

Using Film Screenings to Explore the Nature and Impact of Student Interactions with the Observatory Informal Settlement

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I extend my deepest gratitude to the individuals who have contributed to the realization of this master's thesis, exploring the dynamics of student interactions within the Observatory Informal Settlement (OIS) during film screenings. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Khululekile Banzi, a resident of OIS, whose vision and commitment to creating a communal space for film screenings served as the foundation of this research. Khululekile's insights and firsthand experiences enriched the study, providing a valuable perspective on the complex social dynamics within Observatory community.

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Abstract

This master's thesis presents a detailed exploration of student interactions within the Observatory Informal Settlement during film screenings, employing a qualitative approach deeply rooted in social exchange, intergroup contact, and social identity theoretical underpinnings. Against the complex social dynamic of Observatory and the historical backdrop of South Africa, the study investigates the dynamics that shape perceptions, interactions, and potential positive outcomes in this diverse community. Curated by Khululekile Banzi, a resident of OIS, the communal space created during film screenings serves as a unique platform for both entertainment and education.

UCT students, particularly those residing in Obs Square, engage with OIS residents amidst challenges posed by language barriers, historical contexts, and personal characteristics. The study delves into the transformative potential embedded in sustained engagement, revealing the interplay between preconceived notions and the realities that emerge through genuine, prolonged interaction. External factors shaping these interactions, including the accessibility of film screenings and the deliberate creation of a welcoming environment, are explored to reveal their profound impact on the nature and quality of engagements between students and OIS residents.

Through its theoretical underpinnings the study delves into the complex dynamics of identity, belonging, reciprocity, and understanding. Chapter Five, a focal point of humanizing the OIS narrative, reveals personal connections, shared experiences, and the resilience of the community-driven initiative as crucial elements in reshaping perceptions and encouraging meaningful connections. The theoretical underpinnings explore these interactions, showing the communal nature of shared experiences and rituals while addressing challenges and overcoming prejudices. The film screening emerges as transformative space for negotiation of social identities, fostering a sense of shared belonging. Resilience becomes a defining thread, not only within OIS but as a powerful mechanism for positive change within marginalized communities. The recommendations presented in this thesis transcend academic suggestions, constituting a call for action and a blueprint for sustainable growth, echoing the transformative power of intentional and sustained engagement. The OIS, as a microcosm of resilience and positive change, stands not only as a case study but as an inspiration and a call to join hands in building a more inclusive, understanding, and resilient society.

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1. Chapter One

1.1 Introduction and Context

Observatory or Obs as its fondly called, is a diverse and vibrant suburb situated at the heart of the City of Cape Town. It boasts a rich history - partly because it is one of the oldest areas in the city - and is home to an array of cultures, institutions, and facilities. The neighborhood houses a large student population from the nearby University of Cape Town and other tertiary learning institutes around the city (Schenck et al, 2017). Notably, it houses the esteemed South African Astronomical Observatory, which was built in 1897, and from which the suburb derives its name (Schenck et al, 2017). The suburb is also home to several other important institutions, such as the Provincial Government Groote Schuur Hospital and the Government Psychiatric Hospital Valkenburg.

Observatory holds historical significance, being referred to as a grey area under apartheid era, neither black nor white, or both (Meer, 2019: 2). Observatory is renowned as an inclusive and accepting space for race and class mixing, historically and into the present (Meer, 2019). The area projection as a powerful symbolic space for the ideal post-apartheid life. Observatory's tight-knit community comprises houses, shops, restaurants, bars, and small businesses. It is one of the rare spaces in Cape Town where the middle class can be seen walking on the streets (Meer, 2019: 2). The community's formal residents are predominantly middle class, while there is a significant houseless population. The area also serves as a thoroughfare for people commuting to work, accessing healthcare, or arriving to make use of other public services via public transport in the form of trains or taxis (Meer, 2019; Schenck et al, 2017). People also come to the area for work, undertaking jobs such as domestic work, gardening, car-guarding, or panhandling. The suburb has a reputation as having a notable street and home-based sex work community, it also is home to several prominent NGOs including Rape Crisis, SWEAT, The Triangle Project and numerous others (Meer, 2019: 2). This diversity makes Observatory especially unique in the South African context and reflects the appeal and challenges of other diverse urban spaces across the world (Meer, 2019).

Within this dynamic context, this research takes center stage, seeking to unravel the complex dynamics of interactions within Observatory. Our lens zooms in on the unique intersection between the formal residence of Obs Square and the community of the Observatory Informal Settlement (OIS). The question that drives this exploration is profound in its simplicity: How do students interact with residents of the Observatory Informal Settlement during film screenings? This central inquiry unfolds against the backdrop of Observatory's diversity, a diversity that extends beyond the surface-level coexistence. It prompts us to delve into the nuances of perception, the influences that shape interactions, and the potential pathways toward positive outcomes. The juxtaposition of affluent student life within Obs Square and the struggles faced by the OIS forms the canvas upon which this research endeavor paints its narrative.

As the exploration goes deeper, we navigate the delicate complexities of a community brought together by the magic of storytelling. These film screenings, hosted by Khululekile Banzi, become the stage for a unique intersection of narratives, creating a space where diverse communities converge. The research aims to explore the layers of this cinematic engagement, delving into the nuances that unfold when students from a varied socio-economic spectrum interact with the community of the OIS.

1.2 Obs Square

On March 2010, University of Cape Town (UCT) News noted that UCT embarked on a historic investment in its infrastructure, with a particular focus on the construction of Obs Square, a ground-breaking development that represented the single largest investment in UCT's history (UCT News, 2010). With a shocking budget of R485 million, Obs Square was designated to be a 6,000 square meter block located between Main Road and William Street. This development was said to become UCT's newest and most substantial residence, accommodating a total of 887 students (UCT News, 2010). UCT News highlighted that Obs Square is designed as a seven-story building, featuring ground-floor shops and a range of student amenities. The residence provides single rooms for students, each equipped with an ensuite shower and washbasin. UCT News highlighted that the facilities are geared towards fostering a sense of community and inclusion, with over 100 kitchens to be shared by eight students each, promoting social interaction and collaborative living. Moreover, the residence was said to include 200 parking bays to cater to the transportation needs of its residents (UCT News, 2010).

Dr Max Price who was UCT Vice Chancellor at the time highlighted the importance of UCT's residence system in supporting the holistic development of outstanding graduates. He noted that while only about one-third of the total student population stays in residence, the demand for accommodation often exceeds the available spaces (UCT News, 2010). Obs Square, therefore, was seen as a strategic response to address this challenge, making university accommodation more accessible and accommodating a larger number of students.

UCT News revealed that Obs Square took four years from conception to completion (UCT News, 2011). The first room was done in January 2011 and the last room was finished on 17 October 2011, followed by the official handover to UCT on 25 November 2011 (UCT News, 2011). Remarkably, Obs Square was completed a full month ahead of schedule, showcasing the efficiency and dedication invested in its construction. The university, aware of the curiosity and concerns of the local community, organized a Community Information Day on 21 November 2011 (UCT News, 2011). This event allowed Observatory residents to explore the building, raising questions and expressing their concerns.

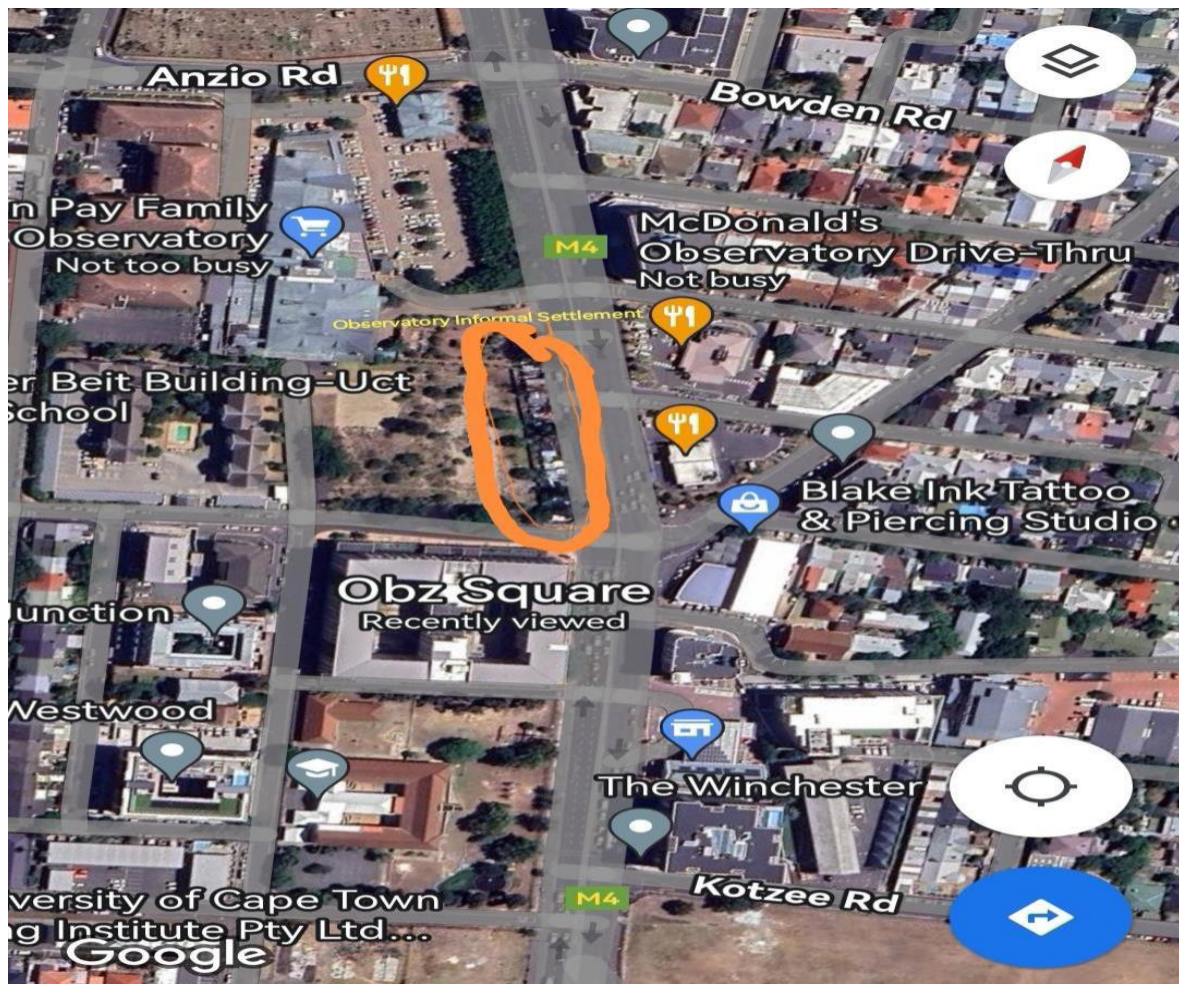
Community concerns, ranging from parking availability and residency policies to the integration of the residence into the existing culture of the suburb, were duly noted (UCT News, 2011). Grant Willis, former director of Student Housing & Residence Life, and John Critien, former executive director of UCT Properties and Services, assured that these concerns were under investigation and would be addressed appropriately (UCT News, 2011). Former Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Crain Soudien highlighted UCT's vision to create a "living learning environment" within Obs Square, urging Observatory residents to actively engage in holding the university accountable for this vision and to become partners in the project. The commitment to being good neighbors was emphasized, fostering a sense of collaboration between the university and the local community (UCT News, 2011).

The residence, completed on budget at R415 million, was equipped with extensive facilities, including social areas, pool tables, study rooms, a computer lab, and a state-of-the-art water-heating system. The building's design prioritized sustainability, with energy-saving features such as motion-controlled lighting monitors and auditory treatment for sound insulation. Moreover, the construction process itself had its unique stories, such as the building of individual bathroom pods. Faced with logistical challenges when considering external

production, UCT invested in a struggling company in the Atlantis community, providing employment for over 100 artisans (UCT News, 2011).

As the doors of Obs Square opened to students, it marked the realization of a vision that goes beyond bricks and walls, a vision of fostering academic excellence, community engagement, and a vibrant campus culture. So, in essence, Obs Square not only met the immediate need for student accommodation but also embodied UCT's commitment to creating a holistic and sustainable living and learning environment. The make-up of students in this residence is diverse and has varied socio-economic spectrums, ranging from those who come from the working-class background to those who come from privileged backgrounds.

1.3 The Observatory Informal Settlement



The Observatory Informal Settlement (OIS) which is highlighted in orange in the above photo is located along Main Road in Observatory – the road connects and extends all the nearby neighborhoods and much further – this busy road runs parallel to the N1 highway. OIS is itself

located at a busy part of this busy road, opposite KFC, MacDonalds and close to the entrance of the popular bar and café-filled Lower Main Road. The OIS is also across the road from the bus stop of the official University of Cape Town's shuttle service in the area and the settlement is located next to Obs Square. This informal settlement initially began in 2019 as an occupation at the Arcadia House old age home; the institution had belonged to the Cape Peninsula Organization for the Aged (CPOA) and had been left vacant before the occupation around 17 September (Daniels, 2022). However, the residents of the occupation were subsequently evicted on 2 October 2019 and the building was demolished, leaving 31 families without a place to call home. Despite this setback, the residents took action and settled on the lawn outside the property where they built tents and subsequently homes made of a wood and zinc structure (Gontsana, 2022). Through their efforts they were able to obtain an urgent interim interdict, which prevented the city from evicting them and ensured their safety and well-being (Gontsana, 2022). Sewlyn Hockey who was acting judge at the time, brought attention to the possibility that the city may have resorted to a "quick fix" solution by relying on its bylaws to evict the occupiers (Broughton, 2020). In his observation, the City's use of these bylaws seemed to be an abuse of power and circumvented the provisions of PIE Act (the Prevention of Illegal Eviction and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act) (Gontsana, 2022).

However, the city decided to approach the Western Cape High Court to challenge the interdict, and the matter was presided over by a full bench of judges including Patricia Goliath, Kate Savage, and James Lekhuleni (Daniels, 2022). During the proceedings, Advocate Ismail Jamie, representing the residents, claimed that the implementation of the bylaws was unlawful and unconstitutional, and that the residents were being constantly targeted by the city (Gontsana, 2022). On the other hand, Advocate Karrisha Pillay, representing the city, refuted these claims, stating that there was no evidence of confiscation of occupier's belongings. She argued that the video evidence of law enforcement officers showed no serious aggression towards the occupants, and no bylaw had been used to evict the residents (Gontsana, 2022). The judges expressed their concern about the potential consequences of upholding the interdict, as it could paralyze the city in this matter and in future similar matters. As such, the judgement was reserved (Gonstana, 2022). It seemingly appears that since it is not during the covid-19 lockdown, in order for the City to evict the Observatory informal settlement residents, it has to do so according to the provisions of the PIE act.

The Observatory Informal Settlement consists of 31 homes with no tap water, no electricity, no toilets, and residents heavily rely on a bucket-system or from using the toilets at Pick n Pay and other shops nearby (Gontsana, 2022). Despite the government's failure to provide basic services such as water, electricity, and ablution facilities, they remain resolute in not leaving their shacks (Broughton, 2020). The Singabalapha (We Belong Here) movement has been instrumental in the struggle of the OIS, they have been at the forefront of the fight against the harassment of the city. Singabalapha is a group of people from Khayelitsha, Nyanga East, Gugulethu, and Langa who are fighting for land and decent housing for all (Singabalapha, n.d). This group works in solidarity with the Reclaim the City, Willow Arts Collective, We See You, Housing Assembly, Tshisimani – Centre for Activist Education, and many others (Singabalapha, n.d).

