Too many rights? Women's reproductive freedom in post-Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the contestations over the legislation and enactment of sexual and reproductive rights in South Africa. The rights to free, quality sexual and reproductive health and rights are inscribed in the Constitution (1996) and within copious legislation and policy documents, yet their realisations remains elusive for much of the population. Teenage pregnancy is a particular node for controversy and public disapprobation in present-day South Africa. Public anxieties and opposition to teenage pregnancy relates, in complex ways, to broader suspicions about moral atavism among young women, in particular. There is a sense that the democratic transition has dismantled established modes of social regulation, resulting in a rupture in the social fabric and in concomitant social damage. This article explores two elements of this idea. Firstly, that the legislation of democratic freedoms has licensed sexual promiscuity among young women. Secondly, that this sexual promiscuity is related to other forms of profligate consumption among the 'born free' generation – those born after the first democratic elections in 1994. Based on seven years of qualitative research in the Eastern Cape as part of a study on post-apartheid youth, this article contrasts claims about the social damage brought about by the empowerment of women in the post-apartheid era, with the experiential accounts of young men and women themselves, as well as their older caregivers.

INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the 1990s, the South African government pursued an ambitious programme of legislative reform. New laws were written to reflect the democratic principles of rights to health, education and gender equality. But in the first two decades of South African democracy, opposition to laws and policies promoting gender equality, both within the ruling African National Congress and the polity at large, cast doubt on the authentic commitment to the equality of women (Walker 2013). The scale of this opposition and its manifold expressions – including high rates of rape and sexual violence (Gqola 2015; Meintjies 2011; Jewkes and Abrahams 2002) – contrast starkly with official commitments to gender equality.

A rhetorical commitment to gender equality combined with pervasive practical renditions of patriarchy, presents a paradox in South African culture. This paradox straddles tensions between freedom and control, autonomy and submission, agency and authority – the political contestations of a society in flux. At its core, this is a conflict between different versions of citizenship and subjectivity vying for ascendancy in a state in transition. That these struggles have been waged so bitterly in what Raewyn Connell calls the 'reproductive arena', reveals the deep social value vested in sexuality, gender and the family. Here, struggles to control sexual behaviour and to propagate certain kinds of future citizens are waged between state and public actors (Connell 2012). The pursuit of sexual freedom and reproductive autonomy by individuals jostles with attempts by different moral authorities – including the state – to order and regulate sexual and reproductive behaviours. This article argues that disputes about gender and generation, imbued with new meaning in the post-apartheid era, are central to popular contestations about sexual freedom and democratic citizenship.

The key claims in this article arose from seven years of primary research in the Eastern Cape, conducted within the ambit of a study about health and wellbeing among adolescents. The findings are therefore specific to the Eastern Cape. Between 2013 – 2020, together with researchers on the Mantsi Wakho study, I conducted interviews with over eighty teenagers across the Eastern Cape's Amathole district and the Buffalo City Municipality, including in the areas of Mdantsane, Gompo, Duncan Village, Zwelitsha and Dimbaza. The interviews were conducted in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, principally in the homes and leisure spaces of the study

participants. Interviews in languages other than English were translated into English by experienced researchers, and thematically coded . The interviews focused on the lived experiences of young people, with an initial focus on the HIV pandemic. However, the interviews also included a wealth of data on young people's identities, consumption practices, and their conceptions of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Focus groups, which allowed for greater engagement between the young men and women, were conducted with them and with their caregivers (largely grandmothers or great aunts). These focus groups explored sexual and reproductive health and rights among youth.

Combining the primary data with secondary sources, I explore how young South Africans practice reproductive citizenship and rights to sexual and reproductive freedom and liberty. I argue that popular responses to teenage pregnancy convey a deep-seated moral objection to sexual freedom, among young women in particular. I explore the history of women's politics in South Africa, tracing ideas of women's rights and freedoms in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. I explore how the responses of young and old people in South Africa's Eastern Cape are used to decipher the meaning of reproductive freedom and regulation for 'born frees', and for their parents and older relatives. The perspectives and experiences of participants from across the generational spectrum illuminate facets of post-apartheid existence, of perceived changes that have occurred, and of the continuities that persist.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

