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QUESTIONING 'COLOUREDNESS': TRACING THE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF  
PEOPLE WHO CHOSE TO REJECT 'COLOURED IDENTITY'

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**Declaration**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date:

### *Acknowledgement*

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## Abstract

This research project explores the identity development of thirteen people, all of whom reside in Cape Town, and all of whom rejected 'coloured' identity. It investigates ways in which the participants used different ideologies to repudiate their 'legal identity' - 'coloured identity'. The thesis utilised the Nigrescence model to locate and to describe the identity development process that the participants went through. It argues that racist incidents experienced by participants while they were growing up, laid the foundation for future questioning of their identities. This study shows that it was not a single factor that led participants to question their identities. Some participants questioned 'colouredness' due to family influence, and in certain cases because of influence at school. The political climate of the 1980s and 1990s gave participants the courage to reject 'coloured' identity. This study shows that in the 1980s the Black Consciousness Movement encouraged most of the participants to embrace a black identity as a form of political resistance. Furthermore, this study argues that in post-apartheid South Africa, most of the participants do not see the need to use racial identities, and therefore do not racially label themselves. Thus, this research project concludes that the black identity that the participants embraced in the 1980s served as a mechanism to protect the participants from negative psychological stress generated by the apartheid regime. It further gave participants a sense of purpose. The findings of this qualitative research study contribute to the understanding of identity development.

Keywords: Race, Non-racialism, 'Coloured' identity, postcolonial subjectivities, identity development, apartheid.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This study approaches the debate around race from a social constructionist perspective. As far as this research project is concerned, race does not exist scientifically. According to Prah (2002), the genetic material responsible for the characteristics that are viewed as racial, constitutes less than half of one percent of our genetic make-up and has no cultural or behavioural implications.

Thus, this study argues that race has evolved out of a historical need to create a racial hierarchy that would maintain and perpetuate the notion of white supremacy and the status quo of white privilege in the world (Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001). The notion of white supremacy is used in this study to refer to the tendency by mainstream society and its institutions to over-value Western society's beauty standards, heritage and tradition; while, simultaneously, devaluing and dehumanising blacks (hooks, 1992).

White supremacy was the cornerstone of the apartheid regime. Hence, in apartheid South Africa, skin colour and hair texture were used as instruments for the reward of power and privilege (Prah, 2002). This kind of use of race is characterised in this research study as racism. As an ideology, racism is defined as a set of ideas that aim to rationalise and justify systematically unequal relations of power between social and cultural groups, writes Duncan (2002).

In the Western Cape, the geographical focus of this study, racism has traditionally been used to divide communities. For example, race was used to promote and encourage

white people to harbour racial prejudice for ‘coloureds’<sup>1</sup> and blacks<sup>2</sup>; and for ‘coloureds’ to see themselves as different to, and better than blacks. By designating the Western Cape a ‘coloured’ preferential area, the apartheid government sought to inculcate and entrench in peoples’ imaginations the notion that ‘coloured’ people are different to and better than blacks.

It is for this reason that Goldin (1987) argues that a distinct ‘coloured’ identity is the outcome of an apartheid history of divide and rule. Sociologists such as Erasmus (2001) write that growing up ‘coloured’ meant knowing that she was not only not white, but less than white; not only not black, but better than black.

The main focus of this research project is ‘coloured’ identity. It takes a slightly different approach to other research studies on this particular topic. Chapter four, the literature review, shows that most research on this subject tends to focus on the social hostility that exists between black Africans and ‘coloured’ people. Other research projects on this topic focus on the social construction of ‘colouredness’ either during or after apartheid. This study instead documents the stories of people who, due to the inspiration they drew from the Black Consciousness (BC) ideology, rejected ‘coloured’ identity in favour of black identity. This research is important for two reasons. Firstly, it strengthens the argument that racial identities are socially constructed; and further shows that ‘coloured’ identity in South

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<sup>1</sup> The label ‘coloured’ is put in inverted commas to signify the fact that ‘coloured’ is a contested identity. Thinkers such as Goldin (1987) argue it was invented by apartheid regime as part of its divide and rule strategy. A different school of thought (e.g. see Erasmus, 2001) argues that ‘coloured’ people participated in the construction of the identity.

<sup>2</sup> The label ‘blacks’ is used in two different ways in this thesis. Generally, when the racial category ‘black’ is used in this thesis, it is used from a Black Consciousness perspective. Meaning it is used to refer to Indians, ‘coloureds’ and Africans. However, in cases where I explain the historical and the political mechanics of the apartheid regime I use ‘blacks’ to refer to people who were classified as either Bantu or black African by the apartheid regime.

Africa is contested in the sense that thinkers such as Goldin (1987) perceive it to be a product of a deliberate divide and rule strategy devised by the apartheid State.

Secondly, very little research has been conducted on the reasons certain people had for rejecting 'coloured' identity during the apartheid regime. To date, no research has looked at the motivations and the emotional and intellectual challenges which people who rejected 'coloured' identity had to negotiate.

A research study exploring such questions would show that what is normally referred to as the 'coloured community'<sup>3</sup> is not homogenous, and that not all 'coloured' people experienced apartheid South Africa the same way. Such research also highlights the experiences and contributions made by 'coloured' people who resisted the apartheid regime.

This study aims to contribute to the study of identity construction in South Africa. In particular this project will address the following research questions:

What led participants to question 'colouredness'? Most importantly, why did participants reject 'coloured' identity for a black identity, in particular?

How did the socio-political and personal environments shape participants' black identity constructions?

What meanings do research participants attach to their 'racial' identities?

The project is based on the assumption that group identities are formulated in accordance with the dominant discourse of the day. Most importantly, this study argues that in social groups there are always people who forge their own identities by resisting the

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of a 'coloured community' is strictly used in this study to refer to people who resided in areas that were designated for 'coloured' people by the apartheid regime.

hegemonic discourse of the day. Hence, the background framework of this study is an investigation into how a socio-political environment can serve as an impetus to an identity formation process. The ultimate aim of this study is to explore the identity development of the participants by describing and explaining their reaction to social pressures and environmental circumstances they grew up in.

### **1.1 Cape Town demographics**

According to Western (1996), 'coloured' people were descended largely from the indigenous Khoisan population and the Madagascan, East African, Ceylonese, Bengali, and Malayo-Indonesian slaves, all taken from areas on the Dutch trade routes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 'Coloured' people constitute the largest population group in the Western Cape. There are approximately 4.1 million 'coloured people' in South Africa, and most 'coloured' people reside in the Western Cape. For example, according to the population projection report prepared by Romanovsky (2006) for the City of Cape Town, 3.2 million people reside in the City of Cape Town, and 'coloured' people presently make up 46% of the city's population. Black people are the second largest population group at 35%, followed by white people at 18%.

The population projection report further argues that between 2006 and 2021, the population growth of the City of Cape Town will slow dramatically, growing by only 300 000 people as opposed to the population increase of 700 000 between 1996 and 2006. The black African population group constitutes the most rapidly growing segment of the city's population. The city's changing demographic profile presents a wide range of challenges in respect of pressure on land and resources, "particularly the need to create productive employment in order for people to share equitably in income growth" (Romanovsky, 2006, p. 13). This has direct and indirect implications for how different groups socially relate to one

another. As chapter four of the thesis shows, economic factors and socio-political factors have always determined the nature of social relations between the 'coloured' community and the black community in the Western Cape.

What this also means is that race remains a salient feature in post-apartheid South Africa. Race, on its own, does not necessarily serve as a hindrance to our journey to a liberated, post-colonial society. This study is in agreement with the view that racial and cultural differences are socially constructed. However, this research project also understands that in an egalitarian, post-colonial society, socially constructed differences will not automatically translate into cultural and social oppression. Rather than argue for a homogenous society, this study is of the view that the point is to eliminate racist institutions, dispel racist ideologies and celebrate difference without violating solidarity (Albert, 2006). These are the working assumptions of this research project. These assumptions are not candidates for absolute truth, "but entries into conversations" (Gergen, 1999, p. 47).

## **1.2 Locating the Study**

Research interest in the concept of racial identity development is not unique to South Africa. As Huddy (2001) points out, researchers from both the humanities and social sciences, worldwide, are taking a strong interest in the subject. It should be noted, however, that the debate on identity development in South Africa is mostly influenced by Eurocentric paradigms. Thus, studies on this topic tend to employ Social Identity Theory (SIT) to discuss racialised identity or identity development.

SIT argues that people develop intellectual short-cuts by categorising others into groups. The groups we belong to inform our sense of self, explains de la Rey (1991). She further explains that, by its nature, the categorisation process compels people to place

themselves in social groups, while, simultaneously, excluding themselves from other social groups. Billig (2002) adds that the categorisation process leads to members of other groups being unfavourably stereotyped simply because they belong to a different social group.

In assessing racial contact and interaction between different social groups in post-apartheid South Africa, most social scientists employ the ‘contact hypothesis’. According to Holtman, Louw, Tredoux, and Carney (2005) the ‘contact hypothesis’ is premised on the assumption that increased direct personal contact between members of different social groups leads to a reduction in stereotypical views of one another, and therefore results in reduced prejudice. Mynhardt and Du Toit (1991) argue that the interaction between members of different groups is often category-oriented, resulting in a depersonalisation<sup>4</sup> of outgroup and ingroup members. The proponents of the ‘contact hypothesis’ then argue that in an egalitarian society, the goal should be to replace category-based interactions with interpersonal-based relations.

In discussing racialised identity development, this research project does not utilise SIT. This thesis also does not employ the contact hypothesis to investigate the effects of the post-apartheid political environment in the way people from different racial groups interact. This study finds the Eurocentric nature of the SIT and the ‘contact hypothesis’ intellectually limiting, for these two intellectual frameworks do not specifically speak to the experiences of people of colour in a racist society.

The study also notes that the question of a Eurocentric psychology has been a source of heated debate in South Africa. De la Rey and Ipser (2004) argue that the debate stemmed from a crisis in confidence regarding the applicability of Eurocentric psychological

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<sup>4</sup> According to Mynhardt & Du Toit, depersonalisation occurs when interaction between individuals does not transcend group boundaries.

knowledge and practice to the social and political problems in South Africa. According to Seedat (1998), mainstream psychology in South Africa is Eurocentric in nature because it is an extension of the colonial project. Consequently, it neglects the experiences of people of colour, or where it aims to investigate the experiences of people of colour, it does so from a Eurocentric perspective. .

It is for this reason that this study discusses and explores the concept of identity formation through employing the Cross's Nigrescence model as its theoretical backdrop. The model explains changes within the identity development process in terms of an individual's reaction to social pressures and circumstances (Hocoy, 1999). It is used in this thesis to find patterns and recurring themes in the participants' stories, which are then analysed from the model's perspective.

### **1.3 The Rationale**

According to Van der Merwe and Davids (2006), in responding to their own unique social and political conditions, towns and cities tend to acquire a distinctive identity. The apartheid regime sought to make Cape Town a 'coloured' city. However, such a project was always challenged, not only by black people, but also by the people classified as 'coloured'. The people who led the challenge and struggle within the 'coloured community' were often students inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Since that struggle was part of the liberation movement, it is important to document it. Since the experiences and stories of the people who participated in that struggle form part of the South African history, it is necessary to record it. This thesis aims to do that, and for that reason alone this study may be socially and academically useful.

Very little research has looked at why certain people rejected ‘coloured’ identity during the apartheid era. In addition, as has been argued in the previous section, psychological research that has been done on racialised identity issues in South Africa tends to employ Eurocentric paradigms. In contrast, this thesis aims to investigate identity development process by using an intellectual toolbox that is rooted in black experience<sup>5</sup>, and not in Eurocentric paradigms. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the efforts of those who seek to strengthen a black or ‘African-centered Psychology’<sup>6</sup>.

#### **1.4 Chapter synopsis**

Chapter one has set the scene for the research study. It explains the assumptions that underpin the project and communicates the theoretical perspective informing the study. It discusses the focus of the project, and explains the rationale behind the research questions that shape this research study.

Chapter two engages with the concept of race and racialism within the African context. It particularly shows the difference between the construction of identities during the colonial times and the development of postcolonial subjectivities.

Chapter three investigates the ideological limitations of Eurocentric paradigms. It critically reviews studies that employed Eurocentric paradigms to explore the issue of race and racialised identities in South Africa. Further, this chapter explores and discusses the Nigrescence model.

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<sup>5</sup> The black experience I have in mind here is ‘black history’ – history of slavery, history of colonialism and basically the history of struggling against racist exploitation and white supremacy.

<sup>6</sup> This phrase is taken from the title of the book ‘African-centered psychology: Culture-focusing for multicultural competence’. It is used in this thesis to signify the fact that this study locates itself in opposition to a Eurocentric-centred psychology.



Chapter four discusses existing research on 'coloured' identity development and explores and investigates research into why certain people reject the racial label 'coloured'. This chapter shows that most research on the subject either focuses on the social hostility between the 'coloured' community and the black community, or investigates the social construction of 'colouredness'.

Chapter five is an outline of the research methodology used to collect and analyse this study's data. This chapter explains how the researcher went about designing the study, and how he conducted the actual research.

Chapter six engages with the research data, and then goes on to present the summary of the findings. The data is analysed under four themes, namely: 'Growing up', 'Becoming political, a search for an alternative identity', 'A radical', and 'Post-apartheid issues'.

Chapter seven explores how the findings of this study correspond with the literature on 'coloured' identity and identity development at large. This chapter also discusses the limitation of the thesis, as well as the recommendations for further research on the topic.

## CHAPTER 2

### RACE THEORY AND POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECTIVITIES

#### 2.1 Racialism in Africa

According to Mamdani (2005), colonialists in Africa made a distinction between 'race and 'ethnicity'. The natives were said to belong to ethnic groups, while, social groups such as whites, 'coloureds', Asians and Arabs fell under the race category. The colonial state understood races to have a civilising influence, while ethnic groups were considered to be in dire need of being civilised. Further, races were governed through civil law and seen as members of civil society, explains Mamdani. Thus, races had rights, and in addition, races were rewarded with social privileges and legal preferential treatment.

Be that as it may, it is worth pointing out that colonial societies in Africa were arranged around a racial hierarchy: with whites at the top, followed by 'coloureds', and then Asians, then Arabs. In other words, the hierarchy of race included master races and subject races, writes Mamdani. He adds that subject races "usually performed a middleman function, in either the state or the market, and their position was marked by petty privilege economically and preferential treatment legally" (p. 8).

In Zimbabwe, for example, this meant that 'coloured' people occupied a middle position between whites and Africans, and tended to promote and to defend 'coloured' identity with all the benefits and privileges attached to that identity (Muzondidya, 2009). According to Muzondidya, those who adopted 'coloured' identity in Zimbabwe were not passive victims of a racially structured process determined by the state, but were 'self-aware actors in their own right'. Some of these people referred to themselves as 'Eurafricans'.

The same social phenomenon took place in Zambia. Milner-Thornton (2009) points out that ‘coloured’ people in Zambia lived in fear that their racial classification and status, “along with the limited privileges these offered, would be taken from them and that they would be reclassified ‘native’...” (p. 200). So, to preserve their privileges and social status, ‘coloureds’ requested separate housing from the colonial Zambian government.

In South Africa, the creation of a ‘coloured’ identity was consistent with the agenda of the colonial project. According to Anderson (2003), ‘coloured’ identity cannot be separated from “the divisive tactics employed by both the British and Dutch regimes throughout the Cape Colony’s history as they struggled with one another for hegemonic control of the region” (p. 33). To strengthen the colonial project, while simultaneously, weakening the resistance to that project, colonialists sought ways to divide ‘coloureds’ and Africans.

This was accomplished through legislation such as the Urban Areas Act in 1923, which exempted Coloured people from having to carry compulsory passbooks for non-Whites. Moreover, as residential segregation and other prison-like controls continued to negatively impact on the lives of indigenous African people, recognition of the relative privileges bestowed on Coloureds contributed to the strengthening of a mixed-race identity in the Cape. (p. 33)

Underpinning this colonial project was a belief in the concept of racialism. The proponents of racialism believe that people are born with heritable characteristics which enable us to divide people into a small set of races, “in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race” (Appiah, 1992, p. 13). It must be pointed out, however, that

although racialism on its own does not necessarily translate into racism, it has been used in the past as the presupposition of doctrines such as racism and genocide.

Winant (2000) traces the rise of racialism to the rise of a 'world political economy'. He explains that the beginning of global economic integration, "the dawn of seaborne empire, the conquest of the Americas, and the rise of the Atlantic slave trade were all key elements in the genealogy of race" (p. 172). According to Appiah (2002), the upshot of this history is that racialism has produced arbitrary race boundaries. The history of racial categorisation in countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia illustrate this point.

Winant (2000) asks if racialism will ever be transcended. In post-apartheid South Africa, research shows that racial identity 'appears to be declining' in its relevance for most people (Alexander, 2006). This thesis also tells a story of 'autonomous subjects' who used political ideologies to "continuously and freely construct and reconstruct" their world and sense of self (Stoller, 2002). Thus, this project locates itself within the broader investigation of 'postcolonial subjectivities'.

## **2.2 Postcolonial Subjectivities**

Werbner (2002) defines the making of subjectivities as a political process, "a matter of subjugation to state authority; moral, reflected in the conscience and agency of subjects who bear rights, duties and obligations; and realised existentially, in the subjects' consciousness of their personal or intimate relations" (p. 2).

The history of colonialism in Africa has meant that racialism is the bases through which African identities have been traditionally constructed (Appiah, 1992). This thesis does not subscribe to the notion that race 'enforce an identity' (Appiah, 1992). Identities are complex and multiple and "grow out of a history of changing responses to economic,

political, and cultural forces, almost in opposition to other identities” (p. 178). This means, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postcolonial subjectivities can no longer be understood in the ‘native/settler paradigm’, which is drawn from biological discourses on race (Mamdani, 2002).

Research conducted in post-apartheid South Africa, for example, shows that racial identity appears to be declining in its relevance for the majority of South Africans (Alexander, 2006). Thus, postcolonial subjectivities tend to be constructed around factors such as class, political ideologies, culture, language and sexuality. Perhaps it is important to emphasise that this does not mean that ‘racialised discourse’ and identities do not exist in post-apartheid South Africa. Rather, what this means is that racialised discourse is expressed in subtle ways, and while some people still subscribe to the concept of racialised identities they possess other social identities as well.

For instance, in his study of how ‘coloured’ subjectivities are constructed in post-apartheid South Africa, Maggott (2003) found that participants are able to ‘play’ with their racial identities by changing their social indicators such as dress, language, and accent. His study further shows that having a ‘white accent’ is seen as positive and desirable, whereas ‘coloured’ people who speak English with a ‘plat’ accent are seen as different and occupying a low status in society.

Similarly, Kwamwangamalu’s (2005) study show that ‘coloured’ people in Wentworth regard other ‘coloureds’ who speak English peppered with slang as ‘uneducated’, ‘degrading’, and ‘standard-lowering’. Alexander (2001) explains that post-apartheid socio-economic environment is such that one’s status and life chances partly depend on how well one speaks and write in English. Further, according to Painter and Baldwin (2004), English is ‘invisibly’ used to create racial and class barriers in post-apartheid South Africa. Hence, in

response, people tend to develop subjectivities that are consistent with the post-apartheid social agenda.

It ought to be pointed out that the process of 'nation-building' directed by the post-apartheid government compels different communities to construct and express their identities in new multiple ways. According to Cornelissen and Horstmeier (2002), the nation-building project entails the "promotion and use of political symbols such as the national, the new national anthem...and national holidays that commemorate key moments in the recent history of the country" (p. 56). Interestingly, it is in this context that 'provincial identity' has developed. For example, Gauteng is seen as a province that embraces 'blackness'. Hence, Johannesburg is seen as an 'African city'. The Western Cape, on the other hand, is characterised as a society made up of 'coloureds', muslims, people of Malay descent. Thus, Cape Town is seen as a cosmopolitan city, "strongly influenced by the manifold European visitors to the city" (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002, p. 67).