1.4 Film Screenings

The film screenings began around February 2020 at the eve of the covid-19, they were started by Khulekile Banzi a resident of the OIS and are still ran by him. In my research, I have chosen not to use a pseudonym for Khulekile Banzi, as he expressed a preference to be identified by his real name. My interactions with Khululekile Banzi and the OIS are genuine and transparent. The decision to proceed without a pseudonym highlights the authenticity and integrity of my engagement with the community, emphasizing a commitment to ethical research practices and a sincere exploration of the dynamics at play in this unique context.

During December 2020, while working on my honors thesis, circumstances prevented me from returning home to the Eastern Cape, leading to a unique encounter with Khululekile Banzi. In a season when most students had departed, I found myself interacting with Banzi outside the OIS during one of my trips from Pick n Pay. Our initial exchange of words soon unfolded into a meaningful connection, where I found myself spending most of my time in the OIS. Banzi shared insights into his work, and what initially struck me was the profound sense of belonging I experienced within the settlement. Beyond the physical space, Banzi's perspectives on the world were captivating and thought-provoking. As a student deeply committed to the idea that the poor also have a right to the city, the settlement resonated with my beliefs. This shared ethos facilitated an effortless connection, laying the foundation for my understanding of Banzi, the OIS, and the broader context that fueled my subsequent research endeavors.

Banzi shared that the reason for the film screenings is two-fold, firstly to bring entertainment for children so they can have something to look forward to but also for adults as well. Secondly is to raise an awareness of local films as he only screen local documentaries and films. The film screenings are based on the national calendar's theme, for example during human rights month the documentaries and films will be centered around human rights. Banzi has a saying that until lions learn to speak, stories of hunting will always glorify the hunter, thus he will continue exercising the action of telling stories. He says that people have a lot of stories to tell thus he sees the use of telling stories as an important tool. He emphasized on the need to show kids the importance of telling their stories and showing them how to do so thus is now hosting film screenings.

The film screenings take place right next to the pavement and the main road, in between Banzi's shack and his neighbors' shack is where the screen is projected. The film screening occurs every Thursday at 7pm and anyone is allowed to join the seating. Banzi uses his WhatsApp group to update people on movies that will be streaming on that particular week. The screening space is not too big, at the center there is always wood fire burning, keeping everyone warm. Outside people who attend the most are UCT students who reside in Obs Square and off-campus accommodations around Observatory. As a student, who also lived in Obs Square in 2020 and 2021, I witnessed the development of the OIS film screening. Currently, the film screenings are playing through a projector but when they began in February, Banzi shared that they were playing through a tablet-smartphone. Around August 2020, the film screenings were playing from a laptop which would be borrowed from other residents within the settlement. Then during 2022, Banzi spoke with a student from Obs Square who helped with the lending of the laptop and downloading of the films and documentaries. On January 2023 another student bought Banzi a projector then Banzi bought other materials to power the projector. The student who bought the projector also sponsored popcorns for the attendees.

The film screenings attendance is diverse, about seven children would attend aged 9 -14 years old and around six consistent resident members from the settlement would attend. Around five UCT students would attend, then once in a while people from Observatory residing outside of the settlement would also attend. After the film Banzi opens a platform for a question-and-answer session to allow for engagement regarding the film and its relevance to our daily life. Next to the OIS is the UCT residence called Obs Square which makes an interesting scenario in this vicinity. UCT is a diverse institution that attracts students from all walks of life,

background, and nationalities. As mentioned before, Obs Square consists of students from different backgrounds, particularly those who are unable to afford the high cost of living associated with private student residences in Cape Town. As a result, the demographic makeup of the residence tends to be more diverse with students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as a mix of local and international students.

In recent years UCT has made efforts to increase the diversity of its student body and to ensure that students from all backgrounds have equal access to education. This includes offering scholarships and financial aid to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as increasing the number of students from underrepresented groups. As a former resident of Obs Square, I am likely familiar with the challenges faced by students from lower-income families. Living in a high-cost city like Cape Town while studying can be financially challenging, especially for those who are not able to rely on financial support from their families. When I had a fee-block, the thought of moving into the OIS for sanctuary had crossed my mind until we were allowed to fee debt clearance. Our precarity as students from lower-income families makes it difficult to even access and navigate the city because there is no financial security to explore this high-cost city.

As a poor student who once lived in Obs Square, I understand first-hand the importance of access to affordable housing and financial support in order to pursue higher education. This experience is becoming valuable as I am moving towards my academic and professional career, it gives a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized communities and a commitment to creating a more equitable society.

Aims and Objectives

As UCT is known as the most prestigious university in Africa, it is interesting to find that outside one of its main residences in a suburban setting there is an informal settlement. It would be interesting to study the interaction of students from residences such as Obs Square with the Observatory Informal Settlement. Conducting this kind of research allows access to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and interactions between students from a prestigious institution like UCT and residents of the OIS. By exploring the nature of student interactions during film screenings, the research provides insights into the complexities of relationships, perceptions, and influences shaping these engagements. It allows for an examination of the factors that

contribute to positive or challenging interactions, offering a nuanced perspective on the dynamics between a university community and an informal settlement.

Thus, this research project seeks to explore the nature of student interactions with the OIS during film screenings. As mentioned before Banzi hosts film screenings on every Thursday's and sometimes would invite those involved in the film either the director or producer for a question-and-answer session after the film (Observatory informal settlement audio visual initiative, n.d). The film screening is a matter of entertainment and educational purposes, one of the attendees alluded that the space has a rich and diverse heritage, and they have learnt a lot about stories they knew less or nothing about (Observatory informal settlement audio visual initiative, n.d).

So, in all the hostility that exists between the OIS and the City, Banzi is able to bring laughter, using film as a tool for both entertainment and education, creating a sense of community and heritage appreciation. The aim of the research is to understand the dynamics of student interactions, the factors that influence them, and how they can be improved to promote positive outcomes for both communities.

Research Question:

- How do students interact with residents of the Observatory Informal Settlement during film screenings?

The following sub-research questions will help guide the main research question:

- How do students perceive the Observatory informal settlement, and how does this influence their interaction with the community?
- What factors influence the nature and quality of interactions between students and the Observatory informal settlement during film screenings?
- How can student interactions with the Observatory informal settlement during film screenings be improved to promote positive outcomes for both communities?

2. Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Community Engagement and Service Learning

At the core of this research lies the foundational concept of community engagement, acknowledged as a central tenet of service learning—a pedagogical approach that integrates academic learning with purposeful community service (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Their work serves as a foundational framework for understanding the multifaceted dynamics of community engagement within the educational context. In their seminal publication, Eyler and Giles underscore the capacity of service learning to cultivate social responsibility, encourage civic engagement, and stimulate personal growth among students.

Central to their perspective is the reciprocal relationship between academic pursuits and community service, a symbiotic interaction that lies at the heart of service learning. According to Eyler and Giles, community engagement is not a one-way street where students merely apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations; instead, it is a dynamic exchange that enhances both the learning experience and the community's well-being (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This reciprocal nature is essential in creating a holistic educational environment where students actively contribute to their communities while refining their academic understanding.

Eyler and Giles go beyond viewing community engagement as a mere extension of academic learning; they posit that it is a transformative experience that nurtures critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By engaging with real-world challenges, students are compelled to think critically, analyze situations, and develop practical solutions. This aligns with the broader goals of education—to prepare students not only with theoretical knowledge but also with the ability to apply that knowledge meaningfully in diverse contexts.

Furthermore, the emphasis on personal growth adds another layer to their perspective. Eyler and Giles acknowledge that community engagement is not solely about imparting knowledge or addressing societal needs; it is also a profound journey of self-discovery and personal development. Through active participation in community service, students encounter diverse perspectives, confront challenges, and evolve as individuals. This transformative aspect is integral to the holistic education Eyler and Giles advocate, where the development of character and social consciousness is as crucial as academic achievement.

Adding another layer to this discourse, Wenger's work on communities of practice introduces a valuable perspective on the collaborative nature of learning within communities (Wenger, 1999). Wenger's theory, initially articulated in 1999, delves into the social nature of learning and the ways in which communities contribute to the development of shared knowledge (Wenger, 1999). This lens brings a nuanced understanding to the dynamics of student interactions during film screenings within the context of marginalized communities. Communities of practice, as conceptualized by Wenger, are characterized by individuals who share a common domain of interest and engage in joint activities (Wenger, 1999). In the context of film screenings within the Observatory informal settlement, students and community members form a community of practice bound by a shared interest in exploring and understanding the narratives presented in the films. Wenger's perspective suggests that, through this shared engagement, both students and community members contribute to a collective understanding, encouraging a collaborative learning environment.

Wenger's emphasis on the social aspect of learning aligns with the communal nature of film screenings. As individuals collectively interpret and discuss the cinematic narratives, they contribute to a shared knowledge base. This collaborative learning process transcends traditional classroom boundaries, highlighting the transformative potential of shared experiences and dialogue. Furthermore, Wenger's concept of a community of practice highlights the long-term, evolving nature of learning within communities (Wenger, 1999). It suggests that the interactions during film screenings have the potential to extend beyond the immediate context, influencing the ongoing relationships between students and the Observatory informal settlement. The shared experiences and collaborative learning may contribute to the formation of enduring connections and mutual understanding.

In the context of this research, community engagement transcends its conventional boundaries, taking on a dynamic and transformative role during film screenings. The carefully chosen films, functioning as mediums for academic exploration, create a distinctive blend where theoretical knowledge converges with the lived experiences of marginalized communities. This deliberate selection of cinematic narratives acts as a transformative tool, bridging the gap between academic theory and experiential understanding. The films chosen for screening operate as vehicles, transporting the rich diverse stories, cultures, histories, and challenges faced by marginalized communities into the realm of facilitated discussions (Boyte & Kari,

1996). This synthesis of academic discourse with the tangible realities of communities establishes a profound alignment with the fundamental principles of service learning and community engagement.

This integration of academic exploration and community narratives during film screenings is particularly pertinent to the overarching goals of service learning. It not only enhances students' understanding of theoretical concepts but also encourages them to engage with the complex and multifaceted realities of marginalized communities. Through this process, students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in a dialogue that goes beyond traditional educational boundaries, cultivating a holistic and empathetic approach to learning and community interaction. The transformative potential of this dynamic engagement is a critical aspect of this research, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of academic inquiry, community service, and the powerful medium of film. The communities of practice framework introduced by Wenger further accentuates the collaborative nature of this dynamic engagement, emphasizing the communal construction of knowledge within the context of community service and academic exploration.

2.2 Community Engagement through Film Screenings

The exploration of community engagement through film screenings has been a subject of extensive research, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics and transformative potential inherent in this intersection. Lee and Priester's (2015) seminal study, *"Increasing Awareness of Diversity Through Community Engagement and Films,"* stands out as a cornerstone in understanding the complex relationship between film screenings and community engagement. Their work highlights the transformative power of films in cultivating dialogue and understanding among diverse groups. Drawing from a rich array of sources encompassing the benefits of diversity and the educational impact of films, Lee and Priester present a compelling argument for the efficacy of film screenings in community engagement.

The intervention detailed in their study, featuring a series of film screenings coupled with facilitated discussions, serves as a compelling model for positive outcomes. It not only leads to increased awareness of diversity but also contributes to the development of positive attitudes toward individuals from different backgrounds. This research's relevance to the present study is evident, aligning with the overarching objective of bringing together students and the Observatory informal settlement community through shared cinematic experiences.

In her influential work on visual ethnography, Pink (2007) significantly advances the discourse on film screenings as powerful tools for community engagement. Pink's research, rooted in visual methodologies, underscores the potency of visual media, particularly films, in cultivating understanding and empathy among diverse groups. This perspective aligns seamlessly with the objectives of the present research, which seeks to explore the transformative potential of film screenings within the context of student interactions with the Observatory informal settlement.

Pink's exploration of visual methodologies delves into the nuanced ways in which visual media can contribute to community-building. Films, as a visual medium, possess a unique ability to convey narratives, emotions, and cultural nuances that might be challenging to express through other means. Within the realm of community engagement, this suggests that film screenings can act as more than mere entertainment; they become platforms for shared experiences, offering diverse communities an opportunity to come together.

Central to Pink's insights is the idea that film screenings provide a space for communities to share perspectives and build relationships. This aligns with the core objectives of community engagement, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect. In the context of the Observatory informal settlement, where marginalized communities face challenges in accessing resources and amplifying their voices, film screenings may serve as a democratizing force, providing a platform for these communities to express their stories and engage in meaningful conversations.

In addition to Lee and Priester's and Pink's contributions, Saulter (2022) delves into the specific context of informal settlements, offering a nuanced perspective on the role of film screenings in amplifying marginalized voices. Saulter's research emphasizes how film screenings in these settings provide a unique opportunity for residents to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives. This localized exploration adds a crucial layer to the broader discussion, highlighting the potential of film screenings not only for fostering understanding but also for empowering marginalized communities to narrate their own narratives.

2.3 Challenges and Risks in Community Engagement

Community engagement, while rich with transformative potential, is not immune to challenges and risks. Furco (1996) critically highlights the vulnerability inherent in community engagement initiatives, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of the potential pitfalls. One significant concern raised by Furco is the risk of community members feeling exploited or tokenized when they perceive that students are extracting value from their experiences solely for academic purposes. This apprehension speaks to the delicate balance required in community engagement, necessitating a mindful approach that prioritizes the community's well-being alongside academic objectives.

Moreover, Hammersley (2012) offers a cautionary perspective on the unintentional reinforcement of power imbalances within the community engagement dynamic. The potential perpetuation of negative stereotypes emerges as a considerable risk if student interactions lack a foundation of sensitivity and respect. Hammersley's insights underscore the need for conscientious efforts to ensure that community engagement initiatives do not unintentionally exacerbate existing disparities. This resonates with the ethical framework guiding this research, emphasizing the commitment to equitable, respectful, and reciprocal interactions.

Navigating these challenges requires an integrative approach that considers the multifaceted nature of community dynamics. Ethical considerations and a commitment to reciprocity become pivotal in mitigating these risks. Students engaging with marginalized communities during film screenings must be equipped not only with academic knowledge but also with a profound understanding of the ethical responsibilities associated with community interactions. This dual focus ensures that the transformative potential of community engagement remains a positive force, fostering mutual growth and understanding.

2.4 Film Screenings Beyond Academia

The utility of film screenings extends far beyond the confines of academia, emerging as a potent force for fostering dialogue and building bridges between diverse communities. Abu- Lughod et al. (2002) and Pink (2013) converge on the recognition of film screenings as transformative platforms, providing spaces where individuals from varied backgrounds can converge, learn, and engage in meaningful interactions. Pink (2007) delves into the unique role of film screenings as creators of spaces, enabling a profound understanding of cultural perspectives and values, thereby laying the groundwork for dialogue and relationship- building.

In the context of informal settlements, characterized by pervasive marginalization and restricted access to resources, film screenings take on added significance. Saulter (2022) illuminates the role of film as a vehicle for community empowerment within these settings. Film screenings become more than just events; they evolve into dynamic platforms where the narratives, experiences, and voices of marginalized community members are amplified. This transformative potential aligns seamlessly with broader discussions on the capacity of narratives to empower and uplift marginalized voices, underscoring film's unique ability to serve as a catalyst for community-building.

