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85th Harold Wolpe Dialogue

15 February 2010

Cape Town

Topic:

**THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS AROUND AIDS**

Speaker:

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The Politics of Gender and Social Movements around HIV/AIDS

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The Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust Lecture,

Monday, February 15, 2010

In this essay, in the effort to contribute to a politically engaged anthropology (Brodkin 1988; Singer 1995; Smith 1999; Susser 1982; Susser 1985), I have analyzed people's active contribution to political change with respect to AIDS treatment and prevention in southern Africa. I have drawn for my analysis on Gramsci's understanding of the role of intellectuals and also on his concepts of common and practical sense in the interpretation of culture in order to explore the relations between people's on-the-ground experiences and the broader political challenges of AIDS.

AIDS is a worldwide epidemic but, it bears most brutally on the global South and within that sphere affects women more than men and young women most of all. However, AIDS has also been the cause of some of the most effective anti-global initiatives¹. Over the past decade, anti-global movements for the treatment and prevention of AIDS, operating in global forums, such as International AIDS Society conferences, the World Trade Organization meetings at Davos, Qatar and elsewhere, G8 annual summits as well as the counter-hegemonic World Social Forum, have transformed the discourse on AIDS.

¹ I use the term "anti-global" not in the sense of opposing globalization, but in the sense of challenging global regulation to take account of the need for medicines at affordable prices in the global South.

Clearly the movements around AIDS have changed the rules of global capital in ways many did not believe possible. Pharmaceutical companies have had to permit lower pricing for poor countries and allow the manufacture of some drugs outside of world patent laws. Obviously, capital has regrouped, defending prices and profits in wealthy countries while introducing new ways to patent second-stage drugs.<1> However, even here, many of the changes that were won required corporations to negotiate with the global South and recognize the needs of the poor in previously unforeseen ways (Parker 2003; Petchesky 2003)

In terms of the question of transformative action, in each setting where I have conducted research, whether South Africa, Namibia, or among the San of the Kalahari, I have seen the emergence of organic intellectuals who sharpen the recognition of possible solutions and frame dreams as realistic demands (Susser 2009). I have seen such leaders work with the support of the local people to generate social movements and change the public discourse around AIDS. In South Africa, in opposition to the government's delaying tactics with respect to AIDS, pressed by effective social movements plans for treatment took shape and accelerated (Robins 2009, Susser 2009). In Namibia, social movements led to the appearance of the female condom at truck stops and supermarkets at heavily subsidized prices. In each case, major barriers had to be overcome in order to win government support and constant struggles were required to maintain any successes.

The aim of this paper is to outline the processes which connect people's practical experiences on the ground with participation in socially transformative movements. In my research I saw three phases to this process: critical thinking based on individual experiences which I have termed "practical sense", the emergence of organic intellectuals who interpret such critiques in the public sphere, and the development of supportive

settings and ritual processes where critical beliefs could be expressed, echoed and collectively supported.

In terms of the power of practical thinking, the findings of this research are surprisingly hopeful. In spite of the remorseless depredations of AIDS, with its ever-increasing rate of infection among both married women and girls, in southern Africa we have seen critical perspectives prevail and social movements transform public culture. Through the darkest hours of misinformation, profiteering, and nationalist rhetoric, we have seen poor women communicating about their collective situation in practical, non-judgmental ways, as they address the collective prevention of AIDS. In the face of government mystification, misinformation, and inaction, we have seen women recognize both preventive measures such as the female condom and the effectiveness of AIDS treatment.

In its very nature, collective organizing around AIDS has had to address the hegemonic moral judgments embedded in ideas of class status, religious respectability, and national (including post-colonial) pride. As Pierre Bourdieu explored in his concept of *habitus*, “style” and manners are crucial in the making of class difference and marking elite status (Bourdieu 1993). Following this insight, post-colonial literature has shown the ways in which purveyors of moralism help to differentiate by style and manners, even matters of sexual conduct, the colonized from the colonizers, and the middle class from the poor (Comaroff 1997; Stoler 2002). Such differentiation is frequently based on the manners and presentation of women and their sexuality.

The control of women’s sexuality has been tied to the history of state power, to the perpetuation of lineage alliances, the differentiation of class in the capitalist state, and the differentiation of the colonizers from the colonized. Whether we are reading about the Irish

working class in the England of the nineteenth century, the Inca women after the Spanish conquest of the Andes (Silverblatt 1980; Silverblatt 1987) or the Black population in South Africa under apartheid, we encounter the derogatory moralizing comments about the sexual morals of the subaltern population. In fact, interestingly, among the Inca, we find women who break the rules under Spanish colonial settlement referred to as wild women or witches (Silverblatt 1980), recalling the classification of women as witches by the Inquisition in early modern Europe (Schneider 1991).<6> The richness of the research in South Africa allows an examination of these issues in historical context.

Gramsci has distinguished “practical sense” -- which people learn from analyzing their own experiences -- from “common sense” (Crehan 2002:110; Gramsci 1971:326-330). Common sense gains its credibility from its echo of hegemonic ideas. **These distinctions between “common” sense and “practical” or “good” sense serve well to capture the counter-hegemonic mobilization with respect to morals, so essential to AIDS discourse.** In colonial and post-colonial terms, common sense is linked with a set of moralisms, often but certainly not always related to Western religious teachings (Comaroff 1985). From this perspective, common sense is a partial reflection of easily assimilated hegemonic sayings or givens. Gramsci sees practical sense or good sense, in opposition to common sense, as derived from people’s pragmatic evaluation of everyday experiences. Practical sense derives from people’s conscious efforts to resolve the contradictions between received discourses and their material challenges understood as counter-hegemonic. Pragmatic sense, in this context, evokes the possibilities for transformative action among women coping with the epidemic.<1>

Although the distinctions are not always clear, the contrast of “common” versus “pragmatic” sense offers a useful guiding light in trying to sort out the changes that were taking place in people’s perspectives on AIDS. Such distinctions are particularly useful in the effort to understand the impact of a confusing public discourse on the understandings of grass-roots women.

