

# **Distributing Coherence: Human Rights, HIV, Police Violence and the post-Apartheid State**

**Oliver Human**

## **Summary**

The ethnographic research for this thesis was conducted in a working class neighbourhood in Cape Town, South Africa. It aims to explore the multiple and sometimes contradictory intersections of power which constitute both the state and the possibilities for life in this neighbourhood. This ethnography highlights that rather than a simple, reified portrayal of the state, the state acts as both a site of power and is constituted by the multiple and contradictory relationships which give it shape as an actor. In this regard the central questions of this thesis are “what is the state?” and “how does it maintain legitimacy?”

This thesis answers these questions by exploring different moments of interaction between the state and the local populace. This neighbourhood was built as a “coloured” area during the racially segregated Apartheid regime as a place to house labour for the local fishing industry. In the past several years this area has been perceived as being antagonistic to the state and its plans. This perception is largely the product of an incidence in 2010 when the local population clashed with the police in order to prevent them from evicting residents. However, at the same time this neighbourhood benefits from many of the organs of welfare that have equally defined the post-Apartheid state. Here benevolence is expressed by the state in the form of free healthcare, widely distributed disability grants, and old age pensions. Having come to this neighbourhood through HIV/AIDS research it was this contradiction between a state that “hurts and heals” which drew my interest.

In this regard the chapters in this dissertation sample some of the diverse relationships between the state and the residents of this neighbourhood. Chapter One looks at the effects the negotiated settlement to end Apartheid has had on political possibilities in post-Apartheid South Africa. This chapter argues that an effect of this process was to raise the state as the master signifier of moral and political possibilities thereby demonising all modes of politics which do not draw on the constitutionalist discourse of the new state. Chapter Two aims to show how, through the work of Community Care Workers concentrating on adherence to HIV and Tuberculosis (TB) treatment, the notion of community provides the state with a continued legitimacy as it realizes its moral

responsibility to its population whilst providing it with greater legibility of areas which had previously escaped the purview of the Apartheid state. An effect of such practices is to continue the perceived separation between state and society.

Chapter Three explores the case of police brutality mentioned above. Here the contradiction between a state that first injures protestors and then provides them with free healthcare is examined. Rather than acting as a monolithic bloc, this chapter tries to show how the state maintains legitimacy because of its ability to distribute blame and centralize an image of benevolence in its self. Chapter Four continues to look at the contradictions of state crafting. However, rather than the distribution explored in Chapter Three, this chapter tries to show how such antagonisms are in fact productive for the state in its efforts to integrate opposite HIV and TB programs. The final chapter looks at how the notion of the “civil” in civil society acts as a means through which the liberal state is able to construct its other. This other, the “uncivil,” makes possible the topography in which the play between state and society gets acted out whilst legitimizing and concealing uncivil state actions. The conclusion to this dissertation reiterates the key ethnographic and theoretical moments of the thesis in order to develop an explanation of the state which is neither a reified, monolithic actor nor a mask for alternative forces which it conceals. Rather, following the work of Michel Foucault, the conclusion illustrates how the state is constructed and acts through the multiplicity of power relations which constitute it.