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**Identity landscapes,  
social capital, and  
entrepreneurship:**

Small business  
in South Africa

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## Introduction

This study examines the relationship between associational membership and entrepreneurship. Based on extensive research in South Africa from 1997 to 2000, it seeks to establish the extent to which social capital – understood as membership of civil society associations – influences business success; in other words, which kinds of relations and associations help entrepreneurs succeed.

Data collected during the fieldwork suggests that membership of groups helps members' entrepreneurial activities insofar as those members develop relations of trust with other members, and can draw on those relationships to support their business ventures. However, it shows that some groups are better at providing this type of support than others – in other words, that trust developed within groups is not always transferable to other domains.

This is an issue the literature on social capital does not address; it also does not explain why people join some groups rather than others. In an attempt to fill this gap, it is argued here that the kinds of associations a person is likely to join – and also whether the trust developed within those groups will be transferable to other domains – is influenced by his or her 'identity landscape'. This term is used to denote people's background pictures; their interpretation of their history and culture; their maps of the world; the maps that allow them to choose certain social actions over others, and to choose whom they want to do business with and whom they do not. Thus this concept allows us to locate our understanding of social networks or social capital in a specific historical and cultural context. Moreover, it helps us to understand the factors contributing to social capital formation, allowing us to go beyond suggesting that repeated interaction, common ethnicity, etc, promote trust and social capital. Identity landscapes, in other words, influence the types of groups people join, and the extent of trust within these groups.

The concept of social capital is discussed in the first section, and the conclusions drawn from the data in the second. Next, the concept of identity landscape and its interpretation in respect of African South Africans is explicated. Finally the connections between these identity landscapes and entrepreneurship in South Africa are drawn out.

### What is social capital?

Social capital has been defined as: '... the component of human capital that allows members of a given society to trust one another and co-operate in the formation of new groups and associations';<sup>1</sup> it has also been described as 'networks, norms, and trust'.<sup>2</sup> A

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, Social capital and the global economy, *Foreign Affairs*, 74(5), p 90. See also James S Coleman, Social capital in the creation of human capital, *American Journal of Sociology* 94, Issue supplement: Organizations and institutions: sociological and economic approaches to the analysis of social structure, 1988, S95-S120.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Putnam, The strange disappearance of civic America, *The American Prospect*, Winter 1996, p 34.

key feature of social capital emerging from the literature is that it is crucial to effective collective action. At the very least, its presence appears to enable the collective action needed for economic development; it is held to strengthen democracy, and promote good governance.

The literature tends to present trust and social capital as either wholly present or absent (in society as a whole or at specific ‘levels’ of society); and as transferable across different domains of society. Moreover, it typically examines social capital solely in terms of its consequences (or functions). Thinking about social capital in this dichotomous and functional manner is not only unhelpful for understanding its many guises and explicating its various consequences, but also ideologically problematic. According to the literature, social capital is absent in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, because the various deductively derived consequences (ie functions) of social capital – democracy, good governance, and high levels of economic development – are absent.

The reason why the dichotomous understanding of social capital is unhelpful is because it assumes the transferability of social capital across various domains. By assuming that social capital or trust present in certain areas of social life is transferable to others, the literature suggests that the absence of deductively derived functions of social capital indicates the absence of social capital as a whole in society (or on specific levels of society). But is social capital in fact transferable across different domains? Why should the level of newspaper readership (to take one frequently used indicator of social capital) suggest anything about the way in which people trust each other? Does a society that has high rates of multiple newspaper readership have more or less social capital? The internet has made it possible for us to read hundreds of local, national, and even international newspapers; what does this do to social capital? In fact, people who read a large number of newspapers probably have less time to participate in associational life. It is only by identifying social capital independently of its function that we can begin to understand its various forms and implications.

It may be argued that indicators of social capital vary from society to society – that, while newspaper readership is a useful indicator of social capital in, say, northern Italy, it is pointless to regard it as such in apartheid South Africa (where blacks and whites read the same newspapers, but inhabited fundamentally different worlds). If this line of argument is acceptable, then the problem of transferability of social capital across domains becomes even more troubling. Why does newspaper readership indicate the presence of social capital in one society and its absence in another?<sup>3</sup>

There are thus two problems with the notion of social capital as it is presently understood. One, the literature assumes that social capital is transferable across domains. Two, its presence or absence is identified primarily by means of/via the presence or absence of its functions.

These two problems are best addressed if the consequences of social capital is explored from a direction opposite to the one used until now. Rather than identify the con-

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<sup>3</sup> This requires us to question the validity of comparative studies of social capital. In the social science literature on the state, for example, the state is defined independently of its functions. This allows for comparative analyses of the state as well as its role in society.

sequences of social capital, and then work deductively backwards to its presence or absence, the heuristic device of ‘identity landscapes’ is constructed. Drawing on Charles Taylor’s arguments about identity, this concept helps us to understand why people join specific kinds of associations. More importantly, it also allows us to explicate the extent of relations of trust present in the associations people join. This, in the next step of the argument, permits us to explore the consequences of these relations. Thus we are not only able to respond to the issue of the transferability of relations of trust, and to identify social capital as distinct from its consequences, but also to comment on its formation.

Thus this paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of the origins of social capital. While Coleman left its origins out of his discussion, Portes and Sensenberrner assume that ethnic distinctiveness plays a role.<sup>4</sup> Putnam provides an historical argument for the presence or absence of social capital, but does not state how far back in history one needs to go to address the question of origins.

Drawing on the research conducted in South Africa on the relationship between associational membership and business development, an attempt is made to present a way of exploring social capital that a) explicates its origins; and (b) distinguishes between the domain and extent of social capital, thus helping us to understand the implications of social capital in a more nuanced way.

## Methodology

Data for this study was gathered from December 1997 through January 2000 in open-ended unstructured interviews conducted in both rural and urban areas in seven of South Africa’s nine provinces: Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Province, and North West.<sup>5</sup> The author and an assistant interviewed entrepreneurs affiliated to various types of social groups in order to understand which kinds of relations and associations helped entrepreneurs succeed, and which were less effective at this. In other words, an attempt was made to understand the extent to which social capital (understood as membership of civil society associations) influences business success. Some of the ‘entrepreneurs of the month’ selected by the newspaper *Sowetan* over the previous eight years were also interviewed, to gain an impression of their business experiences and ascertain whether membership of social associations had helped them, and to what extent.