Building on these distinctions, we can also begin to understand the role of intellectuals in concentrating the murmurs and possibly silenced critique of a disenfranchised or subordinated population. Intellectuals who promote common sense moralisms of sin and condemnation that bear heavily on the disenfranchised without attention to the practical struggles of daily life contribute to the ruling hegemony. In contrast, the ideas of the organic intellectual can be seen as drawing on the roots of practical sense of the subaltern population as it struggles to improve conditions.

Grass-roots protests around AIDS may also be organized in terms of hegemonic “common sense” or counter-hegemonic “practical sense.” (See Linger 1993 for a similar discussion about Italian social movements.) For example, virginity movements represent a grass-roots social movement that adopts hegemonic moralistic categories of sin and redemption. In contrast, the Treatment Action Campaign, in its practical non-judgmental approach to AIDS, represents a counter-hegemonic grass-roots movement.

To recognize the seeds of progressive social transformations we need to begin to identify which groups promote social justice for all, including women and people of color. I would argue that this can incorporate movements that emphasize or clarify the needs of underrepresented groups. In contrast, we need to be able to see which groups promote moralistic perspectives, stereotyping sexual mores of subordinate populations and using such negative stereotypes to assign blame and punishment for society’s ills. Moral judgments and commentaries on sexuality provide a canvas to interpret protest movements fighting for AIDS treatment and prevention.

The pervasive or hegemonic construction of AIDS “risk groups” early on, in terms of gay sexuality, “Haitian” identity, drug using or prostitution, went far beyond the issue of sexual identities in constructing stigmatized groups (Baer et al. 2003). The first organized

social movements with respect to gay identity such as Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and ACT UP, countered the moralistic and stigmatizing labeling of men who have sex with men (Padgug and Oppenheimer 1992; Shilts 1987). The racial and subaltern stigmas associated with the labeling of Haitian identity as a risk were also countered by protest (Baer et al. 2003). In 1990 thousands of Haitian doctors, other professionals, and local residents marched over the Brooklyn Bridge in protest against the classification by the US government of "Haitians" as a risk group for AIDS.<4>

The success of harm-reduction approaches to AIDS prevention highlights the importance of counteracting the stigmatization and criminalization of drug users. At the Toronto 2006 International AIDS Society Conference, harm-reduction perspectives finally attained international recognition in the face of objections from the Bush regime and other governments, as a plenary speaker presented a wealth of incontrovertible evidence showing the success of such programs (Wodak 2006).<5>.

For the past two decades, sex workers have mobilized for union recognition and legal status in many parts of the world, as exemplified by the Sex Workers Advocacy Network (SWAN) and Sonagachi (the path-breaking Calcutta sex workers collective). They have transformed the image of "prostitutes" perpetrated in the early risk categories (Cornish and Ghosh 2007; Jana et al. 2004). However, all such initiatives are still struggling for international implementation.

South Africa and Critical interpretations

In South Africa, the making of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality have clearly reflected changing moral pressures. Hunter (2005) calls on "common sense" to discuss the fragmented cultural roots of the making of masculinity among Zulu-speaking men. He finds that in the early twentieth century, both single men and women were allowed a certain

amount of sexual freedom, as long as no pregnancy resulted. By the 1950s such expectations had diverged : men's sexual license grew to include married men, while women became more restricted. In the later period, those women who had more than one lover were often referred to in derogatory terms.

Just as researchers have begun to look at the historical making of masculinity and femininity, we can trace over time the making of good sense and organic intellectuals in the historical documentation of political consciousness (Bonner 1990; Bozzoli and Nkotsoe 1991; Walker 1991). In their study *Women of Phokeng*, Bozzoli and Nkotsoe use the terms "derived" and "inherent" ideas to distinguish the emergence of women's consciousness. Their research focused on women who, between 1945 and 1960, were subject to the oppressive measures of apartheid, an era that included both the eviction of women from Sophiatown and the much-resisted effort by the apartheid government to impose passes on women. Bozzoli and Nkotsoe define "derived" in terms of the ideologies of popular organizations and "inherent" as the ideas the women derived from their own experiences. In some sense, these distinctions correspond to the "derived" ideas of organic intellectuals and the "inherent" ideas that women generate, which I have labeled "practical sense." They see these two sets of ideas intersecting in the protests over the evictions and the pass laws. They note that the reactions of the women were varied and changed over time. However, they do classify many as "conservative" (i.e. following the common-sense explanations of the government). For example, Bozzoli and Nkotsoe quote one conservative woman in describing the unrest over the imposition of the pass laws on women:

[text]If there is a group of people which has accepted the law, there is no alternative for the others to accept it also. We don't own the land; it is theirs [Whites]. ... One

has to obey authority and do according to its bidding (Bozzoli and Nkotsoe 1991:170).

