

THE ALIENATED RELIGION STUDIES TEACHER: A CASE STUDY IN CAPE  
TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

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## **Abstract**

South Africa's post-apartheid National Policy on Religion and Education instituted in 2003 ushered in a new paradigm for the study of religion in the country's schools. It promotes a programme of teaching and learning about religious diversity that constitute the nation. While this revised policy enabled Religion Studies educators to grapple with new ways of thinking about the study of religion, it still demanded them to assume a standardised role that focused more on their duties and responsibilities of promoting a multi-religious approach in an impartial manner. This homogenous policy image neglected the teachers' interpretations and personal identities. Consequently, a gap emerged between the policy-imagined role and Religion Studies teachers' perspectives. This thesis explores the gap between what the national policy expects from the teachers and their readiness for teaching Religion Studies. Rahel Jaeggi's concept of alienation is used to examine the alienating effects of the national policy images' failure in recognising the realities of the profession. Jaeggi provides a renewed framework on the concept that entails critically analysing an individual's social role in terms of how s/he succeeds or fails to appropriate and identify with it. A case study research of eleven teachers who taught Religion Studies in high schools in Cape Town, South Africa was conducted. The findings reveal that the gap disrupted their roles, and resulted in a 'double' alienation for them. It also shows the educators integrating their religious identities into their teaching methods, which enhanced their proficiency at teaching the subject and alleviating their 'double' alienation. The teachers' methodologies demonstrate that they are open enough to approach the aims of Religion Studies, and to approach diversity that is not from the national policy's perspective of a distant secular approach, but rather one that opens their own religious traditions to new ones. I argue that despite the Religion Studies teachers alleviating their 'double' alienation by integrating their religious identities into their teaching methods, they still remained in a state of alienation due to the post-apartheid government's top-down education strategy.

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## Introduction

After the abolition of apartheid and the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African government instituted a new political regime by adopting the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996. Within this renewed democratic political setting, the state recognised the need to re-evaluate the meaning and function of education in general. ‘Religion education’ in particular was identified as a subject that needed to be reconstructed and separated from its pre-1994 ideology that was shaped by the apartheid government’s implementation of the Policy of Christian National Education (CNE).<sup>1</sup> CNE promoted a mono-religious system of education that featured a strong Calvinistic bias, and reinforced institutionalised segregation based on racial, religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic signs of difference while affirming an Afrikaner Christian nationalist identity (Chidester 2006, 65).<sup>2</sup> However, this

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief historical overview on the origins of Christian National Education see ES van Eeden and LM Vermeulen. 2005. “Christian National Education (CNE) and People’s Education (PE): Historical perspectives and some broad common grounds.” *New Contree* 50: 177-205. Also see Andrew E van Zyl. 2014. “A Historical-Educational Investigation into the Decision to Remove Religious Education from Public Schools in South Africa.” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, 20: 1613-1622. Van Zyl provides an interesting historical-educational approach to discussing Christian National Education in relation to the development of religious education and the evolving Afrikaner nationalist identity. For a detailed historical background on South Africa’s education system with a particular focus on the 2003 National Policy on Religion and Education see Paul Prinsloo. 2008. “A Critical Evaluation of the South African Policy on Religion and Education.” PhD diss., University of South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Afrikaner Christian nationalism is a complex concept since there are various interpretations of its nature, content and the way in which it has been constructed. Yet a starting point of thinking about this concept can be in terms of it being an ideology that was born in the late nineteenth century amongst Afrikaners in South Africa. There are a number of influential factors that have contributed towards its origins and constructions, such as the anti-British sentiments that grew amongst the Afrikaners (particularly due to the Anglo-Boer Wars of 1880-1881 and 1899-1902); the historical developments in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century, especially the spread of neo-Calvinism whereby the politician and theologian Abraham Kuyper was a central figure in the development of these teachings; economic factors and interests;

education strategy to promote Christian (Afrikaner) Calvinism only catered for a minority of South Africa's population, and did not reflect the country's religiously diverse traditions within Christianity and outside of it.<sup>3</sup>

The content of education changed in the post-apartheid, democratic context to be more inclusive and reflective of the diverse reality of the country's population. Nevertheless, the structure of the top-down approach to education remained the same. Departing from a confessional CNE curriculum, the post-apartheid state redefined 'religion education' when it formulated and adopted the National Policy on Religion and Education in 2003. The new policy promotes a programme of teaching and