The provincial identity is an apartheid legacy, and is used to reinforce racial boundaries. Research shows that people in South Africa tend to use 'space' and 'provincial identity' to racially segregate themselves from other social groups. For example, Alexander's study (2007) found that even though there are no policies to enforce racial segregation, participants nevertheless use space as means to reinstate the racial boundaries between black and white in post-apartheid South Africa.

It is also worth exploring the post-apartheid construction of blackness and whiteness. According to Mtose (2008), 'blackness' in post-apartheid South Africa is an ambivalent identity striving for a secure sense of self. Post-apartheid black identity is a hybrid identity that is 'neither oppressed nor free'. Further, Durrheim and Mtose's (2006) study portrays post-apartheid blacks as a people struggling to reconcile the black experience with the white

world. In other words, “black subject positioning is an activity that is beset by conflict and dilemmas” (Durrheim and Mtose, 2006 p. 165). Whiteness, on the other hand, is characterized by deep-seated anxieties about the loss of white privileges. According to Steyn (2004), Afrikaners, in particular, are searching for an “image, a new narrative, a metaphor that would encapsulate in some symbolic form the answer to the community’s angst” (p. 153).

Interestingly, the post-apartheid milieu’s impact on identities influences the expression of sexual identities as well. According to Posel (2003), in the new South Africa, sexuality is ‘boldly and openly on display’. This shows in the “sexy ways of dressing and walking – for women, wearing tight clothing, short skirts, showing lots of cleavage..., and for men, choosing fashionable clothing styled to which shows off good physiques” (p. 8). Furthermore, post-apartheid South Africa has created ‘unprecedented visibility’ of various ‘same-sex sexualities’.

Along with the right to sexual preference has come legislation prohibiting any discrimination on sexual grounds, which has opened spaces for the growth of assertive and vocal gay and lesbian social movements, together with uninhibited displays of alternatives sexualities which would previously have been unthinkable. (Posel, 2003, p. 12)

It is these developments that compel this study to conclude that in post-apartheid South Africa there is no “one familiar mode of subjectivity... irresistibly on the march, everywhere becoming the dominant mode” (Werbner, 2002, p. 1). The notion of multiple identities ought to be understood in the context of the post-modern era we live in. Alexander (2006) defines post-modern as a “shift from fragmentation towards the emergence of new unities of difference, and increasingly these are evolving on a global scale” (p. 64).

## CHAPTER 3

### RACE AND RACIALISED IDENTITIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY

From a review of the literature, it appears that most psychologists use psychological theories (e.g. social identity theories and contact hypothesis) that explain the dynamics of intergroup relations in their investigations of matters related to race and the development of racialised identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

To reiterate, this study uses neither SIT nor contact hypothesis to grapple with issues of race or racialised identities. The following section reviews studies that have been conducted from a Eurocentric paradigm, and shows their ideological limitations, their misunderstanding of race matters and racialised identities, and it basically outlines the incompatibility of a Eurocentric paradigm with what this thesis aims to do.

This thesis concludes that to understand the ubiquitous Eurocentric paradigm utilised by South African psychologists, one ought to keep in mind that psychology in South Africa has always been a predominantly white profession. Thus, the profession is 'integrally bound' with Eurocentric perspectives (Suffa, Stevens & Seedat, 2001). Anonymous (1986) argued that since its establishment, psychology in South Africa has predominantly served the needs of a privileged minority - that is white people. It is worth pointing out that it was the realisation of this fact that prompted the 'relevance debate'. It was during that debate that Seedat (1998) argued that South African psychology is an extension of the colonial project, and that it has neglected the black psychosocial experience. This chapter is inspired by that debate.



### **3.1 The limiting discourse of a Eurocentric psychology**

*I thus caught that culture red-handed - Nietzsche*

The studies reviewed in this section were published in the South Africa Journal of Psychology (SAJP) between 2000 and 2009. The decision to focus on research published during this time period is informed by the desire to discuss the latest research on this subject matter.

The SAJP has published articles that tackle the issue of racialised identities and racism in post-apartheid South Africa by using discourse analysis, authoritarian personality theory, contact hypothesis, SIT, and black or African-psychology perspective. Each of these discursive methods is discussed below in no particular order.

#### **3.1.1 Contact hypothesis**

As has been indicated in chapter one, most research utilise the contact hypothesis to investigate racial contact and interaction between different social groups in post-apartheid South Africa. In their study, Holtman et al. (2005) found that high levels of racial integration within schools lead to positive race attitudes in participants, and that intergroup contact was the most significant predictor for the race attitudes harboured by participants.

Similarly, Alexander's study (2007) utilised the contact hypothesis framework to study the social interactions of university students at a dining hall. She found that even though there are no policies to enforce racial segregation, participants nevertheless use space as means to reinstate the racial boundaries between black and white. Finchilescu, Tredoux, Mynhardt, Pillay, and Muianga's study (2007), on the other hand, explores the reasons given by students for a lack of interracial mixing at universities. Some of the reasons students gave for not socially interacting with students from different racial backgrounds were that: 1) it is

difficult to socialise with outgroup students because they are preoccupied with race issues, 2) students do not interact with outgroups students because they have different interest in sport and music, and 3) students are not interested in socialising with outgroup students simply because they do not want to have outgroup friends.

In their study, Durrheim and Dixon (2005) argue that white participants invoked racial stereotypes in rationalising segregation. Although these stereotypes were used in subtle and sophisticated ways, they were still the same old racist stereotypes that the apartheid regime relied upon to advance its white supremacist agenda. In addition, the study found that although the beachfront area of a small town in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Scottburgh, (the authors used the beachfront as a case study) was frequented by different racial groups, there was scant evidence to suggest that any meaningful racial integration occurred there. Durrheim and Dixon (2005) explain that the contact hypothesis intellectual framework is based on the assumption that contact should “ideally occur between cooperating groups of equal status and should be sufficiently intimate to establish common ground ” (p. 22).

Much of the contact hypothesis research has contributed “immensely to an understanding of contemporary forms of racism, especially as these are articulated and enacted in the mundane, everyday rituals of South African life” (Painter, Terre Blanche & Henderson, 2006, p. 227). However, as Painter et al. point out, most social psychologists in South Africa fail to theoretically integrate political orientations in their research and academic work.

...There still hangs about their work a whiff of ‘methodolatry’, as if, at some level, these social psychologists still wish to resort to method in order to render their position transparently universal and their ‘findings’ of a uniform exchange value in the global marketplace of psychological ideas. (Painter et al., 2006, p. 228)

Consequently, instead of investigating how institutionalised racism encourages racial desegregation and racism in South Africa, social psychologists who utilise contact hypothesis focus narrowly on individual attitudes and individual actions.

In contrast, this thesis is of the view that as long as institutionalised racism remains intact, there will never be an ‘ideal’ contact between ‘cooperating groups of equal status’ in South Africa. For meaningful contact to occur between racial groups, the goal should be to dispel white supremacist ideologies and eliminate racist institutions. Furthermore, it is not clear how the proponents of the contact hypothesis plan to go about creating ‘ideal’ contact zones.

### **3.1.2 Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

Writing in the SAJP, Eaton (2002) argues that research within the SIT paradigm offers a wealth of innovative ideas for exploration in South Africa. SIT aims to understand the social dynamics of intergroup situations. Tajfel (1982), one of the leading theorists of the SIT, wrote that intergroup relations are characterised by the tendency towards ‘ingroup-favouring’ behaviour. “This is determined by the need to preserve or achieve a ‘positive group distinctiveness’ which in turn serves to protect, enhance, preserve, or achieve a positive social identity for members of the group” (Tajfel, 1982, p. 24). Hence, Tajfel understood the concept of a social group as a provider of social identity for its members. He defined social identity as an individual’s self-concept which is rooted in the knowledge of their membership of a social group.

According to Stevens (2003), local social psychologists viewed SIT as a conceptual and methodological framework that aimed to bring together the “‘old’ (i.e. traditional experimental methods of scientific inquiry) and a simultaneous accommodation of the ‘new’ (i.e. more critical, historical and social analyses).” Be that as it may, SIT and its application

‘struggled to uncover and address’ institutionalised racism in South Africa. In other words, SIT was unable to account for ‘deep rooted ideological processes’ that created the conditions of racial oppression, writes Setevens.

Howitt & Owusu-Bempah (1994), on the other hand, have long criticised SIT on the grounds that it rationalises and serves as an apology for racism. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah argue that the theory provides a rationale for the belief that hostility to other groups is ‘natural’ in the same way that positive regard for one’s own group is ‘inbuilt’. Furthermore, it implies that ‘ingroup-favouring’ such as white supremacist beliefs are just as natural and inbuilt. Instead of rationalising white privilege, Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) argue that a socially useful research ought to be concerned with describing and explaining how in-groups and out-groups are socially constructed and maintained by ideologies such as white supremacy, for example.

### **3.1.3 Discourse Analysis**

According to Burman, Kottler, Levett, and Parker (1997), discourse analysis refers to frameworks of meaning that are reflected in language but are rooted and maintained by institutional and ideological structures and social relations. Social scientists use it to uncover how subjectivities are formed and maintained by mainstream society. According to Burman et al. (1997), this type of investigation into how racism functions was first used in South Africa in the late 1980s. They further point out that the first Discourse Analysis workshop was organised in 1994 in Cape Town. Macleod (2002) adds that discourse analysis is becoming a popular qualitative research methodology in South Africa. She points out that between 1995 and 2000, SAJP published twelve articles that used discourse analysis as part of its research methodology compared to the period between 1990 and 1994 which only one

discourse analysis article appeared in the journal. Macleod argues that psychologists find it useful because it has the potential to provide innovative insight into new research areas as well as into 'tired old domains' of Psychology.

A research paper by Painter and Baldwin (2004) certainly does offer insight into how racism manifests itself through language. They explain that the goal behind the study was to investigate how language is sometimes used to create 'various boundaries of inclusion and exclusion'. The study found that participants constructed English as the universal language; whereas IsiXhosa was seen as a black language and therefore not universal. To argue their points of view, participants employed liberal ideas to rationalise the hegemony of English. It is research work such as this one that has enabled discourse analysts to contribute to the development of a 'critical and theoretically respectable social psychology' in South Africa (Painter, Terre Blanche & Henderson, 2006). It also ought to be pointed out that from the outset,

South African critical psychologists working in a discourse analytic frame were concerned, perhaps even more so than many of their European counterparts, with issues such as materiality, real practices and the political impact (or lack thereof) of their work. (Painter et al, 2006, p. 227)

Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994), however, argue that discourse analysis assumes that racism can be detected through language, and it understands racism and white supremacy as an oppression that is reproduced from one generation to the next through stories and language. "All of these assumptions are questionable and fundamentally misleading premises which reproduce the trap of marginalising racism to the statements of readily recognisable racists" (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, p. 57). Thus, this thesis aims to utilise theories (i.e.

Critical Race Theory and Nigrescence model) that are rooted and informed by political ideologies that speak directly to the experiences of people of colour in a racist society.

### **3.1.4 Authoritarian personality theory**

Psychologists who investigate race issues by employing the authoritarian personality perspective tend to rationalise racism by arguing that racists are fundamentally maladjusted people or people with disturbed personalities. But this perspective individualises racism and does not understand it from an institutional and structural perspective. Schlachter and Duckitt's study (2002) which appeared in the SAJP is a case in point. They argue that their study shows that anti-black racism can be linked to psychopathology. The study consisted of 110 predominantly white participants, and 65 percent of the participants were found to have an Axis-I disorder and 35 percent an Axis II personality disorder.

Although this study might have some value for academics who are interested in personality disorders and racial prejudice, it does not illuminate how white supremacist values function in modern society. Further, the foregrounding of the argument that racism can be linked to personality disorders is misleading and distorts issues. This thesis favours a systematic analysis of racism, regardless of whether the sample population under study are people with disturbed personalities.

A slightly different theory, but one which in many ways can be viewed as the cousin of the authoritarian personality theory, is the 'intergroup anxiety' perspective. It is based on the view that people sometimes avoid racial interaction or racial integration for reasons that have nothing to do with racial prejudice. According to Finchilescu (2005), intergroup anxiety is a central explanatory factor in understanding the continuing informal racial segregation in South Africa. She explains that people are likely to experience intergroup anxiety if there has been a 'history of conflict' between the groups. In addition, a difference in group status tends

to increase intergroup anxiety in people, and the conditions that create unequal status between the interacting groups lead to even greater anxiety on the part of the disadvantaged group.

Research (e.g. Majavu, 2007; Soudien, Michaels, Mthembu-Mahanyele, Nkomo, Nyanda, Nyoka, et al., 2008) shows that post-apartheid South Africa is still a racist society. Racism, not intergroup anxiety, is a central explanatory factor in understanding the continuing informal racial segregation in South Africa.

Explanations such as the ones advanced by intergroup anxiety theorists serve to deflect attention away from the fact that racists have to account for their actions. It is not the sole responsibility of people of colour to fight racism, white people, too, have a choice to be anti-racist, argues hooks (1992).

### **3.1.5 Whiteness or White studies**

Steyn (2007) explains that the scholarship of white studies has provided a site of radical critique of societal relations by tracing the historical process that created a racial hierarchy, and by specifically examining the social identity construction of those who are racialised into whiteness. Green, Sonn, and Matsebula (2007) add that whiteness is the most compelling theory that has emerged in recent decades to deal with racism. They write that the innovation of the theory lies in the fact that it locates whiteness rather than racism at the centre of its anti-racism critique.

However, as Ratele (2007) and Stevens (2007) point out, scholars and activists of colour have long grappled with the issue of whiteness. Black thinkers such Frederick Douglass grappled with the kind of whiteness that manifested itself through slave masters. In the 1970s, Biko (2004) discussed the whiteness of white liberals. Back in the 1960s, hooks (2000) was investigating whiteness in the feminist movement long before it was fashionable to do so. Hence, this study chooses to continue in this tradition.

### 3.1.6 Black or African psychology

This study does not subscribe to the view (e.g. Fanon 1986; Grier & Cobbs, 1969) that because blacks were racially oppressed they are, therefore, emotionally damaged or suffer an inferiority complex en masse. Having departed from this assumption, Ratele's study (2005) provides figures of how emotionally disturbed black people are. He argues that racial oppression has led to a situation in which over 1.8 million Africans have a disability of one kind or another. Quoting Statistics South Africa in 2001, he wrote that 227 150 Africans reported an emotional disability, while a 62 480 indicated a communication disability.

Another view (e.g. Durrheim & Mtose 2006) within mainstream psychology in post-apartheid South Africa portrays blacks as a people struggling to reconcile the black experience with the white world. This binary view of the world, in which only black and white exist without any shades in between, stems from Frantz Fanon's writing (e.g. *Black Skin White Masks*, 1986).

More importantly, Fanon's thesis was premised on the assumption that blacks suffer from self-hatred and inferiority complexes. Perhaps, Fanon was influenced on this issue by the studies done by Kenneth and Mamie Clark. The famous doll study conducted by the Clarks aimed to investigate internalised racism in blacks. The Clarks produced five articles on this subject between 1939 and 1950; so Fanon must have known about them. Since 'The Wretched of the Earth' has no reference list, it is difficult to say for sure that Fanon had read the Clarks' work before writing his books on this very subject.

What the doll study was about, according to Banks (1976), was that white-preference behaviour, as the evaluative choice of opposite-race characteristics, was seen as an 'operationalization' of racial self-rejection and self-hatred in blacks. Therefore, a negative concept of self, which develops as a result of social rejection, racist humiliation and negative



labelling was believed to manifest in a tendency to express evaluative and self-identification preferences in favour of white dolls, puppets, and other representations.

Similarly, Fanon's thesis is based on the assumption that self-hating blacks tend to exhibit a soft spot for Western culture. When reading the 'Wretched of the Earth', one notices that Fanon thinks that the black professional class in the colony suffers from this pathology more than the other blacks. This is the same world view that social scientists such Allison Davis and Franklin Frazier subscribed to (Scott, 1997). Since '*Wretched of the Earth*' and '*Black Skin, White Masks*' have no reference list, it is difficult to know for sure that Fanon based his argument on the work of these two African Americans thinkers. However, since Davis published the 'Deep South' in 1941 and Frazier published 'Black Bourgeoisie' in 1955 - some time before Fanon published the *Wretched of the Earth* in 1961 - one can safely assume that he had read the work of these two authors.

In *Deep South*, Davis argues that blacks who seek social and cultural proximity to whites are the ones with the most damaged personalities (Scott, 1997). Frazier argued that the black middle class rejects any identification with the black masses because they suffer from a 'deep-seated inferiority complex', writes Davie (1957).

Banks (1976) writes that the proponents of the black self-hatred ideology have been clear concerning the behavioural manifestations of self-hatred in blacks, whereas the criterion employed in their empirical research have been vague. Furthermore, the logic of the black self-hatred studies is that the categorical same-race choices (particularly of self-identification) of white subjects is an a priori standard of rational behaviour. Not unrelated to this notion is the assumption that "white behaviour in such instances represents a standard of mental health and that the 'common trait' of self-concept may appropriately be measured comparatively across individuals and groups" (Banks, 1976, p. 1180).

Writing about black self-esteem in an American context, Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) posit that an expectation of black low self-esteem was considered as self-evident among social scientists, until an accumulation of empirical findings during the 1970s forced a reconsideration of the association between race and self-esteem. Gray-Little and Hafdahl explained that blacks are protected from low self-esteem because they are able to blame the system instead of themselves for failures and low status, whereas whites do not have recourse to this buffer. And a 1979 study by Banks, McQuater, and Ross found scant evidence to prove that blacks have a tendency to express preferential evaluative orientation toward white characteristics. Moreover, Banks et al. argue that the validity of such a psychological phenomenon as a measurement of content or predictive significance for white preference within the real world of social choices, self-esteem, or racial pride is equally unsupported by available empirical evidence.

This is not to say that this thesis rejects Fanon's writing in toto. The Negriscence model that this study uses to understand and to discuss the participants' experiences incorporates some of Fanon's arguments. More importantly, one could argue that the model is a sophisticated version of Bulhan's black identity development theory. Bulhan (1985) described his theory as being rooted in Fanon's writing. Bulhan's identity development theory is based on three stages, namely: capitulation, revitalisation and radicalisation. The first stage, capitulation, involves increased assimilation into the white dominant culture, while, simultaneously rejecting one's own black heritage. The second stage, revitalisation, takes place when a person of colour rejects the ubiquitous Eurocentric culture for his or her African heritage. In the third stage, radicalisation, the person then aims to synthesise both the Eurocentric view and the African perspective.

There are strong similarities between Buhlan's identity theory and the Nigrescence model. The difference is that the Nigrescence model is premised on the view that black identity development process comprises five sequential stages; namely: the pre-encounter stage, the encounter stage, the immersion stage, the internalisation stage and the commitment stage. It is worth pointing out that the model's stages are more theoretically sophisticated and nuanced than Buhlan's stages of identity development. The section that follows explores in depth the different stages of the Nigrescence model.

### **3.1.7 The Nigrescence Model**

#### **Stage one: Pre-encounter stage**

According to Cross, black people in the pre-encounter stage hold attitudes toward race that range from low salience to race neutrality to anti-black. Blacks who hold low-salience views do not deny being black, but being black and having knowledge about the Black experience have little to do with their perceived sense of happiness and well-being, writes Cross. And, the extreme racial attitude pattern to be found in this stage is anti-blackness. Cross argues that anti-blacks hate other blacks; they do not see blacks or the black community as potential source of personal support. "The anti-Black vision of Blackness is dominated by racist stereotypes or, on the other side of the coin, anti-Blacks may hold positive stereotypes of white people and white culture" (Cross, 1991, p. 191).