The power of film screenings within informal settlements lies not only in the content of the films but in the communal experience they facilitate. By providing a shared space for residents to engage with narratives reflective of their own experiences, film screenings become communal acts of storytelling. This shared storytelling, in turn, strengthens community bonds, fostering a sense of collective identity and resilience. Consequently, film screenings emerge not only as tools for educational and cultural exchange but as integral components of community development, offering avenues for expression, connection, and the collective pursuit of positive social change. In essence, the role of film screenings extends into the heart of community life, offering a medium through which narratives are shared, connections are forged, and community voices are elevated. The implications of film screenings as community engagement tools echo well beyond academic discourse, manifesting as dynamic agents of social cohesion and empowerment within the complex fabric of diverse communities.

2.5 Factors Influencing Student Engagement

Within the realm of community film screenings, understanding the dynamics of student engagement becomes paramount, as identified by Ansell (2002) and Mullick & Haque (2023). These scholars shed light on key factors that significantly influence the depth and nature of student interactions, paving the way for a nuanced understanding of these dynamics. An essential determinant of student engagement is the level of familiarity and knowledge they possess about the community under consideration. As posited by Ansell (2002), students equipped with prior knowledge are better positioned to engage meaningfully. This familiarity allows for a more profound understanding of the community's intricacies, facilitating a more informed and empathetic engagement. Initiatives that prioritize pre-engagement education,

such as orientation sessions or preparatory coursework, can contribute significantly to enhancing students' contextual understanding.

Mullick & Haque (2023) draw attention to the significance of students' comfort levels in navigating cross-cultural interactions. This factor highlights the importance of cultural competence, emphasizing that students comfortable with engaging people from diverse cultural backgrounds are more likely to establish meaningful connections. It highlights the role of intercultural skills in creating an environment conducive to dialogue and understanding during film screenings in marginalized communities.

Acknowledging and navigating power dynamics is a critical aspect of ethical community engagement (Hammersley, 2012). Students' perceptions of their own power or privilege in relation to informal settlement residents can significantly impact their willingness to engage. Awareness of power imbalances is essential to fostering respectful and equitable interactions. Strategies for mitigating perceived imbalances should be integrated into the planning and execution of community film screenings to ensure that students approach the experience with sensitivity and humility.

Despite the acknowledgment of these factors, a comprehensive understanding of their interplay in the context of film screenings with marginalized communities is an avenue ripe for further exploration. The intricacies of how prior knowledge, comfort with cross-cultural interactions, and perceived power dynamics intersect during film screenings remain nuanced and demand empirical investigation. Unraveling these complexities can provide valuable insights for refining community engagement strategies, ensuring that student interactions are not only transformative for the community but also enriching for the students involved.

Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm theory offers a distinctive lens through which to understand human communication, emphasizing the fundamental role of storytelling in our interactions. Fisher's theory, articulated in his seminal work *"Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action"* (2021), departs from traditional models of communication that prioritize rational argumentation. Instead, Fisher contends that humans are essentially storytellers, and narrative form is the primary mode of human communication. According to Fisher, individuals perceive the world and make sense of their experiences through the construction and interpretation of stories. He introduces the concept of coherence

and fidelity as the criteria by which people evaluate the narratives they encounter. Coherence refers to the internal consistency of a story, while fidelity pertains to the narrative's alignment with one's values and beliefs. Fisher argues that individuals are more likely to accept and be persuaded by a narrative if it is coherent and resonates with their existing worldview.

In the context of interactions between students and residents of informal settlements, Fisher's narrative paradigm theory becomes particularly relevant. Film screenings, as narrative experiences, serve as powerful mediums for storytelling. They not only present visual narratives but also encapsulate the essence of shared experiences and cultural stories. Through Fisher's lens, the effectiveness of film screenings in fostering empathy and understanding can be attributed to the inherent narrative nature of human communication. By embracing this narrative paradigm, the analysis of student-community interactions during film screenings gains a theoretical foundation that recognizes the centrality of storytelling in shaping human understanding and connection.

2.6 Communication and Narrative Engagement

Gudykunst and Kim's Intercultural Communication theory, first articulated in the 1980s, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding communication processes between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The theory is particularly relevant in the context of interactions between students and residents of informal settlements during film screenings, as it addresses the challenges and opportunities inherent in cross-cultural communication. One key aspect of Gudykunst and Kim's theory is the recognition of cultural variability and its impact on communication styles. The theory posits that individuals from distinct cultures often possess different communication norms, values, and expectations (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). In intercultural interactions, misunderstandings and conflicts can arise due to these cultural differences. Gudykunst and Kim's model categorizes cultural variability into three primary dimensions: individualism-collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). These dimensions offer insights into how people from different cultures might approach communication, relationships, and conflict resolution.

In the context of film screenings involving students and informal settlement residents, the theory helps unpack potential challenges arising from cultural differences. It highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity, awareness, and adaptability in encouraging effective communication. The theory also introduces the concept of uncertainty reduction, emphasizing

the role of communication in minimizing uncertainty and promoting mutual understanding between culturally diverse individuals.

Moreover, Gudykunst and Kim's theory highlights the importance of intercultural communication competence, which involves the ability to adapt communication strategies to different cultural contexts. This competence becomes crucial for students engaging with residents of informal settlements during film screenings. By applying the principles of intercultural communication, students can navigate cultural differences, build rapport, and facilitate meaningful dialogue, contributing to the overall success of community engagement initiatives.

2.7 Psychological and Sociological Perspectives

Diener and Seligman's (2002) study on happiness contributes valuable insights to the potential psychological impact of community engagement, offering a lens through which to examine the emotional dimensions of interactions between students and community members during film screenings. The study, titled *"Very Happy People,"* explores the factors contributing to subjective well-being and happiness. The central premise of Diener and Seligman's study is the exploration of the characteristics and life circumstances of individuals who report high levels of happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2002). By investigating the subjective experiences of very happy individuals, the study prompts reflections on how community engagement initiatives, such as film screenings, may influence the well-being of both students and community members.

Understanding the psychological impact involves recognizing the potential positive emotions that can arise from meaningful community interactions. Diener and Seligman identify factors such as positive social relationships, engagement in meaningful activities, and a sense of purpose as contributors to happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Applying these findings to community engagement initiatives suggests that film screenings, by encouraging connections and providing a platform for shared experiences, have the potential to elicit positive emotions among both students and community members. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of subjective well-being, going beyond traditional measures of success to consider individuals' own assessments of their lives. This perspective is crucial when evaluating the success of

community engagement initiatives, as it encourages a nuanced understanding of the emotional impact on participants.

In the context of the current research, Diener and Seligman's study encourages a holistic exploration of the outcomes of film screenings, emphasizing the potential for positive emotional experiences for students and community members alike. As students engage with the narratives presented in films and interact with community members, the study prompts a reflection on how these experiences contribute to subjective well-being and happiness within the context of community engagement.

Sociological perspectives, as exemplified by Robert Putnam's (2000) exploration of community engagement and its decline, provide a valuable framework for understanding the challenges faced by marginalized communities in a broader societal context. Putnam's work, particularly in *"Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,"* delves into the erosion of social capital and community engagement in contemporary society, offering insights that extend beyond specific communities to encompass larger sociological trends. Putnam's examination of the decline in civic participation and social connectedness highlights the challenges faced by communities, particularly those on the margins. The notion of "bowling alone" symbolizes the diminishing trend of people participating in communal activities, signifying a shift from shared social spaces to individualized pursuits (Putnam, 2000). This trend has implications for marginalized communities, which may experience heightened isolation and limited access to social resources.

Employing Putnam's perspective to the Observatory informal settlement situates it within the larger narrative of declining community engagement. The challenges faced by marginalized communities are not isolated; they are part of a broader societal pattern. The lens provided by Putnam's work encourages an exploration of how societal shifts impact communities on the periphery and contribute to their challenges. Moreover, this perspective prompts considerations of potential revitalization and community-building strategies within the larger societal context. Putnam's work serves as a call to action, urging a revival of community engagement for the well-being of society as a whole. In the case of the Observatory informal settlement, understanding its challenges through a sociological lens becomes instrumental in not only addressing immediate concerns but also in envisioning long-term solutions that resonate with broader societal changes.

Loïc Wacquant's (2008) work on *"Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality"* offers a significant contribution to the sociological understanding of advanced marginality and prompts a nuanced examination of dynamics within informal settlements. Wacquant's comparative sociological perspective encourages an exploration of how broader societal structures influence the interactions under scrutiny, providing valuable insights for the analysis of the Observatory informal settlement.

Wacquant's concept of advanced marginality refers to a condition where individuals and communities face extreme social exclusion due to economic shifts, urban restructuring, and changes in the global economy (Wacquant, 2008). This perspective is particularly relevant when examining informal settlements, which often emerge as a result of socio-economic inequalities and systemic issues. Wacquant's comparative approach encourages researchers to go beyond surface-level observations, delving into the structural factors that contribute to the existence and persistence of informal settlements.

Applying Wacquant's framework to the Observatory informal settlement allows for a deeper understanding of the socio-economic forces at play. This perspective prompts considerations of how policies, economic structures, and broader societal conditions contribute to the marginalization experienced by the community. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of the informal settlement dynamics with larger socio-economic systems, discouraging reductionist views that isolate these communities from broader societal contexts.

2.8 Critical Media Literacy and Educational Perspectives

Educational perspectives, as advocated by Paulo Freire (1970) and Kellner and Share (2005), bring a transformative lens to the understanding of power structures within educational contexts. Freire's influential work, *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* (1970), posits education as a tool for liberation, challenging existing power structures and fostering critical consciousness among learners. This perspective aligns with the overarching theme of this research, emphasizing the transformative potential of film screenings as a means of education within the context of community engagement.

Freire's concept of critical pedagogy highlights the importance of engaging students in critical reflection and dialogue, encouraging them to question and challenge oppressive systems

(Freire, 1970). The application of Freirean principles to the context of film screenings within the OIS suggests that these events can serve as platforms for transformative learning. By exposing students to narratives depicting the experiences of marginalized communities, film screenings become educational tools that prompt critical reflection on societal structures and power imbalances. Moreover, the work of Kellner and Share (2005) contributes to the educational perspective by emphasizing the need for critical media literacy. In the age of mass media, understanding the role of media narratives in shaping perceptions is crucial. Kellner and Share advocate for an educational approach that equips students with the skills to critically engage with media messages, challenging dominant discourses and promoting a more nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Within the framework of this research, the educational perspectives offered by Freire, Kellner, and Share suggest that film screenings can be transformative educational experiences. These events go beyond mere entertainment; they become tools for fostering critical media literacy and encouraging students to question and deconstruct prevailing narratives, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of challenging existing power structures. Gatto's (2005) critique of compulsory schooling provides a thought-provoking lens through which to examine the hidden curriculum and its potential influence on student perceptions and interactions within community engagement initiatives. In his work, *"Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling,"* Gatto challenges conventional educational structures, questioning the impact of formal schooling on students' social and intellectual development.

Gatto argues that the hidden curriculum, the unspoken lessons and values embedded in the educational system, plays a pivotal role in shaping students' perspectives and behaviors (Gatto, 2005). Within the context of community engagement during film screenings, Gatto's critique prompts reflection on how traditional educational structures may influence students' approaches to interacting with marginalized communities. One aspect of Gatto's critique involves questioning the conformity encouraged by traditional schooling. He argues that the emphasis on standardized curricula and uniformity stifles individual creativity and critical thinking (Gatto, 2005). Applied to community engagement initiatives, this critique invites contemplation on how students, conditioned by traditional schooling, may bring preconceived notions and a reluctance to challenge established narratives during interactions with marginalized communities.

Gatto's perspective also sheds light on the hierarchical nature of traditional educational settings. He critiques the top-down structure of schooling, where authority is primarily vested in teachers and administrators, limiting students' autonomy and decision-making (Gatto, 2005). When considering student interactions within community engagement initiatives, Gatto's critique raises questions about how power dynamics within educational structures may impact students' ability to engage meaningfully with community members.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on three prominent theories, social identity theory, social exchange theory and intergroup contact theory, to explain the underlying mechanisms of student engagement with informal settlement residents during film screenings. Social identity theory, as elucidated by Tajfel and Turner (1979), offers a compelling lens through which the transformative power of personal connections within the context of community engagement can be understood. At its core, social identity theory explores how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, deriving a sense of identity and self-esteem from these affiliations. This theoretical framework becomes particularly relevant in the analysis of student interactions with marginalized communities during film screenings.

Tajfel and Turner posit that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem by positively distinguishing their social groups from others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of community engagement, students entering marginalized communities can experience a significant shift in their social identity. Through the shared experience of film screenings and facilitated discussions, students may develop a heightened awareness of the challenges faced by the community, fostering a sense of connection and shared identity. This transformative aspect is rooted in the social categorization processes outlined by Tajfel and Turner. As students engage with the narratives and experiences depicted in films, they may undergo a cognitive and emotional shift, redefining their understanding of 'us' and 'them.' This reconfiguration of social identity holds the potential to break down preconceived notions, stereotypes, and biases, creating a platform for genuine empathy and understanding. Furthermore, social identity theory helps elucidate the role of positive social identity in fostering social cohesion. As students identify with the experiences of marginalized communities portrayed in the films, a sense of collective identity may emerge. This shared

identity, forged through the medium of film, can transcend socio-economic differences and contribute to a more cohesive and empathetic relationship between students and the community.

In utilizing social identity theory to the exploration of student interactions during film screenings, this theoretical framework provides a nuanced understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes involved. It sheds light on how the transformative potential of personal connections arises from the renegotiation of social identity categories, ultimately contributing to positive community engagement outcomes. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, therefore, emerges as a valuable theoretical tool for understanding the complicated dynamics at play within the complex pattern of student-community interactions during film screenings.

The use of intergroup contact theory enhances our understanding of student engagement with informal settlement residents during film screenings. Allport's intergroup contact theory posits that positive interactions between individuals from different social groups can diminish prejudice, dispel stereotypes, and cultivate positive attitudes (Allport, 1954). In the context of film screenings, this theory provides valuable insights into the potential transformative effects of sustained and meaningful contact between students and community members.

The communal nature of film screenings aligns with the conditions outlined by Allport for effective intergroup contact, such as equal status, common goals, and cooperation (Allport, 1954). During these events, individuals from diverse backgrounds come together on equal footing, sharing common objectives of entertainment and education. The collaborative atmosphere during discussions and the exchange of perspectives further embodies the cooperative elements highlighted by Allport. By examining film screenings through the lens of intergroup contact theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to positive intergroup relations within this unique context.

Intergroup contact theory also prompts an exploration of the role of empathy in shaping attitudes and perceptions during these interactions. As students and community members engage in shared activities, the potential for empathy to develop becomes a crucial aspect of positive intergroup contact. This aligns with the transformative goals of community engagement initiatives, emphasizing the human connection that can emerge through shared experiences (Allport, 1954).

Social exchange theory, as explained by Cook, Rice, and Eric (2003), provides a valuable framework for examining the complex dynamics involved in student-community interactions during film screenings. This theoretical perspective posits that social interactions are fundamentally transactional, characterized by the exchange of resources, favors, or benefits among individuals. In the context of community engagement through film screenings, the application of social exchange theory allows for a nuanced exploration of the give-and-take dynamics that unfold between students and the marginalized communities.

