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Trouble ahead, trouble behind: perceptions of social mobility and economic inequality in Mount Frere, Eastern Cape and Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract

This paper investigates young black South Africans' perceptions of social mobility and economic inequality, using targeted ethnographic interviews in two non-major metropolitan areas of South Africa, and compares these with previous research in metropolitan Cape Town. The two areas studied were the rural communities around Mount Frere (in the Eastern Cape) and the medium-sized town of Newcastle (in KwaZulu-Natal). Interviewees in Newcastle had similar conceptualisations of the distribution of income in South Africa to those in Cape Town, while interviewees in Mount Frere differed. The latter seemed to base their perceptions on their experiences outside of Mount Frere and were much less focused on the continued association of race and class than those from Cape Town and Newcastle. Respondents in Mount Frere and Newcastle agreed with the Cape Town interviewees about the importance of education for getting ahead, but they also stressed the necessity of political connections and highlighted the danger of drugs and alcohol for their mobility prospects. The interviews in Mount Frere and Newcastle additionally suggest the troubling possibility that a 'mobility trap' has developed in both areas.

Introduction

In a previous working paper, I examined perceptions of social mobility and economic inequality among black South Africans in the city of Cape Town (Telzak, 2012). Although Cape Town provides an important opportunity for studying social mobility in South Africa, Cape Town has a number of distinctive economic and demographic characteristics that may limit its relevance to the study of mobility in South Africa more generally. Whereas the majority of Cape Town residents are white or coloured and advantaged economically relative to most South Africans, the majority of South Africans are black and live in more

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economically tenuous conditions. The findings reported in Telzak (2012) may therefore have limited relevance to the rest of South Africa.

In July of 2012, I conducted a series of interviews in the rural areas surrounding Mount Frere (in the Eastern Cape) and in the mid-sized town of Newcastle (in KwaZulu-Natal) in order to begin to probe perceptions of mobility elsewhere in South Africa and to see whether these perceptions do in fact differ from those articulated by black individuals in Cape Town.

More than one-third (38 percent) of South Africa's population lives in what the South African government defines as rural areas (World Bank, 2012). These rural areas were intentionally underdeveloped during the early and mid-apartheid periods in order to provide a source of cheap labour for white-owned capital. Additionally, during this time, large numbers of poor black individuals were removed forcibly out of 'white' South African towns and farms into these areas. Now, two decades after South Africa's democratic transition, the rural population continues to lag behind the rest of South Africa in a number of key infrastructural and human-developmental indicators (du Toit *et al.*, 2007: 525).

The rural population surrounding Mount Frere—located in the former, primarily Xhosa homeland (or 'Bantustan') of Transkei—is among the starkest examples of this underdevelopment. Over 45 percent of those who lived in the greater Alfred Nzo District Municipality—the regional administrative body that includes the rural areas around Mount Frere—were illiterate in 2001 and unemployment reached nearly 68 percent of the population (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2005: 158; 164).

This underdevelopment has led to widespread poverty and malnutrition. In 2002 a survey of 733 households in the communities around Mount Frere was conducted by the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape. The survey found that 96 percent of households lived on less than R560 (about US$70) per month, the upper bound poverty line (du Toit, 2005: 9), compared to roughly 66 percent of those living in the Eastern Cape as a whole and 79 percent of those living in 'traditional areas' in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2012*a*: 11 and 13). Although many in Mount Frere have access to farmland—the PLAAS survey found that 87 percent of households in Mount Frere had access to cultivated land—the underdevelopment of rural areas ultimately limits the productivity of this land and individuals are thus only able to satisfy a fraction of their nutritional needs through farming. As a result, 83 percent of households surveyed by PLAAS reported not having enough to eat at some point during the previous year (du Toit, 2005: 10-11), and Mount Frere suffers from among the highest rates of child malnutrition in the Eastern Cape (Samson, 2002: 1158). Because of the

lack of economic opportunity and high rates of poverty in the rural Transkei, households often rely on remittances from relatives who have migrated to South Africa's urban or industrial centres and on generous, non-contributory old age pensions provided by the state (du Toit *et al.*, 2007; Ardington *et al.,* 2007: 1).

This underdevelopment unsurprisingly influences mobility prospects in rural South Africa. Because those in rural areas have limited access to human capital, financial assets, and infrastructure, there are few opportunities for economic mobility (Carter and May, 1999). The few opportunities that do exist in rural areas are generally concentrated in the public sector and captured by those with tertiary degrees (van der Berg *et al.*, 2002: 7 and 15). With little hope of economic advancement, many rural residents choose to migrate to urban areas in search of work.

There are, however, two major barriers to migration from rural to urban areas: the first is financial and the second is social. Many rural residents lack the financial means necessary to migrate to urban areas in search of work. In fact, there is strong evidence of a large uptick in labour-market migration among prime-age individuals after their households begin to receive South Africa's incredibly generous Old Age Pension (at more than 820 Rand per month in 2007, the Old Age Pension paid more than double the median per capita income of black Africans) (Ardington *et al.,* 2007; Posel *et al.,* 2006).

Meeting the financial constraints of migration, however, is not sufficient; job opportunities in urban areas are often reserved for those who have the requisite social capital. Thus, migration decisions, and successful relocation to urban areas, often depend more on access to existing migrant networks than on merit (see e.g., Baber, 1998: 216). As Seekings and Nattrass (2006: 284) conclude after their review of the limited literature available on rural-to-urban migration, 'The unemployed people who remain in rural areas … where there are few job opportunities [a group that Seekings and Nattrass label the 'underclass'] are probably those who lack the social capital to escape the constraints of local conditions' (Sharp and Spiegel, 1985; Murray, 1995; Nattrass, 2000; Klasen and Woolard, 2001).

Even if individuals are able to surmount these high barriers to migration, their opportunities for employment remain relatively low. Van der Berg *et al.* (2002: 17-32), who develop a model of the relative employment probabilities for black Africans from rural and urban areas, conclude that

> Most rural labour market participants would not be close to the front of the job queue in South Africa's urban labour markets. … Despite this, urban employment probabilities are still better than rural for

many of these people. Thus, the sheer desperateness of the rural milieu would appear to ensure that the very tough urban labour market remains an attractive option' (Van der Berg *et al.,* 2002: 32-33).

If Mount Frere typifies the underdevelopment and poverty of rural South Africa, Newcastle in many ways reflects the apartheid government's state-driven development efforts in South Africa's urban and peri-urban centres, where most of South Africa's population lives today. Throughout the 1970s, the apartheid government developed Newcastle's manufacturing sector in order to support the domestic iron and steel industries (Todes, 1997: 171). Newcastle's two largest townships—Madadeni, which was built for wealthier black Africans, and Osizweni, which was built for poorer Zulu migrants—provided labour for its smelting and forging industries, though most of the jobs in heavy industry were reserved for white men. With robust state support, Newcastle had become the largest commercial centre in northern KwaZulu-Natal by 1984 (Todes, 1997: 311; Hart, 2002: 140-141; Robbins *et al.,* 2004: 13).

However, with the contraction of the steel industry and deindustrialisation, the manufacturing base shifted towards primarily clothing and textile firms owned by Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China, who were aggressively courted by the Newcastle municipality (Todes, 1997: 256 and 270; Robbins *et al.,* 2004: 14-15). The arrival of the clothing and textile manufacturing firms presaged a fundamental shift in labour dynamics in Newcastle: as the almost exclusively male, heavy-industry labour force declined sharply in the early 1990s, the importance of female-dominated manufacturing jobs in the clothing and textile industry to the local economy grew substantially (Hart, 2002: 159-60). These jobs, however, in part because of intense competition from foreign companies, are often worse paying than their heavy industry counterparts and are currently under threat by the National Bargaining Council for paying significantly below the legal minimum wage (Hart, 2002: 165-6; Seekings and Nattrass, 2006).

