” Meanwhile, Hangberg is constituted as a “threat,” no matter what the people in the community say or do.

A right to belong for the people of Hangberg comes out of a feeling that land had cultural significance before the Dutch incorporated the Khoi into their logic of annexation. The Dutch engaged in a symbolic imperialism, taking away the physical land, and in the process, compromising the Khoi’s cultural practices and value systems formed in relation with the land. Louis expressed that alienation when he said, “we’ve been made strangers in our own home.” He traces a long history of conflict over land that was exacerbated when Europeans came. Land

---

<sup>11</sup> Religion, especially Protestantism, was an instrument for disciplining Khoi subjectivity into serving colonial demands.

became a contentious question when the Khoi people were displaced of any connection to it. The Khoi were overpowered by colonial arms, enslaved as a peasantry, and commanded to brandish weapons against other indigenous groups along the enterprising “frontier.” One way the Dutch quelled Khoi resistance was to tear families apart, keeping the young men as slave workers, making them property through their childhood and young adulthood. The women were used as both sexual objects in spectacles for white male predators, and victims of rape and procreation. The Dutch instituted a de facto inquisition on the Khoi body. The body became a symbol for the Khoi losing control of their bodies and their land.

The terror perpetrated upon the Khoi was euphemistically described by colonialists as “domesticating animals.” Since the Khoi were rendered as “animals”, they were seen as “unfit” for governing themselves. Mbembe importantly observes that colonialism objectified the indigenous African body, making people such as the Khoi objects of scientific and social experimentation. He writes, referencing the colonized, that

He/she belonged to the *sphere of objects*. They could be destroyed, as one may kill an animal, cut it up, cook it, and, if need be, eat it. It is in this respect that, in the colony, the body of the colonized was, in its profanity, assimilated to all other things. For, being simply a “body-thing,” the colonized was neither substratum nor the affirmation of any spirit. As for his/her death, it mattered little if this occurred by suicide, resulted from murder, or was inflicted by power; it had no connection whatever with any work that he/she had performed for the universal. His or her corpse remained on the ground in unshakeable rigidity, a material mass and mere inert object, consigned to the role of that which is nothing. (Mbembe 2001: 27)

“Khoiness” was reproduced by the Dutch as an example of Otherness. The Dutch constructed difference according to Western ways of knowing and understanding a Khoi world, a place that had not always belonged to the Dutch. I include Mbembe’s discussion of colonial patterns of perception, because the only right to land for Khoi people was contextualized within conditions of servitude. As Brent, an indigenous activist from Hangberg, told me, “If you do not get up in

the morning and work for the slave master, you are screwed, because nobody will give you anything.” The only existence for Khoi and the people of Hangberg, whether under Dutch rule or contemporary forms of governance, is a government that ignores their demand for freedom and agency.

### **British Imperialism, White Savior Complex**

Expressing discontent with housing provisions dispensed by the government, Brent said, “Now they are building homes. Four children, two parents in a one bedroom flat. This is supposed to be a lounge, not a bedroom. What choice do we have, the government says you are not important because you do not have money and therefore we decide what happens to you. These are rental units we live in. I do not pay rent, I live for free. I do not believe in paying rent to a foreigner. I say, you can take my structure, but what I care about is the ground I am standing on.” Brent’s anger over the “care for the poor” rhetoric is not just an emergent discourse coming out of the transition into a “democratic” South Africa, but aligns with the arrival of the British in South Africa during the early nineteenth century. Missionary groups, primarily the London Missionary Society circa 1795, presented themselves as “refuges” for a repressed and “lost” Khoi people. Isolating and “caging”<sup>12</sup> a Khoi religious belief system was a target of colonial assimilation. The Khoi were polytheistic, believing in a multiplicity of spirits whereas the British introduced a monotheistic belief system that was woven with the material world of capitalism. For example, Johannes Kicherer, a British missionary, writes in his early 19<sup>th</sup>-century account, “Many of these wild Hottentots live by plunder and murder, and are guilty of the most horrid and atrocious actions” (Kicherer 1804: 8). Only with the “grace” of Kicherer

---

<sup>12</sup> To invoke ideas of Khoi as “animals in a zoo” again. Also, the idea of inculcating the association of “lowly” religion in Khoi peoples’ conscience.

can Khoi people become “distinguished trophies of his almighty grace” (Kicherer 1804: 9).

Kicherer and British Protestants imposed a simple opposition between European colonial settlement and Khoi people, legitimizing the idea that the Khoi needed their humanity “restored.”

Moral “enlightenment,” a mode of colonization contrasting with Dutch brutality, remains an insidious mode of “civilizing” the “primitive other” through “hierarchies of credible”<sup>13</sup> (Stoler 1992: 153) religion and cultural narratives. Jean and John Comaroff further explain the contradiction between a liberalist philosophy of missionaries and what destruction and subjugation they enforced in practice. They argue,

While the mission spoke of itself and its intentions in the language of Christian conversion, its practice proclaimed something else. Motivated, silent and unseen, by the very situation of the evangelists (or Protestants in the case of what I am discussing) in the European scheme of things, this narrative told of the reconstruction of a living culture by the infusion of alien signs and commodities into every domain of Tswana [Khoi in the case of my ethnography] life. (Comaroff and Comaroff 199: 36)

The missionaries’ ideological apparatus served as a technique of acculturation by re-educating and re-socializing an “unfaithful, uncultured” population. Missionaries depended upon the colonial industrial economy and provisions and protections from the colonial government.

Along with religious proselytizers, they were also a functional part of more broadly substantiating colonial presence in South Africa. Paralleling God’s purported “rescue” of Khoi people, they followed a similar rhetoric of “welcoming” and “protecting” Khoi communities.

Colonial Britain may have adopted a legal framework to try and give the Khoi autonomy and protection from Dutch encroachment and enslavement, but that legal framework left out most material provisions, such as land, apparently stated in these legal revisions to the Dutch’s forms of law. In other words, colonial Britain made legal rights interchangeable with tangible

---

<sup>13</sup> A structuring derivation of “origin” and “truth”; in other words, a way of controlling where validation comes from.

Khoi land claims. Redistribution never happened, and the British remained managers of Khoi access to land. In 1828, Ordinance No. 50 was passed by the British colonial government to provide legal rights to the Khoi and to undo the cruelties of the vagrancy law sanctioned by British colonial governors in 1809. The 1809 law mandated the policing of a pass, a form of identification providing “essential” proof of “Khoiness.”<sup>14</sup> Along with the pass, the law required the Khoi to be sedentary. Immobile, the Khoi body was made to comply with British comportment. The vagrancy law was a latent institutionalization of slavery, of controlling the Khoi body and labeling Khoi people, as the property of white owners. Any attempt the Khoi made to unbrand their bodies from being signified as commodities, was considered deviant and criminalized. Paradoxically, in 1834, after a putative emancipation of Khoi people from colonial law, another vagrancy law was ratified. The pass was enforced again. The British utilized forms of paternalistic law that operated on a dual legal system. Khoi people had no legal resource because their legal representation was one still prioritized by the British. Paternalism obscured as some “legal promise” intensified early on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Unification of South African Colonies, “White Native”**

In 1913, the Parliament of South Africa<sup>15</sup> passed the Native Land Act, forming one of the foundations of Apartheid rule and the emergence of a modern nation-state, a law predicated on an imagined community of South Africans mediated by white power. Allocating 7-13 percent of land within national boundaries to people of color, the Native Land Act created a mythical language around the idea of “reserves.” The law “entitled” people of color to a “homeland,” an

---

<sup>14</sup> The pass, in essence, performed “Khoiness” for Khoi people.

<sup>15</sup> Legislative body created by the Union of South Africa, which was an executive body constituted by the act of consolidating Britain’s territories in South Africa in 1910.



oblique way of declaring a racist agenda and what would become a concentration camp for surplus labor in industries, especially mining and farming. Inserting “home” into property rights discourse, a space associated with ideas of refuge and kinship, became a mirage from which the white population could extract labor and wreak privation upon people of color. The legislation was a foreshadowing consequence of the “Bantulands” under Apartheid, a place fabricated in white people’s imagination, constructed in order to warehouse all black people within a specific region of the country.

Colored people were lumped into the manufacture of a white “homeland” in the Cape Province, and even more so in Cape Town, before Apartheid, a “home” that was shared with an emerging white elite that treated colored people as their shadow. A “homeland” to the Khoi became construed by colonialists as “vanished.” To vanish meant to be lumped into history under the white protagonist’s history. Leonard Thompson, a historian of South Africa, writes about the time before Apartheid was established and how colored-white relations played out in the Cape Province. He writes,

After the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, discrimination against people of color increased in the Northern provinces, and extended to the Cape Province in the form of official regulations and administrative actions that made it difficult for colored people to compete with whites in public service as well as private industry. The large colored underclasses, including illiterate,<sup>16</sup> poorly paid farm laborers, had exceptionally high rates of illegitimacy,<sup>17</sup> crime, and alcoholism, and many shared white fears and prejudices about Africans. (Thompson 1990: 171)

Thompson ignores the structural factors of colonialism that presented no alternative to colored peoples other than a public and political belief in white power. Also, the vices “illegitimacy, crime, and alcoholism,” while not even explained by Thompson, imply an inherent, essentialized idea of colored “culture,” or what was often perceived to be a “colored problem.”

---

<sup>16</sup> I would add, often only according to the standards of colonial languages, Afrikaans and English

<sup>17</sup> There is no reference to what this illegitimacy is, framed as in relation to colored people.

Such problems are not instances of immoral behavior, but complicated products of the despair and ruination the colonial forces left colored peoples with. One must conceive of colonial residue as an active social and historical process shaping the lives of colored people in contemporary contexts, not a retrospective image of the ruin and its monument to the past, because “to think with ruins of empire is to emphasize less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations, neglect, and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present” (Stoler 2013: 11). Stigmas such as criminality attached to people of color resonate with Hangberg today, as colonial ideas surrounding the token Khoi “savage” or “colored recklessness” resurface. For example, Brent explained to me that the head of the Democratic Alliance, Helen Zille, governor of the Western Cape province, uses the media to distort the community’s story. Zille uses the media to blame the people of Hangberg for things they did, like build homes, deflecting her own accountability in not providing a fundamental need for people in Hangberg. He highlighted, “Zille said they [structures above the “fire break”] must be ‘decent’ structures.<sup>18</sup> Tourism is a problem for them,<sup>19</sup> because people steal things from tourists. People steal because they suffer, not because of drug addiction.” Returning to Stoler’s ideas of “uneven temporal sedimentations in which imperial formations leave their marks” (Stoler 2013: 2), referencing colonialism and racial segregation, Zille’s words and prejudiced associations of theft, reproduce the ideological work of a racial and colonial state that situated the Khoi and colored in marginal positions.

Conditions of marginality were progressively more pronounced by the passage of the Native Lands Act in 1913 and forms of white nationalism that used the rhetoric of white as

---

<sup>18</sup> Relating the incident in September of 2010 when nearly the whole metro police, or as one of the members of the community told me, “her personal defense force”, invaded Hangberg on the order to tear down structures that were built past the fire break, a regulated border, constraining the community’s growth.

<sup>19</sup> Government

“native” and white as “desperate” in South Africa. “Indigeneity” and “despair” enabled a false language of “necessity” for basic resources and “reclamation” of land for white people. The contradiction of owning land, yet being desperate was covered up by white people using ownership and political power to appropriate actual forms of economic hardship among people of color. Then white people could pretend to speak from a position of people of color. “South Africa” symbolizes white dominance, an association excluding any collective, national visions of black and colored people. Before the Dutch and British there was no South Africa, no national economy and grid-work of territories. Instituting a Union of South Africa under British governance, and then a Republic of South Africa under an Afrikaner regime, was a form of statecraft used to solidify white privilege. Any formation of a South African state has represented a consolidation of white power until 1994, which arguably could be explained through crony capitalism, a manifestation of whiteness though controlled under a black government. The notion of policing territory and identity systematically and through political structures emerged through colonial politics and capitalist modes of economic production. The groundwork set by colonialism was then complicated and entrenched through an insistence on not only Western cultural patterns, but also on white as a contradiction, a “supreme” yet “deprived” citizen within evolving questions surrounding national identity. Through the initiation of Apartheid, whiteness was no longer an ideal, but a way to manage people of color’s lives.

### **Apartheid, Performance of White Power**

During Apartheid, legal practice did not just disable people of color’s political voice and legitimacy, but also functioned as an amorphous force, panoptic and performative, disrupting

spaces where dissent could happen by starkly dividing communities based on race. Spuriously, at any time, black and colored communities could be displaced and manipulated. Uprooting people was “protected” under the law, but dispossession did always act in accordance with the law. Part of the law was to enforce dispossession even through transgressions of that very legislation. Segregation was legalized, but violated time after time, in order to give white people an absolute right to dispossess people of color by any means. The Apartheid state purposefully left ambiguities when upholding the law in order to increase their latitude of power. The state left an open-ended juridical framework in order to adapt to any unexpected movements of resistance. It was not only the government that attempted to quell resistance to Apartheid. A white person had the authority to publicly police people of color; any action committed by white citizens, ranging from reactionary to methodical,<sup>20</sup> was defended by the law. Brent, speaking to my position under Apartheid, said, “You could do a citizen’s arrest, and they would believe you, because your skin color was the appropriate color.” Believability was entirely conditioned by white supremacy; therefore any white person could completely distort a story revolving around some arrest, and the question of “truth” or fiction was always lost in the “inscrutable” fact of who one was, a question reductively answered by skin color. Whiteness was the only reasonable argument, so people of color were presupposed to be against the status quo no matter the circumstances of a particular clash between races, whether it be with a white citizen or the South African Defense Force, the National Party’s personal army.

Apartheid law also established a contrast between white people and the space occupied by a person of color, instituting mandates such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Population Registration Act of 1950. The Group Areas Act and Population Registration Act

---

<sup>20</sup> No matter if a white person engaged in a spontaneous assault on people of color, or planned a targeted assault on people of color, their actions were tenable under the laws of Apartheid.

were two pieces of legislation especially impactful in the colored community in and around Cape Town. The Group Areas Act, a law amended and furthered in 1957 and 1966, was integral in forced removals and isolating “racially-distinct” communities, such as District Six,<sup>21</sup> a previously colored community designated as a “white-only” area. In Hout Bay the series of laws “left only two percent of residential land for coloreds and ninety-eight percent for the occupation by whites” (Saff 1998: 109). When Louis remarked to me that Hout Bay was taken from the people of Hangberg, the Group Areas Act is a current vehicle for Hangberg’s current confrontation with dispossession.

