# Popular Politics in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa: A Case Study of Ruiterbos

By

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# Abstract

This thesis argues that the philosophical foundations upon which human beings have been engaged have, across various schools of thought, made the mistake of presuming that some people are more modern than others. This suggestion is refuted throughout this thesis. To do this, intellectual traditions that take the fundamental rationality of all human beings as an indispensable starting point are engaged to argue for the need to acknowledge that everyone *in* the 'now' is indeed, *of* the 'now'. This thesis connects these debates about modernity, rationality and humanity to the contemporary discussions around rural politics with particular reference to Ruiterbos in the Western Cape province of South Africa. By means of detailed empirical and ethnographic research, this thesis illustrates the issues around which people in Ruiterbos are politicised. Via this case study, the a priori assumption that rural politics will necessarily manifest itself *only* with respect to questions of land and agrarian reform or labour relations is complicated. The two issues around which people in Ruiterbos, during the time of this research, seem to be politicised – housing and education – are surfaced throughout this thesis. The thesis argues that the findings in this case study call for an expansion of the issues that are traditionally considered when the question of rural politics is raised. The often historicist approach that limits the possibilities for politics in rural areas should be suspended for an approach that takes popular politics and political agents in rural areas seriously. The thesis finally argues that the conclusions that are reached with respect to questions of modernity and rural politics ought to be adopted to allow for more detailed and thorough explanations of popular politics in places like Ruiterbos.

Emancipation is becoming conscious of the equality of *nature*.

— Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991).

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# 1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

I want the world to recognize with me, the open door of every consciousness.

— Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (1952).

For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man [sic].

— Frantz Fanon in *The Damned of the Earth* (1961).[1]

[1] Here, and in the remainder of this thesis, I use Lewis Gordon's more accurate translation of the title of Fanon's final work – *Les damnés de la terre*. This book it often (mis)translated in English as *The Wretched of the Earth* (Gordon, 2015: 151).

### a. (Euro)modernity, Liberalism and an Ontological Split

Paul Landau's *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400-1948* makes it absolutely clear from the outset that in his book "everyone's basic rationality is assumed" (2010: xii). The premise of everyone being equally capable of rational thought constitutes the missing link in many frameworks that engage the rural subject. The presumption of rationality is not only a political statement, but it is also a question of methodology. This section draws on an array of intellectual traditions and schools of thought. Whilst diverse in their philosophical foundations and their application, the thread that – for the purposes of this thesis – unites them is their commitment to what Fanon calls the "open door of every consciousness" (Fanon, 1952: 181).

A central argument made by Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* is that "Critical thought fights prejudice and yet carries prejudice at the same time" (2000: xvi). One's capacity for working out new concepts with the aim of contributing to the project of setting afoot a new humanity, to paraphrase Fanon, does not automatically escape existing concepts and existing conceptions of humanity. At the heart of radical thought and emancipatory praxis lies an urgent necessity to create new possibilities that simultaneously fight and escape prejudice. Where dehumanizing assumptions remain implicit in projects that claim to be geared towards a more human future, these assumptions must be identified and dispelled urgently.

One such assumption is the idea that certain people are more modern than others. The idea that some people are 'of the now' and thus inhabit the modern, whilst others are from a different time – either pre-modern, post-modern, or anti-modern – has, even in radical circles, not always been transcended. The distinction between modern and unmodern is traced by Sylvia Wynter to a sixteenth century debate between "Bartolomé de Las Casas, the missionary priest, on the one hand and the humanist royal historian and apologist for the Spanish settlers of Santo Domingo, Ginés de Sepúlveda, on the other" (Wynter, 2003:269).

At the heart of this debate was the question of the human. What are the traits that can qualify someone as a human being? For Sepúlveda, who ultimately won the debate, it was the "*rational* (or ratiocentric) political subject" (Wynter, 2003: 288; *my emphasis*) that constituted the

quintessential human. Sepúlveda's Eurohumanist[2] position distinguished itself from the theologically grounded arguments made by Las Casas in two important ways. This new position, in the first instance, set out from the assumed legitimacy of an expanding colonial state, rather than a Supreme Being (Wynter, 2003: 269; 282). In the second instance, Sepúlveda's position distinguished itself from that of Las Casas in its *ontological* distinction between the human and the non-human. Whereas the theological conception of humanity assumed that the non-believers could be brought into the fold of humanity by means of conversion to Christianity, the Eurohumanist position, first articulated by Sepúlveda, conceived of the distinction in terms of the "law of nature" (Wynter, 2003: 296-297). Later arguments around the putative ontological divide between the rational, Euromodern, human on the one hand and, on the other hand, the irrational, nonhuman, unmodern were rooted in the binary introduced by Sepúlveda 460 years ago. Central to the colonial project was the ontological split between colonizers and colonized. It is this split which, if we follow decolonial theory, initiated the modern world together with its colonial underside. From this point onwards, some people were considered *inherently* rational, modern, and human whilst others were not.

Domenico Losurdo's *Liberalism: A Counter-History* explains how Liberalism, much like Euromodernity, is *not* universal – in spite of various claims to the contrary. Losurdo shows how liberalism built on the binary between the rational, modern human and the irrational, unmodern non-human by introducing a 'sacred space' and a 'profane space' (Losurdo, 2011: 310). The sacred space is the domain where the principles of liberalism are applied, whilst the profane space is the domain at the *expense* of which the principles of liberalism are applied. The liberal project, therefore, facilitates the capitalist exploitation of those in the profane space by those in the sacred space. Losurdo links the liberal project to its roots in the racialised oppression of people in Europe's colonies – the profane space. It is precisely in this profane space were, in the liberal tradition, "the distinction between man [*sic*] and nature does not seem to emerge or does not play a prominent role" (Losurdo, 2011: 310). The language of liberalism and the language of modernity have a mutually constitutive history and, perhaps more importantly, are part of the same project.

[2] I use the term Euro-humanism in the same way that Jean and John Comaroff use the term "Euromodernity" (2012: 1). Eurohumanism, like Euromodernity, denotes a particular Euro-American conceptual category which parades as a universal ideology, whilst in reality excluding certain people.

What liberalism's incorporation into the ideology of Euromodernity has allowed for is *mobility* between the unmodern and the modern. In the same way that conversion from 'paganism' allowed for the unmodern to be brought into the fold of modernity, it becomes possible for the unmodern subject to become modern by ascribing to the norms of Euromodernity and liberalism (Losurdo, 2011: 205). For example: a black individual in the colony can, in this framework, become modern if he/she presents themselves like a Euromodern subject in terms of dress, livelihood, values and even accent.

Modernity therefore presents itself as quintessentially rational and contemporary whilst maintaining a colonial and capitalist underside. By means of the reforms introduced by liberalism, Euromodernity is able to conceive of mobility between the unmodern and the modern. These different spaces – the sacred, rational modern space on the one hand and the irrational, profane, and unmodern space on the other – are conceived of as different temporalities. Put differently: those conceptualized as modern are of 'the now', whilst those who are deemed unmodern are considered to be of a *different time*. The ideology of Euromodernity, and its liberal manifestation, is *historicist* in nature. It assumes a teleological progression form an ontological state of pre-modernity to 'the now' – or Euromodernity. This teleological conception of human existence firstly positions the Euromodern subject as superior to the subject that is considered unmodern; and secondly allows the Euromodern subject to play the messianic role of benevolently leading the 'development' of the 'not yet modern'. This is the context in which Walter Mignolo notes that "'Modernity' became – in relation to the non-European world – synonymous with salvation and newness…The rhetoric of newness was complemented with the idea of 'progress'" (Mignolo, 2011: 43)

There are two serious problems with this conception of modernity: one relates to the split in temporalities that is implicit in this conception of modernity, whilst the other relates to the notion of mobility between the two. The first point is obvious, though worth making explicit. Time is something that is shared by us all. It is nonsensical to think of people, all existing at the same time, as occupying different temporalities. Partha Chatterjee (2004: 5) lucidly roots this relationship between Euromodernity and temporality in the capitalist mode of production; he writes that:

> "capital allows for no resistance to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time – something out of pre-capital, something that belongs

to the pre-modern. Such resistances to capital (or to modernity[3]) are therefore understood as coming out of humanity's past, something that people should have left behind but somehow haven't."

Secondly, the power dynamics at play in the notion that there is a possibility for mobility between the unmodern and modern domains are not arbitrary. The idea of mobility from the not-yet-modern to the modern reproduces the dehumanization implicit in the ontological divide mentioned earlier. In July 1970, Steve Biko wrote against the "superior-inferior white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil (and a poor one at that)" (Biko, 1978: 26). One dimension of what Biko is alluding to is the fact that the not-yet-modern subject will always be aspiring to the modern but will never *truly* be modern. The modernity of the supposedly irrational and 'backward' subject will remain in the hands of those Euromodern custodians of 'the modern'.

Many others have joined Biko in linking Euromodernity to mechanisms of oppression. This link is by no means accidental or arbitrary. It is not simply a matter of Euromodernity being able to exist alongside dehumanizing oppression; rather it constitutes the very logic that *allows* for this dehumanizing oppression. The concept of Euromodernity, like all hegemonic ideas, is a mechanism via which those who yield power over others in any given society create, maintain and reproduce the status quo.[4]

The Euromodern – and frequently liberal – idea that rational thought is something that only certain kinds of people are capable of is not a new statement. As early as the 3rd Century BC the Greek philosopher, Plato, asserted that:

> "While all of you in the city are brothers, we will say in our tale, the deity who fashioned you mixed gold in the makeup of those fit for rule, for which reason they are the most precious. In that of the defenders he mixed silver, and iron and brass in the makeup of the plowman [sic] and the craftsmen" (Plato in Rancière, 1983:19).

For Plato the capacity for rational thought is the reserve of certain, 'most precious', kinds of people – or 'philosopher-kings' who have gold mixed into their makeup. He, in anticipation of an aspect

[3] This mention of 'modernity' refers to what is characterised as Euromodernity in this thesis.
[4] This thesis will illustrate some of the ways in which these Euromodern assumptions permeate the logic with which instruments of rule – such as the local state and police – engage those who have been relegated to the 'profane space'.

of what would later become the liberal and Euromodern tradition, insisted on an ontological divide between the rational, thinking rulers and the irrational, unthinking ruled.[5] Euromodernity – and its more recent Liberal manifestation – therefore *always* had a dark underside. Certain kinds of human beings have *always* been kept outside the folds of what it means to be a modern human subject.

There are various schools of thought which have taken note of the continuities between claims of inherent rationality and oppression. Theorists in the Subaltern Studies School have, for instance, noticed that Euromodernity claims itself as the *a priori* location of rationality. Dipesh Chakrabarty notes how "reason and rational argumentation [are often used as] a modernist weapon against "premodern" superstition" (2000: 238). Thus, in the dominant Euromodern tradition, a binary is created between a rational modernity and an irrational pre-modernity. Denials of someone's capacity for rational thought, therefore, carelessly deny that person their contemporaneous humanity – i.e. their modernity[6].

In addition to the Subalternists, Decolonial thinkers have been at the cutting edge of explicating the link between Euromodernity and claims to an inherent capacity for rational thought. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, in a paper on the 'coloniality of being' goes back to the famous Cartesian axiom to re-entangle it with its darker underside. René Descartes' 'I think therefore I am' can be seen as representative of *the* primary assertion of European modernity. It is the idea that, at least philosophically, signifies the mantra through which the modern individual is born. Maldonado-Torres, however, lucidly brings attention to the fact that Descartes' assertion presupposes two hidden dimensions. He notes how

> "From 'I think, therefore I am' we are led to the more complex and both philosophically and historically accurate expression: 'I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)'." (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 252).

[5] One notable distinction between Plato's ontological differentiation and that of Euromodern and Liberal ideologies is the absence of a raced component. These latter ideologies were from the outset profoundly raced. This was not the case with Plato's conceptualization.

[6] I use the concept of 'modernity' differently to the conceptualization of the term that has been discussed so far. Unlike those who perpetuate the Euromodern project, I use the term 'modernity' as no more than a *temporal* category. Those who are modern subjects are therefore, quite simply, 'of the now'. I deliberately abstain from attaching ontological and epistemological significance to the term by limiting it to a category of time. A modern subject is therefore anyone who is an agent *at this point in time*. It is *not* a certain kind of person who thinks and acts in a certain kind of way.

Thus, the binary identified by Chakrabarty is also identified here by Maldonado-Torres. In both cases there is an opposition between rational thought, modernity – and for Descartes: existence – on the one hand and irrational, unthinking unmodernity on the other hand.

Fundamental to this Euromodern project of modernity is a teleological conception of time. The notion that certain people are exterior to the modern moment has been addressed by various scholars. The revolution by black Haitian slaves at the turn of the 19th century was, for example, "unthinkable as it happened" (Trouillot, 1995: 73). These slaves were not considered modern subjects – in fact they were hardly considered as human beings. The slaves from Haiti existed in what Frantz Fanon termed "a zone of *nonbeing*, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (Fanon, 1952: 2; *my emphasis*). Seeing that they were not modern in the Euromodern sense[7], their political action could not be perceived as such; this in spite of the fact that they emancipated themselves from slavery and adopted one of the most progressive, life affirming constitutions in history.[8]

Similarly, Ranajit Guha explains how peasants in colonial India could not be understood by colonial officials as political (Guha, 1983: 6). This was principally because politics – i.e. simultaneous thought *and* action – was considered a modern phenomenon. The Indian peasantry was considered to exist outside of the realms of the modern and as a result the idea that they were being political was inconceivable.

Again, we see that the project of Euromodernity has always had an inner circle and an outer circle. The project of Euromodernity has always had an underside. This underside has been identified by decolonial thinkers as Coloniality[9]. Enrique Dussel, a key figure in decolonial theory, insists that "the "other" is the "other face" of modernity" (Dussel, 1996: 3). Thus, the colonial other is a fundamental part of the Euromodern. The colonial world and the Euromodern world constitute different sides of the same coin. The existence of one depends on the existence of the other. W.E.B. Du Bois pre-empts Dussel with an even more explicit account of the relationship

[7] Though not conceived of as modern within the hegemonic framework, these slaves were, of course, fundamentally modern.
[8] For a deeper analysis of the truly modern and universal character of the Haitian Revolution, see Nick Nesbitt's 2008 book: *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment.*
[9] Coloniality signifies the remnants of colonialism that continue to shape the world we live in.

between the Euromodern and the projects of slavery and colonialism. In *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois (1935: 5) argues that:

> "Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale; new cities were built on the results of black labor…"

The projects of racism and slavery therefore, for Du Bois, form the fulcrum around which the Euromodern world is built. At the theoretical level this relationship continues to hold true. The *idea* of modernity and the *idea* of coloniality are mutually constitutive. This means that the colonial world – and thus the colonial subject – is quintessentially modern and "neither pre-, anti-, nor post-modern" (Dussel, 1996: 3). It therefore becomes vital that 'critical thought', in the first instance, re-entangles Euromodernity – and its liberal reinvention – with its colonial underside and, in the second instance, disentangles itself from the dehumanizing frameworks of the Euromodern/Liberal/Colonial project.

### b. <u>Towards Transcending the Ontological Split</u>

Thus far I have shown some of the assumptions that are implicit in liberalism and Euromodernity. In particular, the problematic ontological disjuncture between the unmodern – or the not-yet-modern – and the modern has been highlighted. This idea has been picked up by various scholars who have realised that a liberal or Euromodern premise dehumanizes a large portion of humanity. Implicit in these conceptions of ontology and temporality are clear positions on the question of thought. Rational and political thought is considered the reserve of the 'modern' subject in the sacred space. Various scholars, some of whom I will discuss here, have departed from this model which denies certain groups of people their modernity – and thus their capacity for rational thought.

Jacques Rancière has, for example, insisted that "all men [sic] have equal intelligence" (Rancière, 1991: 18) and that "thought is not an attribute of the thinking substance; it is an attribute of *humanity*" (36). As such: the capacity for thought follows from existence, rather than the converse proposed by Plato and others. In rejecting the hierarchy of thought – and subsequently a hierarchy of modernity and humanity – assumed by Plato and others, Rancière draws on the experience of the French schoolmaster, Joseph Jacotot, who is able to teach students, via the

method of emancipation. Though he is ignorant of the language that they spoke, the students were able to learn. Rancière, through the story of Jacotot, returns time and again to a rejection of Plato and Euromodernity with an absolute affirmation of the equality of intelligences. The Cartesian mantra which, as I have shown, Maldonado-Torres unpacks into *the* Euromodern assertion of superiority, is reversed by Jacotot who suggests that: "Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am'; and this noble thought of the great philosopher is one of the principles of universal teaching. We turn this thought around and say: 'I am a man [sic], therefore I think'." (Jacotot in Rancière, 1991: 36)

Fanon, similarly, in concluding *Black Skin, White Masks* calls on the world to recognize with him "the open door of every consciousness" (Fanon, 1952: 181). In fact, the two excerpts quoted at the outset of this chapter are taken from the final words of Fanon's most famous books and they capture the man's approach to relating to the society he lived in. Both are pertinent in any attempt at sincere reflection in the Social Sciences today. His closing line to *Black Skin, White Masks* translates to an instruction to himself and all humanity. Put in slightly different words, he instructs us all to acknowledge that everyone is able to think and –perhaps most importantly – to think *rationally*. The poetic line with which his last book, *The Damned of the Earth* (and also his life)[10], comes to an end is another instruction to us all. This time he points out the importance of continuously employing new ideas, frameworks, and methodologies towards emancipatory thought and praxis when he implores us to "…work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man [sic]" (1961: 255)

This thesis tries to take Fanon's pleas seriously. They constitute two crucial cornerstones for any project in the social sciences which seeks to be meaningful. If one wishes to make sense of the society one lives in and one wishes to understand the actions of the people in this society then the fundamental assumption of rationality of *every* person cannot be compromised. It must be assumed that the thoughts and actions of any person or any group of persons 'makes sense'. Furthermore, it must be taken for granted that the role of the researcher is to find a framework that explains the rational capacity of ordinary people. The researcher *cannot* in good faith allow a situation where the researched – like the North African in Fanon's text – "*by the very fact of appearing on the scene, enters into a pre-existing framework*" (Fanon, 1964: 7; *emphasis in* original); rather he/she must necessarily, as a starting point, bracket the existing frameworks and

[10] Fanon died a few weeks after completing *The Damned of the Earth* (Gordon, 2015: 111-112)

allow the evidence to speak for itself. If the researcher does not see the actions of the subjects of his/her study as rational, then it is time to 'work out new concepts' as Fanon suggests.

It is with these cornerstones in mind that this project sets out to research the politics of people in a South African rural[11] area. I return to the community where I grew up to determine the key issues in the community – as articulated by them. I also try to make sense of the ways in which people react to these issues they have identified. It is my hope that a thorough study of the people in Ruiterbos and their politics will shed some light on the politics of people in the Western Cape's commercial farming areas – and, perhaps, beyond.

In what follows I contextualize my project in terms of the existing engagements between the academy and the rural subject. I provide an overview of the position that rural dwellers have, generally, occupied in theoretical projects. This is followed by an overview of the framework I wish to develop and employ in my study. Throughout this section runs a parallel methodological argument. By the end of this chapter I hope to have positioned this project theoretically. I furthermore hope to have convinced the reader of the necessity to develop a framework which, in the words of Lewis Gordon, "requires, paradoxically, a methodology of not *presuming* a method" (2006: 24; *my emphasis*).[12]

### c. The Rural Subject and the Academy

Contemporary debates about people in rural areas[13] of the Western Cape, particularly rural areas where white commercial agriculture is common[14], have largely been influenced by the farm workers strikes in the Hex River Valley in late 2012 and early 2013. These farm worker strikes are

[11] Here, as in the remainder of this thesis, my use of the term 'rural' is a category that denotes geography. I therefore invoke rural as a category of *space*. Whereas scholars have often attached – explicit and implicit – ontological and epistemological connotations to their use of the term 'rural', I explicitly avoid doing this. In this invocation of the term, 'the rural' might be a certain kind of space, but it does *not* give rise to certain kinds of people.

[12] By suspending formalised Method and Disciplinarity, the scholar is able to avoid a trap that fetishizes method at the expense of reality. This point will be elaborated upon as the chapter progresses. For now, it will suffice to note that Method is not an objective 'tool of the trade' but rather a deeply contested mechanism for framing research *within* particular Disciplines and ideological positions.

[13] I am here referring to those communities often labelled as the 'rural poor'. Seeing that the category of 'rural poor' is a raced category in the South African context, the communities of people referred to here are almost exclusively black and brown people in the South African countryside.

[14] The literature that focuses on 'rural' areas is generally divided between scholarship that focuses on research, primarily, in the former Bantustan areas of South Africa on the one hand and scholarship that is concerned with regions of (white) commercial agriculture on the other. The subject matter in this project would fit broadly into the latter, though the complexities and continuities between different types of 'rural areas' should not be underestimated. Not every rural dweller fits neatly into former Bantustan or commercial farming regions. Many people are simultaneously dwellers in both regions and many are dwellers in neither.

considered by most as a watershed moment and it is therefore useful to take this moment as a point of reference as we start the discussion of rural politics. Jesse Wilderman and Lungisile Ntsebeza both wrote about this important event. Jesse Wilderman's MA thesis on the strikes describes them as "historic" (2014: 1) in that farm workers adopted an "overt, confrontational, and adversarial approach that, in this instance, was an apparent break from the traditional discourse [around paternalism]" (2014: 2). Similarly, Lungisile Ntsebeza, one of South Africa's foremost scholars on the land and agrarian questions, argues that the strikes "have undoubtedly introduced a fresh dimension to the prospects of social and economic change in South Africa's countryside" (Ntsebeza, 2013: 130).

Both Wilderman and Ntsebeza consider the actions of these farm dwellers as important, but both of them make two implicit assumptions about the political mobilization of farm dwellers in the Hex River Valley. They firstly assume that *all* the realities of rural people are rooted in oppressive structures. These structures are characterized as colonial or capitalist or as a combination of both but, either way, the status quo of rural people is deemed the product of purely structural factors. Whilst I am not refuting the existence of oppressive structures, the firm focus on these structures brings about the second implicit assumption. If one assumes that oppression can be understood by understanding the historical structures from which oppression originates, then one assumes the political mobilization of the oppressed to *necessarily* be historicist. What this means is that the scholarship in both instances makes arguments that consider the mobilization of people in rural areas to follow naturally from the *structural* limits to their emancipation. The form of politics is *determined* by the nature of the oppressive structure – as perceived by the researchers. Their – fundamentally *structuralist* – analysis therefore takes for granted the notion that an accurate identification of the structures of an oppressive system will automatically allow for the politics of people in rural areas to be understood. This structuralism centres the analysis of the *researcher*. Politics is perceived to be mirrored by the worldview of the researcher, rather than - as Paulo Freire (1970: 109) would attest – the dialectic relationship between rural dwellers on the one hand, and the material conditions that exist around them on the other. The frameworks invoked by the researcher in short: depoliticise people in rural areas.

Jesse Wilderman therefore interrogates the relationship between capital and rural people and is subsequently able to, broadly, identify the strikes in terms of a rising proletariat against

Capital (Wilderman, 2014: 87). Lungisile Ntsebeza on the other hand theorizes these events in the Hex River Valley in terms of the land question – manifesting itself in terms of a wage dispute (2013: 130; 136). The continued colonial and racialised imbalance in land ownership is provided as *the* structural obstacle to emancipation from which the mobilization of these farm dwellers followed. Commercial farming capital or colonial dispossession of land are therefore taken by these scholars as the structural problem which, by its very existence, determined the nature and form of the political mobilisations of farm workers in 2012 and 2013.

I dwell on the arguments of these two scholars because they represent two broad categories when it comes to scholarly engagements with people from rural areas. At a conceptual level, the majority of the literature which engages with people in rural areas is framed with respect to the often nationalist 'land question' or the often economist 'labour question'. The politics of rural people is often understood as motivated by issues around land or labour. Some scholars have certainly looked beyond the scope of either of these factors and have seen the nexus where the land and labour questions converge as the site of oppression and resistance. Nevertheless, the literature is dominated by land and/or labour as the key units of analysis. I will return to the common limitation to these conceptions of how rural politics unfolds, after a brief exploration of these two frameworks in some of the literature relating to political mobilisations of people in rural areas.

From the outset it is important to note that the *people* and politics in rural areas of South Africa are severely understudied. The empirical and ethnographic research in this field is very limited, whilst the theoretical frameworks have also remained somewhat stagnant. Most importantly, the politics of people who live in rural areas has very rarely been prioritized as an area of research. Much work in the social sciences more broadly has focused on structural oppression, but the actual thoughts, practices, and aspirations of people in rural areas are rarely taken as insightful *in and of themselves*. Nevertheless, there are scholars who do engage rural spaces. Though their work is not exhaustive, they do take rural areas seriously as a potential site for politics. By association they also take the people in rural areas seriously as political actors – though not always as agents[15].

[15] Here I make a distinction between agents and actors. In my usage of these two terms 'agents' refers to people who identify important issues and act upon them. People seen in this light are assumed to have a rational consciousness which informs their *political* action. 'Actors', on the other hand, are considered in a historicist way where their actions

One such scholar who takes the rural areas seriously is the late Sam Moyo who is widely considered as an authority on both the land and agrarian question in Southern Africa. In his 2008 book Moyo offers an extensive discussion of the land and agrarian questions in relation to the state. He notably focuses on accounting for the role played by the state as well as the role played by social movements (Moyo, 2008: 5). He views the, virtually stagnant, state led land reform projects in opposition to more democratic popular demands for land. These popular demands for land are deemed to be articulated by specific social movements across southern Africa (2008: 12). He discusses the popular mobilization of people in rural areas, but this discussion remains relative to the issue Moyo identifies as key: namely the issue of inequitable land distribution. His reading of contemporary rural struggles in Africa is worth quoting here:

> Struggles for or against land property rights being individuated through title deeds and, struggles against the introduction of land rentals or levies, and struggles against the exclusion of peasants from access to natural resources through the leasing of state forest and nature reserves, are commonplace throughout the continent. This suggests that the intensity of demand for just land reform is growing (Moyo, 2008: 21).

Moyo's discussion, though by no means all-encompassing, certainly raises an important issue. The issue of land is seen as a key aspect of politics in rural areas. For him, "The principle land question facing southern Africa is that little progress has been achieved in the implementation of land reform" (2007: 60). For Moyo together with Paris Yeros – his co-editor of *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, the land occupation is considered a primary manifestation of politics in rural areas across the world (2005: 35). Political mobilisation is understood in terms of social movements – such as the MST in Brazil for instance – occupying land with the objective of advocating for the land and agrarian questions to be addressed at state level. What this work shares with that of Ntsebeza, among others, is the implicit assumption that the politics of people in rural areas manifests itself in relation to the ownership of agriculturally productive land. Moyo – and Yeros – therefore ascribe to the general facets of the 'nationalist school' mentioned in the above.

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are the result of the natural/teleological outcomes of the structural factors identified by the researcher – rather than their own conceptualizations of their surroundings.

This distinction is quite similar to the distinction drawn between "active citizens" and "activist citizens" by Julian Brown in *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* (2015: 61).

