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'Yolo so party like a Swazi': youth and digital space

Bruneau, Kristiana

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Abstract

There is a culture arising among young people in Swaziland that believes that to be young and Swazi is an ephemeral, temporary, and directionless existence, and having sex and 'partying like a Swazi' is desired, celebrated and the fashion. I illustrate that this construction is a reaction to the banal, routine and regulation of their social spaces. Furthermore, in addition to the spaces being limited in number, imbued within each are structures and routines that reproduce discourses that privilege performances surrounding their normative behaviour and development (including the development of their sexualities). As a result, Swazi society has excluded young people from being active agents in the very discourses that govern and inform their lives, status, agency and citizenship.

Drawing from a phenomenological analysis of WhatsApp conversations combined with fieldwork in Swaziland, this dissertation explores the locality of digital space via WhatsApp in the landscape of the lives of Swazi young. The data illustrated that digital space is residual and resistive, as a reaction to the regulated and restricted spaces in their lives, in digital space young people enact performances of masculinity, secrecy and morality. As well as determined values systems and currencies around sex (and sexual status), vis a vis the exchange of social capital (nude and semi nude photos)- all of which are inherently self destructive. Lastly, in their resistance, Swazi young people are the local agents of their self-destruction.