The Group Areas Act initiated the consolidation of colored people in Hout Bay, but the Population Registration Act of 1950 instituted an imposed “coloredness” and “blackness” where colored and black people’s self-worth was put in question as they tried to live out their lives. The act established a predetermined life dictated by bureaucratic process and an identification card. The passbook, which was detailed and personalized, not only excluded its holder from certain places, but additionally served as an instrument of entitlement for whites and self-hatred among people of color. People of color were subjected to constant self-surveillance. Thiven Reddy elaborates upon the Population Registration Act, writing,

The state identified each person in this register with the following information – racial/ethnic classification, name, sex, age, address, marital status – and entered this information in the register which was verified by an identity card containing the person’s recent photograph, identity number and fingerprints. Minister of the Interior Dr. T.E. Donges, who initiated the Bill, described the basic principle behind a population register. He saw it as a somewhat grand dictionary of state containing the life-story of every individual [...] All those important facts regarding the life of every individual will be combined in this book and recorded under the name of a specific person, who can never change his identity. It is only when the last page in that book of life is written by an

---

<sup>21</sup> District Six in Cape Town which has become an imperial ruin, a place where “colored” people lived and today, remains “a desolate plane of hollow cries”, as one of my South African friends described. When I was in Cape Town, it felt as though the ruination Apartheid was in action. When I took the shuttle through District Six to go to Hangberg, the horrors of Apartheid were visibly leftover, a presence fixed within a fossilized nightmare and past.

entry recording the death of such a person that the book is closed and taken out of the gallery of the living and placed in the gallery of the dead. (Reddy 2001: 74)

Furthering Donges' explanation, the Population Registration Act indicated how the Apartheid state codified the fiction that whites "lacked" rights to land and access to resources. The legislation reduced people of color to disposable documents in order to blur the contradiction that documentation was not just a crude form of bureaucracy, but a method of preserving white power by presenting the illusion of people of color's enfranchisement. Colored people were manufactured as complications within the classificatory system of Apartheid. They were positioned in proximity to white people, but still subordinate to a whitewashing of their lives. Colored people were fashioned as an "enemy" to blackness by giving colored people more opportunity and favors under Apartheid.

### **"Biopolitics" of Race, Colored Identity in a Manichean World of 'White-Black'**

"Whitie!" My white gaze attracted looks and fleeting hollers. Walking through the community, the children stopped riding their bikes, celebrating being done with school, and observed my movements as I had no idea where I was going. Any sense of direction was completely discombobulated. I selfishly thought to myself, "For once my whiteness is visible." Then I realized I was only asserting my white privilege by changing my recognition from an individual to a white man. Acknowledging my positionality was irrelevant to the situation, because as I began to walk from the bus platform, I felt invasive, controlling the childrens' conversations as I penetrated the flow of sidewalk traffic. Attention was focused on my presence. My feelings of estrangement were the opposite of how some people in the community viewed and responded to my presence. I learned by talking with a group of Rastafarians that I was perceived as "ignorant, a person who will come and acquire, a land surveyor, government

agent, or a media reporter.” My whiteness, whether I was critical or uncritical of it, became an association of glamorizing their poverty in pursuit of a self-congratulatory fantasy, dreaming of “privation”. I was a painful history parading through their space. I was an image of the past, present, and future that continues to disregard their everyday struggle. White, not Killian, I brought in power structures that subjected them to violence and abandonment. At the same time, I symbolized a certainty and stability that the people could never experience. Louis reminded me of my symbolic place, “White foreigners are staying in our community, as though we have an extra place for someone able to live anywhere they please.” I am white, and that is not a constructed notion, but a given freedom to unconsciously impose my body, vision, and knowledge upon the community of Hangberg.

---

The ambiguous standing of “coloredness” not “African” or not of colonial descent, denounced colored people to a racial borderland, a liminal zone always caught between white and black communities. Zimitri Erasmus provides a personal reflection on her experience as a colored person, writing,

For me, growing up coloured meant knowing that I was *not only* not white, but *less than white*; *not only* not black, but *better than black* (as we referred to African people). The humiliation of being ‘less than white’ made being ‘better than black’ a very fragile position to occupy. The pressure to be respectable and to avoid shame created much anxiety. (Erasmus 2001: 13)

Apartheid imposed a hybrid racial identity on colored people, a confusing, in flux category fixed against both white and black people. The racial classification of “colored” placed colored people in a “role play” where they functioned as secondary to white people, and yet mattered more than black lives. There was no one racial casting for colored people, therefore constantly restricting how a colored person could interact and open the boundaries of inclusion within a

racial dichotomy of white and black peoples. White rule manipulated “coloredness” such that a colored person could only ever obey what it meant to be white, never able to engage in legitimizing what whiteness is and means for colored people. The inescapable otherness mirroring white people empowered colored people over black people. For example, through the Colored Labor Preference Policy of 1955, a colored person entered the employment pool with more privilege than a black person.

During Apartheid and contemporarily, colored people were made into and still function as a neglected element in dominant discussions surrounding the socio-economic and political divides between white and black peoples. According to Thiven Reddy, being colored,

Functions as both the extreme Other of dominant racial discourse in South Africa, and also as its very ambivalent core. Without it the remaining discursive categories, ‘white’ and even ‘aboriginal native’ and ‘Indian’ categories, lose their central grounding. In a rigidly, hierarchically structured racial classificatory system, there will and must be a category for the ‘unclassifiable’ – the Other – which resists the discourse but also functions to give the classificatory system its very meaning. (Reddy 2001: 68)

The idea of a “colored Other” rests on a dualism. Other confers white dominance in the case of perpetuating racialized difference, and secondly, Other is radically different from whiteness, subscribed to the “savage slot” (Trouillot 2003: 75). To fall within the category of “colored” is to “irrefutably” affirm white supremacy and “intrinsically” degrade oneself for the “greater” social experimentation of becoming “white.” Historically, colored people have been deluded into thinking any transformation undertaken in South Africa empowers black people at the expense of themselves. The notion of “care” concerning colored people never materializes, but rather creates an illusion and fleeting belief that help and recognition for colored people will eventually come. Sister Beadie, a member of the community and outspoken voice on the lack of Hangberg’s political representation in projects of “improvement,” breaks down how white politicians infiltrated and still intervene upon perceptions of blackness in order to get a vote from



colored people and disparage black people. One person during the activist film *Uprising of Hangberg* exclaims, “My people were indoctrinated to believe that the black man is the Devil, a terrorist, and spoils the land” (Valley and Kaganof).

Sister Beadie cites an example of how white developers and political representatives co-opt the racial consciousness of colored people, all in order to serve their needs and disregard any black and colored people’s struggle integral to allowing white people’s satisfaction,

In the past, the first reelections after Apartheid, this ward was ANC. We still have that Apartheid sense where white is right and black is wrong. When it became an ANC ward, only the top of the party provided homes for their family and friends. Problems about land distribution changed political hands into the DA [Democratic Alliance]<sup>22</sup> and it became their ward. Regardless if you come, or if ANC comes, they [the people in Hangberg] will see ANC and turn away. To get their trust back, it is very difficult. DA gave parcels of the land valued at R1,200.<sup>23</sup> They came and gave us food. The mindset is you can give me bread today, you do not have to give me anything tomorrow. There is a fear when identifying as Khoi or San that they [people in Hangberg] have to be with the blacks. They would rather be with the wannabee whites. The realization is the problem, we were brought up that whites gave us food, a job, etc.

The shifting political power from ANC cronyism to a resurgence of the National Party with the Democratic Alliance, equally responsible for corruption, cloak their hypocrisy under the language of a “giver.” Sister Beadie reveals how the production of fear within Hangberg is still predicated on white supremacy. In actuality that fear revolves around a desire to be independent from the politics of racial identity and reinforces the ability for a white state apparatus to be invisible, concealed under the very fear of blackness that is projected and twisted by white officials. Brent complicated Beadie’s generalization about Khoi and San always subscribing to racial identifiers, informing me, “The system established our ‘coloredness,’ but contorting us into some racial scheme does not mean returning to race by reclaiming our Khoi selves.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ruling party in the Western Cape.

<sup>23</sup> R1,200, the equivalent of \$100 in America, is financially unattainable for the people of Hangberg when they are only given R300 every couple months as some welfare stipend. Many are self-employed, often selling drugs or fishing in treacherous waters, and generally that correlates with an unpredictable economic means.

Identifying as Khoi is about exposing the made-up fears, not depending on them.” Brent emphasizes that identifying as Khoi carries the weight of rethinking historical narratives, representing “the unthinkable...that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the questions were phrased” (Trouillot 1995: 82). There is not just an aspiration to move forward purely as Khoi, because people in the community realize how Khoi people have been circumscribed out of history. A part of reclamation is disrupting discursive categories naturalizing race and indigeneity by enacting the historical silencing, complicating the “formulas of banalization” (Trouillot 1995: 96) that construct histories inclusive of Khoi and colored people, but without their agency in the legitimation of history.

### **Demystifying and Decoding Hegemonic “History,” Historical Discourse, and Representational Narratives**

“We are being taught to forget our own history,” lamented Leo, a resident of Hangberg and an Apartheid freedom fighter in his sixties. Leo said with rage, “I was taught under Apartheid to deny the color of my skin and the indigenous ancestry of my blood and belonging. Now my children are being taught the same thing, the capitalist, white man’s narrative.” His words and memory began to fade, his focus receding from our conversation. He dropped his shoulders and gave me a confused look. Fighting to remember, he found it hard to articulate a torment so acute and distant. Leo places himself in a history expecting his passivity, though he participated in that history through his freedom fighting. His memory acts dialectically as voice and silence, recognition and pain. He did not hesitate to unveil his psychic distress and speak truth to power imbalances, but his indignation was overshadowed by a Western, colonial

tradition of historical discourse that alienates his frustrations. What he shared with me continues to go nowhere, to have no grounding in debates around “official” historical knowledge. He muttered hopelessly as he left the room, “I am not sure what direction to take next.” Not only are the community of Hangberg’s attempts to provide an unwritten history, from their perspective, suppressed by the state, but the youth within the community are subject to an educational environment that tries to assert and assimilate a white “corrective” into students’ self-awareness and historical understanding. A self-determined, critical relation to the past goes against the school system’s curricula.

James Baldwin provides a parallel perspective to the thought and more importantly, the feeling of a repressed memory, where memory evokes powerlessness, but also remains irrevocable. The people of Hangberg’s histories can be erased, but memory endures as an element of that act of elision. Baldwin writes in *Evidence of Things Not Seen*,

I do not remember, will never remember, how I howled and screamed the first time my mother was carried away from me. My mother was the only human being in the world. The *only* human being: everyone else existed by her permission. Yet, what the memory repudiates controls the human being. What one does not remember dictates who one loves or fails to love. And memory makes its only real appearance in this life as this life is ending—appearing, at last, as a kind of guide into a condition which is far beyond memory as it is beyond imagination. It has something to do with the fact that no one wishes to be plunged, head down, into the torrent of what he does not remember and does not wish to remember. It has something to do with the fact that we all came here as candidates for the slaughter of the innocents. It has something to do with the fact that all survivors, however they accommodate or fail to remember it, bear the inexorable guilt of the survivor. It has something to do, in my own case, with having once been a Black child in a White country. My memory stammers: but my soul is a witness. (Baldwin 1985: xii-xiii)

Memory alludes to a frightening void for Leo and Baldwin, but also irrefutably a presence, a voice of continual struggle, although contained within Hangberg, where the materiality and experience of memory can complicate the silence of Leo as an actor and agent, not a victim and villain. Hangberg’s history is not a simple reflection of past horrors, but a complex negotiation

with ways in which the past influences the people of Hangberg, while the people of Hangberg resist that identification as a community “carried over” from Apartheid and colonialism. The people of Hangberg, like Leo’s resistance to misery, disrupt historical continuities, such as colonial inventions of African indigenous peoples as “respectable savages” or the legitimacy behind racial categories. Empowering the “soul as a witness,” the people of Hangberg oppose, through everyday practices that do not conform to the state’s wishes, any cruel inscription on their bodies.

Leo’s experience with memory relates to the trajectory of my historical ethnography, my commentary on historical discourse, and my recognition of my own control over analytical ideas. All collectively must form a space where Leo’s memory informs the matrix of “on-the-record” and critical discourse. I am not solely concerned with detecting characterizations of the community’s otherness, but also “practicing a search for truth which may implicate” (Depelchin 2005: 29) and equally interrogate my whiteness and Western descent. Bronwyn, a friend within the community once said honestly and explicitly to my face, “Remember you came into our community, you at best interpret what happens here, only mapping what we go through. You will never fully know what we’ve been through and continue to struggle to live through.” I am perpetuating white, colonial ownership over the making of their own history, if I do not highlight the fact that I can only mediate and construct what occurs. To emphasize history as a process of rewriting the pejorative history incorporating the people of Hangberg as racially Other and “noble savages,” one recreates power relations implicit to the colonial and Apartheid epistemologies. In other words, what becomes a liberating intention evolves into an authorization of someone else’s memory, my personal adoption of Du Bois’ double consciousness, dictating the terms in which the people of Hangberg’s voices are appropriate and

applicable. John and Jean Comaroff explain how an historical ethnography can be best complicated if one accounts not just for what does not lie within a particular narrative, but how a narrative portrays a “reality” of Hangberg and effects a certain relationship with the people of Hangberg. They write,

Improperly contextualized, the stories of ordinary people’s past stand in danger of remaining just that: stories. To become something more, these partial, “hidden histories” have to be situated in the wider worlds of power and meaning that gave them life. But those worlds were also home to other dramatis personae, other texts, other signifying practices. There is no basis to assume that the histories of the repressed, in themselves, hold a special key to revelation...the discourses of the dominant also yield vital insights into the contexts and processes of which they were part. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 17)

Hangberg does not symbolize a “lack” within history, because that mode of understanding reproduces historical knowledge that positions Khoi and colored people were always under the auspices of colonialism and Apartheid. Franz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* provides a contextual example of how an intellectual study can validate and obscure what it means to struggle as an Other, not acknowledging the implications of positioning oneself above a recognition that comes as a manifestation, not disconnected analysis.

In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon, a Martinique-born intellectual living and studying in France in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, who went on to work as a revolutionary and psychiatrist in the Algerian anti-colonial struggle, takes a pertinent stand on the issue of historical erasure and when a French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, appropriates a “source within a source,”<sup>24</sup> black voices “characteristic” of the West’s modes of history-making. Fanon responds, “I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It *is*. It is its

---

<sup>24</sup> Sartre links black voices to a Western production of history, rather than seeing any autonomous perspective among black people that is not necessarily a byproduct of white, Western intervention.

own follower” (Fanon 1967: 135). What it means to live within a struggle characterized by racial and cultural categorization goes beyond careful analysis and political alliance, and is (dis)ordered by the ruptures and continuities happening within Hangberg’s social assemblage, localized and from external sources. As an author and anthropologist, one cannot slip into only recollecting memory. One has to be critical of “what Toni Morrison argues that (re-)memory necessitates a *willed* creation, in which the ‘point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way’” (Gqola 2001: 48). Morrison’s point about willing memory relates to Hangberg because it can create a separation between that which is said to have happened to colored and Khoi people, with that which still configures colored and Khoi lives.