Although Bozzoli and Nkotsoe note that few women were political activists, a number manifest what they term “political consciousness” -- or what I have called here a practical counter-hegemonic view – and some participated in protest movements at particular historical moments. Of significance is the fragility and changeability of such approaches. Following the heavy repression of the apartheid era, they show the breaking of women’s resolve and their retreat to conservatism and common sense hegemonic echoes.

In her collection of oral histories of the gendered and spatialized violence in Mpumalanga District in the 1980s, Debby Bonnin (2000) documents women adopting the symbolic role of “mother.” She describes women taking stands to defend young men and women in the midst of the brutal murders associated with the battle for control of territory between the youth of the United Democratic Front (which was at that time the public anti-apartheid coalition) and those of Inkatha. While Bonnin is explicit that such women were not “feminists” and were fighting with their men for freedom from apartheid and not specifically for women’s rights, she nevertheless notes that such practical experience changed both women’s use of space in the township and their relations to their men partners. Women became more assertive in fighting for their own autonomy and took over many of the household decisions. In addition, where feminists did echo women’s practical sense, they served in the role of organic intellectuals, framing the demands of the community.

This case is particularly relevant today, as Bonin describes Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, a pivotal figure in the recent battle for AIDS treatment in South Africa. During the violent confrontations of the late 1980s, Madlala-Routledge was one of the leading

members of the South African National Organization of Women, which organized a prayer vigil of women for peace. In this case, in responding to a call by Nelson Mandela for women to stand up for peaceful negotiation, such women could be understood as organic intellectuals who combined their demands for national unity among working class Africans against apartheid with the women's movement. Continuing her critical role as a feminist organic intellectual, in 2006, Madlala-Routledge was involved in the implementation of the national AIDS plan in the months-long absence of the Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang. Madlala-Routledge was deputy Minister of Health until fired by Mbeki in 2007 in a decision which aroused national and worldwide criticism (New York Times 2007).

Recent studies have examined the moralisms inherent in the AIDS movement and its association with virginity testing, which was started in the 1990s by two teachers who trace their ideas to Zulu tradition. Although there were and still are a variety of coming-of-age ceremonies for young girls and potential brides, the origins and form of virginity testing in pre-colonial times are open to much discussion (Gluckman 1965; Hunter 2005; Krige and Comaroff 1981; Leclerc-Madlala 2001; Scorgie 2002). However, virginity testing has now converged with fragments of Christianity to develop a moral code of abstinence for girls before marriage. Current rituals involve new ideas of secondary virginity, which are now common in South Africa and other regions such as Uganda as well as the United States. In addition, while such virginity testing is ostensibly based on an observation of a broken hymen, it has become merged with images of youthfulness, a lithe body and other manifestations of the desirable young woman (Scorgie 2002). Thus, the women teachers who started the virginity testing campaign and those who promote such rites, are in fact adopting hegemonic ideas of sin and morality melded with the use of fragmented images of Zulu "culture."

Many have noted how young girls have given birth within months of being declared virgins (Scorgie 2002). In fact, some people seem to be developing a practical critique of the rituals as they argue that the maintenance of abstinence among youth requires education and lifestyle changes more than such a one-time test. Some young girls also see the virginity testing rite as a festival and a status maintaining label. Rather than relying on the abstinence such rituals are supposed to represent, some participants talk candidly and practically about the need for condoms so that they will not find themselves pregnant. Such conversations do not seem to carry images of sin and condemnation but rather emerge in the discussion of practical matters (Scorgie 2002).

Thus, as we have seen with virginity testing, Christian ideas of sin and virginity have merged with Zulu images of the healthy, marriageable girl and the control of fertility. Such hegemonic ideas fit well with the historical gendering of space and power. In rural areas in most of southern Africa, customary law has favored patrilineal inheritance and the national land reform projects are leaving women furthest behind. Even in urban areas under apartheid, housing was frequently assigned to the male head of household. If a woman in need of housing for herself or her family had no husband, she had to ask the oldest son to sign her lease.<8>

Examples of Practical Sense with Respect to HIVAIDS in southern Africa

In the early 1990s, when AIDS was just starting to affect members of the African population, we saw women in the informal settlements around Durban open to learning about sexual options such as the female condom. They exhibited the condom and laughed and talked with practical sense about the need for prevention.

In 1992, we saw women asking for income-generating activities, and reading the ANC constitution. Later, in 1995 women were writing letters to the ANC government and asking to be hired as community health educators. The women were self-confident and strategic. They looked for resources and at the same time offered to work in prevention in practical ways. They understood the opening up of the political sphere within the new South Africa and they expected their voices to be heard.

By 2003, many of the remarks among women in AIDS support groups suggested that the women were trying to exercise “practical sense” and did not echo a moralistic “common sense” about faithful sexual relations expected in marriage. They did not condemn the other sexual relations of their partners but were largely concerned when they “did not trust” the other women. As one woman says, she acknowledges her husband but she refuses to sleep with him because she knows her husband’s mistress and “what is happening with her.” In these situations, discussion did not turn on a moralistic argument about sex and sin, or virginity, faithfulness, and marriage. Religious or “traditional” expectations were not invoked. The conversation turned to practical perspectives on contested sexual relationships.

It became clear from my fieldwork that poor African women, given the opportunity to see and hear for themselves what was possible, demonstrated a practical-, good-sense approach as a product of the thoughtful analyzing of experience. They counteracted the moralistic and inflexible “common sense” which can be understood as a repetition of long-worn familiar and unexamined ideas.