Nearly all the interviews were conducted at workplaces or private homes, and lasted for an hour on average. In 20—25 per cent of the cases, follow-up interviews were conducted. The interviews, in other words, were oral histories of black entrepreneurs. Questions focused on the history of their activities and their plans for the future, and the help and advice they had received from members of their communities. They were also asked

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<sup>4</sup> Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenberrner, Embeddedness and immigration: notes on the social determinants of economic action, *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, Issue 6, May 1993, 1320-1350.

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to the Ford Foundation (Johannesburg and New York offices) and to Rutgers University for funding this project.

whom they tended to trust in their wider communities, and with which of these actors they had discussed their business activities. Finally, they were questioned on their definitions of themselves: ie, their identity.

### **Empirical patterns**

The interviews provide information on which types of associations (trade, political, religious, social, etc) are most effective at fostering relations of trust among their members, thus enabling members to draw on the knowledge and expertise of fellow members in pursuing their entrepreneurial activities.

Not unexpectedly, the data shows that industry-specific trade associations promote small business more effectively than other kinds of associations do. For example, taxi associations generate considerable trust among their members, which benefits members' entrepreneurial activities. While relations between taxi associations are marked by tension and a lack of co-operation (a finding supported by other studies), members within associations support each others' entrepreneurial activities; they frequently seek each others' support for and/or advice on their non-taxi business activities. Almost all the taxi owners interviewed were men, but this was the case in other trade associations as well. Formal trade associations were overwhelmingly dominated by men.

The sample included women entrepreneurs who were members of trade associations and co-operatives—but they were primarily based in rural areas. Nearly all belonged to trade associations or co-operatives engaged in simple manufacturing, marketing, or agricultural production. The women members of rural co-operatives interviewed were almost uniformly successful, both as individual entrepreneurs and as groups. Moreover, they were also more successful than rural co-operatives with male members.

Especially in rural areas, associations such as Housewives' League clubs, burial societies, and stokvels (rotating credit associations) provide women entrepreneurs with advice and information. These associations frequently play a positive role in promoting small businesses, as do trade associations. They provide women with a forum for discussing their businesses concerns, and learning business ideas and techniques. Moreover, a number of rural social associations have transformed themselves into trade associations. However, the urban associations are significantly less effective at generating relations of trust that their members may draw on to enhance their entrepreneurial prospects, and none of the associations in our sample had morphed itself into a trade association.

Political associations such as civics (grass-roots anti-apartheid organisations that emerged in the 1980s in South Africa) don't seem to help their members to develop enterprises. While senior members of political associations do appear to draw on their contact with other senior members, the vast majority do not. Among senior members, relations of trust growing out of the anti-apartheid struggle do seem to help. This is especially true of political groups other than civics (such as UmKhonto weSizwe, the former guerrilla wing of the ANC). As may be expected, political exiles have strong relations of trust with others in the same organisation. However, the vast majority of blacks who have been involved in political organisations have few relations of trust with other members.

While some civics seem interested in promoting economic empowerment, their activities in this area have had limited results.

Religious associations seem to have little effect on enhancing the business prospects of their members. While there is evidence to suggest that churches such as the ZCC do help poor members find employment (domestic work etc), there is little evidence that religious groups help their members with their entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, the interviews clearly suggest that most small and micro entrepreneurs belonging to various Christian denominations see the church as a place for discussing 'sacred' matters rather than 'profane' ones such as business and money. Nearly all my interviewees gaped in horror when asked if they had ever discussed their enterprises with fellow churchgoers.

Such a reaction is far more likely from women than from men. Men were somewhat more comfortable with 'mixing' the sacred and the profane, though they were less likely on the whole to be regular churchgoers. My interviews suggest that religious organisations play a very limited role in promoting the business activities of their members. Church-based associations, much more than urban social associations, appear to be settings of considerable trust. However, when members of religious associations tried to draw on these relations for their entrepreneurial activities, they found that these trustworthy relations did not transfer to the 'non-religious' realm. Therefore, religious associations do not become reservoirs of information and trust which their members can draw on for their business ventures.

Why is it easier for rural than for urban social associations to transform themselves into trade associations? Why do urban women tend not to join trade associations? Why are political associations not successful at generating strong relations of trust among their members? And finally, why are religious associations successful at generating relations of trust, but unsuccessful at transferring this trust to other domains? Here, a few ideal types of black South African entrepreneurs are presented as a way of illuminating these patterns.

### **Ideal types of South African entrepreneurs**

#### *Dora and friends*

The interview with Dora and her friends took place at her home in a former township near Johannesburg. The township consists of three types of dwellings: shacks, hostels, and two-room brick houses built by the apartheid government. Over time a number of residents have added on to their homes; some now resemble fancy houses in the former white suburbs of Johannesburg rather than the other two-room houses on the block. Dora's house is relatively unchanged; an iron gate, tiled floor, and well-appointed bathroom are the only apparent modifications.

Dora runs a *spaza* (a small neighborhood grocery shop) from her house. She sells tripe, vegetables, a few other groceries, and occasionally *pap en vleis* (maize porridge and meat). She started the *spaza* after she had been fired from her job in the early 1990s. Her husband works for a white-owned company as a security guard. His contribution to the household expenses just about covers the grocery bill. It is Dora's income from the

*spaza* that covers all the other household expenses, including school fees for her three children.

Dora's neighbour, Grace, also runs a *spaza* shop; it is identical to Dora's. Their friend, Portia, also runs a *spaza* at her home on the next block. These three women frequently discuss their business problems with each other, and seek each others' advice and help. They share their customers, and do not seem to compete.

Their friends Lolo and Sylvia have sewing businesses. While Lolo sews and sells curtains and bed linen, Sylvia stitches dresses. They sell their products at a stall near the neighborhood school.

All five attend church regularly, but not the same church. They all insisted that they trust their fellow church members, but would not ask them for business advice. When asked why, Dora and Grace observed that they went to church to pray and talk about God, not business. Portia also observed that whenever she (or Grace or Dora) offered to cater for any church event, others in the church resented their being given prominence and the extra business.

All five women had no interest in joining township-based associations such as the township *spaza* association or the local chamber of commerce; they viewed these associations with deep suspicion. Local councillors and the civic association had provided no help. Finally, all five women also observed that relatives were no help whatsoever. The experiences of these five women are shared by an overwhelming number of urban African women.