### **Disrupting the Archive**

De Certeau once defined the science of history as a redistribution in space, the act of changing something into something else. He warns us that our historical labours in the archives must do more than ‘simply adopt former classification,’ must break away from the constraints of ‘series H in the National Archives’ replaced with new ‘codes of representation’ and ‘systems of expectation’ of our own. But such a strategy really depends on what we think we already know. (Stoler 2002: 109)

Archival space, the grandeur of History’s infinite, “magisterial” halls, speaks from the platform of “expert” knowledge. In the case of Hangberg, the symbolic power of the literal archives of South African history and the figurative archives formulated by scholars concluded by attributing colored and Khoi voices to a white authorship. Dictating representations of Khoi and colored people serves as a performance of archival power, meaning construed in reflection to what is inscribed on Khoi and colored bodies, eliminating the actual dialogic place of Hangberg’s situatedness in South Africa’s historical imagination. Revolutionizing the archive that subordinates the people of Hangberg does not only depend on an alternative system of representation, but questions the discursive stronghold that applies a “voice-over” for colored

and Khoi perspectives. Interrogating the documentary “evidence” that realizes the historical being of Khoi and colored lives is an important disruptive process because it reconfigures the dimensions and productions behind “official sourcing”. Stoler furthers the idea that it is important to not only expose the relegated knowledge of an event, but also reconstitute the source that brought that subordinate experience into being. She writes,

If...archival production is itself both a process and a powerful technology of rule, then we need not only to brush against the archive’s received categories. We need to read for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake – *along* the archival grain. (Stoler 2002: 100)

Reading archives that empty out Khoi and colored responses and participation is not only about challenging the codification of categories such as “colored”, or protesting notions of “white indigeneity” in South Africa, but drawing out how asymmetrical power relations, (Khoi—servant to Dutch colonialist; colored man—reduced to a gangster caricature) become associative meanings grafted onto the people of Hangberg’s histories.

### **Theorizing New Approaches to the Politics of Historical Knowledge**

History can never be “written” in the sense of past tense and fulfilling a “completion.” A historical totality relies on a false apprehension of narrative and discourse, a historiographical practice consistent with, especially Western, monologic compositions of historical experience. Fact is not a translator for experience, meaning that factual accounts and experiential histories are not interchangeable. To make the two modes of historical production the same creates an Other in the process, an “us” and them,” a West and a non-West, reproducing a power structure within representations of voice and authorship. For example, Leo, in the sense of Hangberg’s historical situatedness, cannot speak for himself; rather his memory is always an “inarticulable”

difference overwhelmed by the likes of my attentive ears, or intellectual claims. Writing history is political, and a writer must challenge the notion that “the concept of historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit]” (Benjamin 1988: 261). History forms a bricolage, an entanglement of differing and similar social, cultural, economic, and political processes. Conversely, history is not an object of simple revelation and making some self-evident discovery about a particular place and people and tracing it through a linear sequencing of events.

When interrogating historical texts, one should not seek out, objectively and individually, what a particular author’s claim is, or how the author fits into a metanarrative. Instead, one should question how authors articulate themselves through a certain body of language, constructing a fiction<sup>25</sup> and invoking a specific discourse and subjectivity of the self, writer, and collective subjectivity of study. Hayden White, a critical theorist writing on the politics of historiographic practice, argues,

The more interesting question would be to ask, not What do Freud, Foucault, and so on, assert, allege, argue? but How do they establish, through the articulation of their texts, the plausibility of their discourse by referring the “meaning” of these, not to other “facts” or “events,” but rather to a complex sign system which is treated as “natural” rather than as a code specific to the praxis of a given social group, stratum, or class? This is to shift hermeneutic interest from the content of the texts being investigated to their formal properties, considered not in terms of the relatively vacuous notion of style but rather as a dynamic process of overt and covert code shifting by which a specific subjectivity is called up and established in the reader, who is supposed to entertain this representation of the world as a realistic one in virtue of its congeniality to the imaginary relationship the subject bears to his own social and cultural situation. (White 1987: 193)

---

<sup>25</sup> Fiction in the Geertzian, interpretive sense of intersecting anthropology and history, where fiction is something manufactured, not untrue. The writer’s interpretation occurs in addition to the cultural and historical subject, in my case, the people of Hangberg’s own historicizing of the past and contemporary context, their own conditions of historicity particular to their agentive social lives.



White highlights a meaningful dialogue with historical discourse by outlining how one should transform his or her interest from reiterating aspects of discourse (i.e., locating oneself within a particular discourse), and question how one positions himself and herself in relation to discourse and historical representation. Believability is an important dimension of how White talks about forms dictating content, because in Hangberg, for example, a “plausible” narrative about its history is often an untruthful, imposed narrative. One must clarify the social production integral in controlling what is believable and not, and how that qualitative process is not just an element of archiving, but raising a public history and consciousness. A history that confronts the genealogies of the people of Hangberg, and not their sole subjection to the conquest of the Dutch, British, and Apartheid in South Africa, opens history to a process of complication, not reflection. Foucault elaborates, writing,

‘Effective’ history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting (Foucault 1984: 88).

Applied to Hangberg, an apt revision of historical narratives referencing the development and contestations of colored and Khoi identity, would not form an instance of myself obsessing over isolating an understanding, but use what is known about the histories of colored and Khoi people to foster a space for critical inquiry that uses the historical knowledge made by the people of Hangberg. A conception of history as void, in which substance is a narrative of the past already written, denies the complex representations and relations formative to historical residue and lived experience. History is not property to partition, but an ever-shifting terrain of social relations, actively and politically engaging with a present time and space.

## **Empowering a Labor of Uncertainty**



Exploring the thresholds of the community's movement, Brent, his two boys, and I rest on the mountain slope that provides an ungoverned pathway back to Hangberg for abalone fishermen working right off the shore.

## **Fishing as Subsistence and Subversion**

## **Note to the Reader:**

**Chapter 2** (*A discussion of the practice and space of fishing, as both an economy of the community's making, but also a consequence of state intervention and industrial monopolies on fish*)

Brent placed a crocheted cap on his head, preparing for the surge of winds out on the harbor. Wearing the hat did not just serve a practical use, but mocked the assumption, coming from outside Hangberg, that garments of Rastafari life are purportedly signs of “hostile behavior.” The symbolic significance of Brent’s passage from outside Hangberg into the space of the harbor was marked by his insight, “You understand, my locks are a symbol of fear. You walk with me into the public life of the harbor and people from outside Hangberg will fixate on my appearance. Fear creates the divide that stratifies our community’s involvement with the harbor.” I saw the boundaries materialize, excluding Brent and the community of Hangberg. As we moved across an imagined boundary, a hyper-sterile condo complex dominated our frame of vision. Encircled by electric wire and packaged grass, the ivory tower created a world deliberately separate from, yet overseeing Hangberg. At that moment, the tower of wealth gazed upon Brent and me, making the fear-driven ideas of Hangberg all too real. Upon glance there was not a single person or aspect to the place that revealed people did in fact live there.

Directly across the street from this façade of what Brent called, “the real absence of humanity,” lay a decrepit fish processing factory spewing out a dense odor. The factory felt cold and bare, a fenced-in compound of overcrowded buildings with thin, corroding metal sheeting for structural support. In the process of walking by the factory onto the main road leading to the harbor, Brent informed me of its present importance to the community. He noted, “That factory

is the largest and almost singularly, form of official employment for the community. The government just shut the factory down.” Brent need not say any more, let alone explain how the abandonment of economic infrastructure took place. Brent went from explaining a functioning factory that served as a source of employment for the people of Hangberg, into a derelict factory that symbolized how the state excludes the people of Hangberg from work in the formal economy. The harbor came into sight as we kept walking, a desolate plane of concrete and pavement overgrown with weeds, all obstructed by a torn exoskeleton of a fence.

Brent led us through a gap in the chain link fence, and while I could generally see the water and docks, the interactions between the people, structures, fish, and water were indiscernible, because we had to traverse a vast undeveloped area of the harbor before we neared the water. As we approached a portage point, someone recognized Brent and shouted a spirited acknowledgement. Brent responded with a succinct gesture, aware that the two fishermen’s attention had to focus on maneuvering their boat in and out of the bay. The portage site was a partially submerged cement ramp that continued out of the water onto the harbor. With the portage reaching water depths of five feet around the bottom, the fishermen had trouble gaining traction in shifting the boat toward land, because their bodies rose to the surface. Additionally, the waves were choppy, making their brittle, lightweight boat more challenging to guide. Another fisherman joined the two struggling men. Unsolicited help. The fishermen’s solidarity expressed itself through their physical co-operation. The fishermen formed a profound bond against the unpredictability of both the sea and the boats they were operating. Their simple, yet constant participation provided a juxtaposition to a proximate marketplace that allures tourists to simultaneously observe, compulsively purchase and ignore the context in which “authentic” local practice came to be sold at the market.

I told Brent about my visit, weeks earlier, to the market with study abroad friends. Touching upon the political tensions fomented by the market, Brent broke down my experience as an oblivious spectator, a customer hanging out with my friends, meanwhile disregarding the specificity of whom and where a particular vendor of the market came from. When I was in the market with my friends, a critical understanding of who produced what, was general, and not situated in the community of Hangberg, for example. Brent clarified my awareness of how the market was a paradoxical place: although the people of Hangberg make their own goods and determine where they are sold, possessing this agency does not allow for sustainable way to make a living. Therefore, Brent's children may set up their own abalone shell booth at the market, but that relationship between his children and the marketplace is contingent on never changing the current economic circumstance of Brent's family. He said, "I do not go to the market. The only understanding of the community coming out of the market is one dominated by tourists' ideas of who we are. That idea, whether misrepresented or not, serves them and we are supposed to be passive." As I wondered who possessed the harbor and at what expense, we walked through the alleyway, the manufacturer's entrance to a two-story "ocean-themed" plaza.

Any specific use for the building is unclear, because the top story looks like it has not been used in thirty or forty years and the bottom is a random assortment of establishments predicated on cultural consumerism, meant to fulfill a foreigner's experience in visiting the harbor. Every business was either a restaurant, a souvenir shop, or abandoned real estate. The building was truly a vestige of a historical moment under Apartheid that tried to make the harbor a homogenously white space, but failed. The moment in time that the building was constructed, along with other infrastructure in the harbor, is receding, with faded signs, an unclear usage of space, and a generally ghostly presence.

The strange spacing, wide-open (in the case of undeveloped sections), enclosed (in the case of concentrated industrial production), and confused (in the case of the fading plaza that tries to emphasize a glorious transition to tourism that never really occurred) contrasts with the anchoring of immaculate accessories for the wealthy in Hout Bay—yachts. Docked at the furthest points away from the harbor, the yachts were like still lifes of white power. Brent and I sat on the beach for multiple hours and not a single person was out at a yacht. Brent told me, “Those boats are rarely ever used. Most of the time they sit there occupying space that could bolster the expansion of Hangberg’s fishing practices.” There is a double dismissal created by the yacht owners, a dismissal of their boat occupying a spot in the ocean, and a dismissal of the fact that a living fishing collective was preparing to return to a commanding ocean where they may or may not catch limited quotas of fish.

Suddenly Junior, Brent’s dog, distracted us from getting lost in viewing the complicated operations happening on the harbor, focusing our attention toward a European couple strolling the beach. Junior ran toward them and it was as though they became petrified. The couple momentarily stared at Brent and then turned their eyes back on Junior, an innocent dog just begging to play. Brent approached the couple and apologized, but the couple ignored Brent’s engagement and moved toward their car, terrified. Composed, but feeling slighted, Brent, in a frustrated tone said, “Let’s go back now.” The interaction with the couple was not the sole impetus for that decision; I just sensed Brent’s thorough exhaustion, emotionally and physically. Brent was not submissive. He refused to accept the couple’s construction of his social status as somehow subordinate to theirs, stating, “This is where my family loves to be, and I will not pretend to be something I’m not.” Brent’s final words resonated in the crash of waves upon the shoreline, a force whose presence one cannot forget.

### **Statecraft Out at Sea: Policing the Open Water**

Revealing the friction between industrial modes of fishing and local subsistence fishing, Bronwyn, a fisherman and bricoleur of anything that can be reassembled and repurposed, highlighted the difference between fishing for profit and fishing out of provisional need. He exclaimed, “I drop my line for a fish, or three or four if it is a school. The industrial boats, working in accordance with the government, drop an iron cage, catching whatever swims in the path.” Paradoxically, the more ecologically damaging method of mass fishing remains legitimate, and the fishermen of Hangberg practicing Bronwyn’s careful recognition of a fish’s reproducibility are profiled by state conservationists as “poachers” and falsely accused of endangering certain species. The contemporary industrial apparatus of fishing disregards how the fishermen of Hangberg interact with the sea, which includes a multiplicity of practices entrenched in a history that goes back to the establishment of colonial systems of timber razing and the white-owned fishing business controlling the harbor under Apartheid. This is a commonplace story of the political struggle of Khoi and colored people trying to make a living from fishing. Fishing not only forges an economy of living, but also represents a spiritual relationship with the sea. I say spiritual relation, because of the ancestral connection extending back to the Khoi’s first existence on the land. The Khoi formed a fishing community that spoke a language emanating from sounds of nature such as waves crashing upon the rocky shoreline. For example, the range of clicks and different tonalities to words in the Khoi dialect, get much of their inspiration from imitating the surrounding natural environment. Both the Khoi’s material and spiritual relationship with the sea is compromised by the penetration of state-endorsed fishing practices.

In an attempt to resolve the imbalance of power over fishing, beginning with the state, corporate, and industrial fishing actors and agents and trickling down to Hangberg fishermen actually living off the sea, the Marine Living Resources Act (MLRA) was passed in 1998 mimicking similar post-Apartheid rhetorics of “transformation” and “equality.” The MLRA maintained commercial forms of fishing, but tried to restructure the overlying control of white, wealthy, and industrial players by shifting some political representation into subsistence fishing operations. Although the MLRA employed such language associated with social justice and human rights campaigns, the legislation failed to recognize a political perspective coming from within Hangberg and slotted fishermen into a subordinate position within debates over legal claims to fishing. Another more locally geared revision to fishing economies excluding the presence of people from Hangberg happened in 2012, the Small-Scale Fishing (SSF) Policy.

Kimon de Greef, a conservation biology graduate student at the University of Cape Town, outlines the contingencies and constituencies of the SSF policy, writing, “A key guiding principle of the new SSF policy is to ‘adopt an integrated and holistic approach...based on human rights principles.’ This approach is underlined by a need to contribute to ‘alleviation of poverty, food security, and local socio-economic development,’ recognising the central role of small-scale fisheries in supporting coastal livelihoods” (De Greef 2013: 17). Taking a neutral stance, de Greef regurgitates the language of the policy, saying, “The policy thus has a stronger focus on social justice, linked to fulfilling imperatives embodied in South Africa’s progressive, humanistic Constitution” (De Greef 2013: 17). Counter to de Greef’s reiteration of the policy’s aspirations, Louis, outspoken Rastafarian and occasional fisherman, expressed straightforwardly to me, “We can’t open a container<sup>26</sup> on the harbor and open our own fishery.” De Greef falls

---

<sup>26</sup> Container refers to both a shelter that can be used to store fishing materials, and also a shop where fishermen can sell their seafood.



into a liberal-motivated consensus happening in South Africa among ideologues espousing a “rebirth” of the South African “nation” after Apartheid. De Greef’s proclamation is problematic and deceptive, because it is trapped in rhetoric of revisionist language and the restructuring of oppressive policies. In the case of fisherman from Hangberg, a transformation in power dynamics does not take root. In reality, that redistribution of wealth under the auspices of the law hides a quota system that ultimately translates to zonings of the sea whereby the fishermen of Hangberg are consequently further from the harbor where, in Cleo’s<sup>27</sup> words, “it is life and death out at sea.” The precarious situation out at sea is reality, not a fable in search of sympathy. Death is a constant possibility, because fishermen are dealing with boats equal to the size of boats operating in placid ponds and lakes. More generally fishermen are deprived of supplies and resources, forced to pack four people onto a boat meant for two, and have to improvise with a shortage of tools.