Consequently, these blacks may favour a Eurocentric cultural perspective; for example, notions of beauty and art are derived from a white and decidedly Western aesthetic, as reflected in their modes of expressions in cultural and academic preferences, argues Cross.

## **Stage two: Encounter stage**

Cross writes that sometimes the Encounter stage can be a single dramatic event, such as being assaulted by white racists or watching a televised report of a racial incident. In addition, for a black person who has worked hard to be the 'right kind of a black person', racist encounters can shatter a Pre-encounter person's perception of himself or herself and his or her understanding of race relations in South Africa.

Cross points out that in many instances, it is not a single event that constitutes a person's Encounter stage but a series of small, eye-opening episodes, each of which chips away at the person's ongoing world view. Furthermore, the Encounter stage does not necessarily have to be negative; for example, a racist event may revolve around exposure to powerful cultural-historical information about the black experience, information previously unknown to the person involved, writes Cross.

According to Cross, the Encounter stage can be a very painful experience, for one discovers that one's frame of reference or value system is 'wrong', 'dysfunctional', or 'not black enough'. And, this creates a great range of emotions such as guilt, anger and general anxiety.

Inner-directed guilt, rage at white people, and anxiety about becoming the right kind of Black person combine to form a psychic energy that flings the person into a frantic, determined, obsessive, extremely motivated search for Black identity. (Cross, 1991, p. 201).

### **Stage three: Immersion**

Cross writes that there is nothing subtle about this stage, for the person begins to demolish the old perspective and simultaneously tries to construct what will become his or her new frame of reference. And so, all the values and complexities associated with the 'old' self are denied and made to appear useless. However, Cross points out that the new convert lacks knowledge about the complexity and texture of the new identity and therefore resorts to erecting simplistic, glorified and highly romantic speculative images of what he or she assumes the new self will be like. Consequently, the demonization of white people and their culture is often a major preoccupation of new converts, according to Cross.

Also, in this stage the person attends political meetings or cultural meetings, the person goes to Black music sessions, attends seminars and art shows that focus on blackness; everything of value to this person becomes about being black, argues Cross. In addition, Cross explains that this stage is a powerful and dominating sensation that is constantly energised by rage at white people, and a developing sense of pride in one's blackness and black culture.

### **Stage four: Internalisation stage**

In working through the challenges and problems of the transitional period between different stages, Cross argues that the person eventually achieves a new identity, which is internalised. According to Cross, the internalisation stage marks the point of dissonance resolution, and as a result, the person feels calmer and more at ease with self. "One of the most important consequences of this inner peace is that a person's conception of Blackness tends to become more open, expansive, and sophisticated" (Cross, 1991, p. 211).

This resolution of one's racial identity conflicts makes it possible to shift attention to other identity concerns such as religion, gender and sexual preferences, writes Cross.

### **Stage five: Commitment**

Cross writes that after developing a black identity that meets their personal needs, some blacks fail to sustain a long-term interest in black affairs; others devote an extended period, if not a lifetime, to finding ways to translate their personal sense of blackness into a plan of action. Furthermore, as Cross points out, not everyone who has a black identity may become Afrocentric, for Afrocentricity does not incorporate all legitimate interpretations of blackness.

Also, according to Cross, going through these five stages is not a 'one-time event'. Having completed their original nigrescence cycle at an earlier point in the life span, some people may find that the challenges unique to another life-span phase may engender a recycling through some of the stages, argues Cross.

At first glance, these stages give the impression that this model views identity development as a static and rigid process. That is not the case, however. Cross (1991) explains that the 'volatility' of immersion stage can result in either regression, fixation, or stagnation. This is because during this stage a person embraces idealistic expectations about anything black. Thus, 'minimal reinforcement' carries some people into advanced identity development. Cross writes that in certain instances, "traumatic frustrations and contestment of expectancies may break a person's spirit", and, consequently, the person might feel disheartened, in which case regression becomes a real possibility. "For some people, intense and negative encounters with white racists lead to their becoming fixated at stage 3" (Cross, 1991, p. 208).

It is not the aim of this research project to validate the Nigrescence model in any way. According to Hocoy (1999), research studies conducted by psychologists such as Davidson (1975), Milliones (1974), Hall, Cross and Freedle (1972), Parham (1989) and Williams (1975) have substantially validated this theoretical framework both experientially and quantitatively. Among other things, it is for this reason the project utilizes the intellectual framework of the Nigrescence model as its theoretical backdrop in understanding and talking about the research participants' experiences. The goal is to illustrate how certain people of colour were transformed by a series of circumstances and events into persons who are 'more black or Afrocentrically aligned' (Cross, 1991).

It is important to conclude this chapter by pointing out that the fact that this thesis grapples with the topic of racialised identities in a manner that deviates from the mainstream South African psychology does not make this study less psychological. The Nigrescence Model, which this thesis uses to trace the identity development of the participants, is a psychological framework that aims to study black identity development (Hocoy, 1999). Its strength lies in the fact that it aims to move away from the traditional, Eurocentric psychological approach of individualising socio-political problems. Thus, in discussing the identity development of participants, this study places emphasis on the socio-political environment, and explains that in relation to the participants, and not vice versa.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCHING 'COLOURED' IDENTITY

It is primarily in the Western Cape region of South Africa that 'coloured' identity was developed (Goldin, 1987). According to Goldin, within the first two decades of colonial rule, there existed in the Cape a complex racial hierarchy in which people who were later to be designated 'coloured' were accorded a higher status than black people.

After the emancipation of slaves (1834 – 1838), the Cape's cheap labour pool more than doubled in size, explains Goldin (1987). Consequently, the 'coloured' petty bourgeoisie and the skilled strata attempted to defend their privileged social position in the face of mounting prejudice against all "non-European" people, by the assertion of a distinct identity and the sacrifice of African interest.

From 1919, according to Lewis (1987), prominent Cape Nationalists launched a concerted effort to win the 'coloured' vote in the Cape. Lewis argues that this coincided with the party's strategy to enlarge its Afrikaner support-base by tapping the growing industrial and political strength of organised white workers. And so, on the eve of the 1924 general elections, the white labour and national parties combined forces in the so-called 'Pact' alliance, writes Lewis. The 'Pact' entailed entrenching white supremacy in South Africa by protecting white workers from black competition, through labour policies that involved preferential living practices for whites.

For 'Coloureds', the Pact offered a 'New Deal'. In return for their support for the Pact's policies, 'coloureds' would share in the privileges legislated for white workers, and "would be exempted from the restrictions applied to Africans – but as a separate 'racial' group sharing the values and cultures of whites" (Lewis, 1987, p. 119).



This is the backdrop against which 'coloured' identity developed in the Western Cape. This project of 'coloured' identity development continued until the period of the National Party rule, according to Goldin (1987). To further strengthen the project of 'coloured' identity development, in 1945, at the behest of the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC), the government implemented the 'Coloured Labour Preference Policy', writes Lewis (1987).

Goldin (1987) argues that the policy was only one element of a wider system of preference for coloureds. He points out that while the policy sought to secure employment preference for coloureds, the National Party also tried to improve the political and social position of coloureds relative to Africans.

#### **4.1 Coloured political organisations**

Lewis (1987) writes that the first 'coloured' political organisation, the African Political Organisation (APO), was founded in 1902 in Cape Town. According to Lewis, the APO president, Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman, said in 1910 that the APO was an organisation for 'coloured' people only. Therefore, "he, as president, had...to concentrate on the 'the rights and duties of the coloured people...as distinguished from the native races' " (Lewis, 1987, p. 57). Another political organisation that encouraged the development of 'coloured' identity was the Coloured Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), which was founded in 1913.

However, not all 'coloured' political organisations subscribed to the idea of assimilating into the white supremacist South African society. For example, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), which was founded in 1919, drew support from 'coloured' and African workers on the Cape Town docks, according to Lewis. The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) was another 'coloured' political organisation that did not see its struggle as opposed to an African struggle. Adhikari (2005) writes that NEUM was founded in 1943,

and from the early 1960s there was an explicit rejection of 'coloured' identity within NEUM circles.

The United Democratic Front (UDF) was another political organisation that rejected 'coloured' identity. Many 'coloured' activists who rejected 'coloured' identity were inspired and influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement. Adhikari (2005) explains that 'coloured rejectionism' was partly inspired and influenced by the revival of mass protest against the apartheid State after the Soweto uprising. However, it ought to be pointed out that in the 'coloured' community, Black Consciousness ideology appealed especially to the better-educated urbanised groups outside of the NEUM's sphere of influence. Thus, the rejection of 'coloured' identity was limited to a relatively small minority of better-educated and highly politicised people associated with the anti-apartheid movement. "This much is evident from the majority of working-class Coloured voters heeding the National Party's racist appeal and flocking to its banner in the April 1994 elections" (Adhikari, 2005, p. 160).

#### **4.2 The expression of 'coloured' identity**

Adhikari (2005) writes that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of 'coloured' people in South Africa had one desire, and that was to assimilate into white racist society. This meant that the most consistent element in the expression of 'coloured' identity was a close affinity with whiteness and a concomitant distancing from Africanness. This manifested itself in the currency attached to fair skin, straight hair and white heritage in many 'coloured' communities.

Erasmus (2001) discusses the same notions of valuing whiteness and writes that in the 'coloured' community, practices such as straightening one's hair carries a stigma. She adds that the humiliation of being 'less than white' made being 'better than black' a fragile social

position to occupy. "Being coloured often means having to choose between blackness and whiteness" (Erasmus, 2001, p. 13). Inevitably, such a situation leads one to devalue and deny some parts of one's history and cultural heritage. Informing this identity formation is the belief in scientific existence of races. This is because the construction of coloured identity in South Africa has often been linked to the language of 'race-fixed' identities, argues Hendriks (2001).

On the other end of the spectrum, however, Hendriks explains that 'coloured' identity has often been dismissed as the creation of the apartheid State. Many proponents of this school of thought either came from Black Consciousness Movement or political organisations such as the United Democratic Front, South African Communist Party and the African National Congress. This school of thought sees 'coloured' identity as a product of deliberate divide and rule strategy devised by the apartheid State (Adhikari, 2005). The problem with this analysis, however, is that it denies 'coloured' people a sense of urgency, in that it does not take into consideration the significant role that 'coloured' people have played in making their own identities, writes Adhikari.

Erasmus (2001) adds that 'coloured' identities are not merely labels that were imposed by the apartheid State, rather, 'coloured' identities are cultural identities that are 'made and re-made' by 'coloured' people themselves in their search for meaning to their everyday experiences. "Colouredness must be understood as a creolised cultural identity" (Erasmus, 2001, p. 22). Erasmus argues that the 'creolisation' of 'colouredness' means that 'coloured' identities were socially constructed out of 'fragmented cultural material' available in the context of slavery and colonialism.

### 4.3 Post-apartheid 'coloured' identity

Since 1994, what is often referred to as the 'coloured' community has engaged in an ongoing discussion about whether to jettison the 'apartheid-facilitated-social-category' 'coloured' and replace it with a more inclusive black identity or whether to keep the apartheid category. To be 'coloured' or not to be 'coloured' is the question that informs this debate.

Take, for instance, a study conducted by Clint Maggott in 2003. It was an exploratory study of 'coloured' identities, and the aims of the project were to uncover how these identities are constructed in a post-apartheid South Africa. Maggott found that discourses surrounding 'coloured' identity tended to be ambiguous and contradictory. He argues that the 'internal struggle' for identity reflected broader social discourses surrounding 'coloured' racial identity. In addition, the construction of participants' racial identities tended to be built around 'fluid' social properties such as the person's personality, the language the person speaks and the accent of the speaker. Be that as it may, 'coloured' identity is still constructed as distinct from black and white identities; with whites seen as superior, and, therefore, a category to aspire towards. Furthermore, Maggot found that the prevailing view is that the experience and the contribution of 'coloured' people in post-apartheid South Africa is not valued, and as a group, 'coloured' people are perceived as politically powerless.

Caliguire (1996) argues that post-apartheid South Africa has brought with it a degree of uncertainty as political space has been opened up for communities to renegotiate and redefine their own place, as well as their social relations to one another in the new democratic map of the country. "This feeling of uncertainty seems to be particularly pronounced within the coloured community..." (Caliguire, 1996, p. 9). This is because during the apartheid regime, 'coloured' communities were constructed to occupy a middle ground, neither black

nor white; and in the post-apartheid South Africa that middle ground has become a place where uncertainty and ambiguity dwells, according to Caliguire (1996).

Rasool (1996) points out that 'coloured' identity, rather than being self-aware, empowering and confident, has always been based on fear, threat and opposition, and "defined in negative relation to the other, not through a positive perception of the self" (p. 56). Research shows that these feelings of uncertainty and insecurity contribute to the hostile relationships between the black and 'coloured' communities.

In his study, Stevens (1998) found that one of the most prominent themes emerging from the 'coloured' participants' discourse was their perception of black Africans as economically threatening, particularly with regard to employment opportunities in the context of affirmative action. Another prominent theme Stevens identified was the belief that 'coloured' participants felt socially and politically marginalized in post-apartheid South Africa. Stevens' study examined 'racialised' discourses of seven 'coloured' adults from the Western Cape. Through these 'racialised' discourses he explored how participants talked about black Africans and whether representations of 'racial' threat were evident within these discourses. Stevens' findings concur with other research findings on this topic. For example, Maggot's (2003) study showed that in this post-Apartheid era, because society constructs 'coloured' people as distinct from blacks and whites, many 'coloured' people believe that "they are not able to share in the benefits of the development and status which is perceived as being enjoyed by blacks, and was previously enjoyed by whites." Boonzaier's study (1999) also shows that black Africans are viewed by 'coloured' participants as exclusively advantaged by affirmative action. These findings are consistent with the argument that the historical differentiation between 'coloureds' and black Africans occurred along economic, political and social dimensions, writes Stevens (1998).

However, there is also the argument that the 'coloured' community is not homogenous. According to this argument, 'new' conceptions of 'colouredness' are emerging in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Ruiters (2006), a large number of people within the 'coloured' community are undertaking personal journeys into their identities, and that process is painful for some, because it compels people who have denied a part of themselves to come to terms with their history honestly. She points out that:

Many people who have chosen to redefine their personal identities experience ridicule and marginalization from their families and communities because they have revived and adopted identities which were negated and stereotyped throughout history, for example, KhoiSan and slave identities. (Ruiters, 2006)

In the same study, Ruiters explains that the South African state is reinventing itself as an African nation with an 'African' identity that has not been clearly defined to date. Consequently, racial groups within South Africa are grappling with the process of re-naming themselves within this new political milieu. Ruiters adds that "the introduction of an overarching 'African' identity has created insecurities in South African society and has resulted in people holding onto their apartheid-defined identities." Hence, the persistence of a 'coloured' identity in the Western Cape is directly related to how marginal the 'coloured' community feels in the post-apartheid South Africa, writes Ruiters.

Other studies on the same topic (e.g. Duncan, 2002) show that not everybody in the 'coloured' community embraces the label 'coloured'. In his research study, Duncan found that the majority of his research participants were reticent about employing the 'coloured' label to identify themselves. "Hence, when they were constrained to utilise labels like 'coloured', they would preface the term with distance markers such as 'so-called'..." (Duncan, 2002, p. 124). Duncan explains that by employing the term 'so-called', the

participants created the impression that they rejected the conceptual meaning of the label 'coloured'. In the same study, Duncan found that rather than label themselves 'coloured', other participants labelled themselves black instead. By self-identifying as black, these participants could be asserting that they reject 'coloured' identity, and in addition, they reject the apartheid meaning of blackness, concludes Duncan.

To reach his conclusions, Duncan conducted a series of focus group discussions with 26 participants from working-class, 'coloured' communities in the Western Cape. Duncan's study was based on the assumption that racism plays an important role in the construction of social group differences and social group identities in South Africa. Thus, his research aimed to investigate the genesis and articulation of these differences and identities as a function of racism.

De la Rey and Boonzaier (2002) conducted a study that concurred with Duncan's findings. They write that all the research participants in their study distanced themselves from apartheid labels. "None of the respondents, who were previously classified as 'coloured', currently identified themselves as such; rather, most identified themselves as 'black' " (de la Rey and Boonzaier, 2002, p. 82). De la Rey and Boonzaier argue that identity construction is defined and shaped by the socio-political environment that people exist in. Hence, participants in their study vacillated between identification and non-identification with different racially named groups.

Caliguire (1996) argues that, in post-apartheid South Africa, the challenge for 'coloured' people is to define themselves and articulate their interests, concerns and fears in a way that does not foster racial divides. Ruiters (2006) adds that the reconstruction of "coloured identities has to occur within a new framework in which an African identity is more inclusive and within which attempts have been made to move away from past

constructions of identities.” Similarly, Erasmus (2001) argues that in ‘re-imagining’ ‘coloured’ identities, South Africans ought to move beyond the notion that ‘coloured’ people are of ‘mixed race’. “Rather, we need to see them as cultural identities comprising detailed bodies of knowledge, specific cultural practices, memories, rituals and modes of being” (Erasmus, 2001, p. 2).

In exploring ‘colouredness’, this thesis locates itself within the emerging research (e.g. de la Rey & Boonzaier, 2002; Duncan, 2002; Ruiters, 2006) that aims to investigate ‘coloured rejectionism’, to use Adhikari’s phrase. According to Adhikari (2005), ‘coloured rejectionism’ began in the 1960s and grew into a significant movement by the time it peaked at the end of the 1980s. This research project contributes to the study of ‘coloured rejectionism’ by exploring the experiences that compelled participants to reject ‘coloured identity’.



## CHATER 5

### THE METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1 Qualitative Research

This thesis utilises a qualitative research framework as its research methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) write that qualitative research is multi-method in focus. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them, argue Denzin and Lincoln. Mason (1996) adds that qualitative research does not represent a unified set of techniques because it has grown out of a wide range of intellectual and disciplinary traditions. This type of research methodology involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as case study, personal experience, life story and interviews.

This study is driven by an interest in understanding how people of colour make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world, to paraphrase Winegardner (2007). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) describe this process as an examination of people's words in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants. The role of the researcher in this process is to understand a situation as it is constructed by the participants. The research participants present their reality through words. The task of the researcher is to investigate and find patterns in the stories that participants tell to describe that reality, explain Maykut and Morehouse.

To analyse the reality of participants this thesis utilises Critical Race Theory (CRT). It is consistent with the qualitative focus on words, in its emphasis on the importance of using

stories to challenge the dominant view that racial identities are fixed and are biologically determined.

## **5.2 Critical Race Theory**

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2005), Critical Race theory (CRT) sprang up in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. What gave rise to CRT was the fact that new approaches were needed to deal with the new types of subtle or institutional racism that were developing and a public that seemed increasingly tired of hearing about race. It draws from and extends a broad literature base in law, sociology, history and ethnic studies, explain Slorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000). They add that in its efforts to forge a better understanding of the various forms of oppression that people of colour have to contend with, CRT focuses on the racialised, gendered, and classed experience of communities of colour.

Delgado and Stefancic (2005) argue that CRT provides researchers with a different lens and a new way of systematising the search for knowledge. It compels researchers to focus attention on the social construction of race and forces researchers to attend to the material factors underlying race and socially constructed identities. In addition, by using CRT, researchers focus on ways in which the structure of society and its cultural milieu influences how we think about identities, frequently in a “status quo – maintaining” direction, according to Delgado and Stefancic. It names racist injuries and identifies their origin, and through that victims of racism find their voice, write Slorzano et al. (2000).