The political organisation of women has a long history in South Africa. Black, Coloured and Indian women (to use apartheid-era racial designations) were excluded from formal party politics during the eras of segregation (1910 – 1948) and apartheid (1948 – 1994). During these years, formal party politics was the preserve of Whites only, and largely of men only.[1] However, women remained politically active throughout these decades. In 1954, women gathered for the inaugural conference of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) to address the rights of women in particular, and to articulate an agenda for social and political change (Hassim 2014). Notably, the 1954 Women's Freedom Charter preceded, by a year, the Freedom Charter, which remains a lodestar of both apartheid and post-apartheid era calls for unity of action and transformation in the creation of a democratic society. As Hassim (2014) argues, there is still a 'lingering recuperative task' to explore, in greater scholarly depth, about

the struggles of women in the anti-apartheid resistance movement. Hassim notes, for example, that it was in fact the Women's Charter, rather than the Freedom Charter, which first articulated notions of a non-racial democratic South Africa. The 1954 Women's Freedom Charter, 'What Women Demand', has attracted relatively little scholarly attention in discussions of nascent anti-apartheid resistance, leading Hassim to argue for greater attention to women's collective struggles against segregation and apartheid (Hassim 2014). The charter was adopted at the inaugural conference of the Federation of South African Women.

Five decades later women again gathered to campaign for equal recognition under the law but this time against the backdrop of South Africa's democratic transition. During the 1990s, the Women's National Coalition began a grassroots campaign to gather women's demands for, and visions of, a democratic South Africa. The result, The Women's Charter for Effective Equality, chimed closely with the ANC's long-standing rhetorical commitment to a 'non-racial, non-sexist democracy'. During the decades of the anti-apartheid struggle, women's extra political organisation also continued to flourish, including through burial societies, stokvels, and professional and religious groups (Lee 2009; Hassim 2006).

Shireen Hassim identifies two shifts in the South African political environment which changed the course of the women's movement, further elevating feminist politics. The first was in the late 1970s and 1980s, in which mass-scale civil resistance to apartheid developed, embodied in the activities of the United Democratic Front. During this time, political mobilisation flourished at local levels, and women were drawn into politics through community organisations (Hassim 2003). Matters previously consigned to the domestic realm, confronted by women as wives and mothers, featured more substantively on the political agenda.

The second shift in the political landscape, garnering wider support for feminist politics, occurred in the years surrounding the 1994 elections – South Africa's 'democratic transition'. Women's rights advocates championed a commitment to gender equality within the anti-apartheid movement by strengthening connections between women's struggles and nationalist struggles (Hassim 2006). Feminism was perceived by many in the ANC – both within party leadership and within the broad-based 'comrades movement' – as a Western imposition, a divisive distraction

within liberation politics (Meintjies 2011; Hassim 2006; Seekings 1991). From the 1980s onwards, women's rights activists in the anti-apartheid movement worked to reframe feminism as an ideology of popular emancipation rather than elitism. They recast feminism as a political ally and catalyst, rather than a 'third force' within the anti-apartheid movement. They also did this in a way which resonated with popular understandings of women as wives and mothers, infusing deeply-ingrained social identities with new political possibilities.

THE HISTORIES OF SEX AND SEXUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has a chequered history of sexual and reproductive surveillance. Historians, sociologists and anthropologists have argued that colonialism, and particularly the 'civilising enterprise' of Christian missionising, disrupted established forms of sexual education and control, including among youth (Delius and Glaser 2002; Bozzoli 2015). While it is crucial to historicise changes in sexual behaviours and to situate these in relation to broader social dynamics, there is also an implicit danger of essentialising pre-colonial traditions, which often took more fluid forms than those inscribed within colonial and missionary discourses.

What scholarship about the histories of sex and sexuality over many decades in South Africa makes clear, is that perceived transgressions and their public revelations have long inspired attempts at greater regulation of sexual and reproductive behaviours. This is particularly evident in cases concerning supposedly illicit sexual behaviours and in their public exposure and critique (Ratele 2016; Hassim 2016; Hodes 2016; Hodes 2015; Klausen 2014). The sexual behaviours of young women were an intense source of public scrutiny and contestation during the late apartheid era, whether in ANC training camps in Lusaka or in the White suburbs of Durban (Armstrong 2014).