The vast distances covered by fishes’ migration patterns expose the limits to the already fictional rights of Hangberg fishermen: they must go out to sea for weeks at a time, separated from their families, only to return with fish for a meal or two. Brent simplified the totalitarian dimension of a quota system where privation is a result, stating, “There is a permit saying you can only catch four fish and you have a net to catch sixty.” Disparities persist where industrial boats barely leaving Hout Bay continuously make money at the expense of the fishing community of Hangberg. Although there is a fishing co-operative managed by fishermen from Hangberg, the rights are still mediated by the authority of the government. The state instills a competitive logic, leading to greed and a social hierarchy antithetical to the collectivity implied by the public role and use of the co-operative. Brent explained how the state indirectly rules the

---

<sup>27</sup> Cleo is the widow of a dead fisherman who I will discuss later in response to the reoccurring problem of disappearance.

social relations manifest in the co-operative, noting, “There are fishing industries that provide cooperatives, but only community leaders and their families have access to them. The community leaders are a bunch of thieves and they only get for their own. Only community leaders receive contracts, they do not show or teach people how to access these provisions. If you are friends then you will receive access sometimes. They are puppets to the government.” Now operating from within the co-operative, the government effectively effaces its own involvement and excuses the pitfalls of a redistributive policy that does no favors for the fishermen of Hangberg, who often get arrested, come home with virtually nothing, or forever remain at sea.

The tactic of the state is not one of integrating the fishermen of Hangberg into a safer, more reliable, more sustainable environment, but rather a scheme of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2004: 64). Accumulation by dispossession means that a group of people benefit at the expense of another. In the case of Hout Bay, industry and a comfortable consumerist class reap material gains in exchange for the lives of fishermen and a community that thrives on a deep, complex historical bond with the practice of fishing. Where the “free market” of fishing is about commodifying the fish in order to boost the divisive power of money, Hangberg and the fishermen are concerned with the productive capacity of catching fish in order to survive. David Harvey, in his piece “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” raises an international problem, Hangberg fishermen being an example, where industrial fishing companies and the operative governmental body work in tandem to turn basic resources like water into the hands of private, corporate, state-led entities. He writes,

The escalating depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water) and proliferating habitat degradations that preclude anything but capital-intensive modes of agricultural production have likewise resulted from the wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms. The commodification of cultural forms, histories and intellectual

creativity entails wholesale dispossessions. The corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets (like universities) to say nothing of the wave of privatization of water and other public utilities that has swept the world, constitute a new wave of 'enclosing the commons'. As in the past, the power of the state is frequently used to force such processes through even against the popular will. (Harvey 2004: 75)

I think Harvey is important for the conversation of Hangberg fishermen, and I do not want to decontextualize the struggle of fishermen in Hangberg, but rather reveal the ripple effect of alienating the fishermen in Hangberg as not an isolated contestation over economic and cultural production, but a systemic problem facing communities subject to broader transnational and state-dictated flows of capital investment and accumulation. The provincial government and the ANC may partition the ocean into territories of "fishable" or marketable space, but the fishermen of Hangberg weave themselves in and out of the state's mathematically calculated boundaries and cost-benefit analyses of the ocean. I do not know what parts of the sea are specifically bounded, but only the stories of Hangberg fishermen that highlight a general line of regulation along the coast and into Hout Bay.

### **Living against/within the Regulatory Gaze:**

The fishermen subvert the government's pejorative projection as "poachers" by fishing through all the imposed constraints. Fishermen from Hangberg may be denied from a formal right to the sea and harbor, but there are informal ways to catch fish that undermine the state's law enforcement. For example, fishermen hike up the backside of the community at night and during the day (see the vague visual representation in the photograph at the beginning of the chapter), with large sacks of fish and no potential to be arrested. The mountain may be federal land, but the only people walking around are from Hangberg. To the fishermen, that uncharted trail up from the sea back to the community means physically reclaiming state-owned land as an

“everyday form of resistance” (Scott 1985: 29), interconnected with modes of living and cultural production. The state’s assumption of control only drives fishermen to exploit the state’s leap of faith expecting that the fishermen will submit to the state’s policies. One afternoon I watched with Brent as fishermen came up from Seal Island<sup>28</sup> below. I asked one fisherman, “How are you?”

He replied without hesitation, “It is a beautiful day to be alive and even more liberating to walk upon this landscape.” His words spoke to his personal relationship with fishing, one that could not be stopped by the government’s claim over the sea and land route back home. Brent furthered the words of the fisherman by saying, “Fishing is an art form expressed through the craft of adapting to the shifting, one, life networks of the ocean, and two, state sovereignty over certain spaces where fishermen work.” Fishing for the people of Hangberg is about appropriating an agentive space within a hegemonic order of the sea excluding their presence, but also excluding the state’s pivotal role in shaping that construction of the sea. Conversely, fishing is not just about a material presence, but a symbolic resistance consistent with a space never fully occupied and determined by the government.

For the fishermen and the community of Hangberg, fishing is not only about acquisition and gaining provision, but as Brent said, also “making a sustained world that opposes the efforts of the state in sustaining power over fishing’s place and social existence in Hangberg.” James Scott writes in *Weapons of the Weak*, “Where everyday resistance most strikingly departs from other forms of resistance is in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. Where

---

<sup>28</sup> Seal Island is a tourist destination, and was not always named Seal Island, but acquired that name through the development and prison-building on Robben Island, which displaced the seal population to this small land mass off the coast, on the other side of the mountain in which the community of Hangberg lives. Fishermen and people in the community refuse to call it Seal Island, because to the Khoi it had a different name. Seal Island has become a symbol of colonization the Khoi language and sign systems. I did not take note of the indigenous name used, but I want to invoke that here in place of Seal Island.

institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains” (Scott 1985: 33). I would argue Scott’s distinction of everyday resistance is limiting, because the fishing emerging from Hangberg is not about constructing a meaningful, livable space as only an implied, covert form of resistance, but rather the world the fishermen of Hangberg see explicitly deals with the presence of state authority in the everyday spaces they navigate. Bronwyn said to me, “I make a living without any outside consent or authority. Yet we, as fishermen and the supporting community, want to formulate our own sense of public life through the practice of fishing.” The practice of fishing is integral to daily survival, but it is also about reimagining the notion of public space attached to the community produced by the state through, for example, “poaching.” Therefore fishermen will adopt the label, but in a way that challenges the state’s reductive perception of the community.

If the fishermen cannot enter the public discourse associated with Hangberg and fishing practices, they embrace the mythical notion of “poaching” and “jeopardizing” populations of fish, in order to reinterpret it within social relations and practices in the community. For example, I was sitting with Louis and Brent at Louis’ house and Louis said something serious and poignant about the life of fishermen, “We cannot fish here in Hout Bay.” His incisive statement uncovered the fundamental contradiction of living in Hout Bay, yet being prohibited from being a part of any social and spatial organization that is not a product of Hangberg.

Brent responded, “There is a local saying, ‘the work is so scarce, the fishermen are becoming vagrants’.” They both laughed and the conversation took a lighthearted turn, yet remained relevant to real problems impeding fishermen and their spaces of work. “Poaching” and other attempts to stigmatize Hangberg fishermen do not just elicit a direct response from the

people of Hangberg, but also one layered in local, collectively used vernaculars on fishing that circulate throughout the community. I mean that Brent and Louis connected through a language specific to the struggles of fishing as a fishermen from Hangberg, a language including Brent's usage of a local proverb that addresses a serious problem about the fishermen of Hangberg not being able to catch fish without taking massive risks with one's life. In the context of Louis and Brent's conversation the proverb took on a local idiom of humor that I did not initially catch until Louis started laughing. Louis and Brent's laughing complicated the relationship between fishing's locus in the community and the horrors that can happen out at sea.

The interpretive moment of Louis and Brent's solidarity through laughter is an interaction of "emergent articulation," a conceptual tool amalgamating Tania Murray Li's idea of "articulation" (Li 2000: 152) and Michel de Certeau's idea of walking (in the case of my project fishing) as a "space of enunciation" (De Certeau 1984: 98). I argue that fishermen and the community in conversation with fishing embody their own expression and self-identification, and construct a politicized space for that articulation—in other words, an emergent politics of fishing. The practice of fishing in Hangberg includes fishermen's experiences, and more broadly, fishermen and the community responding to those experiences through their own public discourse surrounding fishermen and fishing in Hangberg. De Certeau and Li outline what they mean by their respective concepts, and I want to delve into their thinking around issues of agency in relation to the fishermen of Hangberg's agentic practices.

Fishing for the fishermen of Hangberg parallels De Certeau's idea of walking as a bodily language that performs the space around a particular person or group. Fishermen undermine the surveillance of the state by articulating, in the process of catching fish, the limitations of invisible lines drawn by state authorities in order to confine their fishing practices. De Certeau

describes how walking (and by extension, fishing) enacts and reimagines the state's grid-like topography of the ocean. He writes,

If it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. (De Certeau 1984: 98)

The fishermen of Hangberg make the knowledge of imagined boundaries out at sea a visible problem. The state's policing of the ocean is recognized by Hangberg fishermen through the lengths to which fishermen go to cross between zones of regulation, because the movement patterns of fish blur the objective layout designed for undifferentiated industrial, corporate fishing practices. Bronwyn once said to me before embarking upon a week at sea, "The reason I must be gone so long, is because snook<sup>29</sup> have travelled south. You never can fully know their direction, and you have to patiently and carefully follow their changes in movement." The fish and fishermen form a symbiotic relationship, a dance of sudden changes. Conforming to the zoning laws instituted by the state is to stifle the organic sway of ocean life. Instead, the fishermen break down the state's and the international fishing markets' claim over the sea by crossing through, around, underneath, and beyond any center from which their practices are visible to any opposition. Therefore the fishermen politicize industrial fishing practice, exposing the iron cage fishing technique, because only a technology meant for careless extraction could operate within the state's regulatory framework.

Importantly still, the fishermen's ability to have a political voice that resonates in decision-making that affirms and funds industrial fishing remains unheard outside the community of Hangberg. Even though the fishermen may reconfigure state surveillance and

---

<sup>29</sup> One of the more commonly caught saltwater fishes in Hout Bay.

improvise with scanty fishing tools, their everyday struggle to catch fish and provide for the community is a menacing reality. Li talks about how the fishermen's practice and speech open up the possibility of criticizing industrial fishing and state-sanctioned permissions to fish. As a rethinking of Li I do not mean publicly criticize, but how, for example, Hangberg fishermen criticize the state by occupying the state-owned back side of the community for the transport of fish. However, the fact remains that the fishermen of Hangberg are still erased from pivotal political discussions that determine the outcome of a criticism that may result in some change.

Li writes,

The concept of articulation is thus alert to the unevenness of conjunctures and conditions of possibility, but offers no simple recipe for assessing degrees of determination or the points at which everyday understandings and practices shade into consciously selected tactics. It points rather to the necessity of teasing out, historically and ethnographically, the various ways in which room for maneuver is present but never unconstrained...articulations which have the potential to define broad constellations of shared and compatible interests, and mobilize social forces across a broad spectrum. (Li 2000: 153)

Hangberg fishermen understand the reach of state interest and incorporate and break down the state's tactics of compartmentalizing the ocean into various segments of "permissible" fishing. Yet the fishermen's awareness of state-enforced boundaries, the processes by which the state supervises those areas, and the state's refusal to notice the human<sup>30</sup> and ecological damage of mass farm fishing, is never articulated outside the borders of the community and figures in as a perspective in public debates and media representations considering the fishermen of Hangberg's historical union with the sea. As a result of the state discounting and delegitimizing the life of fishermen, the ability for the community to outwardly express its sorrow over a forever-lost soul at sea fades away without becoming public knowledge outside Hangberg.

---

<sup>30</sup> Industrial fishing is complicit with the state's exclusion of Hangberg fishermen from access to the reasonable reaches of the sea, further endangering the lives of fishermen.



### **Disappearance and Disavowal: Manipulating the Politics of Death:**

As we walked slowly down the street, Cleo lamented, “I can’t say anything, because my husband is part of a government scheme that puts him in the shadows. At this point he must be lost, but I just want to know that his body was found, so we can bring him back. Until then, his disappearance will torment me.” Her mourning is silenced because of the criminality inscribed on fishermen’s bodies and practices. I learned later that fishermen disappear regularly, almost every other week. Cleo tried to fight the normalizing effect of such a painful situation, a banality shaped by the state’s characterization of fishermen as “unlawful.” Fishermen are not just stigmatized through their fishing practice, but also by simply being present out on the water. Because she is forced to repress her feelings, Cleo’s suffering is reduced to an element of everyday life because fishing for Hangberg is an unrelenting challenge. I saw Cleo again two weeks after a search for her husband’s body by fellow fishermen was unsuccessful, and she was still unable to articulate the profound sadness plaguing her, barely uttering a few words to me. Her life was held motionless by the loss of her husband. Disappearance has produced a notion of death that must be, to a certain degree, acknowledged as a possibility.

The death of fishermen is blamed on their “poaching,” when in actuality the experience of death is a subtle perpetration of violence by the dominance of industrial fishing and the state’s efforts to “secure” the ocean. Jenna Brager, in her article “Bodies of Water”, discusses how disappearance for the powerful is a mechanism of distancing oneself from involvement. In the case of Hangberg the state vanishes by removing itself from the precariousness of the fishermen’s lives, yet sponsors the institutions, businesses, policy-makers, and people substantiating that position of uncertainty for fishermen. She writes,

Disappearance is not just a euphemism for state murder, it is the central design of an act of terror. The disappearance—the murder without the corpse, operates in multiple ways.

The systematic concealment of evidence is designed to exonerate the perpetrators. The withholding of information purposefully misled people and made them hold onto the unrealistic hope that they would find their detained loved ones alive. (Brager, *The New Inquiry*)

Even though Brager is talking about Operation Condor in Argentina and Chile, where military dictatorships mass-murdered dissenters and flew them over the ocean in order to eliminate any traces of their bodies, I think the idea of being arrested in a figurative sense is important with regard to Hangberg fishermen, because they are always figured as “delinquents” out at sea. There is always a policing gaze that denounces their presence, and that disparaging, panoptic gaze leads fishermen into rougher open water where accidents are expected. I want to historicize the collision between state authority and the fishermen of Hangberg within a framework of neo-colonial occupation. The state turns the ocean into its own territory by simultaneously converting the ocean into a resource for industrial fishing while treating the ocean as an opportunity to enhance security over Hangberg fishermen.