But some women, relying on government and mission misinformation about nutrition and herbal remedies, had no practical knowledge of broader options of either treatment or prevention. We hear the “common sense” unexamined approach when people are afraid or uninformed about practical possibilities. However, overwhelmingly, the women in these case studies adopted a thoughtful practical perspective to their problems. Thus, notwithstanding the continuing shocking rates of infection among young women in South Africa, we can hope that the nexus of popular practical sense and protest movements, focused by organic intellectuals and seeking treatment, correct scientific information, and comprehensive reproductive resources, can begin to stem the tide.

Similarly, a dying man who wrote to the church congregation in Namibia and pastors who came for training with respect to AIDS education in Windhoek were working towards a practical-sense perspective on AIDS. In their participation in our university seminar, the pastors made clear that they were not concerned about sin, but simply wanted to know how to help youth protect themselves from this disease. In spite of the fact that we heard another local pastor extolling the hegemonic views of sin and refusing to advocate condoms, mothers simply did not follow the teachings. Namibian mothers devoted to the church provided their young sons with condoms, as they told us and as we saw by one son’s bed in the hut that he occupied. Thus, through AIDS support groups, local gossip and church congregations, practical sense was reflected and supported in local community events.

Ja[Public Intellectuals

Through formulating and articulating the narrative of class, organic intellectuals help to transform a working class which fits an abstract sociological category into a class that is self-conscious and can act in its own interests. Further developing the distinction between organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals, we might see the organic intellectual as

one who combined active engagement with the rethinking of society from the point of view of working class people. In speaking of Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X Manning Marable quotes Gramsci saying that, "The new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator" (Marable 2005:6). Terry Eagleton's analysis of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish intellectuals, *Scholars and Rebels* (1999), is also of interest here. He defines these intellectuals as marginal to the colonial center and, as a result, espousing the nationalist cause in Ireland with a sense of practical engagement. Eagleton contrasts the practical engagement and vibrant intellectual community of the colonized and marginalized Irish scholars with the scholarly disengagement of the English intellectuals of the same period.

As the Anglo--Irish situation demonstrates, the historical moment in which scholars emerge may produce a more or less engaged community of organic intellectuals. The long struggle against apartheid in South Africa generated its own small but vibrant community of organic intellectuals among the Black, Indian and White population (to use the inevitable apartheid categories) (Comaroff). In their discussions of land rights, education, and health for a democratic state, they articulated a vision of a non-racial society as represented in the Freedom Charter developed in the early twentieth century by the ANC and restated in 1943 and 1955.

Many of the anti-apartheid leaders who helped promote the Freedom Charter and their younger followers have been involved in framing the debate around AIDS in the current era. In recent years, Nelson Mandela has been a powerful, outspoken advocate and we might see Zackie Achmat, one of the founders of the South African Treatment Action Campaign, as one of the younger followers, whose politics and emotional allegiances were

carved out in the apartheid battles. However, in the current era, intellectuals such as Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, who might have represented the next generation of organic intellectuals leading the anti-apartheid struggle, have come to represent a new elite, with new traditions and newly imposed sexual moralities in relation to the contemporary social condition.

In a sense, adopting dissident views, Mbeki on AIDS was fighting the moral messages of colonialism as he understood them. In a 2001 memorial to Z.K. Matthews, a former professor at Fort Hare (attended by Mbeki's father, Govan Mbeki) and a revered ANC leader from the 1940s, President Thabo Mbeki lamented the view "that we are but natural-born, promiscuous carriers of germs, unique in the world; they proclaim that our continent is doomed to an inevitable mortal end because of our unconquerable devotion to the sin of lust." His argument was made to counteract the "shameful" image of the Black man that the West has created. Jacob Zuma has been more open to AIDS research and has not actively joined AIDS denialists. However, he became famous for his remark that he took a shower after sex with an HIV-positive women because it "would minimize the risk of contracting the disease [HIV]" (BBC News 2006; Motsei 2007). Zuma's argument, which was accepted by a jury when he was charged with rape, was basically that he was an African man and that rape was not only acceptable, but expected customary behavior (Motsei 2007). In his court testimony, he explained that he was prepared to marry the accuser and "if we had reached an agreement with that, I would have had my cows ready" (BBC News 2006). Thus, he framed his actions in a "traditionalist" patriarchal moralism (Mthathi 2006). As Siphos Mthathi, then General Secretary of the TAC, wrote "Zuma's statements about what "culture" says about women, sexual relationships and men's entitlements, and how HIV is transmitted shocked all of us." (Mthathi 2006 p.2) For both Mbeki and Zuma, we might understand their defense of African masculinity as resistance to Western tropes.

Where poor African men find themselves with less and less access to work, they are reminded of the Zulu or Xhosa, or many other groups', militant male identity (a warrior identity exacerbated in the wars over colonial settlement) and patrilineal inheritance patterns, as well as the "*inhoxale*" expectations of respect for men by women (Hunter 2005; Morrell 2001). From a common-sense perspective, they might turn to gendered conflict to ameliorate their situation. In this explosive setting, the images of masculinity, which have been widely promoted in different ways by both Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, resonate with such gendered conflict. Such images, representative of a hegemonic ideology of masculinity, tap into the resentment and loss of poor African men.

Ironically, as Martin Chanock has pointed out in his review of culture and human rights in Africa, opposition to what are perceived by many as Western tropes such as women's rights and sexual rights provide the language for the hegemonies of post-colonial power today. Orientalizing and occidentalizing are parts of the narrative paradigms of today:

[ext]. . . those rights discourses in which culture is invoked as an argument against universalism now largely belong to rulers, not to those who may need rights protected, who talk in terms of wrongs and needs, not rights and culture (Chanock 2000:15).