As Hassim has shown, the passing of gender equality bills during South Africa's democratic transition was due in greater part to the skilful politicking of a handful of key advocates, than to broad-based support within the ANC (Hassim 2006). Hassim has scrutinised the legislative schedule for the first five years of democracy, in which the fundamental commitments of South African democracy were codified within law and policy. In this period of political remaking, advocates

for women's equality lobbied hard to ensure that their objectives featured on the parliamentary slate. Despite strategic politicking, gender equality bills 'languished' in draft form for years (Hassim 2006). The bills were not included on the parliamentary calendar until late in the first session and then only after concerted campaigning by women's rights advocates highlighted the National Assembly's neglect of gender equality legislation. Laws on reproductive rights and social services – including the public provision of contraception, abortion and child support – evoked fervent public and political debate. Many regarded the laws as a political betrayal, at odds with a moral consensus about the social and sexual roles of women in South Africa.

The advent of democracy in South Africa has not been regarded as an unalloyed benefit for public morality. Democratic freedoms have been associated with generational conflict, moral dissolution, and a sense of the erosion of tradition and authority (Gouws and Stasiulis 2016; Ratele 2016; Posel, Kahn and Walker 2007). The perceived harms of the democratic transition are replete in public opposition to gender equality, as both a constitutional commitment and a practical lived experience. This opposition is expressed in a multitude of forms, including the widespread practice of rape and sexual violence (Moffett 2009), the misogyny of many high-ranking political officials (both within the ruling ANC and within various opposition parties), and the clamour of traditional leaders for the formalisation of patriarchal controls over their women subjects (Hassim 2016). The democratic transition is widely regarded as having ushered in a new era of profligacy, apparent in a heady amalgam of sexual and material excess. The appetites of youth, both for sex and for stuff (clothes, cell phones, cars), are understood as an expression of moral laxness, a 'breezy licentiousness' among Born Frees (Steinberg 2013: 497). Aspiration and transformation in the post-apartheid era have been expressed as the freedom to consume (James 2014: 21), and this unbridled consumption is connected, in the public imagination, to new forms of sexual profligacy. It is apparent, in particular, in allegations of sexual and reproductive excesses by young women, like those made in this study.

Figure 1: T-shirt slogans at a popular retail outlet in East London highlight trends in post-apartheid material culture. One states, 'Born in the 90s', crafting a collective identity for a generation of young consumers. Another T-shirt brands its wearer as a 'Material Girl', alluding directly to the desire to consume. (Hodes, East London, September 2014.)

Apartheid was primarily a project of racial domination but functioned within a gendered dimension as well. Mark Hunter and Jonny Steinberg have both written about a 'patriarchal bargain' as a key tenet of apartheid's social contract. In essence, apartheid authority was vested in White monopolisation of formal political power and economic control. Black men participated in this economy because they had little other choice. However, as a means of accommodation, they retained substantial economic and social power over Black women. In the post-apartheid era, these economic and social controls have been symbolically eroded through laws and policies intended to promote gender equality, but they remain commonplace within popular practice and experience. Democratic South Africa ostensibly gives equal rights to all citizens, but it remains a patriarchal society with high rates of gender-based violence as just one manifestation of persistent misogyny and oppression. As this study shows, some men have entered into a 'fraternal contract' in which they join other men to exercise social, economic and biological control over women (Pateman 1988).

The historical record shows that women in South Africa have sought to control their fertility for centuries (Garenne et al. 2001; Bradford 1991). The popularity and persistence of abortion and contraception among many population groups, for as long as the written historical record allows, challenges simplistic pro-natalist assumptions about the sexual and reproductive desires of women in South Africa (Hodes 2013). In recent years, teenage pregnancy has emerged as a national scandal, identified by the Department of Basic Education as a 'moral panic' (Panday et al 2012; Hodes 2017). However, while education officials are at pains to counter the opprobrium that surrounds teenage pregnancy, provincial education departments have acknowledged localised increases in teenage pregnancy, including at primary school levels (Villette 2015). Approximately 20,000 learners became pregnant in 2014, with copious media coverage of the negative consequences for young mothers and for society at large. Rates of teenage pregnancy have continued to rise in more recent years, with 70 000 adolescents aged 15-19 giving birth in 2019, and 67 000 adolescents aged 15-19 giving birth in 2020 (Mashele 2023). Between 2017 and 2021, the number of births to young teenagers (aged 10 – 14) increased by 48.7% (Barron et al. 2022). For adolescent girls aged 15-19, the number of births increased by 17.9% (Barron et al. 2022). In 2019, a total of 106 383 registered live births occurred among adolescents aged 10-19 (Statistics South Africa 2022).