Fishermen do not disappear; they are disposed of by “necropolitical” (Mbembe 2003: 39) directives, extant because the state wants to penetrate the community of Hangberg’s modes of economic production. Necropolitics refers to a political condition of life and death that is built and acted upon by a sovereign political body that controls how one lives and dies. I invoke Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics, because the government, internal to the community through co-operatives and community leadership, and external through the police, legislative bodies, and capitalist industries, naturalizes the space of death for fishermen out of Hangberg. I say naturalize, because of the frightening rate of disappearance that socially produces (1) a condition of “moving past the disappearance” in the community, and (2) residual feelings of suffering and absence that are suppressed because, like Cleo’s husband, fishermen are condemned as “poachers.” Fishermen do not identify as “poachers” because “poachers” is a word that recalls

colonialism's practice of ascribing 'savagery' to Khoi people. The state criminalizes the fishermen as both "poachers" and "savages" and that means participating in a discourse in which the Khoi and contemporary fishermen cannot occupy a space on land and water that came before the relations and political framework of colonial and state intervention. Mbembe talks about how "colonial occupation was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations" (Mbembe 2003: 25). The state writes a new spatial organization upon the ocean that deliberately conflicts with the practices of fishermen from Hangberg.

The fishermen "are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe 2003: 40). Fishermen are riddled by disappearance, and when that disappearance strikes, the chaotic feelings of love, anger, and anguish are profoundly diminished by bodies of law, industrial fishing, and regulation operating at sea. Cleo's mourning is constrained because her husband's death is labeled a "disappearance." She has no concrete and tangible evidence of her husband's death. Instead, Cleo's troubled feelings about her husband are a complex of emotions that can never be reconciled. Thus the sea becomes a mass graveyard of taken-for-granted fishermen from Hangberg. If a fisherman's body never washes ashore, figuratively, the body must be exhumed and recognized through the collective humanity, love, and solidarity shared by the people of the community. The fishermen's disappearances must also be recognized as a product of the state's schematic order asserted over the ocean.

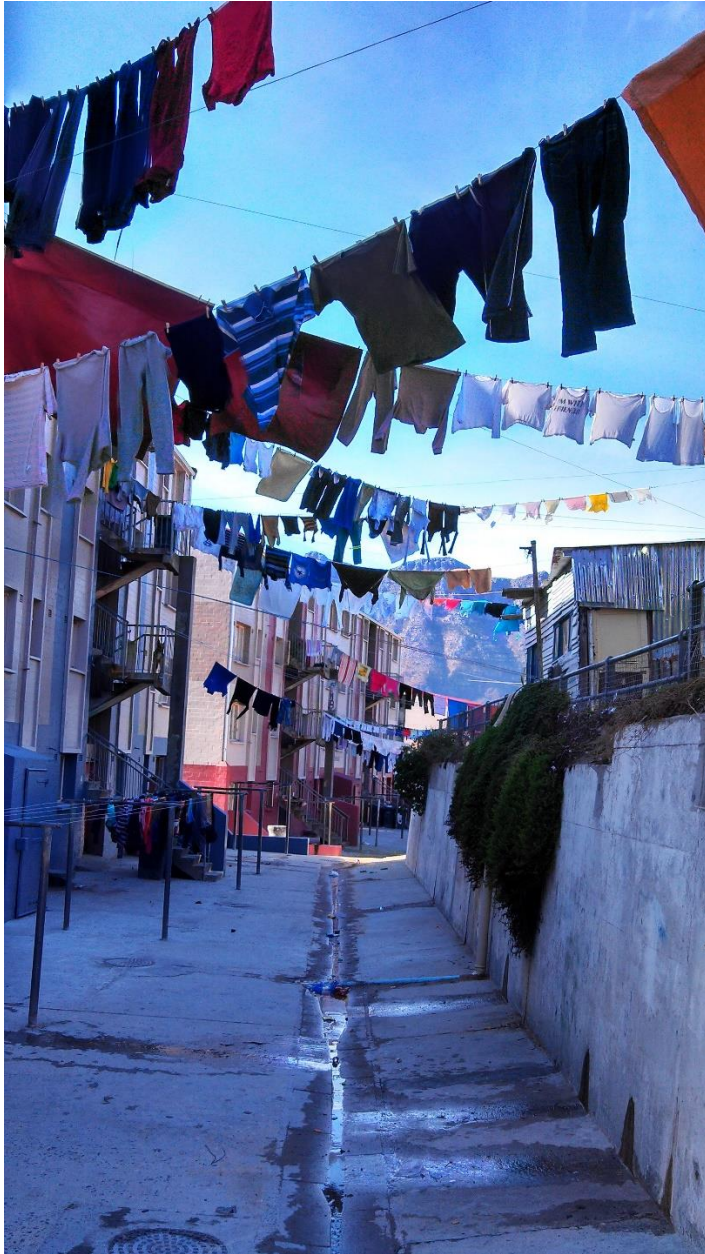
## Conclusion:

Despite disappearance and disguised impositions of the state, the fishermen and community of Hangberg memorialize the death of a fisherman in personal and communal ways. In Brent's house a picture of a friend of the family who was lost at sea hangs on the wall, and Brent once told me, "His soul is everlasting and will always be present in the community and a focus of who I strive to be." Brent challenges the mere fact of his friend vanishing out at sea by expressing his friend's importance to not only him, but to fishermen and the community at large. Where the state, indirectly through the constraints manifest in fishermen's lives, tries to distance its involvement in Cleo's husband's and Brent's friend's deaths, Brent and Cleo bring their spirits back from sea and reveal the profound effect each life had upon them respectively.

Within this chapter, I want to illuminate how fishermen and the community of Hangberg are subjected to state violence and silencing through processes revolving around the practices of fishing. Of equal significance is how the fishermen and community fashion a space of social practice and relation that strengthens the voices and actions of the community while undermining the state's ability to render a fisherman's journey at sea, or a beloved friend's grievance, legible. I am using legible in the sense that the state wants the fishermen to neatly fit within its regulatory schemes of power. Anna Tsing, in her ethnography *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*, discusses the contestability and limitations of an indigenous Indonesian community's marginal position in relation to her ethnographic methodology. I want to invoke her emphasis, where she writes, "It [being the narrative that is told by me] is about the process in which people are marginalized as their perspectives are cast to the side or excluded. It is also about the ways in which people actively engage their marginality by protesting, reinterpreting, and embellishing their exclusion" (Tsing 1993: 5). More

specifically, Tsing talks about integrating “stories, narratives of people and events, because these stories show sites of discursive contestation” (Tsing 1993: 8). The practice of fishing and the community’s relation to fishermen create an alternative story that is in dialogue with the state and industrial-capitalist forces pushing local fishing into a space excluded from legitimate forms of fishing. When I say alternative I do not mean something different from how the state interprets their processes of fishing and the social relations made by such a livelihood. Fishing forms a collectively written story that engages the consequences of a system of misrepresentation, for example, “poaching.” Yet, the fishermen of Hangberg construct a space independent of letting the state-induced consequences of their practices, such as the issue of disappearance, become the sole driving factor for why they choose to go out at sea.

## Politicizing the Home



Clothesline transmissions—blurring places of inhabitation by bridging the separation between government housing and locally-made structures.

## Material Life and Dispossession

**Note to the Reader:**

**Chapter 3** (*A discussion of dispossession, infrastructural disenfranchisement, state hypocrisy, and the different symbolic powers of the home: everyday home, evicted home, and burnt-down home*)

Brent and I squeezed through the two foot gap distinguishing individual homes, in between the “fire break” and government housing, thick sand leaving behind our temporary imprint. We passed through Jeremy and Ingrid’s door into the front yard of their home. Jeremy and Ingrid are Brent’s dearest friends. Brent goes there almost every day. Their son sifted through the sand, making his own imaginary structures. He was completely immersed in the sand, which was encrusted on his face. Our eyes met and he graced me with a smile, throwing sand up in the air that came showering down on his body, all the while laughing hysterically. His expression brought the two of us into harmony, playfully tossing the sand he closely related to. Our simple exchange of friendship and curiosity grew as the sand moved about, on and around us. We created our own momentary intimacy, unsure of what we were building with the sand.

Sand, a protean material, is the soil of Hangberg, and anyone who builds a home there must accommodate its movement. With the desiccation of the dry season and saturation of the wet season, the mountainous slope of the landscape on which the community builds homes, becomes a precarious underlayer with the potential to erode the foundation of a structure. There is no stopping the vicissitudes of the land. The changes in the sand generate a structural uncertainty the community must live with. After Jeremy and Ingrid’s son and I had a joyous time in their front yard, we dusted the sand off our bodies and Ingrid invited me into their home.

Only five minutes later a thunderstorm came roaring into the bay, opening up torrential rain and gale winds that shook the home. The understanding of sand's critical influence on the material life of the community became explicit through the sheltered experience of a storm. Our voices were drowned out by the contact of rain upon the manufactured metal-sheet roofing. There was no immediate reaction from anyone else in the room, and then Jeremy, recognizing my change in disposition, explained, "We move with the land and try and adapt to what nature provides us with." Jeremy's description revealed that ephemeral occurrences such as a storm are not exceptional, but rather are embedded in both the material realities of life confronted by the community and the social relations that emerge from coping with their material impoverishment.

Jeremy and Ingrid wanted a concrete space in which their family could exist that they could make their own, as Ingrid told me: "I do not want to go live in the flats, because then my son will have no yard to play in." The flats are the government housing projects where every person's home looks the same as the next. A flat is one of many connected within the same building by staircases protruding off the back. Sometimes there are no staircases, but a shared concrete front or backyard that people personalize by adding their own structural additions. Ingrid and Jeremy's home was a communal, transient space that attracted, in that afternoon alone, a handful of friends, family, and some wandering people who came and went at various moments when I was there. Their home was a public, inclusive space, where no one was prevented from coming in, no matter the state of that person. For example, an incoherently drunk guy came stumbling through the door and Jeremy welcomed him in. Everyone was in conversation with him until it reached a point where his slurs became obnoxious, unfriendly, and targeted at certain people in the room. Even though Jeremy and Ingrid believed in leaving the material boundaries of their home in flux, they also wanted peace, so they were careful to



address their family's needs and responsibilities. Ingrid gave me a heartwarming maternal embrace, offered Coke to me several times, kept a mental monitor over my hunger, and asked if I could help change their son's sandy clothes. Ingrid made me feel like a part of the family and wanted to know I was doing well throughout my stay at their house. They did not treat me like a witness or an observer, but respectfully asked me to participate in the everyday routine of their domestic life.

Jeremy and Brent stepped outside to build a fire for cooking, while Ingrid brought me into their bedroom to meet their three-day-old daughter. Ingrid encouraged me to cradle her, expressing to me, "You are like her brother." I picked her up and almost instantly she drifted off to sleep in my arms. Ingrid talked about needing another room now, now that the second child had come, as the house had only two small spaces, one being the bedroom and the other being a common, kitchen, whatever-use space with a bed. Not only did their family of four inhabit the home, but Jeremy's nephew and sister recovering from drug addiction and homelessness were living with them.

I heard Brent and Jeremy's voices seep through the pores of the wood-siding and I went outside to experience a new dynamic. Right at my feet when I crossed outside, Jeremy and Ingrid's son bumped into my leg. He was screaming at the top of his lungs in ecstasy, running tirelessly in dizzying patterns. Jeremy had constructed a makeshift firepit by digging out a recessed space in the ground, placing a piece of found grated metal over the top, and forming a border out of rocks from down by the bay. He and Brent were cooking fish, scheming about ways to make money under the table, and appreciating the view from their front yard of mountains in almost every direction. Jeremy recommended I go onto their roof and I climbed up a cement block formation outside the house. The view was amazing and expansive, reaching

across the bay, into the valley, and looking down upon the excess and indulgence of white, affluent communities within the lower elevations of Hout Bay. I noted how breathtaking the perspective was and Jeremy responded with political intensity, “I will let no one take what I’ve grown into and where my history remains. Our home burnt down a couple years ago, and building a new home from nothing made me realize how invaluable this land is to me and the community. We cannot stop fighting on behalf of the struggle that molds us.” Jeremy’s anger was channeled through the fact that the community is obliged to wait for the state to consent to their building houses or for it to provide housing materials.

### **Introduction:**

Beadie, resident-since-birth of Hangberg, described the unknowns of everyday life: “To have a normal day here, it is a struggle. If you are on your own, [in other words, living against the state’s will] you are open and free.” She spoke not of individual day-to-day struggles, but rather those tied to oppressive living circumstances that can ignorantly be taken as “predictable” features to the community’s organization of life. The community has not willingly assimilated to precarious living conditions. Instead, the practices of everyday life for the community contested from the perspective and actions of the community. Interventions made by the state according to legal doctrine and housing development design and oversight complicate the community’s independent assemblages of social life. There is an overlying strategy on the part of the state, to expose the elements of everyday life organized by the community, the home being an important site of contestation where the community of Hangberg “makes meaning in a world that would rather assign such meaning” (Biehl 2005: 16-17). The home in Hangberg is a symbolically and politically-fraught space that has grown out of historical and contemporary

attempts made by the state to dispossess the community of its right to the land, its continued physical presence, and its prerogative to shape its own forms of material and social life. In this chapter I am going to discuss how the home merges with state interests and violence, but also how the home instantiates “local ways of knowing and moving through an environment” (Ross 2010: 64). The state and the community of Hangberg have different relationships with the land.

Whereas the community has a symbiotic relationship with the land and natural surroundings, the state adopts a conservationist stance toward the land and frames the community as the culprits in threatening the imagined, “pastoral” potential of the land. For example, Beadie explained to me, “When I was born I had the sea and the mountain within me. I felt it without knowing. It is like the landscape is inside of you. You undoubtedly honor whatever nature gives you and provides for you.” On the other hand, Helen Zille, leader of the local government, said to the community, “The structures [referencing a fire break dividing state-owned land and the community] are a fire hazard to a beautiful piece of earth.” Beadie contrasts Zille because latent to Zille’s mention of “natural beauty” is a motive to exclude the community from experiencing the “nature” around them; whereas Beadie discusses a relationship with nature that is not constructed out of two opposing human interests, what Zille wants and what the community of Hangberg “does.” Zille projects the responsibility of ecological destruction upon the community of Hangberg, personifying it as a “damaged” land. The state, in the words of community activist Natasha, “won’t allow and does not want to see the community grow.” Natasha highlights the state’s ability to possess “a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault 1984: 261). Through a collision between the state’s biopolitical control, meaning, a management of the community’s ways of life, and the community’s unmoving solidarity against being “housed,” the construction of homes by the community becomes

problematic to the state. I want to argue explicitly in the context of the home that the state is not just dispossessing the people of Hangberg through direct means, such as the police in forcibly evicting people, which I will go into depth later in the chapter, but also controlling the home through the absence of attention, for example by eliminating the infrastructure needed for the people of Hangberg to obtain access to materials and services that would prevent homes from catching fire.

