

# Class, resistance and the psychologization of development in South Africa

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the *psychologization* of development in South Africa, one of the most unequal countries in the world, through a critical analysis of a discussion on a national radio programme about the meaning of Mandela Day. We demonstrate how speakers draw on common sense notions of race, class and party politics that (re)produce subject positions from within a rights-based interpretive repertoire that emphasizes structural reform and class resistance, and an agency interpretive repertoire that emphasizes individualism, responsibility and volunteerism. We further demonstrate how the agency subject~~ive~~ position serves to stifle and resist the rights subject position by drawing on common sense 'psychological truths' about what it means to be a good citizen.

[\[A general point - if 'interpretive repertoire' is used as a conceptual term, then this needs to be differentiated from the concept of 'discourses' early in the paper.\]](#)

*“The mindset of the poor need to change before I will consider giving more”*

A South African’s response to an initiative that calls for ‘well-off’ South Africans to donate 5% of their income to a community project of their choice. Retrieved from <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/call-for-well-off-to-give-5-to-poor-1.1662866#.Uyf3cj-Swuc>

## Introduction

South Africa is one of the most economically unequal societies in the world; forged by centuries-old colonialism, racism and, more recently, liberal macro-economic policies that have fuelled economic inequalities (Seekings & Natrass, 2005; Beinart & Dubow, 2005). While there is a growing black African<sup>i</sup> middle class<sup>ii</sup>, inequality still reflects a racial dimension that was galvanised during apartheid<sup>iii</sup>. Apartheid, it is important to remember, was as much an economic system as it was a system of race categorization, with the black African majority legally relegated to menial jobs to prop up a powerful, predominantly white-dominated, capitalist system (Terreblanche, 2002). The crucial negotiations around the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid saw the black African majority, through the African National Congress (ANC), gain political power but **fail** to transform the economic system, especially in terms of economic redistribution (Klein, 2007).

**Commented [CG1]:** I know this is accurate, but it seems quite a harsh judgement on the black African majority, especially when you consider what they were/are up against. A particularly nasty combination of apartheid and capitalism

The current inequality figures in South Africa are staggering. For example, 60 percent of South Africa’s population earn less than R42 000 (USD4 200) per annum while the top 5% earn 43% of the [country’s earnings in South Africa](#) (Leibbrandt, Finn & Woolard, 2012). Despite constituting 79% of the population, black Africans make up 90% of South Africa’s poor. In 2011, the unemployment rate ([using an](#) expanded definition that includes those who are unemployed and who are not looking for work but desire to be employed) was 53% among black African women, compared to just 8% for white men (Statistics South Africa, 2012). In 2008, black Africans earned on average a mere 13% of

the salary of whites – a figure which has changed very little since the early 1900's (Murray, Woolard, Finn & Argent, 2010). Twenty years after apartheid, therefore, while some progress has been made to address inequality in some non-income indicators, for example, access to education, housing and electricity; income inequality has grown (in keeping with global trends (Piketty, 2014)), and the material conditions of the majority of poor black South Africans have deteriorated.

[I think if you are using the Int Rep terminology/concept, then this needs to be defined here, and distinguished from the concept of discourse. And there needs to be more of a sense of where such IRs can be found – as in what sort of texts. So maybe add a few more refs/examples? Otherwise it comes across as if you are plucking these arguments out of the air – for non-South African readers especially.]

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There is also a sense that you are stating your 'findings' upfront here, rather than using your data extracts to demonstrate how these IR/discourses operate in practice.]

Two interpretive repertoires have emerged about how South Africa should overcome its development challenges. On the one hand, there is a view that the predominantly black African poor have yet to realise their basic human rights as enshrined in the constitution (hereafter referred to as the rights-based interpretive repertoire). Their dissatisfaction and frustration is often demonstrated through protests. Known as the 'protest capital' of the world, estimates indicate that as many as 3000 protests have taken place in South Africa over the past three years. In Gauteng alone, the economic provincial hub of South Africa, police statistics showed that 540 protests were documented over one 40 day period in 2013 with the police declaring 40 of those as 'violent' (Patel 2014). Protests usually focus on unemployment, poor service delivery (such as inadequate housing, water and sanitation, education and healthcare), crime, corruption and low wages. Often inappropriately referred to as 'service delivery protests' (they are much more than service delivery protests), protests reflect a fundamental discontent by the poor with South Africa's development and protests are met with increasingly hostile police responses (Alexander, Lekgowa, Mmope, Sinwell, & Xezwi, 2012).

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On the other hand, there exists a powerful neoliberal interpretive repertoire that acknowledges rights but also emphasizes agency, choice and responsibility (hereafter referred to as the agency interpretive repertoire). The agency interpretive repertoire represents suggests that while poor South Africans as

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~~having do have~~ a right to be unhappy about the slow progress of South Africa's development, ~~but~~ ~~argues that~~ they should ~~expressengage with~~ their discontent ~~'responsibly'~~. Importantly, this interpretive repertoire emphasizes that ordinary South Africans can make a difference in South Africa's development. LeadSA, for example, is a national campaign that is widely endorsed by the state, the private sector, the media and many civil society organisations and aims to promote the idea of individual South Africans taking responsibility for improving the country. Among others, the campaign promotes a Bill of Responsibilities (to complement the country's official Bill of Rights) that outlines how South Africans should act/ behave in order to improve the country and achieve their basic human rights. The agency interpretive repertoire also ~~endorsesfocuses on~~ the democratic right to vote, ~~arguingthat is,~~ that the poor should exercise their democratic right to vote for a political party that will be in a position to deliver on promises. ~~T; with the~~ sub-text ~~here is being~~ that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party ~~is represented as havinghas~~ disappointed the poor and yet the poor ignorantly continue to vote them into ~~power~~ (at the time of writing the ANC had been in power for 20 years).