The story of Newcastle's economic environment cannot be dissociated from the story of HIV/AIDS. Although Cape Town and the rural Eastern Cape are not immune to the ravages of the pandemic, KwaZulu-Natal has been particularly hard hit. HIV/AIDS has touched all aspects of South African society, upending livelihoods, families, and communities, and has disproportionately impacted the women, who account for 60 percent of HIV positive individuals in Sub-Saharan Africa and often serve as primary caregivers to their sick kin (Hunter, 2010: 3 and 6; Seekings and Nattrass, 2006: 333). The disease's broader significance for the local Newcastle economy, however, is less clear: As Hunter describes, in Mandeni, KwaZulu-Natal, an industrial town not too dissimilar from Newcastle, 'AIDS was little more than an inconvenient blip on the radar screens of most

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employers in the area. Especially in low-wage sectors such as clothing, hundreds of people stood at the factory gates ready to replace sick workers' (Hunter, 2010: 114).

Today, Newcastle is KwaZulu-Natal's third largest city with over 330,000 mostly Zulu residents, and manufacturing continues to dominate Newcastle's municipal economy,[1] although unemployment remains high, at over 37 percent in 2011 (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2005: 159; Newcastle Local Municipality, 2007: 20 and 31; Statistics South Africa, 2011: 20). Newcastle's industrial base has made the city a destination for migrants from rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal. However, declining employment and economic stagnation since the 1980s have severely limited the economic opportunities available to Newcastle residents, and by the 1990s black African individuals in Newcastle were making about a third less than those in other major metropolitan areas throughout KwaZulu-Natal. Consequently, migration pathways between Newcastle and larger metropolises, including Durban and Johannesburg, have developed (Todes, 1997: 287-330).

There is some evidence that there are differences in mobility prospects between rural and urban areas. Girdwood and Leibbrandt (2009: 5-6), for example, found that educational mobility, which is often used as a proxy for more economically meaningful measures of social mobility, is substantially lower in rural than in urban locations. The study of social mobility in South Africa, however, is limited, in no small part because of a lack of available data (Seekings and Nattrass, 2006: 264). Thus, there is no available literature on social mobility in South Africa that distinguishes between mobility prospects in large metropolitan areas, such as Cape Town, and smaller urban areas, including Newcastle. By comparing perceptions of mobility in Cape Town, Mount Frere, and Newcastle it is possible to begin to explore how mobility prospects and pathways to mobility may differ in rural, urban, and metropolitan areas throughout South Africa.

The rural population around Mount Frere and the urban population of Newcastle are located in a very different part of South African society compared to the black population of metropolitan Cape Town, which is demographically and economically unique for South Africa. These differences can be expected to influence how individuals perceive their economic environments and opportunities. In this paper, I thus explore how black individuals from both of these regions conceptualise economic inequality and social mobility in their own communities and in South Africa more generally through a series of interviews

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[1] Manufacturing comprised 58.3 percent of Newcastle's local municipal gross geographic product in 2004 (Newcastle Local Municipality, 2007: 20).

that I conducted in July of 2012. After discussing my methodology and briefly introducing the study's participants, I then explore the perceptions of inequality and mobility articulated by these respondents, focusing in particular on how their views compare to those expressed by the black Cape Townians in Telzak (2012).

Methodology

In order to develop a deeper understanding of perceptions of social mobility and economic inequality in South Africa, I conducted a series of fifteen in-depth ethnographic interviews using the interview instrument that I developed for the Cape Town interviewees (see Appendix A) during a ten-day visit to the rural communities around Mount Frere and a six-day visit to Newcastle. Though, unlike in Cape Town (where I was able to use the Cape Area Panel Study), neither Mount Frere nor Newcastle had a pre-existing dataset that could serve as a sampling frame, I nonetheless strove to interview a sample of individuals with diverse *mobility experiences* based on both economic background and outcome as described in Figure 1. Because the sampling methodology used in Mount Frere and Newcastle is less precise than that used in Cape Town, I pay less attention to the distinctions in the views among those in each of the four mobility categories during my analysis. However, by attempting to reproduce the sampling methodology used in Cape Town through purposive sampling, I was able to solicit a range of opinions representative of the broader Mount Frere and Newcastle populations.

I conducted nine interviews with individuals from Mount Frere in the Luyengweni Location and Sivumele Location. Because, as a number of studies have found, livestock ownership is used as the primary savings vehicle for households in Mount Frere and is highly correlated with average income (Samson, 2002: 1165; de Swardt, 2005: 49), the quantity and kinds of animals owned by households (in addition to other luxury goods, such as cars and tractors) were used as proxies for household wealth. Furthermore, because the vast majority of individuals with 'successful' outcomes either does not remain in Mount Frere or achieves this success through migration to South Africa's urban centres, I timed my visit to coincide with the winter break of South Africa's tertiary institutions and used tertiary enrolment as a proxy for successful outcomes, while unemployment was again used as a proxy for unsuccessful outcomes. There is no tertiary institution in Mount Frere; thus, those who had 'successful' outcomes have spent significant time outside of their rural communities and their views may thus have been shaped by these experiences.

	Unsuccessful Outcome *Proxy:* Unemployment or Underemployment	**Successful Outcome** *Proxy:* Employment or Tertiary Enrollment/ Completion
Disadvantaged *Proxy:* Lower Income Upbringing	CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2
Advantaged *Proxy:* Middle/Upper Income Upbringing (large livestock/luxury goods holdings or parents with middle/upper income jobs)	CATEGORY 3	CATEGORY 4

Figure 1: Conceptualisation of mobility experiences in Mount Frere and Newcastle

The interviews were set up by Thobani Ncapai, a fieldworker for the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town, who grew up in Mount Frere, and whose parents still live there. He also assisted in conducting the interviews (see Table 1). Ultimately, three of the nine interviewees were (approximately) from category 2 (MF-1, MF-3, and MF-4), two from category 4 (MF-2 and MF-5), one from category 1 (MF-6), and three from either category 1 or category 3 (MF-7, MF-8, and MF-9). Although category 3 was largely ignored in the Cape Town sample because there is little significant downward mobility for those near the *top* of the income distribution nationally (Seekings and Nattrass, 2006: 336), category 3 may be of more interest in rural settings because the rural elite is still relatively disadvantaged and thus, unlike the urban elite, may still lack the resources necessary to ensure successful outcomes for their children.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the Mount Frere interviewees

	Sex	Age	Background (Household Wealth)	Outcome (Employment/Educational Status)	Category Approximation (See Fig. 1)
MF-1	M	23	*Livestock:* 3 goats	Teaching part time at a primary school and pursuing a BA (when money is available) at UNISA*	Category 2
MF-2	M	20	*Livestock:* 39-43 cows, 103 goats, 1 sheep *Other:* 1 car and 1 tractor	Pursuing a BA in sciences at UFH**	Category 4
MF-3	F	23	*Livestock:* 4 donkeys	Pursuing a degree in educational development at Coastal College, Durban	Category 2
MF-4	M	20	*Livestock:* 3 goats	Pursuing a degree in agriculture at UFH**	Category 2
MF-5	M	22	*Livestock:* 7 cows, 7 goats, 14 sheep *Other:* 1 van and 1 tractor	Pursuing a degree in engineering at CPUT†	Category 4
MF-6	M	25	*Livestock:* 2 cows, 2 goats	Sometimes works teaching adults	Category 1
MF-7	F	20	*Livestock:* 4 cows, 11 sheep	Unemployed; Matric (grade 12)	Category 1 or 3
MF-8	F	23	*Livestock:* 5 cows, 6 goats	Unemployed; Grade 11 (failed grade 12 multiple times)	Category 1 or 3
MF-9	M	22	*Livestock:* 6 cows, 15 goats	In school, grade 10	Category 1 or 3

*The University of South Africa (UNISA) is Africa's largest university with seven regional centres throughout South Africa.
**University of Fort Hare.
†Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Interviewees ranged in age from 20-25, with a median age of 22. Two-thirds of the interviewees were male, while one-third was female. Finally, there was an oversampling of successful outcomes; five out of the nine interviewees were attending tertiary institutions at the time of the interviews, a disproportionately high number for such a poor area. Because these individuals had spent significant time outside of the Mount Frere area, an effort was made to solicit a broader range of individuals pursuing tertiary educations in order to determine which views reflected their experiences in Mount Frere and which views reflected their experiences elsewhere. Three of the nine interviews were conducted in Xhosa through a translator.