They point out that CRT has five distinctive characteristics, namely: 1) centrality of race and racism, 2) challenge to dominant ideology, 3) commitment to social justice, 4) centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5) transdisciplinary perspective. By tracing the origins of racism and in naming racist injuries, this thesis makes race and racism its centre of

focus. It employs an Afrocentric paradigm, and in addition a wealth of knowledge from different disciplines, to discuss and analyse the lived experiences of the participants.

As it has been indicated in the previous chapters, this thesis also utilises the Nigrescence model as its theoretical backdrop. The study uses the model to understand and to describe the identity development processes that participants went through. Further, both the Nigrescence model and the CRT are compatible with the social constructionist perspective that this research is premised upon. Among other things, the social constructionist agenda entails investigating ‘social processes to find explanations for societal configurations’ as far as societal race and gender relations are concerned, points out Maines (2000). Moreover, the social constructionist perspective employed in this thesis is premised on the assumption that social events can be described in terms of socio-political processes that give rise to it (Maines, 2000).

### **5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research uses a qualitative multiple case study design. According to Yin (1993), the case study design is appropriate when a researcher desires to investigate a topic in a manner that covers contextual conditions. In keeping with that spirit, this study aims to locate identity development within a broader political and historical context.

Tellis (1997) points out that case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method; that is: describing, understanding and explaining. The goal of this research is to describe and explain the identity development process that participants went through. Stake (1995) explains that in a multiple case study, certain problems or responses will come up again and again. Thus certain “generalisations will be drawn” (Stake, 1995, p. 7).

He explains, however, that the real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation. “We want to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embeddedness and interaction with its context” (Stake, 1995, p. 16).

Hence, the goal of this thesis is not to draw generalisations about identity development; rather the aim is to understand why and how certain individuals constructed their identities during the apartheid regime.

#### **5.4 Data Collection Technique**

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. Thus this study relied on in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection. The rationale behind in-depth interviews is to allow research participants to reflect on their life histories. For research purposes, this study conducted interviews with the aim to document research participants’ accounts of events, their responses and interpretations of those events, to paraphrase Marshall and Rossman (1989).

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), qualitative in-depth interviews are more like conversations than formal, structured interviews. “The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s meaning perspective, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the response” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 82).

Interviews are important because they allow for the flow of a wide variety of information. Marshall and Rossman add that they also allow for immediate follow-up questions, and if necessary, follow-up interviews to be scheduled at a later date for clarification.

For this research study, no follow-up interviews were necessary. Interviews were tape-recorded and thereafter transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interviews were one hour long on average.

The interview allowed participants to talk about the complexities which may have resulted from them being legally classified as coloured, and their struggles to construct forms of identities which they found meaningful. Moreover, the interview explored and investigated ways in which the research participants went about rejecting coloured identity. The interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix 1 for a sample of the interview questions), and they were all conducted in English.

## **5.5 Participants**

Thirteen research participants from different walks of life voluntarily participated in this study. The sample under study is diverse and varies greatly. It consists of one academic, a trade unionist, six activists, a former city councillor, a published writer, an ordinary worker and two unemployed ordinary community members. The only common factor in the thirteen cases is that these people were once classified as coloured people under the apartheid regime, but chose to reject the label 'coloured' at a certain point in their lives.

To recruit research participants, an email was circulated to an online Cape Town listserv detailing the goals of the study and inviting interested people to make contact (see Appendix 3 for the email that was circulated to the online listserv). In addition, a newspaper advert was placed in the Cape Argus (also see Appendix 3 for the advert placed in the Cape Argus). The advert communicated the goals of the study and invited people to participate in the research. The majority of research participants, however, were recruited by writing and telephoning people whom the researcher knew had rejected 'coloured' identity at one point in

their lives. These people were involved in the anti-apartheid struggle and the researcher knew them through activism circles.

## **5.6 Data Analysis**

Using Critical Race theory tools, the study aims to unpack how identities are socially constructed. Yosso (2005) argues that CRT starts from the premise that race and racism are central, endemic and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how societies such as the apartheid South Africa functioned. With that understanding, this study investigates ways in which research participants conformed to or subverted the dominant discourse in their construction of their identities.

In addition, a case study design is utilised to discover important questions, processes, patterns and relationships in the stories of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Identifying recurring ideas and patterns of belief that link case studies is the most challenging phase of data analysis, according to Marshall and Rossman. They add that as patterns of meaning emerge, the researcher ought to search for patterns that have internal convergence and external divergence. Put another way, this means that the case studies in question should be internally consistent but also distinct from one another.

This study utilises a thematic analysis to search for patterns that have meaning and patterns that are relevant to the research question. According to Braunl and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting meaningful themes that emerge from the research data. Moreover, it uses the insight of the Nigrescence Model to determine themes that capture and explain the experiences of research participants in relation to the overall research question (Braunly & Clarke, 2006). In addition, it utilises the model's approach in analysing the data. Meaning, this thesis engages with the data by describing and

explaining the participants' identity development process in terms of their reaction to social pressures and circumstances (Hocoy, 1999). Hence, participants' reactions to socio-political pressures and circumstances are examined and explained by putting them in an historical and political context.

It should be emphasised that this study does not aim to validate the Nigrescence Model. It uses the model's insight, however, to enhance the understanding of the research participants' experiences.

### **5.7 Qualitative Validity**

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue that qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus. This is because qualitative research is based on the premise that 'objective reality' can never be captured. Instead, what the researcher ought to strive for is an in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon in question.

To secure an in-depth understanding of the research topic, this study documents research participants' personal experiences through the method of interviews – "that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). In addition, this project employs a case study design as its research methodology. According to Yin (1993), to achieve reliable findings in multiple case studies, the researcher ought to choose cases where he or she predicts similar results will be found. If replications are found for several cases, Yin argues that one should then have more confidence in the overall results. "The development of consistent findings, over multiple cases and even multiple studies can then be considered a very robust finding" (Yin, 1993, p. 34).

In short, this study utilises Critical Race Theory, Case Study design, thematic analysis, the insight of the Nigrescence model, interviews, personal experiences to achieve rigour, breadth and an in-depth understanding of the research topic.

## **5.8 Reflexivity**

Parker (2005) argues that it is tempting to reduce reflexivity to an activity which amounts to an unconvincing confession about what has been done, and as a self-serving discussion on the subjective position of the researcher. The rationale behind reflexivity, however, is to get close to the truth as possible. According to Parker (2005), "...we may arrive closer to the truth, to an objective standpoint, by reflecting on our own subjectivity, on how we have come to be located in the research at this point in history..." (p. 28).

Initially, this study was going to be about social relations between the 'coloured' community and the black community in Cape Town. The literature revealed that this particular topic had been explored before. However, I did not feel that was a good enough reason to deter my interest in this topic. So, I continued reading and surveying the literature. A book entitled 'Not White Enough, Not Black Enough' by Mohammed Adhikari (2005) compelled me to consider tackling the topic from a slightly different angle. In the book, Adhikari argues that

The central contention of ... the book as a whole -- is that Coloured identity is better understood not as having undergone a series of transformations during the era of white rule but rather as having maintained a high degree of stability despite obvious changes to the identity. (p. 6)

Adhikari (2005) further argues that the changes that 'coloured' identity experienced during the apartheid era were more about 'accretion and sloughing off' of certain parts



around “a core of enduring characteristics, adding further complexity and subtlety to the way the identity found expression, rather than the evolution of the identity itself” (p. 7). I searched for research that addressed specifically this claim, and I found none. The literature review shows that studies conducted from this particular angle tend to focus on the changing nature of ‘coloured’ identity in post-apartheid South Africa. That led me to conclude that, for my research project to be useful and to have any academic and social value, it would have to focus on people of colour who promoted the evolution of ‘coloured’ identity prior to 1994.

As I proceeded with the research and data collection, I realised that I had to think about what implications it would have for my findings that I, a black South African researcher, was conducting research on people of colour who rejected ‘coloured’ identity. Are the participants going to give me stories that they think I am looking for? Would it be better if a ‘coloured’ researcher conducted the study? Am I going to miss something in data collection because I do not speak Afrikaans whereas the majority of ‘coloured’ people speak Afrikaans as their first language? So, as a researcher I am well aware that in certain cases the fact that I am not ‘coloured’, for example, might enable some things to happen in the research, whereas in certain cases, this might lead to some doors being shut (Parker, 2005).

To discuss and interrogate the data I chose to use theories that directly speak to the experiences of people of colour in a racist society. According to the Nigrescence model, identity development process comprises five sequential stages. That on its own might give an impression that the model argues for a static and fixed identity. On the contrary, the model argues that the process is infinite, and further, the kind of identity that each person develops depends on the person’s experiences and ideological persuasion. Thus, some people become Pan Africanists or black nationalists, while others become black conscious people who believe in a multicultural society.

In engaging with the data, I describe and explain the participants' experiences and their reactions to their social world by putting them in an historical and political context. This is also consistent with the Nigrescence model. It is important to point out that the critics of the Nigrescence model often argue that the model has "greater political than psychological significance" (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 2000, p. 137). Indeed, there is an element of truth in this argument. The model aims to describe ways in which people of colour develop a worldview that contradicts their Eurocentric socialisation in a racist society. As a social psychologist, my view is that psychology cannot afford to ignore politics; after all, people exist in a political environment. Hence, I argue that by studying closely the political environment people exist in, we stand a better chance of understanding the psychological mechanics of people of colour. Mainstream psychology, which views people as if they exist in an apolitical and ahistorical world, tends to pathologise or stereotypes people of colour. By utilising the Nigrescence model, this thesis aims to counter this tendency.

I should also point out that the logic behind the tone assumed in this thesis is based on the view that for one to discuss people of colour's challenges in a racist society, one ought to strive to develop a 'voice of colour'. Developing a 'voice of colour' entails paying attention to black perspectives and black voices that are often undervalued in the mainstream society that overvalues whiteness (Culp, 1992- 1993). This is consistent with CRT because, as Delgado and Stefancic (2005) point out, the early theorists 'strongly believed' in the need to develop a 'voice of colour' and "in the virtues of naming one's own reality" (p. 10). I am aware that there is a risk that this project could be misconstrued as 'essentialising blackness' or that the tone assumed in this thesis is combative and confrontational in nature. I am prepared to take this risk in challenging dominant discourse. I do not dismiss Western

psychology or research done from this paradigm in toto. I take and use whatever I find useful and relevant to my project.

It is also important to emphasise that this study does not argue that 'coloured' people ought to reject 'coloured' identity for a black identity. I am of the view that people ought to construct their identities based on whatever cultural, social or political communities they prefer rather than have elders or the state define their choice for them (Albert, 2006).

### **5. 9 Ethical considerations**

The goals and aims of the research project were fully explained to the participants before they took part in this study. Written consent was obtained from all the participants before the interviews (see Appendix 2 for a copy of a written consent). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants were promised that their names or any other identifying details will not appear in the thesis. Hence, the names that appear in this study are not the real names of the participants, but pseudonyms that the researcher arbitrarily gave to participants. Furthermore, the interview tapes, as well as the interview transcriptions were stored in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

In collecting data, the researcher did not push or manipulate in anyway the participants to talk about issues they did not feel comfortable discussing. So, by participating in this research study the participants were not exposed to any kind of harm, emotionally or otherwise.

I did not pay participants for taking part in this study nor did I make any promises to reward them for being part of this project. Participants were recruited through the word of mouth, a newspaper advert, and through an online listserv. I know three of the participants in this study through activism circles, the rest are people whom I was introduced to by friends

or people who contacted me after seeing the newspaper or the online advert. The only criteria used to recruit the participants was that they had to have been classified 'coloured' by the apartheid regime, although they did not see themselves as such.

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## CHAPTER 6

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter outlines ways in which research participants challenged and subverted the apartheid's discourse in the construction of their identities. The participants' identity development is described in terms of their reaction to apartheid policies, the manner in which they interpret and give meaning to their experiences of growing up in a white supremacist society. In addition, this chapter also interrogates any ideologies that politicised participants. This approach to identity development is consistent with the Nigrescence model.

The chapter is divided into four themes, namely: 'Growing up', 'Becoming political: A search for an alternative identity', 'A radical', and 'Post-apartheid issues'. Each theme has sub-themes, which add nuance and rigour to the interpretation. The sub-themes show how certain incidents are related to the participants' identity development and how that process of identity development is shaped and influenced by socio-political factors.

As Gluckman (1961) argues, the use of case study consists of taking a series of specific incidents affecting the same persons over a long period of time and showing how these incidents are related to the development of the person's sense of self and the way the person understands his/her social environment. Furthermore, by documenting a series of connected case studies occurring within the same area of socio-political life, it is possible to penetrate deeply into the process by which persons and groups live together within a social system.

## 6.1 Growing up

This theme charts and documents the childhood experiences and the historical background of the research participants. It focuses on how the participants were socialised to view themselves. It discusses what ‘colouredness’ meant to participants when they were growing up as children and teenagers.

Psychologists such as William Cross (1991) argue that not all people of colour are socialised the same way, and that the communities or social environments people grow up in determine their perceptions of themselves and their attitudes towards race. Thus, depending on the social environments people grow up in, people of colour are socialised to hold attitudes toward race ranging from low salience to race neutrality to anti-black. People of colour who hold low-salience views do not deny being black, but being black and having knowledge about the black experience have little to do with their perceived sense of happiness and well-being. People who hold extreme racial attitudes of anti-blackness do not view the black community as a potential source of personal support nor do they identify with the black community. Consequently, they may favour a Eurocentric cultural perspective and imbibe white supremacist aesthetic values, to echo hooks (1992). For example, to have straight blonde hair, straight pointed nose and blue eyes might be seen as the ultimate marker of beauty, whereas to have African features is seen as something to be ashamed of.

Childhood experiences of the research participants are explored and discussed against this background. To make this section coherent, it has been divided into two sub-themes, namely, ‘Defining colouredness’ and ‘Getting rid of African markers’.

### 6.1.1 Defining 'colouredness'

When talking of their childhood experiences and their understanding of what 'colouredness' meant to them at the time, participants often likened 'colouredness' to a problem that they had to negotiate from time to time (Cross, 1991). Listen to Brian, one of the participants, recount how he became aware of race in general.

You were aware of race from a very early age. ...Very early age you were aware of race. You know you are told...you live separately, and then...you also ask questions like why can't this happen and then you are told: 'no those people are white, and those people are black, and those people are Indian and Indians live separately.' And then you also want to question why is that so you know and then they say: 'no, you can't go there, you can't do this, and the police will catch you and all that stuff.' That's what you were told when you were still small. So you were aware of the political dispensation...you were made aware of it at a very small age...you were made aware of where your place is in society. Your place in society is there, it's not there!

The underlying assumption in Brian's response is that to be a person of colour in apartheid South Africa was a debit. Furthermore, one was expected to accept one's destiny without too many questions and with an obedience that is found in domesticated animals.

Although this study did not conduct focus groups as a way to collect data, participants seemed to be in conversation with one another. They strengthened one another's arguments, added insight to one another's stories, while simultaneously grappling with the same questions from different vantage points.

For example, compare Brian's story to Chris' explanation that 'colouredness' was simply a social disadvantage for him while growing up. Chris argues that being 'coloured'

felt like a punishment. He says he wanted to go surfing at a beach in the Cape Peninsula called 'Muizenberg', but because he was 'coloured' he could not do that. He points out that he loves swimming, but could not spontaneously swim anywhere he wanted. Moreover, before Chris became politically conscious, he says "I was under the impression that it was black and white, and white was...they are superior, they know everything and they are, they must be your boss."

This is the kind of outlook that the apartheid regime wanted people of colour to adopt. It wanted people of colour to internalise the misperception that black is a "terrible colour with which to be born into the world" (Baldwin, 1964, p. 23). The manner in which the apartheid system reinforced and perpetuated this racist logic was through racist policies that prevented freedom of movement for people of colour.

Furthermore, the apartheid regime constructed a racial hierarchy in which white people featured at the top, followed by Indians, 'coloureds' and then black Africans. Caroline explains how this racial hierarchy influenced her definition of 'colouredness'. She says for her being 'coloured' meant being a little more privileged than black Africans.

...like for me being coloured meant basically... it meant okay in a sense you were a bit more privileged than other people – like than the Africans to use the term that was used that time. You were a bit more privileged in terms of education, in terms of housing, the fact that we had houses in Mitchell's Plain is something...and that's what it meant, ja.

Indeed, being black in apartheid South Africa meant one occupied the bottom level of the social hierarchy. In 1924, the white labour and national political parties joined forces in the so-called 'Pact' alliance, writes Lewis (1987). The Pact entailed entrenching white supremacy in South Africa; and for 'coloureds', the Pact offered a 'New Deal'. In return for



their support for the Pact's policies, 'coloureds' would share in the privileges legislated for white workers, and "would be exempted from the restrictions applied to Africans..." (Lewis, 1987, p. 119).

Perhaps it ought to be pointed out that the racist logic that the Pact alliance was premised on is found in almost every white supremacist society that ever existed in history. For instance, referring to slavery in North America, Malcom X (1968) wrote that there were two kinds of slaves: the 'house' or 'yard Negroes' and the 'field Negroes'. The former were 'fair-skinned' and therefore occupied a higher position in the social and racial hierarchy than 'field Negroes' who were 'dark-skinned'. Slave-owners in Haiti divided slaves on the same racist notion. James (1989) explains that in Haiti the fair-skinned people of colour were classified as Mulatto, and white slave-owners generally preferred Mulattoes to dark-skinned people of colour. This in turn caused blacks and Mulattoes to hate each other, and in addition the Mulatto slaves felt superior to blacks.

Apart from influencing the Pact alliance, such thinking also influenced the modern fashion industry as well. For example, when the fashion world began to include dark-skinned models, they chose 'bi-racial or fair-skinned' models, according to bell hooks (1992) "The non-white models appearing in these catalogues must resemble as closely as possible their white counterparts so as not to detract from the racialised subtext" (hooks, 1992, p. 72).

The racialised subtext in the Pact alliance was understood by all the parties concerned. And that understanding comes through in startling clarity when John discusses views on how the 'coloured' community perceived being black during apartheid South Africa.

I think, on one hand, they were scared, they thought that to be seen to be black would be a 'lowering' of your social statue. Because blacks have got no status in society. They are

street cleaners, they are... I mean that time you had a bucket system; okay. The bucket toilet system. So for you to be associated with black, that's where you gonna get up, you know. I mean it was so extreme.

What John appears to be communicating above is that the apartheid regime constructed all sorts of stereotypes and negative images about blackness, which it then expected people to accept without questioning, while, simultaneously, socially punishing black people for the negative images they had no control over. Needless to point out, this racist logic was rooted in a colonial agenda. Simply put, it was based on the assumption that Europeans brought civilisation to Africans “against whom the Gates of Eden had barely closed” (Davidson, 1991, p. 3). This white supremacist propaganda aims to portray Africa as some kind of ‘Museum of Barbarism’, to use Davidson’s phrase. Hence, the people from John’s community perceived blackness as synonymous with a bucket toilet system.

It is against this racist discourse that we can begin to understand the main objectives and the values of the apartheid’s societal institutions. Apartheid societal institutions such as universities and technical colleges existed to advance and inculcate in students the white supremacist ideology. Thomas lucidly explains how the apartheid education system influenced his understanding of ‘colouredness’.

Because you are coloured, you know. If you look at the schooling system, if you look at, for example, the artisans and trade system in this country where a coloured can do a trade up until N3<sup>7</sup>. He can’t do N4 because it’s becomes a different classification of trade. You

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas is referring to vocational schools which were known as technical colleges. According to Gamble (2003), the educational task of technical colleges was to strengthen and expand craft and trade practices in South Africa. Further, these colleges were placed and embedded in a work-based apprenticeship. “In south Africa, the demand for technical education to made available to white youth was an outgrowth of industrial development that happened in the late 1800s. It was linked to mining and the development of railways,

become a technician after that. But...a black person were not allowed into those institutions. You as a coloured were allowed up to a certain level in those institutions. And that makes you feel...I mean I grew up in basically a family that comes from a generation of construction workers. So you feel more like if I have an N2 that I am the boss of black people, although I have a white boss I'm answering to, you know? But I still have people that answer to me, you know? ...So all of those things built into you a mental identification of superiority. Mentally you feel you are more superior....