Unfortunately, the loss of poor men's employment, which many argue has precipitated brutal gendered conflict, may in fact have been exacerbated by the policies of neoliberalism implemented by the ANC government. In addition, the worsening of women's condition through neoliberal restructuring, including lack of investment in smaller manufacturing as well as social services, where women are both employed and seek

assistance, has increased women's dependence on men's resources and the necessary resort to multiple partners.

As the increasing unemployment and insufficient investment in social programs precipitated the worsening patterns of gendered violence, it also opened the way for men seeking political support to promote cultural claims of patriarchal traditions. In South Africa, such patriarchal values resonated well with the fundamentalist Christian values of the former apartheid members of the far right, some of whom were still among the wealthy White elite. Thus the cultural claims of an elite came to fit well with economic restructuring, as Chanock notes for other parts of Africa:

[As the foreign-inspired structural adjustment programmes cut into popular areas of patronage it was easier for elites to organize support for their own version of rights against a 'foreign' version which had little basis of internal support to begin with. It was not difficult for the challenged elites to present different versions of rights in terms of cultural struggle because in the first place the demand for first-generation civil rights was 'foreign'-supported, and, in the second place, second-generation collective rights, which could be portrayed in culturally collective terms, were compatible with and, indeed, strengthened the elites' control of the state (Chanock 2000:30).

Rites, Rituals, and Resistance

Ideas alone do not mobilize people, as anthropologists have long pointed out. From a conservative point of view, involvement in mass rituals and collective emotional experiences help to generate loyalty and action in relation to the state or hegemonic "common sense." In *Making the Fascist Self*, the participation in mass rallies in Verona and

elsewhere helped to create a committed fascist youth movement in Italy (Berezin 1997). In southern Africa, we might see a punitive moral in the virginity rituals previously described.

Similarly, people with emerging practical sense may hear their ideas framed or sharpened by organic intellectuals but it is in the ritual process of protests, demonstrations, prayer vigils, and, for AIDS, near-death experiences that the emotions and commitments are built among activists (Robins 2006). Thus, collective participation is a crucial component of counter-hegemonic mobilization and the transformation of the moral and economic order, whether it be the Durban 2000 International AIDS Society Conference and the protests by the South African Treatment Action Campaign, the Women and Girls' March at the Toronto 2006 International AIDS Society Conference or the march for the female condom in Namibia.

The South African Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has had an enormous impact, not only in inspiring people with respect to treatment but also in redefining AIDS away from sexual shame. In Soweto, when Mandela put on the TAC "HIV Positive" T-shirt, he was joining in the efforts to redefine public culture around AIDS and shame (BBC News 2006). The TAC has also educated people about what they might need and how to organize to get it. The location of clinics by Médecins Sans Frontières, dispensing treatment in Soweto and the Eastern Cape, had crucial roles in counteracting the myth of the toxicity of Western medicine. Beyond the progressive humanitarian organizations, the missions that provided treatment and the universities, foundations, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (itself the product of a worldwide treatment action campaign) which paid for demonstration treatment programs all contributed to transforming public culture in South Africa. As treatment was seen to work, local people joined the TAC to demand that it be made accessible.

Organic Intellectuals and Changing Public Discourse

International and national non-governmental organizations succeeded in changing the public discourse about the female condom in Namibia based on overwhelming grassroots support. When women and men learned about the female condom, they were keen to try it and none of the local women invoked religious disapproval. In Namibia and South Africa, as well as Zimbabwe, women wrote petitions asking their governments to provide the female condom. In Namibia, these demands were crystallized in the campaign initiated by Veronica de Klerk, the president of Women's Action for Development (WAD), supported by international funds. In August 1999, on National Condom Day, de Klerk announced to the national newspapers with much outrage, that there was not a female condom to be found in the stores of Namibia. She demanded that the government include the female condom in its campaigns. From that beginning, WAD together with the Rainbow Coalition (an internationally funded non-governmental organization focused on sexual rights), and the local representatives of UNAIDS and WHO worked to make the female condom available in Namibia.

It is significant here that the Rainbow Coalition was an organization working for gay and lesbian rights. The organization had led marches to protest the denial of citizenship to a lesbian woman whose partner was Namibian. In this respect, the Rainbow Coalition and the demands for the female condom each emerged from a counter-hegemonic challenge to moralistic images of human sexuality. Such moralisms, here, as in South Africa, can be traced back to missionary influences and post-colonial religious organizations (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997a,b; Hunter 2005).

As we examined with respect to the gendered cultural barriers to science and prevention, it became evident that social movements were key to changes in the representation of women in science and politics as well as in public culture in general.

Cultural Strategies

Ethnographic findings from the Southern African research suggested that sexual decisions were framed by gendered perspectives etched by such expectations as the payment of *lobola* among the people of KwaZulu or the autonomy of Ju/'hoansi women. Just like the vestiges of a church marriage in Europe, defined in a legal system long after many of the wedded no longer practice religious rituals, such expectations are the building blocks or possibly markers upon which contemporary strategies can be created and adjusted.

For example, we know that political economic shifts have placed poor men in a difficult position. Ironically, as men lose their jobs, poor women, largely excluded from the formal labor market, have little choice but to depend on men even more. However, now that many men have fewer jobs, women must multiply the number they depend upon to make ends meet, precipitating jealousy and violence.