In Newcastle, I worked with a non-governmental, social development organisation with an extensive network of contacts in the Newcastle community—Khulisa Social Solutions—to solicit and conduct interviews. Over the course of six days, I conducted six interviews in the townships of Osizweni and Madadeni and in the city of Newcastle (see Table 2). There were an equal number of interviewees who could (approximately) be placed in each of the three mobility categories of interest. Because of the general lack of downward mobility among wealthier South Africans, category 3 was again disregarded in Newcastle, as it was in Cape Town. The interviewees ranged in age from 20-28, with a median age of 22.5 years old. Like in Mount Frere, two-thirds of the interviewees were male and one-third was female. All of the interviews were conducted in English.[2]

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the Newcastle interviewees

	Sex	Age	Background	Outcome (Employment/Educational Status)	Category Approximation (See Fig. 1)
NC-1	M	24	*Advantaged background:* Mother is a nurse and father is a pastor; attended private school and his family owns 2 cars	Graduated from UCT with a BA in economics	Category 4
NC-2	F	24	*Disadvantaged background:* Supports her two sisters (and their children) and lives with her grandfather	Passed matric and now works at a retail store in Newcastle	Category 2
NC-3	M	21	*Disadvantaged background:* Supports and lives with seven people (his uncle and aunt and their children, and his mother who doesn't work)	Works in the storeroom and in deliveries for an 'Asian' clothing factory in Newcastle	Category 2
NC-4	M	28	*Disadvantaged background:* Still lives at home in Madadeni	Grade 11 education and is currently doing 'piece jobs' (works up to 3 days a month)	Category 1
NC-5	M	21	*Disadvantaged background:* Mother is unemployed and two brothers are also unemployed	Passed grade 12 but just does 'piece jobs' as a gardener, but hasn't had a job since February	Category 1
NC-6	F	20	*Advantaged background:* Father is an HR manager and lives 'in town'	Student at the University of Pretoria, studying psychology	Category 4

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[2] NC-4 insisted on conducting the interview in English and without a translator, although he was much more comfortable speaking in Zulu than in English. Ultimately, I believe that NC-4 understood all of the questions that he was asked, although he may not have articulated his views as eloquently as he may have been able to in Zulu.

Although I sought to interview a group of individuals in both Mount Frere and Newcastle that was demographically similar to those whom I interviewed in Cape Town, the samples of interviewees in Mount Frere and Newcastle differ from the Cape Town sample in a number of important ways. The median age of the Cape Town interviewees (26 years old) was considerably higher than that of the Mount Frere and Newcastle samples (22 and 22.5 years old, respectively). Additionally, a much larger proportion of the Mount Frere and Newcastle samples had spent a significant period of time living in a different part of South Africa than those from Cape Town. Finally, the educational attainment of the Mount Frere and Newcastle samples was much higher than that of the Cape Town sample, although the opposite is probably true of the broader populations in these three regions. These demographic differences may make comparisons among the three samples difficult; however, by analysing these samples, it is possible to begin to probe how location shapes perceptions of social mobility in South Africa.

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) conceptualisation of Grounded Theory and Glasser's (1998) practical manual on the topic, *Doing Grounded Theory,* guided my analysis of the Mount Frere and Newcastle interviews. As mentioned above, Telzak (2012) focused extensively on how mobility experience shaped perceptions. However, I ultimately pay less attention to the often-subtle differences in views among members of the four different mobility categories because my sampling methodology in both Mount Frere and Newcastle was less precise and because the sample sizes in both locations were considerably smaller than in Cape Town. Additionally, Hunter's (2010) ethnography of HIV/AIDS in Mandeni—which found that views of love, sex, rights, and HIV/AIDS are deeply gendered—suggests that perceptions of economic opportunity may divide along gender lines. Because of the heavy male bias in the samples, however, I avoid drawing conclusions about how and if perceptions of mobility in these two areas are shaped by gender. Instead, through this study, I seek to paint a preliminary picture of how black individuals in Mount Frere and Newcastle conceptualise their economic environments and begin to investigate how and why their perceptions of inequality and mobility differ from those articulated by black Cape Townians.

Results: perceptions of social mobility among black individuals in Mount Frere and Newcastle

In this section, I examine perceptions of social mobility in the rural areas around Mount Frere and in Newcastle through a close examination of the interviews. After exploring how the respondents in Mount Frere and Newcastle

conceptualise economic inequality, I then examine the primary mobility pathways emphasised during the interviews. Finally, I investigate the interviewees' expectations of both intra- and inter-generational mobility. Throughout this section, I seek to highlight how local economic conditions have shaped the perceptions of mobility articulated by these respondents and, thus, to suggest how others from similar economic backgrounds may conceptualise their own opportunities for mobility.

Economic inequality

In order to facilitate discussion about economic inequality in South Africa, respondents, like those in Cape Town, were shown a series of illustrations depicting the distribution of income in South African society (see Figure 2) and asked a number of questions about the nature of this inequality. During the interviews, respondents expressed a range of opinions about the economic stratification of South Africa, which appears to be shaped by both local economic conditions and the individual's own economic position within the local community. Furthermore, although respondents in both Mount Frere and Newcastle acknowledged the continued relationship between race and class, their understandings of this relationship differed greatly from the views articulated by the Cape Town respondents: those from Mount Frere were ultimately less focused on this relationship than those in Cape Town and respondents from Newcastle had a much more accurate understanding of the changing nature of the intersection between race and class.
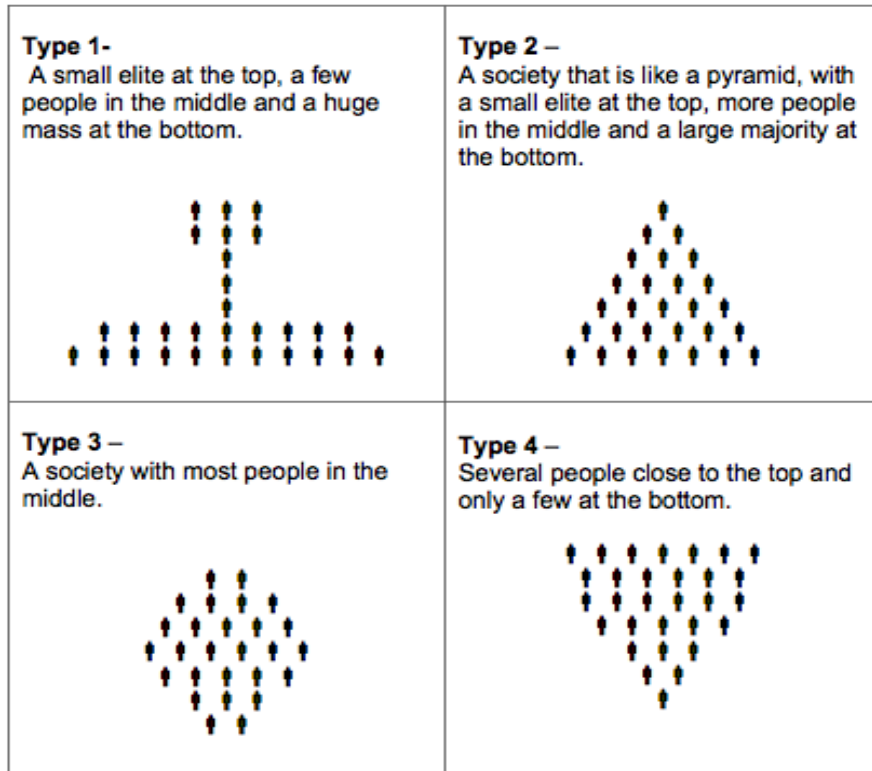
Figure 2: Pictures depicting different models of the economic stratification of South African society