Be that as it may, Thomas had two qualities that put him at a social disadvantage within the 'coloured' community. Because he spoke Afrikaans and not English, and the fact that he is dark-skinned, he was not an 'ideal coloured'. And therefore this meant that within the 'coloured' community, he occupied a lower level in the imagined social hierarchy. He says that within the 'coloured' community there were different social structures. Those with a lighter complexion and straight hair, people who basically looked white occupied the higher social level within the community. And these people tended to speak English at home and not Afrikaans.

To fully understand what Thomas describes above, one has to keep in mind the historical fact that 'coloured' elite aspired to assimilate into the apartheid's white middle-class society (Adhikari, 2005). Hence, the 'coloured' elite viewed English as the language of high culture and civilisation. Afrikaans, on the other hand, was associated with social inferiority and cultural backwardness, explains Adhikari.

Kim's childhood experience appears to contrast Thomas' experience. Kim was encouraged by her parents to cherish and embrace the fact that she is dark-skinned. It is

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harbours, and small engineering workshops in urban centres that developed" (Gamble, 2003, p. 7.).

important to note that out of all the participants, Kim is the only participant who was socialised from an early age to see herself as black and not 'coloured'. Kim explains that her father was 'involved in the communist party' and so was opposed to the racial label 'coloured'. This is because her father "felt we are part of Africa, we are Africans, that was the main thing with him..." She argues that in the environment she grew up in the emphasis was that she is black. "With other people, they sort of saw themselves then as coloured whereas with my father it was no, no, there is no such thing...you are black..".

The point that Kim is communicating is that the support she received from her father enabled her to withstand white supremacist assault, and it encouraged her to explore her African heritage. It is due to her family background that she was inspired to join the anti-apartheid struggle.

Apart from Kim, the predominant theme that emerges from participants' stories is that they were socialised to internalise the apartheid definition of 'colouredness', and that they felt that there was social pressure to conform to society's racist conventions and norms. Mainstream psychological theories such as the 'marginal man' would see the experiences of the participants as representing the classic case of the 'marginal man'. According to this perspective, the 'marginal man' is a person who does not fall 'naturally' into the black or white category (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 2000). According to Owusu-Bempah and Howitt, the 'marginal man' is said to live in limbo, culturally and socially. Psychologically, the 'marginal man' is understood to suffer from emotional problems, low self-esteem and identity confusion, write Owusu-Bempah and Howitt.

This thesis does not subscribe to the 'marginal man' thesis. This thesis interprets the experiences of the participants as showing that the racist society they grew up in left them unaware of the existence of cultural perspectives other than the Eurocentric (Cross, 1991). By

historicising the agency of the participants, this thesis is able to assess the extent to which colonial institutions shaped and influenced the agency of the participants (Mamdani, 2005). Consequently, it shows that apartheid system compelled participants to construct an identity that was ‘undergirded and reproduced’ by apartheid institutions. In other words, the apartheid regime created a ‘legal identity’ to which the participants were supposed to fit in. Through this ‘legal identity’, the participants understood their relationship to the state. Furthermore, through this identity, the participants understood their relationship to other “legally defined groups through the mediation of the law and of the state, as a consequence of your legally inscribed identity” (Mamdani, 2005, p. 16). However, as the conclusion of this thesis show, the participants used their legal identities as the starting point of their struggle against the apartheid regime.

### **6.1.2 Getting rid of African markers**

One issue that most participants grappled with while growing up was how they were socialised to appreciate Eurocentric aesthetic values more than African notions of beauty. In her book ‘Black Looks’, bell hooks (1992) writes that white supremacist beauty standards exist to subjugate and colonise. Reminiscing about what Eurocentric beauty standards meant to the ‘coloured’ community she grew up in, Rose told the following story:

... And hair you know; the texture of your hair. When the baby was born the first thing they would look at is the nails, because the colour of the skins around nails tells the true story of what colour you gonna be ...yeah I know that... especially with my grandparents generations that was the big thing. That was the big thing. And most of people of that generation were very conscious of the importance of being the right colour and so on... ja...

When asked how these Eurocentric beauty standards impacted on her personal life, she explained that she didn't experience the 'skin colour thing' because she has always been fair. However, "... hair just let me down ..." So, to deal with this let down, "you put rollers in or ...I used to wear mine above. I just keep them tied up, you know. And still today I go to the hair dresser once a week ..." According to Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward (1987), a woman's self-concept partly develops from observing and internalising what society thinks of her. This can be observed in the language that Rose chooses to use to refer to her hair. For instance, she says her hair used to 'let her down', and that even today she still goes to the hair dresser once a week so that her hair will not let her down.

Amanda, another participant, makes it clear that being let down by hair meant that you had African hair. She points out that the hair was 'sort of the last telltale sign that you are African or that you have African blood so to speak.'

... In Cape Town specifically, coloureds ... always vacillated towards being white and not black. Okay this is...I'm sure others can put it in a better way. But it was always better to be white than black. ... so if you straighten your hair you look... you are more acceptable because you look more white. So this thing manifested in...but I suppose this getting rid of all African markers was a strong tendency ...in the coloured community.

So, in her efforts to get rid of 'African markers', she explains that she grew up straightening her hair and rolling it like Rose.

I was a very good swimmer... when I turned 16, it was like either swimming or hair. Because I would go to swimming practice...at Athlone Baths...and we practise and we come back... we finish at 8'o clock in the evening and then my hair is wet and tomorrow I must be at school and I can't go to school with my hair looking like this. And I would sit,

wash my hair, roll it and sit under that hair dryer for one hour so that I can look better. So that I can look what I thought was okay for school; I was in high school then.... till eventually I thought no ... this swimming is messing up my efforts to keep my hair straight.

What Rose and Amanda are communicating here is their painful struggle with white supremacist thinking and values through which they saw themselves and the world around them. As hooks (1992) argues white supremacist thinking claims that people of colour are inferior and inadequate; and the blacks who occupy the bottomless pit being the ones with a lot of 'African markers'.

Apartheid society responded differently to people who looked white; in fact, people who looked white were rewarded with social benefits and privileges. This social response had a negative impact on Rose and Amanda's self-esteem. They felt that they were not desirable or beautiful enough. Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward (1987) explain that beauty for some women represents the same amount of importance as do the virtues of intelligence or political influence hold for men. Furthermore, society perceives woman's attractiveness or beauty as her ability to secure male companionship. In a patriarchal society, however, the man chooses a woman based on society's notion of beauty. Viewed from this angle, it becomes clearer that Rose and Amanda were not only battling white supremacist values, but also a patriarchal system premised on the assumption that women ought to be nothing but appendages to men.

Interestingly, this study shows that men, too, were affected by white supremacist beauty standards that apartheid society was premised on. According to Brian, males also had to sanitise any obvious African markers. He says that because he has a fair skin, he was more or less accepted by other 'coloureds'. However, he explains that because his hair is not straight, he could never grow it long and had to keep it short at all times.

I used to try to grow my hair longer when I came into high school but I got a very bad response from some of the fair...fairer, lighter girls. They called me boesman, bushman – all that type of stuff, because I had long ...a longish hair.

In an effort to make his hair ‘acceptable’, Brian decided to buy a hair straightening product. “...This product came on the market...the Wella products...make your hair straight. So I thought I better make my hair straight. But that burned my hair... I almost cried.” After this experience, he went back to keeping his hair short.

It is common knowledge that society’s beauty standards influence who we find attractive or which people we think are worthy of love. Thomas explained how Eurocentric beauty standards shaped love relationships in the ‘coloured’ community he grew up in.

I could never recall actually seeing a so-called coloured woman with long straight hair marrying a guy with not such straight hair. Because it’s like keeping the race pure ... I mean it’s like an alien race type of theory...

Research (e.g. Nemoto, 2008, Okazawa-Rey, Robinson and Ward, 1987) shows that in societies that have been historically organised around white supremacist beliefs and values, relationships between men of colour and women of colour are often ‘tinged’ with the issue of skin colour preference. Individuals often make decision regarding whom to date and whom to marry based on skin colour. Nemoto (2008) argues that men of colour often prefer white women because white female beauty is often portrayed in the media as a source of power and status.

These white supremacist aesthetic values also manifested themselves in the way children teased one another. For example, Lisa recalled how she and her siblings use to tease one another.



...When we called each other's names, I...because I was the darkest of the three I was referred to as 'Kaffir'. ...my brother... he was...I remember we used to call him 'korel kop' [curly hair]. And my sister, she was 'aeroplane neus [nose]'.

To make sense of the above, one ought to take into consideration that, as Brian explained, 'coloured' identity was shaped around physical appearance. This means that an ideal 'coloured' had a 'European look', that is: blue or green eyes, straight hair, and a straight, pointed nose with a fair skin to boot.

As Lisa's experience shows, children of colour grew up knowing that African features brought one ridicule, amongst other things. Listen to her brother when Lisa's mother gives birth to the fourth child. He exclaimed: "a nogger kaffirtjie. A kaffir. Another one." Lisa puts her brother's utterances in context: "like I'm a kaffir and here my mother is giving birth to another one."

Reflecting in hindsight about the way she and her siblings teased one another, Lisa points out that "...it was like a reflection of what was in the community." What Lisa means is that the apartheid system coerced both 'coloureds' and blacks to internalise negative perceptions of blackness, to paraphrase bell hooks (1992). Her argument is that, because of the apartheid system, the 'coloured' community had learnt to "over-value 'whiteness' even as they simultaneously learn to devalue blackness" (hooks, 1992, p. 12).

What emerges from participants' stories is that white supremacists values distorted community's definition of love, beauty and people's sense of worth. This analysis is consistent with Nemoto's finding (2008) that due to internalised white supremacist values, people of colour often subscribe to Eurocentric beauty standard. It is important to point out that some psychologists (e.g. Fanon, 1990, 1986, Grier & Cobbs, 1968) would misconstrue

the experiences of the participants as signs of self-hatred. This thesis does not subscribe to this 'victim blame' perspective, but rather choose to see the experiences of the participants as representing a struggle to conform to a certain worldview that was imposed to people of colour by a racist society.

Hence, this thesis understands the experiences of the participants through Buhlan's psychological defense theory. According to Buhlan (1985), under conditions of prolonged colonial oppression, the colonised develop three major modes of psychological defence. "The first involves a pattern of compromise, the second flight, and the third fight" (p. 193). The colonised compromise by assimilating into the oppressor's culture, they take flight when they run away from the colony, and when the colonised society decides to fight against the colonisers they normally reject the colonial project and its philosophies. Buhlan adds that none of these defence modes exist in a 'pure state', nor are these modes exclusive of others. "All three coexist in each individual and among each generation of the oppressed" (p. 194). It is worth noting that normally some people remain in one or another of these modes depending what mode is prevalent in their social milieu, explains Buhlan. The discussion above demonstrates that the participants lived in a social environment that encouraged them to adopt the first mode of defence. They identified with the dominant culture; and, in addition, they unquestioningly subscribed to Eurocentric values.

## **6.2 Becoming political: A search for an alternative identity**

This theme discusses circumstances and events that led participants to begin to question 'colouredness'. According to Cross (1991), certain events have such a powerful impact on the individual that the person feels compelled to question his or her identity – these events induce identity metamorphosis in individuals. While going through this process, some people experience a variety of emotions such as inner directed guilt and anger.

This study shows that some research participants questioned ‘colouredness’ for a number of reasons. For some it was due to political activism, for others the process was triggered by family influence, mentors and teachers at high school. Yet for some, they began to question ‘colouredness’ simply because they believe they are Khoisan. Thus, this section is divided into sub-themes that talk to each participant’s reason for questioning ‘colouredness’.

### **6.2.1 Emerging political consciousness**

The experiences of eight research participants is explored and discussed under this sub-theme. In trying to recount the series of events that led him to the path of questioning the ‘coloured’ identity, Brad explained that in 1951 he was 14 years old and that the Retreat area<sup>8</sup>, where he has lived for most of his life, was a hub of political activism. He points out that the ANC was ‘very, very active here’, and the Communist Party of South Africa had its own branch in the area as well. He adds that

I stayed with a family that was highly politicised, that belonged to SPEF [referring to the South Peninsula Education Fellowship]; which was sort of an intelligentsia group that used to meet in Newlands. ...But then, during that period of time, I also delivered the New Age and the Torch ...[the Torch was the Unity Movement’s newspaper].... New Age was a tabloid for the ANC, but I didn’t know that time, I was just delivering it, because I was just a little boy.

It is important to put the above in context. Alongside schools such as Trafalgar and Livingstone High Schools which were associated with NEUM, the Unity Movement “ran the

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<sup>8</sup> The history of the Retreat area is interesting. According to Kamish (2008), from the 1930s to the 1950s the area was known as Blouvillei, and both ‘coloured’ and black people lived in the area. However, Retreat was declared a ‘coloured’ area in the 1960s, and blacks were forcibly removed. So, the area was still racially integrated when Brad was a teenager.

Education Fellowships which organised and provided a forum for structured political and cultural debate and discussion” (Chisholm, 1991, p. 4). Chisholm argues that for security reasons, schools were not used to recruit students to Unity Movement; rather this was the task of the Fellowships. Education Fellowships such as the SPEF and the Cape Flats Education Fellowship (CFEF) grew out of the left wing study circles of the 1930s, writes Chisholm. The two organisations became defunct in 1939, but continued in the form of the New Era Fellowship (NEF).

Apart from being exposed to Education Fellowships and political views of the ANC and the SACP, Brad says he read a lot during this time. He considers Black Consciousness as the main political ideology that influenced him to further interrogate ‘colouredness’.

Steve Biko (2004), the founding father of Black Consciousness (BC) in South Africa, defined BC as a philosophy premised on the notion that being black includes all the people who were politically, economically and socially discriminated against in apartheid South Africa. Buthelezi (1991) writes that the definition of the term ‘black’ to include Indians and ‘coloureds’ was vital in the development of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).

It is worth noting here that neither the ANC nor the PAC had at this time arrived at such a precise and strategic definition which embraced all the oppressed and sought to unite them within a single ideological discourse. (Buthelezi, 1991, p. 120)

By articulating how apartheid policies affected black people’s sense of self, the BCM made the personal political. That resonated with many people and is what Brad found appealing about BCM too.

What made Brad finally reject ‘coloured’ identity, however, was a combination of political ideology and lived experience. Around 1957, Brad was employed as a salesperson

and that meant he had to travel nationwide. He recollects some of the bad experiences he had to endure, when at one point, he was on the road for three months with his white boss.

...We stayed in the road for three months. And you are just a boy and you couldn't get into the hotel although they paid, you would get your meal in the kitchen, and you would sleep in the servant quarters of where the workers are. One specific experience that I had was at ...eh...in Phongola. We stayed in Piet Retief<sup>9</sup>, and Piet Retief had...was little ... more developed dorp [town] than ... Phongola was a village. And we stayed in the hotel and in the morning we left. So worked until late in the afternoon and we couldn't get back in time for supper. So I said to my boss when he asked me if we should eat here at a local restaurant; I said yes look give me a cup of tea and a sandwich, a ham sandwich. And the owner of the restaurant refused he said 'no, we don't supply tea to hotnots'. And how can you ask a sandwich; we just give you what we have. And they gave me a mug of...a tin of coffee and a huge frikkadel [meatball] with big slice of bread and that was it. ...So they just gave me that and that was the experience that I carried through my life.

A historical background of the term 'Hotnot' is in order. The term 'hotnot' is the most offensive insult one can use against a 'coloured' person, argues Steinberg (2005). The term comes from 'Hottentot', "a word first used in 1652 by Jan van Riebeeck to describe the Khoi-Khoi; it means 'stutter' or 'stammerer', depicting a people so primitive they are incapable of human speech" (Steinberg, 2005, p. 263).

So, in this trip, Brad was insulted, humiliated, and to make matters worse he was expected to endure this racist treatment without uttering a single word in protest. That had a

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<sup>9</sup> Piet Retief is situated in the South Eastern corner of Mpumalanga, and is about 100km from Pongola, according to the Piet Retief – Mpumalanga website. It is named after Piet Retief, one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Afrikaner leaders.

profound impact on him; hence, Brad says he carried that experience through life. Cross (1991) explains that it is dramatic events like these that spark a black identity development.

Brad argues that these racist incidents made him angry at white people. “I still got a lot of anger, I don’t really accept whites very easily.” The anger that Brad is referring to has been discussed by a lot of black thinkers. For example, Cornel West (1994) argues that Malcolm X was the prophet of black rage. He adds that the style that Malcolm X employed to communicate this rage was characterised by an audacious sincerity. In their book *Black Rage*, Grier and Cobbs (1969) trace the anger that black Americans feel as a result of the fact that they, as a group, have had to endure racism. They argue that blacks in America have been asked to shoulder too much. “They have had all they can stand. They will be harried no more. Turning from their tormentors, they are filled with rage” (Grier and Cobbs, 1969, p. 2). Brad’s anger towards white people ought to be understood from this perspective.

Thomas pointed out that he, too, had problems relating to white people, including white people who were involved in the anti-apartheid struggle.

...Most of these white liberals...don’t tell me you struggle with me, you still go home tonight to your comfortable house where you have a lawyer on standby just in case you get detained. I do not have that privileges. I’m on the run, I’m sleeping at train stations, at bus terminuses, you know. I do not have these privileges that you have, so you can’t call me comrade. Discard that and go on the run with me, then we are equal.

Some of the reasons that compelled Thomas to become a political activist are personal and some have to do with the political environment he grew up in. For example, he says that growing up his family used to visit extended family in Ceres<sup>10</sup>. The extended family lived on

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<sup>10</sup> Ceres lies about 130km north of Cape Town.

a farm which was owned by a white farmer. What struck Thomas was that although the farmer was younger than his father, his father still had to address the white farmer with excessive respect. That raised a lot of questions in Thomas' mind.

I mean I was about 10/12 when I started to ask myself the question: why must my father – as an older person show so much respect to a younger person? I didn't show the same level of respect back to my father. ...And I mean that was my first encounter that I have always carried along – I always carry that experience with me.

Thomas 'always carry that experience with' him because it had a powerful impact on him. Cross (1991) argues that events such as the one described by Thomas above have a cumulative effect. Eventually, the individual feels compelled to react. In Thomas's case he joined the students' movement. Thomas argues that student politics pushed him to the point of questioning 'coloured' identity.

...When I entered secondary schooling – it was a great year in South African history so to speak. It was in the 1980s that the whole question of identity emerged as alternative schooling. That was where I started to question the validity of being called coloured.

The year 1980 is significant in the history of Cape Town politics. According to Chisholm (1991), in 1980 Cape Town schools came into their own; schools became sites and then battlegrounds of struggle, with students organising and leading city-wide boycotts.

What gave impetus to Thomas' process of questioning 'coloured' identity is not only the political environment of the 1980s, however. He says, because he was a social outcast within the 'coloured' community, the process of questioning 'coloured' identity came almost natural to him.

Chris is another participant who had mixed feelings about the 'coloured' community he grew up in. He says that because his family 'looks very Indian' they were discriminated against in the 'coloured' community.

... We were told: 'you don't belong here, you must go to Rylands<sup>11</sup>' or 'go to where you came from'. It was very, very hurtful because I had to protect my sisters, especially this [one sister]...I had to protect her a lot because the two of us grew up together. And she had long hair. Like the girls would be walking in the street and then they would say to her...no, I'm not going to censor what they said....they would call her and say: 'take off that fucking wig' and then they would come and then pull her hair.