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and German romantic nationalism. For more information regarding these influences and others on Afrikaner Christian nationalism see Jela Dobosova. 2009. "Calvinism in the context of the Afrikaner Nationalist Ideology." *Asian and African Studies* 18, 2: 305-323; Mueni wa Muiu, 2008. *The Pitfalls of Liberal Democracy and Late Nationalism in South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 2 titled "An Afrikaner Imagined Community, 1867-1948" provides an insightful discussion on how Afrikaner nationalism was imagined within racial barriers, the capitalist economy, Christian Calvinism, and gender relations. See also Saul Dubow. 1992. 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of "Race."' *The Journal of African History* 33, 2: 209-237; Herman Giliomee. 1987. "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1870-1915." *South African Historical Journal* 19, 1: 115-142; Dan O'Meara. 1983. *Volkskapitalismse Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948*. Johannesburg: Raven Press. O'Meara provides an interesting Marxian perspective in locating Afrikaner nationalism within the dynamic of capitalist development in South Africa. Irving Hexham. 1980. "Dutch Calvinism and the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism." *African Affairs* 79, 315: 195-208; and T. Dunbar Moodie. 1975. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>3</sup> Almost 80% of the South African population follow Christianity. However, only a minority of South Africans follow Christian Calvinism (i.e., Dutch Reformed Churches). According to the Statistics South Africa Census 2001 only 6.7% of the population affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Churches. Other Christian denominations such as Christian Zionism (11.1%), Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (7.6%) and Methodism (7.4%) are shown to have a larger following than the Dutch Reformed Churches. For more information on the statistics for religious denominations in South Africa go to <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/SASStatistics/SASStatistics2012.pdf>. The Census provides reliable data on religious denominations in South Africa. Unfortunately, these data are out of date now since the census in 2011 did not include statistics on religious denominations. There was only a complete census in 1996 and 2001 on religious affiliation.



learning about religious diversity in the country's schools. It introduces religion education as a component in the subject 'Life Skills'<sup>4</sup> prescribed for learners in the Foundation (Grades R-3) and Intermediate Phases (Grades 4-6), as well as in the subject 'Life Orientation'<sup>5</sup> prescribed for learners in the Senior (Grades 7-9) and the Further Education and Training Phases (Grades 10-12).<sup>6</sup> The national policy also introduces religion education in the elective subject 'Religion Studies' that is prescribed for learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Religion Studies remains a relatively new subject since it was introduced in 2006 for FET Phase learners – it was phased in from Grade 10 in 2006, Grade 11 in 2007, and Grade 12 in 2008 respectively (Chetty and Chetty 2013, 253). It replaced the

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<sup>4</sup> Life Skills is a compulsory subject for learners in Grades R to 6. It focuses on the holistic development of the learner by equipping them with knowledge, practical skills and values to assist them in reaching their full intellectual, emotional, personal, physical and social potential. The subject also helps them to become independent and to actively participate as responsible citizens in South African society. For more information on this subject see Department of Basic Education. 2011. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Life Skills Foundation Phase (Grades R-3)*. Pretoria: Government Printers; and Department of Basic Education. 2011. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Life Skills Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6)*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

<sup>5</sup> Life Orientation is a compulsory subject for learners in Grades 7 to 12. Similar to the subject Life Skills, it focuses on the holistic development of the learners to assist them into becoming active, independent and responsible citizens in South African society. However, the subject differs from Life Skills in terms of also guiding learners to make informed decisions regarding their study opportunities and future careers. For more information on this subject go to Department of Basic Education. 2011. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Life Orientation Senior Phase (Grades 7-9)*. Pretoria: Government Printers; and Department of Basic Education. 2011. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Life Orientation FET Phase (Grades 10-12)*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

<sup>6</sup> The Department of Basic Education in South Africa divides education into two bands: General Education and Training (GED) for Grades R to 9, and Further Education and Training (FET) for Grades 10 to 12 (National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 2011, 3, 30). The General Education and Training band is further subdivided into three phases: the Foundation Phase (Grades R–3), the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) and the Senior Phase (Grades 7–9). For more information on this see Department of Basic Education. 2011. *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

confessional subject Biblical Studies from the previous apartheid curriculum to reinforce the national policy's goal of promoting a programme of teaching and learning *about* religious diversity that constitute the nation. Religion Studies reaffirms the national policy's conceptualisation and promotion of religion education as no longer the conduit of oppression, segregation, and discrimination. Instead, religion education assumes a new role as one of many vehicles that strive towards perceiving a common humanity amongst South Africans, and contributing towards formulating a new South African identity. Furthermore, the national policy draws a distinction between 'Religion Education' and 'Religious Instruction'. The former is defined as a secular educational programme for teaching and learning about religious diversity; whereas the latter refers to the confessional teaching of a particular faith or belief which is 'primarily the responsibility of the home, the family and the religious community' (NPRE 2003, par. 19, par. 55). The national policy demands a high level of knowledge and proficiency from teachers. It expects educators to accommodate the diverse reality of learners in an 'impartial manner' regardless of the teachers' personal orientations (NPRE 2003, par. 35). It also calls for educators to "be sensitive to religious interests" in order to ensure that individuals and/or groups are protected from religious discrimination and/or coercion (NPRE 2003, par. 12, 35). Teachers are expected to focus on teaching instead of proselytising; thereby with the added task of shifting from a mono-religious to a multi-religious approach to teaching religion.