One example of the political valence of opposition to teenage pregnancy was the 2015 pronouncement by the then President Jacob Zuma. In mid-2015, growing public interest in pregnant schoolgirls prompted a response from Zuma, who called for pregnant teenagers to be separated from their children and sent away – perhaps to Robben Island – to complete their schooling. Zuma made these comments while addressing the National House of Traditional Leaders; a strategic choice of audience.

The struggle between traditional authorities and local government authorities for legal control over their subjects has gained momentum in recent years. Due in large part to the advocacy of women's organisations in the 1980s and 1990s, the right to gender equality supersedes the right to cultural practices. If a cultural practice promotes gender discrimination, it is not guaranteed constitutional protection under the law.

However, from the late 1990s, a 'turn to tradition' and a reinvigoration of the 'fraternal contract' in South African politics have gradually replaced progressive commitment to gender equality with a defensive reverence for 'traditional values' (Walker 2013: 90). As Walker describes, an 'authoritarian construction of culture' has increasingly been wielded as an incarnation of tradition, while gender equality and reproductive freedom have been cast as foreign newfangled impositions, irreconcilable with an 'African' worldview.

Zuma's statements about teenage pregnancy called for a turn to traditionalism and sought an audience of allies among traditional leaders striving for greater control over their subjects. Zuma's comments on teenage pregnancy made during a speech were reported by the South African Press Association: "The reality is you have got kids with kids. They don't know how to grow a child, how to look after them. They have become a burden to grandmothers, to society. So why should we just sit and look?" (SAPA 2015).

Zuma added that teenage pregnancy was something alien to earlier times when traditional cultures were respected: "There were no pregnancies of teenagers and people built families at the right time."

In his speech to traditional leaders, Zuma also suggested that welfare grants should not be paid in cash but in vouchers to prevent parents from misspending them, including at hair salons (SAPA 2015).

In these statements, Zuma alleged that teenage pregnancy is without historical precedent in South Africa, couching its emergence as a social phenomenon indicative of waning social and moral control over the younger generation, and girls in particular. Zuma also alleged that democratic laws and freedoms were being abused by young mothers who are exploiting their reproductive capacity for material gain rather than for nation-building. The fact that South Africa's president could suggest that teenage pregnancy is a new phenomenon, deserving of severe censure in South Africa, is reflective of a more generalised sense that the democratic transition had gone too far, and that young women in particular were abusing their newfound rights and freedoms.

Beneath this admonition lies a threat that teenage mothers should be punished for their reproductive transgressions. Zuma's invocation of exile to Robben Island conveys the severity and significance of their transgression. Robben Island holds a particular place in South Africa's past as a site of exile for lepers and political dissidents. By suggesting exile there as potential punishment, Zuma reveals the depth and intensity of moral opposition to teenage pregnancy. His remarks also demonstrate how public condemnations of teenage pregnancy serve as powerful political tools to rouse ideological support. In Zuma's threat of exile for pregnant teenagers, Robben Island serves as a new site of exile for those who have defiled a particular dream of democracy by violating the social strictures and national imperatives of post-apartheid South Africa.

As explored below, Zuma's sentiments were echoed, particularly among young men and older caregivers in this study, while young women articulated the difficulties of teenage pregnancy and poverty, expressing concerns for their wellbeing and future, rather than sanctioning irresponsibility and carelessness.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY: A PRACTICE WITHOUT PRECEDENT?

Teenage pregnancy has a long history in South Africa where it has been the source of copious formal and informal social sanctions and forms of both punishment and support (Delius and Glaser 2005; Macleod and Durrheim 2003; Jewkes et al 2001). Pre-marital sexual debut, impregnation and childbearing have been common social practices for many decades (Mkhwanazi 2013; Jewkes et al 2001). In the 1990s, teenage pregnancy was regarded as a relatively widespread occurrence among young South African women (Jewkes et al 2001). However, from the late 1990s, the occurrence has

increasingly been construed as novel and an indication that those poised to best reap the benefits of gender equality and reproductive rights, namely young Black women, were squandering the opportunity to curtail reproduction and work towards gender equality. Revelations about deviant behaviour among Born Frees – including drug use, unsafe sex and teenage pregnancy – tapped into broader collective disappointments about the political transition and stoked beliefs about the recklessness of youngsters who had betrayed the promise and potential of social transformation (Swartz 2010).