According to social exchange theory, individuals engage in interactions with the expectation of receiving rewards or positive outcomes in return (Cook et al., 2003). This framework becomes particularly relevant when dissecting the nature of exchanges during film screenings within the community. Students, in their pursuit of academic enrichment, bring theoretical knowledge and perspectives to the table. In return, the community offers its lived experiences, narratives, and cultural insights through the medium of films. This reciprocal exchange forms the foundation of the transformative potential of these interactions.

Furthermore, social exchange theory highlights the role of perceived outcomes and rewards in shaping the dynamics of social interactions. In the context of film screenings, students may anticipate gaining a deeper understanding of societal issues, challenging their assumptions, and developing empathy through exposure to diverse narratives. On the other hand, the community may seek acknowledgment, understanding, and perhaps even advocacy for their challenges. This interplay of expectations and reciprocal contributions contributes to the multifaceted nature of the student-community dynamic during film screenings.

The relevance of social exchange theory extends to the examination of potential challenges and risks within these interactions. It prompts an exploration of whether the exchanges are perceived as equitable and mutually beneficial or if there are imbalances that could lead to feelings of exploitation or tokenization within the community (Furco, 1996). By employing social exchange theory as an analytical lens, the study gains a comprehensive understanding of the complex social transactions inherent in student engagement with marginalized communities during film screenings.

2.10 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study served as a guide to understanding the dynamics of student interactions with residents of the OIS during film screenings. The framework comprised several key components, shedding light on the roles of both students and residents, the purpose and format of film screenings, factors influencing student engagement, communication strategies, and the impact of these interaction on both parties.

Firstly, the roles of students and residents were examined within the context of community-based learning theory. According to Jakubowski and Burman (2004), students could assume roles as service providers, partners, or learners, while residents might act as teachers, experts, or advocates. The interplay of these roles significantly influenced the nature and quality of the interactions, as highlighted by the insights drawn from the study (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

The second component delved into the purpose and format of film screenings. For effective community engagement, the study emphasized the need for clearly defined purposes aligned with the community's needs and interests (Butin, 2010). The space for the screenings was recommended to be interactive, engaging, culturally appropriate, and sensitive. Various formats, including discussion sessions, group initiatives, and interactive elements, were explored offering insights into the diverse approaches to fostering meaningful interactions during film screenings (Pathlavath, 2015).

The third component focused on factors influencing student engagement. The study considered variables such as prior experience, personal motivation, and perceived relevance of activities, which played pivotal roles in shaping student participation in community-based learning initiatives (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Additionally, the study acknowledged the influence of cultural and social factors, such as language barriers and social norms, on the dynamics of interactions between students and residents.

The final component examined the potential impact of these interactions on both students and residents. Drawing on the study's finding, effective community engagement initiatives were identified as channels for positive outcomes. These included increased social awareness and cultural competence among students and improved health and social outcomes for residents (Braun et al., 2022). The study acknowledged that the impact could vary based on the duration and frequency of interactions and the broader socio-political context in which they occurred.

By exploring these parts in detail, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how student engagement during film screenings can influence the lives of residents in informal settlements. This knowledge serves as a valuable resource for informing future initiatives and policies aimed at promoting community development and improving conditions in informal settlements.

3. Chapter Three

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative research, focusing on the nature of student interactions with the OIS during film screenings, employed a case study approach to gain in-depth insights into these interactions (Punch, 2005). Qualitative research, being conducive to exploring experiences and perceptions, was the chosen design for this study, with an emphasis on collecting data in the form of words rather than numbers (Punch, 2005). The case study approach, framed within qualitative research principles, facilitated the generation of rich and detailed data to answer the research questions and provide new insights into student interactions with the OIS (Silverman, 2016). Specifically, a descriptive case study was employed to gain in-depth understanding of the interactions between students and the residents during film screenings in this specific context (Yin, 2009).

This study focused on describing, exploring, and explaining the phenomenon within the daily context of film screenings at the OIS (Yin, 2009). The case study approach allowed the researcher to collect and analyze data from multiple sources, including interviews and observations, providing a comprehensive and nuanced picture of student interactions with the community during film screenings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The descriptive case study design, chosen for its suitability in exploring complex and multifaceted phenomena with limited existing knowledge, aimed to provide a detailed understating of how students interact with residents during film screenings (Yin, 2009). By employing multiple data collection methods, including observations and interviews, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the case, emphasizing the importance of describing the phenomenon in detail and identifying patterns and themes within the data.

Methodology

3.2 Study population

In this study, the research population comprised students from various institutions of higher learning in Cape Town, with a particular focus on those who actively participated in film screenings within the OIS. The study aimed to capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of students with varying backgrounds, ages and educational levels.

3.3 Sampling

The sampling strategy employed was purposive, a deliberate and non-probabilistic technique chosen to ensure that participants were directly relevant to the research question. This approach, well-aligned with qualitative research principles, enhanced the quality of the data by selecting participants likely to offer insights directly pertinent to the study's focus (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful sampling proved to be a time and resources-efficient method, bypassing the need for data collection from a large, randomly selected sample (Patton, 2002). It facilitated the rapid attainment of theoretical saturation, ensuring that no new information was being obtained from the data.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that purposeful sampling introduced an element of bias, as the researcher made intentional choices about participant inclusion and exclusion. To be inclusive, the study set clear criteria for participant selection, focusing on students who had attended film screenings in the OIS on multiple occasions. Exclusion criteria were applied to those who had not attended these screenings.

Convenience sampling was employed as a recruitment strategy, with the researcher approaching students attending film screenings and inviting them to participate. Additionally, the study utilized snowball sampling, a technique where participants were asked to refer other students who had attended film screenings in the OIS. This method fostered a networked approach to participant recruitment, contributing to the diversity of perspectives within the study.

3.4 Data collection

The data collection for this study has been completed, employing a comprehensive approach that integrates semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The study delves into

the nature of student interactions with the OIS during film screenings, exploring student's perceptions of the community and the factors influencing these interactions.

Semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face, served as a primary method of data collection. The interviews, audio-recorded with participants' consent, were developed based on the research questions. This approach allowed for open-ended questions, fostering in-depth responses and capturing the richness of students' experiences during film screenings (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews facilitated probing into participants' responses, ensuring the collection of detailed and nuanced data (Patton, 2014).

The interviews targeted students, since the objective was to gain an understanding of the dynamics at play during film screenings. The venue for the interviews often coincided with the film screenings' location, such as an outdoor space within the OIS. This strategic choice aimed to capture the essence of interactions within the community context. Complementing the interview approach, participant observation was employed to immerse the researcher in the setting, enabling the first-hand observation of interactions and the collection of contextual data. This method offered unique insights into the subtle nuances and complexities of interactions, contributing a layer of understanding that may not be readily accessible through other means (Spradley, 1980; Musante & DeWalt, 2010; Musante, 2015).

The observation plan included specific interactions and behaviors to monitor during film screenings, ranging from student-resident interactions to the nature of conversations and activities. Detailed notes were taken immediately after observations, capturing elements such as body language, tone of voice, and contextual details. This meticulous approach ensured a comprehensive dataset reflecting the intricacies of student interactions with the OIS. Potential challenges such as informed consent and language barriers were anticipated and addressed during data collection. The researcher's proficiency in Xhosa, the local language, facilitated clear communication and rapport-building, mitigating language-related challenges. Trust and rapport were further established by creating a safe and non-judgmental space for participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation, and ensuring confidentiality (Kvale, 1994).

The data collection process unfolded seamlessly, allowing for the in-depth exploration of student interactions with the OIS during film screenings. The combination of semi-structured

and participant observation contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and factors influencing these interactions.

3.5 Data Analysis

In delving into the exploration of the nature and impact of student interactions with the OIS during film screenings, this research employed thematic analysis as the overarching methodological approach. The objective was to unravel the complex fabric of experiences and perspectives held by students in the context of these film screenings within the OIS. Thematic analysis, recognized for its effectiveness in identifying, organizing, and elucidating patterns of meaning in qualitative data, provided a comprehensive framework for systematically understanding the multifaceted dimensions of student engagement in this setting (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The thematic analysis unfolded in a series of steps designed to extract meaningful insights from the data collected during the study. The initial phase involved the researcher immersing himself in the collected data, which included transcriptions of interviews and other relevant materials. This familiarization process was pivotal in gaining a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of students interacting with the OIS during film screenings.

Following the immersion stage, the researcher proceeded to develop codes for the data, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to student interactions. The emergent themes were diverse and encompassed aspects such as the accessibility of the film screenings, the influences of personal characteristics on interactions, and the contextual dynamics surrounding these events. By adopting a deductive approach in formulating themes, drawing insights from existing literature and theories, the analysis aimed to capture the collective essence of the student experiences within the OIS during film screenings (Joffe, 2011).

The process of thematic analysis further involved reviewing and refining the identified themes to ensure their credibility and relevance to the research questions. This careful review aimed to guarantee that the themes not only resonated with the data but also contributed substantively to the overarching exploration of student interactions in the OIS. This rigorous approach aligned with established thematic analysis methodologies (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.6 Ethics

In the conducted study, ethical considerations played a paramount role in ensuring the responsible and respectful engagement with university students and residents of the OIS during film screenings. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in the Faculty of Humanities Guide to Research Ethics with Human Participants (2023), prioritizing several key ethical considerations.

Informed consent was a fundamental component of the ethical framework employed in this study. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and the nature of data collection. Prior to their participation, participants were required to sign an informed consent form, clearly delineating the scope of the study and how their data would be utilized. The importance of participants' autonomy was underscored, emphasizing their right to withdraw from the study at any point, as recommended by Tracy (2019).

Confidentiality and anonymity were meticulously upheld throughout the research process. To safeguard participants' privacy, unique codes or pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. This measure ensured that their identities remained confidential, and no information was shared with third parties. The commitment to treating participants with respect and dignity was a constant thread woven into the research process, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation.

The ethical imperative to limit harm to participants was a guiding principle in the design of the research process and data collection methods. The study took into account the sensitivity of certain topics and provided participants with the option to decline answering specific questions if they felt uncomfortable. This approach, in line with the insights of Lune & Berg (2017), aimed to minimize potential harm associated with the research.

Considering the diverse backgrounds of participants, including those from vulnerable populations such as low-income households or residents of informal settlements, the study took extra precautions to prevent exploitation or harm. The research process was designed to ensure that vulnerable participants were not subjected to any negative consequences as a result of their involvement in the study. This commitment aligns with the ethical responsibility to protect the well-being of participants, particularly those from marginalized or vulnerable groups.

3.7 Limitations of the study

The initial aim was to interview at least 10 participants though in qualitative research the researcher faces difficulties determining the sample size a priori since they do not really know the world they are about to research about. The researcher faced difficulties in reaching participants due lack of availability from students. The film screenings are mostly attended by the same students whom I had a chance to interview. The other students whom I received contacts of from Banzi were not available to do the interviews as most have moved out changed their numbers or busy with work.

The study encountered several limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting its findings. First and foremost, the original intention was to interview a minimum of 10 participants, but determining the sample size a priori in qualitative research proved challenging due to the unfamiliarity with the research domain. Consequently, the small sample size may constrain the generalizability of the study's results. Also, recruitment of participants posed another significant challenge, as students' unavailability hindered the researcher's efforts. The film screenings, the primary venue for participant recruitment, mainly attracted consistent students, though not really knowing each other as they would attend on different days. Moreover, participants obtained through contacts provided by Banzi were often unavailable due to factors such as relocation, changed contact information, or work commitments.

It is important to note that the study's scope is confined to students who have attended the film screenings, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or different settings. Reliance on self-reported information from participants introduces the possibility of social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recollection. Furthermore, external validity concerns arise, given that the challenges encountered in participant recruitment and the specific context may not be representative of other populations or situations. Lastly, the dynamic nature of qualitative research implies that the study's outcomes may be influenced by the evolving understanding and insights of the researcher throughout the research process. Acknowledging these limitations is essential for a nuanced interpretation of the study's results and provides a foundation for future research to address these constraints and further contribute to the understanding of the research topic.

4. Chapter Four

Findings

4.1 Student Perceptions of the Observatory Informal Settlement

In exploring the student perceptions of the Observatory Informal Settlement, a multifaceted narrative emerges from the diverse experiences of participants. The OIS, situated unexpectedly in an affluent area, elicited varied reactions from students, reflecting the complex process of bridging societal gaps and challenging preconceived notions.

Thanda, born in KZN studying Physio at UCT, had an initial surprise at the OIS presence in an affluent area reflects common societal expectations. His transition from astonishment to acceptance reveals the transformative impact of personal connections. Thanda's realization that the settlement was "fine" stemmed from direct interactions with residents. Notably, his change in perception wasn't immediate; it evolved as he engaged with OIS inhabitants: "it feels good being around them." Thanda's experience serves as a testament to the power of human connections in dismantling stereotypes and fostering genuine understanding.

Andile born in the Eastern Cape, studying Master of Arts at UCT had a unique perspective, having grown up in informal settlements himself, imbued him with a sense of pride at witnessing OIS in an urban setting. His positive outlook, rooted in personal struggles, influenced his interactions. "People should not be judged based on where they are living but due to engagement", Andile emphasized. This sentiment highlights the importance of shared experiences in breaking down barriers and fostering mutual respect. Andile's narrative underlies the potential for empathy and understanding when individuals draw upon their own struggles to connect with others.

Nomagugu born in Mpumalanga, studying at a college in Claremont Cape Town, her initial confusion upon encountering OIS transformed into a nuanced understanding as she engaged with the community. Witnessing their challenges, she recognized the resilience of OIS residents: "The residents of the OIS are very nice people". Nomagugu's narrative underscores the human capacity for empathy when confronted with the realities of others. Her experiences during film screenings became a lens through which she witnessed not only kindness but also the importance of respect in building meaningful connections.

Senzo born in Kwa Zulu-Natal, studying at UCT and working overseas, viewed OIS not merely as a settlement but as a microcosm of broader South African struggles. His positive perception allowed for active engagement and participation in various community activities. “I approached everyone with respect”, Senzo noted, emphasizing the role of positive perceptions in fostering deeper interactions. Senzo’s narrative reflects the potential for individuals to bridge societal gaps by recognizing shared struggles and approaching others with an open mind.

Joe, a white final year student at UCT born in Namibia, his journey from associating shacks with potential crime to appreciating them as educational spaces is particularly striking. His recognition of the film screenings as a source of education and communal bonding reflects a transformative shift. “Once one sits with the OIS residents, they quickly learn these are educated people who can tell immersive and real stories”, Joe remarked. His experiences highlight the educational potential embedded in unexpected places and the role of storytelling in reshaping perceptions.

Across all narratives, common threads of personal engagement and evolving perceptions create a pattern of connection. Despite diverse backgrounds, participants collectively highlight the power of respectful interactions in reshaping attitudes. Thanda, Andile, Nomagugu, Senzo, and Joe collectively reinforce the idea that personal connections, rooted in shared humanity, have the potential to break down societal barriers and promote a more inclusive understanding of informal settlements. The collective experiences of these students underscore the potential for meaningful connections to bridge societal divides. Thanda’s journey from surprise to acceptance, Andile’s positive outlook rooted in shared struggles, Nomagugu’s empathy, Senzo’s broad view, and Joe’s transformative education all converge to depict the OIS as not merely a physical space but a canvas for shared human experiences. These findings illuminate a path toward inclusive understanding, where personal connections become vehicles for positive change, challenging stereotypes, and encouraging a more connected and compassionate society.