Similarly, Nomalanga Mkhize in her PhD dissertation on the prospects of tenure reform in South Africa with respect to farm dwellers in Cradock suggests from the outset that "the resolution of the land question should be the central "leitmotif" informing the South African development agenda." (Mkhize, 2012: 4). Her analysis continues to assume the centrality of the land question although an explicit demand for land does not emerge in the dissertation. She argues that "The demand for land is there, although farm workers in Cradock are unlikely to articulate this readily given the prevailing conditions within which they live" (Mkhize, 2012: 175).

This position, which I have categorized as 'nationalist', takes seriously the colonial project as one that dispossessed black people of their land in favour of white settlers. Subsequently the ethical imperative for the land to be returned to those who were dispossessed becomes central as a *political* struggle. The work that takes this position engages with people in rural areas in terms of what I term a nationalist framework. For those who show fidelity to this position, the issues and practices of people in rural areas are understood in these terms and their politics is read through a preconceived lens which centres the land and agrarian questions.

This nationalist position is particularly dominant in the literature that deals with former Bantustan areas, but it also permeates the literature on commercial farming areas in the Western Cape, South Africa. In *The Promise of Land* (2013) Lungisile Ntsebeza wrote a chapter which – though it recognizes the fact that farm dwellers in the Hex River Valley in 2012/2013 were acting organically (2013: 133-134) and not through unions – is rooted in an assumption that the 'land question' is the underlying concern of participants in the strikes. The idea of 'change' in his title which contemplates the "prospects for change from below" (2013: 130) implicitly refers to 'change' *per* the 'land question'. The land question therefore is a central theme which *informs* a substantial amount of scholarly engagements with people in rural areas and their issues.

Perhaps a notable exception to a centring of the land question is Ashley Westaway who in his doctoral dissertation on bare life in the Bantustans suggests that "Whereas formal apartheid ended in 1994…segregationism remains a predominant form of governance in South Africa today" (Westaway, 2009: 34). The dissertation suggests that "Instead of 1994 being a point of discontinuity between apartheid and democracy, it is better understood as providing a bridge from apartheid segregation to a more modern class- and demography-based, type of segregation." (87). For Westaway the key issue in rural areas, particularly the former Bantustans, is the question of

governance. He escapes the assumption that politics in rural areas boils down to a question of land, or labour for that matter, but does share certain facets with the nationalist position. Westaway, like others in the nationalist school, conforms to a statist framework of rural politics.

The nationalist school's approach to reading rural issues translates into a very *particular* relationship with the state – notably the postapartheid[16] state in the South African context. The ANC[17] government, as the organization that has claimed responsibility for ending apartheid, is seen as the mechanism via which the land question *ought* to be resolved – in the case of Westaway's argument the solution would also come from a better approach to governance by the ANC-led state. As a result, this school of thought emphasizes the role that government policy ought to play in addressing the land question; with some critics blaming the prominent role played by the World Bank in developing land reform policies in South Africa for the failures of land reform (Hall and Williams, 2003). Sam Moyo and Ben Cousins, for example, centre the role of the state in introducing transformational agrarian policies to replace the ineffective and neoliberal ones that are in place (Moyo, 2008: 5; Cousins, 2007). For Moyo, the social movements he sees developing throughout the continent place pressure on the state to introduce more radical policies around land redistribution and reform. The state is generally viewed as trying, but not doing enough to resolve the issue of African landlessness.

The emphasis on the land and agrarian questions, with a subsequent emphasis on government policy, is not limited to the academy. It is a position that is shared by various political parties, movements, institutes and NGOs which operate outside of the academy. I will briefly discuss a few such examples to illustrate the ways in which the nationalist school of thought permeates into various engagements with people in rural areas[18]. This will be done with respect to

[16] I use the term 'postapartheid' in the same sense as Achille Mbembe uses the notion of the postcolony in his acclaimed book *On the Postcolony* (Mbembe, 2001: 15). It is not a point in time that comes after apartheid – in the sense that time of apartheid is over and has been replaced by a totally different social structure ('democracy' in this case). Instead, postapartheid South Africa, like Mbembe's postcolony, is a legally independent entity which continues to carry the sociological and material trappings of apartheid.

[17] African National Congress.

[18] As a preliminary comment, I must point out that these frameworks outside of the academy often have very serious and tangible consequences for people in rural areas. Whereas the academy tends to exist for itself and does not interact with people in rural areas beyond occasional stints of 'field work'; political parties, NGOs and what is usually termed 'civil society' tend to interact with people in rural areas more regularly. As such, they have a seriously heightened potential for causing far reaching damage in these interactions.

the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Black First, Land First organisation (BLF).

"PLAAS does research, policy engagement, teaching and training about the dynamics of chronic poverty and structural inequality in Southern Africa…" (PLAAS website, 2016). With various scholars such as Cousins, Hall and Du Toit that are cited in this thesis affiliated to PLAAS, there are many layers to the work that is done at the institute. However, for the purposes of this argument there are two things worth noting. One is the obvious point that the land and agrarian questions are central to the focus of the Institute for Poverty, *Land* and *Agrarian* Studies. The second point is the fact that the institute concerns itself predominantly with government policy. Lungisile Ntsebeza comments that PLAAS is concerned with "…how to help government formulate policy. The question of challenging the policy framework [does] not arise." (Ntsebeza, 2004: 29).

Similarly, the Economic Freedom Fighters came onto the South African political scene in 2013 and with the launch of their 2014 election manifesto, re-centred the land question at the level of South African party politics. The first of seven non-negotiable pillars for economic freedom is considered to be the "Expropriation of South Africa's land without compensations for equal redistribution in use." (EFF Election Manifesto, 2014). In the 2016 election manifesto the centrality of land remains a crucial point around which the EFF intends to mobilize (EFF Election Manifesto, 2016: 5).

This centrality of land is echoed by former EFF chief ideologue, Andile Mngxitama, whose BLF organisation is also mobilizing around the question of land. In its constitution the BLF organisation notes that:

> "…there is currently no national movement that is committed to the return of the land to the people in total. There are many localised and uncoordinated efforts including opportunistic abuses of landlessness for other ends by forces of reaction and reformism, but not land reclamation and re-conquest efforts by our people. Landlessness is being used for political expediency." (BLF Constitution, 2015)

Mngxitama's BLF simultaneously assumes that there is a resonating call for land[19] to be redistributed and that the BLF organisation, unlike all others, legitimately articulates the demand for this land. Whilst BLF correctly identifies a relationship between rhetoric around landlessness and political expediency, they sadly fail to escape *precisely* that criticism.

Rural politics in South Africa has, therefore, been perceived in terms of the land question. The state-civil society nexus, which continues to exclude significant portions of ordinary South Africans, has assumed the land question to – directly or indirectly – be the key issue in South Africa's rural areas. This is in a context where empirical evidence which shows the land question to be primary is hard to come by. Ruth Hall, a researcher at PLAAS for instance concedes that "very little is known about the *demand* for land" (2004,222; *my emphasis*).

This nationalist position, first mentioned with respect to Ntsebeza's discussion of the 2012 and 2013 farm dwellers protests, does not constitute the only conceptual position in studies of people from rural areas. The position broadly described as economist in the discussion of Jesse Wilderman's thesis is, similarly, held throughout the scholarship. In this tradition, people in rural areas are often studied as a narrow rural working class in conflict with a capitalist class. This position dominates, though not exclusively, to the studies of commercial farming areas. Whereas the land and agrarian questions are central to what I have termed the nationalist school, the labour question is central to what I am calling the economist school.[20] Things like working conditions, wages, and unionization of people in rural areas are central concerns for people who follow this school.

Doreen Atkinson's book on farm dwellers in South Africa for instance takes the broadly economist position where she engages farm workers as "a class invisible in [South African] society" (Atkinson, 2007: 3). Similarly, much of the work by Gavin Williams (2005; 2010) regarding wine farms in the Western Cape is informed by this position. Henry Bernstein also takes

[19] In our engagement with demands for land, it is worth specifying which type of land does attract popular attention. Here there is variation between rural and urban land. Organisations like Abahlali baseMjondolo a – shack dweller movement based mainly in KwaZulu Natal – have, for example, consistently been mobilising for land and dignity in *urban* areas (Gibson, 2011). Those I have characterised as sympathetic to the nationalist school of thought have routinely focused on rural land rather than a demand for urban land. This is in spite of the fact that a genuine and credible popular demand for urban land has existed since at least 2004. There has been no comparable popular demand for *rural* land.

[20] With high levels of unemployment in South Africa's rural areas – 56% in Ruiterbos – a focus on formal labour (wages, working conditions, etc.) will invariably fall short of engaging reality.

the labour question as the obvious starting point. For him, the primary concerns are the "agrarian questions of labour in a new, globalising, conjuncture of capitalism" (2003: 221). He argues that the fragmentation of the production process in the era of globalisation has considerable consequences for the rural working class; that the classic land and agrarian questions are being relinquished into obsolescence by the fragmentation of labour in this latest stage of Capitalism, giving rise to what he calls an "agrarian question of labour" (Bernstein, 2003: 216; 221). In a more recent article, he argues that the ANC led government has allowed for, if not encouraged, "a process of 'normalization' of *capitalist* agriculture (farming and agribusiness) in South Africa since 1994" (Bernstein, 2013: 42; *my emphasis*). He accuses the postapartheid regime of having colluded with capitalist agriculture to ensure that labour remains cheap in South Africa at the expense of farm workers who had worked on farms for so long (Bernstein, 2013: 37). Fred Hendricks' articulation of the "overwhelming *proletarian* reality of rural South Africa" (1995: 41; *my emphasis*) echoes Bernstein's position that rural politics ought to manifest itself in terms of the conflict between labour and Capital.

Again, one should not misconstrue this point as a rejection of the existing oppressive structures. Such a denial would be naïve and disingenuous. A fundamental contradiction between the interests of Capital on the one hand and [rural] labour on the other is, for example, impossible to argue with. This contradiction, however, does not obviously translate into the *a priori* politics of people in rural South Africa. The relationship between oppressive structures and popular politics is in other words not necessarily a *causal* relationship.

I have thus far discussed the economist and nationalist schools as though they constitute distinct and unrelated categories into which much of the literature dealing with rural people fits neatly. It is not my intention to portray these frameworks as mutually exclusive, as there is a lot of overlap between these two positions. There are for instance many scholars who explain the colonial dispossession of black people in terms of white Capital. This means that colonialism and apartheid, together, are considered as a form of *racialised* Capitalism. Harold Wolpe (1972) held this view when he argued that "Apartheid is the attempt of the capitalist class to meet the expanding demand for cheap African labour" (427). For Wolpe, Apartheid "must be seen as an ideology which sustains and reproduces relations of production" (1972: 454). Similarly, Colin Bundy brings Wolpe's ideas into the South African countryside when he argues that "the underdevelopment of

the African peasantry can only be understood within the framework of the development, severally, of agrarian, mining and industrial capital in South Africa" (Bundy, 1979: 243). For Wolpe, Bundy, and others, the land and agrarian questions are therefore intricately linked to the question of labour.

In fact, many of the scholars discussed thus far have throughout their work acknowledged some form of relationship between the land and labour questions with respect to rural areas. In a seminal text by William Beinart and Colin Bundy the history of political struggles in rural South Africa are considered in some detail. In a continuation of the criticism made by Beinart and Bundy in their book, the contemporary literature on rural areas continues to side-line *popular* politics as a primary question in the South African countryside. Due to a focus on structural questions, *people's* politics continues to be framed "in terms of dispossession and mounting immiseration" (Beinart & Bundy, 1987: 25). The questions of thought and praxis, in relation to conditions in rural areas, therefore remain obscured in much of the scholarship.

Nevertheless, attempts to transcend the limitations of structuralism in the field do exist. A perspective that blends the nationalist land question and the economist labour question in South Africa's countryside has given rise to a synthesised 'livelihoods perspective'. This framework offers an "integrated analysis of complex, highly dynamic rural contexts" (Scoones, 2009: 183). Such a complication of rural life allows for issues other than land and labour to be discussed as meaningful aspects of rural livelihoods. The approach nuances the key concerns in the countryside but is *not* concerned with popular politics in rural areas. If popular politics is the product of a dialectic relationship between rational thought and praxis within a certain context, then the livelihoods perspective allows for the expansion of the material conditions – or context – within which the rural subjects operate. The political aspirations of rural dwellers are, however, *not* foregrounded by this approach. The livelihoods approach therefore constitutes a nuancing of the structuralist traditions outlined earlier. Whilst making radical contributions to the scholarship on rural areas, this approach still produces an *a priori* framework within which politicisation of the rural subject is expected to unfold.

Similarly, Phillip McMichael's critique of frameworks that consider the peasantry through the "capitalist lens of modernity" (McMichael, 2008: 224) goes against the grain of traditional frameworks for reading the agrarian question. In an attempt to "examine the [global] peasant movement through its own discursive practices" he draws on the experiences of the Movimento

dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra[21] and La Vía Campesina to argue for "reformulating the agrarian question as a question of food" (2008: 215). This leads him to a conclusion that "Peasants Make Their Own History, But Not Just as They Please…"[22]. McMichael's argument constitutes a meaningful intervention in the understanding of the food sovereignty movements across the world. What, however, does this mean in places where politicisation does not take place under the auspices of food sovereignty, agrarian reform or workerism?

These nuances to the traditional framings of politics in rural areas are certainly valuable. They however converge in their limited concern for the *articulation* of issues by people in rural areas. On whose terms and in which frames is the politicisation of people in rural areas expressed? The focus in much of the existing scholarship is on the *context* within which the rural subjects are understood to operate – or expected to operate. Rural dwellers are not expected to be their own liberators from this context. Whilst diverse in many respects, the aforementioned schools of thought and approaches have one commonality, namely: a blind spot for the organic *articulations* of politics *by* communities of people in rural areas. This thesis inserts itself at this point with an express concern for these popular articulations and aspirations in rural South Africa.

How then, should the manifestation of these articulations be understood? In the nationalist school a progressive liberation movement, like the ANC, with good land policies is anticipated as the agent for politics or revolutionary change – perhaps with a polite nudge in the right direction by civil society. In the economist school this change is expected to be brought about via the unionization of the rural working class to fight for their interests as workers. As a result, the difficulties of organizing people in rural areas under a union banner are debated extensively in this school. The quintessential agent of history is therefore the landless subject, the exploited worker, or someone for whom both identities apply. In all instances there is much discussion of the absence of a revolution – whether nationalist or workerist. In these frameworks a revolutionary political moment is highly anticipated.

In a study of poor people's movements in the United States, Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward come to a very similar conclusion. They first criticise the left for not understanding popular struggles. They continue to argue that, "the left has not tried to understand these

[21] Known in English as the 'Landless Workers' Movement' or MST for short.
[22] This turn of phrase is also the title of McMichael's article.

movements, but rather has tended simply to disapprove of them. The wrong people have mobilized, for they are not truly the industrial proletariat. Or they have mobilized around the wrong organisational and political strategies" (1979: x-xi). For Piven and Cloward (1979: xi), "popular insurgency does *not* proceed by someone else's rules or hopes; it has its own logic and direction." (1979: xi; *my emphasis*). This argument made by Piven and Cloward, near on 40 years ago, is strikingly applicable to the debates discussed in this section. Their criticism of the left can easily be extended to the various schools of thought illustrated thus far. In short: moments in the form that they are anticipated by scholarship are rare. This could either be a failure of the subjects in these studies to transcend the false consciousness that is often attributed to them and 'act as they ought to' *or* it could be a failure of the researcher to understand the realities of popular action[23] and, also, the situation in which popular action occurs. This thesis concurs with Piven and Cloward and argues that the latter explanation for the perceived absence of a revolutionary moment is most useful. This thesis intends to transcend this problem and avoid the trait that the various schools of thought outlined in this section have in common: namely, the *depoliticization* of people in rural areas.

### d. Towards New Concepts that Recognize the Open Door of Every Consciousness

This section started out with two quotes from Fanon which are crucial to this project. These quotes respectively address both the theoretical and methodological problems that were introduced in the above. In short: everyone is capable of rational thought and scholarship must work out new theoretical frameworks that function to re-humanize and re-politicise rather than dehumanize and depoliticise. Researchers can take these two extracts as a starting point from where to work out new frameworks which allow ordinary people to be political agents. This thesis is concerned with doing exactly this. In the section that follows I develop a framework which seeks to break from the existing modes of engagement by allowing people to be a rural subject and a political subject *simultaneously*.

I have already laboured the point that Fanon pleas with everyone, including the scholar, to assume that ordinary people are capable of simultaneous – rational – thought *and* praxis. In short: in order for us to see people as political, and in order to avoid depoliticizing them, we must assume

[23] Or, indeed, the lack of popular action.

that they are capable of engaging the world around them *rationally*. This section will explore why this assumption is so fundamental and how a failure to provide alternative frameworks is complicit in the oppression of those already oppressed.

In light of this, and whilst noting that systemic oppression is a reality, this thesis argues that oppressive structures do not, *prima facie*, beget emancipatory politics. It, for example, does not follow from an observation, that land is in fact inequitably distributed, that people in South Africa are – or should be – politicized around a demand for land. Similarly, the reality of exploitative relations of production on farms does not *automatically* translate into an explicit workers' struggle to unionise. The politicisation of people is *not* structurally determined and is certainly not determined by scholarly assessments of structures. Here Andries Du Toit's (2004) argument against the concept of 'Social Exclusion' relates. Du Toit critiques this term for its casting of the current 'social' as normative with exclusion from that society understood as the problem. He rejects the "patronising and normative assumption that we (whoever 'we' are) know in what the poor want (or ought to want) to be included" (2004: 1001). Popular politics and 'what the poor want' is, rather, the product of a collective process where the dialectic relationship between thought and action is brought into conversation with the material realities[24] that confront people in rural areas.

This illustrates the imperative for the rational thought and modernity of people in rural areas to be assumed. Any framework that fails to take this seriously, reproduces the very tropes that colonialism and capitalism were premised upon. The unmodern subject continues to be seen as just that. My basic critique of existing frameworks in the study of people from rural areas is therefore that people in rural areas are not recognized as fundamentally *modern* subjects. This, of course, does not negate the radical intentions of the scholarship quoted in the earlier sections. Both the nationalist and economist schools intend for an emancipated future – or at minimum a *more* emancipated future. Unfortunately, they however do not escape the pitfalls of critical thought which "fights prejudice and yet carries prejudice at the same time" (Chakrabarty, 2000: xvi).

Nevertheless, frameworks that silence the silenced are obsolete and must be rethought and replaced. The frameworks adopted throughout the literature that engages people in rural areas have

[24] These material realities, of course, include the structural manifestations of oppression such as postapartheid continuities of landlessness and exploitation on commercial farms.

uncritically accepted Euromodernity, and its liberal reincarnation, as virtuous and without an underside. This is what accounts for the teleological determinism that constitutes the approach that was outlined in earlier sections. The key issues are identified by the scholar as questions of land and/or of labour and the rural subject is *a priori* considered as 'not yet' rational/political/modern. Only once the rural subject sheds his/her 'false consciousness' and mobilizes on the *terms* of the researcher – i.e. in terms of land and/or labour – does the rural subject cross over from the domain of the unmodern to the domain of the modern. Only then does the rural subject join the researcher in the sacred space.

The denial of rural people's modernity is an insidious theme in engagements with people from rural areas. Reference is often made to rural people's 'closeness to the land' or inherent capacities for dealing with livestock. This is in most cases framed either positively as pastoralism of people who have 'not been corrupted' by modernity; or it is termed negatively as backward primitivism of people who do not have the capacity to enter the modern era. Similarly, the commonning practices of people in rural areas are either discarded as primitive communalism or celebrated as post-capitalist communism. Alternatively, the practices of people in rural areas are read as a rebellion against modernity. People in rural areas are therefore consistently read as pre-modern, post-modern, or anti-modern (Dussel, 1996: 3). All of these tropes are indicative of an uncritical affirmation of the Euromodern/Colonial tropes which have caused so much harm in the past. All of these narratives around the rural subject maintain the ontological split that Euromodernity has created between the inner sacred space of 'the now' and its underside.

Unlike the dominant approach in the literature that engages people in rural areas, I intend to treat the rural subject as a fundamentally modern subject. Like Landau in his book I will assume the rationality – and modernity – of every rural subject. The capacities for rational thought and temporality are, of course, understood as shared between us all.

### e. Some Notes on Methodology

At this point, a few comments about my personal role as researcher in Ruiterbos, where I grew up, are in order. I am from Ruiterbos and therefore have an ambiguous relationship with most of the people I engaged for this project. I am simultaneously bound to this community *and* positioned at a distance from it. My 'foreign' ancestry, education, and socio-economic class

position set me apart from the rural community which this project seeks to engage. At the same time, I am a member of this community. I have longstanding personal relationships with many of the people interviewed for this project. Some were my classmates in school, some were my rugby coaches, and some are friends with my family and myself. This ambiguous relationship between researcher and researched has obvious advantages and disadvantages. I therefore urge the reader to bear the presence of the researcher in mind whilst reading this thesis. The privileges and advantages I have are infused into this project but should not be indulged at length. There is a tendency in scholarly work to labour the structural and positional relationship between researcher and researched. This 'recognition of privilege' often takes the form of a self-indulgent narrative which centres the researcher. Where the power relations between researcher and researched are already skewed, these narcissistic discussions of reflexivity and positionality invariably reinforce such skewed power relations. I wish to remind the reader that no one writes from nowhere. All writing, including this thesis, is from somewhere and from someone.

Bearing this in mind, I must note that the fundamental differences between researcher and researched in terms of knowledge production are *not* necessarily mirrored in terms of political struggle. It is, in other words, possible for the researcher to be committed to the struggles of the researched. This does not translate into a rejection of one's privileges as a researcher but, rather, into an invocation of these privileges in service of the struggles of the researched[25]. The Sangtin Collective[26] were very clear on this issue in a discussion with Richa Nagar – a researcher. Their exchange is worth quoting in full here:

> "Whenever I became anxious about how this division of labor gave me the power to represent the collective and this journey, the group tried to allay my concerns by reminding me that

[25] This commitment of the researcher to struggles can take very different forms. Sometimes, as was the case with the Sangtin Collective, the interventions made in the academy – i.e. the research itself – constitutes a commitment to the struggle. At other times, one's *position* as a researcher is valuable to the collective. Richard Pithouse, for instance, notes that the "work of the university trained intellectual… is often largely practical" (2014:87). For the most part, the contributions I was able to make to these struggles relied on my *role* as researcher, rather than my research itself.

[26] The Sangtin Collective is a group of women from a diverse range of social, geographical and institutional backgrounds who came together in 2002 to contest the politics of knowledge production and the NGOization of women's empowerment (Sangtin Writers, 2006: xxvi). The book, *Playing with Fire*, is one of the outcomes of the ground breaking work done by this collective. The book takes on a range of crucial questions, including issue of ethical research and ethical solidarity between researchers and researched.

forming an alliance was primarily about strategically combining, not replicating, our complementary skills. As Richa Singh and Ramsheela once explained to me:

> We have the skill of doing activism; you have the skill of writing. We do complementary things; that is why we are an alliance. If we were to teach you how to mobilize women in our villages now, it would take you a few years to get good at it. Similarly, you are teaching us how to write and edit a book, but it would take us a few years to write a good book. Maybe it is not even the best use of our time to write a book! We need to be doing as much work as we can do on the ground, and you need to be writing as much as you can about that work. There is nothing wrong in your undertaking the main labor of making the book. It will still remain our book." (Sangtin Writers, 2006: xxxix)

What Richa Singh and Ramsheela articulate so effectively is that there are roles for scholars in a struggle. Scholars can be in solidarity with struggles. This solidarity must however be carefully considered. The El Kilombo Intergaláctico collective, in an interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos,[27] argue that dominant versions of 'solidarity' "[produce] a political subject (the solidarity provider) that more closely resembles a spectator or voyeur (to the suffering of others) than a participant or active agent …" (2007: 1). They go on to warn that "this practice of solidarity urges us to participate in its perverse logic by accepting… that those who could make change don't need it and that those who need change can't make it. To the extent that human solidarity has a future, this logic and practice do not!" (2007: 1). Solidarity is therefore about commitment to a struggle, rather than the distanced 'objectivity' fetishized by formal Disciplinarity and Method. S'bu Zikode, a key leader in the Durban based shack dwellers movement, Abahlali baseMjondololo also makes this point when he insists that Fanon "believed that the role of the university-trained intellectual was to be inside the struggles of the people…" (Zikode in Gibson, 2011: vi). In this thesis, the role of the university trained intellectual and scholarly research in relation to the subjects of that research is understood within this framework.

I return now to the ways in which the structural analysis in the economist, nationalists, and combined approaches to the politics of people in rural areas is limited[28]. I identify in these

[27] This is a pseudonym that the spokesperson of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico went by.
[28] Note how these approaches are described as limited, rather than untrue. Whilst critical of the *a priori* assumptions made in these traditions, I do not wish to imply that oppressive structures do not exist or that the land and labour questions are irrelevant to the politics of people in rural areas.

determinist positions two interconnected, yet fundamental limitations – one is theoretical whilst the other is methodological. These limitations mark the point of insertion of this thesis with respect to existing frameworks.

At a theoretical level both of these approaches are caught in what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls a "deeply historicist" (2000: 23) mode of thinking. Historicism, according to Chakrabarty,

> "tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first, as an individual and unique whole – as some kind of unity at least in potential – and, second, as something that develops over time." (Chakrabarty, 2000: 23)

Ian Baucom elaborates on Chakrabarty's point when he notes that:

> "Historicism's fundamental task is then dual: to place objects within their situation and to *invent* situations and periods of time in which to place objects. Its tendency however, is to mask its second (in fact, preliminary) operation, to treat situations not as artificial forms of time which it has invented but as natural entities it has discovered" (Baucom, 2005: 43; *my emphasis*).

From this discussion it is clear that there is an ideological component to historicism. It is not simply about identifying a situation or period of time from which politics will, supposedly, follow naturally. Rather, it "requires the very *concept* of the situation or period of time as an abstract category of analysis" (Baucom, 2005: 43; *emphasis in original*). Historicist method therefore allows scholarship to escape engagement with the status quo – and its people – by focusing on the *invention* and conceptualisation of historical moments rather than contemporary realities.

The historicist approaches to studying the politics of people in rural areas therefore make certain theoretical assumptions. It is assumed that there are historical events which have chronological, *a priori* consequences. In this context, the work of the scholar becomes that of identifying a key event in history – such as colonialism or capitalism or the combination of these two projects. Once this key historical event is identified, there are presumed 'natural' consequences that follow in a teleological fashion. In other words: there is a political *determinism* inherent in both the nationalist and economist positions. In the case of the nationalist school the colonial project where black people are dispossessed of their land is seen to give rise to a land

question and subsequent mobilization of black people to regain access to the land they lost. Similarly, the economist school identifies commercial farming capital as the historical 'determiner' which gives rise to an exploited rural proletariat which will at some stage seek to become unionized and collectively challenge their status as the exploited rural workers.