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The agency interpretive repertoire also encourages volunteerism. A popular campaign in this regard, and the focus of the text presented later in the paper, is 'Mandela Day' where South Africans are asked to devote 67 minutes of their time to a community cause. The 67 minutes represent the 67 years that Nelson Mandela devoted to politics. Mandela Day has become a ~~symbol~~ of the agency interpretive repertoire that focuses on the values that Nelson Mandela apparently stood for. Mandela's values, however, are by no means uncontested. For ~~some~~, the story of Nelson Mandela is that he was a radical freedom fighter who led the liberation struggle and was incarcerated for 27 years for his role in the struggle, to someone who 'changed' to becoming a symbol of conciliation and forgiveness in post-apartheid South Africa. For ~~others~~, Mandela was indeed a freedom fighter during apartheid but that he (and other negotiators) yielded to capitalist pressures during the negotiations to a peaceful transition and succumbed to white capitalist fears that the economy would collapse if the

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post-apartheid government pursued a more radical system for economic redress, for example, nationalisation of mines and land (Klein, 2007).

As psychologists working in resource-limited community settings, it is striking to note just *how* polarised these two interpretive repertoires have become both within the discipline and in popular discourse. This paper, therefore, stemmed from two frustrations. Firstly, from within a disciplinary perspective, we have often been called on to design agency-based behavioural change interventions to encourage poor people to take the steps to protect themselves and their children from their unhealthy environments through, for example, participating in community food gardens, washing hands at strategic times and reducing child exposure to the dangers of unsafe energy. There are, of course, a number of problems with this approach; not least of which is that most of these problems would be greatly diminished if the poor actually had access to healthy and enabling environments such as clean water, proper sanitation, and accessible healthy food options in the first instance.

However, the health behaviour change discourse fits neatly within and is propped up by the disciplinary boundaries of psychology and is, in many instances, celebrated as progressive and relevant (there are, of course, very few health psychologists interested in the health implications of food insecurity). However, when the discussion extends to social justice, economic redress and how we as psychologists can understand it, it becomes more difficult to justify our work as 'psychological'. After all, understanding social protests should be left to sociologists, public management specialists and political scientists! While we realise that this is a problem of how 'psychology' is conceptualised in a post-colonial context rather than whether our work is in fact psychological, the point being made is that the polarization of the two interpretive repertoires is also reflected in the disciplinary boundaries of what we think is psychology, particularly in a developing country context.

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The second frustration was our observation about how difficult it is for poor South Africans to make political statements without their intentions and actions becoming individualised and party politicized. For example, there has been a recent and interesting turn towards more political ‘body protests’ by the poor in South Africa. For example, naked protests by female slum dwellers, protests by women wearing soiled underwear to demonstrate the hygiene implications of inadequate water access in slums, and the placement of human faeces in strategic areas (for example, international airports) to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the lack of sanitation facilities in slums. We have noted just how difficult it is for political protest to raise awareness of the plight of the poor within the context of powerful individualised agency interpretive repertoires that invert the political intention of protests into actions of ‘lone wolf’ **criminals** with party political agendas (belonging to one party who is trying to show up another party’s failures) rather than political in its broader sense. Public and media responses also reveal deep seated racial discourses **representing about how** such protests **as revealing a** ‘natural’ propensity by the black African poor to behave in inappropriate ways. The political intentions of these protests are subverted by constructions of what it means to be developed, to behave appropriately and to ‘participate’ meaningfully in a democracy. Class resistance, especially social protests, are therefore stifled by being **represented as** ~~dated~~ outdated, backward and driven by individual and party political criminal agendas rather than any meaningful resistance to a macro-economic structure.

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The aim of this work, therefore, was to **demonstrate how** these two interpretive repertoires are taken up and reproduced in the talk of two South Africans. More specifically, the work aimed to demonstrate how the interpretive repertoires construct a psychologised, self-actualised, socially compassionate subject whose (noble) goals are contribute to South Africa’s development; but which ultimately serves to stifle calls for class resistance and structural change. Before we proceed, however, it is perhaps worth reflecting on the various ways in which class has been dealt with in psychology and justify why the analysis of talk provides us with interesting insights into the study of class.

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## Class, psychology and talk

Mainstream psychology has mostly assumed that classes are distinguishable, for example, the poor, working and middle classes have clearly defined material boundaries; that people from different classes perceive and think differently, which may be influenced by their class positions (see for example, Kraus, Piff & Keltner, 2009; Kraus, Côté & Keltner, 2010); that the boundaries between classes are permeable (upward and downward mobility is possible); and that there are psychological impacts related to class position, for example, [that](#) living in poverty influences psychological outcomes (Haushofer, 2013). A growing body of literature has also focused on the relationship between inequalities (not just poverty versus wealth) [and/or](#) mental health indicators (Melzer, Fryers & Jenkins, 2004). Class also features in the different ‘modalities’ of psychological intervention, for example, therapy (Fouad & Brown, 2000, Kim & Cardemil, 2012), coping and resilience (Buckner, Mezzacappa & Beardsley, 2003) and, perhaps more insidiously, how the poor could think and act their way out of poverty (consider, for example, Corley’s contentious research on the 20 habits that separate the rich from the poor) (Corley, 2009). There are two major problems with the way in which class has been written into mainstream psychology.