Chris explains that what further pushed him to interrogate his identity was his involvement in student politics. He says that in 1976 he attended Heathfield High School, and there the teachers were associated with the Unity Movement. When the Soweto uprising broke out that year, Chris explains that the teachers at his school called all the students to the assembly to explain the reasons behind the student uprising. "We were told that... we need to think, each one must go back to themselves and think what are we going to do."

As Chisholm (1991) points out, it is important to keep in mind that the year 1976 inaugurated a new phase in South Africa's political history. The political terrain opened up to mass struggle, and student activism, through the South African Students' Organisation (SASO)<sup>12</sup>, gave an impetus to Black Consciousness ideology.

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<sup>11</sup> Rylands, a suburb of Cape Town, was classified an Indian area by the apartheid government.

<sup>12</sup> According to Buthelezi (1991), SASO was an organisation that represented black student opinion, and one of its aims was to create solidarity black university campuses. The leaders of the organisation such as Biko regarded the student organisation as not just a movement for Africans only, but rather they saw SASO as an organisation that represented all those who were oppressed by the Apartheid regime. According to Sono (1993), "SASO was essentially



Chris recalls how his high school teachers introduced him to books such as the ‘Communist Manifesto’; moreover, they explained to them the demands of the Freedom Charter. He says at first he was incredulous. “I was just sitting there and thought ‘what is this?’ ‘is this happening?’” In the end, Heathfield High School students decided to do something to show their support and express their solidarity with the Soweto student uprising.

Like Chris, Lisa also went to Heathfield High School. She agrees with Chris that teachers there belonged to the Unity Movement, and even had programmes such as debating society which was under the umbrella of the South Peninsula Education Fellowship.

Lisa explains, however, that what made her question ‘colouredness’ was her childhood experiences. She says that she was never accepted in the ‘coloured’ community.

...my feelings of racism was more in the coloured community itself. You know, trying to establish my place in that community and having to struggle in that community. I didn’t even think of...the...how it was like with white South Africans. I didn’t even think about it, it was just trying to strive for a place in this coloured community. And it was about a person who is light skinned, straight hair, sharp features, thin lips, you know all those kinds of things. Ja.

Lisa adds that the struggle to be accepted by the ‘coloured’ community left her ‘scarred’ to the point whereby she had to seek psychological counselling. What Lisa describes as emotional scarring, Du Bois (1989), in *The Souls of Black Folk*, defines as ‘double-consciousness’. According to Du Bois (1989), double-consciousness is an overwhelming feeling that compels people of colour to always look at themselves through the eyes of others,

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a political student organisation, not because it had been compelled to, but because it unilaterally declared an absence of dichotomy between politics and education” (p. 80).

“of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”  
(p. 3).

Although Lisa has learnt to deal with that emotional scarring, she points out that she gets angry when ‘I think that there is an issue of racism’.

I become very enraged... I become like quite angry, like violently angry. It was last year when there was an incident that I thought someone was being racist and I went into a rage. But then I realised how hurt I feel. Like the hurt was like just so deep.

Lisa’ violent anger, which corresponds with Brad’s anger, brings to mind what bell hooks (1995) calls ‘killing rage’. In her book, *Killing Rage*, hooks recalls an incident which made her feel this rage. She writes that she felt a ‘killing rage’ towards a white man she got into an argument with.

I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly ‘racism hurts’. With no outlet, my rage turned to overwhelming grief and I began to weep, covering my face with my hands. (p. 11)

Lisa says that the rise of BCM further compelled her to question ‘colouredness’. “I really began to raise the thing of colouredness... it was during Steve Biko’s time – black power. ...that was the time really when I became more assertive about my [black] identity.”

John is another participant who went to Heathfield High School.

I reached high school in about 1976. So because there was a lot of student protests already happening... 1976 was the real turning point. So the whole issue of access and the right to education and access to mother tongue in education...that became the foundation... we were

involved in the barricades; then we were involved in making posters, shouting slogans: 'coloured education is gutter education'; 'we demand the same education as our white...'

He explains that as time went by, he became more and more aligned with BCM politics. And that meant that he no longer wanted to be classified as a 'coloured' person. "...Being regarded as black was a very profound thing."

As a young boy, John was in the Boy Scouts. He explains that at the time, the boys scouts were racially divided and so that made him aware of race politics at an early age. He says that the manner in which the boys scouts were racially segregated made them suspect that apartheid was wrong.

Another participant who went to a high school that was dominated by Unity Movement teachers is Ralph. Although he attended Trafalgar High School, Ralph says his political consciousness was not inspired by Unity Movement. He points out that his mentor introduced him to politics, and encouraged him to think critically. His mentor was a member of the South African Communist Party, and Ralph was about 13 years old when he first met his mentor who used to sell a communist newspaper in his neighbourhood. What attracted him to his mentor was the manner in which the mentor engaged other people. He used to 'talk to people, not lecture to people.' The mentor taught him about the communist ideology, and he says although he agreed in principle with the ideology, he refused to join the party.

He adds that apart from his mentor's influence, he also read a lot. "Luckily for myself I was an avid reader and trying to understand things." Reading inspired Ralph to become a writer.

A dominant theme that comes out of the stories told by Chris, Lisa, John and Ralph is that schools also played a major role in politicising some of the participants. Five of the

participants in this study went to schools that were dominated by Unity Movement teachers. The schools were dominated by Unity Movement politics because teachers in the Western Cape were one of the most politically conscious and organised groups within the ‘coloured’ community. Moreover, Unity Movement activists are a product of the Teachers League of Southern Africa (TLSA) and the APO’s politics.

For example, the two high schools that produced some of the prominent ‘coloured’ activists and intellectuals that fought against the apartheid State were conceived by the APO’s president. Dr Abdurahman was the driving force behind the establishment of the Trafalgar High School in 1911 and the Livingstone High School in 1934, writes Adhikari (1993). Harold Cressy, who was elected the president of the TLSA in 1913, was a principal at Trafalgar High School (Adhikari, 2000). So, it is not an exaggeration to state that the TLSA and the APO influence in the ‘coloured’ community had far reaching consequences as far as anti-apartheid struggle is concerned.

The Unity Movement’s influence was not only in schools. It organised and spearheaded informal education within the ‘coloured’ community. Participants such as Caroline were introduced to politics through informal educational programmes that were first conceived by the Unity Movement.

As a young woman, Caroline was what people normally call a ‘bookworm’; she read a lot, she was at the library whenever she had free time. One day, while she was reading at the library:

I saw people going into the library hall ... I was wondering what was happening, so I just went there to find out what was happening. And it was actually a political meeting – a youth meeting that took place.

At this particular meeting they showed a political film. The film triggered something in her consciousness, and, consequently, from this meeting she then went on to attend a lot of other meetings. “I think that’s how my consciousness started in terms of politics.”

Dick (2007) explains that in apartheid South Africa, public libraries were sites of struggle and conflict. He adds that libraries were viewed by political activists as spaces where they could have their meetings. “A central idea was that ‘the books were just the props,’ implying that debate and discussion of South Africa’s political and cultural condition was of primary concern...” (Dick, 2007, p. 701). This resulted in a situation whereby people became aware of political and economic ideas not from reading books but from discussions and debates inside and outside of the library. This is how Caroline was introduced to political activism.

On thinking deeply about what made her receptive to the political message she received at the library, she points out that

...My father was always very outspoken against the government... So I grew up in that kind of environment. My father was very anti-government, and that basically came down to anti-white. So I grew up in the household where you had this anti-white thing. ...and my political perception changed afterwards...

She explains that her perception changed because within the anti-apartheid struggle there were white people fighting against the white supremacist government of the day.

Under this sub-theme, Brian is the only participant who did not grow up in Cape Town. Interestingly, his childhood experiences are not different to the experiences of the participants who grew up in Cape Town. In fact he questioned ‘colouredness’ for the same reasons that other participants questioned ‘colouredness’.

Brian explains that he grew up in Kimberley, and moved to Cape Town later in his life. He says that he was introduced to racial politics in Kimberly at a very early age. He remembers one incident that opened his eyes to what was happening around him.

He was walking home after school one day and as he went past one house in which a white man was sitting on the veranda, he (the white man) shouted ‘moenie na my huise kyk nie, jou hotnot [don’t look at my house you hotnot]!’ He adds that “he said it in such a bad way that made me feel bad, you know.”

In his youth, he gravitated towards anti-apartheid struggle. He recalls how he and his comrades anticipated the launch of the UDF in Kimberley.

...UDF had just launched and when they had just come near to Kimberley they were blocked by the security branch. Before they even came to Kimberley. We were still waiting for the meeting and we wait the whole day. And then the following day the security branch came to my work and they want to know ja you were waiting for the UDF. How the hell they know that? ... and who was on the list that you people were waiting...who was all waiting? So I’m trying not to tell them. But you know they tell you about your job and I had already lost jobs too. I lost jobs too you know. If you don’t cooperate with them, fine you lose your job. I already started at the company and then I just worked and worked and a few days and one day the boss just comes to me, I don’t know why, I come early, I do my job, I do everything right...he says to me ‘... you must leave now.’

He explains that these kinds of experiences made him feel frustrated and angry. Consequently he left Kimberly and came to Cape Town. On arriving here, he rejected ‘coloured’ identity.

“At that time you were so angry, you would say anything and do anything. ...At that time...you were angry at that time...so you say I’m black, I’m black.”

A closer reading of the participants' stories shows that although the participants took different trajectories to questioning 'colouredness', in the end they all rejected 'coloured' identity partly because of political beliefs. It is important to note that the political beliefs that inspired participants to question 'colouredness' were a mixture of Unity Movement politics and the BCM politics.

Looked at from the Nigrescence model perspective, the experiences of the participants represent the first signs of breaking away from the worldview in which they were socialised to view themselves and the world around them (Cross, 1991). Psychologically, this break, as the participants' experiences reveal, generates feelings of inner-directed anger and anxiety; while, simultaneously, the person harbours rage for white people, writes Cross.

It is worth noting that Buhlan (1985) refers to this stage as the 'revitalisation stage'. When the participants entered this stage they began to question their 'colouredness', while simultaneously, rejecting Eurocentric values, beliefs, norms and outlook. In other words, the participants realised that their "liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and of autonomous dignity" (Memmi, 2003, p. 172). The experiences of the participants illustrate that the participants became fully aware that 'attempts at imitating' the coloniser required self-denial, hence they concluded that the rejection of Eurocentric values is indispensable to self-discovery. It should be pointed out that the same passion which made participants admire and absorb Eurocentric values compelled them to assert their break with their Eurocentric socialisation (Memmi, 2003).

### 6.2.2 Family Influence

Two participants in this study were primarily influenced by their families to question 'coloured' identity. These are Rose and Kim. Rose's family was very active in the Unity Movement, whereas Kim's family was active in the ANC and SACP.

Rose admits that her family 'influenced me completely'. She explains that she went to Livingstone High School and she grew up in a family that was 'passionately' against racial classification. As far as her family was concerned there was no such thing as a 'coloured' or any other racial classification for that matter. It is because of subscribing to these politics that the family had friends across the colour line.

Kim describes her family home as a place where they would sit at the table and her father would discuss the history of the Black Panthers with her. She says her father would ask rhetorical questions such as: 'can you see what black people are capable of doing?' or 'Can you see how educated, how empowered, how confident black people are?'

In the 1980s her father arranged for her to attend a white school. She says she had a terrible time there because the teachers were racist, so were the students. "Once I got there I realised that gosh people are nasty. I'm darker than people, and that became the issue once I was at school. It wasn't easy, I wanted to leave many times..."

She explains that teachers and students at her new school started referring to her as a 'coloured' girl or bushman. She then told her father about this. "My dad said 'no, no, no baby they are ignorant, they are illiterate people'."



Kim's experiences show that it is possible for people of colour to be socialised from an early age to develop a proud black identity (Cross, 1991). It is important to point out that out of the thirteen participants, Kim is the only person to have been socialised to have a black identity. It is possible that this is due to the fact that other participants encountered BC in their early adulthood through student movements, whereas Kim, on the other hand, grew up on BC politics.

### **6.2.3 Khoisan Politics**

Three of the research participants in this study identify themselves as Khoisan, thereby rejecting the label 'coloured'. Jaco, Oregon and Amanda were never involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, however.

These participants only began taking the issue of questioning 'coloured' identity seriously after 1994. For example, Jaco first heard about Khoisan history in 2000. He says that he first heard of Khoisan history by accident. He was listening to 'Punt' radio station one evening when 'they started discussing the history of Khoisan people'. People were phoning in and the radio DJ was encouraging listeners to comment. He found the show interesting because 'coloured' people from the Western Cape and Gauteng area phoned in to discuss the issue of 'coloured' identity. And it was from this radio show that he heard about the Khoisan conference that was being organised. He took down the contact details of the people organising the conference, and he contacted them.

According to Cross (1991), some people become black conscious after discovering historical information about the black experience which was previously unknown to them. The radio programme that Jaco listened to exposed him to Khoisan history, and the knowledge of that history compelled him to question and eventually reject 'colouredness'.

Although Oregon also only seriously questioned ‘colouredness’ after 1994, he explains that he was receptive to Khoisan politics because of his childhood experiences. He recalls some of these experiences.

One day, my dad and my mom and I were walking on the streets of Paarl, and we did some window shopping and so forth and so on. And I saw this restaurant there and I was ahead of my mom and my dad and I ran into this, I walked into that restaurant and the owner saw me and he chased me out. He said ‘gaan, hotnot, ...jy soek nie hulle nie’ [go hotnot, I don’t want you here]. I didn’t know what ‘hotnot’ was. So that always stuck to my mind, ‘what is hotnot?’ and I asked my dad and my mom, and ag, they say ‘daai ou is mal man’ [that man is mad] – you know he is mad. But it was in my brain, it was implanted in me.

Then came apartheid’s forced removals.

We were forcibly removed about two or three times. We were moved from the mountain where dad had a smallholding to town – into Paarl town. And then there the same thing again, we were chucked out and we moved right to the other side of town and we stayed there and we were chucked out again. So they moved us right opposite to the mountain, and now that was.... that’s Drakenstein mountain, you know. So the area we were shifted to is Drakenstein.

These experiences had a cumulative effect on Oregon. He started to wonder ‘where do I come from?’ ‘Who were my great grandparents?’ He started reading in search for answers. Some of the books he read addressed the issue of Khoi-Khoi and San people, and he points out that these are the books that put things in perspective for him. From reading about Khoi-Khoi and San people, he joined the Khoisan movement.

Amanda gravitated towards Khoisan politics because of her childhood experiences as well. As a young girl she was teased by her playmates because she had ‘kroes’ hair. Consequently, “as I was growing up, I’ve always wondered where I fit in; why do I look the way I look?” She says that her grandmother would often speak of their Griqua ancestry. In 2000 she heard about a movement to revive Khoisan culture. She decided to make contact with the people behind the initiative. “And that’s when I joined the movement in 2000.”

She points out that when she first embraced Khoisan identity she was “so angry... I was angry with Europe, anything that Europe or white or..., I was very angry.”

According to academics such as Michael Besten, the development of Khoisan identity in post-apartheid South Africa was driven by fear and insecurity.

... insecurity and fear of especially Bantu-speaking African favouritism and coloured marginalisation, reinforced very much by the perception that affirmative action and black empowerment benefited mainly Bantu-speaking Africans, encouraged individuals and groupings to rethink and redefine their identities, their space, as well as their relations to others, with some opting to invoke Khoe-San identities” (Besten, 2009, p. 149).

Besten adds that, psychologically, the Khoisan identity provided individuals with geographical rootedness, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, ethno-cultural specificity, legitimacy, integrity and a sense of entitlement to resources. This view is consistent with Mamdani’s (2005) analysis of postcolonial states. According to Mamdani, postcolonial states tend to use ‘indigeneity’ as the litmus test for rights, a test for justice and thus for entitlement.

This thesis, however, is of the view that what emerges from the discussion above is that political consciousness and questioning of ‘coloured’ identity did not only occur during the apartheid period. Certain experiences within this period may have laid the foundation for

a later questioning of one's identity. According to the Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991), black identity development is a continuous, evolving process that occurs over a lifespan.

### **6.3 A radical**

This theme focuses on the ideology<sup>13</sup> people utilised to question and reject 'coloured' identity, while, simultaneously, constructing an alternative identity. This study shows that the motivation and lifetime experiences that initially compelled participants to question 'coloured' identity determined how they went about constructing an alternative identity for themselves. Further, participants mainly used Black Consciousness as the ideology to construct their identities.

#### **6.3.1 Black Consciousness**

In *I write what I like*, Biko (2004) argues that when one becomes aware of one's blackness, then comes the realisation that one ought to do something about the oppressive conditions that black people find themselves in. "The interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme is of paramount importance" (Biko, 2004, p. 53). The underlying assumption in the BC interpretation of blackness is that black consciousness is a process of political radicalisation. The Black Consciousness Movement did not make distinctions between people of colour; as far as the movement was concerned, all oppressed people in apartheid South Africa were black. It is the BCM's spirit of solidarity and its politics that aimed to unite oppressed people on common ground instead of perpetuating racial differences created by the apartheid regime that made the movement appealing to most participants in this study.

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<sup>13</sup> This study understands ideology as a set of ideas that people use to make sense of reality and the world they inhabit. Furthermore, according to Berlin (1988), ideology also provides people with standards for making ethical, political, existential and aesthetic decisions.

Hence, John explains that rejecting ‘colouredness’ for blackness made mockery of the State’s classification of people. He adds that those ‘coloured’ people who refused to reject their ‘coloured’ identity were seen as being sympathetic to the State, whereas ‘coloured’ people who embraced ‘blackness were viewed as being part of the anti- apartheid struggle and therefore revolutionary.

The notion of embracing blackness as a political resistance dates back from Marcus Garvey<sup>14</sup>; it inspired political movements such as the Negritude<sup>15</sup> and the Black Panther Party<sup>16</sup>. Prominent black thinkers such as Malcolm X premised their teaching on the philosophy that black people ought to liberate themselves from mental slavery by embracing their African heritage. bell hooks (1992) explains the rationale that informs the notion of embracing blackness. “Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination...” (hooks, 1992, p. 20). The BCM that influenced John’s thinking understood this reasoning; and it used that understanding to inspire and shape students’ political organisations throughout the country.

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<sup>14</sup> Marcus Garvey was the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Lewis, 1998). The association advocated an end to colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean, and its philosophy was premised on the argument that the African continent ought to be developed into a modern network of nations that would constitute a United States of Africa.

<sup>15</sup> Senghor (cited in Finn 1988: 38) explains that Negritude “is the consciousness of being black, the simple recognition of the fact, implying acceptance and responsibility for one’s destiny as a black man, one’s history and one’s culture.”

<sup>16</sup> According to Ogbar (2005), the Black Panther Party was founded in 1966. The BPP formed as an ideologically inchoate black nationalist organisation borrowing from an eclectic collection of ideas. Its teaching were based on the philosophy of black pride and black determination.

Although John initially embraced blackness as a political resistance strategy, he points out that, gradually, he started to incorporate his political views into his social life. So, he started growing an Afro, and listening to Jazz. By being associated with BCM,

...therefore your dress code, your language, your... music and, your whole life you want to show that you are black. And that you are not accepting this State's classification of coloured and you are not accepting to be associated with that identity – whether it's 'Coons'; or whether it's a by virtue of food or through the style of dress and you know...