In Zuma's comments about teenage pregnancy, he alleged that teenage pregnancy had no historical basis in African society. Through invalidating indigeneity and arguing that teenage pregnancy was without historical precedent, Zuma implied a rupture with a moral past, arguing that democracy had brought with it a dissolution of values, in particular among youth. These claims resonate with the perception that democracy has unsettled the social order and disrupted the traditions through which authority and decency have historically been upheld.

At the source of debates about teenage pregnancy in South Africa is a contestation about biological capital, accumulated alongside other forms of capital, including cultural, social and economic capital (Vineis and Kelly-Irvine 2019). Young women, as embodiments of post-apartheid promise and potential, are seen as wasting the prospects of freedom and opportunity available in the post-apartheid era. Sex has been increasingly politicised, with teenage pregnancy cast as emblematic of misspent youth among Born Frees. Young South Africans are aware of the perception of theirs as the generation best poised to have realised the dreams of democracy, and of misusing this opportunity. In this research, young South Africans attributed their failure to realise the potential of educational and material advancement to the perceived loss of traditional values and social controls. Doom-saying was again connected to historical rupture; a casting aside of tradition with chaotic effects. As Aija, a 19-year-old in Mdantsane, explained:

> There's this thing that the youth of today is doomed. They know things that they are not supposed to know. People say that the youth are not meant to know things so as to keep up with the culture. (Interviewee 1 Mdantsane, 3 December 2014)

Here, the staggered wisdom of tradition has been replaced, in the post-apartheid era, with pervasive yet fatuous knowledge. The acquisition of this knowledge has distorted the morality of South African youth, with rising rates of teenage pregnancy as one manifestation. A focus group with young men from Mdantsane affirmed these connections and highlighted the belief in teenage pregnancy as a post-apartheid phenomenon:

> Facilitator: Why are girls becoming pregnant as teenagers?
>
> Kwakza: Because they are rebellious to the laws that are given to them by their parents. And when they reach teen stage they have peer pressure and influence by their friends, and end up pregnant.
>
> Butho: Because the modern way of living is not the same as olden days, even their parents don't sit down with them and tell them what's right or wrong...
>
> Tsotso: I think it's freedom and all these rights they are given. When they are told not to do something, they will say, 'I have the right to do that'. Even when they go out, they drink booze and the peer pressure gets to their mind. The influence of alcohol plays a significant role. She gets pregnant after that and regrets her decision, but it's too late.
>
> Kwakza: To add on that these girls are spoiled by the government by giving them the grant. So they know that when they have a child they get money, money that they don't use for the baby. They buy Brazilian hair, so it's too much freedom they are given. (Focus group with adolescent boys, East London, 29 November 2014)

Democracy is linked to the dismantling of respectability, to the collapse of social hierarchy with resultant loss of control by elders over youth and by men over women (Steinberg 2013; Hunter 2011). The perception is that young women are exercising their freedoms recklessly and then cloaking their mistakes in a mantle of democratic rights. The social grant system is seen to be incentivising this recklessness, encouraging young girls to have children and to generate income

for frivolous pursuits such as new hairstyles. Pregnancy is allegedly identified as a source of material enrichment, securing access to social grants which can be spent on whatever young women desire.

'BABIES FOR BLING': PREGNANCY AS PROFIT?

In the post-apartheid present, as already mentioned, a desire for material advancement through access to the child support grant, is alleged to be incentivising pregnancy (Hodes, Toska and Gittings 2016). Young women are claimed to be having children to access the child support grant (a cash pay-out of around R500 per month in April 2023), and then to be spending this on leisure pursuits and luxury items, such as alcohol and beauty treatments.

One of the most important initiatives in post-apartheid South Africa has been the introduction of a system of social grants which have enabled economic activity in places that were once destitute (Groenemeyer 2016). These were principally previous bantustans, which served as 'dumping grounds' for apartheid's 'surplus people' i.e. those who were viewed as an unproductive part of the economy in South African areas designated White. The grant system may well be the most effective anti-poverty programme in the post-apartheid era.

