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# A Boy Is Not A Person That You Would Have To Tend: Towards A Humane Anthropology Of Boyhoods

In this paper, I build upon a nascent and developing field of Black boyhood studies. Studies by Dumas and Nelson (2016), Drake (2016), hooks and Powell (2015) and many others have done well to index the ways in which critical aspects of becoming human for Black boys have remained unimagined and unimaginable in social science, anthropology, and social imagination. These studies have shown Black boys are imagined only as adults, and when not adults, as problems in need of fixing. A key limitation with this work is its centredness on the US experience of Black boyhood which does not have various cultural nuances observed in southern African Black boyhoods. Building on this corpus of work from Black boyhood studies, I argue for an Anthropology of Boyhoods that humanises boys, and Black boys more specifically. Using ethnographic data collected with young amaXhosa men in the Eastern Cape, I show social science and anthropological studies of amaXhosa men have mirrored many of the aspects noted in Black boyhood studies by imagining Xhosa boyhood only in relation to adulthood (i.e. initiation – ulwaluko) and post initiation lives through ukwakha umzi (building a homestead). Through uncovering the pre-initiation lives of Xhosa men (i.e. in boyhood), I show a more complex and nuanced depiction of amaXhosa boyhoods not currently reflected in anthropology or social science more broadly. In this way, I posit, to show more humanised representations of Black boyhood, and amaXhosa boyhoods more specifically, we have to “tend” to the boy – and not only in adulthood, but throughout their lifecourse. In doing so, ultimately I argue we can have more comprehensive understandings of the processes of becoming for Black boys as they come not only into their genders – but ultimately humanity. While exciting fields as the anthropology of Childhoods and Youth exist, ultimately, I argue for an Anthropology of Boyhoods that illuminates joys, complexities and nuances of being a boy.

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