While four of the nine individuals interviewed in Mount Frere chose type 1 when asked how they would describe South African society—indicating that they believed there was a substantial gap between a relatively small group of wealthy individuals and a much larger group of poor individuals—the remaining five individuals selected either type 2 or type 3—suggesting that they thought there was a much more equitable distribution of income and a much larger middle class in South Africa (see Table 3). Although there is little in the interviews to suggest why this split in perceptions of economic inequality exists, upon closer examination of those who selected type 1, a conspicuous pattern emerges. All four individuals who chose type 1 were currently studying at tertiary institutions *outside* of Mount Frere, generally in urban areas where the differences between wealth and poverty are more pronounced. In contrast, all of those who selected types 2 or 3 had spent little, if any, time living outside of Mount Frere—where everyone is relatively poor—and thus may not have been exposed to the full magnitude of economic inequality in South Africa.

Table 3: Conceptualisation of the distribution of income in South Africa by location

	Type 1 (# of individuals)	Type 2 (# of individuals)	Type 3 (# of individuals)	Type 4 (# of individuals)
Mount Frere	4	4	1	0
Newcastle	3	1	2	0

In fact, there is some, if limited, evidence for this hypothesis. MF-5, who is studying engineering in Cape Town, described how 'if you look at different [townships], even in Khayelitsha in Cape Town, there are too many poor people. There are [so] many [poor] people in [Khayelitsha]. … [But] when you go to the suburbs, there are only a few suburbs', and thus only a few 'rich guys'. He thus believed that South Africa closely resembled 'type 1', with most of the population near the bottom of the income distribution and only a small elite of wealthier individuals. In contrast, those who had spent their whole lives in Mount Frere did not realise the extent of the poverty that exists in urban townships; rather, they tended to view individuals in townships, like MF-7 did, as 'in the middle' with 'cars …, big houses and electricity'. Even MF-8, who recognised that some people in the townships 'are suffering … [and] they just manage to get [enough] food to have something to eat', still 'would put [most of the people from townships] in the middle'. Thus, those who had not spent a significant amount of time outside of Mount Frere believed that the distribution of income was much more equitable and that there was a relatively large middle class.

Almost all of those from Mount Frere, however, to some degree conceptualised economic inequality in terms of the spatial organisation and migratory patterns of black South Africans. MF-7, the unemployed 20 year-old woman, for example, described why society looked like type 2: while most of the black people live in 'rural areas' and are poor, because 'we do not have jobs', the 'middle … live[] in towns[hips]', and the 'rich … are in the suburbs or in the towns'. MF-6, the part-time adult educator, expressed similar views but more directly in terms of the migratory patterns that he has observed in Mount Frere: 'In South Africa, most of the people' are in rural areas and are poor, but the many who 'migrate from this place in the rural areas, [to] the urban areas' are wealthier.

Like those from Mount Frere, the Newcastle interviewees were split between those who chose type 1 when asked how they would describe South African society and those who chose either type 2 or type 3, although for different reasons than the Mount Frere respondents. Unlike in Mount Frere, the

conceptualisation of economic inequality in Newcastle appears to primarily reflect the economic position of the respondents. Those from categories 1 and 4—those who had experienced relatively little mobility—tended to highlight the widespread poverty and relatively small upper classes in South Africa, when justifying their decisions to select type 1. NC-6, for example, a student at the University of Pretoria who is from a relatively well-to-do family, argued, 'I just feel like there are more people living in poor conditions. … Looking at Newcastle there aren't that many rich people. So I think type 1 is [what] Newcastle and all of South Africa [look like]'. Likewise, those from category 1 stressed this widespread poverty when selecting type 1. As NC-4, an unemployed 28 year old, explained, 'Most people [like myself] are unemployed. … [Those] in the middle' comprise a relatively small group that 'support[s] other people, when they need something … like food, or shelter, or clothes'. In contrast, those in category 2—those who had experienced a considerable degree of mobility—tended to believe that most individuals in South Africa were situated similarly in the income distribution. NC-3, the 23 year old who works in a clothing factory, selected type 3 because 'here in South Africa we do not have too many people who are rich. Most are in the middle, like me'.

Despite differences in how individuals from Mount Frere and Newcastle conceptualised the distribution of income in South Africa, the vast majority of individuals from both places recognised the continued relationship between race and class in post-apartheid South Africa. MF-4, who is pursuing a degree in agriculture at the University of Fort Hare (UFH), for example, argued that he 'would place the white people on top because they are ... richer than us black people [who] are at the bottom'. Similarly, NC-2, the retail store employee, argued that the white people are 'at the top. … I don't know if it's their culture or what but they are' at the top, while black Africans are primarily on the bottom, although 'they can be' near the top.

The Mount Frere interviewees, however, were ultimately much less focused on the economic position of other racial groups than their Cape Town counterparts. Whereas those from Cape Town volunteered their views about the racialised stratification of income in South African society, those from Mount Frere, perhaps because the population of rural areas in South Africa is almost entirely black African,[3] focused extensively on the distribution of income within the black community and needed to be prompted to speak about the location of white and coloured individuals within this distribution. As MF-3, the 23 year-old woman pursuing an education degree in Durban, said unsolicited when she

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[3] In fact, I was among the only white individuals whom many of the interviewees had ever seen in their communities.

first saw the income-distribution illustrations, 'I am not going to talk about the white South Africans; I will talk about the blacks'.

In contrast, those from Newcastle, like those from Cape Town, more willingly shared their views about the racialised distribution of income in South Africa. However, they ultimately had a much more accurate understanding of the changing nature of the relationship between race and class and the increasing black African presence in the middle and top of the income distribution. NC-1, the UCT graduate, described how 'back in the day, [black Africans] would have been [only] 0.05' of the upper classes. Today, he argued, most of the white people are still 'at the top … [but they only comprise] 0.5' of these classes. Similarly, NC-2 maintained that '45 percent' of the top is 'black' mostly because of 'BEE [Black Economic Empowerment]' programs, and NC-6 described how 'the black people' are 'mixed up in the bottom and … the top', though she later qualified her statements about the degree of black penetration into the upper classes. There were some individuals who maintained, like those in Cape Town, that there were very few black South Africans near the top of the income distribution (see NC-4 and NC-5). However, in contrast to the Cape Town interviewees, the majority of respondents maintained that the upper classes had become relatively integrated since the end of apartheid, perhaps reflecting the significantly larger proportion of black middle- and upper-class individuals in Newcastle than in Cape Town.

This more integrated conception of the distribution of income in South Africa may ultimately impact how blacks from Newcastle formulate their goals. NC-6, the University of Pretoria student, originally claimed that she had only a 'zero-to-ten' percent chance of making it to the top, because she's not 'business minded'. However, near the end of the interview, after I asked her whether she knew that approximately 50 percent of middle and upper class individuals in South Africa are black African, she responded 'Oh, okay, wow', that 'make[s] it more possible for me to get to the top. Wow, is it 50? That's a lot. … I [would say] it's more possible than … ten' percent now.