In these approaches, the possibilities for politics are therefore set from the outset. In both cases the key issues faced by people in rural areas as well as their reactions to these issues are predetermined. The only action that is recognized, and sometimes celebrated, as political action is the mobilization of people in rural areas around questions of land or labour. The researcher, who has identified *the* key historical determiners, has – on an a priori basis – set the terms of politics. This means that there is no room for people in rural areas to *articulate* the issues they face on their own terms. Furthermore, there is no room for them to *engage* these issues on their own terms. People in rural areas, and their actions, are collectively regarded as capable of action, but not agency. In short: these approaches *depoliticize* people in rural areas. Whilst the assumption that land/labour is at the heart of rural politics is problematic within the literature, I suggest that the adoption of these assumptions can be even more damaging outside the academy. (Un)fortunately academics tend to be confined to their ivory towers. When depoliticizing presumptions are made outside of the academy, questionable *assumptions* that depoliticize the rural subject lead to questionable *practices* that depoliticize the rural subject. When NGOs, civil society or political parties adopt such assumptions, the silencing of people in rural areas tends to be perpetuated.

It was mentioned earlier that rural areas, with their issues, people and politics, are severely understudied. This is rooted firstly in a genuine shortage of good research, and secondly in the limitations of the frameworks that dominate this field. It becomes increasingly paradoxical to study the politics of people in rural areas when the dominant frameworks function to depoliticize them. When Fred Hendricks, for example, insists that "there is a huge amount of ignorance" [29] (Hendricks, 2016) among people in rural areas who simply do not know what their rights are, he

[29] This concern with the ignorance in rural areas is the product of a simplification of rural areas into a homogenous block. Whilst many scholars have tended to homogenise rural dwellers, the reality is that communities in South Africa's rural areas are just as diverse and cosmopolitan as communities anywhere in the world. Rural communities – like all communities – are a motley crew of individuals with different experiences, professions, levels of education, etc. The Bosbou community in Ruiterbos has farmworkers, teachers, preachers, unemployed people, migrants, and what Stephen Feierman (1990) would term "intellectuals". The organic dialogue between these different peoples translates into a wealth of knowledge and insights into all spheres of life. As such, the perceived ignorance in rural areas is attributable to a simplified and homogenising gaze, rather than any ontological reality.

holds a clear view of what would constitute political mobilization in rural areas. In his view, the absence of a *predetermined* political consciousness is attributed to 'ignorance'. Similar referrals to 'false consciousness' or 'ignorance' in rural areas are often made outside of the academy as well. Both conservatives and radicals have routinely re-silence people in rural areas by operating under the explicit or implicit presumption that people in rural areas 'don't know what is good for them'.

The historicist method, which permeates the variations of the nationalist and economist schools is rooted in the cliché that one ought to study the past in order to understand the present. In this approach, the realities of the present tend to be side lined in favour of, supposedly, thorough engagement with the past. This rejection of historicist method by no means rejects history. I, instead, follow Baucom's suggestion, which Westaway (2009) also adopts, that "time does not pass…it accumulates" (2005: 34). The politics of the past manifest themselves most plainly in the present. Good scholarly work must therefore immerse itself in the present in order to come to terms with the past – rather than the other way around. This deviation from historicism allows for the rural subject to be re-politicized. The conception of history as accumulated time – rather than past time – escapes historicist method and escapes conceptions that see history as divorced from the politics and realities of the present.

The theoretical limitation in much of the literature relating to people in rural areas gives rise to a methodological problem. As is evident from the above, these conceptual frameworks *presuppose* the factors that will motivate people to act. They fall into the trap of what Fanon (1964) refers to as an "a priori attitude" where the rural subject – like the North African in Fanon's text – "*by the very fact of appearing on the scene, enters into a pre-existing framework*" (7; *emphasis in original*). Issues are thus introduced by the scholar, rather than deduced from the participants in a given study. This translates into a methodology that seeks to confirm the *world view* of the scholar, rather than one that aims to make sense of the world we live in.

Perhaps a final comment on the consequences of the theoretical and methodological limitations of existing frameworks is in order before I proceed to the ways in which this work intends to transcend these limitations. In the above-mentioned approaches, where the scholar presumes the key issues as well as the form that politics might take, an ontological distinction is implicit. A distinction is made between thought and action. The researcher, by adopting a given

framework, is positioned clearly as the thinker/theorist/philosopher[30], whilst the rural subject is considered only capable of action. Between the researcher and the researched an ontological divide – the same ontological divide that is central to the Euromodern/Liberal conception of the human – therefore materializes. The researcher is *inherently* considered to be responsible for abstract thought, with the researched – in this case the people in a rural area – are only capable of political action *as conceptualized by the researcher.* It is this ontologically fixed conception of the rural subject which, ultimately, depoliticizes the rural subject. The rural subject is not considered capable of conceptualizing the world he or she lives in *in his/her own terms.* Surely an honest study of people in rural areas will have to assume the fundamental rationality – and thus modernity – of the rural subject? Surely the rural subject must be assumed capable of responding to the world around them in both praxis *and* thought?

As I have noted thus far there are serious dangers to presupposing what one will find when doing research. Much of what stands as research methodology often translates to a narrowing of the possibilities of the research. A response to this is what, as noted above, Lewis Gordon (2006: 28) observes "requires, paradoxically, a methodology of not presuming a method". This is the only way in which the prevailing problem of "disciplinary decadence" (Gordon, 2014) can be transcended. It is the role of the researcher to engage the researched honestly *before* finding the analytical tools to make sense of what he/she found. There are very serious consequences to approaching research with a fixed and predetermined position.

The previous sections suggested that formal methodology has certain limitations. The schools I have broadly termed 'Nationalist' and/or 'Economist' approach the people in rural areas in terms of historicist method. This method – which presumes that politics is inevitably (pre)determined by Events in history – is profoundly ideological. Perhaps Paulo Freire best captures this when he suggests that "Underestimating peasants' creativity and regenerative capacity, disregarding their knowledge at whatever level, trying to "fill" them with what technicians believe is right – all these are *expressions of dominant ideology*" (1985: 30; *my emphasis*). Implicit in these ideological approaches is the problematic, yet constitutive, depoliticization of people in rural areas.

[30] In the Platonic sense of 'the philosopher': where only certain kinds of people – those with gold mixed into their makeup – are considered capable of philosophical thought.

This depoliticization by means of historicist Method is in turn rooted in an implicit denial of the rationality, modernity, and – at times – humanity of people in rural areas. In the previous sections I argued at length against these denials and suggested that, *in reality*, everyone is fundamentally 'of the now'. Everyone is rational, modern, and human. In this contestation around modernity, a fundamental disjuncture between determinist Methods of enquiry on the one hand and reality on the other comes to the fore. Put slightly differently and, again, in the words of Lewis Gordon: the frameworks that "dominate academic reflection…collapse into obsession over methodology at the expense of truth" (2006:42). The realities of the researched are ignored or obscured by the researcher via an ideologically loaded investment in Method.

The problem of formalized Method has been identified and commented upon by various people. Paulo Freire for instance pre-empts Gordon's position when he argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that:

> "Just as the educator may not elaborate a program to present *to* the people, neither may the investigator elaborate "itineraries" for researching the thematic universe, starting from points which *he* [sic] has predetermined." (1970: 108; *emphasis in original*)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith also suggests in no uncertain terms that:

> the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. In other words, they need to be 'decolonized'" (1999: 39)

The Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar build on this need for decolonizing methodologies when they argue that

> "the persistence of the traditional compartmentalization of theory and methodology has often presented academics working across borders from engaging more centrally with theory *as* praxis and from focusing more explicitly on the questions of sociopolitical relevance in knowledge production." (2006: 149-150; *emphasis in original*).

These extracts point to the existence of a continuing coloniality at the level of Method – as well as an imperative to disentangle research from this continuing coloniality. Much of academic

research emerged out of a colonial context. Whilst colonialism and the theories that legitimated it have fallen out of favour, the methodologies of this underside of Euromodernity often continue to reproduce colonial tropes[31]. One such trope is the aforementioned ontologically determined divide between theory and praxis. Method positions the researcher as the embodiment of reason with the researched, at best, acting as the site of praxis. The colonial roots of institutionalised research methodologies reproduce the sacred-profane, rational-irrational, and modern-unmodern dichotomies that were discussed and rejected earlier in this chapter.

In order for this problem to be transcended, theory and praxis must be seen as different sides of the same coin. Similarly, methodology must be seen as profoundly intertwined with theory. Contrary to claims regularly made throughout the academy, adherence to a set methodology does *not* automatically lead to the discovery of truth. Rather, ideologically informed assumptions about 'The Truth' are an inherent part of any formalised Method. Put differently: Methodology does *not* beget realities/truths; *false* Reality/Truth, rather, predetermine Methodology.

One of the most striking ways in which Method comes to replace meaningful scholarly enquiry as the objective for research is via an emphasis on Disciplinarity. Particular disciplines become "in solipsistic fashion, *the world*" (Gordon, 2014: 86; *emphasis in original*). This 'world' of disciplinary decadence is removed from reality and serves as its own frame of reference. It is a 'world' where engagement with reality is side lined in favour of applying the rules of the 'world of the discipline'. "Becoming 'right' is", as Gordon suggests, "simply a matter of applying, as fetish, the method correctly" (2014: 86). This fetishisation of method at the expense of truth and reality leads to a point where, in the words of Fanon: "methods devour themselves" (1952: 5). Formal methodologies therefore serve to affirm Disciplinarity, rather than engage realities. Formalised methods therefore become redundant in processes that seek to make sense of realities in a meaningful way.

The inward-looking gaze that institutionalised methodology – and Disciplinarity – facilitates must be transcended. For Lewis Gordon this takes the form of a "*teleological suspension*

[31] It has been illustrated throughout this chapter that even scholarship with radical roots and radical intentions does not always manage to escape these colonial tropes. The – crudely colonial – notion of different kinds of people with different capacities for rational thought continues is carried into critical thought.

*of disciplinarity*" (2014: 87; *emphasis in original*) alongside a "suspension of method" (2014:85). Richa Nagar is even more explicit on the question of Method and Disciplines when she suggests that ethical research that is concerned with truth and realities must be articulated by means of an "anti-disciplinary" approach (2014:89)

Bearing these serious problems of formal 'Methodology' in mind, this project seeks to, in the first instance, transcend formalised Method and Disciplinarity. The false truths and false realities of Method and Discipline respectively are rejected by this project. The remainder of this section will discuss the ways in which I went about this project. I took the status quo as my starting point in the conceptualisation and execution of this project. The only assumption I made was that "the oppressed must [and *can*] be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (Freire, 1970: 54). Everyone's rationality, modernity, and humanity is therefore presumed. Through dialogue[32] with various people in and around Ruiterbos, I sought to determine the key issues – if any – around which the community was politicised. This approach has consequences for the way in which questions of History, Categorisation, and Politics are understood. Whilst these consequences will become evident over the next few chapters, it is worth briefly elaborating on them here.

In terms of History, my emphasis on taking 'the now' and people 'of the now' as my starting point compliments the view of Baucom and Westaway that time accumulates. History – 'accumulated time' rather than 'past time' – is therefore in the present. If this is true, then I concur with Ashley Westaway that: "Instead of clinging onto the cliché that we study the past in order to understand the past [and the present], perhaps it is time that we explored the reverse discipline, which is to study the present in order to understand our histories" (2009: 30). In this way the determinism of historicist method is escaped. Historicist method identifies Events or Forces of the past which are considered to determine the present. My approach to history, rather, takes the status quo in Ruiterbos as its starting point and asks: how did we get here?

This conceptualisation of the present as the vessel of history has implications for the categorisations that are used in this thesis. When research adopts historicist method, the past is

[32] Various people have argued extensively for dialogue as method for radical scholarship. Paulo Freire's suggestion that "The correct method lies in dialogue" (1970: 67) is for instance echoed by Nagar (2006: xlvi) when she suggests that "knowledge must emerge out of sustained, critical dialogues with those who are the subjects of that knowledge". I am sympathetic to their arguments and adopt dialogue as a central component of my research.

viewed as fixed. Key factors in the past are dogmatically defended and seen as the inevitable inaugurators of the present. This perceived rigidity of the past in turn, results in a perceived rigidity in categories of analysis that are deployed. Historicist method therefore *produces* 'agents'. The Worker, The Black, The Citizen, etc.[33] are therefore – analytically – the products of determinist scholarly engagements. This categorisation of political agents is problematic at two levels. Conceptually it succumbs to the pitfalls of Method and Disciplinarity. An ideological, and therefore, inevitable teleology for The Agent is presumed at the expense of reality. This leads to the second problem. People simply do not always behave according to the categories they have been placed into by researchers. The presumed homogeneity of these categories of identity runs counter to reality. People who might for instance be described as 'workers' at a socio-economic level cannot be guaranteed to act as workers *politically*. People are in other words and as Michael Neocosmos (2016: 16) argues, able to transcend their social location when they act politically. Categories of analysis that are rooted in social location or in determinist historicisms are therefore not accurate and therefore not useful here.

Nevertheless, the process of scholarly engagement is dependent on categories in some form. If I wish to generalise at any level it will become necessary to conceive of categories. This project therefore must invoke 'categories'. These are however not the product of historicist method, but rather the product of the rational thought of the subjects of this research. In light of my assumption that people are capable of rational thought, it follows that the way in which they categorise themselves must be taken seriously. Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, a scholar and activist in Bolivian struggles, is firm on this issue. For her people are who they say they are, and "who can say that they are not" (2015). This project therefore draws its categories from the way in which people *see themselves*. This means that the categories invoked here are sometimes unorthodox and *always* flexible.

The people who are engaged in this project sometimes mobilize as parents or as a community, whilst at other times conceiving of themselves as 'bruinmense' or 'plaasmense'[34]. The

[33] I am not challenging the existence of these categories. Rather, I am challenging the idea that they are ontologically fixed and constant through space and time. This creation of conceptual agents that are ontologically fixed cannot escape these categories becoming categories of *identity*. They shift from being units of social analysis to becoming a simplified essence of what a person is.

[34] These terms translate into 'brown people' and 'farm people' respectively. It is interesting that these categories, whilst related to the better-known categories of 'coloured' people and 'farm workers', extend beyond these categories.

categories invoked here are therefore *not* ontologically fixed, but rather fluid and continuously changing. They are rooted in particular kinds of political consciousness and subjectivity, rather than particular 'kinds of people'.

This view of history and categorisation also has implications for what is meant by 'Politics' in general and popular politics in particular. Here the political struggles seen as forms of "anti-power" people struggle for "power-to", rather than "power-over" (Holloway, 2002: 44). The fact that everyone is presumed to be capable of rational and critical thought therefore escapes the fetishization of 'resistance'. Popular politics in Ruiterbos is seen in this project as a positive and collective effort *for* something, rather than a negative struggle *against* something. The *ideas* by ordinary rural subjects translate into the objectives of the struggle. I am aware of the significant thrust for 'power-over' exerted by the state and other structures and, as the following chapters will show, this thesis remains sensitive to this. Nevertheless, the primary focus of this thesis is not on the forces of oppression and repression. Nor is this thesis concerned with the glorification of resistance in the face of repression. Via the approach taken in this thesis, the primary concern to come to the fore relates to an exploration of the 'struggles *for* the power *to*-'. Put slightly differently: this thesis is concerned with the thought of the people of Ruiterbos. What is the kind of future that people have conceived? What are they prepared to struggle for? What are the possibilities for the people of Ruiterbos?

In light of these questions, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with various members of the community at Ruiterbos.[35] I accepted the suggestion made by both Nagar and Freire that dialogue is crucial for research that wishes to engage people, rather than objectify them. The insights gained are therefore the product of numerous open-ended interviews and follow up interviews (Rapley, 2001: 303). The initial interviews were structured around the aspirations of participants and purely served the purpose of exploring the collective political subjectivities of the participants. These interviews were framed to give participants the opportunity to articulate their own account of the status quo as well as their thoughts and experiences with regard to the idea of

These identifications as brown people and farm people seem to be in excess of the traditional categories of race and class. I use the terms plaasmense and brown people interchangeably in the thesis. Due to my presumption that everyone is capable of conceptualising the status quo, it follows that the categories invoked by the subjects of this study are best suited for this project.

[35] Most interviews were conducted in Afrikaans which is the dominant language in the region. I conducted and translated these interviews myself as I am fluent in reading, writing, and speaking both Afrikaans and English.

a ‘better’ future. I had these initial discussions with various members of the community who were identified via both informal discussions with community members – who are known to me – and a snowballing technique similar to the one used by Feldman and Stall in their study of women’s activism in Chicago (Feldman and Stall: 2004: 13).

Loosely put: this first round of interviews allowed for the key issues in Ruiterbos to be identified. Following this first discussion I returned to these, and other, interviewees several times. Each time we continued the discussion in light of the literature, other interviews I had done, my own thoughts, observations and experiences as a member of the community and, at times, a changing status quo. Between July 2015 and July 2016[36] I have therefore been in continuous dialogue with various members of the community of Ruiterbos. These discussions as well as my own insights, as someone who traverses multiple spaces, languages and modes of thought and writing, have given rise to the insights that are captured in this thesis. These insights are continuously changing in response to more dialogue and a changing status quo. This thesis therefore must not be read as *the* story of Ruiterbos and its people but, rather, as a glimpse into the collective mind of these modern, rational, and rural subjects.

### f. Chapter outline

The next chapter deals with the battles fought by the people of Ruiterbos to ensure that the primary school in the community remains open. This struggle for access to education transcends claims to the constitutional right to education and must be seen as such. Struggles around race, space, and re-humanisation are deeply intertwined with this struggle for the school. The politicisation illustrated in this chapter transcends resistance *against* closing this school and takes the form of a sustained argument *for* the survival of the next generation in the community. The contestation also takes the form of a struggle for the history and prospects for continued social reproduction in Ruiterbos. I conclude by using the case study of mobilisation with respect to schooling in Ruiterbos to demonstrate the process via which popular politics, in this case, manifests itself.

[36] The discussions and findings in this thesis are informed by this particular date range. As a significant amount of time has passed between these interviews and the submission of this thesis, there have been a series of developments in Ruiterbos and beyond. For the sake of coherence, these developments are not dealt with in this thesis.

Chapter 3 engages the struggles for citizenship that are being waged by the community of Ruiterbos. The fight to be included into the municipality and the fight for housing are again infused with an overt subjectivity which is continuously asserted, but routinely ignored. The chapter contextualises the housing struggles in terms of the historical factors that produced the environment within which these struggles are developing. I draw on regional and national manifestations of a 'rebellion of the poor' to illustrate that the politicisation around housing in Ruiterbos, indeed, constitutes an articulation toward meaningful inclusion into the citizenry of South Africa. The chapter shows that this demand for citizenship takes the form of an assertion of inclusion into the production of space alongside an insistence that their settlement should be included into a direct relationship with the local state. The chapter concludes with a return to the process via which popular politics in Ruiterbos comes to be.

The final chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the aspects relating to Ruiterbos that have been illustrated in this thesis. The section also deals with questions that are not adequately engaged in this thesis and are in need of further study. The section returns to the method of popular politics as it emerged in this thesis. This section suggests that popular politics emerges via a process – with political consciousness, subjectivity and mobilisation as constituent parts. This leads the chapter, and the thesis, into a conclusion that revisits the earlier discussions around modernity and determinist understandings of popular politics.

# 2.Keeping the School: It is about more than just Education

Rather than bettering their lives, children are denied an opportunity for schooling and will end up back on the white man's farm as workers.

— Clive Uithaler, Ruiterbos community chairperson (2015).

## a. Introduction

Situated at the southern foot of the Outeniqua Mountain Range, Ruiterbos is a small farming village about 35 km north of Mosselbay in South Africa's Western Cape. People have lived here for a very long time – the first mention of Ruiterbos in official records relates to the farm *Ruiter Bosch* being granted to a Mr Meyer in 1754 (Steyn, 1945: 8). With a long history of sharecropping, subsistence farming, and commercial agriculture, the people of Ruiterbos have in many ways been typical of a South African rural population. In line with South Africa's history of racialized segregation, Ruiterbos – still – has a mainly white landowning population on the one hand and a landless brown[37] population on the other. Within both groups there has always been diversity and confrontation (Meyer, 2016). In terms of socio-economic stature, for instance, the white community included wealthy commercial farmers as well as poor sharecroppers. Similarly, the brown population in Ruiterbos has always been rather diverse. Whilst the majority have generally made a living as farm workers, there were always people who occupied different positions on the socio-economic ladder. Before and after the transition from apartheid in the 1990s, there were teachers, truck drivers, entrepreneurs, and hotel managers in the brown community. Whilst I will return to the intra- and inter-racial dynamics throughout the thesis, two things ought to be emphasised from the outset. Firstly: there is, and always was, diversity in terms of social standing *within* both the brown and white communities. Secondly, the racialised segregation *between* brown and white has, historically, been maintained via ideological and systemic means. The segregation of people in Ruiterbos is therefore not accidental, but rather the outcome of concerted and active processes.

One area in which this racial distinction has manifested in recent years, relates to schooling. Between the 1950s and early 1990s the wider Ruiterbos area had at least six primary schools – of

[37] In terms of apartheid era racial categories, these people who are referred to as 'brown' in this thesis would be known as 'coloured' – or 'kleurling' in Afrikaans. The historical as well as contemporary place of 'coloured people' in South Africa is a widely contested question. Debates around 'coloured identity' are widespread inside and outside of the academy. At various junctures, the stakes in this debate have been very high – with citizenship, culture and restitution often at the heart of these debates. Whilst these debates are interesting and, in some respects, quite telling, they do not feature in this thesis. In this project questions of identity or place are not particularly consequential. Instead, the ways in which people identify *themselves* is the focus of this project.
As such: I deliberately do not use the term "coloured" in this thesis as it is not a democratically developed concept in Ruiterbos. I instead use the terminology that is used by the subjects of this research. 'Coloured' people in Ruiterbos identify as 'brown' and I have adopted their classifications of themselves. In this way the significance of racial structures *and* the thought of rural subjects can be foregrounded simultaneously.

which three were designated for white children and the remaining three for brown children (Meyer, 2016; van der Merwe, 2016). Of these six schools, only two have remained. Laerskool Ruiterbos – the oldest of the white schools – was established in 1898 and still stands today. Denneprag Primêr[38] – the other primary school remaining in the area – has schooled the brown children in Ruiterbos since the 1970s. Both of these schools are rather small with fewer than 100 pupils in either school. At the moment, the fate of these two schools is the most contentious issue in Ruiterbos.

On the 16th of October 2012, the Western Cape Minister of Education, Mr Donald Grant, announced a plan to close 20 schools across the province by the end of that year (WCED statement, 2012). Denneprag was one of the schools included on the list proposed for closure. According to the departmental plan, Denneprag would be closed down by the end of 2012 and its students would be sent to Laerskool Ruiterbos where they would, according to the department, be accommodated. Since 2012, the question of the schools has been a central issue in Ruiterbos. The brown community challenged the closing of their school via both formal and informal avenues of dissent.

The first two sections of this chapter are concerned with contestations relating to the two schools. These sections set out with an illustration of the issues that are at stake in this contestation as well as an account of the events that unfolded since the 2012 announcement. These sections are concerned with firstly, bringing the reader up to speed with the situation in Ruiterbos – in terms of schooling. Secondly, these sections set out to illustrate people's *thoughts* in terms of schooling in Ruiterbos. The last section returns to some of the discussions initiated in the previous chapter to consider the implications of this contestation around schools for popular politics.

In the previous chapter I insisted on a role for the researcher that presumes ordinary people's capacity for thought. Furthermore, I argued that frameworks for understanding the status quo should not be given from the outset, but rather developed in response to the realities established by means of thorough research. The discussions in the previous sections imply an imperative to allow the subjects of any given study to articulate their situation as well as their ideas, thus allowing the evidence – as far as possible – to speak for itself. As a result, this chapter largely draws on discussions with the people of Ruiterbos for the articulation and contextualisation

[38] Hereafter referred to simply as 'Denneprag'

of the struggles in and around Ruiterbos. Most of the insights here are therefore the product of in-depth interviews with people whose life stories and opinions shed light on significant events that happened in Ruiterbos's recent history. I also drew on documents gathered by a committee that celebrated the centenary of Laerskool Ruiterbos.[39] Of course my own ideas and experiences are, again, infused into this chapter.

### b. The story of Schooling in Ruiterbos

On Saturday 24 November 2012, learners, parents, and teachers marched through Marsh Street – the main street in Mosselbay – to protest at the local education department (Le Roux, 2012). Clive Uithaler, the then chairperson of the school governing body, insisted during the protest that "they will fight the closing [of Denneprag] into the highest court" (Uithaler in Le Roux, 2012). This protest was in response to the decision made by the Minister of Education to close down Denneprag and amalgamate it with Laerskool Ruiterbos. The community at Bosbou[40] insisted that there is no good reason to close their school and that, quite on the contrary, the only reasonable thing to do is to ensure that Denneprag remains open.

The resolute decision in this community to ensure that the school remains open was rooted in a range of reasons. The standoff between the government officials, represented by the Minister of Education in the Western Cape, on the one hand and the community of Bosbou on the other had the fate of Denneprag at its centre. The statement released by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) on 16 October 2012 officially announced the minister's decision to close the school. The relevant section has been reproduced here:

> 6. **Denneprag Primary School** (Eden & Central Karoo)
>
> I have considered all representations made to me by the governing body of the school, the community concerned at the public hearing and members of the public. Among the relevant considerations which have emerged were the following:

[39] Here I must express my gratitude to the generosity of Tannie Annetjie Meyer who gave me access to all the relevant letters, notes and documents she had in her possession. My contextualization of Laerskool Ruiterbos and the white community of Ruiterbos in particular is deeply indebted to the research done by Tannie Annetjie and her committee in organizing the centenary celebrations of Laerskool Ruiterbos in 1998. Her opinions, insights and stories were also invaluable to this thesis.

[40] 'Bosbou' is the local name for the brown settlement of the wider Ruiterbos area.

> Denneprag Primary School's learner numbers are low and have decreased to 43 learners.
>
> Denneprag Primary School relies upon multi-grade teaching. Based on learner enrolment figures at the school, the staff establishment provided by the WCED consists of two educators. These educators are required to teach 43 learners across Grades 1-7.
>
> The 43 learners can be accommodated at Ruiterbos Primary School (which is 5km away from Denneprag Primary School).
>
> **Given these considerations I have therefore made the decision to close Denneprag Primary School.**
>
> Further to the information above I want to point out that:
>
> The WCED will arrange for safe and reliable learner transport to be provided for the 43 learners requiring transport. These learners will be accommodated on an existing learner transport route.
>
> The incidence of multi-grade teaching will be reduced where the two educators from Denneprag Primary School follow the learners concerned to Ruiterbos Primary School.
>
> The learners concerned will have access to better literacy and numeracy development opportunities, as well as sports and other extra-curricular activities at Ruiterbos Primary School.
>
> I believe that the transfer of learners to Ruiterbos Primary School will create better learning opportunities for the learners at Denneprag Primary School. (Grant, 2012)

Since this announcement, the community has vehemently opposed the closing of the school. They have challenged both the considerations made by the minister *and* the unspoken logic that 'legitimates' the closing of the school. The above excerpt from the statement released by the WCED captures the explicit and official reasons provided for the closure of Denneprag. In what follows, the reasons why the community of the Bosbou settlement is, till today, challenging the proposed closure of the school are discussed in some detail. It must be noted from the outset that the fight is specifically *for Denneprag to remain open*. In other words: the community is not objecting to the idea of the two – admittedly small – schools amalgamating. They are, however, objecting to the idea that *their* school should be the one to close.