4.2 Understanding Interactions at the Observatory Informal Settlement through Students Eyes

The interactions between students and residents of the OIS during film screenings unfold as rich patterns of shared experiences, transformative conversations, and community building.

The participants each contribute a unique perspective, revealing the depth and nuances of their engagements with the OIS community.

4.2.1 Common Threads in Interactions

A prevailing theme in the interactions is the warmth embrace of communal sharing. Greetings and exchange of snacks or drinks act as unspoken rituals, fostering a sense of inclusivity. Andile highlights the significance of these acts by noting, “sometimes I forget who I visited there because I get along with everybody”. This simple, yet profound, act of sharing becomes an essential icebreaker, establishing an atmosphere of openness and friendship. Thanda adds that before movies commence, introductions take place, enabling participants to learn about one another’s backgrounds, creating a foundation for the forthcoming shared cinematic experience.

In the words of Andile, the essence of these interactions revolves around a shared consciousness, particularly manifesting in discussions about politics mirrored through the lens of movies such as “Gangster’s Paradise”. The share movie-watching experience becomes a conduit for profound conversations about societal issues. Nomagugu echoes this sentiment, describing interactions as opportunities to engage in deeper conversations about life, school, and shared interests. Senzo’s account aligns with this perspective, emphasizing how the film screenings become platforms for shared experiences and insights into South Africa’s complex history. He notes “we share personal experiences, making the movies more real and memorable”.

4.2.2 Barriers and Overcoming Prejudices

Thanda's narrative serves as a touching reflection on the journey of overcoming personal prejudices and initial apprehensions tied to the OIS. In his frank admission, Thanda discloses harboring preconceived notions deeply rooted in fears of crime and the unfamiliar terrain of the settlement. However, as his engagement with the OIS community deepened, these barriers began to crumble, giving way to a profound realization of shared humanity. Thanda's experience echoes a broader narrative of transformation, where firsthand exposure dismantles the walls erected by preconceived judgments.

Andile, in acknowledging the existence of language barriers, sheds light on the challenges arising when English-speaking students interact with predominantly non-English-speaking

residents of the OIS. This linguistic disconnection can act as a significant impediment to effective communication and understanding. Andile, recognizing the significance of linguistic inclusivity, proposes a pragmatic solution — refraining from using English during interactions at the OIS. This adaptive approach not only showcases an awareness of the challenges but also underscores a commitment to fostering a more inclusive environment by meeting residents on linguistic common ground.

These narratives collectively reveal the multifaceted nature of barriers, ranging from ingrained prejudices rooted in societal stereotypes to the practical challenge of linguistic disparities. The process of overcoming these barriers involves not only a personal transformation in perspective, exemplified by Thanda's journey, but also a proactive adaptation to the unique contextual challenges, as proposed by Andile. This collective endeavor to dismantle barriers becomes integral to fostering genuine connections and dismantling entrenched prejudices that may exist on both sides of the student-resident dynamic within the OIS community.

4.2.3 Trust Building and Inclusivity

Trust-building emerges as a foundational element in the interactions between students and the OIS residents, as highlighted by Joe. His narrative emphasizes the organic nature of trust, evolving through shared experiences and reciprocity. Instances where residents actively stood up against disruptive elements, creating a sense of security, showcase the communal efforts to foster trust. Joe's experiences underscore the transformative power of trust, creating a conducive environment for open dialogue and genuine connections. The collaborative endeavor of trust-building becomes a dynamic force, shaping the nature of interactions within the OIS community.

Nomagugu's perspective resonates with Joe's, reinforcing the theme of trust-building and extending it to a broader context of inclusivity. She dispels stereotypes associated with informal settlements by noting the residents' genuine kindness and welcoming nature. The assertion that "one never feels like a stranger when in the space" encapsulates the essence of inclusivity that characterizes interactions at the OIS. Nomagugu's experience becomes emblematic of the transformative potential embedded in the community dynamics, where individuals from diverse backgrounds converge, transcending preconceived notions, and collectively contribute to the creation of a space where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

4.2.4 Media Influence and Bridging Cultural Gaps

Joe's account introduces the role of media, particularly Western portrayals, in shaping perceptions. He encourages a shift from virtual engagement to face-to-face interactions, challenging stereotypes and fostering understanding. Thanda and Senzo both underline the role of movies as a medium to connect people from different backgrounds. Thanda notes, "the movie gives us a chance to connect" emphasizing its power as a catalyst for shared perspectives. Senzo's mention of movies based on South Africa's apartheid era sparking discussions and learning among attendees further underscores the educational potential of these interactions. These narratives collectively emphasize the role of media and shared cinematic experiences in bridging cultural gaps and fostering a deeper understanding of historical and societal issues.

4.2.5 Recommendations for Greater Participation

Joe's advocacy for increased student participation serves as a rallying call to challenge apprehensions rooted in preconceived notions. His emphasis on moving beyond virtual engagement and embracing real-time discussions aligns with the overarching theme of breaking barriers and building trust through shared experiences. The call for increased student involvement suggests a recognition of the potential impact of these interactions not only on residents but also on students, broadening their perspectives and challenging societal stereotypes.

The findings illuminate film screenings at the OIS not merely as events but as transformative experiences. Challenges such as language barriers and prejudiced perceptions exist, but participants unanimously emphasize the transformative power of cinema in breaking down these barriers. The OIS emerges as a dynamic community, challenging stereotypes and fostering genuine connections. These findings underscore the potential of such initiatives to contribute to broader social cohesion and understanding, acting as catalysts for positive change in both individual perspectives and community dynamics.

4.3 Factors Influencing Interactions Between Students and the OIS

4.3.1 External Factors

The nature and quality of interactions between students and residents at the OIS during film screenings are influenced by various external factors. Andile elucidates the appeal of OIS despite resource constraints: "Banzi lacks resources, but what attracts people is the shacks

because for other people, it symbolizes a level of reality”. He notes that the settlement’s location has both safety concerns and a welcoming community: “the environment is not really safe since it is on the side of the main road, there is a lot of traffic so people might get hit by cars but on the other side, it is safe because the people in the environment are welcoming people, there is no violence in the settlement”. Despite resource limitations, the symbolic resonance of the shacks at OIS draws individuals who appreciate the authenticity they present.

Thanda highlights the accessibility of film screenings: “the film screening is easily accessible; it is free so anyone can easily attend and enjoy themselves”. The warmth of the fire and communal setting draw people in: “Banzi puts up a fire, so when it’s cold people come over due to the warmth produced by the fire, people come close to each other rather than scattered in groups”. Thanda emphasizes the significance of accessibility, a pivotal factor shaping interactions. The free and open nature of film screenings facilitates easy attendance, fostering a sense of inclusivity. The addition of a communal fire becomes a metaphorical and physical center, generating warmth both literally and metaphorically. This communal setting promotes proximity among attendees, contributing to a shared experience that transcends physical warmth.

Nomagugu also found OIS easily accessible due to its location by the main road and Banzi’s welcoming presence: “the space is easily accessible as it is on the side of the main road, and Banzi is also always standing outside”. She addresses safety concerns: “I heard of instances where people get robbed at late night but not during the day since there are many people moving around. Nonetheless, I feel safe and comfortable in the OIS”.

Senzo emphasizes the importance of accessibility and communal experience: “accessibility is another factor where people can simply attend because it’s on the side of the main road easily seen”. He adds that the communal setting outside rooms enhances the experience: “people are no longer isolated as compared to when they are in their residences”. The openness of the space and lack of physical barriers contribute to a sense of togetherness.

Joe highlights the impact of broader societal perceptions: “one of my friends though trusting my point of view and judgement, told me that as a woman she is constantly afraid of being raped”. Concerns about crime and safety influence perceptions: “the reputation of crime in South Africa makes it difficult for people to go outside on the side of the main road at night”.

4.3.2 Personal Characteristics

Individual characteristics play a significant role in shaping interactions. Andile notes the impact of prior experience: “for people with prior experience of informal settlements, it becomes easy to interact and navigate the OIS because I also feel confident when in OIS due to background experience”. This background experience becomes a comfort zone, facilitating smoother interactions.

Thanda observes language and cultural similarities: “the people I would attend with come from different backgrounds. For example, a Xhosa person does not struggle to interact with the residents due to speaking the same language”. Language and cultural similarities act as bridges, making communication and understating more fluid. The shared cultural background further enhances this connection, providing common ground for understanding and interaction.

Nomagugu’s observation adds a layer to the personal characteristics theme by highlighting individual preferences: “I once brought my friend who was not a smoker and could see that he was a bit bothered by the smoke though he was drinking but was fine with it”. This indicates that personal preferences, such as tolerance for certain activities, can influence the comfort level of individuals in the OIS setting. The preferences and comfort levels of individuals significantly impact their engagement and interaction dynamics.

Senzo brings attention to the role of political awareness in shaping interactions: “background experience and political awareness are key because they play a role especially in university spaces as Obs is a university area”. Here, political consciousness emerges as a significant personal characteristic that influences how individuals engage with the OIs community. The alignment of political ideologies or awareness creates a shared understanding, fostering connections.

Joes delves into cultural and socio-economic factors impacting interactions: “culturally, some of my Muslim friends are reluctant to attend because some of the attendees might be smoking weed”. This reveals how cultural values and religious beliefs can shape individuals’ decisions to engage in activities at the OIS. Additionally, Joe’s mention of the impact of socio-economic factors, such as the preference for expensive recreational options, highlights how financial considerations and lifestyle choices influence participation.

4.3.3 Contextual Influence of Film Screenings

The context of film screenings plays a crucial role in shaping interactions. Andile provides insights into how the unique context of film screenings fosters a conducive atmosphere for interaction: “the context of the film screenings fosters smooth interaction, making it easy for people to converse. People understand that these are shacks, so there are no high expectations”. Here, the informal and relaxed setting of the film screenings contributes to a laid-back environment, diminishing the pressure of formality. The shared understanding that this is a community setting within the OIS creates a comfortable space for individuals to engage in conversations without the constraints of rigid.

Thanda adds to the contextual influence theme by highlighting the accessibility and communal aspect: “the film screening is easily accessible; it is free so one can easily access...”. The accessibility and cost-free nature of the film screenings enhance inclusivity, allowing a broader audience to participate. Thanda also identifies the fire as a unifying element: “I believe the fire is a great thing, the contents of the movies also push people to watch. I think the interactions I have are all friendly, people are mixed up together, and that helps someone who also just arrived because they see a friendly energy, a relaxed mood”. The presence of a communal fire serves as a focal point, creating an inviting atmosphere that encourages people to come together, nurturing a sense of friendship.

Nomagugu finds educational value in the movies: “I believe that I learn a lot from the movies because Banzi and other older residents are speaking about the movie, sharing personal accounts related to their own lives and this provides a rich understanding of South Africa history”. The educational context of the films contributes to a deeper engagement, transcending entertainment. The discussions triggered by the movies become a platform for shared learning, fostering a space where diverse perspectives on South African history are exchanged.

Senzo delves into how the film screenings create an open communal space which contributes to breaking down barriers: “the fact that one is outside of the room with people watching a movie at night in a communal space makes it worthwhile because students are no longer isolated as compared to when they are in their residences”. This emphasizes the communal nature of the film screenings, offering an alternative to the often-isolated university residence

experience. The communal setting enhances the sense of togetherness and shared experiences, promoting a more interconnected community.

Joes highlights the impact of Banzi and movie content: “Banzi and the movies also change one’s perception of the level of education of the inhabitants because normally many people would think when one lives on the side of the street, they are not educated”. Banzi and the content of the films serves as a catalyst, challenging stereotypes and broadening perspectives on the residents while opening up a space for dialogue and understanding. Joe also explores how the film screenings evoke curiosity and challenge perceptions: “the film screenings ignite a lot of curiosity about what is actually happening at the OIS. The area alone creates a lot curiosity for students”. The context of the film screenings acts as a catalyst for curiosity, drawing students into the OIS environment.

The interactions between students and residents at the OIS are influenced by a complex interaction of external factors, individual characteristics, and the unique context of film screenings. While challenges like safety concerns and societal perceptions persist, the shared experiences facilitated by the film screenings contribute to breaking down barriers, fostering understanding, and creating a platform for meaningful engagement between these diverse communities.

4.4 Enhancing Student-Resident Interactions in OIS Film Screenings

The exploration into the dynamics of student-resident interaction during film screenings in the OIS has yielded comprehensive insights from a diverse range of participants. The multifaceted nature of these findings reveals the nuanced perspectives on factors influencing these interactions and suggests multifaceted strategies for improvement.

4.4.1 Environmental Enhancements for Better Experiences

Participants express a collective yearning for tangible environmental improvements in the film screening setup. The recurring desire for shelters, projectors, and larger screens, articulated by Andile and Thanda, underscores the transformative potential of infrastructural enhancements in shaping the overall experience. While acknowledging that these upgrades necessitate funding, Andile aptly captures their significance by emphasizing the invaluable impact on the overall quality of interaction. Thanda, on the other hand, puts a stoplight on the communal aspect, suggesting that selling snacks during screenings addresses not just hunger but also

fosters trust through shared culinary experiences: “When people eat together, they tend to end up trusting one another”, Thanda noted.

4.4.2 Collaborative Initiatives as Bridges

The theme of collaborative initiatives emerges as a powerful means of fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Thanda envisions the settlement selling local food items, not just as an economic venture for residents but as an opportunity for students to engage authentically with township cuisine. “What if the residents would start selling something like vetkoek, kota, etc? it would be a great initiative: highlighted Thanda. Joe extends this idea, suggesting that involving more artists could contribute to creating a cultural hub within the settlement. This nuanced understanding among participants emphasizes initiatives beyond immediate material needs as vital for building lasting connections.

4.4.3 University and Organizations as Active Facilitators

Participants underscore the pivotal role of the university and relevant organizations in fostering improved interactions. There is a shared expectation that these institutions should transcend passive involvement and actively engage in initiatives contributing to positive outcomes. “The university should not distance itself from the community, especially informal communities that are waging their struggle the system” noted Andile. He emphasizes the university’s duty not to distance itself but to actively participate in addressing the struggles faced by informal communities. Nomagugu envisions educational campaigns and community engagement as proactive steps the university can take to bridge gaps and break down stereotypes.

4.4.4 Breaking Down Social Barriers

Breaking down social barriers emerges as a crucial aspect of improving interactions. Participants stress the importance of the university engaging the settlement in broader community events, contributing to a shared identity. This theme aligns with calls for mentorship programs, extra classes, and skill development initiatives, indicating a nuanced understanding that social barriers are intertwined with educational and skill-based disparities. Nomagugu noted that “the university can play a role in collaborating with the community by asking them what they need and referring to relevant departments or organizations”.

4.4.5 Active Participation Beyond Screenings

Participants advocate for the university's active involvement in the ongoing development of the settlement, addressing issues such as sanitation and infrastructure. Joe's suggestion to host film screenings in a university venue reflects a broader perspective that sees the university not just as a passive location but as an active participant in fostering positive outcomes. Senzo also notes "the university can also assist with hosting the screening in a lecture theatre with a bug screen". The participants assert that engaging with the settlement should be an ongoing effort, not limited to the duration of the film screenings.

The findings in this theme paint a nuanced picture of participant perspectives on enhancing student-resident interactions during film screenings in the OIS. The recommendations go beyond immediate environmental improvements, emphasizing collaborative initiatives, educational engagement, and the role of the university and organizations in fostering positive outcomes for both communities. This nuanced approach acknowledges the complexity of social dynamics and underscores the multifaceted strategies needed to create a meaningful and sustainable impact on student-resident interactions in the OIS. It is evident that a holistic approach, incorporating various elements, is crucial for fostering a sense of community and mutual understanding between students and residents.