### *George Langa*

I met George Langa in a very different setting: a plush office in a newly constructed office complex. He and his business partners, Terry and John, are all former members of MK. While in exile they lived in Zambia and later in Zimbabwe, where they ran a shoe factory and electronics shop as their front. After returning to South Africa in the early 1990s they worked for a white-owned furniture business for six months, and subsequently established their own. Their company manufactures living room furniture. Most of their clients are whites. They also export their products to other countries in southern Africa, notably Zambia and Zimbabwe. Terry, who was engaged in marketing and promotion activities in MK, is in charge of marketing and sales at the firm, and initially used his old contacts.

Once a month the three meet other former MK members in their area. Most of the latter are also in the private sector. They discuss business problems, and swap information. They rarely discuss politics; they are all now interested in making money. As George observed, 'our priorities have changed – politics is not our focus anymore.' Former MK members who are now in the government rarely come to these meetings.

George is a member of one formal business association, which he said helps them by putting them in touch with other businesses. Neither he, Terry or Johnny are members of any community association. Their story is typical of most former politically active Africans who ran civics or were in the ANC or UDF.

### *Six men outside Butterworth*

In a village near Butterworth in the Eastern Cape, six men have established a fence-making business. With almost no employment opportunities in the area, and farming not very productive, starting a small business or migrating to city were the only options. With few industrial or mining jobs available these days, migrating to the city was not as economically attractive as it used to be. However, starting a business seemed difficult; no one in the village – not the community leaders, civic members or church leaders – had any idea about what kind of business one should start, and how.

Then Steve lost his job and returned to the village. He had been working in the Free State at a parastatal, where he used to work on large machines that produced wire fences. Steve decided to set up a manual fence-making plant at home. This was his village; he knew the village authorities, he knew the people, and he could bring together a few of the friends and clansmen he used to play with as children.

So six of them pooled their savings (totalling R270), bought 18 rolls of wire and a few poles, approached the village leaders for their ‘support’, and started doing business. They use poles to form the frame on which they weave the fence, and rocks as weights to stretch it. They sell the finished product to farmers, or shop owners in neighbouring towns.

As Mandla and Joseph – two of the members – observed, it is because they are from the same village, grew up together, and understand the constraints they face that they trust one another.

The experiences of these six men are typical of rural African men in South Africa. The decline of employment in the mining and manufacturing sectors since the 1980s has forced many to return to their villages and find new ways of generating an income. The data suggests that individual rural businesses do not perform as well as group-based rural businesses.<sup>6</sup>

### *Tito*

Unlike George Langa, Tito was never politically active. He lives in a former township, and worked in a large city during the 1960s and 1970s. He and his friends used to meet every night at his home and drink beer. Soon they asked Tito to buy the beer and sell it to them. By 1981 he was running an illegal shebeen (informal tavern) called Tito’s Oasis. Police raids were frequent, but stopped when Tito began cultivating white as well as black policemen, who began drinking at his shebeen.<sup>7</sup>

In 1985, under new legislation, he applied for a permit legalising his shebeen, which he eventually received in 1990.

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<sup>6</sup> The only exceptions to this rule were businesses owned and run by individuals close to the political heads of former black homelands.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, one white policeman who frequented **Tito’s Oasis** in the days when it was illegal was a son of Jimmy Kruger, a minister of justice under apartheid.

Today Tito's Oasis is an area landmark. Tito sells not only beer but also African (and some Indian-African) meals, and even South African wine in bottles that carry his own label: 'Tito's Wine'. When one visits Tito's Oasis during the day, one sees Tito and his waiters working tables occupied by German and American tourists. The walls are covered with business cards – evidence of all those who have had a drink with Tito. It is only at night, when the tourists are holed up in their hotels, that Tito's Oasis turns into the pulsating shebeen it has been since 1981.

A consummate host and entrepreneur, Tito is an active member of the local chamber of commerce and the Tavern Owner's Association. These associations have helped him to promote his shebeen and turn it into a landmark. Tito developed the idea of a shebeen route, and has got Satour to write about it in its travel brochures.

Tito is not a regular churchgoer; he jokes that 'the church comes to him'. What he means is that members of local congregations come to Tito's Oasis after Sunday services. African men tend to regard churches as a female preserve, and Tito is no exception.

His daughter and brother work for him, but other relatives have been of little help. Friends have been more helpful, although he notes that it has been hard to maintain old friendships as his business has grown and prospered; many of his old friends resent his success, and rarely visit his shebeen.

### *Venda Maize Mill*

After a gruelling four-hour drive along a dirt road from the town of Hazyview in Mpumalanga, one arrives at a small hamlet. It is like all other hamlets in the area, except in one respect: it has an electric maize mill, owned and run by 36 women. They came together many years ago to form a local branch of the Housewife's League, a social organisation formed by black middle-class women in the 1950s which still has branches throughout South Africa.

Primarily a support network for black housewives, most local branches are engaged in charitable projects. A few, like this one in the dusty hills outside Hazyview, have transformed themselves into successful entrepreneurial agencies. Branch members grow vegetables and sell them at a stall in the village, and have also opened a day care centre. But their most striking and successful venture is the mill.

It began when the daughter of a branch member met a representative of a foreign NGO operating in South Africa and mentioned her mother's social activities. The NGO wanted to facilitate entrepreneurial projects in rural South Africa. In 1997 it donated a maize mill to a co-operative formed by branch members.

This is the first electric mill in the area, and is widely utilised by local farmers. In peak season the mill employs 15 people besides the 36 members of the co-operative. Apart from the vegetable gardening business, the day care centre and the mill, the women have also started a sewing school where, for a fee, they train young women from the area.

The women have a growing income from their various business ventures. To better manage their finances, a few of them took classes in accounting at a Mine Worker's Development Centre in the area. Funded by a division of the National Union of Minework-

ers, the Centre runs a training programme mainly for retrenched miners, but is open to all in the area.

Spokespersons for the co-operative stated that they had received no help from the government or local civics, but did receive the support and approval of the village authorities in the area. Managers of the Mine Worker's Development Centre also observed that they could not have set up a training school in the area without the approval of the village authorities.

Like Dora and her friends, these women are also regular churchgoers. And, like the former group, they observed that the church community was for praying only and that church leaders were there to discuss otherworldly matters, not this-worldly matters. Unlike Dora and her friends, the approval of the village authorities has legitimised their business in their eyes and in the eyes of local residents; this has reduced resentment, generated support for their business in the village, and thus facilitated their business ventures.