The commitment of rural dwellers to education which is illustrated and discussed in this chapter is not unique to Ruiterbos. The link between communities that are marginalised in society and struggles for formal education is a longstanding link. Indeed, the South African student uprising of June 1976, which many consider a watershed moment in shifting the balance of forces against the apartheid regime, is but one example of popular struggles for dignity and humanity crystalizing around a demand for education. Similarly, the radicalisation of marginalised students in South Africa's historically white universities in 2015 recognised a socially grounded, quality education as the mechanism for building a more just society.[41]

Likewise, among rural dwellers, this appeal to education as a means towards an emancipated end is not new. In a study that looks at legal empowerment among farm workers and dwellers in South Africa, Tina Kolhammer (2009: 12-13) notes that "The most common answer given by farm workers and dwellers when asked what they think is needed to change the situation of their group, was education". In her study farm workers and dwellers therefore "appreciate and prioritise education as a means of empowerment" (13). Whilst the scope of her study was limited to the *legal* rights of rural dwellers, the larger significance of education as an instrument of emancipatory struggles remains. With this context in mind, we shift our focus back to Ruiterbos and the resistance to the imminent closure of the local school.

The first reason for rejecting the proposed closure of the school relates to the reasoning of the minister. The community of Ruiterbos challenges the numbers quoted by the minister arguing that more than 43 students have always been enrolled in Denneprag. According to Margaret Menavel, a teacher at the school and lifelong resident of Bosbou, the learner numbers at Denneprag have been steadily increasing in the last few years (Menavel, 2016).[42]

[41] I was an active participant in these movements and have written elsewhere about them. Here it suffices to say that the mobilization of students was rooted in a recognition of education – conceived in a very broad sense – is a stairway to a more dignified existence for most people. Access to this stairway was considered indispensable to those struggling for an emancipated future.

[42] Although the increasing enrolment at Denneprag is not the focus of this thesis, this growth of the school may well be linked to the growth of the community. With the population that surrounds the school increasing every year, the ever-increasing demand for access to schooling seems to follow naturally. The implications of population growth in Ruiterbos broadly and Bosbou in particular will be elaborated upon in the next chapter which is more explicitly concerned with the politicization of the community with respect to questions of housing.

In addition to challenging the learner numbers quoted by the minister, the community questions the applicability of these findings to Denneprag *over* Laerskool Ruiterbos[43]. Across many interviews conducted with various members of the community, the limitations placed on learning by low learner numbers or multi-grade teaching were considered equally applicable to Laerskool Ruiterbos (Uithaler [a], 2016; Malgas, 2016; Uithaler [b], 2016). Clive Malgas, a parent and community leader in Bosbou, for example explains that "the community of Ruiterbos[44] feels, quite simply, [that] it is no problem that we close one of the schools …but because the development is taking place up here and because this school [Denneprag] up here has more classrooms the community just feels: why must our children drive when they can walk [to school]?" (Malgas, 2016). These comments capture a general sentiment among the people of Bosbou. They do not object to the idea of amalgamation in principle, but: either both schools remain open, or Laerskool Ruiterbos[45] must be the one to close down – instead of Denneprag.

Another issue that Malgas's comment points to is the question of, hypothetically, transporting Denneprag's learners down to Ruiterbos. The parents in the community are particularly opposed to the idea that their children be transported down the Robinson Pass to Laerskool Ruiterbos (Malgas, 2016; Uithaler [a], 2016). There are three main reasons for this particular objection.

The first objection boils down to the fact that the community is not convinced that the minister will make good on his promise to "arrange for safe and reliable learner transport to be provided for the 43 learners requiring transport" (Grant, 2012). According to the WCED policy, "The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) provides transport to learners living in rural areas who live *more than 5 km* from their nearest school, and where public transport and hostel

[43] I attended Laerskool Ruiterbos from the first to the seventh grade. My six younger siblings also attended this school (the youngest finished grade 7 at the end of 2015) and my father served on the governing body of Laerskool Ruiterbos form 2008-2009. In light of this, some insights regarding Laerskool Ruiterbos stem from personal familiarity with the school.

[44] The 'community of Ruiterbos' in this context refers particularly to the members of the brown community who live in the settlement known locally as 'Bosbou'.

[45] The main reason why Laerskool Ruiterbos is favoured to close down, rather than Denneprag, is because Denneprag is situated within a community, whilst Laerskool Ruiterbos is not linked to any community. In 2015, all but seven learners were transported to Laerskool Ruiterbos and back. The Bosbou community is in agreement that those learners who are already being transported to Laerskool Ruiterbos may as well be transported a little further to Denneprag (Solomons, 2016; Uithaler [a], 2016). This version is considered preferable to the suggestion that learners be transported out of the settlement in Bosbou to go to school at Laerskool Ruiterbos – which is currently not linked to a community or settlement.

accommodation aren't available." (WCED, 2016; *my emphasis*). Contrary to the Minister's assertion that Laerskool Ruiterbos is 5km away from the settlement in Bosbou, the distance between the settlement and Laerskool Ruiterbos is exactly 4.4km[46]. Transport for the learners from Bosbou is therefore, technically, not mandated by the official departmental policy. Parents and members of the community are concerned that the minister will either not make this exception for their children or, if he does make an exception, the special arrangement would be precarious and at risk of reversal by future administrations (Solomons, 2016; Uithaler [a], 2016). As a result of the problem that the community is anticipating with transport, their children might have to walk along a very dangerous road to school twice a day. This is something that they are not prepared to allow.

The next two reasons for opposition to traveling to Ruiterbos relate to the safety of the children. Whether the learners are transported down, or they walk, their parents consider a trip down to Laerskool Ruiterbos dangerous for their children – and, of course, unnecessary seeing that there is a school right there *in* the community. In addition to the community's scepticism about their children being secured transport to Ruiterbos, they consider the prospect of traveling down to Laerskool Ruiterbos dangerous. The tragic accident in Rheenendal, close to Knysna, and about 120km away, where 14 children and their bus driver died on their way to school is fresh in the memory of the community.

On the 24th of August 2011 a severely overloaded bus – 34 seats transporting 58 children – lost control and crashed into a river. Forty-four children were injured and 14, along with the bus driver, lost their lives in the accident (Fisher, 2014; Stander, 2015). Regardless of the likelihood of such an accident repeating itself in Ruiterbos – and, as we will see the perceived likelihood is high – the community in Bosbou has strong reservations about transporting their children to another school (Muller, 2015). The community is in particular disbelief about the fact that the minister would expect them to send their children along the dangerous road to Laerskool Ruiterbos little more than a year after the tragic accident which supposedly left him "shocked and saddened"

[46] I measured the distance between Laerskool Ruiterbos and the settlement by car, but the reader can access a virtual representation of the distance at: https://www.google.co.za/maps/dir/Ruiterbos+Primary+School/-33.9167408,22.0322598/@-33.9297988,22.0126816,4873m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m14!4m13!1m10!1m1!1s0x1dd679e5e8868cdf:0x56d9657f05e480e1!2m2!1d22.037!2d-33.9458399!3m4!1m2!1d22.0252307!2d-33.9170152!3s0x1dd678352805f6bb:0x499da61b3a0ab99!1m0!3e0.

(Grant, 2011). It would seem that the minister did not allow himself the necessary capacity to mourn and grieve the loss of these children. Furthermore, the prevention of similar incidents is, according to the Ruiterbos community, not sufficiently centralised in the approach that is being adopted by Grant and his administration.

The final objection to transporting children to Laerskool Ruiterbos, and by some distance the most significant one, relates to the particular road that the learners would have to travel. The 4,4km from the Bosbou settlement to Laerskool Ruiterbos is along the notoriously dangerous Robinson Pass. With a range of sharp bends and steep descends, this road has claimed the lives of many people who travelled it. Parents in Denneprag are therefore particularly opposed to see their children walk *or* drive along this road. The two photographs below might give the reader some indication of the risks associated with traveling along this road.


*Bosman River Bend 1: The sharpest bend in the road down to Laerskool Ruiterbos as viewed from below. The bend has been the site of many accidents. Particularly trucks and busses coming down the steep Robinson Pass have regularly lost control of their vehicles and landed in the Bosman River below.*

*Road from Bosbou to Laerskool Ruiterbos 1: Following the sharp Bosman River Bend, the road continues for 2km down a very windy mountain pass.*

The dangers associated with these roads are captured by Eric Solomons, a father of two. Eric asks with much gravity:

> "how can I allow that my child, a five or six-year-old child, walks down this pass[47] in the mornings!? There are accidents that happen here in the pass that do not make it onto the news every day. Even if it is just a bakkie[48] knocking into another bakkie, but something happens." (Solomons, 2016)

In this extract, Eric captures the general sentiment of many interviewees. Out of concern for their children, the parents at Denneprag cannot bring themselves to accept the Department's plan. The inevitable compromise of safety and convenience for the learners has contributed to the community's resistance of the planned closure of Denneprag. It is noteworthy that their objections are primarily rooted in the fact that a school *already exists*. They consider it unnecessary – and to some extent provoking – to make concessions around the safety of their children under these circumstances. The resolve to not endanger their children via daily trips down to Laerskool Ruiterbos and back was conveyed by the current chairperson of the Denneprag Governing body, Gerald Uithaler. He points out that the parents are *so* serious that they have vowed that "if it [the proposed amalgamation] is going to happen, their children will not be coming down here [to

[47] This refers to the Robinson Pass that the children would have to travel along if the schools closed.
[48] A 'bakkie' is a South African term for a pickup truck.

Laerskool Ruiterbos]" (Uithaler [a], 2016). Parents therefore consider the WCED plan as a choice between the lives of their children on the one hand and their education, and futures, on the other.

In a community where 56% of the population is unemployed and where 52,6% (Statistics South Africa, 2016) of people have no more than primary schooling, these frustrations are reasonable. If education is a rare mechanism available to disenfranchised peoples to break out of the whirlpool of unemployment and poverty, then any project that complicates access to education is at its core reactionary and unethical. A further illustration of this is the abrupt and unannounced termination of the Sao Bras bus in the final week of my research for this project. Ruiterbos does not have a high school. The nearest school for secondary education is in Mosselbay. To this end, the WCED had traditionally facilitated a bus that travels between Ruiterbos and Mosselbay on a daily basis; transporting learners to high school and back. In the concluding days of my time interviewing people in Ruiterbos, the community in Bosbou received news that this service would be terminated. This news certainly adds insult to injury in a context where one cannot help but wonder whether the underdevelopment of Ruiterbos' access to education constitutes a deliberate project, rather than an unfortunate coincidence.[49]

As a point of comparison, I briefly digress to discuss a relevant and related situation in Robertson earlier in 2016. Parents in Robertson had shut down a local farm school – designated for farm workers' children – due to a lack of transport for the children. Parents demanded a bus for their children who had to walk in dangerous conditions to and from school every day (Maregele, 2016). One of the parents, Christina Erasmus, notes that "It's not safe for my two young children to walk alone on that road"; she goes on to point out that "When its [sic] misty, there are no pavements for them to walk on. Three children have been knocked down and killed while walking from school. Especially now in the reaping season when farm roads are busy with trucks." (Erasmus in Maregele, 2016). When the department eventually agreed to send a bus, only 90 of the 280 children in the school were transported to school. The remaining children did not live beyond the departmental 5km threshold and were, as a result, forced to walk along the dangerous road. In response to parents' demands of the WCED Jessica Shelver, the departmental

[49] Seeing that news of this development reached the community at this late stage in my interview process, it does not form part of the analysis in this thesis. Nevertheless, it must be noted in light of the overall arguments being made in this thesis.

spokesperson responded that: “given these budget cuts, [we] will not be able to improve learner transport.” (Shelver in Maregele, 2016).

The similarities between the challenges that the ‘plaasmense’ of Robertson are facing and the difficulties anticipated by the people of Bosbou are striking. Whether the department is choosing not to assist the learners in Robertson with transport, or whether the department is, in actual fact, unable to assist them is not the main concern – particularly in Ruiterbos. What is significant is that difficulties around transport are to be anticipated and these difficulties could be avoided if Denneprag simply remains open. Of course, there is also the serious risk of a violent death for any child traveling between Bosbou and Laerskool Ruiterbos to get to school. For this reason, the community of Bosbou sees it as in their best interest – as well as the best interest of their children – to fight for their school to remain open.

Let me briefly step back step back from the articulations made by the people of Ruiterbos to flag the way in which their arguments tie into my earlier discussion on Euromodernity and conceptions of the human. Judith Butler, the American philosopher and activist, has been at the forefront of theorising precarity and grievability in the wake of the infamous September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the USA. When placed in conversation with these people who, unlike organs of the state, value the lives of their children, Butler’s arguments become particularly insightful. The people of Ruiterbos as well as the people of Rheenendal and Robertson are frustrated at the fact that the lives of their children are not sufficiently prioritised. The gamble that the WCED is taking on the lives of children in these communities is unreasonable. Butler (2004:32) asks: “…if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?”. As such one first needs to be a *human* – and a *Euromodern* human – before one can be grievable and mournable. Butler reiterates this point when she says that:

> “Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?” (2004: xiii-xv)

In light of Butler’s insights there are two important things to note. Firstly, the rural subject discussed thus far is not grievable in the eyes of the WCED. The rural subject is deemed too low

down on the hierarchy of what constitutes 'modern humanity' and as such the lives of these people are particularly precarious. The second important observation to make in this section is the fact that these rural subjects are painfully *aware* of their precarity in the eyes of Grant and his administration. In the case of Ruiterbos, people are explicitly fighting for their "menswaardigheid"[50] (Uithaler [b], 2015). This fight for 'human value' – or dignity – is in direct response to an overarching position that perceives these particular people as inadequately modern and therefore: not sufficiently human. The people of Ruiterbos and the people of Robertson are fighting to be modern, to be human, and – in the terminology of Judith Butler – to be grievable.

In addition to the above, the community is prepared to, resist the closure of the school for another reason. The people of Bosbou do not merely consider the school valuable and practical for their *children*. They are also fighting to protect the practical value of the school *beyond* being a site for education. Whilst its value as a place of learning for the next generation is certainly the prime reason for this struggle, the value of the school beyond education also constitutes a significant motivation for this struggle.

The Bosbou settlement does not have any communal building other than the school. In spite of numerous struggles for a communal meeting hall – which will be detailed in the next chapter – there is no public building other than Denneprag. As a result, Denneprag has become a space for the social reproduction of the community. Beyond being the site of education for children, the school is also the location where the community library is housed. After being available to learners throughout the school day, the library becomes a public library in the afternoons.

The school is also the site of weekly church services. There is no church in this community and the school is therefore, again, the only suitable structure for church services. The NG Church[51], the All Saints Church, and the AGS Church[52] all have followings in the community and they all conduct their church services in the school building (Malgas, 2016). What is significant here is the fact that the different denominations are dependent on the school remaining open in order to house

[50] 'Menswaardigheid' is the Afrikaans term for 'dignity'. Etymologically, the term is made up of the Afrikaans words for 'human' and 'value'. The connotations of this word therefore simultaneously emphasise a claim to the right to dignity guaranteed in the South African constitution, *and* an explicit claim to being *valued as human beings*.
[51] 'Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk' – Dutch Reformed Curch.
[52] 'Apostoliese Geloofsending' – Apostolic Faith Mission

their respective churches. When there are deaths or weddings in the community, the memorial services and ceremonies also take place in the school building.

Similarly, the site where state services are made available to community members is also at the school grounds. In light of the fact that so many members of the community are unemployed, many people in Bosbou are claimants of social grants – 56% of people in Bosbou between the ages of 15 and 64 are unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The entire process, from registering for social grants to the actual receipt of these grants, takes place at the school (Uithaler [a], 2016). In addition to Denneprag serving as the site for claimants of social grants, the school also constitutes the site from where the mobile clinic serves the community on a weekly basis (Uithaler [a], 2016).

The final function of the school building, other than facilitating education of course, is that of community hall. As mentioned earlier, there is no public building in the community other than the school and therefore, community functions or meetings are also held at the school. Clive Uithaler, the community chairperson, notes:

> "Denneprag is the gathering point of our community. If there is a problem in the community we quickly go to the school and say 'Ma'am, we have a problem: would you phone the doctor' – many people do not have cell phones...It is the central point of our community. It is the heart of the community." (Uithaler [a], 2016)

The school is therefore both an educational *and* a community asset. If the building that currently houses the school were to be abandoned as a school, it would no longer be possible for the building to fulfil any of its diverse functions. As we will see in the following chapter, the community is not officially incorporated into the wider Mosselbay municipality. As a result, the upkeep of community buildings is something that the municipality refuses to take responsibility for. The only reason the school is maintained now is because the WCED has taken responsibility for it. If it were to desist from doing this, there is no state department that would take over from them and the community does not have the resources to uphold the building. Whether it is the replacement of windows or payment of the electricity bills, the community in Bosbou is dependent on a state department to maintain the building. From their point of view, this department ought to be the WCED.

### c. Beyond practical investments in the school: 'more than just a school'.

The previous section discussed the practical reasons for an attachment to the school. From a concern for the wellbeing of their children to the insistence that the school is an integral part of the community's existence and reproduction, a clear case was made in favour of utilitarian reasons for keeping the school open. A crude realist analysis will indicate, with respect to these contestations, that it is in the material *interest* of the Bosbou community to conserve the school – both as a building and as an institution.

In this section I will be turning to some of the less pragmatic arguments for preserving Denneprag. The positions articulated throughout the interviews set out with the aforementioned emphasis on the *practicality* of the school in the community. These however do not constitute the only arguments for keeping the school. As the dialogues between the community members and myself progressed, the arguments that legitimated fighting for the school underwent a shift. In addition to legitimating their struggle through articulations of what the school *is*, people started to legitimate their struggle in terms of what the school *represents*. This section is dedicated to a discussion of what is *represented* by Denneprag. I start with a discussion of the key ideas around representation as articulated by members of the Bosbou community. From here I proceed to contextualise these representations that people in Ruiterbos are prepared to fight for.

In April 2016 I met with Eric Solomons to discuss the issues people face in Ruiterbos. We met outside Denneprag and spoke about a range of things. Eric moved to Ruiterbos from Graaff Reinet in the Eastern Cape 34 years ago. He has two children who both went to Denneprag and is active in the community with respect to housing struggles in particular. We spoke for well over an hour on the lawn outside the school and our meeting quickly became something of a gathering. Various passers-by joined us throughout the discussion for a range of reasons. Some came to listen to what we were talking about, others came to ask us something, and others still, came to tell us what they thought on the various topics we discussed. When it came to the question of the schools Eric – to the approval of the small crowd that had gathered – articulated his position as follows:

> "[For] all the years we know that school as the '*white*' school. Sorry for the word, but we know the school as that and then we said, 'okay, that's fine, it's alright' [let them have their white school]. Then, the parents here – now this is before my time, and they are already dead–about 40 years ago stood up due to the kids having to walk from up here, early in the

mornings, all along this road where big trucks were driving to go to that [coloured] school in the valley. They *could* not go into that [white] school on account of the fact that they *may not be there*. Okay, that's fine. After '94 when it was decided to combine the [white and coloured] schools some of our parents on the farms put their children in there – in the white school. What do the plaasboere[53] do? They take their children *out* [of the school]. [As if to say:] 'No, no my child will not sit in one class with a brown child'. They take their kids out and drive their kids through to Hartenbos[54]…Now, in 2012 the WCED decided that this school here [pointing towards Denneprag] must close and that they are going to take these kids down to *that* school. I say no. In my personal opinion, I don't think that this school should close. Our parents, who have passed on by now, who were illiterate like me too – I am not educated – they saw that we are fighting for the right thing here. When they said our kids must go down, we said no, that *cannot* happen. Why should we preserve *that* school and the white people's history whilst our own history here must perish!?" (Solomons, 2016)

Eric's discussion here is insightful on a range of issues. For now, there are two in particular that ought to be flagged. Firstly, it is clear from this discussion that the attachment to Denneprag is, at least partially, informed by an investment in the *history* of the school. The community sees the story of the school as intertwined with the story of the entire settlement. The second idea that is central to Eric's argument is that the history of both schools is intertwined with racialised and segregationist modes of existence. Race, history and – perhaps most significantly – the history *of* race in Ruiterbos are therefore profoundly significant to the contestations around schooling.

The settlement in Bosbou was originally built to house forestry workers (Booysen, 2016).[55] People working for the Department of Forestry were housed here whilst working on the pine plantations at the foot of the Outeniqua Mountains – about 10km north of Ruiterbos. To the left of the Robinson Pass the forestry department had, at the time, built large spacious houses to accommodate its white employees and to the right of the road a settlement of small wooden houses

[53] The term 'plaasboere' is the category that the brown people (also known as plaasmense) use to describe white landowners. The term certainly carries racial connotations and refers to land ownership, rather than farming as such. White people who have settled in Ruiterbos as hobby farmers are therefore also included in this category. In this thesis, I use the term plaasboere in the same way as the brown community of Ruiterbos does. The term, when invoked in this project, therefore carries with it a historicized racial and class dimension. (Refer to earlier sections of this thesis for a discussion of the relations between race, class, land ownership and rural politics that are assumed in this thesis)

[54] Hartenbos is a suburb of Mosselbay and is about 30km from Ruiterbos.

[55] 'Bosbou' – the colloquial term for this settlement – is in fact the Afrikaans word for forestry.

for its brown workers. This settlement to the right of the road is what has become Bosbou. With the decline of the forestry industry in the area, the makeup of the settlement started to shift. Farmworkers who had been directly or indirectly evicted from the farms started to move into the settlement (Booysen, 2016). The children of these workers would have to walk 7km each way down to the school designated for brown children. Incidentally this road is the same one that parents are refusing to send their children along today. Parents and grandparents who had to walk the 14km per day along the Robinson Pass to get to school are now vehemently opposed to having their children, literally, walk the same, treacherous paths as them.

In the early 1970s the workers living in the settlement started to mobilise to pressurise their employer to build a school inside the settlement – in order to avoid the arduous trips their children had to make. After some years of struggle and negotiation, the community of forestry workers were able to secure a school inside Bosbou. The workers would spend their free time clearing the forest where the school stands today so that the structure could be erected for the school building (Uithaler [a], 2016). Once the school was built, children no longer had to travel along the dangerous Robinson Pass to get to school and back. Slowly the school became a space that united the community. It gave this community a sense of pride and slowly started to be used as more than just a school (Solomons, 2016; Menavel, 2016). In short: the school started to become what it is today. The attachment to Denneprag is therefore rooted in two considerations. In the first instance, the school is practical – for the community as well as for the children. In the second instance, the school is important as a symbol of the community's reproduction of itself.

The history of segregation in Ruiterbos is by no means arbitrary or exceptional. Henri Lefebvre argues convincingly that physical, mental and social space is actively produced (1974: 11). The ways in which space is filled is not arbitrary. It is, rather, the product of explicit and implicit ideologies. Lefebvre ultimately ventures the position that: "If space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production. The 'object' of interest must be expected to shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*" (1974: 36-37; *emphasis in original*). In any attempt to contextualise the nuances that surround the story of Ruiterbos, Lefebvre's calling must be heeded. What, therefore, is at play in the production of space in Ruiterbos?

Whilst for Lefebvre the seen and unseen motions of capitalism are responsible for the production of space, the arguments put forward by Fanon in *Les damnés de la terre* are similarly insightful in the case of Ruiterbos. For Fanon, "when you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species" (1961: 40). The colonial context described by Fanon therefore allocates space along racial – and subsequent ontological – lines. As such the colonial world is "a world cut in two" (38), a "Manichean world" (41), a "world divided into compartments" (37). In Ruiterbos this ontological and racist allocation of space is deeply intertwined with the history of the struggles around schooling. When Eric speaks of the 'white school' that he '*could* not go into' he intuitively makes the same arguments Fanon and Lefebvre make at length in their books: that space in Ruiterbos is *produced* ideologically – in this case by racism, colonialism and apartheid.[56]

I turn now to a brief discussion of the history of Laerskool Ruiterbos – the school that the community for practical and symbolic reasons refuses to adopt as theirs. In Eric's discussion it is evident that he is opposed to the conservation of Laerskool Ruiterbos's history at the expense of Denneprag's history. In what follows I will elaborate on this history in order to consider the reasons why Eric, and many others, are not invested in the conservation of this school and its history – particularly if this will be at the expense of their own school, history and heritage.

Laerskool Ruiterbos opened in July 1898 with the registration of Sybil Meyer, Daniël Coetzee, Edith Meyer, Lilian Meyer, and Zietsman Terblanche (Meyer, 2016). The three Meyer siblings were descendants of the original Meyer who was granted the farm *Ruiter Bosch* in 1754. Their father, Nikolaas Meyer, donated land for the school to be built. Between its founding in 1898 and the transition to postapartheid in 1994 Laerskool Ruiterbos was designated exclusively for white children. The state sanctioned segregation along racial lines is deeply intertwined with the history of Ruiterbos. When Laerskool Ruiterbos celebrated its centenary in in 1998 the organisers of the celebrations received a letter from a Mr Dirk Vermeulen who briefly served the school as headmaster from April 1939 to March 1940. In the letter Vermeulen nostalgically remembers the children he taught there and reminisces about the – white – community of Ruiterbos. In the letter

[56] Of course, these oppressive systems cannot be divorced from the Capitalist mode of production which continuously produces and reproduces these – and other – mechanisms of oppression.

he is notably proud of one of his students who later became involved in politics. He fondly remembers a Percy Terblanche whom he, in later years, "often ran into at National Party meetings" (Vermeulen, 1998). It seems as though the political ideology of the apartheid state was rather significant for at least some teachers and learners at Laerskool Ruiterbos. From the gendering of activities – with the girls doing needlework whilst the boys do gardening[57] – to participation in the "Landbou-skou" (Vermeulen, 1998) in George and even direct participation in National Party conferences, Vermeulen's letter suggests a close relationship between apartheid ideology and the school.

Schooling under apartheid in South Africa was systemically segregated along racial lines. Different races – which as a result of the Group Areas Act (1951) was synonymous with different *spaces* – were treated very differently in terms of, among other things, education (Nel & Binns, 1999: 119). Apartheid ideology was therefore reflected in the spatial distribution of different schools (Mather & Paterson, 1995: 12). This ideology of racial segregation, separate development and white supremacy was also reflected in the functional components of the different education systems. Education for black, coloured and Indian people was deliberately underdeveloped and underfunded. As late as 1991 the then still apartheid state spent R28 on a black pupil for every R100 that was spent on a white pupil (Nel & Binns, 1999: 119). The spacial and structural segregation of poor black, coloured and Indian schools from the wealthier white schools continues till today. Similarly, the uneven and racialized distribution of opportunities within the schooling system also continues to be recreated in postapartheid South Africa. In short: the infamous system of 'bantu education' remains covertly – and at times overtly – intact.

In light of the above, Eric's point that this school was, historically, never meant for them as brown people is significant. Not only were they excluded from the school and the community that it served, but their physical and symbolic exclusion was in many ways *also* integral to the existence of the school and *its* community. At least structurally, the reason for two small schools – rather than one larger school – is rooted in the apartheid era logic of 'separate development'.