This analysis ultimately suggests that local economic conditions may shape how individuals in South Africa conceptualise economic inequality. Whereas those in Cape Town were focused extensively on the continued relationship between race and class—which is particularly characteristic of the Western Cape—those from Mount Frere—who live exclusively among other black Africans—were less interested in the economic positions of other racial groups, and those from Newcastle—where the top and middle of the income distribution are significantly more integrated, as they are in most of South Africa—had a much more accurate understanding of the changing nature of the relationship between race and class since the end of apartheid. Furthermore, as the Newcastle

interviews reveal, how individuals conceptualise economic inequality—especially the integration of the middle and top of the income distribution—may influence how accessible they believe the higher income classes are and ultimately their motivation for reaching these classes. Perceptions of economic inequality can, of course, change if individuals widen their economic horizons, as they did for those from Mount Frere who attended tertiary institutions outside of rural areas. However, the ultimate determinant of how individuals conceptualise the distribution of income in South Africa appears to be local economic conditions, not broader national trends.

Summary Table 1: Economic inequality

	Perceptions
Cape Town[4]	Mobility experience of the Cape Town respondents influenced perceptions of the distribution of income in South Africa. While those who had experienced little social mobility—those in categories 1 and 4—tended to emphasise the insurmountable gap between rich and poor that ultimately precluded the emergence of a middle class, those in category 2, perhaps because they have experienced some degree of upward mobility, could better imagine pathways from the bottom to the top and, thus, highlighted the presence of a robust middle class by selecting type 2. Nearly all interviewees, however, stressed the continued association of wealth and class in South Africa and thus believed that the top of the distribution was predominantly white, while the bottom was entirely black.
Mount Frere	The Mount Frere interviews suggest that location influences perceptions of economic inequality. All four individuals who chose type 1 were currently studying at tertiary institutions outside of Mount Frere, generally in urban areas where the differences between wealth and poverty are more pronounced. In contrast, all of those who selected types 2 or 3 had spent little, if any, time living outside of Mount Frere—where everyone is relatively poor—and thus may not have been exposed to the full magnitude of economic inequality in South Africa. Although those from Mount Frere recognised the continued association of race and class, the Mount Frere interviewees were ultimately much less focused on this relationship than their Cape Town counterparts.
Newcastle	Like those from Cape Town, the Newcastle interviewees in both Categories 1 and 4 tended to highlight the widespread poverty and relatively small upper classes in South Africa by selecting type 1. In contrast, those from category 2 highlighted the existence of a broader middle class in South Africa by selected types 2 and 3. Although those in Newcastle highlighted the racialised nature of the income distribution in South Africa, they ultimately had a much more accurate understanding of the changing nature of the relationship between race and class in South Africa than those in Cape Town and Mount Frere.

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[4] Comparisons to Cape Town are drawn from Telzak, 2012.

Shoots and ladders: pathways to mobility in Mount Frere and Newcastle

Local economic conditions also influenced how respondents from both Mount Frere and Newcastle conceptualised the available pathways to mobility. Like the Cape Town interviewees, those from Mount Frere and Newcastle recognised the importance of education for social mobility. However, unlike those from Cape Town, the interviewees identified politics and government employment as the single most important mobility pathway and highlighted the pitfalls of illegal-drug and alcohol abuse, which the respondents claimed was ravaging their communities. This next section closely examines the mobility pathways identified by the interviewees, noting how their local economic environments shape their perceptions of these pathways.

'Without an education you cannot go anywhere'

All the interviewees from Mount Frere and Newcastle, like those from Cape Town, recognised the importance of education—and in particular, tertiary qualifications—for upward mobility. MF-3, the tertiary student studying in Durban, for example, described how 'an education' 'is the most important thing' to get to the top, and MF-1, the student at UNISA, asserted that people achieve mobility 'by getting educated'. Similarly, NC-5, the unemployed gardener, underscored the importance of education to gaining employment: 'Education is the most important thing', he argued, to being 'more easily employed'. And half of the Newcastle respondents (NC-4, NC-5, and NC-6) independently proclaimed, that 'Education is the key to everything', using nearly identical phraseology as KS-7 did during his interview in Cape Town (Telzak, 2012: 26-29). NC-3, the factory worker with a matric degree, thus, described the necessary steps to upward mobility in South Africa: First, 'go to school. [Then] finish school, [and] go to tertiary, and *only* after tertiary should you start looking for a job'.

In fact, those from Mount Frere and Newcastle were even more emphatic about the importance of education for mobility than those from Cape Town. Not only did many think that education facilitated economic success (like all of those in Cape Town did), but they also believed that mobility was *impossible* without an education. MF-6, the part-time adult educator, for example, unequivocally declared, 'To move from the bottom to the top you *need* an education', and MF-4, the agricultural major at UFH, stated flatly, 'To get to the top you have to go to university'. Education is so intertwined with upward mobility in Mount Frere that many defined the upper classes not by wealth, per se, but by educational

attainment. As MF-3 concluded, 'I define those who are rich by their education'. MF-7, the unemployed matric-degree holder, reflected MF-3's sentiments exactly: 'The people at the top … [are those who are] educated'. Similarly, those from Newcastle stressed the impossibility of upward mobility without an education. As both NC-4 and NC-5 argued, 'Without an education, you are going nowhere'.[5]

Like the respondents in Cape Town, those from Newcastle offered a combination of individualistic and structural explanations for why individuals failed to graduate from high school and/or pursue tertiary qualifications. NC-2, for example, argued that those who drop out of school are 'lazy', while NC-3 described how 'going to school without any money, no shoes, no food, and no uniforms is a very difficult situation'. Unlike in Cape Town, however, there did not seem to be a consistent relationship between the opinions that individuals expressed and their economic backgrounds; both NC-2 and NC-3 were in category 2.

In contrast, those from Mount Frere tended to offer a different explanation for why so few of their peers had successfully completed high school and tertiary degrees: they faulted their parents' generation for not instilling in them the importance of pursuing education. As MF-1 described, 'Our parents are uneducated because … they had cows and goats, and didn't see the need to go to school' and, as a result, a lot of their children also 'do not see the need for education'. Those who do end up pursuing an education are thus often forced to by their circumstances. As both MF-1 and MF-6 described, it is those who 'see that their parents have no cattle—[see] that they have no chance to survive without education—[who] end up getting educated'. MF-4, thus, hoped that 'as the generations grow up [i.e., as time goes on] … parents will [start to] advise [their children] to go to school'.

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[5] While this quote is from the interview with NC-4, NC-5 articulated identical sentiments, but in slightly different words: 'Without education you cannot go anywhere'.

Summary Table 2: Education

	Perceptions
Cape Town	All of those in Cape Town recognised the importance of education for upward mobility. Those in categories 1 and 2, however, stressed the large structural barriers to educational attainment, while those in category 4 faulted individuals for not valuing education and taking advantage of the educational opportunities available to all South. Africans.
Mount Frere	Those in Mount Frere were more emphatic than those in Cape Town about the importance of education for upward mobility. They, however, faulted their parents' generation for not instilling in their peers the importance of pursuing education.
Newcastle	Those in Newcastle also emphasised the impossibility of upward mobility without education. Individuals in Newcastle, like those from Cape Town, offered a combination of individualistic and structural explanations for why matric and tertiary completion rates were so low.

Politics and political connections: the only way up

As the previous section demonstrated, individuals from Mount Frere and Newcastle appear to have very similar views as those from Cape Town about the importance of education for facilitating upward mobility. However, although those from Mount Frere and Newcastle believed that education was necessary for upward mobility, they did not think that it was sufficient; rather, in contrast to the Cape Town interviewees, they stressed the singular importance of politics and political connections for social mobility. Whereas those in Newcastle highlighted the important role that politics and government tenders play in facilitating success, those in Mount Frere described how underdevelopment of rural areas resulted in few opportunities for mobility *besides* running for political office or working for the government.