Firstly, despite psychology’s acknowledgment of poverty and class as an important consideration (see Carr & Sloan, 2003), sometimes even [misappropriating a language of class](#) (Augoustinous, 2009); the discipline has largely ignored the structural determinants of class inequality (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Vera & Speight, 2003) and [psychology](#) has often reinforced psychologised stereotypes of what it means to be poor or middle class (Bramel & Friend, 1981), for example, poverty is often framed “as personal failure and wealth as a personal achievement” (Bullock & Limbert, 2009, p.220). Calls for the structural determinants of class-based power to be made more overt have permeated various strands of psychology. However, very little psychological research has focused on revealing class-based power and even less work has been done in relation to *development* in the Global South (with a

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few exceptions see, for example, Kumar & Burman [2009] who edited a special edition of the Journal of Health Management that focused on critical/subaltern perspectives on the UN MDGs). The second issue relates to the assumption that both 'class' and its psychological 'inner world' correlates can be objectively measured and studied dispassionately to explain the psychology of class (Argyle, 1994). While attempts at understanding the 'psychological' role in 'class' may be a worthwhile pursuit, what is missing is how representations of class appear and how they are managed in everyday interactions.

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A turn to talk, therefore, offers the opportunity to understand how class is enacted in the context of everyday conversation. It moves us away from the assumption that language is transparent and conveys 'truths' how people 'think' about class; ~~but arguing~~ that language is used to produce and reproduce subject positions (Davis & Harre, 1990, Edwards & Potter, 1992) in the contexts of everyday talk. In other words, notions of class are assumed to be constructed through talk and talk is not necessarily a neutral device that reflects ideas about class.

We also assume that participants adopt subject positions and draw on strategies to introduce, account and manage those positions in relation to talk about class. While there is some agency in adopting and manoeuvring between subject positions, those positions are limited to what is available within a particular interpretive repertoire (Edley, 2001). We will demonstrate in this analysis, for example, that within a rights-based interpretive repertoire, speakers find it difficult to position themselves as self-actualised, hardworking and politically astute. Importantly, subject positions sometimes rub contradict each other and represent 'ideological dilemmas' that speakers attempt to navigate. In this analysis, for example, we will attempt to show how 'agency' becomes contested and represents one such ideological dilemma.

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We also draw on previous works that have highlighted how *common sense* accounts of class manifests in interactions (for example, Whitehead, 2013, Walkerdine, 2003, Stuber, 2006) and how alternative accounts, for example, resistance to capitalist ideologies and calls for structural economic reform are suppressed. Propped up by the disciplinary foci of psychology and ‘psy’ more generally (Rose, 1999), this power differential can also be thought of as a form of governmentality that produces modes of subjectivity that govern how people (poor people in particular) should think and behave in terms of being a good citizen. We were particularly interested in exploring how, in the context of everyday interaction, common sense ‘truths’ about class are produced and reproduced, who can lay claim to particular kinds of development modalities (*how* South Africa should develop), which authorities can legitimately speak on behalf of the poor and how these modalities produce a neoliberal subject that fits in with a psychologised (De Vos, 2012) discourse of development while stifling class resistance.

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## Methods

The study used a purposive approach to identify the text on which our analysis is based. Based on the two frustrations outlined in the introduction of this paper, we were interested in finding an information rich case that highlighted how South Africans talk of class in natural interactions. The selected text was a 12 minute and 3 second audio discussion on a national radio programme that stemmed from a disagreement between two South Africans on the meaning of Mandela Day. One of the participants (hereafter referred to as participant X) was the chairperson of an ANC branch who had written about his discontent about Mandela Day activities in a national newspaper. The other participant (A) is a presenter on a national radio programme. The newspaper article by X argued that volunteer activities, encouraged by Mandela Day, such as painting the walls of schools and giving out second hand clothing to orphanages allow the middle class to feel better, but do not address economic inequality or social justice and therefore maintain the status quo. Participant A took offence to these views as he was a supporter of Mandela Day activities and, in particular, has been involved in the

Commented [CG19]: I'm not sure about the rationale for the study and whether the narrative about 'frustrations' works. What about using a selected example of how South Africans talk about class in a 'natural' interaction to examine /identify /illustrate which discourses (Int Reps?) are drawn on and mobilised in these accounts? Decide whether this is an inductive or deductive approach.

building of a school hall in a low income area. Participant X is a black African male and participant A is a white male.

The discussion was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, it represented a 'natural' interaction between two speakers and was not contrived or directed by a researcher, for example, in a research interview. It could be argued, however, that the interview was contrived in that it was a pre-planned radio discussion with an interviewer (A) and interviewee (X). We acknowledge this and indeed take the subject positions related to professional roles as part of the analysis (akin to Goffman's 'footing'); but the talk was still 'natural' within the parameters of a radio discussion. Secondly, it was one of few public discussions that foregrounded class as opposed to any other social asymmetries, particularly race that tends to dominate discussions in South Africa. Thirdly, the discussion received extensive subsequent media and social network attention, perhaps because, as some commentators noted, it summed up the major disagreements about class in South Africa. The discussion was downloaded as a podcast from the radio website and transcribed using a modified Jefferson method (Jefferson, 2004). It should be noted that although the original newspaper article and the subsequent media responses were not used in the data presented in this paper, they did inform some of our thinking about class. The data were analysed using a [form of](#) discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992) with a special focus on identifying subject positions (Edley, 2001) evoked in the discussion. It is important to note that our analysis was not limited to the interaction (as perhaps some [forms/genres](#) of conversation analysis would advocate) but our assumption was that talk reflects broader discourses of class-based formations (akin to Omi & Winant's, 1994 [analysis of](#) race formations). In this sense, "it is impossible to understand social structure if we do not understand social interaction" (Pascale, 2008, p348) and vice versa.