As has been shown by Frantz Fanon (1990), what John describes above is also another form of political statement or resistance. Referring to 'native intellectuals' who have been schooled in the West, Fanon explains that after independence these intellectuals tend to have an urgent need to flee white culture and to seek their culture somewhere else. Thus the intellectual places special importance on the customs, traditions and appearances of African people

The logic that Fanon describes above also compelled Kim to reject 'coons' or 'the minstrels' as part of her cultural identity. Thus, by rejecting 'coloured' identity and the traditions associated with that identity, Kim feels that she is locating herself within the broader African experience. It is important to note that research shows that minstrels are controversial within the 'coloured' middle class for reasons different to the ones given by Kim.

According to Steinberg (2005), the 'coloured' middle class have always openly scorned the minstrels with "a degree of anger and revulsion that truly astonishes" (p. 119). Steinberg explains that the 'coon carnival' is the 'coloured' poor's oldest contribution to the history and culture of Cape Town. It represents the sarcasm of a 'creolised' people. Tracing its origins, he argues that according to popular myth, 'coloured' people got the idea from

African-Americans who travelled to the Cape in the mid-nineteenth century. Steinberg points out that these African-Americans were ex-slaves and were travelling on a ship called the 'Alabama'. When they disembarked, they treated Cape Town "to their clownish, obsequious, Uncle Tom performances of self-denigration" (Steinberg, 2005, p. 19). According to Steinberg the myth insists that the 'coloured poor' were immediately seduced by these slapstick ex-slaves. "...It was not long before they themselves started painting their faces black and white, and became self-loathing jesters, aping the apes, revelling, perversely enough, in their collective memory of slavery" (Steinberg, 2005, p. 119). Andie Miller (2002) explains that the popular carnival song, 'Daar kom die Alabama', is sung in tribute of the Alabama that docked in the Cape in 1863. Perhaps it is worth noting that the term 'coon' is an abbreviation of raccoon (Martin, 2007).

The 'coloured' middle-class disassociates itself from this tradition because they view it as backwards and not part of the English high culture and civilisation that they aspire to be part of. Kim, on the other hand, rejects this tradition because she sees it as not being part of the African experience. She explains that she grew up in an environment that encouraged her to identify with blackness.

Kim further argues that people who call themselves 'coloured' do so due to apartheid indoctrination.

....Indoctrinating people...to get people to look at themselves in the mirror and to say they find themselves unworthy. I mean...hell I don't think even the best psychologists in the world can do that. They got people just to do that. And then of course to segregate people, to let those people segregate themselves from others. I mean it's... I mean how sick can you be? And they pulled it off... and they are still pulling it off. Because these people have

been so indoctrinated that they cannot and are unwilling to change, you know. So for me it's sad, it's very, very sad.

The point that Kim is making is that colonisers rationalise their privilege and the oppression of people of colour with myths regarding their own superiority and the presumed inferiority of the colonised (Albert, 2006). As Albert explains, it does not stop there, for these myths become reality after a while. And, the effects distort the views of both the coloniser and the colonised. Consequently, the mythical portrait of the colonised ends up being accepted and internalised by the colonised, argues Memmi (2003). So, for Kim, the fact that some 'coloured' people proudly refer to themselves as 'coloured' means that these people have a distorted view of themselves. That distorted view is based on the fear of being associated with blackness.

On reflecting what blackness means for her, Kim states that embracing blackness means expressing pride in one's history and heritage, and being politically aware.

I would say for me a source of strength... a source of pride...because when one sort of looked at the black panther...those sorts... and of course my dad would also say, look at Che Guevera, he even came all the way to Africa. It is being an internationalist I would say. And doing something in your community to make a difference, you know. Sort of like organising and that kind of thing...not sort of sitting and doing nothing...but being proactive, I would say.

Similarly, Caroline's definition of blackness is rooted in Black Consciousness philosophy. This is illustrated by the way Caroline defines herself. As far as she is concerned she is 'coloured' because of how she looks, but because of her political ideology "...who I identify myself with...makes me separate from coloured people."



Caroline argues that she rejected 'coloured' identity because she identified with the majority of black people in South Africa. Caroline says that she first became aware of the fact that as a 'coloured' person she was just as oppressed by the apartheid regime as black Africans. And through political education, she concluded that the term 'coloured' was created by the apartheid regime, and that it is a 'derogatory term' and therefore "I shouldn't use it when I refer to myself."

Similarly, Chris rejected 'coloured' identity due to the fact that he got radicalised in the student movement of the 1980s. He explains that at the time there existed a political environment of black pride, which motivated him to question his 'coloured' identity.

...At that time the coloured issue was discussed and I remember there was a lot of lecturers.... There was one particular lecturer that I remember who spoke about this coloured...the term coloured, and said we could have...you know...it's so easy just to change it to something else; to say that you are Cape tiger, or a baboon or cannery or whatever. So it's a derogative term and we should not use it, and if you are forced to use it then you use the so-called... but black was the used term; that was used at that time.

Chris remembers people growing Afros and dreadlocks as one way of showing off their black pride. He says people listened to reggae music, in particular Peter Tosh and Bob Marley's music. He explains that the lyrics of these two reggae musicians were inspiration for his generation.

Peter Tosh and Bob Marley were part of the Rastafari movement. Andwele (2006) explains that the international success of reggae music and Bob Marley gave Rastafarianism a profile which inspired confidence in black people all over the world. According to Lewis (1998), the Rastafari movement is unapologetically Afrocentric. Hutton and Murrell (1998)

add that the Rastafarian psychology involves an expression of self-confidence that is rooted in black pride and the affirmation of one's black heritage. The expression of that psychology is very strong in both Marley and Tosh's lyrics.

This is the music that people like Chris were listening to. As he explains it, it gave them hope, it inspired them and it motivated them to question and challenge the apartheid social order. Local poets and writers also contributed to this vibrant political and social milieu. For example, Ralph points out that through his writing and poetry, he contributed to the efforts that created the 80s environment. He explains that his writing explored and discussed BC values and philosophies.

Ralph stopped seeing himself as a 'coloured' person long ago. "I'm beyond that...to take label 'coloured' is putting myself into a prison." As far as he is concerned he is an Azanian. He explains that in Azania, racial labels would be of no significance. Neither would ethnicity be accorded importance. "...You would be an Azanian of Xhosa stock, Azanian of Zulu stock, Pedi, Afrikaaner stock, or Jewish stock, or English stock or Indian stock."

Historians agree that the name Azania was first used by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) to refer to South Africa, but was also adopted by the BCM as a protest name for South Africa. The vision that Ralph has of Azania echoes Biko's vision of an egalitarian society. In an article entitled '*American policy towards Azania*', Biko (2004) writes that "we are looking forward to a non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference" (p. 158).

Among other things, it is because of the BC's vision as expressed by Biko that many thinkers such as Halisi (1991) argue that BC philosophy is a "synthesis of the fundamental political principles of the three most prominent black liberation organisations, the African

National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM)” (p. 101). Neville Alexander (1991) explains that he discovered later in his life that some of the ideas in the writing of some of the BC publicists were drawn directly or indirectly from PAC, ANC and NEUM sources.

Ralph is not the only participant who talked of Azania. Thomas also sees himself as a ‘son of Azania’. He says that he felt compelled to conduct personal research into his family origins because on “putting forward the argument that I am black – how do I support that argument? How do I tell people, look I am much a son of Azania as you are a son of Azania?”

Through his own research he discovered that his ancestors were originally from Java, and that they were brought to Cape Town as slaves. After the emancipation of slaves in 1838, his ancestors mixed with the local black population. It is partly on this basis that Thomas feels that he can now support his argument that he is not ‘coloured’ but black. It is partly because of this history that Thomas reasons that:

I now have an identity, and not a given identity, but I have an identity that was constructed over a period of time. So when I’m saying ‘I’m not coloured, I’m black’, I can tell you ‘look I’m from Java’. We came here, we revolted and we were executed, we were sold off as slaves, after my ancestors were freed they mixed with a local black population.

Many black thinkers often argue that to decolonise the mind, blacks have to immerse themselves in their history and roots. This is because colonialism’s aims were to undervalue black people’s history and culture, to echo Ngugi wa Thiong (2006). Furthermore, Biko (2004) writes that colonialists were never content with merely holding people of colour in

their economic grip and emptying their brains of all form and content, “they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it” (p. 30).

Looked at from this angle, it becomes clear that Thomas’ motive to trace his family history and his conception of his blackness is rooted in BC. In fact, Thomas makes it clear that his blackness derives from the basic BC principle that all oppressed people are black. “I’m part of the Black Consciousness Movement.” Thomas explains that when he says he is black he means he has a ‘right to space’ in this country like everyone else. Further, he demands to be treated with dignity just like everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.

The dominant theme in participants’ stories is that BC gave them a new frame of reference to view themselves. This manifested itself in the way that they wore their hair and the music they listened to. Cross (1991) explains that when people of colour go through the process of developing an Afrocentric frame of reference, they, simultaneously, feel a need to withdraw from everything perceived as representing the white world. Consequently, some people ‘consume passionately’ what mainstream society considers black music or black literature. Yet, some people concern themselves with developing a proper ‘African hairstyle’, and such concerns carry over to style of dress, writes Cross. This section of the thesis shows that the participants went through this process, and that this process marked the beginning of a new life for them. They were no longer ‘coloured’, but black.

This analysis is consistent with Buhlan’s identity development’s stages two and three. According to Buhlan (1985), when people of colour go through stage two, the revitalisation stage, they reject the dominant culture, while, simultaneously, champion and romanticise the indigenous culture. In the third stage, the radicalisation stage, people resolve to live harmoniously with both the Eurocentric outlook as well as their African heritage. The

experiences of the participants show that the participants were going back and forth through these stages.

#### **6.4 Post-apartheid issues**

This theme explores and investigates ways in which participants' identities are affirmed or challenged by the post-apartheid socio-political environment. The dominant theme that emerges is that most participants feel that the present government's use of old apartheid identity categories is problematic. Participants take offence that they have to complete State documents that require them to classify themselves as 'coloured'.

John, who describes himself as a black African male, explains that it is painful for him to complete post-apartheid State documents that still have the same racial classifications as the documents used by the apartheid government.

It pains me to fill in a State form or any form by the way that ask me to classify myself as coloured. I mean I very often would scratch it out on the form and make a tick by black; okay. They say 'no, it's for the purposes of the State figures and everything.' And I said: 'well maybe the State does not recognise me as a person, you know. It recognises me on the basis of my race like the apartheid.' So if I could fight that under the apartheid, why not now?

The irony that John is pointing at has been a source of heated discussion in post-apartheid South Africa. The cornerstone of post-apartheid South Africa is a democratic constitution which champions a commitment to non-racialism, "invoking the claim to our common humanity as the basis for the allocation of shared human rights and eradication of discrimination" ( Posel, 2001, p. 59). Yet, that same juridical assertion of human sameness co-exists with existential reiterations of racial classification and difference. The reiterations

of racial classification and difference manifest themselves in government policies such as affirmative action programmes and the Employment Equity Act.

It is for this reason that John believes that the post-apartheid State has failed to create an awareness in people that the new South Africa is a democratic society in which racial classifications can be 'undone'. He argues that the post-apartheid State does not support initiatives that aim to undo the harm caused by apartheid racial classification, and "that's where our difficulty lies today." He adds that a serious intervention is needed given the history of South Africa. John points out that the post-apartheid State could help civil society by creating a space in which civil society could bring some of these debates out to light. Until that happens the social stigma that comes with being racially classified based on apartheid racial classifications will 'continue to prevail', says John.

Why don't we have far more radio advert ... around non-racialism, around demystifying an apartheid classification? ...The state can do that; it has the reach to do that. So why doesn't it do it? At school you make special time available for demystifying some of these constructs.

If, as Moodley and Adam (2000) explain, the end of apartheid meant the collapse of legislated identities, then John's expectations are logical and fair. Most participants in this study hold a similar viewpoint.

Rose, for example, argues that the post-apartheid government ought to have moved away from using racial classifications a long time ago. It is because of that reason that she refuses to answer questions in State documents that ask if she is 'coloured' or not.

I don't tick. I refuse ...I hate it. I hate it. Strong word. But I so hate that. I can't see the sense anymore. I think this government needs to move away from race and start to look more on economic issues.

According to Rose, social reforms such as affirmative action reinforce the notion of racialism. She adds that affirmative action is unfair, it discriminates against people "simply because in the old government you were coloured". She says that her husband who never believed in racial labels is a victim of affirmative action. Her husband had to abandon his career because he reached a glass ceiling as a 'coloured' male. Thus, Rose is grateful that her children are female, "because coloured women can still get jobs."

There appears to be a contradiction between Rose's anti-apartheid struggle experience and her views on affirmative action. She views a social policy that aims to open doors that would otherwise remain shut for all people of colour as discriminatory (Wise, 1998). Research shows that even with affirmative action in place, white males continue to dominate management positions in South Africa (Moleke, 2006). Furthermore, there are plenty of opportunities for whites in post-apartheid South Africa irrespective of their income or education. They have access to credit, they can easily start a business if they want to, and they still make more money in their lifetimes than it is for the average black person. This partly contributes to unequal distribution of wealth in South Africa, and unequal distribution of wealth leads to a racially and economically unequal society. As a social policy and in principle, affirmative action is meant to intervene and reverse the situation.

That is not how Rose understands the situation, however. She argues that it is horrible that in post-apartheid South Africa she has come to understand the country in terms of race more than she ever did while growing up under apartheid. She says that when she grew up, racial labels were a swear word. "It's not like that anymore; which is quite painful actually."

Rose grew up in a family which firmly and sincerely believed in non-racialism, but today she says she finds herself at the receiving end of racialism. “So you do become bitter...”

Thomas also finds it puzzling that post-apartheid government still uses the same racial labels as the apartheid government. “...The liberatory government still maintains some old fascist, racist identification in all government documents.”

He explains that being part of the generation that fought against racial classification, he does not understand why, in post-apartheid South Africa, he has to complete documents saying he is ‘coloured’. He says that if that is the case, then his fight and quest for his identity was in vain.

You see, so what I do is I just do not to fill in the thing called race. Many times they asked me, but identify yourself, then I say okay ‘others’ and then they have a few lines next to ‘other’ – I say ‘human’. Look, if I identify myself willingly and to a large extent I can argue that I have sacrificed willingly to be...as a black person.

He says he does not understand the rationale behind maintaining old racial labels. He says it is almost like being told that the apartheid state was right, “that you are a coloured. I mean I can’t reconcile those positions.” Thomas feels that by maintaining racial labels that were used by apartheid government, the present government perpetuates the ‘coloured’ identity. The question that seems to be in the minds of Thomas and the other participants is: “can South Africa continue to construct her social realities in racial terms in ways that transcend the ideological burdens of the past?” (Posel, 2001, p. 56)

Thomas explains that the problem is not only with post-apartheid state documents, but that socially, some people in the black community question the authenticity of his claim to be black. He says that it is difficult to be black in this country, ‘to volunteer to be black’.



It's like we went to Gugs [Gugulethu] one day, another guy – his son came from the bush<sup>17</sup>, so we went there....and this other one said: hey, I can't eat here because I am not a 'Madoda' [man]... you didn't go to the mountain... you are a boy. Old as you are you are a boy. You didn't go to the mountain. Now you stand there and say but...eish, is it so difficult to being black in this country. To volunteer to be black.

Thomas' voluntarily taking up the label black is a decision influenced by political ideology. This, however, manifests as problematic for there are also certain cultural expectations associated with blackness which he may not have complied with.

Chris explains that the black community has not always reacted to 'coloured' activists who embraced blackness in this manner. In the 1980s, for example, the black community welcomed activists who rejected 'coloured' identity without reservations, says Chris. However, after 2000 something changed; some members of the black community started asking questions such as: 'how can you be black?' 'how can you be African?'

My surname is also like an Afrikaner surname; so how can you be African? And at one point I became tired, and I thought I'm not going to go for another decade fighting this. I'm just me and I'm going to live. So, but I guess it's not from my generation of black people; it's the younger people who was doing that. Then I...at one point I thought I'm not going to even engage this because these are people who does not know what we went through collectively. And so I left it at that.

What is painfully ironic about Chris' experience is that when he was growing up as young boy, the 'coloured' community rejected him because he 'looked too Indian', which compelled

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<sup>17</sup> In Xhosa tradition boys have to spend time in the bush/mountain as part of rite of passage into manhood. And, according to Xhosa custom boys do not eat or socialise with men.

him to question 'colouredness' and in the end reject it for a black identity. Now, in post-apartheid South Africa, some blacks argue that he is not black enough simply because of his surname and the way he looks. Research (e.g Eaton, 2002; Posel, 2001) shows that post-apartheid South Africa has not honestly engaged in dialogue about racialised identities. Given that our past was clearly shaped by the demarcation of different 'race' groups, how do we grapple with the past, while also attempting to create new forms of identity that may be more inclusive?

Moreover, as Posel (2001) points out the other questions South Africans have to answer are:

What are the criteria for racial classifications? With whom is the authority of categorising race vested? On what basis will claims to knowledge about race be issued and defended?  
(p. 76)

It is because these questions remain largely unanswered that people such as Caroline take offence when they are required to complete post-apartheid State documents that compel them to say that they are 'coloured'. Caroline explains that when she wanted to register for a course in 2002, she found herself being coerced to state that she is 'coloured'.

I remember in 2002 I applied to Unisa to do a course – like part-time course, and they actually had the classification, and they put a disclaimer there, they said it's for ...like basically for them to understand equity, and whether they give space to the right people...blah...blah...blah... and I didn't fill it in...because I refuse to fill it in... because I'm not gonna say coloured. And when I got to the lady at front, she told me I can't leave it empty, because the computer doesn't actually...the programme is written in such a way that it doesn't move beyond that point. So I have to fill it in, so I said okay but then fill in black,

because I am a black South African. And she said 'yeah, yeah, yeah'. And afterwards when I checked my form, she actually filled in coloured. And I have got a political problem with that...but with Unisa I'm a coloured student. You see so it offends me, it offends everything that I stand for, my value system, everything.

Although Caroline understands politically why the government still uses racial labels, she feels that the post-apartheid State should have done away with racial labels nonetheless. Doing away with racial labels would inculcate in people the notion of non-racialism, argues Caroline. People such as Caroline have no argument against redress or any other post-apartheid social reform agenda. What she is pointing out for society to consider is that race, which was previously the locus of privilege, has in post-apartheid South Africa become a site of redress, and the unintended consequence of that is that race has "taken a form that gives renewed significance to the catalogue of race established under apartheid" (Posel, 2001, p. 75).

According to Kim, the fact that post-apartheid government uses old racial labels signifies that South Africa as a nation is stuck and unable to move beyond viewing reality through a racial lens. "We have to move away from these things." She points out that the use of old racial categories does 'cheese me off'. Among other things, it is for this reason that she says, as a mother, she is nervous about raising her child in post-apartheid South Africa.

It's scary for me as a parent to be living in this country. I love South Africa, wow! It's an amazing country, amazing people, but I try also to put my child into the situation with people sort of trying to read people...because they always seems okay at surface level and then the racism begins, you know.

Research participants in this study agree that the government should stop reinforcing racialism and apartheid racial categories through government policies such as the Employment Equity Act. Thinkers such as Neville Alexander agree with this viewpoint. Alexander (2006) argues that the government is capable of implementing affirmative action without using racial categories of the past. He writes that the government ought to use economic concepts such as 'class' and 'income' instead to determine people who are eligible for affirmative action. "The large area of overlap between 'race' and 'class' in South Africa makes this approach possible" (Alexander, 2006, p. 10).

It is important to note that two participants in this study refuse to use racial labels to refer to themselves today. Brian explains that post 1994 race analysis has been replaced by class issues. He argues that:

I don't worry. I don't worry, I just carry on...I have to struggle to keep my job, I have to struggle to survive... I have got to struggle for my economic survival, that's my struggle. I can't be worried with kak. No, I'm serious, I can't worry with kak.