### *Ubuntu Sewing Project*

The last set of entrepreneurs to be introduced live in a village in North West near the Botswana border. In 1993 two social workers from a South African NGO arrived in the village, and offered to help villagers set up small businesses. Only a few people in the village had formal jobs, either working as domestic workers in nearby towns or as workers on white-owned farms. A handful of men from the village had migrated to the mines and large industrial areas. Income for people in the village thus comes from remittances from these miners, factory workers, domestic workers and farm workers. Prospects for farming in the sandy soil are limited, although this is not immediately evident when looking at the maize fields on the large white-owned farms fewer than 80 kilometres away.

Thus, as the social workers saw it, small business ventures would help this poor community; however, none of the villagers was willing to discuss projects with them. After considerable frustration, they approached the village council, which, after some persuasion, agreed to call the villagers to a meeting. After much debate, the social workers were permitted to present their proposals, and village leaders asked the villagers whether they would be interested in joining various proposed projects. Nine women expressed an interest in a sewing project, and the Ubuntu Sewing Project was born.

The women pooled their savings to buy fabric and other supplies, and the NGO supplied seven sewing machines and provided basic training.

The women sew curtains, dresses, and bed linen, most of which they sell in the nearby town of Mmabatho. Apart from collecting orders, delivering the finished products, and staffing their stall in Mmabatho, they are also avid window shoppers; they peruse the products at the local department store looking for new designs and styles. This, they insist, is what has allowed them to remain in business for more than six years. They buy their fabric and supplies in town, and stated repeatedly that they always bought their supplies first before dividing the remainder of their income among themselves.

Apart from the initial blessing of the village leaders, the women involved in the Ubuntu Sewing Project have received little help from others in the village, including their

husbands and families. They did note, though, that other villagers were did not resent their success. The women observed that they helped to support each others' households, and turned to each other for help and advice. They interpret the approval of the village authorities as a permit to 'do well', both as a group and as individuals.

### Identity landscapes

To understand why certain networks are more useful for business development than others, we also need to understand why black men and women entrepreneurs join certain kinds of associations and not others. If trade networks are more useful than social networks in urban areas, why do urban women entrepreneurs not draw on them? Since rural women seem to find rural social networks useful, why are rural men not as successful at exploiting them? In this section an attempt is made to provide answers to these questions. It is argued that one's identity landscape inclines one to join specific associations.

By identity landscape is meant the framework that provides the basis, implicitly or explicitly, for one's moral judgments, intuitions or reactions; conveys the norms and values of one's community; and captures the social, political, and economic changes experienced by one's wider society. Identity landscapes have three dimensions: one's sense of respect for and obligations to others; one's understanding of what constitutes a full life; and one's sense of commanding dignity and respect.<sup>8</sup> In other words, our identity landscapes define for us the people we trust, the people we are willing to engage with, and, most pertinently for the purposes of this study, the people we are willing to do business with.

The notion of identity landscape introduced here is rooted in Charles Taylor's remarkably insightful discussion of modern western identity.<sup>9</sup> According to Taylor, this identity is dialogically constructed, and provides modern people with a background picture which helps them to structure their lives. It forms the basis upon which people make judgments, choices, and discriminations. It specifies their relations to society, as well as the moral contours of their social actions; thus Taylor argues that our identities provide us with some kind of moral map.

What is unique about modern western identity is its roots in beliefs about the value of autonomy, authenticity, and individual rights. It is one's search for autonomy and authenticity that leads one to define oneself dialogically, and specify one's identity. Of course, this does not mean that modern western individuals are always fully conscious of their moral map. But it does suggest that, were we to probe deeply enough for the moral basis of everyday social actions, we would ultimately be looking for people's identities.

Given the western philosophical roots of the notion of identity, it is unclear whether and how this manifests itself in non-western societies. As Taylor himself notes, the focus on individual authenticity and rights is uniquely western. While identities in Africa or

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<sup>8</sup> For Taylor, these three dimensions constitute the three axes of modern identity. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*.

Asia are indeed likely to be constructed dialogically, their roots in values such as individual authenticity or autonomy are debatable at best.

People in post-colonial societies do construct individual identities, and do concern themselves with values such as authenticity, autonomy, and individual rights. The difference – a critical one – is that while westerners are led to construct these identities for historical-philosophical reasons, people in post-colonial societies do so while they negotiate their relations with their non-western values and beliefs on the one hand, and with the western institutions and practices they have encountered in the years since colonialism on the other.<sup>10</sup> In other words, their search for authenticity and autonomy is a requirement of their post-colonial existence today – and nowhere is this more visible than among Africans in South Africa.

Thus, while the notion of identity captures, as Taylor has argued, beliefs rooted in the western philosophical tradition, the notion of identity landscapes captures the cultural and political dilemmas rooted in non-western traditions and involved in the construction of a definition of oneself. While identity construction, according to Taylor, involves a dialogical negotiation within the parameters of one's social-historical (ie western) background, the construction of one's identity landscape involves a dialogical negotiation across at least two such backgrounds (where possibly only one emphasises the value of individual authenticity and autonomy). To talk of identity landscape is to talk not only of individually constructed identities influenced by social values, but also of individually constructed identities refracted by the experiences of colonialism, apartheid, or, more recently, globalisation.

But identity landscapes not only represent identities refracted by colonialism; they also refer to identities refracted by social status, economic position, and so on; in other words, people of similar socio-economic or cultural backgrounds are likely to have similar identity landscapes. Thinking about identities in this way makes it possible to work with identity issues sociologically. Identity landscape is presented here as a sociological concept. To explore how the three axes of identity (ie, one's sense of respect for and obligations to others; one's understanding of what makes a full life; and one's sense of commanding dignity and respect) are refracted by social/economic/political categories and historical experiences is to explicate identity landscapes. While individuals are unlikely to have similar identities, people with shared histories and/or cultural experiences are likely to have similar identity landscapes. Therefore, if one becomes familiar with people's history, cultural practices and world views, it becomes possible to piece together their identity landscapes.

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<sup>10</sup> Archaeological and historical evidence suggests that there was some interaction between people of various civilisations. The difference is that these interactions were not accompanied by the systematic imposition of one world view and one set of ideological beliefs.

### **Ubuntu sensibilities**

*Motho ke motho ka motho yo mongwe* (a person is a person because of another person).