**Commented [CG20]:** Edley is good on distinguishing between IRs and discourses and subject positions, as is Wetherell et al 'Discourse as Data' text. This is another possible place where this distinction could be clarified. Having defined IRs and discourses earlier in the paper, this section would be concerned with how you identify the distinction between IRs and discourses in your analysis.

## Findings

Extract one is taken from the beginning of the interview where participant A introduces the context of the discussion, that is, he represents himself as-is unhappy with X's perspective on Mandela Day as outlined in his newspaper article. A initially takes on a relatively professional tone in keeping with his role as presenter and welcomes X, "X nice talking to you and good morning". Similarly, X in keeping with his role as 'guest' ~~and~~ thanks A for having him on the show. X is then called on to account for his position. The extract foregrounds an overarching discourse of development that emphasizes, first and foremost, who needs to change (develop). It sets up and reinforces a division that suggests that the poor black African majority-~~black African~~, votes for the ANC and are in (material) need; and the middle class represents everyone else who presumably do not vote for the ANC and help (or are obliged to help) the poor. In addition, the extract presents and reinforces two interpretive repertoires about *how* South Africa should develop and, more specifically, what Mandela Day should represent. To remind the reader participant A (white male) is the radio presenter and participant X (black African male) wrote the initial article.

**Commented [CG21]:** Throughout the analysis, this wording would be more appropriate for a discourse analysis of this kind, that adopts a broadly social constructionist approach.

**Commented [CG22]:** Where is this in the extract, and how is a discourse different from an Int Rep?

### Extract 1

- 1 A: On Tuesday [name of newspaper] had an article (.) that was written by an ANC branch  
 2 member and it was entitled an insult to Madiba (.) and it sort of sang Nelson Mandela's  
 3 praises which was fair enough I think most people would (.) agree with that one. But he also  
 4 had a dip about what he called cosmetic and insulting (.) activities, cosmetic charity and PR  
 5 activities playing to the gallery while failing to change the world. Now somebody who's using  
 6 the platform that I enjoy on [name of radio station] to try and (.) finish (.) a school hall in  
 7 Thokoza on Mandela Day, I took exception to that and I replied to his article. He's asked for  
 8 (.) a right of reply so pleasure to welcome the chairman (.) of the ANC [name of branch]  
 9 branch. Interesting we were there yesterday (.) X nice talking to you and good morning.
- 10 X: Good morning and thanks for (.) having me.
- 11 A: Yes indeed (.) Please explain your article (.) cause cause (.) I took exception to it, considering  
 12 that we are involved in (.) in projects for Mandela Day that you seem to be criticising.
- 13 X: Yup (.) maybe firstly I'm I'm just - this is my personal opinion so I'm not  
 14 representing any party.
- 15 A: I see (1.0) okay fair enough

16 X: Ya (.) the point I'm making is that (1.0) Mandela Day has been reduced to (1.0) a day  
 17 where people (.) do things that make them (.) sleep at night (.) you know (.) more than making  
 18 those other people to sleep at night (.) so what I'm saying is (.) you go there (.) you distribute  
 19 these dirty clothes to this orphanage and you come back and you feel so good that you've (.)  
 20 done (.) something. I'm saying that that is not the ideal that (.) Mandela: (.) fought for. If I  
 21 celebrate (.) somebody else's birthday and I'm claiming that I'm celebrating that person's  
 22 ideal: (.) then I must first ask the question (.) what are those - that person's ideals. What is it  
 23 that I must continue from where he has ended? And Mandela's ideals like I've explained in  
 24 the article (.) are more than just what we are doing (1.0) and therefore (.) if someone is  
 25 building a good school in Limpopo because you have seen that in Limpopo people are  
 26 schooling under the trees and that is - if that is a big project then it must be applauded (.) but  
 27 I'm talking about (.) all of us must push (1.0) for (.) a better ideal for this day (.) because the  
 28 majority of what they do is just charity (.) it doesn't change the people's lives. It is blasting  
 29 and patronising the poor (.) nothing is changing and we know that Mandela fought for a  
 30 change (.) he didn't fight (.) for a status quo (1.0) where a (.) a particular race (.) or class (.) or  
 31 gender (.) or sex: (.) oppresses the other .

Within the [discourse of development-discourse](#), both participants draw on common sense notions of class and race in South Africa, that is, there is a [distinguishable middle class](#) who help (or are obliged to help) through Mandela Day activities; and there is a [black African poor](#) who are in need of material help. Both participants slip easily between terms such as 'helping' and 'poverty', make reference to examples of extreme need - an orphanage or a school where learners are being taught outdoors under trees and make reference to the geographic locations that represent low income areas such as Thokoza (a notoriously impoverished black African township) and Limpopo (a resource poor province that has experienced a number of challenges in education).

While the two speakers both agree that the poor are in need of material help, two interpretive repertoires are produced about *how* South Africa should develop – one that emphasizes volunteerism, agency and the idea that those more fortunate [can make a small difference](#) (agency interpretive repertoire adopted by A) and one that calls for more radical economic and structural reforms as well as larger scale projects (rights-based interpretive repertoire adopted by X). Both speakers use schools as examples, but X wants new schools built by large businesses in impoverished contexts, for example, where children are learning under trees. However, A suggests that individuals [can make a difference](#) through, for example, volunteering to help to build school halls. What is also at stake within these two interpretive repertoires are moral claims to Nelson Mandela's values. X draws on

Commented [CG23]: Where and how in the extract is this group classed (and are they racialised)?