In Newcastle, respondents repeatedly emphasised the important role of political office and government work in facilitating upward mobility. NC-1, the UCT graduate, in response to a question about whether it was possible for an individual to 'get to the top', replied, 'If you're involved in politics, yes! I think it's very much possible'. Similarly, NC-2, the retail shop employee, when asked which individuals were in the upper classes, exclaimed, 'It would be the government of course!' And NC-5, described how, those who are 'working for the government' are those who comprise the middle and upper classes.

These views may reflect both the progress that South Africa has made in integrating the public service through aggressive affirmative action programs and the increasing role of the public sector in the South African labour market. Though black individuals comprised the majority of the public sector in South Africa during apartheid, they were largely relegated to low-level (and consequently low-pay) positions with little opportunity of advancement (Cameron, 2005: 77). However, since the end of apartheid, the proportion of non-white senior managers in the public service more than doubled from 35 percent in 1995 to 87 percent in 2011 (Cameron, 2005: 82; Public Service Commission, 2011: 50). In contrast, management positions in the private sector still remain predominantly white; only 24 percent of senior management positions in the private sector were occupied by non-white South Africans in 2012 (Commission for Employment Equity, 2013: 9). Thus, the public sector may present the primary option for black African economic advancement in South Africa.

At the same time, public sector employment has ballooned since the end of apartheid: in 2005, 1.6 million of the 8.6 million (or 18.6 percent) of formal sector employees were employed by the public sector (Bosch, 2006: 17). Today, nearly 23 percent of all formal sector employees work for the South African government (UASA, 2012). And these figures exclude individuals who are employed indirectly by the government, through companies that derive most of their revenue from government tenders. Furthermore, public sector employees earn a significant wage premium over their private sector counterparts—up to 35 percent more, according to Bosch (2006: 22)—perhaps explaining why those from Newcastle believed that government workers were in the middle- and upper-class strata, while their private sector counterparts were not.

Those from Newcastle, however, stressed an alternate route to mobility: business ownership. NC-2, for example, later qualified her statement about the upper classes being comprised entirely of government officials: 'Sometimes [the upper classes] work for the government', NC-2 argued, but other times 'they have their own businesses'. As NC-4, the unemployed 28 year old, later explained, 'Most of [the middle and upper classes] are politicians', but there are also 'those who are self-employed and own their businesses'. These successful business owners, however, according to individuals from Newcastle, were ultimately reliant on government contracts and political connections. NC-4, upon further questioning, described the individuals who reached the middle and upper classes through business as those who own '[government] tender businesses'. And, according to NC-1, 'If you look at the guys who [] actually … get the tenders, [they] are the guys who are involved in politics'. As NC-6, the University of Pretoria student, put it: 'It's all about politics nowadays, although we don't want to admit it. … There's tenders this, there's [tenders] that, and it

all goes via politics'. Thus, it's rarely business alone that facilitates mobility; rather, 'it's business plus politics'.

Those in Mount Frere also highlighted the distinctly political character of the upper-income classes. MF-6, the part time adult educator, described how being 'educated' is important for getting to the top of the income distribution, 'but these days the people who are rich are politicians, [those] working in parliament and municipal workers'. Similarly, MF-1, the education student at UNISA, argued that the middle and upper classes are 'government workers, ... [those who] are in politics'. Thus, MF-4, the agricultural major at UFH, stated, 'If you are in politics, … you can get to the top'.

Table 4: Key infrastructural and educational development indicators for Alfred Nzo Municipal District, Newcastle, and Cape Town

	Flush Toilet Connected to Sewage (%)	Weekly Refuse Removal (%)	Piped water Inside House (%)	Electricity for Lighting (%)	Matric Degrees for those 20+ (%)
Alfred Nzo	5	6	6	46	13
Newcastle	56	71	50	87	33
Cape Town	88	94	75	94	30

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2011: 16, 20, 26, 39, 43, and 48.

However, because of the underdevelopment of rural areas, the Mount Frere interviewees did not also recognise business ownership as a significant pathway to upward mobility; rather, they stressed that running for public office and government employment were among the only pathways available to them for upward mobility. According to the 2011 South African Census, Alfred Nzo District Municipality, like the vast majority of rural areas in South Africa, lagged behind both Newcastle and Cape Town in a number of key infrastructural and educational development indicators (see Table 4). These figures are, however, likely to overstate the development of the rural communities around Mount Frere; the Alfred Nzo District Municipality encompasses a number of small- and medium-sized towns, which are most likely significantly more developed than their surrounding rural communities.

Many of those from Mount Frere bemoaned this underdevelopment and ultimately faulted it for circumscribing their opportunities for mobility. MF-5, the CPUT student, described how 'if you look in rural areas there are no computers in school. … If you read their textbooks—they have those new NCS

curriculum ones—they say "To find out more about this, go to the nearest library" ', but there are no libraries. And MF-4 lamented the general lack of 'infrastructure' in rural communities. As MF-9, the unemployed 22 year-old tenth grader, pleaded, 'Instead of [just] focusing on townships, [the government should] make sure to concentrate on rural areas' and 'support them'. Thus, 'people in rural areas,' according to MF-9, 'don't have any information about what is happening'—that is, they don't have access to the same opportunities that those elsewhere do—'and [therefore] there are few people from rural areas who are rich'. If the government did 'improv[e] the infrastructure of the rural areas,' MF-4 was confident, there would be increased opportunities for mobility. If there were a 'tar-road here', MF-4 gave as an example, 'people would be able to open a car-wash'. In fact, the only significant 'private sector' opportunities that individuals from rural areas could pursue, according to some of the respondents, were not in the private sector at all: MF-8, the unemployed 23 year-old eleventh grade student, argued that the best 'companies' to work for are those 'good companies, like the department of education, health and so on'.

Thus, as MF-8 indicated, the only potential for mobility available to individuals from rural areas was through politics and government employment. MF-1, described the ideal mobility pathway to the upper classes: 'For example, let's say you are a ward committee [member], you have to look after people in the community. Then next you get the step to be a councillor, after a councillor you are a mayor, and you follow those steps until you reach the top'. In fact, both he and MF-4 conceptualised the distribution of income in society entirely in terms of the distribution of governmental resources. MF-1 believed that society resembled type 2 because 'we get money from the [national] government and the [national] government is distributing the money to the local government' and the local government is then distributing the money 'to the local communities'. In contrast, MF-6 thought that society more closely resembled type 1 because 'in South Africa the money is given to a few people, like ministers in government and it goes down or is lost'.

These views appear to merely reflect the reality of social mobility in Mount Frere, and many other rural communities, where government employment and political office may be the only pathways available. As du Toit *et al.*(2007: 526) describe in their examination of social capital in Mount Frere, 'What stable and secure livelihoods there are in the area are those linked to the state and local government. In turn, access to these is governed by a local elite that is both traditional and political and which [abuses] its economic clout and connections with state power'. Respondents from Mount Frere thus saw government employment as the only mobility opportunities available to them; six of the nine individuals interviewed expressed hope that they would one day work for the government.

However, the fact that politics and governmental employment are viewed as the primary mobility pathways in both Mount Frere and Newcastle may ultimately have detrimental repercussions for South African society. Della Porta and Pizzorno (1996: 85-7), in their investigation of corruption in Italy, found that 'business politicians'—or those who entered politics because it was their 'sole avenue to upward mobility'—were much more prone to corruption. The perceptions of politics as among the only pathways to upward mobility expressed in this section may thus help explain at least part of South Africa's widespread corruption and may thwart future efforts to combat these corrupt practices.[6]

Summary Table 3: Politics and political connections

	Perceptions
Cape Town	Although those from Cape Town recognised the importance of politics and affirmative action to upward mobility, they ultimately stressed that access to social networks with knowledge about the private job market was more critical to mobility in South Africa.
Mount Frere	Those from Mount Frere stressed that the underdevelopment of rural areas circumscribed their opportunities for upward mobility and argued that running for public office and government employment were among the only significant available opportunities for mobility.
Newcastle	Those in Newcastle also emphasised the important role of political office and government work in facilitating upward mobility. Although the Newcastle respondents stressed another pathway to mobility—business ownership—they believed that business owners were ultimately reliant on government contracts and political connections.