[57] It is interesting that this was still the case when I attended Laerskool Ruiterbos as a learner between 1999 and 2005. The boys were still sent to do gardening on Fridays whilst the girls would be sent to learn about sewing. Particularly since the dawn of postapartheid in 1994, the demographic makeup of the school changed significantly. This however did not go hand in hand with thorough transformation of the culture and ethos of the school. The school continued gearing itself towards the reproduction of citizens suited for apartheid society.

With the closure of white schools in Leukloof and Hammelkop respectively in 1968 and 1970 (Meyer, 1998), Laerskool Ruiterbos increased in size and became the main white school in the area. Nevertheless, the interchangeability between white schools was not mirrored by all schools in the area. The two brown schools– which amalgamated in 1994 to from Denneprag – were entirely separated from the white school. Laerskool Ruiterbos and Denneprag, in spite of being situated less than 5km from one another never competed against one another in any extramural activities. The history of Laerskool Ruiterbos – at least from the perspective of the brown people of Ruiterbos – is therefore a history from which they are excluded. Perhaps more importantly, it is a history that they were *actively* excluded from. The agony with which Eric recounts the fact that they had to walk past the white school to get to the brown school alludes to an antagonistic relationship between the brown community on the one hand and Laerskool Ruiterbos on the other. Similarly, Clive Uithaler relates how some of the 'plaasboere', who are today fighting for Laerskool Ruiterbos to remain open, were the ones to beat him up when he had to walk past the white school to get to the school where he was permitted to be (Uithaler [a], 2016). His account of Laerskool Ruiterbos, much like Eric's account, reiterates the point that the story of the brown community and the story of Laerskool Ruiterbos are at odds with one another.

Whilst the brown community is attached to Denneprag and rather hostile towards Laerskool Ruiterbos, the same is not true of the plaasboere. In an interview with Henry Meyer, the chairperson of the farmers' association and a descendant of the original settler family of 1754, the plaasboer community's attachment to the school became clear. For him there was no question about it: Denneprag should close and Ruiterbos must remain open (Meyer, 2016). Henry, who himself attended Laerskool Ruiterbos, insisted that the standard of education at Laerskool Ruiterbos is higher than at Denneprag. Whilst he had no way of knowing this for certain – his children are transported to Hartenbos on a daily basis and have not attended Laerskool Ruiterbos *or* Denneprag – he argued that the facilities, discipline and infrastructure and Laerskool Ruiterbos is superior to that of Denneprag (Meyer, 2016).

In our discussion Henry, much like Vermeulen in his letter, had a sense of nostalgia for the 'good old days of Ruiterbos' and considered Laerskool Ruiterbos as a place via which "improvement can be brought to the coloured community" (Meyer, 2016). To Henry, the school is of no practical value. Neither he nor his family have any contemporary link to the school.

Nevertheless, when the farmer's association was approached by the community of Bosbou for support in their struggle for Denneprag to remain open, he advised them to concede to the department and negotiate favourable conditions for the closing of Denneprag (Meyer, 2016). Why would Henry, or the farmer's association he represents, care which school closes and which school remains open? Like Henry, none of the plaasboere in the farmers' association have any direct relationship to either school. The only thing that ties them to Laerskool Ruiterbos more than to Denneprag is *precisely* the history of Laerskool Ruiterbos that is so despised by the brown community. Laerskool Ruiterbos is 'their little piece of history' which would perish if it were to succumb to the struggles of the brown community.

This value of Laerskool Ruiterbos in the plaasboer consciousness is not to be underestimated. As Tannie Annetjie Meyer, Henry's mother and teacher at the school from 1955-1959, put it: "Everything happened at the school… we had church services and prayer hours in the evenings, polio vaccinations were distributed at the school, films were screened, and the school even housed the library for Ruiterbos' community" (Meyer, 2016). She insists that Laerskool Ruiterbos was "important for the school children in terms of education, but for the wider society as well". The memory of Laerskool Ruiterbos is therefore something that the plaasboere are invested in. Whilst they do not have a tangible relationship to the school as it stands today, they certainly do have an investment in the things that the school represents to them.

What should be obvious to the reader at this point is the fact that, in the past, Laerskool Ruiterbos *was* for the plaasboer community what Denneprag *is* for the brown community today. In other words: Laerskool Ruiterbos was, from the perspective of the plaasboer community, *more than just a school*. Their personal life stories as well as the reproduction of their community is intertwined with the story of Laerskool Ruiterbos. This is equally true of Denneprag today. There is, however, one notable difference. Denneprag, for the brown community, is of symbolic *and* practical value today. Laerskool Ruiterbos on the other hand is, at least from the perspective of the plaasboer community, *only of symbolic value*. In fact, the plaasboer community has withdrawn its support for this school entirely. In Eric's discussion, quoted at length earlier, the point that the plaasboere have taken their children out of Laerskool Ruiterbos and transport them daily to Hartenbos was raised. For some years now, there have been no white children in attendance at Laerskool Ruiterbos. When asked about the reasoning for this, the parents of these white children

insist that the 'standard' of education at Laerskool Ruiterbos is not high enough. The argument is generally that 'coloureds are not sufficiently competent at school and as a result the teachers have to spend more time with them – neglecting the white children' (Steenberg, 2015; Meyer, 2016). According to Elizabeth Steenberg, a white resident of Ruiterbos who has recently been employed as a teacher at the ATKV[58] sponsored pre-school in Bosbou, "in the coloured schools… there is almost a more laidbackness [sic] and there aren't always great expectations/standards" (Steenberg, 2016). Similarly, Henry Meyer in our discussion attributed the –relatively – low standards in the coloured schools to the problem of foetal alcohol syndrome (Meyer, 2016).

The, often perverse, distaste for what Laerskool Ruiterbos is *now* as opposed to the fond nostalgia for what it once was seems to be at the heart of the plaasboer consciousness. Christine[59], an educational activist in the Eden District Municipality with over 30 years' experience as a teacher and educationist, notes how the situation regarding the schools in Ruiterbos is similar in other parts of the Western Cape as well. She cites various examples throughout the Southern Cape to illustrate the fact that "the white schools are running empty. In the smaller towns, what they do now, they have private schools. Ladismith has a private school now for the white kids… [in other areas] they transport the kids, or they go to hostel" (Christine, 2016). She goes on to point out that across the region there is a trend of "the traditional white school running empty with coloured learners filling it up and then the coloured school closing. I say this [closing of the coloured schools] is because the governing bodies [at white schools] want to keep their white teachers in posts." (Christine, 2016)

She contextualises the history of education in South Africa's rural areas in the following way:

> "Because Education was as highly contested an area under the previous regime (different education systems, curricula and budgets for different races), *these small schools were the result and product of advocacy and pressure from ordinary non-white citizens to enhance*

[58] Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging – a society concerned with promoting the Afrikaans language and culture. Till 1994 the society was only open to white Afrikaners who were Christian, but today it is open to all who share the values of the ATKV. Nevertheless, the versions of Afrikaans language and culture that are advocated for continue be heavily influenced by Afrikaner Nationalist definitions of language, culture and identity. The history and development of Hartenbos – a suburb of Mosselbay – went hand in hand with the growth of the ATKV. Till today, Hartenbos is of central importance to the ATKV (Kaljee, 1993: 50)

[59] At the request of the interviewee, I am using a pseudonym in writing about this interview.

*the chances of their children to achieve economic progress, development, freedom and academic and intellectual growth*, but often it was also compassionate European/White farmers whose wives were looking for something to occupy themselves with in a meaningful way and started such schools. Often, it was also because the farmers lived very far from the closest town and thus were forced to home-school their own children but then opened the school to the farm-labourers' children too as they could then get some government support.

Also, the 'white' farm/rural schools received much support from the neighbouring farms. *This support was withdrawn as the demographics of the staff and learner population changed*. Resources were withheld as many farmers do not necessarily agree with the new education system which promotes integration and diversity, etc. The schools are therefore in dire need of resources, etc. and many of them are in states if disrepair and struggle to survive. They are also running empty as the white parents send their children to hostel and the farm/working class child is left to receive a poorer quality of education as the schools often have to become multi-grade schools (more than one grade being taught in one class)" (Christine, 2016; *my emphasis*)[60]

There are two things I wish to flag in Christine's discussion. Firstly, brown communities across the region have historically fought for schools to send their children to. Secondly, since the integration of schools in 1994, there has been an active withdrawal of support from the plaasboere. Even where there is support and attachment to the *symbolism and history* of a school, there is very limited *material* support for brown schools. There is a trend of white parents not sending their children to schools that are predominantly attended by brown children with a subsequent trend of disassociation between white communities and brown schools – whether these schools are historically white or not. In the interview with Margaret Menavel (2016), the peculiar dichotomy between the white and brown children in the area came up. She found it odd that white parents are willing to go through such lengths, driving past dozens of brown schools, to take their children to very specific schools. When asked about her thoughts on this question, she noted that this practice is "still racist". This comment is indicative of the overt continuation of apartheid in postapartheid.

[60] This is an extract from email correspondence between Christine and me. It is reproduced here with minor edits of spelling and punctuation.

This continuation is not an abstract concept generated in the ivory towers of a university, but rather the palpable reality for the brown people of Ruiterbos.

In terms of the contestation around the schools there are therefore different positions held by different collectives. Both the plaasboer community and the brown community have a clear *opinion* of the way things are as well as a clear opinion of how they ought to be. In the Bosbou community, the struggle for their school is not directly aimed at the plaasboere. Rather, their struggle is positioned against the WCED which is being resisted on two grounds. According to them, and to paraphrase Eric Solomons again, the WCED is invested in 'conserving the history of the whites at the expense of their own history'. This is the first point around which the struggle for Denneprag is being waged. The second point takes the previous one a step further: not only is the WCED considered to be invested in white history and heritage at the expense of brown history, but they are also considered to be prioritising white history over the material *interests* of brown children.

According to the community in Bosbou the only reason why one might want to preserve Laerskool Ruiterbos rather than Denneprag is because of the meaning that this 116-year-old school has for the plaasboere. The school is not practical for anyone and its conservation therefore only serves a symbolic purpose. Where only 7 children live close enough to Laerskool Ruiterbos to walk, whilst all the children at Denneprag live in the immediate community, the decision to preserve Laerskool Ruiterbos simply does not make sense. Nevertheless, the WCED has decided that it is more appropriate to close Denneprag than Laerskool Ruiterbos. This decision is perceived, by the community in Bosbou, as a rejection of brown people's history and interests. The closing of a small farm school which is meant to serve the brown community is considered to be done at the expense of this brown community. It is this process that is perceived by the brown people of Bosbou as a mechanism via which brown people are neglected *again*. The WCED's decision to close Denneprag is seen as amounting to the oppression of brown people and a repeat of historical cycles that benefit white people at the expense of brown people. Clive Uithaler underscores this in his position on the consequences of closing Denneprag. He points out that "rather than bettering their lives, children are denied an opportunity for schooling and will end up back on the white man's farm as workers" (Uithaler [a], 2016).

### d. What does this mean for popular politics?

The previous two sections relied heavily on in depth interviews conducted between July 2015 and July 2016. Throughout the discussions in the aforementioned sections, the focus remained on the ideas of the brown community of Bosbou. At this point, it is my hope that the reader has a clear understanding of the issues that are at stake in terms of schooling in Ruiterbos *as well as* the thoughts the Bosbou community has in relation to these issues. There are three distinct moments that can be identified from the testimonies and ideas gathered by the people of Ruiterbos. These moments all relate to a central theme in this thesis: they respond to questions around politics and the *possibilities* for popular politics in rural areas. In what follows I use the aforementioned contestations around schooling to illustrate the collective social processes that facilitate popular politics in Ruiterbos.

With respect to the previous two sections, it is firstly clear that the people from Bosbou have identified a problem. They have perceived a threat in the proposed closure of Denneprag and have articulated the problem that they have identified in clear terms. They consider the proposal made by the WCED as a threat to their children's prospects of getting educated – therefore preventing children from breaking out of a cycle of poverty. Furthermore, they see the proposed closure of the school as a threat to the broader community. Closure of the school would for all intents and purposes amount to a closure of the churches, the clinic, the library, the community hall, and the social welfare pay out point. The people of Bosbou have therefore, in a nuanced fashion, identified the proposed closure as a serious concern.

The second point I wish to highlight out of the previous section is the fact that the community in Ruiterbos have collectively identified a *context* for the problem they are facing. As is evidenced by the various extracts from interviews quoted in the above, the people of Bosbou have a clear understanding of the history surrounding both schools – as well as the wider Ruiterbos community. The problem that has been identified is in other words not presented in abstraction. There is an astute awareness of social, economic, historical, and political context within which the question of schooling is being contested. One might say that the problem that is *identified* in the above section has also been *theorised* – at least to some degree.

This partial theorisation, or contextualisation, of the problem that has been identified by the people of Ruiterbos gives rise to the third and final point I wish to emphasise. In addition to

having identified and contextualised the problem, the people in Bosbou have an *opinion* on the issues. It is not simply a matter of having identified the problem and explained where it comes from. In addition to this the community in Bosbou has evaluated both the problem *and* the history of the problem.

I noted in the first chapter that I am presuming that everyone is capable of rational thought. That everyone – including the routinely depoliticised plaasmense – is able to articulate the status quo. As is evident from the accounts given thus far in this chapter, my initial presumptions seem to have been appropriate. It is clear from the above that ordinary people – many of whom have very limited formal education – are capable of articulating their status quo. Furthermore, and taking the arguments I made in the first chapter one step further, it is clear that plaasmense are capable of conceiving of the *conditions* that brought about the status quo as well as the status quo itself. Lastly, the plaasmense here are able to theorise and evaluate their status quo.

For the purposes of this particular thesis, I will use the term 'political consciousness' to denote these three points. *The identification, contextualisation, and evaluation of a particular issue amounts to what I call a political consciousness*. In light of the fact that consciousness is the product of collective identification, contextualisation, and evaluation, this consciousness is necessarily a collective consciousness. The collective nature of political consciousness does not preclude the possibility of internal contestation regarding the particular issue. In the case of the Bosbou community, people are continuously in disagreement around the exact nature of the problem. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a certain political consciousness. In Bosbou there is a detailed understanding of the problem faced by the community. This identification of something that the collective is – in a negative sense – *against* is the foundation of political consciousness – and as we will see: popular politics.

Political consciousness is shared by a collective and the collective is defined by shared thought. Put differently: the collective appears as the product of thought, rather than identity. With respect to the Bosbou community, the 'plaasmense' – in relation to the question of the schools – shares a political consciousness. It is not a given that every person living in Bosbou will share this particular political consciousness with respect to the school. Nevertheless, the immediacy of social location and lived experience profoundly impacts the political consciousness that is likely. Social location will not *determine* the political consciousness that arises but will certainly *influence* it.

Political consciousness therefore does not merely exist in abstraction. It is profoundly influenced by people's social location. Both the identification of the problem and the contextualisation of the problem are born out of the material conditions that people are confronted with. Only the *evaluation* of the problem is beyond social location. In light of the fact that political consciousness contains all three these components, it follows that political consciousness is deeply influenced, though not determined, by people's social location. This is why all the people in Bosbou who were interviewed for his project were in agreement that it is a problem for the school to close. On this matter there was general consensus. Similarly, there was general consensus around the social, political, economic, and historical processes that constitute the context within which the problem materialised. In terms of the reasons *why* it was a problem for the school to close the arguments were, however, more diverse. This illustrates the effectual, though not causal, relationship between social location and political consciousness.

In terms of the contestation around the schools a second factor has emerged. In the introductory chapter, I noted with reference to the work of Holloway that the things people are fighting *for* are significantly more interesting than the things that people fight *against*. What I have described in my discussion of political consciousness amounts to the mechanisms via which people identify the things they wish to struggle against. Through a combination of necessity and collective deliberation, the same people who have established a political consciousness of their situation – in this case with respect to schooling – are able to determine the things that they are fighting for.

In the court case against the WCED, the following eight points were presented to the High Court as grounds for deeming the closures of the schools unlawful:

1. They did not take account of the best interest of the child;
2. Section 33 of the Act is unconstitutional;
3. The procedure in s33 was not followed;
4. There was no consultation or meaningful consultation with parents, the SGB, educators and school principals;
5. The public hearings were conducted by departmental officials who predetermined the outcome;
6. The public hearings were a sham;
7. There were no placement plans or meaningful placement plans in place;

8. There were no safety plans in place. (Bozalek, 2013)

Interestingly, arguments number- 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 all objected to being silenced, ignored and disregarded. The court case was therefore challenging the presumption made by the department that it has the legal right to make decisions *about* people without taking their political consciousness into account. Put in a different way, the court case can be read as a fight *for* something. The applicants took the WCED to court to make two significant claims. Firstly, they were claiming that their humanity ought to be recognised and secondly, they claimed that their humanity is equal to that of others.

I term this articulation of something *for* which people are struggling: 'political subjectivity'. *The collective articulation, in a positive sense, of ideas for the future amount to political subjectivity*. This conception of 'political subjectivity' concurs with Holloway's articulation of the term when he argues that "Subjectivity refers to the conscious projection beyond that which exists, the *ability* to negate that which exists and to create something that does not yet exist." (2002, 32-33; *my emphasis*). Similarly, Stefan Bird-Pollan's conception of "subjectivity as the *capacity* for freedom…" (2015: 35; *my emphasis*) concurs with my conception of political subjectivity in this thesis by insisting that political subjectivity is concerned with a positive conceptualisation of *what ought to be*. This political subjectivity is independent of social location. This means that the things that the community in Bosbou envisions are independent of their social, economic, political, and historical context. The persistent insistence that their human existence, along with that of their children, ought to be respected and acknowledged constitutes a positive articulation of what they are wanting to struggle *for*. Their political subjectivity is not limited to their social location, nor is it limited by the existence of other political consciousnesses and subjectivities. Their rational, modern claim to equal humanity exists in and of itself.

The final stage that can be identified in Ruiterbos is the stage of political mobilisation. The community took to the streets and the courts to fight for their school, their history, and their humanity.[61] In other words: people's political consciousness as well as their political subjectivity

[61] Some leaders in the community fought along various parallel lines. The court battle and the authorized protest action in the main street of Mosselbay were to be supplemented with a road blockade to close the Robinson Pass. This was planned and coordinated meticulously, but the authorities found out about this plan and preemptively criminalized the leadership inside the community. In a community where the various organs of the state very rarely pay any attention, the leaders were being intimidated and a police presence was suddenly visible throughout the community. The

materialised in the form of *organised* political mobilisation. The people of Bosbou took their conceptions and evaluations regarding their school along with their intentions for the status quo and put these into action when they organised to actively resist the closure of the school.

The social location from where their political mobilisation arose was of course also influenced by *other* political consciousnesses, subjectivities, and mobilisations. In the instance of Ruiterbos, the plaasboer community for instance has a completely different mode of identifying, contextualising, and evaluating the particular issue. Furthermore, they had a distinctly different conception of what ought to be fought *for*. Their political subjectivity and mobilisation therefore differed from that of the Bosbou community. Political mobilisation is therefore, much like political consciousness, not independent of social context. Whereas political consciousness is influenced by social location in particular, political mobilisation is influenced by the political subjectivities of the collective on the one hand and the *other* political mobilisations it has to interact with on the other hand. As a result, the possibilities for politics – in the form of political mobilisation – in Bosbou are not only influenced by the political subjectivities of *that* community. The prospects of their politics materialising are also profoundly influenced by the political mobilisations of agents such as the local state, the police or the plaasboer community.

What I term political mobilisation is the same as what Laurence Cox and Alf Gunwald Nilsen (2014: 57) define as 'social movements'. For them social movements are a "process in which a specific social group develops a collective project of skilled activities centred on a rationality – a particular way of making sense of and relating to the social world – that tries to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities, in part or whole". For them, social movements need not necessarily be progressive or outside of established state power. On the contrary, their conception of social movements allows for 'social movements from below' *and* 'social movements from above'. Similarly, political mobilisations - and the consciousness and subjectivity that informs them – are processes. This means that the politics of any social group – including those that yield power, such as the state – can be understood as developing via this process.

protection of thoroughfare along the Robinson Pass, and not the interests of the plaasmense of Ruiterbos, were the only concern for the authorities.

In light of this, the mobilisation in Ruiterbos must be explored further. Holloway (2002: 154) is again insightful on the matter when he argues that "social antagonism[62] is not, in the first place, a conflict between two groups: it is a conflict between creative social practice and its negation, or, in other words, between humanity and its negation, between the transcending of limits (creation) and the imposition of limits (definition)." The political mobilisation of people in the Bosbou community is therefore concerned with materialising their political subjectivity in the face of its negation. This negation takes the form of the political mobilisation of the local state and the plaasboer community. They are committed to articulating their humanity and their indisputable status as fundamentally modern people; those who have politicised against this seek to obstruct them in doing this. This chapter drew on the insights of the people of Ruiterbos around the contentious issue of schooling to illustrate one of the ways in which these people are asserting their humanity, modernity, and rationality. Their assertions are, in this instance, materialising with respect to a school which is much more than a school.

These assertions of basic humanity are however not appearing in a vacuum. These claims to universal humanity are being contested and negated. In this instance, the legal system, the WCED and the plaasboer community are all deeply implicated in the direct and indirect negation of that which the brown community of Ruiterbos believes 'ought to be'. The manifestation of political consciousness, political subjectivity, and subsequent political mobilisation around the struggles for Denneprag is a nuanced and intricate struggle. The key ideas with respect to this issue are in this chapter largely articulated by those who are most affected and therefore most insightful. The collective claim to humanity made by the people of Bosbou is routinely being silenced and ignored by various groups – including those with a scholarly framework. Nevertheless, a careful consideration of the thought, speech and actions of this community suggests that a battle is being waged by the people of Ruiterbos. This battle can be summarised as a battle *for* humanity and modernity against the systemic and ideological negation of this humanity.

A final point that must be noted explicitly by way of concluding this chapter is that popular politics quite obviously *does* exists in Ruiterbos. Overt and covert claims that people in rural areas do not possess the appropriate levels of consciousness to translate into political activity have

[62] What Holloway has termed 'Social antagonism' is the same as what I have termed 'political mobilization' in this thesis.

evidently allowed for some realities to go unnoticed. The narrow frameworks within which complex human beings in rural areas are often studied has meant that a kind of political dormancy has been read into the rural subject. The failure of people in rural areas to explicitly mobilise around predetermined issues is often interpreted as an indication of absent-, limited-, or backward political capacity within communities of rural dwellers. The suspension of such limited and limiting frameworks is demonstrably crucial in any attempt to engage the political capacity of rural dwellers.

# 3.Housing and Citizenship in Ruiterbos

Once we have our title deeds, other things will come into place … then people begin, literally, to live.

— Clive Malgas, Ruiterbos community leader.

### a. Introduction

If it is the case, as the previous section suggests, that the struggles around schooling in Ruiterbos manifest themselves through political-, consciousness-, subjectivity and mobilisation, then we must consider the range of consequences that follow from this. If we, at least for the time being, accept these interrelated stages of politics as the *method* via which popular politics manifests itself, then the historicist and structuralist determinisms discussed earlier can be escaped. By focusing on the *ways* in which popular politics manifests itself – rather than the substance of popular politics – it becomes possible to interrogate the politics of ordinary people *without* needing to first decide, a priori, what the key issues in a given community will be. By focusing on the 'how?' question, rather than the 'what?' question, it became possible in the previous section to allow the subjects of this study to recognise, conceptualise and mobilise with respect to their material conditions. The realities in Ruiterbos are therefore the outcome of a dialectic relationship between the material conditions Ruiterbos on the one hand and the people/agents in Ruiterbos on the other. As such, it became possible in the previous sections for the content of their struggle – in this case schooling – to surface as a key issue around which the community of Ruiterbos was *politicised*. It became possible for the *actual* struggles of this community to form the substance of the previous section. By asking the question of: '*How* are people engaging with their material conditions?', it was possible for *them*, rather than the researcher, to surface the key political issues.

This pragmatic approach to the method of people's politics has the advantage of allowing different issues to exist alongside one another. Whereas the approaches criticised in the first sections of this thesis seek to classify *the* fundamental issue in rural South Africa, the approach outlined above seeks to, in the first instance, make sense of the existing methods and manifestations of politics. In reality, people are politicised around a range of different issues. As such, it is important for scholarly work to incorporate this range of political issues into any attempt to represent and engage people's politics. With respect to Ruiterbos – and therefore also this thesis – education and schooling is but one issue around which the people of Ruiterbos are politicised. Another theme that has consistently come up at the heart of politics in Ruiterbos is that of housing. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on this housing question in the context of Ruiterbos. The ultimate goal of the chapter is to lay bare the form and nature of popular politics with respect to the question of housing in Ruiterbos.

As such this chapter will follow a similar pattern as the previous chapter in its emphasis on the experiences and ideas of interviewees. Close attention will be paid to the nuances around access to adequate housing for the people of Ruiterbos. By creating a dialogue between the thoughts and experiences of interviewees on the one hand and official state rhetoric on the other, the politics around housing in Ruiterbos will be illustrated. This chapter therefore includes a discussion of the history of housing for plaasmense in Ruiterbos. This section will be followed by an articulation of the status quo as articulated by the people of Ruiterbos with respect to housing. This will be followed by a discussion of the precise things that the people of Ruiterbos are fighting *for*. The last section of this chapter steps back again to contextualise the various contestations in Ruiterbos within the broader contemporary South African moment. This section ties together the concrete discussions around housing that unfolded in this chapter, with the broader critiques that are made by this thesis.

### b. Housing in South Africa – an accumulation of our history.

In following the arguments made by Westaway and Baucom, that "Time does not pass, it accumulates, and as it accumulates it deposits an ever greater freight of material within the cargo holds of the present" (Baucom, 2015: 325), the context within which housing in Ruiterbos must be considered cannot be divorced from the history of colonial and apartheid spatial and social planning. As the previous section showed, the brown community in Ruiterbos – with few exceptions – lives in the settlement locally known as Bosbou. This settlement originally housed brown forestry workers in wooden houses. These workers were separated from the white workers on the other side of the road and the white farmers living throughout the larger Ruiterbos district. The separation of different races into different spaces is not unique to Ruiterbos; rather, this segregation is a continuing legacy of colonial and apartheid policies.

In 1994 the, late, South African Communist Party (SACP) and African National Congress (ANC) leader of the underground military wing and the first ANC minister of housing, Joe Slovo, noted that during apartheid "what housing there was, was about control…it was about the administration of deprivation" (Slovo in Goodlad, 1995: 1629). Black people[63] were actively excluded from white and resourced areas – particularly in urban centres. In white commercial

[63] Here I use 'black people' in the Black Consciousness sense which considered all those who were designated 'non-white' under apartheid (coloured, Indian and black) as *black* (Biko, 1978: 52-53).

farming areas, like Ruiterbos for instance, the administration of housing and space was also informed by this racialized deprivation – and, on the other hand: privilege. Indeed, the debates in parliament that culminated in the passing of the infamous Natives' Land Act in 1913 asserted that "the native should be treated firmly [and] kept in his place…They should tell him, as the Free State told him, that it was a white man's country…that if he wanted to be there he must be in service" (Keyter in Plaatje, 1916: 40). Rural areas, that did not fall into the homelands areas, were ruled by the same principle, later introduced by the Transvaal Local Government Commission of 1922, that "the native should only be allowed to enter the [white areas] … when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the White man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister" (Goodlad, 1996: 1630). The urban centre as well as the commercial farm were seen as "essentially the White man's creation" (Transvaal Local Government Commission of 1922 in Goodlad, 1996: 1630). Both of these *kinds of* space – urban centre and commercial farm – were central to the social reproduction of white South Africans – among them: the plaasboere of Ruiterbos.