To address these exigencies and the increasingly contradictory demands on both men and women, in some parts of KwaZulu, women talk about men paying only the initial *lobola*, which used to indicate the first step of marriage. According to traditional rules, after the initial payment the couple has legitimate rights to have sexual relations. However, many men do not have the resources or full expectations of completing the full *lobola* payments over time. In this new situation, they can initiate such payments with several women. Thus, the payment of *lobola*, which used to protect women and constitute a form of engagement and security, is still salient in urban communities but no longer assures the woman that her husband will stay with her or take care of the children. This may also reflect the decreasing

importance of children who were previously crucial to agricultural labor, in an urban setting. In addition, of course, this new pattern greatly increases the vulnerability of women to AIDS.

Among the Ju, women's autonomy was still clearly evident in their reactions to everyday events. Women spoke up in front of powerful men at important national organizing meetings and demanded mosquito netting materials or criticized political decisions. Women saw themselves as able to teach their husbands about condoms and, if necessary, provide them in a sexual encounter. However, the autonomy of the women also allowed them to go to bars where they become vulnerable to beating, rape, and exploitation from Ju men and especially men from other groups among whom they have less respect.

In terms of the breadth of knowledge, government and religious institutions seemed to have much influence. In South Africa, we found that government discourse about the toxicity of treatment led women with limited exposure to alternative sources of information to reject the calls to mobilize and support the Treatment Action Campaign. Government and religious institutions also had a major impact on the availability of preventive technology. In northern Namibia, some international religious representatives and many women members of congregations advocated AIDS education and the use of condoms. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that even devout mothers were providing such life-saving resources to their sons, condoms were not available on the premises of major hospitals. Overall, people's strategies reflected a practical understanding of their relationships shaped by a historical experience of cultural difference.

To more precisely situate the role of culture, I would like to consider the issues of "culture" and the argument initiated by Ferguson (1999) with respect to Zambia. Ferguson maintains that the emphasis on class and the emergence of capitalism led urban

anthropologists to look for family forms in southern Africa similar to those they had observed in Western societies. The nuclear family was expected to appear as industrial capitalism developed. Ferguson argues instead that culture reasserted itself and that kinship relations of today resemble many of the patterns first described in the African tribal situations. I would emphasize instead the flexibility of culture. As many have phrased the issue, it would be more accurate to point to the way in which historic cultural tropes have been reinvented by local people or by political leaders to address historically specific situations (Ranger 1997).

Certainly, we cannot overemphasize the impact of global capital. Clearly we are dealing with a society today in which class is salient, and the national and global economy are crucial forces. Since the 1930s in southern Africa, workers have indeed contested power in the mines and elsewhere in similar ways to the nineteenth-century Welsh mineworkers of Great Britain (Burawoy 1998; Gluckman 1961). Since the waves of crippling strikes in South Africa during the 1980s, the power of the South African trade union movement (COSATU) has been recognized as a crucial force in the successful battle against apartheid., Researchers as diverse as A. L Epstein (1958) and Mayer (1971) were cognizant of the differences between changes in the workplace, associated with wages, employer--employee relations, and unions, and changes in the household associated with patterns of marriage, inheritance, and responsibility for children.

However, clearly, one of the more glaring gaps in the early urban analyses had to do with kinship and gender. In overlooking the politics of gender in relation to kinship, the Manchester School anthropologists reflected 1950s Marxism, the American sociology of Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton, and the anthropology of George Murdock. The idea that kinship under capitalism could be characterized in terms of a “nuclear family” based on the

man's wage and the woman's domestic labor was, as we now know, a particularly mistaken assumption that described aspirations toward a specific bourgeois class experience in a particular era (Coontz 1988; Sennett 1970). Residence in a "nuclear household" is only one aspect of family. Political systems that regulate resource sharing, food distribution, and inheritance patterns serve to consolidate wealth, poverty, and class in capitalist societies in many different ways.

However, in criticizing the notion that a nuclear family was necessarily the result of capitalism, we need not neglect the insights of A. L. Epstein and others among the urban anthropologists of the Zambian Copperbelt, who understood that cultural constraints operated differently in different situations and particularly with respect to waged labor as opposed to family. In his classic study of urban Lusaka, *The Kalela Dance*, Clyde Mitchell (1956) described how mineworkers sang tribal songs in competitive dances during their day off from the mines. Mitchell analyzed these displays in class terms and suggested that even tribal identifications in Lusaka were structured by the new urban environment. Nevertheless, he described marriages still established and adjudicated according to custom. Epstein also suggests that the historical processes that generate cultural difference were more salient in relation to kinship and gender than they were in the workplace. His research demonstrated that mineworkers looked to unions, not customary law, to address their grievances, while they structured their home lives according to customary procedures that allowed them the privileges of masculinity.

While both Mitchell and Epstein described marriage and kinship as intimately intertwined with customary law, neither of them assume that this is an unchanging category. In their view, people strategized with respect to customary law (Van Velsen 1967). It was never one static set of rules. People implemented customs and acknowledged

kinship according to the situation and in this way influenced the gendered distribution of income, property, and security in both urban and rural settings (Gluckman 1965; Turner 1957; Watson 1971).

Abner Cohen talked of tribalization and detribalization being significant at different historical moments (Cohen 1974). His theoretical framework did not take into account the ways in which tribal and customary identification may shift in one direction in the public realm of trade and urban politics but may shift in a different direction in the equally public discourse with respect to women. Nevertheless, in his 1960s ethnography of Hausa cattle trading in Nigeria, Cohen described the situational nature of customary restrictions on women who observed *purdah* in marriage but were perfectly capable of traveling and trading unprotected when single or divorced.