The feeling of being abandoned is an integral part of the lived experience of people in Hangberg. The community is engaged with the state, which exercises power over their formation of social and material life. Dispossession by the state is an important dimension to the relationship between the state and the community. On one hand, dispossession of the people of Hangberg's family, friends, things, structures, and land is an effect of the state trying to make the community's livelihood unlivable. On the other, dispossession reflects the oppositional actions of the community, for example, building a house against any court mandate prohibiting the community's fundamental existence. The state enforces the notion of "a normal and collective (and hence political) organization of human life founded solely on bare life" (Agamben 1995: 135) where the community is constructed in a social space of stasis, "the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant" (Agamben 1995: 142). Where the state wants to repress the community of Hangberg, the community fashions an everyday life and responds to acts of dispossession by politicizing the personal and social relations embodied by the home. The people of Hangberg also foment local discussions that surround the politically-charged space of the home. Therefore the people of Hangberg tell a story set "against this backdrop of negligible material support and state abandonment" (Ross 2010: 3) where "people craft everyday lives accorded with their ideals and personal sensibilities while grappling with the alienation" (Ross

2010: 3) authorized by the state's desire to render the people of Hangberg outside life worth considering. I am going to examine how the community's life is isolated outside humanity, why it is problematic that the state wields that "sovereign decision" (Agamben 1995: 142) and "state of exception" (Agamben 1995: 54). By state of exception I mean how a governing body treats a people and their history as an aberration from the norm and order of things. Applied to Hangberg, I want to break down the state's use of a state of exception by looking at how the community forges a counter-hegemonic struggle and livable space contrary to and in dialogue with the "sovereign" projections of disposable life made by the state.

### **Everyday Souls:**

Brent looked at me with frustration as he talked about how the home isolates the family's life. He and his family created a space that contained every practicality supporting their everyday subsistence. He said, "Four children, two parents in a one bedroom flat. The other room is supposed to be a living space, not a bedroom, washroom, kitchen combined into one area." I did not need to look any further from where we were sitting on his and his wife Donita's bed to recognize that the room bordering their bedroom was in a state of chaos and confusion. Donita and Brent's two kids bounced from room to room, showing Brent and me their toys, running into Donita, who was trying to cook, and jumping and squirming on their bed. The two boys' bunk bed was in the kitchen. Their dog Junior could not find a place to rest because every time he curled himself up to rest, the kids collided with him. It was difficult for anyone, even the dog, to find peace in the home. Simply coexisting in the home was a challenge because everyone in the family, including Junior, wanted different things within the same congested moment.

When the family's time in the home was not completely aligned, conflict blossomed, for example when Brent was trying to listen to reggae peacefully on his bed and Donita and Brent's two boys wanted to play. They were wrestling on the bed when Brent, enraged, grabbed the two boys and disciplined their bodies with a swing of his hand. The two boys cried, hanging their heads as they made their way to the bunk bed. I felt totally powerless and removed from the situation, yet I was involved in inciting the boys' excitement, because they fed off my presence as a new, young person. The boys wanted to talk about their day at school with me, be silly together, and argue that Brent should turn off the reggae and put on cartoons, because they wanted to show me their impersonations of favorite characters. I could not understand the familial dynamic in their home by viewing it through my own lens; I had to live and interact with the space and Brent's family as though I were a part of the family and joined in making the space into a home. Therefore, "the house and the home as a dwelling, is not just a material structure, but a social and cultural place" (Buhler 2014: 47). Brent, Donita, the two boys, and Junior's home is not determined by the fact that the state was the allocator of the space. The family embodies their home specific to their needs and desires.

Brent exclaimed, "I do not pay rent, I live for free. I do not have proper toilets, I do not have functional electricity. How can you pay rent for something you are not given, like service delivery? I fix problems myself when they come up. The worst part is that I am broke, so when you cannot afford addressing the problem, you live with it." I want to make it clear here that I am not describing the home as an extension of poverty in order to recognize the community of Hangberg as "victims," but rather to reveal how the "victim" label misrepresents their everyday life. To reduce the community to "victims" produced by state control disregards the agency of the families' attempts to navigate, realize, and change the circumstances that come as the state's

perception of “lack.” I want to break down that perception coming from a “humanitarian” state that actively “warehouses” people in flats. Also I want to recognize the ingenuity and creativity of the people of the community in reconfiguring expectations such as a rent payment, or electricity from the grid, and making those acquisitions and decisions in opposition to any legibility supervised by the state.

Brent questions the rhetoric of state assistance, where the people and structures of Hangberg become disposable and transposable objects because the state believes their poverty only correlates with “depravity.” The state does not look beyond the notion of a “shack.” The state produces a public discourse that represents the community of Hangberg as an “undesirable” life. Brent described the significance of the “shack” by challenging its ahistorical foundations. He stated, “A shack is not just a shack, it is a home, a place where memories were built. It is a history of a people.” Whether it is a self-made structure, or a flat, the connotations of a “shack” and the lifestyle attached to it persist, which simplifies the complexity of life that plays out in a flat or bungalow.<sup>31</sup>

Roscoe, political studies student at University of Cape Town and member of the Civic Association<sup>32</sup> in Hangberg, explained why the community resists state-run housing projects and is wary of trusting the binding agreement they must sign in order to live in state housing projects. Even though political and social organizations such as the Civic Association are intended to represent the community’s interests, Roscoe indicated that antithetical to that democratic logic of representation and thinking are leaders who grow too obsessed with the seat of authority they are given. He said,

---

<sup>31</sup> Bungalow is colloquially known in Hangberg as a self-made home.

<sup>32</sup> A civic organization serving the community’s needs, providing resources for such things as court cases, materials for rebuilding homes, educational spaces after schools. It also tries to help facilitate communication between the community and the provincial government.

There is no clear channel or way of doing things, and it causes conflict and problems within the community, and it looks as though the community is not following the proper channels. In the court order it says people shouldn't be putting up any structures within the community of Hangberg, but then in the Peace Accord<sup>33</sup> it says people are allowed to do put up structures if they are granted permissions. Now people are skeptical of where those permissions are coming from, because nothing is actually manifesting and they are not included in the discussion surrounding housing projects and mandates. People within the circles of community representation can't keep out their personal interest. The manner in which community leaders are involved should be to push government to make sure land is available.

As a consequence of the bureaucratic inconsistencies embedded in discussions about whether or not people in the community should be allowed to build in the community, people are dubious about why one would be permitted to live in a home, be disallowed from building a home, or be evicted, because where those decisions come from is ambiguous, yet powerful. In other words, the state and the community leaders' roles in legitimizing housing policies are based on private affairs where they own the conversations about housing in the community.

Rightfully so, the community is tentative in submitting to the state's power over housing development. Many people in the community spoke to me about a relocation housing program created by the state called Blikkiesdorp, which the state presented as a public housing program for homeless people and people subjected to relocation. In reality, Blikkiesdorp's image as a settlement initiative is a disguise that hides how horrifying the living conditions are with punitive, day-to-night policing and asbestos-ridden homes causing pneumonia and tuberculosis. The media frames the story of people's migration as a willing one and Blikkiesdorp as a viable alternative to homelessness, but, for example, preceding the 2010 World Cup the state "cleaned-up" the areas where spectators would be. "Cleaning-up" meant placing impoverished and homeless people of color in Blikkiesdorp. Kevin, who lives in Hangberg and who has

---

<sup>33</sup> The agreement made after the "War of 2010" when nearly the entire metro police force came into the community to remove "illegal structures" and violently attacked the community. It was made between the Peace and Mediation Forum—another civic, political body supposed to serve the community—and state officials.



participated in debates over housing, compared Blikkiesdorp to the Nazi regime, saying, “The treatment of Blikkiesdorp is like a concentration camp.” Fiona Ross, in her ethnography about a predominately colored “township” within the Cape Town metropolis, *Raw Life, New Hope: Housing, Decency and Everyday Life in a Post-Apartheid Community*, makes a cogent argument about the state’s double talk about development housing projects in Hangberg. She writes,

All development projects have a myth of origin. That accompanying the move to the new site goes something like this: Residents are poor. Housing is substandard. There are limited or no services. People are ill. Relationships are short-lived. These features of urban living are not the result of state failure, planning, capitalism’s unequal distributions of wealth, or even of apartheid planning’s horrifying success, but are failings of the residents, who can only be saved by education. (Ross 2010: 33)

Beneath the state development agents’ picture framing the community of Hangberg in despair, the actual impoverishment facing Hangberg is taken as evidence of the community’s incompetence when it comes to overcoming its problems. Instead of recognizing the community’s political representation and acknowledging the social and material innovations involved with forming everyday life, the state distorts any issue, such as housing, by claiming the community is in “in need of an intervention.” Housing, therefore becomes the state’s prerogative to do as it pleases in relation to providing for and taking away housing for the people of Hangberg. Importantly though, the community is not isolated from the characterizations of their homes, and its marginalization is not a question of “lack,” but a question of how that “lack” is productively imposed by the state, and how the community’s precariousness evolves with its own structural and social organization around the home.

I argue that the community of Hangberg forms a “zone of social abandonment” (Biehl 2005: 2) where the power of the state is reconstituted by the people of Hangberg’s practices of everyday life, yet the embodiment produced by the state’s power over the community is not internalized by the people, but complicated by the fact that the people of Hangberg reinterpret

and situate spaces such as the home through “local ways of knowing and moving through an environment” (Ross 2010: 64). Biehl explains his idea of a zone of abandonment by saying, “Zones of abandonment make visible realities that exist through and beyond formal governance and that determine the life course of an increasing number of poor people who are not part of mapped populations” (Biehl 2005: 4). Abandonment by the state is not just a negative relation the people of Hangberg are hopelessly caught within. State abandonment enables a home where Beadie’s words, “you are on your own, open and free,” resonate as a possibility. To be neglected, open and free implies a reality of exposure to the unpredictability of everyday life, but that vulnerability still opens the people of Hangberg to the possibility of making a life that matters. Rather than being mediated by a paternalistic relation determined by the state, the home is a space where the community acts upon its needs without waiting for the state’s seal of approval. The people of Hangberg are expected to subordinate themselves to the state’s mythical claims about why their living practices “require transformation,” when representatives of the local government are the people who won’t engage with the voices and lived struggles of people in Hangberg.

### **Evicted Souls:**

In response to a leave of appeal made against the court order responsible for the unauthorized eviction from her home in Hangberg, Janina Samuels wrote in her affidavit, “I will suffer grave prejudice if this application is refused. I will face the risk of being arrested and jailed for not vacating and destroying my own home, in circumstances where my family and I have nowhere else to go and we will be rendered literally homeless if I am forced to comply with the sentence imposed by the Magistrate.” Janina’s case involves the “fire break”—or “die sloot,”

colloquially—which means the channel. The channel is a gully where water is supposed to pass through. Above the “fire break” is federally owned land and below, right along a two-foot, trench-like indentation in the land, are homes raised by the community of Hangberg. Roscoe informed me of the historical shift in meaning associated with the arbitrary boundary, saying, “What was originally a water channel became symbolically transformed into its contemporary usage as the fire break.” The water channel was a strategic dividing marker the state used to limit the growth of the community, and within my field work people used “fire break” to recognize the division, because that aberration in the landscape has become a politically-charged space representing the state’s territorial encroachment on the community’s life. Consequently, the state is limiting the growth of the community because the more families expand and others move into the community, the less room there is for homes. In order to enforce the border and decrease space for living in the community, the judicial body of the state drafted a court order giving the state the power to prosecute anyone from Hangberg who build a house past the “fire break.”



A panoptic snapshot of the community invoking the state-constructed discourse that imagines the community as the perpetrator of fire upon the “uncharted” area above. In reality the situation is the inverse: fire is a problem to the community below, a consequence of the state “protected” land above the yellow line. The state is not passive in relation to fire, but rather creates the potential for fire to become such a political divide and devastating force to the community’s predominately wooden structures along the “fire break.”

In 2010 the “War” happened in Hangberg, which I touched upon earlier. Now I want to invoke the event as a key example of how the state used the law to physically intimidate the community, and how the extrajudicial and extra-sovereign power exercised by the state paradoxically violated its own sanctions. At least fifty police officers and several “street-sweepers,” a symbol of the Apartheid regime’s use of militaristic abuse toward colored and black people, raided the community without ever declaring a court order and fired at the people of Hangberg, unprovoked. The people of Hangberg were subject to a state of exception, and “in the state of exception it is impossible to distinguish transgression of the law from the execution of the law, such that what violates a rule and what conforms to it coincide without any remainder” (Agamben 1995: 57). Since the people of Hangberg are considered an exception to humanity and life worth living, the state could command a violent police assault on the community, because the state has all the constituting power to decide what transpires and how the story is told in the media. At the time, seventeen homes had been built past the “fire break” when the

state-sponsored police terrorism began, and not a single trace of those homes was left, with destruction crews systematically razing the homes and taking the broken materials away. People were torn from their homes, children beaten in “street-sweeper” vans and told that their families were “criminals,” and several people lost their eyes because police fired at close range on community members who just wanted to understand what had erupted. The “War” was a terrifying historical moment that threatened the community of Hangberg, but also a moment that brought wholehearted solidarity to the community. As one of the people of Hangberg said in the documentary film made on the “War,” *Uprising in Hangberg*, “We want a solution, if they remove us, they can only move us to the graveyard” (Valley and Kaganof). The community does not want to submit to the demands and housing standards set by the state, and that means remaining through any means necessary, even if living entails the risk of dispossession.

Janina Samuels’ case of eviction represents the state’s transgressive revisions to the court order. Irrespective of the context in which Janina was detained and taken by the police, the law incorporates Janina’s case to preserve its authority over her ability to defend herself against an unlawful eviction. Agamben, in discussing the sovereign power of the law, states that the “Law prescribes nothing” (Agamben 1995: 49). Relating back to the court-enshrined eviction order imposed upon the people of Hangberg, Agamben’s description of (1) the law capitalized with an “L,” as a bureaucratic personage or consortium of many different actors and agents, and (2) the law “being in force without significance” (Agamben 1995: 54), complicates Janina’s right to a defensible position because the court order forms a contradiction. The contradiction of the law in the case of the “fire break” is that the police can violate the people of Hangberg’s constitutional right to a home and the police proceed with impunity, all the while the court order is supposed to be a representation of the law which is a product of the constitution’s framework

of rights. The law is supposed to protect the police and the people of Hangberg as equals, but the law gives police the privilege and access to act as a “protector” of the law, even by violent means. The court order formally ostracizes the already bare life of people in Hangberg. The documentation standardizing the High Court<sup>34</sup> order uses matter-of-fact language. For example the court reads,

Preventing the building, extension or completion and/or fresh occupation of current or new informal instructures (or the reerection of those that have been dismantled) on or above the sloot on the properties; restraining and interdicting anyone from building, completing, extending and taking occupation of any further informal structures on or above the sloot in Hangberg.