This Nguni proverb captures the essence of social relations in South Africa in the years prior to colonial influences. Conveying an approach common to all ethnic groups in South Africa, it reflects the notion of *ubuntu* (in the Nguni languages of isiZulu and isiXhosa) or *botho* (in the Sotho languages of Setswana, Sesotho and Sepedi). But *ubuntu* refers to more than social relations; it also underpins the process of identity construction among Africans in South Africa.

In pre-colonial times, one's place in the world, or position in society, was built from two interrelated components: one's labour/work, and one's social relations. Individuals were defined by their work, but this consisted not only of what they produced for/by themselves but also of the social relations they reproduced and strengthened in the process. The converse also held true: it was their social relations that permitted them to be successful at work and at defining their place in the world.

*Ubuntu* had another dimension as well. At its core is a belief that all people are worthy equals. To treat some people as if they were not one's equal would lead one to believe that only certain members of society helped one to construct one's life, and others not. But not to carry one's entire community is not respectable. This belief that all people need to be equally respected, and that their personhood matters, was reflected in politics. The chief (or king), it was held, was a chief (or king) through his nation (*kgosi ke kgosi ka setshaba* – a king is a king through the nation). It is by carrying all the members of one's nation that one is a leader.

In other words, in pre-colonial society one's obligations and respect for others defined one's place in the world. One's independent activities were regarded as worthy only insofar as one maintained one's obligations towards others. In fact, the two were interwoven so tightly that the boundaries of one's work and one's obligation to others were not recognised. To not satisfy one's obligation was to not respect one's fellow men; to carry one's community was one's obligation to society.

To act in accordance with *ubuntu* sensibilities was what made for a full life. Without work, life was meaningless; without a social network, work was valueless. And it was mastering the paradoxical relationship – between one's egalitarian relationship with others in the community and the dominance of the community over the individual – that granted one dignity. To live a full life was to dignify oneself. In other words, activities vis-à-vis one's community defined a person. Notably, it was people's obligations to themselves that required them to respond to their obligation to others.

As Jean and John Comaroff observe, the ontology at the root of *ubuntu* 'is a far cry from the ontology at the base of modern western individualism, in which spirit and matter, people and objects were definitively set apart and in which every man and woman was responsible, on their own account and in their own right, for their spiritual, social, and material situation in a radically disenchanted universe. In short, while both cultures

place a great deal of weight on the active subject – the human being acting upon the world – the two forms of individualism had fundamentally different ontological roots.’<sup>11</sup>

This discussion paints a picture of the ideal type of *ubuntu*. How *ubuntu* was interpreted by people depended on their social position, their experiences as individuals and as a community. Nevertheless, it is clear that *ubuntu* defined the contours of the African identity landscape.

With the introduction of colonial actors and their influences, social hierarchies in the African community gradually sharpened.<sup>12</sup> Interactions with western actors refracted people’s understanding of *ubuntu*; interaction with a different ontology introduced variations in the African identity landscape. The building of one’s personhood now required not only social networks, and negotiations with others in one’s community; it also necessitated negotiation with a different, and in some respects, contradictory ontology. This process of negotiation and renegotiation did not leave *ubuntu* sensibilities untouched; it refracted them. Interpretations of *ubuntu* now varied not just along economic, political, or social lines – it also depended on one’s negotiation with colonial influences.<sup>13</sup>

While Christian missionaries were interested in systematically undermining the *ubuntu* sensibilities of Africans, it is clear that Africans did not quite trade in their *ubuntu* sensibilities for western world views as much as draw on these sensibilities to interpret the latter and in the process transform the former as well. John and Jean Comaroff have done an excellent job in discussing how Africans interpreted and responded to these influences.

Colonialism increased social hierarchies among African peasants, between African farmers and migrant workers, and between those who had had western education and those who did not. A black farming elite emerged. They were from the stratum of blacks that had formed ‘at the nexus of the mission station, wage employment, farm tenancy, school, town and township, and in the process acquired a culture and a set of aspirations and assumptions about the world and their place in it that were radically different from those of their ancestors’.<sup>14</sup> This upper stratum of blacks was numerically dominated by peasants. These peasants came to embody bourgeois values, and gradually entered urban occupations and adopted new lifestyles. Their new interactions and experiences led them to reinterpret their *ubuntu* sensibilities.

Below this bourgeois elite came the middle peasantry. This social class was distinguished from the upper peasantry not just in terms of material wealth, but also in terms of

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<sup>11</sup> John L and Jean Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa*, vol I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, p 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; and John L and Jean Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: the dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*, vol 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> My discussion of the ideal type of *ubuntu* is not meant to imply that African communities were culturally isolated prior to colonialism -- only that the pre-colonial interactions were not accompanied by the systematic imposition of one world view and one set of ideological beliefs.

<sup>14</sup> Tom Keegan, *Facing the storm: portraits of black lives in rural South Africa*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1988, p 133.

cultural practices and lifestyles. The vagaries of colonial economy made downward mobility real and frequent. *Ubuntu* sensibilities provided a measure of social support. Especially during difficult economic times, the middle peasantry drew on the support of communal work parties based on village and kin ties (known as *ilima*).

The poorest peasants retained an *ubuntu* sensibility similar to that of their pre-colonial ancestors to a greater extent than either the middle or the upper peasantry. They depended on the help of co-operative work parties (*ilima*) to farm. The gradual commercialisation of land and agriculture left them in a precarious economic position, but they were able to 'overcome' their economic problems by becoming workers at the newly founded manufacturing and mining companies. While 'the upper peasantry metamorphosed into a petite bourgeoisie, so the poorest segment of the population became a hyphenated class of peasant-proletarians'.<sup>15</sup> And, with the advance of the mining and manufacturing sectors, even the middle peasantry was drawn into the category of migrant workers.

State policies in the first half of the 20th century, along with customary practices, were effective in ensuring that mostly men migrated to the towns and mines, while women stayed in the villages, tending to the fields and nurturing the children. In order to farm and run their households, the women once again turned to the practice of co-operative farming parties (*ilima*). These groupings brought together the women (and the remaining men) of a village and neighbouring villages to work on the land. These were usually all-day events; each member brought not just their labour but any agricultural implements they might have. The day ended with the 'host' providing food and beer for all the participants. Thus, if the initial period of colonial development had weakened (or at least reduced the value of) *ubuntu* sensibilities, the developments of the 20th century clearly strengthened them in some contexts. Reciprocal relations among villagers grew stronger as rural 'people were thrown back repeatedly on their social resources and on the familiar practice of *setswana*'.<sup>16</sup> The policies of apartheid only strengthened this effect; women were now legally restricted from remaining in urban areas.