The colonial principle of 'separateness' – or *apartheid* in Afrikaans – was therefore constitutive of the ways in which space in general and housing in particular has been distributed in South Africa. This separateness was, of course, created and maintained by calculated- force, exploitation and dehumanisation; and has, as a result, left a resounding legacy today. Ruiterbos is no exception to this with the spaces for social reproduction allocated to plaasmense and plaasboere respectively being physically segregated and materially unequal. Ruiterbos still mirrors the colonial world that Fanon (1961). Ruiterbos furthermore fulfils Fanon's prophecy that "the primary Manicheism which governed colonial society is preserved intact during the period of decolonization" (50). The racialized distribution of space that informed the colonial and apartheid periods remains intact today. Indeed, the segregationist past of South Africa has accumulated into our presence. It is with this general context of fundamental segregation and inequality in mind that we must explore the politics around housing in Ruiterbos. What is the status quo that the people of Ruiterbos are confronted with?

On 28 November 1997, the South African state passed the *Extension of Security of Tenure Act* – generally referred to as 'ESTA'. This legislation related to commercial farming land in particular and was drafted in response to "past discriminatory laws and practices"; therefore, serving the purpose of ensuring that "occupiers are not further prejudiced" (Act No 62, 1997).

According to this act, any occupier who has openly resided on land before 4 February 1997, or who has lived on land for more than 3 years is considered to be legitimately living there. Furthermore, any occupier who has been living on land for a period of 10 years or more is entitled to security of tenure on the land – regardless of whether this person is providing labour to the legally recognised owner of the land or not. The Act was, in short, a well-intentioned attempt to deal with the historical injustices faced by farm dwellers (Atkinson, 2007; Hall and Williams,).

In the years preceding the passing of this Act, a mild state of panic occupied the – white – land owning population of Ruiterbos. Kathy Schultz, a long-time activist around tenure security in the Southern Cape, describes the shift of rural dwellers from farms onto rural settlements as a product of "sheer terror from the farmers" (Schultz, 2015). She describes how farmers "shoved" their workers off the farms very quickly in the mid 1990s when there was a perceived risk of rural dwellers, after a certain number of years, gaining rights to the land that they were living on. Eric Solomons notices a similar thing when he notes that "the guys were being put off the farms on almost a daily basis, resulting in an increased demand for housing during the mid- to late 1990s" (Solomons, 2016). The anticipated effect of ESTA therefore profoundly impacted the production of space in Ruiterbos. The brown people – who had often been living on farms for generations – found themselves in urgent need of housing[64].

A report compiled by Human Rights Watch, a well-known international advocacy group, in August 2011 ratifies the observations and interpretations laid out by both Solomons and Schultz. The report focuses on "the situation of agricultural workers in the Western Cape province in South Africa" (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 22). More than 260 people were interviewed in this attempt to articulate the day-to-day realities of farmworkers and farm dwellers in the Western Cape. Among a series of observations and recommendations found in the 111-page report, a key theme relates to housing for plaasmense across the Western Cape province.

The Human Right Watch report notes that "the practice of providing on-farm housing is diminishing, in part due to farmers' concerns that farmworkers will gain land tenure rights" (2011:

[64] An important note here is that people were not necessarily sad to leave the farms. The expectations around a new political dispensation in the country generated a lot of hope in people (Solomons, 2016; Uithaler [a], 2016). People were relieved to no longer be at the mercy of the farmers. They were looking forward to being incorporated into the citizenry of the 'New South Africa'. As such, the passing of the Security of Tenure Act alongside the rising expectations – notably around the constitutional rights to housing – made for a very hopeful displacement *off* the farms.

30). In addition to this diminishing practice of providing on-farm housing, those who do have housing on farms have, as suggested by both Eric and Kathy, systematically been evicted off these farms. Indeed, in the 20-year period between "1984 and 2004, nearly 1.7 Million people were evicted from South African farms" (2011:50). These evictions straddled both the apartheid *and* postapartheid eras. One would be forgiven for – mistakenly – assuming that the apartheid state presided over the majority of these evictions when, in reality, "more people were evicted from farms in the decade after 1994 than were evicted from farms in the prior decade" (2011: 51). These trends across South Africa and the Western Cape provide the backdrop against which the housing question in Ruiterbos unfolded.

It is this wider context of overt and covert evictions that put pressure on the settlement in Bosbou to start accommodating those in need of spaces for social reproduction. This increasing demand for housing soon made the community leadership – Clive Uithaler, Eric Solomons, and Clive Malgas in particular – realise that the units that were available in Bosbou were not going to suffice for the rising demand. As such applications were made to the local Department of Housing and the Department of Land Affairs to build additional houses for the plaasmense coming off the farms. The applications succeeded, and it became the task of the community to find a site for this housing project. In effect, the state was going to assist the community to expand the Bosbou rural settlement for the plaasmense of Ruiterbos. The location for this new settlement was hotly contested and resulted in a serious confrontation between the plaasmense and the plaasboere of Ruiterbos.

Upon some consideration and research, the ideal location for the settlement was identified as a vacant piece of state-owned land a few hundred metres above Eight Bells.[65] This space was centrally located and already owned by the municipality; making it the ideal location for the proposed settlement. Unfortunately, this proposal was vehemently opposed by the plaasboer community. In a plaasboer community meeting hosted at Eight Bells, this proposed settlement was discussed at length. The outcome of this meeting was, in short, that this settlement should not be located at the heart of Ruiterbos (Solomons, 2016; Uithaler [b], 2015).

[65] Eight Bells Mountain Inn is a four-star hotel at the heart of Ruiterbos. The resort employs a substantial number of people from the brown community and is surrounded by a range of small farms. The family that has owned the hotel for generations has also been an integral leg in the social cohesion of the plaasboere community.

An array of colonial and racist tropes were invoked as legitimation of this position. Fears around pollution, noise, crime, etc.[66] were at the heart of the reasons put forward for the settlement to be built elsewhere. Further the idea that clientele would be disturbed, and property prices would be devalued by such a settlement were serious concerns at this meeting. Petitions were set up and signed where the plaasboer community said to the brown community: "we don't want you here" (Uithaler [b], 2015). This is not a new phenomenon. Paul Maylam, in a thorough engagement with the historiography that seeks to explain the apartheid city, notes that "there is… ample evidence of rate payers exerting pressure for residential segregation" (1995: 26). There consequently is a history of those with power in society – such as white landowners –insisting on segregationism in an attempt to reaffirm their ideological and economic hegemony. At this meeting it was therefore, in short, agreed that such a settlement at the heart of Ruiterbos was going to be bad for business and unsafe. There was an outspoken resistance to a more equitable 'production of space'[67]. There is much debate about whether these inegalitarian positions are justified by ideological and psychological means or by materialist understandings (Maylam, 1995: 24). Whereas this thesis does not have the scope to engage this debate, it is evident that both aspects exists. There is both an ideological continuation of the principles that informed apartheid spatial planning and at least a *perceived* economic interest in maintaining and recreating segregated spaces for social reproduction in Ruiterbos.

This dispute between the plaasmense, plaasboere, Department of Housing and local state was ultimately settled in favour of the plaasboere. Thanks to interventions by the local state, it was agreed that the settlement would indeed be moved away from the proposed location and that it would be built as an addition to the 40 existing housing units in the Bosbou settlement (Malgas, 2016). Rather than building a new settlement on the state-owned land[68] close to Eight Bells, the new housing was moved to the land owned by the Department of Forestry.

[66] At this point it is worth noting that these legitimations for opposing the site for the new settlement were making a summary claim to differential levels of civilisation among the plaasmense and plaasboere respectively. The argument claiming that the settlement would be 'bad for business' can for instance be deconstructed as an argument that suggests that: 'the hotel is a nice civilized place with nice civilized clientele; the uncivil nature of the proposed settlement would be at odds with the nature of the hotel'.

[67] I use the concept in the sense that Henri Lefebvre invokes the notion.

[68] As will become evident throughout this chapter, the fact that the settlement is *not* on land owned by the local state – but rather the department of forestry – serves as a cardinal legitimation for the neglect of the interests and concerns of the Bosbou community.

### c. Who gets to 'produce space'?

This raises an immediate question around the rationale behind such a move. What are the factors that motivated the plaasboer community *and* the local state to make this decision which was clearly *not* in favour of the poor and dispossessed majority? One might argue that the local state's decision to side with the plaasboere was motivated by pragmatism – the plaasboere have money and influence and are for the most part also supporters of the in-power Democratic Alliance (DA)[69]. Whilst the allegiances of the local state could be put down to electoral pragmatism, this is not the case for the plaasboere. The overarching decision to oppose the building of the settlement close to the heart of Ruiterbos does not make sense. It is not the pragmatic decision. There is no evidence to suggest that such a settlement will necessarily bring more bad than good to the plaasboere of Ruiterbos. It must therefore be assumed that the plaasboere were not, in the first instance, motivated by pragmatism. There must have been something else to serve as justification for their position on the question of the settlement.

At this point it is useful to break momentarily and highlight some arguments from Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) that, in my view can help interrogate the rationale for the position taken by the plaasboere and the local state. In his book Mamdani argues that colonial society excluded people from conventional civil society based on their race (19). These excluded people were not citizens of civil society, but rather the subjects in the realm of uncivil society. Civil society and uncivil society were ruled in diverse ways by the colonial administration – or rather, bifurcated state. A system of decentralised despotism was introduced – by the state – to rule subjects, whilst citizens were governed by means of the various principles of democracy (15). Mamdani goes on to elaborate on the mechanisms for direct and indirect rule that are employed by the colonial state in its differential treatment of those deemed citizens and those deemed subjects.[70]

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[69] The Democratic Alliance (DA) is a political party in South Africa which enjoys most of its support in the Western Cape province. The DA has dominated the Mosselbay municipality since the 2000 local elections.

[70] It must be noted that Mamdani makes his argument for the most part regarding the Bantustan areas of South Africa where people are viewed as *subjects* of the state to be indirectly ruled through 'traditional authorities'. He juxtaposes this to the urban areas where *citizens* are directly ruled by democratic means. His analysis is not particularly concerned with South Africa's commercial farming rural areas. Whilst his differentiation between direct and indirect modes of rule was strictly speaking not developed to apply to these commercial farming areas (there are no traditional authorities that could mediate the state's decentralized despotism), his differentiation between citizens and subjects is useful even in these areas. The point that South Africa's commercial farming areas have various kinds of people with different kinds of relationships to the state *is* worth expanding for the purposes of this thesis.

It is evident that there *does* seem to be a distinction between the people of Ruiterbos. A conceived, perceived, and lived space – in Henri Lefebvre's sense – is not produced equitably, nor is it produced democratically. Some people have a recognised ability to produce space, whilst others are no more than the recipients of this production of space. Broadly speaking it appears that plaasboere, with the ratification by the local state, *produce* space in Ruiterbos whilst plaasmense *suffer* the production of space. Clive Uithaler explains this discrepancy when he says that "Everyone has a right to democracy, but just because one is of another colour it is said: 'no, we displace[71] you, we are going to go against your presence here'" (2015). Put differently: Uithaler is of the view that democracy and, more specifically, a democratic production of space is not accessible to the brown community. With respect to the relationship that this entails to the local state and the schema introduced by Mamdani, this means that *citizenship* is not inherent in all people of Ruiterbos. Some people – to be more specific: plaasboere – are deemed inherently civilised and are therefore citizens. They are subsequently treated as such by the local municipality. Others, such as the brown community of Ruiterbos, are on the other hand deemed uncivilized and are therefore *not* inherently citizens. As such, democracy and the democratic production of space is not something that the status quo allows them to lay claim to.

This status quo is, as mentioned in the above, not unique or an anomaly. On the contrary: Joe Slovo's discussion of the history of housing in South Africa alongside Fanon's discussion of the production of space in the colonial context suggest that this status quo is a remnant of South Africa's past that has been carried into its present. This continuity between a past that favours a given ontological divide between citizens and subjects and a present that recreates the same suggest that Achille Mbembe's (2001: 15) notion of a postcolony is indeed an apt characterisation of the status quo in Ruiterbos.

Furthermore, this ontological differentiation between certain *kinds* of people who are citizens whilst other *kinds* of people are not, relates strongly to the arguments made in the first chapter of this thesis. The ontological divide between 'civilized' citizens and 'uncivilized' non-citizens in the Ruiterbos context mirrors the ontological divide between the modern, rational human and its foil as described in the first sections of this thesis. The plaasboere, in the first

[71] Clive uses the Afrikaans word 'verdryf' which has connotations of coercion, subordination and forced removal. These connotations of the Afrikaans word are not adequately captured in the English translation.

instance, therefore have a preconception that the brown community is not yet modern or not yet truly human and therefore cannot really be civilized citizens. It is this underlying narrative of the brown community as unmodern, uncivil and subsequently as non-citizens, that serves as a justification for them being side lined when it came to the production of space in Ruiterbos. Conversely, the production of space constitutes one of the mechanisms that maintain ontological distinctions between the modern, civilised, human citizen and its opposite. We will see in the following sections how this denial of the plaasmense's fundamental modernity and citizenship has played itself out to date. The housing question in Ruiterbos will continue to act as a leitmotif for the plaasmense, plaasboere and the state's various forms of politicisation around the fundamental modernity, or lack thereof, of the brown community of Ruiterbos. Ideological positions around modernity and citizenship are enacted through the contestations around the production of space in general and the housing question in particular.

### d. When do we begin, literally, to live?

With the completion of the first phase of housing in the early 2000s, the community of Ruiterbos was faced with their next set of challenges. As briefly noted earlier, the settlement was ultimately built on land owned by the department of forestry – Bosbou. The process whereby the municipality built houses in Bosbou preceded the acquisition of the land from the department of forestry. This means that the houses were built by the municipality – in conjunction with the state department of housing – on land that it did not own. Upon completion of this first phase of construction, this fact led to an ambiguous relationship between this community and the local state. On the one hand there was a relationship and the state was responsible for the people whom they had built houses for and who were residents of one of the 14 municipal wards. On the other hand, they were residing on land that was, from the municipality's point of view, 'private land'.

Ruiterbos was not the only place where this ambiguous relationship materialised. In fact, all along the Garden Route there were settlements on forestry land that were affiliated, though not incorporated, into various municipalities. From Mosselbay and George in the western end of the Garden Route through Tsitsikama right up to Humansdorp and Port Elizabeth on the eastern border, forestry has historically been *the* major industry in the area (Booysen, 2016; Briel, 2002). the completion of the first phase of construction with respect to the settlement in Bosbou led into a further area of contention. Whilst the site for the community settlement was now agreed upon –

though unfavourably from the perspective of the brown community – there continued to be a shortage of houses (Malgas, 2016). The organic expansion of the existing community alongside the continuing migration[72] of – often former – farm workers from the farms into the settlement has maintained the discrepancy between houses that are needed and those that are available. According to Clive Malgas (2016), the current shortfall lies at more than 100 units. This means that an excess of 100 families are either living in cramped conditions with other families or are constructing makeshift temporary structures to live in.

This unheeded need for housing which is growing exponentially, is a concrete outcome of the recent history of displacement of plaasmense from the farms in Ruiterbos. The spaces that have for generations been occupied by the plaasmense of Ruiterbos have within a generation become unavailable. On the farms, the picture painted by Kirk Helliker of "Subservient workers [being] treated as "children", wholly dependent on the love and discipline of the farm owner" (2013: 77) had continued to ring true well into the postapartheid era. The shift away from plaasboer patronage was as a result, for the most part, welcomed by the plaasmense of Ruiterbos. It was generally agreed that a constitutional right to housing served as a markedly better foundation for social reproduction than the precarious dependence on the goodwill of plaasboere on whose private property one is residing.

The expectation from plaasmense that their interests would be protected by the government that they participated in electing has unfortunately been misplaced. As indicated, evictions off farms have increased in recent years. Similarly, there has been little effort made to ensure that the living conditions of plaasmense improve. In short: the state neglected to protect the interests of plaasmense both on the farms and off the farms. Clive Malgas notes that no state institution wants to take responsibility for Ruiterbos in general and Bosbou in particular. He explains that "government says: 'I can't just throw you away; you are a child of mine, but I also can't quite take responsibility for you' (2016). According to Malgas, "every state department that one might

[72] The demand for tenure security in Ruiterbos is therefore not tied to privately owned land. It is a demand that is made of the state to create and maintain modern and functional settlements for the benefit of rural dwellers. This fact calls rhetoric around tenure security in rural areas into question. The state sanctioned portrayal of rural dwellers as people who are seeking for tenure security on commercial farms legitimates an *indirect* relationship between the state and most rural dwellers. Indeed, what the rural dwellers in Ruiterbos are struggling for is *precisely* a more direct relationship with the state. The frameworks that focus on tenure security on commercial farms, and in so doing absolve the state from direct responsibility for its rural constituency, are being contested by the people of Ruiterbos who are explicitly advocating for a direct relationship with the local – and national – state.

engage – Housing, Land Affairs, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development, Forestry – makes *sure* that they are able to claim that Ruiterbos is 'not entirely their baby' in the event that something happens. If the baby, however, is able to *give* anything, then suddenly Ruiterbos becomes their baby again".

This ambiguous relationship between various state departments and plaasmense is not unique to Ruiterbos. The Human Rights Watch report cited earlier makes a similar observation. The report notes that "Municipal government are generally unprepared to assist evicted farm dwellers, and there is no clear agreement on which government entities are responsible for doing so" (2011: 85). "The DRDLR[73] is not responsible for housing generally. While the Department of Human Settlements is responsible for housing, it is not tasked with addressing the needs of farm dwellers, and also requires the supply of land on which to build houses. The Department of Agriculture, which does focus on farmers and farmworkers, does not seek to address farm dweller evictions…" (Human Rights Watch report, 2011: 86-87). There is also historical continuity to this particular problem. Paul Maylam again notes that the historiography of segregated spacial planning in South African cities is rife with examples of tensions between the central and the local state. He explains that "When central-local state tensions did arise they often centred on financial issues. Each party tried to shift the burden of black housing costs onto the other" (1995: 36). Whereas this observation was made with reference to the apartheid city, it rings equally true for the plaasmense of Ruiterbos who, much like their counterparts in other regions of the province and the country, are frankly falling by the wayside. On the one hand they are caught between a state that has routinely permitted the housing question for plaasmense in Ruiterbos to, at best, be deferred to an indefinite point in the future or, at worst, ignored altogether. On the other hand, the plaasboere continue to squeeze the people of Ruiterbos by insisting that the plaasmense's constitutional right to housing is not actualised on land to which they hold the title deeds.

One of the implications of this has been that the residents of Bosbou do not own the houses that they live in. Whilst there is an understanding among members of the community that certain dwellings belong to certain families, no one owns a title deed to their houses. "There are people who were willing to give everything that they were able to give to have the title deeds to their

[73] Department of Rural Development and Land Reform

houses in their hands and many of them have passed away since" says Clive Malgas (2016) in our interview. Clive continues with concern:

> "the older generations in particular are living with the fear that they will not be able to prove that the houses they live in belong to them when they are challenged…if you cannot prove that it is your property, to who do you bequeath [your house]? You cannot entirely say: 'this is my house, I am going to leave it to my grandchild'. Again, this is about title deeds… Once we have our title deeds, other things will come into place because then Mosselbay will say: 'now I am inaugurating Ruiterbos. Now I am responsible for Ruiterbos'. Then new things get added. There are services that are expected here in Ruiterbos that will finally get done… then people begin, literally, to live[74]."

Clive's detailed account of how important title deeds are to people in Ruiterbos is succinctly captured by his *literal* conflation between the title deeds and life for people in Ruiterbos. This is evidence that the title deeds, that are so desperately craved in Ruiterbos, are not merely a fetishization of private property. Rather, they are an integral part of social reproduction. Ownership of the home is interwoven with the humanity of the plaasmense of Ruiterbos. There is a converse perspective to this dialectic relationship between the symbolic meaning of title deeds on one hand and humanity on the other. The inability of plaasmense in Ruiterbos to secure title deeds to their homes functions to deny them life and subsequently: humanity.

By contrast, it is important to briefly pause and reflect on the processes via which the plaasboere came to hold *their* title deeds. This process was neither accidental nor ahistorical. The colonial project in South Africa was meticulous in developing a situation where the social reproduction of brown communities, like the one in Ruiterbos, was entirely at the mercy of the colonial administrators (Maylam, 1995: 27). One watershed moment in this process was the passing of the Natives' Land Act of 1913. In many ways the normative state where plaasboere own title deeds to land, whilst plaasmense live in precariousness was consolidated in 1913. To date one of the best accounts of these processes remains Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa*. In this book Plaatje compiles careful observations around the causes, processes and consequences of the Natives' Land Act to petition the British people to overrule the decision to pass this act in South

[74] The original Afrikaans phrase from Clive was: 'Dan begin mense, letterlik, te leef.'

Africa. He describes throughout the book how "Awakening on Friday morning, June 20 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth" (1916: 21). Plaatje lucidly captures how this new law – and its enforcement – affected the plaasmense of South Africa in 1913. One tragic scene is worth quoting at some length:

> "Mrs Kgobadi carried a sick baby when the eviction took place, and she had to transfer her darling from the cottage to the jolting ox-wagon in which they left the farm. Two days out the little one began to sink as the result of privation and exposure on the road, and the night before we met them its little soul was released from its earthly bonds. The death of the child added a fresh perplexity to the stricken parents. They had no right or title to the farmlands through which they trekked: they must keep to the public roads – the only places in the country open to the outcasts if they are possessed of a traveling permit. The deceased child had to be buried, but where, when, and how?
>
> This young wandering family decided to dig a grave under cover of the darkness that night, when no one was looking, and that crude manner the dead child was interred – and interred amid fear and trembling, as well as the throbs of a torturing anguish, in a stolen grave, lest the proprietor of the spot, or any of his servants, should surprise them in the act. Even criminals dropping straight from the gallows have an undisputed claim to six feet of ground on which to rest their criminal remains, but under the cruel operation of the Natives' Land Act little children, whose only crime is that God did not make them white, are sometimes denied that right in their ancestral home." (Plaatje, 1916: 73-74)

The indignation in the scene described here sets out the confines within which the social reproduction of plaasmense throughout South Africa was possible during the colonial and apartheid eras. The electoral success of the ANC government in 1994 created the legitimate expectation that an important rupture was imminent. The Natives' Land Act of 1913 redefined the *methods*[75] of social reproduction for plaasmense across the country. Those who remained on the farms as workers, rather than owners or labour tenants, might have undergone a shift in their methods of social reproduction but the location of this social reproduction remained the same. The

[75] Seeing that the Act prohibited black people from owning land or from working the land as sharecroppers or labour tenants, they were left with no choice but to enter the labour market. They were systematically forced into becoming workers in colonial, and later apartheid, South Africa. The precarious livelihood of plaasmense is rooted in these processes. Their methods of social reproduction became dependant on their employer/landlord, rather than themselves.

wave of farm evictions from the late 1980s onwards are in many ways the conclusion of the processes that Plaatje wrote about seven decades prior.

Gert Pieterson, a farm dweller who was evicted along with his wife and two children despite not having alternative shelter in 2011 – almost a century after the Natives' Land Act was passed and 17 years into South Africa's 'democratic era'– submits a testimony that is disturbingly reminiscent of the excerpt quoted from Plaatje. Gert accounts that:

> "We had nowhere else to go or to sleep that night. We were forced to camp on the side of a road on the outskirts of Stellenbosch. We slept there in the freezing cold with only plastic tarpaulins to use as some form of shelter from the elements. We did not have enough food to eat and were forced to endure the indignity of using the bushes to relieve ourselves." (Pieterson in Human Rights Watch Report, 2011: 50)

The increased demand for housing in Bosbou must be understood as a culmination of this wider context. The accounts by both Plaatje and Gert Pieterson point towards the history of violent, racialised segregation that underpins the relationship that the plaasmense from Ruiterbos have with both the plaasboere *and* with the local state. Indeed, this is a skewed relationship where they are *subjected* to the rule of the colonial masters. A relationship that – at the structural level – ensures unequal access to humanity and democratic citizenship and subsequently facilitates the manifestation of a world that palpably reflects the Manichean world described by Fanon in 1961.

The previous chapter concluded with a framework via which we are able to understand the manifestation of politics in rural areas. This popular politics of rural dwellers – or communities of people in general – has three interrelated stages: political consciousness, political subjectivity and political mobilisation. The formation of political consciousness around a particular issue is the product of a collective process via which people organically conceptualise, contextualise and evaluate the given issue.

The fact that every interviewee from the Bosbou community articulated the housing backlog and incorporation into the municipality as problems shows that the political concern has been *conceptualised*. Indeed, the following comment from Andrew Uithaler is indicative of this:

> "we are struggling for so long with housing here. The project that started around 1997 is still not settled and the people of Bosbou are still sitting without title deeds. We have still

not been transferred to the municipality. We are still struggling and how many years has it been now: over 23 years already" (2016).

This sentiment from Andrew is buttressed by accounts from all the other members of the Bosbou community that were interviewed as part of this research. The conceptualisation of the problem is therefore nuanced via the contextualisation of the issue.

With respect to housing in Ruiterbos, the contextualisation of the issues take both a historical and a socio-political explanation. Eric Solomons articulates the historical reasons for this heightened demand for housing as the product of direct and indirect evictions off local farms. Clive Uithaler on the other hand provides a deeper analysis that attributes these evictions as well as the initial resistance to the settlement for the plaasmense *and* the perpetual ignoring of the housing backlog in Ruiterbos to an ontological split that is assumed by the custodians of state, and other, power. The reason he gives for the fact that the local state and the plaasboere of Ruiterbos are actively inhibiting the possibilities for meaningful social reproduction is worth stating again. He notes that "Everyone has a right to democracy, but just because one is of another colour it is said: 'no, we displace you, we are going to go against your presence here'" (2015). This insistence that it is the *racist* ideology, which has marred South Africa's past, which is to blame for the status quo with respect to housing suggests a thorough analysis of the problem on his part. By articulating it in this way, Clive embeds the housing problem in the philosophical problem discussed in the earlier parts of this thesis. In short, the overt characterisation of the brown community in Ruiterbos – because of the colour of their skin – as inferior and backward is understood as the context within which the question of housing is remaining unresolved.

Of course, the aforementioned conceptualisation and contextualisation of the housing question is subsequently evaluated by those in the community. Already in Clive Uithaler's comment, it is clear that the unresolved housing question is infuriating. It is clearly considered to be unjust and unreasonable that the productions of space is not democratised in Ruiterbos. It is further held that insufficient housing in Ruiterbos and inability of residents to secure title deeds is unacceptable. Similarly, when Margaret Menavel, a teacher at Denneprag and founding member of the Bosbou settlement in the 1970s, explains the segregated production of space – including the efforts to maintain segregated schools – in the wider Ruiterbos area as "still racist" (2015), she makes a clear moral judgement on the concerns outlined above.