Drugs and alcohol: the highest hurdle

Respondents from both Mount Frere and Newcastle repeatedly attributed immobility among their peers to illegal-drug and alcohol use. Drug and alcohol use, the interviewees argued, led to extremely high school drop-out rates, thus stifling a primary pathway to upward mobility. As MF-1 described, 'A lot of [my peers] do not see the need of education because most of them are using drugs'. MF-6 also faulted drugs and alcohol for poor educational outcomes for

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[6] For a detailed and insightful analysis of post-apartheid corruption, see Hyslop (2005). South Africa's Special Investigating Unit estimates that US$3.8 billion (or 20-25 percent of the government's procurement budget) is lost to corruption (*The Economist*, 2011).

those who remained in school: 'Talking about our youth, most of them are [taking] drugs, [or] drinking too much alcohol. That is why they are not going to school or, if they are [going to] school, their minds are not there; their minds are on dagga [marijuana], cigarettes, and alcohol'. As NC-3 concluded, more people were not leaving poverty—that is, few people were mobile—because 'poor people are becoming more and more [addicted to] drugs, … [so] they [are] dropping out of school'.

Perhaps more fundamentally, however, those from Mount Frere and Newcastle believed that drugs and alcohol blinded individuals to their futures and thus circumscribed their mobility. As NC-5 explained, 'South Africans [who] use drugs … [do] not think about the future; they [only] think about the now'. MF-2 echoed NC-5's sentiments: Poor individuals 'are using drugs that manipulate their minds and cause them … not to think about tomorrow's lives', that is their future. Thus, MF-2 claimed, drug and alcohol users do not have a 'goal and vision in life' and will never 'reach the top'. And drug and alcohol abuse, according to the respondents, also circumscribed the mobility of the addicts' children: As MF-8 argued, 'People … spend all [their] money with friends buying alcohol. So at the end of the day [their] children do not have money to [continue] their studies because [their parents] did not save money. … [Thus so many people] end up on the bottom'.

Although most studies indicate that illegal-drug use in South Africa is a comparatively minor problem (Brook *et al.*, 2006; Peltzer *et al.*, 2010), alcohol use seems to be much more prevalent. Per capita alcohol consumption among South Africans is more or less average, compared to other countries; however, alcohol consumption among those who drink is extraordinarily high (WHO, 2011). According to the South African Department of Health, over one-third of African males and over two-fifths of African females who consume alcohol binge-drink for a significant portion of the weekend, presumably because most South Africans receive their pay checks on Friday (Department of Social Development, 2007: 9; *The Economist,* 2011). Although there is some drug and alcohol abuse in South Africa, these statistics indicate that individuals may overestimate the prevalence and thus the impact of these actions.

Additionally, none of the respondents acknowledged the possibility that this alcohol and drug abuse was *symptomatic* of a society without a significant degree of economic mobility, not its cause. The interviews suggest a possible explanation for this trend: by blaming the immobility of their peers on addiction, the respondents could conceptualise a simple and straightforward solution to South Africa's economic woes: ending this addiction. NC-2, for example, argued that 'the youth are dropping out of schools, doing drugs, alcohol, everything'. But, she claimed, 'If [they] can [instead] focus, and know what they

want in life, they can be at the top'. Similarly, NC-5 vividly described why there would be fewer poor people in the next ten years: 'Those who are doing drugs will die', he explained, and everyone else, who didn't do drugs, will '[go] to [educational] institutions. … Therefore, the number of people with money will increase'. This analysis, thus, suggests that, although focusing on illegal-drug and alcohol abuse has merit from a public-health point-of-view, it risks obscuring the larger, and very real, structural economic problems facing South Africa.

Summary Table 4: Drugs and alcohol

	Perceptions
Cape Town	Although some of those from category 4 mentioned the hazards of alcohol use, the vast majority of Cape Town interviewees did not see drug and alcohol abuse as a significant obstacle to upward mobility.
Mount Frere	In contrast to those from Cape Town, those from Mount Frere saw illegal-drug and alcohol abuse, which led to extremely high school drop-out rates and blinded individuals to their futures, as among the most significant hurdles to upward mobility in their communities. The Mount Frere interviewees, however, failed to acknowledge that the high rates of drug and alcohol abuse could perhaps be symptomatic of a society without a significant degree of economic opportunity, and not its cause.
Newcastle	Like those from Mount Frere, the Newcastle interviewees emphasised the pitfalls of drug and alcohol abuse and stressed that drug and alcohol use was the cause, and not a symptom, of the relative lack of mobility in Newcastle.

Expectations of social mobility in Mount Frere and Newcastle

Expectations of intra-generational mobility in Mount Frere largely corresponded with expected educational outcomes. Those in Mount Frere, however, were ultimately less optimistic that their economic gains would be passed on to their children. Nonetheless, for many of the Mount Frere interviewees, especially those from poorer backgrounds, intergenerational mobility was only a secondary concern; ensuring the mobility of their younger siblings was more pressing. In contrast, expectations of intra- and inter-generational mobility in Newcastle closely mirrored those in Cape Town and reflected previous mobility experience. The interviews, however, like those in Cape Town, ultimately reveal the possible development of 'mobility traps' in both Mount Frere and Newcastle.

Those from Mount Frere believed that their mobility depended entirely on whether or not they received tertiary qualifications. Those who were pursuing post-secondary qualifications were very optimistic about their mobility. MF-4, the UFH agriculture student, for example, asserted, 'I can move from the bottom to the top' because once 'I pass my degree, I am going to get a job and have money'. In contrast, those who did not expect to pass matric and enter a technikon or university thought that their chances of economic success were incredibly low. 'The problem' is, MF-9, the 22 year-old tenth grader, explained, 'I am not doing well at all in my studies'. 'If I make sure that I am studying hard', he continued, 'maybe I can be on top' but the chances that will happen 'are few'.

The Mount Frere interviewees who expected to be economically mobile, however, ultimately viewed this mobility as more precarious than those in Cape Town did. While the Cape Town respondents were incredibly optimistic that their own economic success would guarantee that of their children, those from Mount Frere believed that they ultimately had a modest impact on their children's economic outcomes. MF-6, for example, who claimed that he 'will be' at the top, maintained that all he could do to help his children succeed was 'to call them to sit with me and explain to them … [that they must] go to school … [and] not drop out before they finish'. In the end, however, he insinuated that it was up to them to succeed. MF-2, the other UFH student, was even franker in his assertions: MF-2 thought that the 'chances are very good' that his children will reach the top if they '[do] what I tell' them. But ultimately, MF-2 argued, 'it depends on' them.

Although those from Mount Frere volunteered their views on intergenerational mobility when prompted, they were generally less focused on the mobility of their children than on the mobility of younger siblings. As MF-3 articulated, her primary motivation for pursuing a tertiary degree was to get 'a job [that] I will work in for [] ten years [in order to] make sure that I am helping my younger brothers to study and look[ing] after my home'. Only then would she consider pursuing her own dreams of 'hav[ing] my own business as a fashion designer'. Similarly, MF-4 described, 'I must go to school so that I can get money to support those who follow me—[my younger siblings]—because [my family has] got nothing'. These views suggest that obligations to family in Mount Frere may ultimately circumscribe the dreams and ambitions of economically mobile Mount Frere residents.