The specificity locating “on or above the sloot” is a deceptive distinction because Janina lived right below the fire break, not a single thing of hers, let alone her home, coming within less than twenty feet of the channel. I went to visit Janina while I was in Hangberg, and there was no element of her life that was invading the “fire break.” The law was based on a myth that was totally hypocritical. Janina was taken from her home, and when she returned she was convicted of contempt of court because she refused to render her family homeless knowing that there was nowhere else to build a home.

Janina was aware of her rights as a citizen of South Africa, and challenged, in a leave of appeal, the legal institution’s treatment of her as though she was already a “criminal” serving a sentence. She took a firm, knowledgeable stance, stating,

I was not legally represented during my trial and elected to defend myself. It was my first time in court and I was not familiar with legal processes. I did not avail myself of the services of a lawyer as I believed that I had done nothing wrong as my home was located in an area to which the court order did not apply. I myself could not afford the trips to Cape Town to find help and there are no legal aid or pro-bono legal services available to people such as myself in Hangberg or Hout Bay. I am further advised that the sentence imposed by the Magistrate was improper in that it amounts to an eviction order obtained pursuant to criminal proceedings, which failed to comply with the provisions of section 26(3) of the Constitution which require all relevant circumstances to

---

<sup>34</sup> Meaning within federal jurisdiction

be considered before someone is evicted from their home or has their home demolished. I am advised that the State is not entitled to obtain eviction orders under the guise of contempt of court proceedings.

Janina reveals that she could be dispossessed no matter the circumstance of that particular eviction. Her statement reverts the accountability back to the state who violates its own legal doctrines. Not only does Janina recognize the exceptional treatment she was given under the auspices of the law, but she also reveals how when someone from Hangberg is taken into custody on the basis of “infiltrating” state-owned land, there is nobody to turn to for assistance because the legal functionaries of the state presume the people of Hangberg are automatically convictable for their actions. Janina argues that she was “punished as a political tactic” (Foucault 1984: 170) of the state. In other words, the false accusations holding her in defiance of the court order are not a reflection of the law, but how the law functions as a biopolitical instrument the state can use to authorize punishable life in Hangberg.

Besides protesting how the state incriminated her, Janina was contesting the state’s ulterior motive in legitimating a project of displacement that begins with eviction and then deepens Janina and her family’s unstable livelihood. Athena Athanasiou explains how in a context where dispossession takes place, the notion of being and having are equally applied to Janina. Athanasiou writes, “Being and having are constituted as ontologically imbricated with each other: being is defined as having; having is constructed as an essential prerequisite of proper human being” (Athanasiou and Butler 2013: 13). In the circumstance of Janina already incarcerated on the supposition of “criminality,” the fact that she is disenfranchised from the local legal infrastructure, has no money to pay an attorney willing to help her, and has no alternative place to live limits Janina’s position to one of “absence,” a position favoring the power of the state.

In the context of the “fire break” and extending to the community as a whole, the people of Hangberg’s living spaces are under siege by the state’s desire to dispossess the community both of its material life and of its public, collectively valued shared space. In other words, homes are configured together by the people of Hangberg to open up a local, subjective form of mapping belonging where one’s occupation of housing space is intimately related to the movement of the larger community. By mapping and the broader movement of the community I mean, for example, how Jeremy and Ingrid open up their home to anyone throughout the day, creating interconnected spaces where other people will leave their home to visit, but carry that personal sense of home with them to share among people at Jeremy and Ingrid’s place. The state uses the “fire break” to make the community’s movement and occupation of space more discernible. Life in a home on the cusp of dispossession relates to a situation where “common, collective, and public assets are converted into private property rights” (Athanasίου and Butler 2013: 12). The state wants private ownership over the land, because otherwise the community structures everyday lives that elude the controlling gaze of the state. For example, Jeremy and Brent have their own marijuana growing and selling business where they use one home to cultivate crops and the other to distribute the product. Almost no one, even in the community, knows where the marijuana is grown and when it is transferred between Brent and Jeremy’s homes. Athanasίου talks about how the force of dispossession works to legitimize itself, arguing, “The power of dispossession works by rendering subjects, communities, or populations unintelligible, by eviscerating for them the conditions of possibility for life and the ‘human’ itself” (Athanasίου and Butler 2013: 20). Dispossession delegitimizes the community of Hangberg’s historical claims to land and strips the community of its attempt to counteract repressive state housing policies. Janina and the people whose homes are near, on, and above the



“fire break” refuse notions that they are “disposable” and live in homes without any social, cultural, and historical significance. The state’s efforts to dispossess the community, such as the court order, resonate throughout the community and are not only symbolic of areas around the “fire break.” Fire is not limited to symbolic meaning produced around the “fire break,” but rather fire is a destructive force that takes lives and razes homes, a reality people within the community never know is coming until it’s too late.

### **The Souls of Ashes:**

The week I began my field work, a fire had raged through a section of homes bordering the “fire break” and rows of homes below that line, leaving behind eleven barely recognizable homes and a husband, wife, and their two children burned alive in their sleep. The community was in mass mourning. When I went up to the area, Natasha was facilitating the building of new structures over the removed ruins and untraceable ashes of the family consumed by the fire. Natasha, speaking of the family reduced to ash, said, “I can hear them. It is still very real, the memory of their lives hovering like a ghost over this desolation.” A ceremony would be held the following week, but there was no space to construct a burial ground where the family died; instead other people living in Hangberg will just build over that family’s history and physical space, because the unclaimed space is hard to come by. Living without a home terrifies families because a family can never assume there is space to build. One must act competitively toward open land, because of the constricting control of the state. The space where the family died was being prepared for a new family, whose quick acquisition of space represents how the people of Hangberg cannot wait to negotiate with the state, because living without a home becomes more and more of a permanent homelessness. Kerry Chance, in her piece “Where There is Fire,

There is Politics': Ungovernability and Material Life in Urban South Africa," discusses how fire is a living reality among urban, poor communities of color in modern-day South Africa. Chance writes, "Flame leaves inscriptions on the homes, belongings, and bodies of the poor, an identification in contemporary South Africa that is rendered through intersections of race and class" (Chance 2015: 407). Fire is not an anomaly, but an ominous force that speaks to the politics of life in the community, and evidence of how the state manages the material and social organization of life through law-enforced limits of structural expansion and the absence of infrastructure such as fire preventive building materials. The racialized and class-driven difference inscribed on the community allows for fire to be an agent of destruction and silence.

The state's response to problems revolving around housing in Hout Bay, and the media's subsequent capture of the state's intervention, can be read through a juxtaposition of how the state accounts for problems in white, wealthy communities in Hout Bay versus Hangberg. Brent counter-narrated the media's "truth" production, comparing a fire in the economically and racially elite conclave of Hout Bay to a fire that ignited in Hangberg. He said, "There was a fire in Hangberg and they sent three firemen and many people in the community had to join in the extinguishing. The newspaper said there were three trucks full of firemen. When a fire was burning in the rich people's area, the entire force was there. The police and other fire stations from other areas came." In contrast to Brent's narration, a fireman explaining their efforts to extinguish the recent Hangberg fire, said in a newspaper article, "Accessing the bungalows with our trucks was difficult. It's a challenge we always face responding to shack fires." The fireman conflates a "shack" with the people of Hangberg who inhabit those homes, objectifying the poverty of the people of Hangberg as a "nuisance" to his job. By conflate I mean that the fireman disrespects the distinction the people in Hangberg like to make between what they are

believed to live in, “shacks,” and what they claim they live in, bungalows. Whereas, Brent exposes how the media is complicit with the state’s deceit regarding life in Hangberg, in the sense of that the fireman presents a fire in Hangberg as “taken care of,” and in another sense that the media lied about the number of fireman responding to the previous fire discussed by Brent. The fireman talking about the recent fire does not bring up the incommensurate attention paid to wealthy, white communities who can afford losing homes. In the valley communities of Hout Bay homes are massive and clearly delineated as properties with lawns, walls, and fences, where fire can burn for a while before destroying a person’s home, but that time translated to the context of Hangberg means upwards of five homes could be decimated, with no time for families to gather their things, let alone escape with their lives.

Since fires in Hangberg are misinterpreted by the state as the community’s doing, the state can enter as the solution to a “Hangberg problem.” While the community of Hangberg starts the fires, the trash accumulated everywhere on the ground, along with homes mostly made of flammable material, fuels the fires. Trash and flammable material are problems that result from the state not providing trash pick-up and housing materials that won’t ignite. Chance writes about how “criminality” projected upon the people of Hangberg leads to fires being understood as a consequence of the community and not infrastructural neglect or totalitarian boundaries that exercise power over the people’s means to life. She argues, “If shack fires are posited as symptoms of criminal agency, the force of technical and legal interventions by the state is framed as their cure” (Chance 2015: 409). Returning to the eviction order, fire is another political mechanism where the state’s attempts to validate an interpretive framework are superimposed on how the community operates, manipulating how fire is received within the experiences of the people of Hangberg. In opposition to the criminal myth-making of the space of the home in

Hangberg, Brent told me that fire is not just material evidence of the state determining what story is told about the home, but also represents the creative adaptations of space the community activates in order to improvise upon inadequate materials and close proximity to fire, which can break out at any time. He told me, “I can show you anywhere, people are clever and build their own fire break, because people are knowledgeable and fire is a daily reality. We cannot afford to build with block. With wood, it is a heap of ash and I have to start all over again.” On the surface one could assume the home is yet another marker of oppressive circumstance, but that assumption is predicated on ignoring the depth of social and cultural practice that constitute the home for the people of Hangberg.

### **Conclusion:**

The home includes everyday practices, subjection to state modes of dispossession, and potential for fire’s erasure of families and their things. The people of Hangberg are not passive recipients of their living conditions, but they actively reshape their precarious lives in order to imbue meaning, purpose, and agency into the changing spaces they occupy. Butler’s argument, that “there are ‘subjects’ who are not quite recognizable as subjects, and there are ‘lives’ that are not quite—or, indeed, are never—recognized as lives,” (Butler 2009: 4) relates to the schemes of state power and dominant representations of the people of Hangberg that materialize in insidious, subtle ways. More important to the community of Hangberg is that the people in the community invoke the question about how their life is recognizable to people in and outside the community. Butler frames that question, saying, “In what sense does life, then, always exceed the normative conditions of its recognizability” (Butler 2009: 4)? The people of Hangberg have shaped an everyday life that disrupts the “inherent truth-value” communicated behind state-drawn lines

such as the “fire break” and formed a collectively-built material and social life that fits into their local organization of community and solidarity, simultaneously resisting the structural, political, and social conventions expected by the state. The state does not have a hegemonic voice and vision within the community because the people of Hangberg do not normalize the state’s orthodoxies surrounding housing and their everyday lives. The people of Hangberg make decisions regarding the formation of their everyday lives and the homes and spaces they occupy in order to politicize and defuse the state’s interventions in the community.

## Conclusion



Donita washing her clothes, with rhythm.

## **Reading Fanon into Discussions of a “South African” Nationalism and Hangberg’s**

### **Historical Struggle:**

The community of Hangberg’s struggle and engagement with marginality is not unique. Marginality relates to histories of nationalism which links to how colored people ended up in Hangberg. Under Apartheid, a brutal white nationalism resulted in making national space as one only belonging to white people. Apartheid also included a revolutionary nationalism for people of color, a direct liberation from the racist structures, ideas, and supreme white voice established under Apartheid. People of color’s identification with nationalism: the ideals, demands, and actions associated with their, emerged under Apartheid, but had a continued relevance through the formally-declared end to Apartheid. “The intertwining of race and nationalism in relation to histories of dispossession and accumulation” (Hart 2014: 21) lives on after Apartheid; its ghost haunts the memories and contemporary realities of people of color still marginalized, impoverished, and left to living in the spaces shaped under Apartheid. Apartheid is alive, not necessarily through a legal system of racial oppression and violence, but as a past traceable to the present where the people of Hangberg are subjected to punishment and containment by the state.

Apartheid is not only recreated in the violence committed by the Democratic Alliance against the people of Hangberg; it is also reproduced more extensively in South Africa. One of the more extensive issues of nationalism impacting contemporary Hangberg is an ongoing myth of social change after Apartheid. By myth I mean that the ANC has abused its own revolutionary past and national struggle, all in order to consolidate wealth as the “national bourgeoisie” (Fanon 2004: 97). Franz Fanon describes the national bourgeoisie as a self-serving African class that governs the respective African nation-state after colonial rule, though still through lens of colonial interests. He writes, “What makes a bourgeoisie is not its attitude, taste,

or manners. It is not even its aspirations. The bourgeoisie is above all the direct product of precise economic realities. Economic reality in the colonies, however, is a foreign bourgeois reality. It is the metropolitan bourgeoisie, represented by its local counterparts, which is present in the colonial towns” (Fanon 2004: 122). The national bourgeoisie of South Africa are a twisted<sup>35</sup> import of Western society resulting in an African elite that uses the struggle of the colonized in order to appease the West’s economic infiltration while they get paid off. I am going to discuss how Fanon’s ideas about the pitfalls of national consciousness in relation to colonial power and post-colonial independence, where a corrupt state has built its fortune at the expense of communities like Hangberg. Fanon highlights that contradiction where Hangberg was supposed to be empowered and economically stabilized by the “democratic” transition out of Apartheid, but instead is a symbol of the progress that has only been made for those possessing wealth and seats of power. I argue that the space and people of Hangberg embody South Africa’s current state of neocolonialism because the Democratic Alliance’s reassertion of white power and the ANC’s cronyism have resulted in an intensification of corporate capital coming from former and current empires. For example, look at the mining industry financed by the West, the private security conglomerates guarding white people, the harsh immigration legislation that has spawned xenophobic tensions with migrants from other African countries,

---

<sup>35</sup> I choose to use politically-charged language because I believe that Malcolm X and Fanon’s argument about violence and reclamation by any means necessary, must be the militant tactics when violence has been a defining relationship for people of color in societies around the world. People of color have always been subordinated to and silenced by those narratives of violence. There is no time to wait for consensus for the people of Hangberg. Louis, a Rastafarian in the community, said it best about the revolutionary mindset about the people of Hangberg, ironically using “you” to talk about the state, but that “you” could also symbolize my presence as a white man. Louis said, “You can’t keep us here, we are going to explode. When protests don’t work, we will throw stones and arm ourselves with whatever we have. We do not get land claims here, but we were born here. We have to take back what has been stolen from us.” Brent also has an incisive point. Commenting on when the metro police attacked the community in 2010, he said, talking about the police as the state’s “clean-up” crew, “In 2010 they fought against us, shot our eyes out, ran at us again and again, and then they pay lawyers to defend us. How can you pay someone to defend me, but you are my enemy?”



and the tourist industry sponsored by the ANC and the DA in order to bring revenue from a Western audience. All are producing pronounced divisions of wealth within the same racial structures and methods of control, tactics introduced by the British and Dutch, codified further by the Afrikaaners during Apartheid, and purportedly ameliorated by electing a “democratic” government after Apartheid.