In light of the above one can therefore identify the existence of conceptualisation, contextualisation and evaluation of the broader housing question by the community of Ruiterbos. Through debate and discussion people in Bosbou have articulated the question of housing with much empirical and philosophical complexity. It is precisely this point – as evidenced by the details outlined thus far – which allows us to conclude that political consciousness can be identified with respect to the question of housing in Ruiterbos. The next section will explore the implications of this political consciousness. Does the political consciousness described in this transform into political subjectivity?

### e. Housing, Ruiterbos and the local state

The previous section outlined a concrete political consciousness of what is at stake with respect to housing in Ruiterbos. In this section we must move beyond this and attempt to get a sense of what the plaasmense in Ruiterbos are fighting *for*. In other words, we will elaborate on the question of political subjectivity as it relates to the housing struggles of the people of Ruiterbos. With this in mind we move on to the second issue that came to rise with the completion of the first set of houses in 2002 is the issue of incorporation into the wider Mosselbay municipality (Uithaler [b], 2015).

Due to the fact that Bosbou remains classified as land owned by the Department of Forestry, the local municipality considers it as private land. Whilst the people who live in the settlement are strictly speaking part of ward 14 of the Mosselbay municipality, the land upon which their settlement is built is not considered part of the local state. The implications of this status for the relationship between the people of Bosbou are unfortunately ambiguous and concerning.

In 1997 a process to develop a dignified settlement for the people of Bosbou started (Uithaler [b], 2016). This process is yet to be concluded. With the growth of the population needs have developed. Requirements like a Clinic (Uithaler [c], 2016; Solomons, 2016), title deeds to existing houses (Malgas, 2016; Solomons, 2016; Uithaler [a], 2015) and communal spaces like meeting halls and sports fields (Solomons, 2016) have been identified in Ruiterbos. The consensus among the plaasmense in Ruiterbos is that these needs are necessary in order to secure the success of building the Bosbou community. The needs that are listed here by interviewees in this study have routinely been conveyed at the annual Integrated Development Planning meetings between the community and the Mosselbay municipality. An Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is a tool

that municipalities must – by legislative requirement – develop and adopt in order to strategically guide all planning, budgeting, management and decision making in a given municipality (Mosselbay Municipality IDP, 2012; Mosselbay Municipality IDP, 2013). In order to develop these plans, meetings are traditionally called in the various municipal wards between the communities that live there and their representatives in the municipality.

Below are extracts from some of the IDPs that have governed the Mosselbay municipality's engagement with Ruiterbos in recent years. Noteworthy is the repetition of needs that are identified by the community *and* by the municipality. Nevertheless, the material investments into resolving the challenges that are identified are conspicuously absent.

Integrated Development Plan : 2012-2017 68
Mossel Bay Municipality: Explore Endless Horizons

**6.15 Ward 14 – Profile**

Ward 14 covers the areas of Friemersheim, Great Brak River, Greenhaven, Wolwedans, Ruiterbos and surrounding rural areas.

6.15.1 Summary of Development Needs listed by Community

- Upgrading of all gravel roads
- Speed humps / Traffic Calming
- Stormwater Drainage Infrastructure
- Upgrading of Sport field / Rugby Field / Cricket Field (Greenhaven)
- Play Parks
- Public Transport Services
- Street Lights / High mast lights
- Community Food Garden
- Small Farmers Development
- Post Office Service - Ruiterbos
- Upgrading of Pavilion at Sport Field (Brandwacht)
- Rectification of Houses / New Housing Development
- Community Hall Ruiterbos
- Permanent clinic services in Ruiterbos
- Soup Kitchen
- Youth Development Programmes and Projects
- Land for SMME Development and heritage cultural development
- Conservation of Heritage Sites in Mossel Bay
- Upgrading of Heritage buildings
- Government Subsidised Crèches
- Day Care Hospital Services
- Library Services for Wolwedans
- Job Creation – LED Projects
- Police station
- Tourism Development around Mossel Bay's historic heritage culture

*2012-17 IDP 1: The 5-year plan for the Mosselbay Municipality captured a need for a post office, a community hall*[76] *and a permanent clinic in Ruiterbos. Both the meeting hall and the clinic were corroborated as tangible needs by the interviews I conducted.*

[76] This community hall referenced in these IDPs which constitutes a perpetual outstanding item, relates directly to the previous chapter on the closure of the school in Bosbou. In light of the fact that the construction of a meeting hall for the use of the community is at best delayed and at worst cancelled, the primary school in the community – Denneprag – performs the only function of communal meeting space. The means that the objection to the intended closure of Denneprag, as outlined in the previous chapter, is compounded by the reasonable doubt in the capacity and intent of the local state to fill the voids that would be left by the closure of the school.

*8.3.3.3 Action Plan for Ruiterbos Rural Settlement*

| Problem Statement | Activity / Actions | Responsible Departments | Time Frames | Cost Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Surveyed plan hasn't been submitted to SG | *Formalisation of Subdivision* | | | |
| | Meetings with Mrs. L Brown from the DRD&LR to address issue of submission of General Plan | Dept. of Develop Planning, Legal Services | 1 month | No cost |
| | Meeting with Baily & Le Roux Surveyors & DRD&LR to address the issue of submission of General Plan | Dept. of Develop Planning, Legal Services | 1 month | No cost |
| | Surveyor General approval | Surveyor General | 2 months | |
| | Assist Ruiterbos community to appoint an attorney to transfer and register erven to individual owners | Housing, Legal Services | 3 months | Owners Cost |
| | Keep community informed on progress regarding submission of General Plan, transfer of erven, etc. | Housing | Continuous | No cost |

*2012-17 IDP 2: Similarly, the transfer of the settlement into municipal administration - and title deeds into the control of the home owners - were identified as priorities for the 5-year period from 2012 to 2017. Again, there was a corresponding call for this process to be expedited and executed from interviewees in my study.*

## 5.14.2 Critical Development Needs Identified by Community

- *Upgrading of all gravel roads*
- *Speed humps / Traffic Calming*
- *Stormwater Drainage Infrastructure*
- *Upgrading of Sport field / Rugby Field / Cricket Field and Play Parks*
- *Public Transport Services*
- *Street Lights / High mast lights*
- *Small Farmers Development*
- *Post Office Service – Ruiterbos*
- *Tourism Development around Mossel Bay's historic heritage culture*
- *Rectification of Houses / New Housing*
- *Community Hall Ruiterbos*
- *Permanent clinic services in Ruiterbos*
- *Soup Kitchens and Food Gardens*
- *Youth Development Programmes*
- *Land for SMME Development and heritage cultural development*
- *Conservation of Heritage Sites*
- *Upgrading of Heritage buildings*
- *Day Care Hospital Services*
- *Library Services for Wolwedans*

*2013/14 IDP 1: The same priorities are identified again in 2013/2014. It seems as though the demands of the people in Ruiterbos are – quite unapologetically – reproduced on an annual basis.*

| PROJECT DESCRIPTION | PROJECT OBJECTIVE | LOCATION | BENEFICIARIES | IMPLEMENTING AGENT ROLEPLAYERS | PROJECT COST | FUNDING SOURCE | BUDGET 2014/15 | BUDGET 2015/16 | BUDGET Out Years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Upgrade Amy Searle Stormwater Channel | To improve stormwater infrastructure | Green Haven | Community | Municipality Community (Labour) | R 16 781 401 | MIG Municipality | R 4 503 080 | R 6 490 119 | R 5 788 202 |
| Upgrade of Gravel Roads and Stormwater | To upgrade road and stormwater infrastructure | Friemersheim | Community | Municipality Community (Labour) | R 11 142 438 | MIG Municipality | R 3 693 095 | R 3 446 711 | R 4 002 632 |
| Upgrade of Gravel Roads and Stormwater | To upgrade road and stormwater infrastructure | Herbertsdale | Community | Municipality Community (Labour) | R 7 042 010 | MIG Municipality | R 3 887 550 | R 3 154 460 | - |
| Upgrade of Gravel Roads Grace Land Crescent | To upgrade road and stormwater infrastructure | Sonskynvallei | Community | Municipality Community (Labour) | R 900 000 | MIG Municipality | - | - | R 900 000 |
| Provision of refuse bins / Skips for dumping, of Garden material /refuse | To prohibit illegal dumping of garden refuse, and to keep area clean. | Wards 9, 12 and 13 | Community | Municipality Community | R 300 000 | Municipality | - | R 300 000 | - |
| Beautification of Rural Settlement Entrances "Area Name and plant trees" | To beautify rural settlements areas and to identify areas by name. | All Rural Nodes | Community | Municipality Community (Labour) | Operational | Municipality | Operational | Operational | Operational |
| Develop a new cemetery | To provide cemetery for local community in close proximity | Sonskynvallei | Community | Municipality Community (Labour) | Operational | Municipality | Operational | Operational | Operational |
| Finalisation of Land Rights Dilemma and Formalised Town Establishment | To be legally recognised a municipal service area, formalised town establishment for improved service delivery | Ruiterbos Brandwacht Friemersheim Toekoms | Community | Municipality Communal Property Associations | Operational | Municipality | Operational | Operational | Operational |
| Develop New Community Halls | To develop recreations facilities for rural communities. To enhance community development | Ruiterbos Toekoms Herbertsdale Buys Plaas Vlees Bay | Community | Municipality Communal Property Associations | Capital | Municipality | Capital | Capital | Capital |
| New Bulk Water Pipeline | To upgrade water network infrastructure: clean drinking water | Friemersheim | Community | Municipality | R 450 000 | Municipality | R 450 000 | - | - |
| Upgrade Water Network | To upgrade water network infrastructure: clean drinking water | Herbertsdale | Community | Municipality | R 1954 386 | Municipality | - | - | R 1954 386 |
| Maintain and develop new Play Parks with appropriate equipment | To develop sport and recreational facilities for children and youth | Brandwacht Toekoms Herbertsdale | Community | Municipality | R 165 000 | Municipality | R 55 000 | R 110 000 | - |
| Upgrade of Rugby Field, Fencing, Grass, Clubhouse and Ablution facilities | To develop sport and recreational facilities for children and youth | Sonskynvallei | Community Sport Bodies Schools | Municipality | R 750 000 | Municipality | - | - | R 750 000 |
| Upgrade / Extension of Crèche | To create additional capacity at local crèche to enhance ECD | Sonskynvallei | Community Crèche Committee | Municipality | R 300 000 | Municipality | - | - | R 300 000 |
| Housing Development Provision of bulk infrastructure for 230 erven | To develop low cost housing units to 230 households as per Integrated Human Settlement Plan | Sonskynvallei Powertown | Community | Municipality Dep. Human Settlement | R 9 500 000 | DOHS | R 5 000 000 | R 4 500 000 | - |
| Housing Development Provision of bulk infrastructure for 150 erven | To develop low cost housing units to 150 households as per Integrated Human Settlement Plan | Herbertsdale | Community | Municipality Dep. Human Settlement | R 11 000 000 | DOHS | R 11 000 000 | - | - |

*2014/15 IDP 1: The transfer of land and housing to the municipality and the people of Ruiterbos respectively is again prioritised for 2014 and 2015. Similarly, the community hall remains an incomplete priority item. Attention must be drawn to the fact that the municipality has identified itself as the mechanism that ought to fund these projects; nevertheless, no resources are allocated to this or any of the projects relating to Ruiterbos. If no money is made available for agreed upon priorities, then it indicates that the obstacle to resolving the issues identified by the community in Ruiterbos are political and not technical. 3 years into the identification of priorities in Ruiterbos, the local state maintains its unspoken policy of disregard for Ruiterbos.*

## DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES MUNICIPAL MANDATE

- Ramp for disabled at Greenhaven Library and Repair of Library Floor.
- Ramp for disabled at Suiderkruis Ablution facilities.
- Tarring/ Paving, Daisy- and Iris Street in Wolwedans.
- Tarring/Paving of Lelie / Faring in Friemersheim / Street lights Friemersheim
- Upgrade of storm water in Nemesia Street / Enlarge culvert in Botha Street.
- Construct Channel from Geelhout Street to Sewer Plant
- Upgrade Soccer field / Establish Cricket field / Upgrade Play Park in Hibiscus
- Upgrading of Rugby Field in Greenhaven: Upgrading to be completed
- Food security- Establish Food Gardens in Greenhaven and Wolwedans
- Armco Barriers along main access roads in Greenhaven and Wolwedans area
- Speed Bumps and 3 point stop. Corner Amy Searle and Wolwedans entrance.
- Taxi rank Corner of Murray and Amy Searle /Upgrade cemetery access road
- Ablution facilities at the Greenhaven Cemetery / regular maintenance.
- Widen Protea Avenue and St John Circle and complete Marigold upgrade
- Road and Stormwater upgrade in Ruiterbos / Community Hall for Ruiterbos

*2015/16 IDP 1: By the municipality's own list of priorities, the Community Hall - which had been a priority since 2012 - is identified as a Ward 14 priority again.*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| HANDS ON SUPPORT WITH LAND RIGHTS ISSUES | **RUITERBOS**<br>NDPW. RDLR and the Municipality is in process of transferring land to community.<br>**FRIEMERSHEIM**<br>Communal Property Association (CPA) registration in process<br>**TOEKOMS**<br>In process to identify suitable land for low cost housing development<br>**GREAT BRAK RIVER**<br>Bolton's Footwear is in process to transfer land to the community | • NDPW<br>• RDLR<br>• CPA<br>• Municipality | Operational Cost |

*2015/16 IDP 2: Transfer of land and title deeds is 'prioritised' again in 2015/2016.*

| DEPARTMENT TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC WORKS | |
|---|---|
| Mossel Bay Hospital | R 400,000,000 |
| New Pathology Lab | R 8,300,000 |
| Ambulance Station | R 8,100,000 |
| Ruiterbos Housing | R 400,000 |
| Upgrade Van Heerden Building | R 629,233 |
| Sao Bras School | R 100,000 |
| Park Primary School | R 1,080,693 |
| Upgrade Building 24 Marsh Street | R 750,000 |
| Great Brak River Senior Secondary | R 720,991 |
| Social Development Offices Upgrade | R 7,000,000 |
| Flood Repairs | R 45,484,000 |
| General Roads Upgrade | R 78,553,000 |

*2013/14 IDP 2: Only once were funds budgeted for any of the projects identified as priorities by both the plaasmense of Ruiterbos and the municipality. In the 2013/2014 financial year R400 000 was budgeted for housing in Ruiterbos. It is unclear whether these funds were meant for the building of houses or the transfer of title deeds for existing houses. Regardless of what the intention of this was, there has been no evidence of actual spend on housing in Ruiterbos. It is unclear whether these funds were reallocated, or maladministered and I was unable to find out where these funds went in spite of laborious attempts to do so.*

These extracts illustrate several things with respect to the relationship between Ruiterbos and the municipality. The articulation of needs on the one hand and the failure of the municipality to acquiesce to any of these needs is an indication of fundamental disjuncture in the relationship. The contradiction between what the people in Ruiterbos want and what the local state is willing and/or able to provide is palpable in the contradictions throughout the IDP documents. In many ways, one might argue that the 'administration of deprivation' – a phrase introduced via Joe Slovo earlier in this chapter – remains an unfortunately apt characterisation of the way in which the local

state relates to the people of Bosbou. In the following sections, the context and implications of these contradictions will be explored in more detail.

### f. The 'rebellion of the poor' and citizenship in (rural) South Africa

Evident in the previous two sections is a fundamental contradiction between what the people of Ruiterbos want and what the local state does. Gillian Hart notes that this is not unique to Ruiterbos when she deduces that the local government has become "*the* key site of contradictions" over the decade of the 2000s (2014: 5; *emphasis in original*). This position is by corroborated Peter Alexander when writes that:

> "Since 2004, South Africa has experienced a massive movement of militant local political protests. In some cases these have reached insurrectionary proportions with people momentarily taking control of their townships, and it is reasonable to describe the phenomenon as a *rebellion of the poor*" (2010: 37; *emphasis in original*).

Others like Pithouse (2014) and Selmeczi (2015) have similarly written about the postapartheid period with reference to a 'rebellion of the poor'. Hart uses the phrase "movement beyond movements" (2014: 49) to describe the same phenomenon of popular uprisings at municipal level across the country since the early 2000s.

Whilst there is much nuance in the ways in which the concept is invoked by these and other scholars, there is general consensus that the particular period of postapartheid that began in the early 2000s has certain distinguishable characteristics. These characteristics can be summed up as an increasingly strained relationship between the state on the one hand and most of the South African people on the other. In short: people's patience with the deferred dream of democracy in postapartheid South Africa has run thin. What Holloway calls "the scream" (2002: 1) can go some way towards explaining the mechanisms via which this rebellion of the poor has come to be. The political moment of postapartheid South Africa that has been described as a rebellion of the poor is, conceptually, born out of what Holloway denotes as 'the scream'. This scream is constituted by a dialectic relationship between

> "that which exists and that which might conceivably exists, between the indicative (that which is) and the subjunctive (that which might be). We live in an unjust society but we wish

it were not so: the two parts of the sentence are inseparable and exist in constant tension with each other" (Holloway, 2002: 6-7).

There is therefore a tension between what *is* and what *ought to be*. It is this tension between what is and what ought to be which is at the core of the rebellion of the poor. From the Bredel (Hart, 2014), Balfour (Alexander, 2014), and Ruiterbos political mobilisations to the ascent of Abahlali baseMjondololo (Pithouse, 2014) in Durban a consistent paradox between the local state and communities of ordinary people underpins the protests. Similarly, the violent murder and repression from the state in places like Ficksburg – where Andries Tatane was publicly shot and killed by police – and Marikana or De Doorns the paradox between the objective realities that are delivered by the state and the expectations from its constituency is becoming increasingly apparent. Indeed, Hart's suggestion that the local state is the primary site of contradictions – and ensuing contestations – seems to be accurate. Ordinary people across South Africa are consistently and persistently laying claim to something. Whilst the demands that underpin the rebellion of the poor are so diverse that they have routinely been technicised[77] as 'service delivery protests', there are fundamentally political demands that informs these seemingly diverse sets of demands – which range from housing and electricity to schooling and better wages. If the rebellion of the poor has an indicative and a subjunctive component to it, then the underlying contestation in this national rebellion of the poor in general, and contestation in Ruiterbos in particular, necessarily has a positive subjectivity to it.

What I have termed political consciousness in this thesis – the conceptualisation, contextualisation and evaluation – of a problem allows for the negative formulation that inspires the scream. This however cannot exist in a vacuum. Indeed, the identification of a problem. – or political consciousness – cannot exist without an equal and opposite sensibility about what ought to be. This second constitutive part of the scream is what this thesis has termed political subjectivity. What do people fight *for*?

[77] It is precisely because these protests are routinely viewed in the negative sense that the analysis does not shift beyond a simplistic, technical explanation. Whereas concrete demands for service delivery with respect to wages, houses, schools, etc. are certainly a starting point, they are only one half of 'the scream' from protesters. It is only with the recognition that people are simultaneously against one thing and in favour of another that the political core of this rebellion of the poor can be understood. Political consciousness *and* political subjectivity give rise to these mobilizations. Failure to recognize this method of popular politics will invariably lead to the incomplete analysis that is rife in the language of 'service delivery protests'

When Clive Malgas insists that the legally recognised ownership of a house will allow people in Ruiterbos 'to begin to live', then he answers this question for us. By conflating life with material things – like title deeds – that the people of Ruiterbos are fighting for, Clive surfaces the second constituent part of the scream. He in other words illustrates not only the negative political consciousness as it relates to housing in Ruiterbos, but also illustrates the positive political subjectivity. What the people of Ruiterbos are fighting *for* in Clive's account is: life. This claim to life is, in essence, an insistence on humanity and modernity. The 'menswaardigheid'[78] that Clive Uithaler insists on alongside the 'life' that Clive Malgas wishes for the people on Ruiterbos lays claim to ontological inclusion in the face of its denial.

What does this articulation of fundamental humanity and modernity by the people of Ruiterbos mean in the relationship between the community and the local state? If the relationship between a state – be it local or national – and its constituency is defined by citizenship, then the relationship that has been illustrated in this chapter thus far is one where *citizenship* is indeed at stake. The political subjectivity of the people in Ruiterbos manifests itself in terms of this question of citizenship. Put differently: the people of Ruiterbos are fighting *for* citizenship[79]. The indirect relationship of subjecthood (Mamdani, 1996) that currently governs the relationship between the local state and the people is being rejected. People in Ruiterbos are insisting on a direct relationship with the state. The protests described by Phumi Booysen (2016) where farm worker and forestry communities throughout the Southern Cape mobilised to insist on inclusion into the local municipalities since 2002[80] illustrates this demand for a *direct* relationship to the local state – or citizenship. Similarly, the organisation of the Ruiterbos community towards gaining citizenship in the true sense of the word constitutes political mobilisation. The continued organisation and mobilisation towards the IDP meetings as well as protests at the Mosselbay municipality (Fortuin, 2016) are instances of political mobilisation with respect to the question of citizenship in Ruiterbos. The political subjectivity of these communities has allowed them to identify something

[78] Human dignity.
[79] This analysis extends beyond Ruiterbos and to the moment that is being characterized here and elsewhere as a rebellion of the poor. Whereas this rebellion is routinely limited to a service delivery problem, the protests are concerned about fighting *against* inefficiencies in delivering the dreams of democracy and *for* citizenship in postapartheid South Africa.
[80] It is interesting to note that this mobilization in the Southern Cape coincides with the period described by Hart, Alexander and others as the period of heightened contestations at local state level. It would seem that the rebellion of the poor across South Africa had a profound manifestation in Ruiterbos and across the Southern Cape.

to fight for. This in turn allows for a shift into the final phase of popular politics where the political consciousness and subjectivity gives rise to political mobilisation.

Furthermore, the fact that "the guys were being put off the farms on almost a daily basis" (Solomons, 2016) was not understood as an undesirable outcome. Indeed, the prospect of a direct relationship to the 'people's government' instead of an indirect relationship to the state – mediated by the patronage of plaasboere - was welcomed. The shift off the farms and into the settlement in Bosbou in the 1990s offered an opportunity to, in Mahmood Mamdani's sense, also migrate from subjecthood into citizenship. The physical move from one kind of space to another was a hopeful move from the realm of decentralised despotism on the farms of the plaasboere to a privileged and sacred locality of the civilised: citizenship (Mamdani, 1996: 17).

In *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, Julian Brown explains that:

> "Citizenship is a central term in contemporary South African politics. The struggle *against* apartheid could be conceived of as a simultaneous struggle *for* citizenship, at least in the way the idea was articulated by Marshal six decades ago: 'a status bestowed on all those who are full members of the community…[and] equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed'. The struggle against a racist order that did not accept all South Africans as full members of a national community sought to overthrow it, and replace it with one that did." (2015: 57; *my emphasis*)

The project of replacing the exclusionary, apartheid conception of citizenship with one where the plaasmense of Ruiterbos have a recognised legitimacy as citizens in the eyes of the local state has not yet been actualised. Brown continues that:

> "The start of the post-apartheid era was thus marked by an expansion of the political possibilities connected to citizenship: the end of the struggle to achieve formal recognition brought about – for many activists – the birth of a new wave of struggles, this time to give effective substance to formal rights of citizenship" (2015: 58-59)

This development of struggles relating to citizenship is palpable in Ruiterbos where the empty shell of citizenship has been extended to the plaasmense who are now permitted to vote. Nevertheless, the substance relating to citizenship remains out of reach. The ontological divides between the civilised, modern citizen and an uncivilised, unmodern non-citizen – or subject

(Mamdani, 1996) – is recreated and maintained in the ways in which the local state interacts with the people of Ruiterbos. Indeed, a close analysis of the demands placed on the Mosselbay local state with respect to the housing backlog, the demands for title deeds and the call for a participatory process in the production of conceived, perceived and lived space is indicative of a fundamental assertion of citizenship by the plaasmense of Ruiterbos.

By way of conclusion it therefore seems evident that the political consciousness that is expressed in the earlier sections of this chapter translates into a conceptualisation, contextualisation and evaluation of at least two problems. In the first instance, the houses available in Bosbou do not meet the needs of the community. This housing backlog translates into an urgent demand for housing in Bosbou. A related problem around which people in Bosbou are conscientised has to do with incorporation into the municipality. The fundamental conflict between the community and the local state which "can't quite take responsibility [for the Bosbou settlement]" (Malgas, 2016) translates into the second problem around which political consciousness exists in Ruiterbos.

I digress briefly to note a further implication of this demand for rural housing. Whilst it is not the key argument made in this thesis, this politicisation around rural housing calls into question one of the assumptions that are often made with respect to the broader housing question in South Africa. Much of the literature that deals with housing in South Africa attributes the demand for housing to urbanization. The narrative suggests, in short, that socio-economic factors are pushing many South Africans from the rural areas into the cities where they place a strain on existing infrastructure. Key among the areas where strain is placed is housing. This line of argument suggests that a demand for housing is consequential to urbanization. The findings in this chapter, however, suggest that this is an erroneous position. Here there are people from rural areas who are politicized around claims for a *rural* house, rather than an urban house. There is no urbanization at stake here, and yet housing is identified as a primary need in the community. The frames of reference via which the housing question is articulated by the community in Ruiterbos is similar to the way in which, say Abahlali baseMjondolo, articulates their demand for a right to the city. The claims to life and dignity respectively suggest that the ontological and epistemological assumptions that drive the demand for housing in both urban and rural areas are the same. In both instances, a claim to humanity, life, dignity, modernity, and *citizenship* is at stake. The demand for

housing therefore precedes urbanization. The demand for housing, though perhaps expedited in cases of large-scale urbanization, exists independently.

Fred Hendricks, Lungisile Ntsebeza and Kirk Helliker therefore seem to be affirmed in their assertion that "there are many ways in which the rural and the urban intersect, it is the migrant labour system and the search for durable livelihoods that lie at the heart of this connection" (2013: 3). I would take their point one step further and, based on the findings in this chapter, argue that the issues around which political consciousness and political subjectivity is developed are not bound geographically. The popular politics of the rural seems to be the same as that of the urban areas. Questions of housing and education are not geographically confined to rural or urban areas. They constitute fundamental claims that transcend the rural-urban divide.

Now, in turning back to the question of housing in Ruiterbos, as outlined in this chapter, it can be understood within a historical context of confining the plaasmense of Ruiterbos to what Domenico Losurdo (2011: 310) calls the 'profane space'. This maintenance of a sacred space and a profane space in Ruiterbos where plaasmense are marginalised and have their interest denigrated is not unrelated to a national phenomenon of a scream against the denial of meaningful citizenship to most South Africans. What has come to be known as the 'rebellion of the poor' contains both a negative and a positive component. In other words: there is a political consciousness that exists with respect to the national rebellion of the poor; there are concrete things that people are fighting against. This, however, exists alongside a dialectic understanding of what *ought* to be. This understanding, in the context of Ruiterbos and beyond, translates into a belief that what ought to be is: the universality of modernity, citizenship and life. Plaasmense in Ruiterbos and those in the profane space throughout South Africa therefore are fighting *for* something. Political subjectivity and subsequent mobilisations are, in other words, constitutive of a fight for *citizenship*[81].