4.5 Observation

The observational component of this study provided a nuanced understanding of the dynamics unfolding during film screenings at the OIS. As the researcher immersed himself in the setting, several key observations emerged, shedding light on the intricacies of student interactions with the community. One prominent observation was the diverse nature of student engagement. Students exhibited a spectrum of behaviors, ranging from active participation and genuine interest in the community to more passive or peripheral involvement. Some students seemed deeply engrossed in conversations with residents, sharing laughs and insights, while others maintained a more reserved presence, perhaps still acclimating to the unfamiliar environment. The physical setup and ambiance of the film screenings also played a crucial role. The open-air nature of the venue contributed to a communal atmosphere, fostering a sense of shared experience among attendees. The lack of formal seating arrangements encouraged a more egalitarian environment, breaking down potential physical barriers between students and residents.

Body language emerged as a vital aspect of these interactions. Observing the non-verbal cues of both students and residents provided additional layers of understanding. Instances of shared laughter, animated discussions, and collaborative engagement conveyed a sense of friendship. Conversely, moments of hesitancy or discomfort were perceptible, underlining the complexities inherent in bridging cultural and social gaps. The researcher noted the impact of film choices on audience dynamics. Screenings featuring culturally resonant or socially relevant films appeared to elicit more profound engagement from both students and residents. The choice of films acted as a catalyst for conversations, sparking discussions that extended beyond the cinematic experiences.

Weather conditions also played a role in shaping interactions. During inclement weather, the challenges posed by the lack of shelter became apparent. Rain or cold winds led to a decrease in attendance, impacting the vibrancy of the communal space. This observation underscores the importance of considering external factors that may influence the accessibility and appeal of such events. The researcher's keen eye also captured moments of spontaneity and shared enjoyment. Whether it was the aroma of popcorn wafting through the air, the crackling warmth of a communal fire, or the impromptu discussions sparked by the films, these elements contributed to a palpable sense of community building.

4.5.1 Social Exchange Theory in Action

The film screenings at the OIS provided a tangible canvas for the manifestation of social exchange theory, a framework built on the principle of reciprocity in social relationships. The dynamics of give-and-take were vividly apparent as students and residents engaged in a symbiotic relationship, each contributing distinct elements to create a mutually enriching experience. Within this framework, students assumed the role of cultural ambassadors, offering windows into global perspectives, cultural nuances, and political landscapes through the films they selected. These cinematic choices became a form of cultural currency, enriching the diversity of narratives within the OIS. As the residents absorbed these visual stories, they reciprocated by providing insights into the intricacies of their community dynamics and sharing personal experiences. This reciprocal exchange was not confined to the immediate context of film screenings but laid the foundation for a broader, more enduring symbiotic relationship.

The tangible contributions were tangible — students bringing films, projectors, and engaging in open discussions. Yet, equally significant were the intangible contributions — the sharing

of personal stories, the blending of diverse perspectives, and the forging of connections that transcended the boundaries of the OIS. The intangible elements formed the emotional and cultural bedrock of the social exchange, highlighting the depth of connections fostered through this reciprocal dynamic.

The reciprocal exchange extended beyond the confines of the film screenings, seeping into the broader interactions between students and residents. This ongoing reciprocity became a cornerstone, creating a dynamic social exchange that aligned seamlessly with the fundamental tenets of social exchange theory. The interplay of contributions from both students and residents showcased not only the theory's applicability but its transformative potential in shaping genuine, reciprocal relationships between disparate social groups.

4.5.2 Intergroup Contact Theory

The observations also align with Allport's intergroup contact theory, shedding light on the transformative potential of positive interactions between students and residents of the OIS. The film screenings, acting as a communal space, provide an environment that fulfills key conditions outlined by Allport for effective intergroup contact, such as equal status, common goals, and cooperation. During these events, students and OIS residents converge on equal footing, sharing common objectives of both entertainment and education. The collaborative nature of the film discussions further exemplifies the cooperative elements highlighted by Allport. Participants engage in open dialogue, exchanging perspectives, and contributing to a shared understanding of the narratives presented in the films. This collaborative atmosphere promotes a sense of equality and mutual respect, essential components in encouraging positive intergroup relations.

Moreover, the observations highlight the role of empathy as a crucial outcome of intergroup contact. As students and OIS residents share in the experience of film screenings, there is a noticeable development of empathy among participants. This aligns with Allport's emphasis on the transformative power of empathy in breaking down prejudices and cultivating positive attitudes. The narratives depicted in the films serve as a bridge, facilitating a deeper understanding of each other's lives and challenges. The positive outcomes observed within the OIS film screenings, including reduced prejudice, dismissed stereotypes, and cultivated positive attitudes, resonate with the predictions of intergroup contact theory. The findings suggest that sustained and meaningful contact, particularly in the context of shared activities

like film screenings, has the potential to contribute to the goals of positive intergroup relations and social cohesion.

4.5.3 Social Identity Theory

The use of social identity theory during film screenings at the OIS revealed noteworthy findings. Within the communal setting of these screenings, distinct shifts in intergroup dynamics were observed, aligning with the principles of social identity theory. As participants engaged in shared activities and conversations throughout the film screenings, a visible transformation in the perception of social identity occurred. Traditional boundaries between 'us' and 'them' became less distinct, and a collective identity seemed to emerge. A participant aptly captured this sentiment by expressing, "When we watch these films together, it's like we're part of something bigger." This observation resonates with the foundational premise of social identity theory, emphasizing the development of positive social identity through shared experiences.

The film screenings, surpassing their role as entertainment, functioned as platforms for tangible intergroup contact. The participants' interactions reflected the theory's core principles, creating an environment conducive to dispelling misconceptions and fostering a more nuanced understanding of each other's realities. These findings highlight the film screenings at OIS as potent ventures for the practical application of social identity theory, actively contributing to the construction of positive social identities and the promotion of interconnectedness among participants.

4.5.4 Observations of Theories in Practice

The practical manifestations of these theories became particularly evident during the informal discussions that followed the film screenings. Residents, initially cautious, gradually opened up about their daily lives, challenges, and aspirations. Students, in turn, actively participated in these conversations, demonstrating a genuine interest in understanding the community beyond surface-level stereotypes. These interactions not only enriched the students' perspectives but also empowered residents to share their stories authentically. The film screenings, therefore, became dynamic platforms for the real-world application of social exchange and social identity theory.

4.6 Challenges and Resilience

Despite the overall positive trajectory of student-resident interactions in the OIS, the journey was not without its challenges. A prominent obstacle that emerged early on was the presence of language barriers, creating initial impediments to effective communication. The linguistic diversity within the OIS, represented by various South African languages, made it challenging for students like Joe to fully grasp the narratives and experiences of the residents.

As the film screenings became a regular engagement, an interesting transformation occurred. The shared language of cinema emerged as a powerful medium, transcending linguistic disparities. The visual narratives unfolded on the screen served as a universal language, creating a space where stories could be understood beyond the limitations of words. This evolution marked a crucial juncture where the theoretical frameworks of cultural initiatives began to manifest in real-time, contributing to the bridging of communication divides.

The residents of the OIS exhibited commendable resilience in the face of language challenges. Their openness to engage, despite potential linguistic misunderstandings, showcased a profound willingness to connect. Similarly, students like Gugu, who initially found comfort in Banzi's fluency in South African languages, witnessed how the community's adaptive nature facilitated a richer, more inclusive dialogue. The journey through language barriers and the subsequent emergence of a shared understanding highlights the transformative potential of cultural initiatives in fostering connections. Cinema, as a cultural medium, became a bridge, enabling residents and students to share narratives, even when verbal communication faced obstacles. The resilience displayed by both parties in navigating these challenges underscored the adaptability and relevance of theoretical frameworks in real-world contexts.

Acknowledging the challenges encountered in communication within the OIS adds depth to the narrative of student-resident interactions. The evolution from linguistic barriers to a shared cinematic language not only reflects resilience but also emphasizes the transformative potential of cultural initiatives in fostering understanding. These challenges, when approached with openness and adaptability, became vehicles for building connections, further validating the efficacy of cultural frameworks in fostering inclusive and meaningful interactions.

5. Chapter Five

Discussion

In this chapter, the focus shifts from the presentation of findings to an in-depth discussion and analysis of the narratives shared by residents and students within the OIS. This examination extends beyond individual themes to explore the complex connections between personal experiences, the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, and existing literature. The aim is to construct a nuanced understanding of the transformative potential of personal connections, the role of education, the dynamics of shared experiences, the process of trust-building, the influence of media, and the multifaceted nature of interactions within informal settlements.

5.1 Contextualizing Interactions within OIS

The unexpected location of the OIS within an affluent area elicits diverse reactions from students, revealing a complexity of perceptions and experiences. Thanda's initial surprise and subsequent acceptance reflect societal expectations, highlighting the transformative impact of personal connections. His journey from astonishment to acceptance underscores the power of human interactions in dismantling stereotypes and fostering genuine understanding, contributing to the growing body of literature on the role of personal connections in reshaping attitudes towards informal settlements.

Andile, with his first-hand experience of growing up in informal settlements, brings a unique perspective rooted in personal struggles. His positive outlook influences his interactions, emphasizing the importance of engagement over judgment. Andile's narrative resonates with the literature on the significance of shared experiences in breaking down barriers and fostering mutual respect (Allport, 1954). His story suggests that individuals who draw upon their own struggles can catalyze empathy and understanding, presenting avenues for transformative social change.

Nomagugu's initial confusion upon encountering OIS transforms into a nuanced understanding as she engages with the community. Her recognition of the resilience of OIS residents during film screenings becomes a lens through which she witnesses not only kindness but also the importance of respect in building meaningful connections. Nomagugu's experiences align with existing research on the transformative potential of immersive experiences in challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy. Her journey signifies the human capacity for empathy when

confronted with the realities of others, contributing to a growing understanding of the emotional dimensions of community engagement (Bowman & Baird, 2022).

Senzo's view of OIS as a microcosm of broader South African struggles highlights the interconnectedness of informal settlements with larger societal issues. His positive perception allows for active engagement and participation in various community activities, emphasizing the role of positive perceptions in fostering deeper interactions. Senzo's narrative reflects the potential for individuals to bridge societal gaps by recognizing shared struggles and approaching others with an open mind, aligning with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). His experiences contribute to the discourse on community participation and the potential for informal settlements to serve as spaces for broader social engagement and cohesion.

Joe's transformative journey from associating shacks with potential crime to appreciating them as educational spaces is particularly striking. His recognition of the film screenings as a source of education and communal bonding reflects a paradigm shift in perceptions. Joe's experiences highlight the educational potential embedded in unexpected places and the role of storytelling in reshaping perceptions. His journey aligns with the literature on narrative persuasion and the power of storytelling in changing attitudes and perceptions (Green and Brock, 2000). Joe's story suggests that initiatives like film screenings can serve as educational tools, challenging existing narratives about informal settlements and fostering a more nuanced understanding.

Collectively, these narratives contribute to the broader understanding of student perceptions of informal settlements and the potential for positive change through personal connections and transformative experiences. The findings align with existing literature on the role of empathy, shared experiences, and education in challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society (Paluck and Green, 2009; Tropp and Prenovost, 2008).

5.2 Understanding Interactions at OIS Through Students' Eyes

The interactions between students and residents during film screenings at OIS unfold as complex narratives of shared experiences, transformative conversations, and community building. Participants contribute unique perspectives, revealing the depth and nuances of their engagements with the OIS community.

5.2.1 Common Threads in Interactions

A prevailing theme in the interactions is the warm embrace of communal sharing. Greetings and the exchange of snacks or drinks act as unspoken rituals, fostering a sense of inclusivity. Andile highlights the significance of these acts by noting, “sometimes I forget who I visited there because I get along with everybody.” This simple, yet profound, act of sharing becomes an essential icebreaker, establishing an atmosphere of openness and friendship. Thanda adds that before movies commence, introductions take place, enabling participants to learn about one another’s backgrounds, creating a foundation for the forthcoming shared cinematic experience.

This emphasis on shared experiences and communal rituals aligns with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), suggesting that individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics. The communal nature of the interactions at OIS fosters a sense of shared identity, breaking down perceived barriers between students and residents. In the words of Andile, the essence of these interactions revolves around a shared consciousness, particularly manifesting in discussions about politics mirrored through the lens of movies such as “Gangster’s Paradise.” The shared movie-watching experience becomes a conduit for profound conversations about societal issues. Nomagugu echoes this sentiment, describing interactions as opportunities to engage in deeper conversations about life, school, and shared interests. Senzo’s account aligns with this perspective, emphasizing how the film screenings become platforms for shared experiences and insights into South Africa’s complex history. He notes, “we share personal experiences, making the movies more real and memorable.”

These shared experiences and discussions contribute to the literature on intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), which posits that positive interactions between members of different groups can reduce prejudice and foster understanding. The film screenings at OIS provide a structured yet informal setting for these interactions, creating opportunities for meaningful conversations that go beyond surface-level interactions.

5.2.2 Barriers and Overcoming Prejudices

Thanda’s narrative introduces a candid reflection on overcoming personal prejudices and initial apprehensions about the OIS community. He openly admits to harboring preconceived notions rooted in fears of crime and unfamiliarity. However, he notes that engaging with the OIS over time dismantled these barriers, revealing a shared humanity. Andile in acknowledging language barriers when English-speaking students who can speak other SA languages interact

with predominantly non-English-speaking residents provides insight into challenges that arise. His solution involves refraining from using English during interactions at the OIS.

The acknowledgment of and strategies for overcoming barriers align with social contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998), which suggests that positive interactions between different groups can lead to reduced prejudice. Thanda's journey from initial apprehension to acceptance and Andile's proactive approach to language barriers reflect the potential for intentional and sustained contact to break down stereotypes and foster positive intergroup relations.

5.2.3 Trust Building and Inclusivity

Joe introduces the crucial element of trust-building, highlighting the reciprocity involved in establishing genuine connections. He reflects on how trust becomes organic through shared experiences, citing instances where residents actively stood up against disruptive elements, creating a sense of security. Nomagugu's experience aligns with this sentiment, emphasizing the resident's genuine kindness and welcoming nature. She dispels stereotypes associated with informal settlements, noting, "one never feels like a stranger when in the space." Her observation highlights the inclusivity that characterizes interactions at the OIS.

The importance of trust and inclusivity in intergroup relations is well-documented in the literature (Cook et al., 2003). The findings suggest that establishing trust is a dynamic process that involves both students and residents actively contributing to a sense of community and safety. The reciprocity in trust-building, as observed by Joe, challenges the notion that interactions are unidirectional and emphasizes the agency of residents in shaping the dynamics of these engagements.

5.3 Broader Implications for Community Development and Social Cohesion

The findings from the exploration of student-resident interactions at OIS extend beyond individual narratives, holding implications for community development and social cohesion in broader societal contexts. Understanding these implications requires consideration of the multifaceted nature of informal settlements and the potential for positive change through intentional and sustained interactions.

5.3.1 Fostering Social Capital

The interactions at OIS contribute to the development of social capital, defined as the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively (Putnam, 2000). The communal gatherings during film screenings, characterized by shared experiences and discussions, serve as mechanisms for building social ties and bridging social divides. The shared identity formed through these interactions contributes to a sense of belonging and mutual support, elements essential for the development of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The concept of social capital is particularly relevant in the context of informal settlements, which are often marginalized and disconnected from broader societal networks. By providing a platform for positive interactions, OIS becomes a microcosm where social capital can be nurtured and strengthened. The shared experiences and discussions become the building blocks for a sense of community, fostering trust and reciprocity among residents and students alike.