Commented [CG24]: Ditto – ok this point is made below.

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Commented [CG26]: ditto

notions of Mandela as a radical freedom fighter who fought for larger structural reform in keeping with earlier historical narratives of Mandela's life, while A draws on notions of Mandela as caring and compassionate and making a difference in individual's lives in keeping with later constructions of Mandela in post-Apartheid South Africa.

What is interesting is that both speakers appear to have the concerns of the poor at heart and both appear to hold Nelson Mandela (and his 'values') in high regard, logically there is clearly a place for both positions in South Africa, that is, one that calls for both structural change and one that volunteerism that relies on individual agency; BUT the two positions are constituted as still appear polarized and hostile.

**Commented [CG27]:** are these '2 positions' the same as the agency and rights-based Int reps mentioned in the above para? Because the paper goes on to talk about subject positions, I don't think it's helpful to refer to these as 'positions'. It's almost like this is closer to a rhetorical analysis of positions taken in an argument/debate, following Billig, which is a rather different approach.

The speakers adopt different subject positions within these interpretive repertoires. In introducing the discussion, participant A takes up a particular kind of middle class subject position by stating that he is helping to finish build a school hall in a low income area (line 7) on Mandela Day. His use of words like "try" and "finish" suggests that others had not tried and had not finished a school hall in this particular government school (line 6) and that he and others were stepping in to help. He goes on to indicate that he is privileged to enjoy a platform to do this as a presenter on a national radio station (presumably his platform allows him to source funding and volunteers to complete the project). X, however, aligns himself with the black African poor. By referring to 'people' and 'those other people', X differentiates between two groups of people – the poor and the middle class. X further distances himself from the middle class (and their actions) by emphasizing 'you' when referring to Mandela Day activities, for example, "you go there (.) you distribute these dirty clothes to this orphanage and you come back an you feel so good that you've (.) done (.) something..." (lines 18-20) and later by referring to 'they' when referring to "because the majority of what they do is just charity (.) it doesn't change the people's lives" (line 28). X invokes images of continued struggle by using phrases like "Mandela fought" (line 20, 29) and "we must push" (line 27).

**Commented [CG28]:** How is this classed in the extract?

A second interesting observation is how X distances his views from any political party. Following the greetings and introductory remarks, X states that the views he is about to express are his personal opinions that do not represent those of “any political party”, that is, by implication, the ANC (line 14). A ~~is~~ initially appears to be surprised by this statement (he responds by saying “I see” followed by a one second pause,) perhaps because X wrote the article explicitly precisely in his capacity as the chairperson of an ANC branch. However, A accepts Xs position by stating ‘okay fair enough’ and, in so doing, invites him to continue. What is interesting is that X was not directly invited to discuss his party political views. X was introduced by A as the chairperson of an ANC branch but nonetheless he felt the need to distanced himself from this party political position upfront nonetheless. By distancing himself from party political views and affiliations the fact that he is a leader in the ANC, X begins his argument by appealing to his status as an individual ordinary South African-ness, which, given which ANC branch he is ‘representing’, is black African and poor. We will return to the conflation of race, class and politics in extract two but for now, the point is that both speakers appear to be positioning themselves within a class formation that appear to be interwoven with race and party politics.

**Commented [CG29]:** ‘Felt the need’ implies some internal state which is the opposite to what you would expect in a discourse analysis

**Commented [CG30]:** Where does he do this in the extract? ‘this is my personal opinion?’ is that what’s going on there?

**Commented [CG31]:** He can’t both distance himself from the ANC branch and represent himself as linked to it, maybe reword this bit

Participant X introduces a motive for the middle class’ ‘superficial’ activities by suggesting that Mandela Day activities allow the middle class to sleep better at night but those activities do little to alter address the status quo (Lines 19 and 20). Here, X is drawing on the notion of ‘white guilt’, that is, that the white minority did not give up much (in fact, appear to be better off economically) after apartheid but engage in activities on Mandela Day to appease that guilt and, therefore, sleep at night after engaging in Mandela Day activities. X also offers an argument that draws on universal notions of social justice and ‘change’ that Mandela supposedly stood for, when he states that Mandela Day “doesn’t change the people’s lives it’s blasting and patronising the poor (.) nothing is changing and we know that Mandela fought for a change (.) he didn’t fight (.) for a status quo” (lines 29-31).

**Commented [CG32]:** A refers to ‘cosmetic’ in the extract, where is ‘superficial’?

**Commented [CG33]:** Add ref to this concept?

What this common sense account of class does, however, is to suppress alternative discourses about class and race in South Africa. It is feasible, ~~for example,~~ that the answer to inequality in South Africa is perhaps more radical than ~~that to which what X alludes to,~~ ~~such as for example,~~ wealth redistribution or the nationalization of land and banks that many had hoped for in the transition to post-apartheid South Africa. It is also possible for South Africans to volunteer their time to social justice movements or that the middle class could volunteer in poor, white communities. It is feasible that help could be in terms of ~~improving~~ developing critical consciousness among the poor and not limited to material help. It is also feasible that both the middle class and poor ~~people~~ could be volunteering in their 'own' communities or that the poor could volunteer to help the middle class (for example, to help them be better, less greedy people). Nowhere is it formalised that Mandela Day should entail the middle class assisting the black African poor materially. Yet these alternative discourses are virtually absent in the opening lines of the discussion, ~~as~~ both speakers quickly move into a discussion about how the black African poor should be helped materially and adopt class subject positions in relation to that ~~scenario~~.