But what of the men? Did men maintain and strengthen *ubuntu* sensibilities in the urban areas? And did the few women who migrated to urban areas (largely to do domestic work in white households) maintain them as well? How did the urban men and women interpret and express *ubuntu* sensibilities?

Oral histories, biographies, novels, and anthropological studies offer a complicated answer. Men who migrated to urban areas and lived in hostels appear to have maintained strong community ties (which they interpreted in ways similar to their ancestors) with others from the same village or group of villages. Discussing social relations in the hostels of Cape Town, Mamphela Ramphele observes that 'kinship ties are maintained and utilised as a source of support for newly arrived workseekers in the form of accommodation, food and placement in jobs. People from the same home village also help and sup-

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<sup>15</sup> Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: the dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*, p 159.

<sup>16</sup> Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: the dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*, p 58. *Setswana* is Tswana for *ubuntu*.

port one another.’<sup>17</sup> Multi-ethnic hostels tended to be divided along ethnic lines, with the ‘other’ in *ubuntu* sensibility referring to people of different ethnicities. These divisions became a matter of life and death for residents of multi-ethnic hostels during the political tensions between ANC and Inkatha supporters in the early 1990s.

Some hostels were ‘family’ hostels, and thus also allowed women. However, in contrast to male residents, social ties among women in these hostels were very weak. While they did appear to help each other in times of illness, death or childbirth, they were usually tense, if not hostile, toward each other. Thus hostel women tended to exclude others from their definition of their community; community for these women meant their villagers. Ramphele attributes this to the fact that women lived in the hostels at the pleasure of their husbands or lovers.<sup>18</sup> This dependence undermined the development of relations of trust among them, she argues. Available evidence suggests that even though male hostel dwellers frequently formed relations of trust with other residents with the same ethnic background, the women tended not to form such relations.

Township life under colonialism and the early years of apartheid did not refract *ubuntu* sensibilities in a fundamental way. Especially in the first half of the 20th century, social and community ties in townships such as Sophiatown or Alexandra were legendary. Interestingly, multi-ethnic ties flourished in townships outside hostels. Writer Can Themba touched on township identities in his short stories and novels; in his short story ‘Kwashiorkor’, he writes of an Abner Mabiletsa, a resident of Alexandra:

‘Abner Mabiletsa was one of those people who was not content with life in the reserves in Petersburg district where he was born and grew up. He did not see where the tribal set-up of chief and *kgotla* – tribal council – and customs, taboos, superstitions, witchcraft and the lackadaisical dreariness of rotating with the sun from morn till eve, would take the people and would take him. Moreover, the urge to rise and go out to do things, to conquer and become someone, the impatience of the blood, seized him. So he upper and went to Johannesburg, where else? Everybody went there.

‘First, there were the ordinary problems of adjustment; the tribal boy had to fit himself into the vast, fast-moving, frenetic life in the big city. So many habits, beliefs, customs had to be fractured overnight, So many reactions that were sincere and instinctive were laughed at in the city. A man was continually changing himself, leaping like a flea from contingency to contingency. But Abner made it, though most of the time he did not know who he was, whither he was going. He only knew that this feverish life had to be lived, and identity became so large that a man sounded ridiculous for boasting he was Mopedi or a Mosuto or a Xhosa or a Zulu – nobody seemed to care. You were just an African *here* ...’<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, The dynamics of gender politics in the hostels of Cape Town, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15 (3), April 1989, p 410.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Can Themba, Kwashiorkor, in *The will to die*, Cape Town, Johannesburg: Africa South Paperbacks, David Philip, 1985, p 15-6.

In his autobiography, former state president Nelson Mandela observes that Alexandra's 'population, drawn from all African language groups, was well adapted to city life, and politically conscious. Urban life tended to abrade tribal and ethnic distinctions, and instead of Xhosas, or Sothos, or Zulus, or Shangaans, we were Alexandrians. This created a sense of solidarity which caused great concern among the white authorities.'<sup>20</sup>

In addition to generating inter-ethnic (inter-linguistic) solidarities, township life also led to the formation of neighborhood groups, burial societies, and *stokvels*. Where formerly women (married and unmarried) had come together to form burial societies in their own villages with their kith and kin, now women and occasionally men formed such groups with people they just knew as neighbours. Urban women were also active members of church associations, prayer groups, and secular self-help groups.

Church associations, and especially prayer groups (*manyanos*), were popular among African women. They have been described as 'the oldest, largest, and most enduring and cohesive' of South Africa's African women's organisations.<sup>21</sup> The attempt by missionaries to transform the everyday activities of African men and women had many consequences. One was that churches became arenas where, in addition to religious matters, women's daily activities were discussed. Women went to church to learn about hygiene, the right way to keep house, raise children, etc, and this continues until today. Africans had to 'cast away their indigenous clothing, customs and beliefs, which were all described as pagan and barbaric',<sup>22</sup> and in their stead adopt lifestyles drawn from Victorian England.

African women did continue to regard fellow churchgoers as trustworthy. Fellow churchgoers were viewed as a source of knowledge and information, but only in respect of housework and related activities – and, of course, religious matters. Churches sought to undermine *ubuntu* sensibilities; whether they were successful is doubtful. What is clear is that a few relations of trust emerged among churchgoers. However, these were rarely transferable to other (secular, non-housework-related) domains.

Not unexpectedly, African men tended to stay away from churches and church associations. While mineworkers did participate in church services held in hostel compounds, their involvement was not as deep as that of the women. Urban men were involved in few social associations. Instead, their community was defined by their friends and colleagues and shebeen (ie pub) friends.<sup>23</sup> It seems as if ethnic, language, or regional differences did not play a significant role in the construction of these urban communities, and while such ties still exist today they tend to be weak. Part of the reason for this is the anti-apartheid movement.

The civic movement that gained strength in the late 1970s and 1980s brought together people of different political and ideological persuasions. The leaders were united by one

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<sup>20</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to freedom: the autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p 77.

<sup>21</sup> Mia Brandel-Syrier, *Black woman in search of God*, London: Lutterworth, 1962, p 97.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Biko, *I write what I like*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996, p 56.