[81] This claim to citizenship is in many ways a refutation of a normative state that I have termed postapartheid. People are not willing to accept that we should live in a period where formal apartheid has legally come to an end, whilst we are remaining with all the trappings of an apartheid society. Thrust in the popular psyche is one of shifting from postapartheid to post-apartheid.

# 4. Concluding remarks

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

— Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

### a. Ruiterbos and its people, today

This thesis has shown the contemporary political story of Ruiterbos. In the period between July 2015 and July 2015, the people of Ruiterbos have primarily been concerned with two key issues. The first of these issues is the imminent closure of the local school, Denneprag, situated in the Bosbou settlement. The second is the long-standing question of access to housing. In this section we will revisit some of the key issues as they relate to the people of Ruiterbos.

With the announcement in 2012 that Denneprag should be closed down and amalgamated with Laerskool Ruiterbos, a struggle for the school began in Ruiterbos. The closure of the school was viewed as detrimental to both the learners who were attending Denneprag at the time, *and* the community as a whole. The suggestion that young children must travel the near-5 kilometres to Laerskool Ruiterbos in any form was unacceptable in light of the physical risk to the children travelling along this unsafe route. This concern for the physical safety of the children was compounded by evidence that the state education department would, in the long run, not prioritise the safety of the children. This translated into a concern that the community's prospects for educating the next generation and furnishing them with a chance of breaking out of the whirlpool of poverty that constitutes much of the reality in Ruiterbos will be compromised. The position of the people of Ruiterbos was one of defiance. They were unwilling to have their children relegated to an ontological status where their fundamental grievability (Butler, 2004) would be negated. The proposed closure of the school made the lives of the children of Ruiterbos – both literally and metaphorically[82] – precarious.

Further to the concerns relating to current and future threat that the closing of the school would pose to the children of Ruiterbos, there were other practical considerations that garnered support for the school to remain open. In a settlement that has a tenuous relationship to the local state, the school building constitutes the only communal building for social reproduction. The physical structure of the school building serves as a library, a church, a clinic and a community hall. It is the only[83] space where various key functions of the community, ranging from the

[82] The children's prospects of remaining alive *and* their prospects of improving the quality of their lives were considered to be under attack by the resolve of the department to close the schools.

[83] The local state holds that it is unable to spend money on the construction and upkeep of communal goods such as a meeting hall. This means that, whilst the WCED was only intending to shift the *educational* function of the building, they would naturally no longer spend money on the upkeep of the building and this expense would have to be shifted to the local state or the community itself.

collection of social grants to funeral services for a deceased elder, could take place. The decision that had been taken and imposed by the provincial ministry of education would destroy the "heart of the community" (Uithaler [b], 2015). This thesis has shown how the community held firm that this could *not* be accepted.

These practical investments in the school were underpinned by deeper concerns. This thesis has illustrated that the function of the school was but one factor for its value; another factor was its *meaning*. To the people of Bosbou the history of the school is, in many ways, synonymous with the history of the community itself. Denneprag is the product of the work of the community and was built by this community. It has therefore become an integral part of the existence of the plaasmense of Ruiterbos. In the past, the same has also been true in terms of the relationship between plaasboere and Laerskool Ruiterbos. Much like today's Denneprag serves the plaasmense as a space for social reproduction *and* a space for educating the next generation, Laerskool Ruiterbos has, historically, served a similar purpose for the plaasboere of Ruiterbos; from polio vaccinations to film screenings, the physical structure of Laerskool Ruiterbos was a space for social reproduction for the plaasboer community of Ruiterbos.

It is significant to note at this point is that these histories are, due to the history of segregationism and apartheid in South Africa, at odds with one another. In fact, the existence of Laerskool Ruiterbos is *antithetical* to the existence of the brown community in Bosbou. Parents and grandparents of the children who are in Denneprag today created for themselves, in Denneprag, that which Laerskool Ruiterbos had denied them: their humanity. Laerskool Ruiterbos was never meant for them and existed at the *expense* of the brown community. Its principal function was to facilitate the exclusions of the brown community in Ruiterbos. The meaning of Laerskool Ruiterbos therefore represents a historical – and contemporary – challenge to the very existence of the brown community. The objection to the closure of Denneprag in order for Laerskool Ruiterbos to be preserved as the only primary school in the region must be understood in this context. Laerskool Ruiterbos, much like the apartheid system that it represents to the brown community, is not universal. It is, symbolically, a particular and the people of Ruiterbos are unwilling to see it parade as a universal. This contestation relating to the proposed closure of Denneprag emerged, in this thesis, as a key issue articulated by the people of Ruiterbos.

A further issue that was central to comprehending the material realities of Ruiterbos during the time of this research was that of housing. With respect to this question, this thesis has shown that a housing question underpins the aspirations of the plaasmense or Ruiterbos. The housing question in Ruiterbos developed in relation to the passing of the Extension of Security of Tenure Act which saw many plaasmense, who were based on the farms, overtly and covertly evicted off these farms. This alongside natural growth of the community created a pressing need for housing. In a context where a direct relationship with the state – to replace the indirect one that existed during apartheid and on the farms – was highly sought after. A shift into a direct relationship with the state in a municipal settlement was highly anticipated. The possibilities of this were, however, severely diminished when the plaasboere and the local state were aligned in an insistence that this settlement should *not* be built on state owned land in the heart of Ruiterbos.

Denied the chance to participate in a democratic process of producing space, the settlement for the plaasmense of Ruiterbos was relegated to their second-choice location in Bosbou – owned by the department of forestry. Here a direct relationship with the local state has to date not been established. With no suggestion that the local state has any intention to change this, the people in Bosbou have remained in an indirect relationship with the local state. The lives that were inhibited under apartheid and on the farms were expected to change with this shift off the farms and into the fold of traditional civil society in a settlement that forms part of the municipal wards. Unfortunately, the perceived life-giving value of direct incorporation into the municipality did not take effect. Instead, people in Ruiterbos still do not have any right to claim access to municipal goods. The fact that there has been routine agreement between the local state and the people of Ruiterbos that this transfer to the municipality is a priority, there has been no effort made to affect this transfer. The people in Ruiterbos still do not formally own the houses that they live in and the housing backlog in Ruiterbos is not even acknowledged by the local state. Similarly, urgent community needs such as a meeting hall and a clinic are recorded as priorities on an annual basis. Nevertheless, there seems to be an implicit agreement that the plaasmense of Ruiterbos will indefinitely be confined to the realm of subjecthood; there seems to be a consensus that Bosbou's exclusion from civil society will remain the norm and not the exception.

### b. Method of Popular Politics[84]

The status quo described in the previous section is by no stretch of the imagination indicative of a society that has entered into an emancipated zone. In fact, as Ian Baucom and others have noted, the contemporary, material realities in Ruiterbos are the summation of its history. Sadly, this history is one that has made every effort to maintain the plaasmense of Ruiterbos on the periphery of society. This thesis has however shown that whilst people do not control the conditions under which they operate, they *do* make their own history (Marx, 1852). The infuriating situation where basic facets of a decent life, such as a house and a school to send your children to, are denied to the plaasmense of Ruiterbos is, however, not the story of Ruiterbos. This thesis has argued that the story of Ruiterbos is more accurately captured by engaging the politicisation of its people. In this section, I will return to the nuances around political consciousness, subjectivity and mobilisation that exists with respect to this case study. Of course, this will not be an exhaustive discussion, but this section does wish to return to the *method* via which popular politics has materialised in this thesis.

I have argued that popular politics manifests itself via various components that constitute phases of a process which culminates in the politicisation of people in rural areas around particular issues. The first of these phases is the collective process whereby ordinary people organically conceptualise, contextualise and evaluate, a particular question. I have, in this thesis, termed this process: political consciousness. With respect to the question of education, the people engaged in this study have for instance clearly expressed a political consciousness on the issue. This political consciousness, in sum, constitutes a mechanism via which the agents of politics identify the issue that the struggle is levelled *against*.

This process is strongly influenced by the social location of the collective in question. In Ruiterbos the community in Bosbou, for example, identified the closure of Denneprag as 'a problem'. Similarly, the thesis has shown how the incorporation into the Mosselbay municipality constitutes the conceptualisation of a problem by the plaasmense of Ruiterbos. This conceptualisation is then contextualised with respect to both housing and education. With respect

[84] This conceptualization of the process of popular politics is heavily indebted to a very late-night conversation with Kayla Jacob. I thank her for pushing the limits of the argument I had been making at the time to, in effect, collaboratively develop the framework that this thesis uses in its understanding of the process via which popular politics comes to exist.

to schooling, the interviewees in this study for example cited both pragmatic *and* symbolic explanations to inform their position on the closure of Denneprag. This thesis has shown that ordinary people in rural areas are capable of *theorising* pressing issues such as the proposed closure of a school. The ideological and historical factors that inform a decision such as the one to reinforce Laerskool Ruiterbos at the expense of Denneprag are identified and articulated in this collective process. Similarly, the people of Bosbou were able to *explain* the segregationist production of space or the marginalisation of Bosbou by the local state as a continuation of colonial and apartheid logic (Menavel, 2016; Uithaler [d], 2016; Solomons, 2016; Malgas, 2016).

Lastly, and with respect to both the questions of housing and education, the thesis has shown how the organic processes of the community have translated into an *evaluation* of the problem. The issue that was in each instance identified was first nuanced by a *contextualisation* of the question and subsequently expanded by a value judgement of issues identified – the closure of the school, production of space and incorporation into the municipality respectively. People therefore, via these stages, developed a collective understanding of what the problem is, why it is a problem and of course, that it is a problem. Collectively these variables constitute the initial stage via which popular politics is manifested throughout this thesis. This 'political consciousness' in effect answers the question: what are people struggling against?

Of course, this is merely the first part of the larger process. The second phase of this process is what this thesis has characterised as 'political subjectivity'. Whereas political consciousness is concerned with articulating what a given group, such as the community in Ruiterbos, is struggling *against*, political subjectivity is concerned with what people are in fact fighting *for*. It is concerned with taking the negation of what exists one step further and projecting beyond that which exists to that which *ought to be*. This process is, unlike political consciousness, *independent* of social location. The questions of 'what do we want?' is premised on nothing other than the collective, rational thought of a given community. This thesis has illustrated this phase of the process in Ruiterbos with respect to both issues around which political consciousness has developed.

With respect to education, for example, people are affirming the fundamental humanity of themselves *and* their children. Moreover, they are asserting that their humanity is not to be denigrated; they are as human as anyone else. The assertion of an "equality of *nature*" (Rancière, 1991: 27; *emphasis in original*) is precisely what the people of Ruiterbos believe 'ought to be'.

The insistence that the lives of their children as well as their prospects for sustaining life are indeed sacred as well as the insistence that the history of a dehumanising system should not be preserved at the expense of their own constitutes precisely what the plaasmense of Ruiterbos believe 'ought to be'. Similarly, the question of housing extends beyond a fight against exclusion from the production of space or the apparent inability of the state to hear the needs of the people in Ruiterbos. The political consciousness with respect to these negatively articulated problems, is intimately linked to a positive sensibility of what ought to be. Here the articulations of "menswaardigheid"[85] (Uithaler [b], 2015) and "life" (Malgas, 2016) are the principles that people believe *ought to* inform their relationship to the local state. They are, in other words, struggling *for* citizenship. The political subjectivity of the people in Ruiterbos constitutes a fundamental affirmation of their humanity. With respect to the various arms of the local state, this translates into an insistence that the nature of the relationship with the local state *must* be one informed by the principles of citizenship.

Political subjectivity therefore articulates with political consciousness with respect to issues around which people are politicised in any given environment. Indeed, the deeply political articulation of what *is* and *should not be* alongside what *ought to be* is the mechanism via which all politics develops. To this end, this thesis suggests that the "social movements from above" (Cox and Nilsen, 2014) such as the local state, similarly, have a collective process that they go through in determining their disposition towards citizens and subjects alike. The logic of the local state or the plaasboere or the Western Cape Department of Education must therefore be understood in terms of the very same process as the one that illustrates political aspirations of the plaasmense in Ruiterbos.

There are two very important factors with respect to this process that must be stated explicitly. The first is that it is not ontologically defined. Any social group – progressive or reactionary – is capable of developing political consciousness and political subjectivity with respect to a given issue. The second important point to note is that these processes are so intimately linked that they, in fact, cannot be separated. No matter how embryonic either phase of the process is, one will always exist in relation to the other. The question of "what exists?" is always in a dialectic relationship with the question of: "what might conceivably exist?" (Holloway, 2002: 6).

[85] Human dignity.

It is the inability to recognise these interrelated and dialectic parts of what Holloway (2002) terms "the scream" that has resulted in the popular (mis)characterisation of the 'rebellion of the poor' in South Africa. Yes, people across the country and in Ruiterbos are fighting against bad service delivery, *but* they are also fighting for something. The nature of what is being fought *for* might differ from place to place. In Ruiterbos is it is inclusion into the realm of civil society: i.e. citizenship. I would be unsurprised if this and other similar claims to citizenship and inclusion into civil society inform political subjectivity well beyond Ruiterbos.

Chatterjee suggests that truly modern and free political societies depend on people who are "citizens, not subjects" (2004: 33). Chatterjee suggests that in "most of the world" (3), civil society is "demographically limited" (39). This means that, whilst the liberal rhetoric relating to civil society suggests that it is a universally accessible domain, the reality is that this domain excludes certain people – and certain kinds of people. According to Chatterjee, this leaves most of the people in most of the world relegated to a secondary domain of politics that he calls "*political society*' (38; *emphasis in original*). Congruent to Mamdani (1996), Brown (2015) and others, this realm zone of being is the one where the people of Ruiterbos find themselves. Their claim to humanity and a relationship of citizenship to the local state must be understood within this broader context of a scream *for* inclusion into the fold of civil society – and its negation.

The final constituent part of the process of popular politics is when the dialectic between political consciousness and political subjectivity described in the above develop into organised action. This organised action has, in this thesis, been defined as political mobilisation. Influenced primarily by the political subjectivity - what people are fighting for – *and* the political mobilisation of other groupings. It is a process via which people organise themselves to actively assert their political subjectivity in the face of its negation. This negation is rooted in the political mobilisations of other collectives of people such as the local state, the police, or the plaasboere – as is the case in Ruiterbos. political mobilisation is an assertion of the political consciousness and subjectivity of a given group in the face the mobilisations towards its denial. The contestations between what Cox and Nilsen (2014) have characterised as 'social movements from above' on the one hand and 'social movements from below' on the other hand gives a useful overview of this process.

Mobilisation with respect to the question of the school took the form of, among other things, organised protests in the main street of Mosselbay. Here the community, who had

collectively developed political consciousness and subjectivity, expressed this in an organised political process. Similarly, the question of citizenship in Ruiterbos and throughout the Southern Cape (Boysen, 2016) is the issue around which people have since 2002 consistently mobilised. This has taken the form of targeted participation in the IDP meetings with the local state and even confrontation with the local state in the form of organised protest.

This thesis has, therefore, identified a framework for understanding the *manifestation* of popular politics. I am aware of the fact that there are almost as many definitions of 'politics' as there are political theorists. Many of these are very useful and have informed the framework that has developed in this thesis. The defining trait of this approach is that it centres the political agent as an agent and not merely an actor. People are not expected to act out what Julian Brown calls "already written scripts" (2015: 61). Instead, their capacity for "writing scripts and creating the scene" (Brown, 2015: 61) is taken acknowledged and seriously. The underlying premise in this conceptualisation is that, as many have noted, ordinary people – like the plaasmense of Ruiterbos – are capable of being the protagonists of their own liberation. These are the people that affect social change. It is the dialectic relationship between their collective, rational thought on the one hand and their collective, rational praxis on the other that, in a dialogue with the material world around them, that constitutes the reality that ought to be engaged by scholarship. As we will see in the next section, the findings in this thesis call for a nuancing of some of the assumptions that have informed scholarly work in general and the engagements with people in rural areas in particular. The empirical status quo in Ruiterbos as well as the politicisation in this context points towards a fundamental claim of modernity and its negation. This is what is at stake in Ruiterbos.

### c. Modernity and Determinism: revisited

If the primary assertion in Ruiterbos is one of modernity, it must be emphasised that this scream for modernity – to invoke Holloway – is crystal clear. This thesis has shown that the plaasboere and the local state are, however, either not hearing the scream for modernity at all or are, at best, hearing a muffled version of it. At the core of the contestations illustrated throughout this thesis, a fundamental tension between an assertion of modernity and its denial emerges. The people of Ruiterbos are asserting that they are 'of the now' and are consequently laying claim to the implications of this. These implications include houses, education and other basic facets of citizenship. On the other hand, various collectives are operating to deny this claim to modernity.

Seeing that the claims made by the plaasmense of Ruiterbos are clear, and they are nevertheless not being heard, it means that the translation or interpretation of the scream for modernity is not very effective. The new concepts that Fanon (1961) implores us to work out relate precisely to the tools that are necessary in order for the scream to be heard as clearly as it is being articulated – and for it to be taken seriously.

Unfortunately, the state and its functionaries operate as executioners of the collective will of those who yield power in society (Marx and Engels, 1848). These yielders of power can only ensure the continuation of their privilege at the *expense* of maintaining the status quo. As such, the imperative for functionaries of elite interests, such as the local state or the plaasboere, working out new concepts is particularly limited. We cannot expect them to want to work out new concepts. Critical thought and radical scholarship, on the other hand, is not doomed to negating the clear scream for modernity from the rural subject. Chakrabarty is correct when he suggests that critical thought, in spite of its best efforts, does not always escape prejudice (2000: xvi). As such, scholarship can – and must – be in solidarity with those in rural areas who are articulating a claim of fundamental modernity. Critical scholarship therefore has an imperative to work out the concepts that can amplify, rather than muffle or silence, the scream for modernity as articulated by the agents in any given study.

To this end, radical scholarship – and *all* scholarship for that matter – must shift its onset point away from oppressive structures and the fetishization of repression and resistance. Instead, the point of departure should be the question: 'what are people laying claim to?'. By starting with a concern for what people are struggling *for*, one is immediately led to two consecutive questions. The first question asks: what is being claimed? The concern, in this regard, is with identifying the content of what this thesis has termed political consciousness and political subjectivity. The second question that follows from this is: how is that which is being claimed denied? This leads to the negation of the scream or the obstacles to emancipation. Here one's analysis will inevitably come up against oppressive structures, ideas and histories.

What is important with respect to this discussion is the order in which the questions are engaged. Traditional approaches to rural politics have taken the oppressive structures as their onset point. Structural determinants such as the land and agrarian question or the question of labour on commercial farms are taken as the point of departure. In effect, the second question – relating to

the negation of emancipation – comes to precede a concern for that which is ultimately being claimed. This structuralist onset point inevitably leads to a concern with the oppressive implications of these structures for the rural subject. From this concern with oppression, arises an expectation of resistance; a particular kind of political consciousness and political subjectivity is expected to materialise. When this inevitably does not happen – particularly on the terms articulated by the given structural analysis – a nihilism about rural politics sets in. The structurally and historically determined inevitability of repression and the subsequent anticipation of resistance leaves the researcher waiting for Godot.

This thesis has both explicitly and implicitly held that the assertion of modernity *precedes* its denial. Importantly, this is a methodological claim and not a historical claim. Whereas this thesis recognises that the claim *for* modernity and its negation are perpetually and dialectically begetting one another, I argue that critical thought has an obligation of solidarity with quests for emancipation. The onset point in any study which wishes to escape the nihilism that flows from determinist methodologies, must be an *emancipatory* approach. This emancipatory approach to explaining political struggles is premised on the recognition of the dialectic between the assertion of modernity on the one hand and its denial on the other. If time, as Baucom (2005) suggests, indeed accumulates then the status quo – as the accumulation of our history – must be our point of departure. In this point of departure where there are two diametrically opposed forces. The first is a claim of universal modernity and the second is the negation of this claim. The researcher must pick a side in this tension. This requirement for scholarship to transcend the myth of 'objectivity' and align itself with the assertion of the rural subject requires a methodology which centres the assertion of modernity as principal.

This thesis has argued that all people are fundamentally modern and, further, that people are their own liberators. Critical thought, in order to qualify as such must be concerned with both understanding *and* destroying oppressive structures, ideas and histories. Solidarity with those who are asserting their modernity and whose liberation radical thought is fundamentally concerned with requires fidelity to their struggle. Just as the pedagogy of the oppressed in Freire's text must be forged "*with*, not *for* the oppressed…" (1970: 48), so too critical scholarship must be an act of solidarity. This thesis has illustrated that the conceptualisation of oppressive structures is *secondary* to the assertion of fundamental modernity by the rural subject. Heeding this position

not only recognises the open door of every consciousness, but it also opens the door for truly emancipatory politics for researcher and researched, alike. This will, naturally, lead the analysis to *relevant* structures, ideas and histories that function to negate the claim to modernity from the rural subject. It will escape nihilism and will manage to fight prejudice and escape it.

**d. <u>Some final words…</u>**

This thesis, with Ruiterbos operating as a case study, shows that a critical engagement with politics in rural South Africa requires a nuanced approach. Gordon's reservations about a fetishization of Disciplinarity (2014) are indeed validated. The politics of people in Ruiterbos would be inadequately engaged by means of a lens of political science, sociology, philosophy or any other single discipline. The methods and frames of reference that have come to define scholarly disciplines would, in this instance, not allow for a comprehensive engagement with the people of Ruiterbos and their politics. This limitation is not only one that exists with reference to Disciplinarity, but also one that exists with respect to the scope of this particular thesis. This thesis could not hope to make absolute assertions with respect to Ruiterbos. In the 4 years between the start and end of this research project, several tangential questions arose. These were not exhausted in this thesis, but I am nonetheless noting them here.

One question that is raised by this thesis is that of the rural-urban divide. What exactly – if any – are the political differences between the urban and the rural? This thesis has shown that the politicisation in urban and rural areas is not ontologically determined. There is therefore no inherent difference between the two spaces. Politicisation around questions such as access to education, housing, productions of space, citizenship and modernity are not confined to either of these types of geographical space. By liberating the conception of the 'rural' from its ontological connotation, the analytical possibilities of the concept will be opened up. This will in turn facilitate an escape from the homogenising gaze with which people in rural areas are routinely engaged. The possibility of different groups with different concerns and interests – all operating within the temporal zone of the modern – will be actualised. Further, the recognition of possibilities for politics beyond social, and geographic, location will open up the prospects of engaging popular politics in a holistic manner. The implications of a removal of this urban-rural divide is in need of further engagement.

Similarly, this thesis has interrogated the manifestation of popular politics in one specific rural area. Whilst some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this process these cannot be conclusive until several similar studies are conducted. To this end, it would be important to explore the applicability of the methodological assumptions and conclusions in this thesis beyond this particular case study. The comparison between direct and indirect relationships between rural dwellers and the state in a context where the modernity of rural dwellers is taken for granted would also require further exploration. How are communities in rural South Africa relating to the local state[86]? What is the meaning of an assertion of dignity in the face of a local state? These are the kinds of questions that are in need of further exploration beyond Ruiterbos and beyond Ruiterbos.

The final development that I must comment on at the end of this thesis is that of the land question. The research of this thesis was done in 2015 and 2016, but the writing of the thesis was only concluded at the end of 2018. This means that there have been several developments during this 4-year period. One such development was the decision at the ANC conference in December 2017 that the ruling party would support a policy for land expropriation without compensation. This was advanced in February 2018 when parliament agreed to a constitutional amendment that would allow for the expropriation of land without compensation. Whilst there has been no roadmap for achieving any of this, these developments have reaffirmed public discourse around land reform that mimics apartheid distribution.

The ethical imperative for land reform is undisputed. One area that, however, receives little attention when it comes to this question: do rural dwellers *want* ownership land? Is there, in other words, political subjectivity – as described in this thesis – with respect to land? Does the claim that is being made by people in rural South Africa, and its subsequent negation take the form of a demand for land? The discussions around land reform seem to make the assumption that this indeed exists. whilst this may indeed be the case in some instances, there is no evidence in this thesis to corroborate this position.

[86] In Ruiterbos this local state was administrated by the Democratic Alliance. Elite discourse on electoral politics in South Africa has routinely drawn distinctions between the form, content and nature of the various political parties in South Africa. This thesis has not observed any deviation in the political assertions made by the DA local state. It would be important to consider whether there are indeed any real differences between, say, the ANC and DA responses to the scream for modernity in places like Ruiterbos.

In the process of interviewing the people of Ruiterbos, it soon became event that a demand for land was not materialising as a primary concern. This worried me. In a country where the question of rural politics is routinely framed with respect to an unresolved land question, it was suspicious that this question was coming up. As such, I asked people explicitly about the demand for land. People in Ruiterbos were evidently aware of the national debates and insisted that access to land should not be ruled out. Clive Uithaler, for instance, explains that:

> "we have remarkable tradespeople and farmers here in Ruiterbos, but there is no point applying for land to farm on and you are living in a tin shed in some backyard. The housing must be resolved first and then we can ask: what are we going to do now? Then the next step can be about giving people work and putting bread on the table…land can be part of this, but there are more urgent things now– like houses." (Uithaler [a], 2016).

Here the assertions of the subjects of this study seem to corroborate the suggestion made by Ruth Hall that "Struggles for land are often interwoven with wider rural struggles for survival and for control of the countryside" (2004: 222). Whereas her work suggests that the demand for land remains primary, the findings in this particular project suggest that this is not quite the case. In an environment where struggles for survival are interwoven with struggles for land, this thesis concludes that the struggles for survival are *primary*. Land in the form that it is traditionally understood in the nationalist school is perhaps a secondary concern that *could* come to the fore if the primary mechanisms for social reproduction were made available to people in Ruiterbos.

Raj Patel argues that "There is a dialectical relation through which the land question is lived. To ask a land question is to ask, in effect, about the history of social relations, and their present configuration, and about where the meaning of land is at the moment." (2015: 294-295). The meaning of land in Ruiterbos is intimately intertwined with the demand for housing. Broader debates around the land question in the South African context, must break from the populist expediency at the hands of which this theme has so often suffered. This thesis does not claim to resolve this land question. Nevertheless, the way in which it has materialised might offer some indicators for an approach to land reform that centres those who are expected to be the beneficiaries of such a process.

The particular manifestation of a 'land question in this thesis is not unique to Ruiterbos. Struggles around housing and dignity resonate from the shack dwellers' movements in Durban to

the favelas of Sao Paulo. Dignity and housing seem to be key to many struggles across the world. These struggles know no divide between urban and rural and they know no neat categorisation into historical determinism. Is the primary political task for organisations and people committed to emancipation perhaps that of linking these struggles together throughout the world?

This thesis had one last objective which is important enough to end the project on. Ruiterbos has been caught in various struggles that aim to affirm the humanity and modernity of its people. These struggles have been waged in an environment of deliberate negation. The assertions made by the people in Ruiterbos and the concrete objects of their struggle exist independently of this thesis. The often-tedious struggle for better and more dignified lives for the people of Ruiterbos and their families has, sadly, been underway long before the first word of this thesis was written and will continue long after the examiners read the last word in it. The insights gathered in this thesis are, of course, heavily indebted to the generosity of the people of Ruiterbos and the contribution it will make to their struggle is likely to be minimal. Nevertheless, my hope is that it will not going to be negligible. At the very least, the simple assertion of humanity and modernity by the people of Ruiterbos will be asserted in all platforms until it is heard.

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