In extract two, we see how ~~the two subject positions~~ crystallise as the two speakers interact more intensely. The traditional interviewer and guest roles have been replaced by vociferous debate on a more personal level. We also see the emergence of an ~~ideological dilemma~~ in relation to democratic agency. While X attempts to distance himself from party politics, in extract two A brings Xs party affiliation back into the discussion. We pick up the exchange during a heated interaction (approximately six minutes and 30 seconds into the discussion) when the two speakers had been interrupting each other.

**Commented [CG34]:** Specify what these are – are they subject positions , or positions in a rhetorical debate?

**Commented [CG35]:** Expand a bit on what this involves/entails and how it appears in the extract

## Extract 2

- 1 A: Alright you=  
 2 X: =Mandela fought =  
 3 A: = Okay, okay you've put your point very well you see but you  
 4 see you demand the eradication (.) you say people should be demanding the eradication of

5 corruption (.) of crime (.) of poverty (.) of unemployment (.) etcetera (.) etcetera (.) etcetera.  
6 You see but your party has been in power: (.) for eighteen years (.) and you have the vote (.)  
7 so surely if you're unhappy with a lot of those things, you vote out the government in power.  
8 Isn't that what Mandela did (.) bring democracy (.) so it seems to me that – and (.) and you've  
9 pointed out you're talking as an individual

10 X: Ya

11 A: But somebody who's also the chairman of an A.N.C branch (.) to be criticising individuals for  
12 doing terrific work all be it on a small level, not on a on a macro level (.) don't you  
13 understand why people take exception to that?

Commented [CG36]: Albeit?

14 X: No. People can take exception, and I think it's a (.) a power of opinion

15 A: Yes

16 X: It's there when people take on a (1.0) an exception to my opinion (.) but the point I'm making  
17 (.) the point I'm making (.) is that people who can change the wealth of this country (.) is not  
18 in the ANC (.) is in (.) is in us (.) is in everybody else (.) and those people must contribute,  
19 that I'm not talking on behalf of the ANC (.) I'm just those are my opinion =

Despite the fact that X represented mentioned that the views represented-expressed in the discussion  
answere his personal opinions and not those emerging from his role as chair of an-the ANC branch's in

extract one, A draws attention to the fact that X is in fact a chairperson of an ANC branch. Notice

how A emphasizes the individual letters of the ANC in line 11 to draw attention to this fact. X is

called on to account for his lack of acknowledgement of why “people would take exception to that”.

In addition, despite the fact that X did not explicitly mention corruption, unemployment or crime up

until this point; participant A positions X (together with the poor) as ‘demanding’ the eradication of

these phenomena. His use of ‘etcetera’ three times suggest an extended list of demands made by poor

South Africans who vote for the ANC. His tone with pauses between each ‘etcetera’ also suggests that

these demands have become tiresome and perhaps undeserving. A draws attention to how ‘others’

who do “terrific work all be it on a small level not on a on a macro level” (line 12). Interestingly, not

one is X does not call on -A called on to account for his party political affiliation, which implies that

A is using this discursive strategy as a means of criticising X and undermining the validity of his

views.

Commented [CG37]: I think what's going on here may be that A is mobilising X's role in the ANC to try and undermine the validity of his views, by politicising them. This forces X to represent his views as 'my personal opinion'. Maybe reword 1<sup>st</sup> sentence.

Commented [CG38]: Albeit?



Moreover, X (and by implication the poor) is positioned as having 'the vote' (line 6) but foolishly continues to vote for the ANC. A's use of the phrase 'having the vote' alludes to the fact that the political landscape in South Africa is largely dependent on the party for whom the poor vote (given that the poor are in the numerical majority). Poor black Africans are represented as who now have an opportunity to change their circumstances but are not doing so because they continue to vote for the ANC. A argues draws attention to the fact that it is individuals' choice to vote for a party and that he cannot understand how the poor continue to vote for the ANC when it has failed in its service delivery promises. He argues that "your" party (line 6) has been in power for the past 18 years and that "you have the vote" to vote government out of power but that poor black people (that "you" represent) continue to vote the ANC into power. A then constructs a contrast between draws on the seemingly irrefutable notion that democracy is what Nelson Mandela fought for (line 8), rather than demanding the large scale structural and economic reform called for by that X calls for. Participant X's 'demands' for economic and structural reform are resisted through a call for the -to individual right to vote because, of course, this is what A constitutes suggests Mandela as having fought for.

Commented [CG39]: Isn't this use of 'you' heavily racialised?

X finds it very difficult to counter these arguments. He resorts to a rather vague answer in line 14 "No. People can take exception, and I think it's a (.) a power of opinion" and clumsily tries to deflect the discussion back to his earlier arguments in favour of economic and structural reforms. He suggests that the wealth of South Africa does not lie in the hands of the ANC but is in 'us' and 'everybody' without actually specifying who 'us' and 'everybody' is. X includes himself in the change with the word 'us' but then this slips and X excludes himself when he says 'those people'. Again, X states that he is not talking on behalf of the ANC and that "those are my opinion", reverting to his earlier positioning. (?)

Commented [CG40]: Isn't X here trying to unsettle A's divisive and dismissive use of the Othering term 'you' here by drawing all South Africans together into the more inclusive 'us'?