<sup>23</sup> While unmarried women frequented shebeens, married women rarely did.

goal: overthrowing apartheid, and establishing majority rule. However, the means to be used by the civics were disputed: while the ANC argued for a multiracial fight against apartheid, the black consciousness movement held different views. More importantly, while the latter regarded *ubuntu* sensibilities as a critical force in bringing Africans together and spurring the movement, the ANC regarded this focus as part of the problem. As former members of a civic have observed, they believed *ubuntu* sensibilities had held Africans back, preventing them from taking risks and actions that would have contributed to their political and economic strength.

But if the anti-apartheid struggle helped to weaken *ubuntu* sensibilities, the policies of the apartheid regime strengthened them in unintended ways. If treating all in one's community as worthy equals had been important to pre-colonial African identities, then the transformations wrought by colonialism had tended to undermine them. Class and education differences had crept in and divided African communities. The upper, middle, and lower peasantry had been a creation of the colonial political economy. However, apartheid weakened the significance of these differences, especially in townships. Pass laws applied to all; the threat of being searched and arrested was faced by all. The apartheid police were quite non-discriminatory in this regard. The possibility of relocation, too, was felt by all. Also, townships were quite mixed in class and education terms – a mine-worker might live next to a lawyer, a teacher next to a domestic worker. In this way, apartheid introduced new prisms through which Africans interpreted *ubuntu*.

Thus apartheid's effect was not merely to deepen or extend the effect of colonialism; its effects were in many ways contradictory to the colonialism's consequences. If colonialism had increased social hierarchies and individuated identities, apartheid decreased some social hierarchies, increased others, and reinvigorated certain *ubuntu* sensibilities. But these *ubuntu* sensibilities appear to have been qualitatively different from the ones held by Africans in pre-colonial times, for they were now seen through the lens of colonialism and apartheid. In a 1984 study of poverty in rural settlements, Sharp and Spiegel observed that while residents 'construct networks of neighbourliness and ... express these relationships in the idiom of kinship ... such networks are based on short-term reciprocity rather [than] on any long-term commitment. Loss of access to reliable sources of cash income condemns most households to dropping out of the networks of reciprocity at precisely the point when those networks are needed most urgently.'<sup>24</sup>

The conditions in these settlements were structurally quite similar to those in urban townships: both brought together a motley group of residents who did not necessarily share ethnic ties, village allegiances, etc. What they had in common was living in the same settlement. As with township residents, relations of reciprocity and neighbourliness were weak. While they offered some social support, they were unable to easily form a basis for collective action that would benefit members of the community economically.

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<sup>24</sup> John Sharp and Andrew Spiegel, Vulnerability to impoverishment in South African rural areas, paper written for the second Carnegie inquiry into poverty and development in South Africa, Cape Town, 13-19 April 1984.

And, as the leaders of the civics attest, it was by breaking township people's belief that they had to carry their community that they were successful in their collective effort.

ANC leaders fought against *ubuntu* sensibilities because, in undertaking collective action such as the anti-apartheid struggle, 'carrying one's entire community with oneself' is not possible. As with any collective movement, some township residents were opposed to the struggle, its particular character, its leaders, etc. To bring those people on board would have taken time – and enough time had been spent living under apartheid. To convince others who supported the ANC's goals to join the struggle despite the absence of those critics meant that the former had to discard their belief that all those in the community were worthy equals, and that carrying one's community was important.

Refracted through the experiences of colonialism, apartheid, and now the post-apartheid era, *ubuntu* sensibilities retain their distinctiveness. They shape the options and opportunities available to South African Africans, and explicate patterns of social action in this country.

In his novel *Disgrace*, J M Coetzee vividly captures the expression and influence of *ubuntu* sensibilities in South Africa today. In a conversation between David and Lucy about Petrus's marriage proposal, Lucy alludes to the understanding of *ubuntu* sensibilities as it is interpreted today through the lens of historical experience when she observes: '... Petrus is not offering me a church wedding followed by a honeymoon on the Wild Coast. He is offering me an alliance, a deal. I contribute the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing.'<sup>25</sup> Petrus's proposal is but an expression or an interpretation of his *ubuntu* sensibilities. His position is society depends on the social relations and ties he sustains and constructs. Lucy appears to understand the value of identity constructed this way. Morality, as David understands it from his western perspective, is not the point here. It is not about distinguishing the right from the wrong, or thinking of winners and losers; it is about carrying the 'community' as a whole.

### **Entrance, domain, and extent**

These patterns of *ubuntu* sensibilities as refracted by the prisms of colonialism, apartheid, and majority rule help us to understand why people join certain groups and not others, and trust members of some groups rather than others.

The village community is central to the identity landscape of rural women. Apartheid, and colonialism prior to it, made it difficult for African women to migrate to urban areas. Women were forced to remain in the villages to cultivate the land and raise children. The experience of remaining in the hinterland and eking out a living was part of the prism through which they understood *ubuntu*. To work their farms, build their homes and support their families, rural women relied on co-operative work parties (*ilimas*). *Ilimas* made collective action possible, but also encouraged a sense of community and collective action in respect of economic activities. The difficulty of the exit option – leaving to work elsewhere – further strengthened co-operative action. This is not to suggest that there were no divisions among women in these villages; generational divisions were common,

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<sup>25</sup> J M Coetzee, *Disgrace*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1999, p 203.

taking the form of conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. But, despite these divisions, *ubuntu* sensibilities remained strong partly because the women only interacted with western ontologies in a limited way. And when negotiation with western ontology was required, village authorities, elders, and community participation became critical for validating and legitimising this.

Given this identity landscape, rural women have been more inclined to join social and trade associations legitimised by the village community. Their experiences with *ilimas* have encouraged rural women to transform their social associations into trade associations. The domain of relations of trust is transferable in this case. And with the approval of the village, and the legitimacy thus accorded to the group, relations of trust within these associations tend to be strong.

The situation in respect of urban women is rather different. For one thing, urban women define 'community' in a different way. *Ubuntu* sensibilities involve obligations to one's community, but for these women the boundaries of their community are unclear. Overwhelmingly, for them, communities do not refer to their ethnic/village communities; instead, they tend to consist of a loosely defined neighborhood and church network. Most urban women depend on the support of other women in the network primarily in respect of family matters – thus the network acts as a safety net for its members. But this support structure is rather tenuous. The safety net remains in place for any woman as long as she remains at the same social and economic level as the others. The emphasis in their *ubuntu* sensibilities on 'carrying their community' with them, the presence of an exit option, and the importance of the social support system mean that group members do little to upset the equilibrium in their network and social associations. One consequence of this is that groups tend to settle for known and tested activities, agendas and goals, and discourage members from changing its agenda. These relations of trust, in other words, are not transferable to other domains.