Chris' approach to the issue is slightly different to Brian's. He argues that part of the reason he called himself black in the 1980s was because he had little knowledge of his ancestry roots. After conducting his own personal research, he concluded that he is of mixed descent.

He defines the concept 'mixed descent' as being of 'mixed blood, mixed culture'. "It is so mixed that there is no culture." Chris adds that because he is a person of mixed descent, he does not emphasise one heritage over another. He does not give preference to one racial group, 'because I have all these groups in me'.

Chris' attitude towards racialised identities in post-apartheid South Africa resonates with some of the participants in this study. As this section of the thesis shows, in post-

apartheid South Africa, most of the participants do not see the need to identify themselves in terms of racial categories. They particularly take offence to the fact that the post-apartheid government compels them to complete State documents that classifies them as ‘coloured’. Further, the participants associate all racialised identities with the apartheid regime.

The experiences of the participants reveal what Mamdani (2005) calls ‘postcolonial dilemmas’. The postcolonial dilemmas arise from the legacy of colonialism, “with its legally enforced distinctions between races and ethnicities, civil law and customary law, rights and custom, subject races and subject ethnicities”, which the postcolonial state inherits (p. 9). As the experiences of the participants show, South Africa has ineffectively tried to resolve these dilemmas by establishing a “New Constitution that addresses and seeks to protect all individuals and group rights” (Kiguwa, 2006, p. 317). It could be argued that the main factor that contributed to the ineffectiveness of the New Constitution in resolving postcolonial dilemmas is the ‘reconciliation politics’ that accompanied the New Constitution. As Stevens (2003) points out:

Reconciliation politics in some ways undermined the basis for truly addressing the atrocities, inequalities and disparities of the past and condemned them prematurely to history. Furthermore, it allowed for a glimpse into historical matters of oppression, but denied the opportunity to address these beyond the level of cathartic confession and disclosure (e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). Whilst uncovering many atrocities, it also served to scapegoat some and concealed structural contradictions within the status quo.

Hence, this thesis argues that to effectively resolve the colonial legacy requires that the post-apartheid government deal with institutionalised racism that continues to perpetuate and reinforce social inequality along racial lines. Furthermore, the post-apartheid government

ought to sincerely engage critics such as Posel (2001) who ask: “What are the processes of racial recognition that accompany the new uses of old racial categories?” (p. 76)

This thesis also notes that the experiences of the participants mean that their identities are constantly changing, and that the socio-political environment participants exist in plays a major role in that process of change. This is consistent with the Nigrescence model that views identity development as an ever evolving process and dependent on socio-political environment people exist in. Further, looked at from the Nigrescence model perspective (Cross, 1991), the fact that most participants believe that racialised identities are not important in the post-apartheid South Africa means that the participants have acquired a new existential worldview. It would make an interesting research in the future to find out more about what that worldview entails.

### **6.5 Summary of the findings**

The Nigrescence model was employed in order to understand and systematically map the identity transformation that accompanied individual’s participation in the black movements in the United States (Cross, 1991). In this study, the insight of the Nigrescence model has been used to explore the identity development of participants who were involved in the struggle against the apartheid regime, and also individuals who questioned their identities because of the way the apartheid regime positioned and treated people of colour. The analysis of data shows that in their struggle against the apartheid regime, most participants rejected ‘coloured’ identity for black identity. In addition, the analysis of data shows that blackness is not a homogenous category. Most importantly, based on the analysis of data, this thesis shows that being black is “a state of mind” (Cross, 1991, p. 148). The experiences of the participants confirm the Nigrescence model’s assumption that being black involves “a wide spectrum of thoughts and orientation” (Cross, 1991, p. 149).

The first theme, 'Growing up', discussed the experiences and the historical background of the participants. It argues that growing up under the apartheid regime was painful, demeaning, humiliating, and simply oppressive for participants. This thesis shows that what made matters worse was the fact that many participants unquestioningly subscribed to the white supremacist values that the apartheid regime was founded upon. Instead of subscribing to the 'victim blame' perspective which leads one to pathologise people of colour as being 'self-hating', this thesis argues that the participants were socialised to embrace a Eurocentric world view, which they later rebelled against.

The second theme, 'Becoming political: A search for an alternative identity', interrogated events that led participants to begin to question 'colouredness'. It documents series of events that led participants to question 'colouredness'. This thesis argues that these events were racist in nature, something that made most participants angry, and, consequently, some participants tended to mistrust white people. The feelings of anger and the mistrust directed at white people shows that the participants were breaking away from the hold of their childhood socialisation (Cross, 1991). The Nigrescence model views this break-through as the beginning of the new identity development.

The third theme, 'A radical', showed that most participants utilised the BC ideology to construct a black identity, and to fend off debilitating racist stereotypes about themselves. According to the Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991), the black identity developed by the participants served three psychological functions. Firstly, it protected the person from the negative psychological stress generated by the apartheid regime. Secondly, it gave the participants a sense of purpose, and being affiliated to political organisations that were fighting against the apartheid regime gave meaning to the participants' lives. And, thirdly,

blackness provided the participants with a psychological mechanism to facilitate social intercourse with people 'outside the boundaries of blackness'.

The fourth theme, 'Post-apartheid issues', shows that some participants have moved away from identifying themselves in terms of race; in fact they associate racialised identities with the apartheid regime. This analysis confirms the Nigrescence model's assumption that in racist societies, black identity is used as a psychological buffer to negotiate racist encounters (Cross, 1991). This implies that in a different society people of colour are likely to develop different existential worldviews to engage the new socio-political environment. The experiences of the participants in post-apartheid South Africa confirms this assumption.

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## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this research study was to document the stories and experiences of the people who, for various reasons, rejected the racial classification label 'coloured' imposed on them during apartheid. By utilising CRT, it investigated the processes and factors that were significant in shaping the ways in which participants came to identify. Further, by employing CRT this thesis was able to name the participants' racist injuries. In tracing the origins of the racist injuries as well as the participants' identity development the following themes emerged: childhood experiences related to family and society at large, introduction to politics and identity questions that politics triggered in participants' minds, reflections on what being politically committed meant to participants, ideologies that went into the social construction of participants' identity, and reflections on the use of race in post-apartheid South Africa.

#### 7.1 Growing up

The childhood experiences of the participants in this research project were characterised by a constant need and an overwhelming pressure to fit into the social roles created by the apartheid state for members of South African society. This process is normally referred to as 'socialisation', which is not unique to apartheid South Africa. Societies, in general, have features that enable them to create social groups with specific interests, and those social groups tend to understand the world and society in light of their interests, explains Albert (2004). What was unique about apartheid South Africa is that its overarching feature was white supremacy. The economy, the state, and even the basic moral fibre of society was organised and structured around white supremacist beliefs that affected peoples' sense of worth and how they related to people from other social groups.

This is not to say that people are passive agents of the socialisation process. In fact, according to the social constructionist perspective, people partake in the socialisation process by constructing their own identities - either in line with the state's agenda or against it. What interests this research project is the manner in which people construct their identities as a way to rebel against the state's agenda.

This study shows that the childhood experiences of the participants were characterised by conflicting emotions of how to accept and act out the social roles that the apartheid state had put in place. Since the logic that shaped the structure of apartheid society was based on white supremacy, people were compelled to construct their identities around white supremacist values and standards. The apartheid state encouraged people to desire and overvalue whiteness. There were psychological and social benefits attached to being white, and people who looked and acted white were rewarded.

As this study shows, participants understood this logic, for their childhood was geared towards socialising them to accept this as being the natural order of things. Hence, some participants struggled to reconcile their self-images with the Eurocentric aesthetic values that they were expected to cherish, assess and judge themselves by.

This analysis is consistent with previous research on this subject. For example, Adhikari (2005) argues that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most 'coloured' people in South Africa had one desire, and that was to assimilate into white racist society. This meant that the most consistent element in the expression of 'coloured' identity was a close affinity with whiteness and a concomitant distancing from Africanness. This manifested itself in the way that the 'coloured' community valued fair skin, straight hair and their white heritage. Research by Maggott (2003) found that in post-apartheid South Africa, some people still

construct 'coloured' identity as distinct from black and white identities; with whites seen as superior, and, therefore, a category to aspire towards.

## **7.2 Becoming political, a search for an alternative identity**

This study showed that it was not a single factor that led participants to question their identities. Apart from political ideologies such as Black Consciousness and the Khoisan revival movement, participants questioned 'colouredness' due to family influences, and in certain cases because of influence at school.

Although different factors motivated participants to question 'colouredness', the political climate of the 1970s and 1980s gave participants the courage and space to confront race and 'colouredness'. It is important to note that most participants in this study became politically active during the late 1970s to 1980s. As has been indicated in Chapter Five, the year 1976 inaugurated a new phase in South Africa's political history. The political terrain opened up to mass struggle and student activism. Similarly, in 1980 Cape Town schools came into their own; becoming sites and then battlegrounds of struggle, with students organising and leading city-wide boycotts. Participants' accounts show that it is this political climate that encouraged participants to search for alternative ways of looking at themselves.

This finding is consistent with Adhikari's (2005) argument that the trajectory of 'coloured rejectionism' began in the 1960s and grew into a significant movement by the time it peaked at the end of the 1980s. Adhikari (2005) further points out that "it was particularly in the wake of the 1976 revolt that these ideas took root as a popular phenomenon within the Coloured community and were imbibed by an increasingly politicised student population" (p. 131).

Significantly, there were two ideologies competing for the minds of the youth in the 1980s. The Unity Movement ideology of non-racialism was losing its appeal, while, on the

other hand, Black Consciousness ideology was becoming popular among students and the Cape Town youth. Chisholm (1991) explains that what gave BC ideology the edge was the fact that BCM and SASO influenced the shape and form of political struggles during this period.

Instead of responding sensibly to these developments, the Unity Movement dismissed and derided BC ideology as an “American implantation, class-based and manipulated by the CIA” (Chisholm, 1991, p. 16). The Unity Movement did not adopt this self-defeating attitude towards the BCM only. It branded the independent trade union movement which was spurred by the Durban strikes of 1973 as being ‘reformist’, and silenced and marginalised feminists for being divisive, writes Chisholm. This kind of attitude within the Unity Movement alienated them from students from the township schools who had sought to be part of the 1976 student revolt. Hence, the youth either moved away from the Unity Movement or fought a losing battle inside the organisation (Chisholm, 1991).

However, not all the research participants were politically active around this period. For example, three participants only began to question ‘colouredness’ in a totally different political climate, in the 1990s. This thesis shows that some of the racist incidents that participants experienced during the apartheid era laid a foundation for a later questioning of their identities. This analysis is consistent with the Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991), which argues that black identity development is a continuous and evolving process that occurs over a lifespan.

This study argues that the political environment people exist in, influences and shapes their construction of identities. This analysis is consistent with research findings on this topic. For example, in their study, de la Rey and Boonzaier (2002) found that “identity is context-dependent and located within specific social and historical conditions.” Similarly, Maggott’s

study (2003) also found that social and political contexts matter in how people construct their identities. Ruiters' study (2006) shows that socio-political conditions have always played a role in the way 'colouredness' is constructed, and the way 'coloured' identity continues to be constructed today. Stevens' research (1998) found that the political context define how social groups see themselves, and that a political environment has a huge impact on social relations between 'coloured' and black communities in the Western Cape.

### **7.3 A radical**

Most participants in this project were motivated and inspired by Black Consciousness ideology to reject 'colouredness'. BC encouraged people of colour, especially students at the time, to embrace blackness as a form of political resistance. The underlying assumption in the BC interpretation of blackness is that identifying as black is a process of political radicalisation. When the participants in this study call themselves black, this is what they have in mind.

Socially, participants' celebrations of blackness manifested themselves through the kind of music they listened to and by the way they wore their hair. People grew dreadlocks; they listened to Jazz and Reggae music. This research argues that Jazz and Reggae music are rooted in Black Consciousness ideology, for according to these music genres, black people ought to have confidence to express their black pride and to affirm their African roots and black heritage. Hence, this study argues that participants were taking more than a political stance when they rejected 'coloured' identity for a black identity. Participants were actually affirming their African heritage, which the apartheid state had socialised them to be ashamed of.

In post-apartheid South Africa, research shows that there are a substantial number of 'coloured' people who reject the racial label 'coloured' for many reasons. For example, in de la Rey and Boonzaier's study (2002), participants who were previously classified as 'coloured' identified themselves as black. One participant explained that she is black because of her rejection of and activism against apartheid. Similarly, Duncan's study (2002) found that participants were reticent about identifying themselves as 'coloured'. When they were forced to describe themselves as 'coloured', they would preface the label with distance markers such as 'so-called', explains Duncan. Participants employed the term 'so-called' because they resisted using apartheid labels, and to create the impression that they did not accept the social meaning normally attached to the label, argues Duncan (2002).

Four of the research participants in this research project do not accept the 'coloured' label because they believe that they are of Khoisan descent, first and foremost. For the participants in this study, embracing their Khoisan heritage gave them a sense of being and belonging. The Khoisan movement gave participants an historical understanding of themselves and the society they grew up in.

However, as Adhikari (2005) points out, the Khoisan movement has found little support in the 'coloured' community. There are many reasons for this. One reason is that post-apartheid South Africa has been characterised by the emergence of a 'wide spectrum of positions' on what constitutes 'colouredness'. Adhikari (2005) argues that:

many people who have gone beyond simply accepting racial categories as given are wrestling with questions about the extent to which they should express their identity as black, as African, as South African, as Coloured, as descendants of slaves or whether they should make a stand on the principle of nonracism. (p 186)

#### **7.4 Post-apartheid issues**

This study shows that participants appear unhappy and disillusioned with the fact that in post-apartheid South Africa they have to complete state documents requiring them to classify themselves as 'coloured'. Generally, participants feel insulted, and that it means that all their struggle and experience was for nothing. This is understandable and quite a rational response given the fact that for some participants the issue of 'colouredness' was a source of family conflict. Furthermore, this study shows that participants' identity exploration was fraught with pain, humiliation, and personal sacrifice. And so, when the post-apartheid government asks them to fill in state documents that require them to classify themselves as 'coloured', they feel that they are being asked to ignore and discount all their experiences and struggle because it was insignificant and meaningless. In short, they feel mocked and ridiculed.

Eaton (2002) explains that the social alienation felt by people in post-apartheid South Africa is rooted in the government's agenda to create a state with an African identity. According to Eaton, this began when the Mbeki government steered away from 'Mandela's nation building discourse', choosing instead to focus on 'lingering racism' and inequality.

This thesis is of the view that the government's project to create a state with an African identity has to be more inclusive, so that it can be shared by all people of colour in South Africa (Ruiters, 2006). To achieve these ends, post-apartheid politics ought to be based on values that question any form of exclusion that is based on fixed social and cultural categories, argues Erasmus (2001). What shape would that take in real life is beyond the scope of this research project, but would be interesting to explore in future research.

This research project also shows that affirmative action has the potential to make people of colour who were previously classified as 'coloured' feel excluded, despite the fact

that affirmative action laws benefit all people of colour. These findings are consistent with Stevens' research (1998) in which 'coloured' participants in his study perceived black Africans as economically threatening, particularly with regard to employment opportunities in the context of affirmative action. Maggot's (2003) study also found that many 'coloured' people believe that they are unable to access the benefits which they perceive to be enjoyed by blacks in post-apartheid South Africa. Similarly, Boonzaier's study (1999) shows that black Africans are viewed by 'coloured' participants as exclusively advantaged by affirmative action.

This thesis argues that the misconception that affirmative action benefits black Africans is due to the fact that post-apartheid government uncritically uses old apartheid racial categories in implementing social policies such as affirmative action and Employment Equity Act. To create a political climate in which such social confusion does not happen, it is has become necessary for South Africans to start asking themselves if it is possible to construct our social realities in racial terms in ways that transcend the ideological burdens of the past (Posel, 2001).

### **7.5 Limitations and Recommendations for future research**

This is a qualitative multiple case study design. So, the goal was never to draw generalisations about identity development; rather the aim was to understand why and how certain individuals construct their identities. Thus, the research design of the study limited the scope the study could cover. Consequently, this study has nothing to say about identity development in general, but has plenty to say about how the thirteen research participants in this study went about constructing their identities. It shows that the political climate of the 1980s and 1990s compelled participants to question their identities. Most importantly, the previous chapters show that most of the participants developed a black identity to protect



themselves against the psychological stress caused by the fact that they lived in a white supremacist state. Hence, this thesis interprets the participants' black identity development as being a state of mind (Cross, 1991). In addition, this thesis argues that there is no one way to be black. As shown by the experiences of the participants, "being Black involves a wide spectrum of thoughts and orientation" (Cross, 1991, p. 149).

For future research, it would be interesting to investigate why, in post-apartheid South Africa, some people who were previously classified 'coloured' prefer to identify themselves as black. It is equally important to explore ways in which post-apartheid political environment encourages people to create identities that are inclusive and anti-racist. It would also be useful to trace how the post-apartheid government's project to create a state with an African identity implicitly assigns 'moral authenticity' to Africanness or blackness (Erasmus, 2001).

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview schedule

Introduction: Thank you for taking part in this study. I will be taping our conversation if that is fine with you. Please do not feel obliged to share anything you do not feel comfortable discussing. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

- Tell me your life-story. Where you grew up, your primary relationships and how you started to develop a consciousness around 'race'?
1. At what age did you become conscious of race?
  2. How did that happen?
  3. What did 'colouredness' mean for you? Did you question the meaning of 'colouredness'? How?
  4. What led you to question 'colouredness'?
  5. How did those close to you (parents, family etc.) identify in terms of race? How has this shaped your own thinking?
  6. What personal factors and relationships were important in terms of how you chose to identify in terms of race?
  7. What social and political factors and relationships were important in terms of how you chose to identify in terms of race?
  8. You now consider yourself black? What does that mean for you?
  9. What does 'colouredness' mean for you now?
  10. How do people who call themselves 'coloured' view you?
  11. How do black South Africans see you?
  12. How do you see blackness in post-apartheid South Africa?

13. How do you see the role of race in post-apartheid South Africa?

University of Cape Town

Appendix 2: Consent Form

**Name of the researcher:** Mandisi Majavu

.....

**Participant's Name:**

**Date:**

I,..... voluntarily participate in this study. I agree that I could be quoted on condition that my identity would not be revealed. It was explained to me that the study is about people who were formerly classified as coloured under the apartheid regime, but who refer to themselves as black. Also, it was explained to me that the study aims to explore and describe my life experiences in terms of how I chose to identify in terms of race. I have been asked to participate in a series of interviews that will be tape-recorded. I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this study at any time.

I was informed that the interview material would be used for the researcher's Masters degree research in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town and may also be published in form of an article in an academic publication.

**Participant's signature:**

**If you have any questions or concerns about this study you may contact the project supervisor, Dr Floretta Boonzaier at [Floretta.Boonzaier@uct.ac.za](mailto:Floretta.Boonzaier@uct.ac.za) or 021 650 3429**

Appendix 3: This is the original version of the newspaper advert that appeared in the newspaper, 'Cape Argus', on November 3, 2008. The advert was also circulated on an online listserv.

***Research participants to take part in a M.A. research project.***

My name is Mandisi Majavu, I am a student at the University of Cape Town. My research project aims to investigate the views and feelings of people who were classified as 'coloured' during the apartheid regime, but choose to call themselves black. So far, no research has been conducted on why certain people reject 'coloured' identity.

A research that explores such questions would show that what is normally referred to as the 'coloured' community is not homogenous. Furthermore, such a study would help broaden what it means to be black in post-apartheid South Africa.

If you are interested in participating in this study, we could arrange to meet for an interview. You can contact me by telephone at 072 354 4088 / 021 447 4321 or via email:

[mjvman001@uct.ac.za](mailto:mjvman001@uct.ac.za)