Allegations that young women are squandering money on luxuries, neglecting their national responsibilities as mothers, have a history in South Africa. These charges gathered ground at particular historical and economic moments, in which women entered the labour force in larger numbers and established a modicum of financial autonomy. Women's entry into the labour force and their acquisition of greater financial autonomy has, at numerous historical junctures, been shunned as a conduit for frivolous materialism (Hodes 2015).

The gender dimension of the post-apartheid grant system traces its history to the state maintenance grant, which was one of the principal social welfare mechanisms of the apartheid state that sought to enable the subsistence of White families, and to a lesser degree, Indian and Coloured families. Black children residing in bantustans, who were the poorest in South Africa, did not benefit from the grant at nearly the same scale as other races. In 1995, as apartheid policies were being cast aside or rewritten, the Lund Committee for Family and Child Support was

convened to develop a grant that would reach more poorer families than the social maintenance grant (SMG). In 1995 South Africa became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, and there was significant impetus within government to design programmes that would serve the rights of children (Groenemeyer 2016). In the early years of the democratic transition, it was foreseen that economic growth and job creation would ultimately obviate the need for a social grant system; grants were seen by the government as a stop-gap measure and as a necessity for the continued subsistence and survival of poor children and their families. However, against a backdrop of ongoing unemployment and persistent inequality, the child support grant has become an essential mechanism for families seeking to survive and subsist.

The cognitive and educational impacts of the child support grant (CSG) are in fact the opposite to popular claims about the grant incentivising pregnancy among young women. A study conducted by UNICEF found that the impact of the CSG reduced delays in girls entering school by 27%, with girls enrolling early obtaining higher scores on maths and reading tests – testament to the valuable impacts of the CSG. The CSG was found to promote human capital development, improve gender outcomes and reduce the historical legacy of inequality (UNICEF). As opposed to promoting early sexual debut and pregnancy, the study found statistically significant associations between the CSG, a reduction in sexual partners, and later sexual debut. It also found a reduction in pregnancy among those who received the CSG, particularly when recipients had started receiving the grant at a young age (UNICEF: 7). Despite all evidence to the contrary, the popular perception persists that social grants are incentivising pregnancy among girls and young women.

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION?

The post-apartheid media landscape has seen an explosion of images that glamorise high-end consumption, presenting luxury objects as indexical of empowerment and transformation (Posel 2010). The promotion of conspicuous consumption in the media and the ubiquitous appearance of sexualised images of young women are symbolically connected to growing sexual and material profligacy. The young women in this study were blamed for abusing the welfare system and for squandering state assets, both in the form of social grants and in misspent biological capital. As a young man from Mdantsane stated:

> [I]n these days teenagers at the age of 16 and 18 are getting pregnant just to get the grant... All they care about is having fun and nothing else... Some of them get pregnant on purpose of getting the grant money from government, because in their homes there is no bread-winner or maybe the sister is a domestic worker and she has to feed lots of people in the household... [T]hey decide to have a baby as a source of income. But now they use the money that was meant to feed their babies to have fun... go to braai places and buy alcohol... They say, "success is all about making profit", so by having babies they are making a profit. (Anonymous interviewee 23 Mdantsane, 28 July 2014)

One of the claims here is that young women are exploiting their sexual desirability for enrichment; that they are using sex for material acquisition. In this sense, the public reaction to claims about teenage pregnancy is also a reaction against heady new fusions of unbridled consumption encapsulated in the word 'bling' (Posel 2013). In the popular imagination it is connected to an abnegation of responsibility. To reiterate Zuma's claims about teenage pregnancy: young women are understood to be using their reproductive capacity for material advancement rather than nation-building. Instead of embodying the ideals of post-apartheid freedom and transformation, investing their biological capital at the right time and giving birth to a new generation of 'born free' citizens, they exploit reproduction for consumerist gain. Rather than realising the dreams of a post-apartheid future, for which their parents and grandparents had struggled, teenagers have tethered their elders to another cycle of domestic labour and familial responsibility. This view also emerged in interviews and focus groups with teenage men and older caregivers. A grandmother explained:

> The problem now with our youth is that they get out of hand. Some parents are complaining about their children. They complain about teenage pregnancy and that their children give birth to a child. They have many children which are going to be your responsibility as a grandmother. [The mother] will leave the kids with you and wander the streets... What am I going to do with the house full of kids?... I am the one looking after her [daughter's] kids. She takes the money and drinks it. (Anonymous interviewee, 50, Mdantsane, 24 December 2014)

The alleged abuse of rights and freedoms was echoed by Siyamthanda, a 19-year-old young man. Asked by a researcher what he thought of teenage pregnancy, he responded:

> Teenage pregnancy has been there since the olden days it's just that these days it has escalated... And the new government laws push them [young women] to have babies and from what I see is that the grant money also encourages them. Some even know that if I have two or three babies, at the end of the month I will have more money to drink and buy clothes, for themselves not for their babies.

Siyamthanda regards the provision of social grants as encouragement for girls and young women to have children. Grants were being misspent by feckless young mothers. This materialism was signalled also by Thelma, an elderly caregiver, who, in the context of a discussion about housing, stated: '[O]ur own children, all they want now is money. All they want is money, that is my fear' (Thelma, Mdantsane, 15 December 2014).

REPRODUCTIVE TREASON?

The idea of 'dole mums' or 'welfare queens', is a concept applied in many contexts the world over (Richter 2009: 94). It is also commonly used in South Africa, although research has consistently failed to support claims that teenage girls are having babies to access child support grants (Makiwane et al. 2006; Solomon 2013). Nevertheless, the idea persists, cutting a swathe across popular conceptions about youth and responsibility, about sexual and reproductive freedom and citizenship, and about fears for the future. The fear in South Africa is related to notions that the young generation is betraying the promise of democratic freedom and that they are using state resources for material gain rather than for social transformation and democratic redress. The fear that girls will be 'left behind', will 'drop out' of the race for social transformation and demographic redress and that their futures will be dimmer, held powerful sway among the young men and women in this study. The interviewees articulated the fear that pregnancy, far from a means of material enrichment, had negative consequences for teenage mothers in the Eastern Cape. It could mean they have to drop out of school and that meagre household economies would be further depleted. As a 19-year old male explained:

> At school we were taught not to have sex, especially girls, because they can have babies and drop out of school and be left behind. (Focus group with adolescent boys, East London, 29 November 2014)

In contrast to allegations of 'pregnancy for profit', young women described the financial and social challenges that pregnancy and young motherhood entailed:

> Interviewer: How is it to have a baby?
> Akuhle: Yho!
> Interviewer: It's difficult?
> Akuhle: Yes, it's difficult.
> Interviewer: Why do you say it's difficult?
> Akuhle: Because I don't have a life. It disturbs you as well. I'm supposed to be doing my matric but I'm not in school because of the baby. (Interviewee 11, Dimbaza, 19 December 2014)

Akuhle had gone to her local hospital to seek an abortion but was told by a healthcare worker that she was 'too young'. Her family discouraged her from having an abortion, telling her that she might die from the procedure. Her boyfriend and the father of the child was also against her getting an abortion and promised that he would help with the baby. However, she has not been able to re-enrol in school after the birth because she lacked adequate support from her family.

While teenage pregnancy was supposedly countenanced among previous generations, Born Frees are alleged to have abandoned the strategies of secrecy and concealment that used to surround pre-marital pregnancy. The advent of democracy and passing of laws that are seen to support or even incentivise teenage pregnancy through the provision of healthcare and social grants, are understood as licensing promiscuity. Pregnancy beyond the confines of sanctioned morality may be an assertion of corporeal autonomy for young women (Posel and Hardon 2012). This may, however, be perceived as a lack of modesty and shame, a violation, and a collective injury (Mkhwanazi 2010). This sense of collective shame caused by teenage pregnancy was echoed in the account of a 23-year-old male:

> Some girls get pregnancy when they are young. I once saw this girl in the clinic and she was young. To think that she is going to have a baby while she is a baby herself, it's embarrassing. (Interview 37, Dimbaza, 11 November 2014)

While motherhood was both a value and aspiration among the teenage girls and young women in this research, the value of motherhood was balanced against more immediate aspirations regarding education, professional advancement and financial stability. Rather than a source of new freedoms and opportunities, pregnancy and teenage motherhood was understood by numerous teenage girls in this study as weakening their future prospects for educational and material advancement. As one young woman, Noluntu, explained:

> Some friends of mine said it is not nice to fall pregnant when you are still young because the boys like to deny their children, and you will end up raising the child alone. A child will mess up your future. You end up not being able to go out to the mall with a friend, or if you see something in a magazine, you end up not being able to get it for yourself. (Interviewee 8, 22 June 2014, Mdantsane)

Another young woman stated:

> It [pregnancy] ruins your dreams. And you will not be able to finish school and you have the responsibilities... It is not something that a girl should think or dream about whilst they are at school. (Interviewee 9, 10 May 2019, Mdantsane)

Young mothers themselves were aware of the negative impact of having a baby on educational advancement. As Mihlali recounted:

> I want to study at Fort Hare now but am currently not doing anything. I have a baby. (interviewee 10, 8 May 2020, Zwelitsha)

Contrary to the allegation of 'mercenary motherhood' which implies that young women are relying on their reproductive capacities for social and material

advancement instead of aspiring to professional advancement through education, these young women understood education as the best means of pursuing a lucrative career. They aspired to order their reproductive destinies accordingly. But, as is clear in Noluntu's association of a successful future with consumer purchase power, teenage girls in this study associated aspiration and advancement in the post-apartheid era with the freedom to consume.

CONCLUSION

This article drew on the narratives of young people and their care-givers to explore young people's experiences of sex and sexuality in post-apartheid Eastern Cape. South African history reveals the power and malleability of motherhood as a political identity. The privileging of motherhood as women's primary social identity has established connections between gender equality and the liberation struggle and has allowed women to leverage greater power within the anti-apartheid resistance movement (Hassim 2006). Women's rights advocates have aligned their ideological goals as feminists with those of the anti-apartheid movement. They aimed not to unsettle or undermine their male comrades in the liberation struggle but to promote an understanding of how women's rights resonated with democratic enfranchisement.

While 'motherism' is mutable, re-interpreted in response to the political needs of different eras and ideologies, it is still the crux of women's social identity in South Africa. In contrast, motherhood among teenagers is understood as an arch expression of delinquency, promiscuity and the abuse of democratic freedoms and ideals. The rights and freedoms accorded to children, youth and women, are perceived as promoting sexual profligacy, connected symbolically to other forms of feckless and rampant consumption. Among both older adults and young men in this research, the legislation of gender equality was perceived as licensing promiscuity among teenagers. Young men in this study took a similarly traditional approach, revealing perhaps a new 'fraternal contract' in which young and older men are aligned in their opposition to women's sexual and reproductive rights and freedoms. While the young women in this research used a rights discourse to defend sexual freedom, their experiences of sexual and reproductive rights did not signal a rupture in democracy so much as a continuity of apartheid-era reproductive controls, in which teenage pregnancy was publicly condemned but privately countenanced.

The scandal of teenage pregnancy has flourished because of its resonance with deep-seated public beliefs and fears about the loss of social and sexual control over youth. The perceived failings of South African youth have tapped into broader collective disappointments about the political transition from the apartheid to the post-apartheid eras. Waves of moral panic about deviant behaviours – including drug use, teenage pregnancy, and unsafe extramarital sex – have stoked beliefs regarding the recklessness of youngsters who are believed to misuse their reproductive citizenship and betray the promise of social transformation and class mobility ostensibly on offer in post-apartheid society.

Aspiration and advancement in the post-apartheid era have become associated with the freedom to consume. A growing academic literature explores how consumer culture collides with the language of aspiration, ambition and advancement that is characteristic of the post-apartheid era (Salo and Davids 2009). Scholarship on youth culture in post-apartheid South Africa has also explored how sex has become an item of consumption, at the same time as consumption has become increasingly sexualised (Delius and Glaser 2002). This is a version of freedom that allows for conspicuous sexual and material consumption, yet simultaneously punishes and censures young women who seek to invest their biological capital in material gain. Young women are alleged to be abusing the freedoms endowed by democracy. Born Frees, and women in particular, are believed to be behaving with a sense of sexual impunity, abusing the rights that democracy has endowed, rather than channelling their procreative powers into morally-sanctioned forms of nation-building.

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NOTES

1. With some exceptions in which franchise was extended to certain other racial groups by virtue of land ownership.

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