X is positioned by A, therefore, as having views that are inherently party political, and compelled to distance himself from this. He is represented as having unrealistic expectations about structural and

economic reform; as continually ‘demandings’ change through social protests; and as blindly votinges for a party that has failed the poor for close to two decades. In contrast, A’s account we see the production of a self-actualised middle class subject who is hardworking and does “terrific work”; is socially compassionate, recognisinges social issues beyond themselves and willingly givinges of their time and resources to projects such as Mandela Day. This middle class subject is also constructed as ~~is~~ task centred, by focusing on making a difference on one task on the “micro level” that will make an immediate difference in people’s lives; asean engaginge in development activities independent of party politics; and as useings their democratic right to vote appropriately, and is contributing to development of the poor because the government is failing in this regard. The agency interpretive repertoire, therefore, produces powerful universal ‘psychologized truths’ about what it means to be a responsible and self-actualised South African citizen who sees beyond themselves, which is very difficult to argue against. This figure is classed and racialised.

**Commented [CG41]:** This is a key innovative aspect of your analysis and I think it could be emphasised more.

It could be argued that an ideological dilemma is constructed around which kinds of ‘agency’ holds more power in talk about South Africa’s development. A shows psychologized agency by helping to make a small difference in people’s lives in the ways mentioned above. X, however, also show agency in positioning his views about development as independent of party political affiliation. In addition, agency is involved in organising and participating in social movements and social protests, in lobbying to build bigger schools, and it could be argued that much agency is involved in voting for the ANC – the poor do not find the opposition parties’ policies appealing, are happy with the ANC’s policies, but protest against those implementing the ANC’s policies. Yet these forms of agency are not seen as credible in the agency interpretive repertoire. In extract three below, we see how this ideological dilemma plays itself out and how a more psychologized notion of agency stifles any other forms of agency.

**Commented [CG42]:** If this is a discourse analysis, surely the point isn’t whether A or X ‘show’ agency, but how they each draw on particular discourses (or Int reps) around agency and rights that constitute and position classed and racialised South African subjects in specific ways. And these subjects are constituted in opposition to one another – the caring helpful, self-actualising white middle class thoughtful voter contrasted with the foolish helpless black African poor who need their help. A mobilises these discourses (or Int Reps), in which these subject positions are embedded, to marginalise Xs views and to undermine their credibility. Agency is relevant here because the ‘caring’ white middle class SA subject is constituted as agentic, and the ‘foolish’ poor black south Africans as passive. I’m still not sure how this links to the ideological dilemma – or quite what the ID involves. Reword this para I think to clarify this

### Extract 3

- 1 X: What difference am I making because at night those people must eat (1.0) I'm saying if if  
 2 that causes a big - like I say if you go down, you go to this place you build a bigger school  
 3 because you see them (.) they don't have school whatever (.) that is a contribution (.) but I'm  
 4 saying (.) the majority of our people are more entrapped into making them feel good (.)  
 5 because they've done something and nobody is questioning the sustainability of that  
 6 something that they've done (.)
- 7 A: But what's wrong with feeling good X?
- 8 X: [inaudible mumbling]
- 9 A: I mean you can still question (.) I mean anybody but an idiot (.) would not be concerned about  
 10 the inequalities in the country (.) alright. Anybody but an idiot of course every time you - but  
 11 to say therefore (.) that this is a PR seeking exercise (.) because you actually want to do  
 12 something (.) to help the immediate needs of people in trouble (.) that's very offensive X (.)  
 13 they are not mutually exclusive (.) the two views (.) surely ?
- 14 X: No (.) the point I'm making A (.) and I'll emphasise it (.)

Similar to the previous extracts, X and A continue to take up different subject positions in relation to South Africa's development. The two speakers maintain their common sense class-race positions and continue to respectively draw on the agency and rights interpretive repertoires. X criticizes the middle class' activities by suggesting that the middle class become 'entrapped' (line 4) into wanting to feel good - suggesting a degree of **powerlessness and thoughtlessness** about their involvement in Mandela Day activities. Earlier he offered a similar critique by suggesting Mandela Day allows the middle classes to 'sleep **at night**' to **appease their guilt**.

**Commented [CG43]:** And lack of agency?

**Commented [CG44]:** And this is challenging the agency discourse / Int Rep which constitutes them as 'caring'

In response, in line 7 A questions "But what's wrong with feeling good X?" A calls on X to account for his position as antithetical to what might appear to be a basic element of human existence (wanting to feel good). Positive psychological and emotional functions are constructed as the normative standard from which Xs arguments are evaluated. Again, X finds it difficult to respond and mumbles something that is inaudible. A further attacks X's suggestions about the middle class not considering inequality when A frustratingly states in line 4 that "(.) I mean anybody but an idiot (.) would not be concerned about the inequalities in the country". A's reference to 'idiot' implies that he has considered inequality when engaging Mandela Day activities and that he feels offended that X would imply that. X, again, finds it very difficult to counter these arguments. However, for the first time the

possible commensurability of the two positions is introduced. In lines 12 and 13, A states that “they not they they’re not mutually exclusive: (.) the two views: (.) surely ?” to which X agrees in line 14. However, the discussion continues and ends with the two speakers agreeing to disagree.

Taken together, the three extracts demonstrate just how powerful the agency interpretive repertoire is in the talk of South Africans. The image of a self-actualised, caring, hardworking South African subject who gives freely of their time and votes sensibly provides an appealing vision for how South Africa should develop. X is compelled to denied the option speaking as an individual independent of party political affiliation and is represented as demanding, unrealistic and politically uneducated. Importantly, A’s agency is constructed as more powerful than X’s agency related to structural reform and class resistance.