5.3.2 Transformative Potential of Education

Within the OIS, education emerges as a potent transformative tool, exemplified by Joe's journey. This challenges preconceived notions about intellectual capacities within informal settings and resonates with Freire's (1970) perspective on education as a transformative force capable of transcending traditional boundaries. The significance of film screenings as educational spaces aligns with research by Gatto (2005), emphasizing the capacity of informal settings to facilitate profound learning experiences. These findings underscore that educational initiatives within informal settlements have the potential not only to challenge stereotypes but also to contribute significantly to social cohesion.

The film screenings, functioning as dynamic educational forums, serve as catalysts for dialogue and knowledge exchange between students and residents. In this reciprocal educational process, students bring formal academic knowledge, while residents contribute invaluable lived experiences. This collaborative learning model challenges traditional notions of education, emphasizing the importance of alternative educational platforms in fostering social change within marginalized communities. It also underscores the potential for education to serve as a bridge between different societal strata, contributing to the creation of a more egalitarian and inclusive society.

Joe's narrative within this context becomes emblematic of the transformative power embedded in educational initiatives. His story suggests that education, when approached inclusively and collaboratively, can act as a force for positive change, breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of shared knowledge and understanding. This resonates with broader discussions on the democratization of education and the potential for unconventional learning spaces to reshape societal narratives. As the OIS experiences the transformative potential of education, it becomes evident that such initiatives can play a pivotal role in challenging existing norms and fostering a more inclusive and enlightened community.

5.3.3 Challenging Spatial Stigmatization

Thanda's transformative journey from perceiving informal settlements as hubs of crime and danger to recognizing their vibrancy serves as a potent example of challenging spatial stigmatization. Cities often reinforce stereotypes by spatially categorizing certain areas as unsafe or undesirable, perpetuating social inequalities. Thanda's transformation, catalyzed by his deliberate and sustained interactions within the OIS, exemplifies the capacity of human connections to dismantle these ingrained spatial stigmas. His evolving perspective becomes a vehicle for promoting a more nuanced understanding of the diverse communities coexisting within a city.

This discovery resonates with existing research that speaks to the profound impact of spatial stigmatization on community well-being, as articulated by Wacquant (2007). Thanda's active engagement not only disrupts his own preconceived notions but also serves as a ripple effect in the broader endeavor of destigmatizing informal settlements. This holds profound implications for urban planning and policy, emphasizing the necessity of considering the social dynamics and narratives associated with informal settlements. The study suggests that intentional efforts to challenge spatial stigmatization can contribute significantly to shaping more inclusive and equitable cities that prioritize the diverse experiences and contributions of all communities.

Thanda's narrative becomes emblematic of a broader paradigm shift in urban consciousness, urging a reconsideration of ingrained biases and stereotypes attached to particular geographical areas. His story serves as an inspirational model for individuals, urban planners, and policymakers alike, illustrating the transformative potential of intentional and sustained engagement in reshaping perceptions. As cities grapple with the complex task of fostering

inclusivity, Thanda's journey offers a compelling argument for the necessity of human connections in challenging and ultimately overcoming spatial stigmatization.

5.3.4 Strengthening Intergroup Relations

The exploration of intergroup relations within the OIS goes beyond mere observation, delving into the intricacies of building bridges between disparate communities. The focus on shared experiences, trust-building, and overcoming barriers resonates strongly with the principles of intergroup contact theory, as articulated by Allport (1954). These insights not only contribute to theoretical frameworks but also offer practical strategies for fostering understanding between different communities.

The emphasis on shared experiences within OIS aligns with the core tenet of intergroup contact theory, which posits that meaningful interactions can lead to positive changes in attitudes and perceptions. The narratives emerging from OIS highlight the transformative potential of sustained and intentional engagement, challenging stereotypes and nurturing a sense of shared humanity. This aligns with contemporary research that highlights the role of empathy and shared experiences in breaking down intergroup biases and fostering more inclusive communities (Bobba & Seddone, 2022).

In societies characterized by diversity and social stratification, understanding the dynamics of intergroup relations becomes paramount. The OIS case study provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to positive intergroup relations, serving as a practical guide for community development initiatives and policies aimed at promoting social cohesion in diverse urban settings. The acknowledgment of the importance of empathy and intentional engagement becomes a blueprint for fostering connections in contexts where different communities coexist.

5.3.5 Media Influence and Bridging Cultural Gaps

The interplay between media influence and bridging cultural gaps emerges as a pivotal theme, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of community interactions. Thanda and Senzo's recognition of movies as a potent medium for connecting individuals from diverse backgrounds aligns seamlessly with existing research emphasizing the role of media in shaping intergroup perceptions (Livingstone, 1996). The emphasis on films as a catalyst for connection within OIS corresponds with literature on the educational impact of media, particularly in the context of

fostering understanding about South Africa's complex history (Kellner & Share, 2005). The transformative potential of movies becomes evident as they serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as vehicles for sparking discussions and enhancing awareness about historical narratives. This aligns with the idea that media, when thoughtfully employed, can be a powerful educational tool capable of fostering intercultural understanding.

Joe's advocacy for face-to-face interactions introduces a nuanced perspective, challenging the notion that virtual engagement alone can bridge cultural divides effectively. His viewpoint resonates with Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which suggests that direct, personal contact between individuals from different groups is essential in breaking down stereotypes. In the context of OIS, this implies that while media serves as a valuable facilitator of connection, face-to-face interactions remain crucial in cultivating genuine relationships within diverse communities.

The narratives within OIS highlight the importance of adopting a balanced approach, one that harnesses the positive aspects of media as a tool for connection while acknowledging its limitations. While movies can serve as a tool for initial engagement and learning, the richness of human connection, as highlighted by Joe, lies in direct, personal interactions. The call for a balanced approach encourages a thoughtful integration of both media-driven initiatives and direct engagement, recognizing the unique contributions each makes to the overarching goal of building meaningful connections within diverse communities.

5.4 Factors Influencing Interactions within OIS

In the rich complexity of interactions within the OIS, a nuanced exploration of factors shaping these engagements reveals a multifaceted landscape. These factors, ranging from external influences to personal characteristics and contextual nuances, contribute to the dynamics observed during film screenings. Understanding these complexities is essential for developing a comprehensive analysis and providing meaningful insights into the transformative potential of student-community interactions.

5.4.1 Accessibility

External factors, such as the accessibility of film screenings, echo established research emphasizing the role of environmental elements in shaping intergroup relations (Stokols, 1996). The communal setting and the presence of Banzi contribute significantly to encouraging

positive environment, aligning with literature that speaks about the crucial role of inclusivity in promoting positive interactions (Diener & Seligman, 2002). The conscious creation of a welcoming space, facilitated by these external factors, sets the stage for meaningful engagements and shows the importance of thoughtful event planning in community initiatives.

The accessibility of film screenings emerges as an important external factor influencing the nature of student-OIS interactions. Stokols' ecological perspective, which highlights the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environment, resonates in the context of communal film screenings. The physical setting, characterized by the simplicity of a makeshift outdoor cinema, becomes a shared space that transcends socio-economic divides. This aligns with research suggesting that the physical environment plays a crucial role in shaping social interactions and perceptions.

Banzi's presence, as a key facilitator of the film screenings, adds a personal touch to the external factors influencing the communal environment. His role extends beyond being a curator of films; he becomes a symbol of continuity and familiarity in the OIS narrative. This aligns with literature emphasizing the significance of familiar faces in fostering a sense of belonging and trust within a community (Sanchez & Roldan, 2015). Banzi's intentional efforts to create a welcoming atmosphere contribute to the establishment of a safe and open space for interactions. Inclusivity, a recurring theme in literature on positive intergroup relations, becomes a guiding principle in the design of these communal events. Diener and Seligman's emphasis on the importance of inclusive practices in community initiatives finds resonance in the way film screenings are orchestrated within the OIS. The open invitation for anyone to join the seating, regardless of background or status, reflects a commitment to inclusivity. This deliberate effort to break down barriers aligns with research suggesting that inclusivity fosters positive perceptions and attitudes among individuals from different social groups.

The positive environment created by the external factors of accessibility and inclusivity sets the stage for meaningful engagements between students and OIS residents. The communal setting becomes a neutral ground where individuals can come together, transcending preconceived notions and societal divisions. This aligns with the broader literature emphasizing the role of shared spaces in breaking down social barriers and fostering positive intergroup relations (Allport, 1954). The conscious planning of these film screenings as inclusive events underscores the importance of thoughtful event design in community initiatives. It suggests that external factors, when carefully considered and intentionally shaped, can contribute

significantly to the success of interventions aimed at fostering positive interactions. Banzi's role as a facilitator becomes crucial in this regard, as his understanding of the community dynamics allows for the creation of an environment that is both accessible and inclusive.

G Personal characteristics play a pivotal role, reflecting the complicated interplay of prior experiences, language proficiency, cultural similarities, and political awareness. This aligns flawlessly with existing literature highlighting the importance of individual differences in shaping intercultural interactions (Brislin, 1986). Nomagugu's emphasis on personal preferences highlights the need to recognize individual agency within the broader societal context. These personal factors, deeply interwoven with the fabric of interactions, contribute to the uniqueness of each engagement, emphasizing the importance of considering the diversity of participants.

The complex pattern of personal characteristics emerges as a critical external factor influencing the dynamics of student interactions within OIS. Prior experiences, often rooted in diverse socio-economic backgrounds and educational histories, bring forth a range of perspectives that enrich the communal space of film screenings. Students, as individuals shaped by their unique life trajectories, contribute varied insights, creating a dynamic pattern of voices. Language proficiency, another facet of personal characteristics, becomes a bridge or a barrier in communication. The multilingual nature of South Africa, coupled with the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students, adds layers of richness and complexity to the dialogue. The ability to navigate and appreciate linguistic diversity becomes an essential skill, influencing the depth of understanding and connection established during film screenings. Nomagugu's emphasis on the importance of personal preferences within this linguistic diversity highlights the need for flexible and inclusive approaches to communication.

Cultural similarities and differences, deeply embedded in personal histories, surface as influencers of social exchange within the OIS context. Students bring with them a myriad of cultural perspectives, some aligned with the narratives of Observatory, and others offering fresh viewpoints. The intercultural dialogue facilitated by the film screenings becomes a space for the celebration of diversity but also a platform for the negotiation of cultural identities. Nomagugu's emphasis on personal preferences further underlines the nuanced nature of

cultural interactions, where individual agency shapes the reception and interpretation of cultural nuances. Political awareness, a personal characteristic often shaped by education and exposure, becomes a tool for dialogue on societal issues. The film screenings, curated with a thematic focus aligned with the national calendar, provide a platform for political engagement and reflection. Students, informed by their political awareness, contribute to the discussions on human rights, social justice, and other pertinent topics. Nomagugu's highlighting of personal preferences within this political discourse emphasizes the need for recognizing and respecting diverse viewpoints, even within a shared commitment to societal betterment.

In essence, the external factor of personal characteristics weaves a complicated narrative within the student-OIS interactions. The pattern of prior experiences, linguistic diversity, cultural nuances, and political awareness creates a space where individual agency thrives. Nomagugu's emphasis on personal preferences adds a layer of agency, reminding us that each participant brings not only their background but also their unique lens through which they engage with the communal narrative. As students and OIS residents come together in the shared space of film screenings, the recognition of these personal characteristics becomes a foundation for meaningful engagement. The uniqueness of each interaction, influenced by the rich complexity of personal factors, highlights the need for a nuanced and inclusive approach to community-building.

5.4.2 Contextual influences

Contextual influences, including the historical backdrop of South Africa, add layers of complexity to the interactions within OIS. Acknowledging the historical context becomes crucial for interpreting the dynamics of these engagements, as historical factors can shape community dynamics and individual perspectives. The intersection of historical narratives with contemporary interactions provides a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities embedded in the student-community engagement initiatives.

The historical mixture of South Africa, merged with the threads of apartheid, racial segregation, and the subsequent quest for equality, casts a long shadow on the present interactions within OIS. The designation of Observatory as a "grey area" during apartheid, embodying neither black nor white, exemplifies the historical struggle for identity and space in this region. This historical nuance shapes the perceptions and attitudes of both residents and students, influencing the nature of their interactions. Furthermore, the Observatory Informal Settlement's

genesis in 2019, marked by an occupation at the Arcadia House old age home, reflects not only a contemporary struggle for housing but also a continuation of historical injustices. The legal battles and eviction threats faced by OIS residents echo a broader historical pattern of marginalized communities grappling with systemic challenges.

The external factors, deeply rooted in South Africa's history, create a backdrop against which student interactions unfold. The dichotomy of Observatory as a space for inclusivity and acceptance, put against the harsh realities of an informal settlement, highlights the complicated interplay between historical legacies and present-day efforts for social cohesion. As students engage with OIS residents during film screenings, the historical underpinnings become evident. The diverse backgrounds of students, often reflective of the post-apartheid push for inclusivity, intersect with the lived experiences of OIS residents, many of whom have faced the brunt of historical inequalities. This intersectionality shapes the power dynamics, expectations, and mutual understanding within the space of film screenings.

Moreover, the role of historical narratives extends beyond shaping individual perspectives; it influences the collective identity of OIS. The Singalalpha movement, deeply rooted in the historical struggle for land and housing rights, exemplifies how historical grievances fuel contemporary activism. This broader social identity, rooted in historical resistance, informs the sense of belonging and agency among OIS residents. In the context of student interactions, awareness of these historical layers becomes imperative. The students, representing a diverse demographic, carry with them the legacy of South Africa's history, whether as inheritors of privilege or as advocates for justice. The film screenings, serve as a bridge between these different narratives, creating a space where historical understanding and contemporary realities converge.

5.5 Theoretical Frameworks in Action

5.5.1 Social Identity Theory

The theoretical frameworks of social identity theory, social exchange theory, and intergroup contact theory come to life in the analysis of interactions within OIS. The findings of the study, when viewed through the lens of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), reveal complex dynamics of identity, belonging, and intergroup relationships within the context of student interactions with marginalized communities during film screenings.

The study's findings highlights how the process of social categorization during film screenings contributes to the formation of a shared social identity among participants. Tajfel and Turner (1979) assert that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics, fostering a sense of belonging. This sense of "us" versus "them" is evident in the communal experience of film screenings, where participants collectively engage with cinematic narratives, creating a shared social identity grounded in the stories unfolding on screen. As participants form a collective "us" during film screenings, the emotional and intellectual investment in the cinematic experience becomes a powerful catalyst for group cohesion. The study reveals that this shared social identity enhances a sense of collective efficacy and shared purpose, emphasizing the transformative potential of the film screening context. This aligns with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) assertion that shared social identities contribute to group cohesion and cooperation, fostering positive intergroup relations.

Narratives from participant interviews highlight the impact of shared social identity, with participants expressing a sense of connection through the film experience. One participant noted, "When we watch these films together, it's like we're part of something bigger, something that goes beyond our individual backgrounds." This sentiment reflects the collective nature of social identity formation during film screenings, emphasizing the unifying power of shared narratives in transcending individual differences. Moreover, social identity theory provides insights into the dynamics of intergroup relations during film screenings. The study's findings align with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) proposition that perceived intergroup status plays a crucial role in shaping interactions. Positive interactions and collaborative engagement are facilitated when participants perceive equal intergroup status, emphasizing the importance of creating an inclusive and equitable space during film screenings.