Further, while urban women were engaged in various forms of entrepreneurial activities, from running shebeens and *spazas* (neighborhood grocery shops) to tailoring businesses, they rarely saw these activities as businesses; instead, these women tended to regard them as part of their domestic chores. Like cooking or farming, selling meat or beer was a way of ensuring that the children were fed. Joining a trade or a political association meant redefining themselves, and in the process possibly losing their social support network. Thus urban women tended to join social associations, but avoided trade and political associations. The absence of village elders or authorities to legitimise their networks meant that the relations of trust in the social associations they did join were usually weak. They tended not to join trade associations, and in the religious associations they did join they developed relations of trust with fellow members that were rarely transferable to other domains.

The communities of urban men consisted of colleagues, neighbours, and shebeen friends and were multi-ethnic. The exit option was recognised, and frequently used. Unlike women, men were able to relocate for employment relatively easily; this ensured that community networks were weak. These weak community ties, paradoxically, made men willing to join political associations. Work, as discussed earlier, did play a major

part in *ubuntu* sensibilities in pre-colonial times, and continues to do so today. The only difference is that, unlike in pre-colonial times, urban men increasingly see work as separate from the social realm. They worked in the mines because they had to, and because the changing economic structure required African men to think of work as distinct from their social beings. Working in the mines or a factory did nothing to influence their place in society – it was merely a way of feeding oneself and one's family. Negotiation with the western ontology had led them toward this distinction.

For urban men who still retained ties with their villages, their place in the world was defined by how they were involved in the economic, political and social affairs of the village. For urban men who had lost all ties with the rural areas, work in a factory, mine, or business was a way of defining one's place in the world. Given this, they were more likely to join trade and also political associations. Moreover, they tended to develop strong relations of trust with other members in those associations. These relations were, however, not easily transferable. Relations with others in trade or political associations were regarded as contractual, not community relations. It appears to be difficult to transfer the relations of trust developed with the trade/political associations to other domains (example, social relations).

The community played a stronger role in the identity landscape of rural men than in that of urban men who had lost all ties with the rural areas. Rural men were those who went to work on the mines or factories in urban areas, but retained strong ties with their villages. When they were laid off, they frequently returned to their villages. A number of rural men, however, left the village only to work on nearby white-owned farms. Work and social relations in the village defined their position in the world. They defined their community as those in their village – 'their' people. Colleagues at work were rarely included. Not surprisingly, these men tended to join social associations legitimised by the village elders (just as rural women did), and informal and village-based trade associations and co-operatives. They did not join urban-based trade associations as easily or frequently as the urban men who had lost rural ties. Their relations with other members of the village-based trade association were strong, unlike their relations with other members in the odd urban-based trade association. Their relations of trust with others in social associations were easily transferable to other domains.

An attempt can now be made to make explicit the identity landscapes of the African entrepreneurs introduced earlier. Dora and her friends represent the urban female African identity landscape. This draws heavily on the role of the community – but the 'community' it applies to varies. For urban women such as Dora and her friends, 'community' refers to not necessarily to their kin, clanspeople, or inhabitants of the village they grew up in, but to their circle of friends. It is this circle which is their community, and its members share a similar identity landscape. Living in an urban area such as Soweto defines them more than their ethnicity does. Helping each other in taking care of their household defines them further. Despite being competitors (insofar as three out of the five friends run identical *spazas*) they would rather help each other in their businesses than compete. The relations of trust among them do not easily transfer to other domains-

and neither, as discussed earlier, do the relations of trust developed with fellow churchgoers.

For urban men such as Tito and George Langa, community ties are considerably less significant. For them, making it in the new South Africa is what counts, not mastering the nuances of *ubuntu*. For rural men, community ties are more meaningful, and helping each other while helping oneself becomes crucial. They define 'their' community not only as their family and friends, but as also as other villagers, including the village authorities.

Rural women appear to have the most elaborate understanding of *ubuntu* – considerably stronger than that of rural men. As the women in the village near Mmabatho observed, women involved the group support each other more than others in their families or the village do. However, such a support group is meaningful only if 'approved' by the village authorities and the village community. And, once it has been approved by them, the relations of trust developed within it are easily transferable to other domains.

## Conclusion

Thus the identity landscape of urban women leads them to join social associations; however, the relations of trust that develop within these groups tend not to be transferable to other domains. Urban women are unable to draw on their social networks to enhance their entrepreneurial activities. While their social support system does seem to help them start small businesses, it is of little use in helping those businesses succeed. One might even argue that the social associations of which they are members undermine the success of their businesses. Further, their identity landscape steers them away from joining formal trade associations, leaving most urban women with few networks useful for their business' success.

Rural women offer a useful counter-case. As in the case of urban women, their identity landscape leads them to join social associations. However, in this case the relations of trust generated within these social associations are in fact transferable to other domains, and help support entrepreneurial activities. Thus the social networks of rural women are useful for starting a business as well as enhancing their business activities.

The identity landscape of rural men tends to be similar to that of rural women. It too leads them toward relations of trust that can help them in their business dealings. While their relations of trust are not quite as strong as those of rural women (this is partly a consequence of the presence of the exit option available to them, which is rarely available to rural women), the transferability of these relations to other domains boosts their business prospects.

Urban men are successful in businesses because their identity landscape leads them to join formal trade associations. The contacts developed in these associations are critical to the success of their businesses. Moreover, while the relations of trust present in the loosely defined communities of most urban men help them to establish their businesses, it is their participation in formal trade associations that appears to be most important for their continued success.

Thus the concept of identity landscape seems to be valuable when analysing the formation of social capital and its consequences, and is worth exploring further. It allows us

to analyse social capital as distinct from its function. More importantly, it permits an analysis of why people engage in certain kinds of associations, whether the relations of trust developed in them are likely to be strong, and whether they can be transferred to other domains. Understanding these issues leads us to recognise the nuances of social capital instead of merely regarding it as a dichotomous category. Finally, it facilitates the comparative study of associational life, its patterns, causes, and consequences.