The expectations of mobility in Newcastle, in contrast, were greatly influenced by mobility experience and closely resembled those expressed by Cape Town residents. Like in Cape Town, those who were economically successful—those

in categories 2 and 4—expressed optimism about their own mobility and that of their children. NC-1, the UCT graduate, for example, proclaimed that his 'chances [of reaching the top] are pretty good' and that his children 'should do well for themselves … because they have me' and my success. And NC-2, the retail shop employee, described how she 'will move' up and how she will 'make sure that, once I am educated, [my children] will get the [best] education ever' and thus have 'many opportunities' to reach the top. In contrast, those who had not experienced a considerable degree of economic success, were generally less optimistic about their own mobility. NC-4, the unemployed 28 year old, for example, said that 'maybe' he could reach the top, but the exasperation in his voice was audible.

In the end, the interviews reveal the potential emergence of a mobility trap in both Mount Frere and Newcastle. Those who had limited expectations about their own mobility—in Mount Frere, those who did not expect to receive tertiary qualifications and in Newcastle, those who were economically unsuccessful— also had limited expectations about their children's ability to transcend their economic circumstances. NC-4 ultimately believed that 'there is no chance' his children would reach the top; as he predicted, it was more likely that 'they will end up in prison by doing bad things in the community'. Similarly, MF-8, the unemployed matric graduate, claimed that the chances that her children will reach the top are 'big if I can find a job, work hard [so that I can] take them into school'. But if not, she insinuated, her children had few chances for upward mobility. As I hypothesised in Telzak (2012), if parents feel that there is little hope that their children's socioeconomic status will differ from their own, then they may be less inclined to invest significant resources in their children's future, making these perceptions reality.

Summary Table 5: Perceptions of social mobility

	Perceptions
Cape Town	While interviewees from category 2 and 4 were optimistic about their own and their children's mobility, those from category 1 were pessimistic about the economic opportunities available to them and their children, perhaps indicating the development of an intergenerational 'mobility trap.'
Mount Frere	Those from Mount Frere believed that their mobility depended entirely on whether or not they received tertiary qualifications. In contrast to those from Cape Town, however, the Mount Frere interviewees believed that they ultimately had a modest impact on their children's economic outcomes, suggesting that a 'mobility trap' may also exist in Mount Frere. The Mount Frere respondents, however, emphasised their more immediate obligation to support family members and younger siblings and were generally less focused on issues of intergenerational mobility.
Newcastle	Like those from Cape Town, the expectations of mobility in Newcastle were greatly influenced by previous mobility experience. While those who were economically successful—those in categories 2 and 4—were incredibly optimistic about their own mobility and that of their children, those who were less successful—those in category 1—were pessimistic about their and their children's economic opportunities, again indicating the development of an intergenerational 'mobility trap'.

Conclusion

The views expressed by respondents in Mount Frere and Newcastle indicate that perceptions of economic inequality and social mobility are shaped by local economic conditions and by an individual's economic position within his or her community. Those from Mount Frere conceptualised economic inequality in terms of the migratory patterns of black South Africans, the primary pathway to mobility for rural residents, and were much less focused on the economic position of other racial groups in South Africa, perhaps because the populations of rural areas in South Africa are almost entirely black African. Though previous mobility experience influenced conceptions of inequality in both Cape Town and Newcastle, those from Newcastle, where there are much larger black middle and upper classes than in Cape Town, had a much more accurate understanding of the continued association of race and class in South Africa.

Perceptions of the pathways to upward mobility were also influenced by local economic conditions. Those from both Mount Frere and Newcastle, unlike those from Cape Town, identified politics and government employment as among the only available local mobility pathways, reflecting the disproportionate role of the public sector in the labour market of both areas. Although alcohol and drug

abuse do not appear to be more widespread in Mount Frere and Newcastle than in Cape Town, the respondents from Mount Frere and Newcastle, unlike those from Cape Town, repeatedly emphasised the pitfalls of illegal-drug and alcohol abuse. Despite the differences among the three areas, however, nearly all black South Africans interviewed, regardless of their mobility backgrounds, stressed the importance of education for upward mobility.

The interviews from Cape Town, Mount Frere, and Newcastle point to an additional, and particularly troubling, similarity among all three areas: the possibility that a mobility trap—or a perpetuation of the cycle of immobility because parents, pessimistic about the available economic opportunities, do not adequately invest in their children's futures—identified in Telzak (2012) extends beyond Cape Town. If a widespread mobility trap does in fact exist in South Africa, a large portion of the South African population may feel alienated by the existing economic system and is at risk of being left out of any future economic gains. Furthermore, the persistence of a mobility trap could exacerbate the already intense fragmentation of South African society along economic lines, and perhaps weaken the stability of post-apartheid South Africa.

Appendix A: Guide for semi-structured interviews

Preliminary Data:

1. Name
2. Age
3. How do you support yourself?
4. In order to gauge material goods that people have:
   a. Do you have a TV? (If so, what kind: widescreen vs. older model)
   b. Do you have a cell phone? (If so, is it a smartphone?)
   c. How do you listen to music?
   d. Do you have a car? (If so, what kind?)
5. Number of dependents (Try to parse out whether he/she is supporting people in other parts of country):
   a. Do you send money to family members who do not live nearby?
   b. Who are these family members? How much money do you send them per month?
6. Where do you live?

Interview Questions:

1. These four pictures show different types of society. The first picture represents a society with a small elite of rich people at the top, a few people in the middle, and a large number of poor people at the bottom. The second picture represents a society that is like a pyramid, with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and a lot of poor people at the bottom. The third picture shows a society in which most people are in the middle. The fourth picture shows a society with lots of people at the top, some in the middle, and very few at the bottom.
   a. Which of these pictures, in your view, describes South Africa today?
   b. Where would you situate yourself in that picture?
   c. Is this the same way society looked 10 years ago? What about 20 years ago?
   d. In your understanding of the economic makeup of society, where would you place most of the white people? Where would you place most of the black individuals? If you remove all the black people, what picture would you say best describes white society? What about black society?
   e. How do you think society should look? Where would you like to be in this hypothetical society?

f. What are the chances that you'll reach the top? What about your children? What are the chances you'll be in the bottom? What about the middle?

2. Personal financial situation
    a. Is your overall financial situation today better, the same or worse than it was five years ago?
    b. Why has it gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse over the last five years?

3. Differences between rich and poor
    a. How large do you think the differences between rich and poor are?
    b. Have these differences gotten bigger or smaller in the last 5/10/15 years?

4. Future predictions
    a. Do you think that the number of poor people in South Africa in five years' time is going to be larger, the same or smaller than it is now?
    b. What about the number of rich people?
    c.   The number of middle class?

5. Material possessions
    a. What material possessions do you think defines someone as rich in South Africa?
    b. What about poor?
    c. What about middle class?

6. Government intervention
    a. Do you think that the government is doing too much, enough, or too little for poor people in South Africa?
    b. Do you think they're doing too much, enough, or too little for rich people in South Africa?
    c. What do you think the government should do differently for the poor?
    d. What do you think the government should do differently for the rich?

7. Economic status of South Africa's black Africans
    a. Do you feel that the number of black middle class and rich people has increased, decreased, or remained the same in the last 10 years?
    b. How do black people become middle class or rich?
    c. Why are some people rich and others poor?
    d. How does one become richer?

8. Hypothetical questions
    a. What kind of car would you like to buy if money were no limit?
        i. Why do you want that car?
        ii. How will people respond if you drive around with that car?
    b. If I give you R5000 tomorrow what would you spend it on? If you had to give it away, to whom would you give it?

9. Additional questions
    a. What would your family think if you came home with a white girlfriend or boyfriend? Is this different from how other people in your neighbourhood would react?
    b. When you were younger, what did you want to be when you grew up and why? Why have you (not) achieved these ambitions? What are your aspirations now? What is the likelihood that you will reach them?

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