Customary law remains vital to this day in defining the obligations of family and particularly in framing women's situations (Nhlapo 2000). As Gwendolyn Mikell has shown so well, the underlying contradiction for women today in many African societies is the relationship between customary law and Western constitutional formulations (see this argument with respect to AIDS in Bassett and Mhloyi 1991). However, as Chanock argues in his review of debates in Africa around customary rights, the maintenance of customary law is frequently in the interests of the maintenance of patriarchal status quo:

[ext[The areas of family law and land law are most often invoked as falling within the realm of the cultural, and are both often linked also to religion ... it is by no means obvious why some areas of law have retained seemingly secure places in the realm of culture while others relating to basic matters of rights, entitlements, powers and duties (say ... contract, labor law ...) have not (Chanock 2000:34).

Chanock also points out the centrality of rights to land in conflicts over customary law and recognizes the relationship of such conflicts to labor migration and insecurity:

]ext[It was, and is, the threatened loss of land which produces the most vigorous claims about its cultural embeddedness and inalienability. And it was, and is, the strains on family organization produced by the cash economy, migration and urbanization and the feared collapse of reciprocal obligations between generations, that make emphasis on the cultural nature of family authority and roles so necessary (Chanock 2000:35).

As the government demands greater sacrifice from workers and poor people lack social services, customary law becomes even more important as a point of security and stability. We can clearly see this process in Ferguson's (1999) description of the return to custom following Zambia's disastrous economic decline. Clearly, as AIDS wreaks death and destruction across southern Africa, such rights and obligations become areas of extreme conflict, which often break down, as noted earlier, along gender lines. These lines of insecurity and conflict leave the situation wide open for hegemonic intellectuals to explain in their own terms. As Chanock points out:

]ext[The experience of difference depends on the power to create culture, on the labor of elites in essentializing, displaying, and institutionalizing elements of the myriad of practices in any community (Chanock 2000:20--21).

]a[**Contemporary Notions of Witchcraft**

A related area in which anthropological insights are particularly illuminating is the debate around witchcraft and sorcery. Modernization arguments see witchcraft disappearing as modernity and industry lead to more rational scientific perspectives. In contrast, during the

1960s, Shirley Lindenbaum showed that among the Fore of New Guinea, ideas of sorcery were exacerbated by the expansion of colonial control and the loss of land. Since then, many contemporary anthropologists have documented the continuing salience of such ideas (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001b; Geschiere 1997b) and this has been fully borne out in the world of AIDS (Ashforth 2000; Ashforth 2005; McGregor 2007).

There are, however, divergences in the explanations for the continuity of witchcraft. As noted above, Ferguson argues that “culture” survives in the form of witchcraft and sorcery and that arguments that capitalism would transform culture were mistaken. Jean and John Comaroff (2001a) argue that in South Africa and elsewhere, millennial capitalism itself, or what many have seen as the neoliberal turn bringing cutbacks in services and income for the poor, precipitated an increase in mystical thinking as people tried to imagine ways to get rich or simply survive in an unpredictable economic world.

Geschiere (1997b) makes a more grounded and nuanced argument which helps to illuminate some of the cultural categories that confuse the AIDS public health debate. He points to the increasing significance of markets and cash in rituals as diverse as those related to marriage or death. He argues that many folk concepts have been re-invented to suit the contemporary context or, in his words, “the creative hybridization of endogenous concepts” (Geschiere 1997a:343). Here, we can begin to see the interplay of AIDS and sorcery. As noted earlier, marriage, reproduction, and fertility are central to the survival of the lineage and also the society in general (see Meyer Fortes' preface in Ngubane 1977). As a result, central facets of conflict and ritual tension in Zulu and other narratives concern women who, as outsiders, must marry into a patrilineage and bear its children (Ngubane 1977). Sites of danger and tension are also the sites of sorcery accusations, where folk healing and *sangomas* (witch doctors) are crucially involved. Even more centrally, funeral

rituals reflect or express the conflicts between the affines or relatives of the in-married wife and the husband's lineage (Geschiere 1997a). At the funeral and in the event of a husband's death, in terms of customary law, the daughter-in-law is in the position to lose all rights to stay in the husband's house or inherit his property. Many accusations of sorcery circulate around such circumstances. In the 1950s, one widow noted: "To be a widow in the country ... is to be made responsible for all the misfortunes of the neighbourhood. A widow is always suspected" (Mayer 1971:242). Similar sentiments were replicated among rural migrants in Zambia in the 1990s although since for many groups in Zambia the children belong to the matrilineal relatives, the same stresses may work out differently on the ground.(Ferguson 1999). Such tensions clearly play a part even in the urban biography of Khabzela, the South African popular radio disc jockey who died of AIDS in Soweto. In the narrative researched by the journalist Liz McGregor, Khabzela's mother and sister accuse his wife of sorcery. She is evicted from his house and from caring for him after they move in. Witchcraft concerns are still very powerful today in urban Soweto (Ashforth 2000).

In addition, conflict over the amassing of bride wealth reflects generational issues over the spending of cash (Geschiere 1997a). As Chanock argues: "Much of the essentializing of the notion of culture, in the past few decades of rapid change in Africa, has been done in the context of the confrontational dialogues between generation and gender It has also been employed as a metaphor around which generations and genders, otherwise sharply divided, could be encouraged to unite in opposition to outsiders" (Chanock 2000:20). Thus, any disruption of the survival of the middle-aged kin members and the loss of bride wealth for the next generation might precipitate accusations of sorcery, as we heard reported among the orphans in a rural village.