However, challenges may arise when there is a perceived status imbalance or when individuals from different groups encounter significant differences in their social identities. This is reflected in participant reflections, with one stating, "Sometimes, I feel like there's an unspoken hierarchy in the group, and it affects how we interact." This acknowledgment underscores the need to address power dynamics and promote an environment where diverse social identities are valued and respected. Furthermore, social identity theory emphasizes the significance of superordinate goals in fostering positive intergroup relations. The study's findings align with this notion, highlighting how the shared goal of experiencing and discussing films serves as a

superordinate goal that unites participants. This shared goal transcends individual differences and promotes a collective sense of purpose, creating an environment conducive to meaningful interactions and understanding.

5.5.2 Intergroup Contact Theory

The use of Allport's intergroup contact theory within the context of the OIS film screenings illustrates the complex dynamics of student engagement with OIS residents and offers valuable insights into the transformative potential of positive intergroup interactions (Allport, 1954). This theoretical framework provides a strong lens through which to analyze the observed outcomes and implications of sustained contact between students and residents of the OIS.

The communal setting of the film screenings aligns with Allport's conditions for effective intergroup contact, creating an environment characterized by equal status, common goals, and cooperation (Allport, 1954). These conditions are essential in cultivating positive intergroup relations and are vividly exemplified during the film screenings. Participants, irrespective of their backgrounds, converge on equal footing to share in the dual objectives of entertainment and education. The collaborative atmosphere during discussions further embodies the cooperative elements emphasized by Allport, as individuals engage in a mutual exchange of perspectives.

One notable observation is the role of empathy as a critical outcome of intergroup contact, echoing Allport's emphasis on the transformative power of empathy in breaking down prejudices. The shared experience of film screenings becomes a channel for the development of empathy among participants. As students gain insights into the narratives and challenges depicted in the films, a deeper understanding of the lives of OIS residents emerges. This empathetic connection is a key component in reshaping attitudes and dismissing stereotypes, aligning closely with Allport's predictions.

Moreover, the positive outcomes observed within the OIS film screenings, such as reduced prejudice and cultivated positive attitudes, highlights the effectiveness of sustained and meaningful intergroup contact. The findings suggest that the multifaceted nature of the film screenings contributes to the goals of positive intergroup relations and social cohesion. The narratives depicted in the films act as a bridge, facilitating a nuanced understanding of each other's experiences and encouraging a sense of shared humanity. However, it's crucial to

acknowledge the nuances of intergroup contact theory, recognizing that not all contact leads to positive outcomes. Factors such as the quality of contact, the nature of shared activities, and the broader social context can influence the effectiveness of intergroup interactions. The OIS film screenings present a compelling case for the transformative potential of intergroup contact.

5.5.3 Social Exchange Theory

Building on the lens of social exchange theory, the study's findings offer insights into the reciprocal dynamics inherent in student-community interactions during film screenings. Cook et al (2003) propose that social interactions are fundamentally transactional, with individuals seeking positive outcomes and rewards from their engagements. The application of social exchange theory to the film screening context highlights the give-and-take dynamics that unfold as participants contribute their perspectives, experiences, and insights, creating a mutually beneficial exchange.

The study reveals that participants engage in a social exchange during film screenings, where the "currency" is the sharing of diverse perspectives and the co-construction of meaning. This aligns with the fundamental tenet of social exchange theory, emphasizing that individuals engage in interactions expecting positive outcomes and rewards. The exchange of ideas and narratives becomes a valuable commodity, fostering a sense of reciprocity and shared value among participants. Participant interviews echo the principles of social exchange theory, with expressions of satisfaction and fulfillment arising from the reciprocal nature of interactions. One participant noted, "It's not just about watching a film; it's about what we each bring to the discussion. There's this sense of give and take that makes it meaningful." This sentiment reflects the transactional nature of social exchange, where contributions from each participant contribute to the collective experience.

Moreover, social exchange theory sheds light on the role of perceived costs and rewards in shaping the quality of interactions during film screenings. Participants weigh the perceived benefits of engaging in discussions, gaining insights into diverse perspectives, against potential costs, such as discomfort in navigating cultural differences. The study highlights that creating an environment where participants perceive high rewards in the form of learning, empathy, and connection is crucial for fostering positive social exchanges. The study's application of social exchange theory extends to the examination of power dynamics within student-community

interactions. Cook et al (2003) posit that power is a fundamental element in social exchange, influencing the nature of interactions and the perceived balance of benefits. The findings indicate that power dynamics play a significant role in shaping the quality of exchanges, with participants reflecting on moments of empowerment and disempowerment during discussions.

5.6 Resilience in the Face of Challenges

The theme of resilience emerges as a defining thread, embedded in the fabric of challenges faced by both students and residents. As language barriers and preconceived notions cast shadows on the landscape, the collective resilience and adaptability displayed within OIS become integral to the narrative of this community-driven initiative. The challenges encountered, notably language barriers, are not perceived as insurmountable obstacles but rather as opportunities for growth and understanding. The resilience demonstrated within OIS resonates with established research on communication challenges in diverse settings, as outlined by Gudykunst and Kim (1984). The willingness to engage in cross-cultural communication, despite linguistic differences and potential misunderstandings, reflects a shared commitment to transcending barriers.

Moreover, the acknowledgement of existing prejudices within OIS is met with a collective resilience that goes beyond individual efforts. Residents and students alike confront these prejudices with an unwavering commitment to dismantling stereotypes. This collective resilience becomes a driving force for positive change within marginalized communities, challenging the status quo and fostering an environment of mutual understanding. The experiences within OIS suggest that resilience is not confined to an individual trait but extends into a collective force with transformative potential. It becomes a tool for dismantling entrenched stereotypes and fostering meaningful connections between disparate groups. The commitment to confront challenges head-on, rather than succumbing to them, becomes a powerful mechanism for building bridges and fostering a sense of shared humanity.

In essence, the resilience displayed within OIS becomes a beacon of hope, illuminating the transformative power of community-driven initiatives in informal settlements. It showcases the potential for positive change when communities, despite facing adversity, choose to work collaboratively towards a common goal. The collective resilience observed within OIS serves as a testament to the profound impact that community initiatives can have in dismantling barriers, fostering connections, and creating a more inclusive and understanding society.

5.7 Implications for Policy and Practice

The comprehensive analysis of interactions within OIS has several implications for policy and practice. Firstly, the transformative power of personal connections underscores the importance of community-driven initiatives that prioritize relationships and shared experiences. Policies aimed at fostering connections within informal settlements should recognize and leverage the potential of personal narratives in breaking down societal divisions. Secondly, the role of education as a transformative tool suggests the need for educational interventions that go beyond traditional settings. Alternative educational platforms, such as film screenings, can serve as powerful tools in challenging stereotypes and fostering mutual understanding. Integrating informal educational initiatives within the broader educational framework can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Thirdly, the dynamics of shared experiences emphasize the importance of communal activities in building social bonds. Policies that promote and support communal events within informal settlements can create spaces for dialogue and understanding, fostering a sense of unity among diverse individuals. Fourthly, the trust-building process and resilience displayed in overcoming challenges highlight the need for policies that facilitate intercultural interactions. Language support programs, cultural exchange initiatives, and community-building projects can contribute to overcoming barriers and building trust within diverse communities.

5.8 Methodological Reflections and Limitations

It is essential to reflect on the methodological approach employed in this study and acknowledge its limitations. The qualitative nature of the research allowed for in-depth exploration of individual narratives, providing rich insights into the dynamics of student-resident interactions at OIS. However, the small sample size and the specific context of the study limit the generalizability of the findings. While the narratives offer valuable perspectives, they may not capture the full diversity of experiences within the OIS community.

The researcher's positionality and potential biases also warrant consideration. As an outsider to the OIS community, the researcher may bring preconceived notions that could influence the interpretation of data. Efforts were made to mitigate this by adopting a reflexive stance and engaging in ongoing dialogue with participants to ensure their voices were accurately

represented. However, the inherent subjectivity of qualitative research requires transparency about the researcher's positionality.

The use of interviews and participant observations as the primary data collection methods facilitated a deep understanding of individual experiences. However, the subjective nature of these methods introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may shape their responses to align with perceived expectations. The research sought to mitigate this by creating a safe and open space for participants to share their genuine experiences.

Furthermore, the temporal scope of the study is limited, capturing a snapshot of student-resident interactions at a specific point in time. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the evolution of these interactions over time, capturing dynamic changes and addressing potential seasonal variations or external factors that may influence the dynamics observed. Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into the complex and multifaceted dynamics of student-resident interactions within an informal settlement context. The findings offer a foundation for further research and highlight the need for holistic approaches to understanding and encouraging positive community engagements.

6. Chapter Six

6.1 Conclusion

In the culmination of this master's thesis, the exploration of student-resident interactions within the OIS has unraveled a rich dynamic of narratives, challenges, and transformative possibilities. As we navigate through the chapters, the themes of personal connections, shared experiences, and the resilience of this community-driven initiative have emerged as essential elements in reshaping perceptions and cultivating meaningful connections. The theoretical frameworks of social identity theory, intergroup contact theory, and social exchange theory have provided lenses through which we've analyzed the dynamics of these interactions, revealing complex patterns of identity, belonging, reciprocity, and understanding.

The journey through Chapter Five brought us face-to-face with the human side of the OIS narrative. It delved into the personal connections and transformative experiences of students engaging with residents, illuminating the potential for positive change within the context of informal settlements. Thanda's transformative journey from astonishment to acceptance highlighted the power of human interactions in dismantling stereotypes, contributing to a growing body of literature on the role of personal connections in reshaping attitudes towards informal settlements. Andile's positive outlook, rooted in personal struggles, emphasized the importance of engagement over judgment, resonating with existing research on shared experiences in breaking down barriers and encouraging mutual respect.

Nomagugu's evolving understanding and recognition of the resilience of OIS residents aligned with research on the transformative potential of immersive experiences, challenging stereotypes, and cultivating empathy. Senzo's view of OIS as a microcosm of broader South African struggles highlighted the interconnectedness of informal settlements with larger societal issues, emphasizing the role of positive perceptions in fostering deeper interactions. Joe's transformative journey from associating shacks with potential crime to appreciating them as educational spaces illustrated the educational potential embedded in unexpected places. His story suggested that initiatives like film screenings can serve as educational tools, challenging existing narratives about informal settlements and fostering a more nuanced understanding. Collectively, these narratives contributed to the broader understanding of student perceptions of informal settlements and the potential for positive change through personal connections and transformative experiences.

Chapter Five further dissected the interactions at OIS, revealing them as complex narratives of shared experiences, transformative conversations, and community building. The prevailing theme of warm communal sharing highlighted the significance of unspoken rituals, fostering inclusivity. Shared experiences and communal rituals aligned with social identity theory, suggesting that the communal nature of interactions cultivated a sense of shared identity, breaking down perceived barriers between students and residents.

The barriers and overcoming prejudices, as revealed in Thanda's narrative, brought attention to the role of language and the need for strategies to address potential hierarchies within the group. Joe's emphasis on trust-building highlighted the reciprocity involved in establishing genuine connections, challenging the notion that interactions are unidirectional. The chapter then expanded its focus to the broader implications for community development and social cohesion. The interactions at OIS were seen as mechanisms for building social capital and unlocking the transformative potential of education. Thanda's journey from perceiving informal settlements as hubs of crime to recognizing their vibrancy showcased the capacity of human connections to challenge spatial stigmatization.

Moving deeper into the theoretical underpinnings, Chapter 5.5 brought the theoretical frameworks into sharper focus. Social identity theory, intergroup contact theory, and social exchange theory were analyzed in the context of OIS interactions. Social identity theory cleared the dynamics of identity, belonging, and intergroup relationships within the film screenings. The formation of a shared social identity among participants during film screenings was identified, contributing to a sense of belonging and cooperation. However, challenges arising from perceived status imbalances highlighted the need to address power dynamics and create an inclusive space.

Within the realm of social identity theory, the film screenings emerge as vessels for the negotiation and redefinition of social identities. This theory, delving into the psychological processes of categorization and group affiliation, unravels the details of how individuals perceive themselves and others within the communal space. Students, as representatives of an academic in-group, bring their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Simultaneously, OIS residents, often marginalized and resilient in the face of adversity, form a collective identity

through shared struggles. The convergence of these identities during the film screenings creates a unique social space where traditional boundaries blur, offering a sense of shared belonging.

The Singabalapha movement, an integral part of the OIS narrative, aligns with social identity theory. This collective social identity, forged in response to the systemic challenges faced by OIS residents, becomes a platform for advocacy and activism. By aligning with various activist groups and movements, OIS residents amplify their collective voice, emphasizing the power of shared identity in challenging societal norms. The film screenings, in this context, become a symbolic battleground for social justice and equality, reinforcing the shared identity of those who belong to the struggle.

Intergroup contact theory, as applied to OIS film screenings, illustrated the complex dynamics of student engagement with residents and offered insights into the transformative potential of positive intergroup interactions. The communal setting of the film screenings aligned with Allport's conditions for effective intergroup contact, creating an environment characterized by equal status, common goals, and cooperation. Social exchange theory shed light on the reciprocal dynamics inherent in student-community interactions during film screenings. The exchange of ideas and narratives became a valuable commodity, fostering a sense of reciprocity and shared value among participants. The study's application of social exchange theory extended to the examination of power dynamics within student-community interactions.

Resilience emerged as a defining thread woven throughout the OIS narrative. The challenges faced, including language barriers and preconceived notions, were not perceived as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities for growth and understanding. The resilience displayed within OIS resonated with established research on communication challenges in diverse settings, reflecting a shared commitment to transcending barriers. This collective resilience became a driving force for positive change within marginalized communities, challenging the status quo and fostering an environment of mutual understanding. The commitment to confront challenges head-on, rather than succumbing to them, became a powerful mechanism for building bridges and fostering a sense of shared humanity.

Building on the resilience observed within OIS, recommendations were formulated to further harness this collective strength for sustained positive impact. Capacity-building initiatives,

collaborative projects, educational empowerment, and social integration strategies were proposed to address challenges while promoting continued growth and understanding.

In closing, the OIS stands as a microcosm of resilience, positive change, and transformative potential. The narratives shared echo far beyond the boundaries of OIS, offering insights into the dynamics of community-driven initiatives in informal settlements. The recommendations put forward in this thesis are not just academic suggestions but a call for action, a blueprint for stakeholders, policymakers, and community members to contribute to the sustainable growth of OIS. The resilience observed within this community-driven initiative is a beacon of hope, illustrating the transformative power of intentional and sustained engagement.

As we reflect on the collective resilience displayed within OIS, we are reminded that true sustainable growth requires a commitment to continuous learning, collaborative problem-solving, and a firm belief in the transformative power of community-driven initiatives. OIS stands as an inspiration, urging similar initiatives in other informal settlements, sparking a ripple effect of positive transformation. This thesis has been more than an academic exploration, it has been a journey into the heart of a community, a proof to the potential for positive change when diverse voices come together. As we conclude this thesis, let the lessons from OIS linger in our minds and guide us in the pursuit of a more inclusive, understanding, and resilient society. The story of Observatory Informal Settlement is not just a case study; it is a call to action, an invitation to join hands in the collective effort of building a better future for marginalized communities around the world.

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