

Panel 2: Medical Matters: The Pains and Impacts of the Pandemic

Nelly Sharpley – *Matters of the Family: Covid and Vaccination in Rural South Africa*

Building on the insights of the book *Covid and Custom* which illustrates the responses of rural families and communities to the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020/21, this paper moves on to assess the reception and reception of vaccination in rural communities. The paper covers the turnaround from the 'closing the gate' approach of government to rural communities' during lockdown to the open and aggressive outreach campaigns associated with of the rural vaccination in the province. The paper explores how the campaign was launched and administered in the Eastern Cape and how it was received in rural areas. It then reflects on issues of enforced compliance and indirect cohesion and the process of decision making around vaccine uptake. The paper concludes that, while youth tended to adopt transactional attitudes to vaccination, linking it to the issuing of social grants and employment, older community members and household heads treated vaccination as a family matter to be engaged but carefully managed with a process of family strategies and communication. The paper rejects the idea that vaccination was widely rejected in rural communities on purely cultural grounds, suggesting instead that opposition had more to do with the way families and communities had experienced lockdown than any blanket rejection of western biomedicine, as the media like to present the situation. The paper concludes that complex ways in which rural communities engage with bio-medical interventions continues to require careful attention.

Bonelwa Nogqaza -- *Open Wounds: Covid and the Politics of Cuts in Tsolo, Eastern Cape*

This paper explores the consequences of framing the Covid pandemic as an issue of culture and custom in rural South Africa and the implications of this for the way culture has been re-politicised in this time of 'recovery and reconstruction'. It mediates this discussion through an account of "wounds" and how the wounds of the past remain open fields of conflict and debate. The paper focuses on the views of traditional healers, *ncibi* (surgeons) and rural community members on the mouth as a wound that should not be covered and *inxeba*, the wound of circumcision. The paper explains local attitudes to the imposition of masks without adequate communication and engagement and the implications of future state intervention in the cultural life of communities through the bans of customary practice. The paper shows how the insensitivity of the state's Covid response opened the old wounds of colonialism and the divisions within communities between believers and non-believers. It shows how these divisions continue to simmer in rural communities and how they have been reignited through the management of the pandemic, and other external development initiatives such as the mining on the Wild coast, which has pitted defenders of local cultural practices and the environment against pro-development factions in the same communities.

Kate Rice – *Sons and Mothers: Gender-based Violence, Youth Drugs-Use and the Ambiguities of Intimacy in the rural Eastern Cape*

In the 1950s urban South Africa was consumed by a crisis of what officials and academics called "juvenile delinquency". In working-class white communities this took the form of concerns about bikers and "ducktails" and in African working-class townships it involved an extensive discourse on "tstotsism", unemployed, criminalized urban youth who were seen to be destabilizing settler cities politically. In the various reports and commissions appointed to get to the bottom of the *tsotsi* phenomenon academics and officials drew a close connection between the abhorrent behaviour of *tsotsi* youth and their mothers. It was alleged that mothers, especially single mothers, lacked moral fibre and were 'aiding and abetting' their sons in perpetuating violence and criminality. This unholy alliance was said to be a product of their close and intimate bond, which was contrasted to the more distanced relations between urban youth and their fathers. In the rural areas, forms of anti-social behaviour and violence were associated with "traditionalist" forms of masculine expression, such as stick fighting. Here violence was also sometimes considered to be egged on by women, who celebrated the protective violence and masculinity of their sons. In the rural Eastern Cape today there

is a crisis of gender-based violence, including the violence of sons on their mothers. The past intimacies of collusion are seemingly now replaced by greater inter-personal fear and violence. This paper explores how the pandemic and post-pandemic situation in rural areas has facilitated “son on mother” violence, connected to rising forms of youth criminality and drug use in rural areas. The paper explores the complex ambiguities kinship and intimacy in pandemic times.

Kholekile Ngqila and Zikhona Mtwana -- *Pregnancy and Reproductive Health in Times of Crisis: The Impact of the Covid Pandemic in Young Women's Health*

This paper is concerned with youth pregnancies and the reproductive health services in rural areas. The paper focuses first on the customary forms of pregnancy management in rural areas. It explores how pregnancy was and sometimes still is managed by women and their close kin without bio-medical intervention, and how pregnancy and childbirth is navigated in without bio-medical services and in the absence of state assistance within the framework of customary practices. The paper then considers the way young women currently access the reproductive health services offered by the state, and how pregnant women and their families use of these services, and how this has impacted on pre-existing cultural practices for rural women. Against backdrop the paper turns to the province-wide closure of clinics and hospitals during the pandemic lockdown and how that impacted young women's pregnancy management and reproductive health. Did the young women return to past practices or use private health practitioner as services providers. One of the themes in the paper is the commodification at the local level of the free health services of the state in this time of scarcity, while others returned to customary practices within families. The paper concludes with a discussion of the post-pandemic realities for young women and what interventions might best serve their interests of young women today.