Commented [CG45]: And this is a classed and racialised figure

Commented [CG46]: Not quite – see my point/comment on p.18. it’s not about A’s agency so much as the work that these discourses /int reps around agency and rights do in this talk

## Discussion

This study has foregrounded class as an important feature of talk about development in South Africa. It demonstrated how the common sense conflation of race, class and party politics serves to create a division between two (class) subject positions even when the speakers agree that the two positions are not mutually exclusive. Importantly, the agency based interpretive repertoire<sup>s</sup> served to resist and stifle talk about class resistance by drawing on seemingly incontestable ‘psychologized truths’ about what it means to be self-actualized, responsible citizens. The study builds on previous studies by focusing on the (re)production of class based power issues in everyday interactions suggesting, at least in part, that the production and enactment of class subjectivities are much more complicated and fluid than what is typically represented in structuralist accounts of class and their psychological correlates. The study also contributes to a growing body of critical psychological literature that focuses on the intersectionality (Cole, 2009, Yuval-Davis, 2006) of class and other social asymmetries in interactional settings (Whitehead, 2013, Stuber, 2006, Walkerdine, 2003). Importantly, it contributes to a few studies that have paid specific critical attention to issues of development and

Commented [CG47]: Not sure this is the best way of putting it to get the key points across

Commented [CG48]: refs

underdevelopment in the Global South (Dominguez-Whitehead & Whitehead, 2014, Kumar & Burman, 2009).

One of the interesting findings of this analysis was that the two subject positions remained polarized throughout the discussion. We would argue that it is precisely the common sense class and race division that could explain why the two subject positions remained so distinct and intact. Because there is such a strong overlap between class and race in South Africa -with the two subject positions presented in this paper mapping this - and that historically there has been so little upward mobility for the majority of poor black Africans; it is difficult to imagine alternative discourses in the current economic and political climate that could straddle the two subject positions. However, if we assume that the two positions represent different parts of an ideological dilemma (particularly in relation to agency), then when taken together play off against each other to produce a rich narrative of class, race and politics in South Africa.

**Commented [CG49]:** are you using this to refer to the views of A and X? this isn't the usual use of the concept of subject positions and needs to be clarified I think

**Commented [CG50]:** clarify

The agency interpretive repertoire intersects with the many of the core tenets of mainstream psychology such as self-actualisation, social compassion, hard work, task orientation and so forth. The psychologization of how South Africa should develop in everyday interaction can be thought of as a form of governmentality that is reinforced by and reinforces the discipline of psychology.

Historically, psychology has propped up the agency interpretive repertoire through the production of self-actualized individuals who are concerned about inequality and to a large extent this remains intact. However, psychology in post-apartheid South Africa has made attempts to reconfigure to be more 'relevant' (Macleod, 2004) for the majority of South Africans and the infusion of community, liberation, critical and Marxist psychology into the academic discourse to provide alternative accounts for the role of Psychology. Yet, these too have sometimes been guilty of producing uni-dimensional accounts of class and psychology that reproduce the status quo. An example of this is the notion that we need more 'psychology' in poor 'communities' as they have been typically neglected from a

**Commented [CG51]:** this is a big concept to introduce at this late stage. In fact, this last para seems to be about a slightly different issue and could be omitted. Reading the final para below though, is this para arguing that the agency int rep advocates a need for psychological 'help' for the poor??

mental health perspective, a view often upheld by the professional bodies that represent psychology in South Africa. More of psychology in poor settings, it is assumed, will help South Africa heal from its historical traumas and improve their mental health. However, there is very little critical interrogation of what is 'psychology' and 'community' in the first place or whether we need 'psychology' at all in poor communities (Palmary & Barnes, forthcoming). The need for more institutionalised forms of psychology in poor contexts becomes a noble and worthwhile cause. More importantly, as the analysis in this article highlights, the production of an agency interpretive repertoire may suppress any meaningful resistance to exploitative capitalist ideologies. It means the demand for mainstream psychology with a new set of poor clients can continue with very little resistance.

## Conclusion

After twenty years of democracy, poor South Africans are materially no better off than they were during apartheid. The agency interpretive repertoire constitutes a powerful set of discursive practices to explain why this is so – the [black](#) poor are [represented as](#) demanding, unrealistic and continue to vote for a problematic political party – and suppresses alternative interpretive repertoires about [classed and racialised](#) resistance in South Africa. It is this kind of [discourse/ Int Rep that is mobilised by mind set that](#) the anonymous South African referred to in the opening quotation of this paper. The agency interpretive repertoire also [mirrors and creates a disciplinary need for](#) psychology in poor settings. [While analyses of class remains a noble cause, we need to be constantly vigilant about the assumptions of agency interpretive repertoires within mainstream psychology and popular discourses.](#) It is hoped that this work will stimulate more work and discussion on class and psychology in South Africa.

Commented [CG52]: Does it? I didn't get this from the data, or it could be argued more clearly

Commented [CG53]: Not very clear – could be a stronger final sentence

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<sup>i</sup> We use the official 'race' nomenclature in post-apartheid South Africa, that is, white, black African, Indian and coloured. In no way do we support the idea that there are biological race differences but we use the categories to make illustrative points about how 'race' is enacted with class in interactions.

<sup>ii</sup> We mostly use the categories of *poor* and *middle class* based on the categorisation of groups socio economic indicators based on Rothman (2005). We do realise that these categories are not exhaustive for this analysis. However, they do represent the two socio economic groups where much of the contestation of how South Africa should develop is evident.

<sup>iii</sup> Apartheid was a system of racial segregation that was enforced legally between 1948 and 1994. Apartheid classified all citizens according to one of the following 'race' groups - white, Indian, coloured and black.