Research on contemporary rituals suggests that women's protections in customary norms are undermined by war (Hutchinson 1996; Hutchinson 1997; Hutchinson and Jok 2002). Among the Nuer, historically a cattle-herding population of the Sudan, women were still central to the symbolic realm in the 1980s. Even as Nuer men energetically entered the politics of the modern state, women's lives were intimately tied to the exchange of cattle (Hutchinson 1996). However, by the 1990s, the protection that these rituals and practices historically afforded women had been destroyed by the decades of warfare in that region (Hutchinson and Jok 2002). As noted earlier, if war has this effect, it is quite possible the destruction wreaked by AIDS in southern Africa could undermine women's ritual protections and leave them open to levels of violence never before countenanced. For example, practices, such as that described above, in which the security of women was assured by the payment of *lobola*, are no longer working. While terms of marriage appear to be following ancient tradition, in fact, only the initial symbolic trappings remain, undermining the actual security and alliances they originally cemented.

Where AIDS destroys patterns of marriage and childbirth, and where deaths are too soon and too many for ritual conflicts to be assuaged, it would be surprising if witchcraft and sorcery were not intertwined in the contemporary moment. Nor should we expect such ideas to be limited to the "traditional healing practices" of the past but, rather, they might be viewed as an opening for "alternative healing," including the "denialist" ideas of the West. As the government has promoted confusing messages and Western medicine has been portrayed as toxic, "alternative" healing in South Africa has become, not a complementary alternative as described in many ethnographic instance, but instead, a rationale for rejecting treatment. In fact, "alternative healers" are claiming that Western medicine is killing people and requiring that Western treatment be rejected in order for the alternative method to succeed (McGregor 2007; Natrass 2007).

As in many parts of the world, the market can be heavily implicated in contemporary ritual (Geschiere 1997a). In fact, the healing solutions currently being sold in South Africa cost money and are making some people rich (McGregor 2007; Natrass 2007). Such solutions are not being invented only by African “traditional” healers. The medicine “Africa’s Solution” was bottled and sold to Khabzela by Tine van de Maas, who was born in Holland (McGregor 2007). Multivitamins have been invented and marketed by a corporation led by Matthias Rath, a European entrepreneur (Specter 2007).¹¹ Rath, promoted by Minister of Health Tshabalala-Msimang, has drawn the Treatment Action Campaign into ongoing and costly litigation, using resources and energy that would have been much more constructively spent in educating people about AIDS treatment.

Thus, with respect to AIDS and “denialism” in South Africa, I would be less inclined to accept a general explanation of millennial capital or the perpetuation of “culture” as the explanations for the adoption of a mixture of “alternate” treatments. Women who saw Western treatment working took *practical*-sense perspectives and often even enthusiastically joined the Treatment Action Campaign. However, people with no such immediate models, rejected the TAC. Surrounded by doubt and mystery, they were much more likely to be drawn into the whirlpool of alternate beliefs, traditional or newly invented. They were much more vulnerable to the market forces of unproven concoctions brewed up by non-scientific entrepreneurs, small and corporate. The government, in the form of Minister of Health Tshabalala-Msimang, weighed in with both promotional and financial support for such unproven non-scientific ventures, and not only delayed the distribution of anti-retroviral treatment backed by proven health results but labeled the medically proven drugs toxic. In addition, Herbert Vilakazi, a US-trained sociologist and Chairman of the Presidential Council on Traditional Medicine, contended that such treatments were poison sent by the West to kill Africans (Natrass 2007; Specter 2007). He

testified in front of parliament on behalf of uBhejane, a “traditional” medicine, and assured *New Yorker* journalist Michael Specter that “I have personally seen hundreds of people who have taken uBhejane and they have gotten relief.” Vilakazi continued: “Who benefits from ARVs? ... Pharmaceutical companies ...” (Specter 2007:36). Under these circumstances, the manifestation of critical “good sense” among poor African women is extraordinary. One example of this extraordinary display of “good sense” occurred in 2005 in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, an extremely poor area. Several hundred women braved police firing rubber bullets to march into the local hospital, demanding that the hospital speed up the provision of HAART.

Examining community experiences with AIDS in historical perspective, it is clear that women’s views of the family and expectations of marriage continue to differ from those outlined in Western social science. This is not a simple argument for “cultural difference.” “Culture” as a concept has to be used very gingerly in South Africa and in describing subaltern populations or class differences. Much of what is labeled “culture” falls into Gramsci’s unexamined fragmented hegemonic “common sense” --: an amalgam of religious constructs and folk beliefs that seem to be used to outline an unexamined but highly judgmental moral universe. As we have seen, many women described in these pages were adapting in pragmatic and creative ways to the epidemic but their “good sense” (in Gramscian terms) was framed by their historical experience, which included a history of customary marriage patterns as well as their everyday interactions. However, the signature feature of such “good sense” is that it did not take on a moralistic dimension but rather opened a path to a constructive and creative transformation of daily life.

While women in their roles as mothers, caregivers and ‘first responders’ to the AIDS epidemic are struggling with the lack of day care, education, transportation

and adequate water, they are also undermined through ideologies of gender exploited in the public sphere. Social movements around AIDS have not yet fully acknowledged, not to say resolved, the contradictions of gender ideologies and the intertwining of politics, traditionalism and Western fundamentalist religions. The prevention and treatment of HIV for women, men and children has to be understood within this wider social context if it is to be successful.