Nationalism invokes a past. It imagines a moment in time of apparent unification, and it tells a dominant history of acquisition and erasure in the case of the formation of “South Africa” by colonialists. In the context of Hangberg, nationalism is not about contesting the one national space made when South Africa became a nation-state. One has to “think *with* nationalism *against* nationalism—and this entails beginning with taken-for-granted understandings in order to denaturalize the meanings of nation and liberation in relation to the rapidly changing world” (Hart 2014: 13). In South Africa communities of color have spoken from a historical position of contestation against colonialism and Apartheid’s schemes of political and economic power. Take, for example, the Rhodes Must Fall movement happening now, a decolonization and black consciousness movement surrounding education and involving general political discussions of enfranchisement. The Rhodes Must Fall movement has exposed the South African “nation” as a fractured reality, a place where people of color are still discriminated against and deprived of occupying an equal space with white people. The image of a “rainbow nation” is an ideological fantasy. The “rainbow nation” was an imagined community—Nelson Mandela’s vision of South Africa’s future—and now that ideology operates as a smokescreen used by the state in order to deflect confrontation with issues of silencing around people of color. Apartheid’s racial segregation is not a distant memory, but rather incarcerates the space of Hangberg as debris from which the state can then already operate in a taken-for-granted position of power. Residues of

oppression from the literal past inscribed on the present, especially in disguised ways, such as the white-owned harbor of Apartheid implicated in today's state-regulated denial of fishermen from Hangberg who continue to be excluded from having a right to fish around Hout Bay and the coastline. Another example of historical residue includes the actions of people in Hangberg who build homes against a state-run repressive legal system, reconfiguring their historical pain symbolically as a lived space of value and resistance for the community. The lived experiences of colonialism and Apartheid for people of color still cry out as wounds that have not been healed, let alone addressed.

Gillian Hart's theory of ANC nationalism during and after Apartheid as two codependent processes of governance—de-nationalization and re-nationalization—is an important way of understanding the evolution of the ANC's radical black politics under Apartheid. The ANC, which came to power in 1994, employed the political rhetoric of change to disguise its rampant thievery from poor communities of color. The ANC party turned into a money-grabbing elite complicit with massive injections of foreign finance and social capital. By finance and social capital I mean how, for example, Cape Town has undergone a significant transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The city has amassed wealth by developing corporate infrastructure downtown, while the poor communities of color in the margins receive nothing. In the meantime, NGO programs and police interventions try to discipline the people within these poor communities to believe that their lives are "horrible" and require "improvement." Coded in "models-for-improvement" is the desire to socialize communities into a more "socially acceptable" life such as Khayelitsha, a poor black community on the outskirts of Cape Town where several NGO projects have taken place, but today often function as ivory towers, eerie wastelands that stand out in opposition to the community's construction of everyday life. In Hangberg, these projects

of “development” for poor black and colored sections of urban South Africa are operative; the provincial government has attempted to displace the people of Hangberg when it wants to promote tourism and international spectacles like the World Cup of 2010. Hart describes de-nationalization as,

signaling the simultaneously economic, political and cultural practices and processes that are generating ongoing inequality and ‘surplus’ populations, and the conflicts that surround them. De-nationalization focuses attention on the historical and geographical specificities of southern African racial capitalism and settler colonialism, their interconnections with forces at play in other parts of the world, and their modes of reconnecting with the increasingly financialized global political economy in the post-apartheid period. (Hart 2014: 7)

Hart locates re-nationalization as the moment when the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), formed by the South African Communist Party in 1962 and later adopted by the ANC under Apartheid, eventually led to a situation of political flux where,

the overthrow of the apartheid state would inaugurate a phase of bourgeois national democracy that would pave the way for the second-stage socialist revolution. This aspect of re-nationalization highlights that it is not a separable ‘political’ process, but is crucially about making the case for accommodation of the inequalities of post-apartheid capitalism as a transitory phenomenon, to be superseded by the (ever-retreating) second phase. (Hart 2014: 8)

De-nationalization and re-nationalization form the contradictions of political power after Apartheid whereby the ANC overthrew the National Party in principle to liberate the masses as the point from which democratic rule would organize itself. In reality, the ANC became an insulated party exercising control from its throne of excess and caudillismo authority.<sup>36</sup>

Franz Fanon foresaw the issue of colonial import and the pitfalls of national consciousness; though writing in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, his theories are equally as pertinent into the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries of South Africa. What Fanon described and lived during the

---

<sup>36</sup> Caudillismo denotes the “strong-man” bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes of Latin America throughout the Cold War, but I use it to refer to also the dictatorships and neocolonial classes that came in Africa at varying moments of post-colonial independence.

Algerian struggle against French occupation, lives more broadly in places subjected to colonial rule. Apartheid was a further instantiation of white colonization, because Afrikaaners gained rights in South Africa thanks to the violent domination of the “interior” perpetrated by Dutch and British settlements. Fanon’s prescience illuminates a common story among anti-colonial struggles and the post-colonial formation of independent states, paying particular attention to how colonialism operates within the framework of nationalism. Nationalism was used as a tactic of resistance among people of color in South Africa, but then that national scale of liberation became an independent, democratically-appointed government, the ANC, which after Apartheid formed an oligarchy only concerned with lining their pockets with money, securing power, and using “crises” of resource disparity and the military to protect those prerogatives over profit and political sway. The accumulation of money and power is predicated on economic and political dependencies on the West. In describing the evolution of a “small but powerful black capitalist class allied with white corporate capital” (Hart 2014: 7), Fanon writes that,

instead of inspiring confidence, assuaging the fears of its citizens and cradling them with its power and discretion, the State, on the contrary, imposes itself in a spectacular manner, flaunts its authority, harasses, making it clear to its citizens they are in constant danger. The single party is the modern form of the bourgeois dictatorship—stripped of mask, makeup, and scruples, cynical in every aspect. Such a dictatorship cannot, in fact, go very far. It never stops secreting its own contradiction. Since the bourgeoisie does not have the economic means both to ensure its domination and to hand out few crumbs to the rest of the country—so busy is it lining its own pockets not only as fast as it can, but also in the most vulgar fashion—the country sinks ever deeper into stagnation. And in order to hide this stagnation, to mask this regression, to reassure itself and give itself cause to boast, the bourgeoisie has no other option but to erect imposing edifices in the capital and spend money on so-called prestige projects. The national bourgeoisie increasingly turns its back on the interior, on the realities of a country gone to waste, and looks toward the former metropolis and the foreign capitalists who secure its services. Since it has no intention of sharing its profits with the people or of letting them enjoy the rewards paid by the major foreign companies, it discovers the need for a popular leader whose dual role will be to stabilize the regime and perpetuate the domination of the bourgeoisie. (Fanon 2004: 111)

Fanon highlights the tension and contradiction between a movement out of Apartheid that disturbingly mirrors histories of white occupation and political power. The ANC has perpetuated a racial divide through the expansion of an economy based on capitalist gain for the ANC party, white landowners, and corporate, and foreign investment and consumption. As a consequence, the corruption at the state level has led to an exploitation and abandonment of people of color who, according to the “rainbow nation” rhetoric, are supposed to have equal claim and access to land, infrastructure, economic opportunity, and a voice in the political arena that determines their lives.

The ANC and political collectives of people of color attempted to find a loophole in the political system of Apartheid in order to initiate revolutionary change and a radical restructuring of society. Members of the liberation movements voice dissent, criticisms, and counter-narratives to Apartheid that did not always advocate nationalism as a way of dismantling the Apartheid state. The people of Hangberg are trying to foster that multiplicity of national voices through, in Fanon’s words, “a social and political consciousness, a humanism” (Fanon 2004: 144) where people value a critical awareness of the system of governance in place, and not a collective consciousness among people of color that relies on a retrospective of the revolutionary movements of Apartheid. A national consciousness has led to a post-Apartheid reality where people of color are disenfranchised by a double standard—nationalism as a rhetorical device for structural change, and nationalism used to advance a party-politics mentality that furthers the gap between the people and the government. Fanon argues that “the nation should not be an affair run by a big boss obsessed with the question of succession” (Fanon 2004: 127), but rather the people should form an operative democracy where “the party is not the authority but the organization whereby they, the people, exert their authority and will” (Fanon 2004: 128). The

ANC, the DA, and other manifestations of the state have become the colonial tyranny people of color have incessantly fought against. To paint a negative picture of the realities of people like the community of Hangberg ignores their historical struggle that refuses to be co-opted into a movement toward national economic, political, and social change, recognizing that the movement of nationalism embodies a contradiction. On one hand, the state defines itself against the evils of Apartheid, but at the same time, reflects the terrors of that history by marginalizing people of color and excluding communities of color from a political stage that matters to their livelihood.

The people of Hangberg “understand that wealth is not the fruit of labor but the spoils from an organized protection racket” (Fanon 2004: 133), and that the rhetoric of substantial social transformation after Apartheid has not resulted in any national voice and space that recognizes their presence. The “nation” is an instrument of the state that asserts itself over the people of Hangberg. When the people of Hangberg expose the projects of the state, they speak to the potency of a human collectivity where marginalized people living in South Africa do not “cultivate the spirit of the exceptional or look for the hero, another form of leader” (Fanon 2004: 137). Instead, the people must “appropriate the bridge” (Fanon 2004: 141), Fanon’s metaphor for signaling the multitude of ways in which a local struggle, such as the people of Hangberg’s, strives to be interconnected with other marginalized urban communities of color, united toward closing the gap between the state and the people. Then “nobody has a monopoly on truth, neither the leader nor the militant. The search for truth in local situations is the responsibility of the community” (Fanon 2004: 139). The state is not an imposition of truth, but a way for the people of Hangberg to understand their position in relation to forms of power and exclusion that have a profound historical rootedness. In the spirit of Fanon, the people of Hangberg are not

strict objects of power and intervention, but a beautifully complex people that experience life in, outside, and against taken-for-granted forms of control. They reconfigure historical and contemporary dispossession as a meaningful space that seeks no compromise, and rather tries to share in a broader South African landscape of power that would rather prey on people of color's disempowerment.

## Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Writing Against Culture." In *Anthropology in Theory*, edited by Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, 466-79. Malden: Blackwell, 2006.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes on an Investigation)." In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma, 86-111. Malden: Blackwell, 2006.
- Athanasiou, Athena, and Judith Butler. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
- Baldwin, James. *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. New York: Henry Holt, 1986.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 253-64. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1988.
- Biehl, Joao. "Dead Alive, Dead Outside, Alive Inside." Introduction to *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, 1-34. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Brager, Jenna. "Bodies of Water." *The New Inquiry*. Last modified May 12, 2015. Accessed March 10, 2016. <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/bodies-of-water/>.
- Buhler, Andreas Joachim. "Smiling in the Face of Precarity: Housing and Eviction in Hangberg, South Africa." Master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 2014.
- Butler, Judith. "Precarious Life, Grievable Life." Introduction to *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 1-32. New York: Verso, 2009.
- Chance, Kerry Ryan. "'Where There is Fire, There is Politics': Ungovernability and Material Life in Urban South Africa." *Cultural Anthropology* 30, no. 3 (2015): 394-423.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Boulder: Westview, 1992.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven F. Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- De Greef, Kimon. "The Booming Illegal Abalone Fishery in Hangberg: Tough Lessons for Small-Scale Fisheries Governance in South Africa." Master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 2013.



- . "Family of Four Die in Hangberg." GroundUp. Last modified April 21, 2015. Accessed April 5, 2016. [http://www.groundup.org.za/article/family-four-die-hangberg-fire\\_2856/](http://www.groundup.org.za/article/family-four-die-hangberg-fire_2856/).
- Depelchin, Jacques. "Genocide in Rwanda and the Question of Ethics in African History." *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition*, 25-52. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2005.
- Erasmus, Zimitri. "Re-imagining Coloured Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa." Introduction to *Shaped by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, 13-28. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove, 1967.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.
- Ferguson, James. "The Anti-Politics Machine." In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma, 270-86. Malden: Blackwell, 2006.
- Fortun, Kim. "Ethnography in Late Industrialism." *Cultural Anthropology* 27, no. 3 (August 2012): 446-64.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Body of the Condemned." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 170-78. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- . "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 76-100. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- . "Panopticism." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 206-13. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- . "Right of Death and Power over Life." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 258-72. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- Gqola, Pumla Dineo. "'Slaves Don't Have Opinions': Inscriptions of Slave Bodies and the Denial of Agency." In *Shaped by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, edited by Zimitri Erasmus, 45-63. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Graeber, David. "It Is Value That Brings Universes into Being." *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, no. 2 (2013): 219-43.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

- Grunenbaum, Heidi, and Steven Robins. "Crossing the Colour(ed) Line: Mediating the Ambiguities of Belonging and Identity." In *Shaped by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, edited by Zimitri Erasmus, 159-72. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1992): 6-23.
- Hart, Gillian. *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014.
- Harvey, David. "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession." *Socialist Register* 40 (2004): 63-87.
- Hendricks, Cheryl. "Ominous' Liaisons: Tracing the Interface between 'Race' and Sex at the Cape." In *Shaped by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, edited by Zimitri Erasmus, 29-44. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Kicherer, Johannes Jacobus. *Narrative of the Mission to the Hottentots and Boschemans: With a General Account of the South African Missions*. London: Bye and Law, 1804.
- Li, Tania Murray. "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resource Politics and the Tribal Slot." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 1 (January 2000): 149-79.
- Matthews, James. *Cry Rage: Odyssey of a Dissident Poet*. Athlone: Realities, 2005.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-40.
- . *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California, 2001.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "Society, Economy, and the State Effect." In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma, 169-86. Malden: Blackwell, 2006.
- Pollack, Martin. *Fire Break and High-Risk Fire Area in Hangberg, Hout Bay*. Photograph. City of Cape Town. October 10, 2010. Accessed April 5, 2016. <https://www.capetown.gov.za/en/Pages/HangbergprotestasetbHangberg.aspx>.
- Reddy, Thiven. "The Politics of Naming: The Constitution of Coloured Subjects in South Africa." In *Shaped by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, edited by Zimitri Erasmus, 64-79. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Ross, Fiona C. *Raw Life, New Hope: Housing, Decency and Everyday Life in a Post-Apartheid Community*. Cape Town: UCT Press, 2010.

- Saff, Grant. *Changing Cape Town: Urban Dynamics, Policy and Planning during the Political Transition in South Africa*. Lanham: University of America, 1998.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- . *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance." *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109.
- . "'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives." *Representations, Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories* ser., Winter, no. 37 (1992): 151-89.
- . "'The Rot Remains': From Ruins to Ruination." Introduction to *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, 1-38. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- . *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon, 1995.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- "The Uprising of Hangberg." Video file. Vimeo. Posted by Dylan Valley and Aryan Kaganof, 2014. Accessed September 10, 2015. <https://vimeo.com/109263953>.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.