The national policy provides a guide on *what* educators ought to teach about religion. However, it does not specify on *how* they should teach Religion Studies. This made it challenging for teachers to consistently meet the requirements of the curriculum. The subject was revised through the introduction of the Religion Studies Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document in 2010, which was

implemented in 2012, and formed part of the state's broader efforts in amending the country's educational curriculum. The motivation for this amendment was that the curriculum could be more accessible to educators in which they were provided with detailed guidelines on what they needed to cover on a term-by-term basis. The meticulous nature of the Religion Studies CAPS document made the curriculum and the 2003 national policy more accessible to educators as they were provided with detailed guidelines on *what* and *how* to teach the subject.

However, a major problematic feature that remained amidst the curriculum changes was the expectation of Religion Studies teachers to assume a standardised role that focused more on their duties and responsibilities of incorporating a multi-religious approach in an impartial manner, than recognising the teachers as individuals with diverse personal orientations. This is confirmed in South African educationist Nazir Carrim's statement that South African education policies construct a homogenous role for teachers in which they "are positioned more as 'reproducers' of the state's agenda and as implementers, rather than formulators, of policies" (Carrim, 2003, 318). Their roles are conceptualised as being instrumental and 'reproductive' in the creation of a democratic society that often ignores the context of the teachers' actual lived experiences, and how they make sense of their position (Carrim 2003, 306, 314). In agreement with Carrim, Jonathan Jansen highlights that every education policy document formulates "powerful images of the idealised teacher" that demand drastic role changes for the teacher without addressing him or her directly (Jansen 2003, 119). Suren Seetal supports Jansen's statement by pointing out that teachers are required to change themselves and what they do in order to meet the specifications formulated by policy makers who neither know the teachers nor the contexts in which they work (Seetal 2006, 145). Using their insights, we can confirm

that the national policy demands Religion Studies teachers to take on an accommodating, sensitised and impartial role that immediately conforms to the state's broader nation-building projects in reconstructing South Africa to be an inclusive and democratic society. This vision of reconstruction can be restricting since it overlooks teacher development, particularly in terms of their personal orientations shaping their conceptualisation and teaching of Religion Studies. As such, the homogenous policy image seems to provide little, if any, room for educators to identify with their new role, including their individualities, in a changing context. This suggests the state policy's failure to understand the joint conceptualisation and implementation of curriculum, and teacher identity and professionalism.

While there is extensive research on the teaching experiences of religion education as a minor component of the compulsory subject Life Orientation, there remains insufficient empirical research on Religion Studies and the teachers' experiences with the subject. With the focus on Religion Studies teachers this study will provide pertinent insights into how the national policy is translated and implemented in the country's schools. It will also demonstrate how the national policy's exclusive focus on reconstructing an inclusive and democratic South African society can have an alienating effect on certain role players in this process. Such a focus will draw attention to how a gap manifests as a cumulative effect from a number of smaller forces and factors. These forces and factors are not just political even though they include political aspects and realities. On the one hand, the Religion Studies teachers are negotiating a teaching strategy that struggles to find a foothold between a religious identity that was forged during apartheid and a modern, secular nation. On the other hand, the educators are engaging with their personal religions in much deeper and more profound ways. Thus, a focus on Religion Studies educators

will be a productive way to discuss the teaching experiences of religion in a democratic context.

This study will argue that there is a gap between what the National Policy on Religion and Education expects from the teachers, and their readiness for teaching Religion Studies. It identifies this gap as an alienating experience for teachers. This will be achieved by using Rahel Jaeggi's concept of alienation to critically analyse the alienating effects of the national policy images' failure in recognising the realities of the profession.

The first chapter begins with clarifying the concept of alienation within modern Western philosophical debates and in Religious Studies scholarship. It will become clear that even though scholars working from the various disciplines of philosophy, sociology, theology, and religious studies have produced compelling arguments regarding alienation, their works promoted essentialist concepts of human nature that were problematic when addressing contemporary issues relating to the condition of discontent of human social relations. This called for a renewed framework to reinterpret alienation as a significant and relevant concept. Rahel Jaeggi's (2014) recent work *Alienation* makes a key contribution to re-establishing the concept by critically analysing an individual's social role in terms of how s/he succeeds or fails to appropriate and identify with it. This chapter will discuss Jaeggi's framework and its relevance for interpreting the experiences of Religion Studies teachers within the contemporary South African context.

For the second chapter, South Africa's education policies within the apartheid and post-apartheid contexts will be analysed in terms of how these formulate dominant images of a teacher in general and a Religion Studies educator in particular. Various South African scholars highlight the problematic nature of the post-apartheid

policy images of the teacher. The policy images demand a drastic role change without addressing the teachers' interpretations and personal identities. In the particular subject of Religion Studies, educators are mandated not to teach in line with their religious orientations. Instead, they are required to adopt a multi-religious approach, and to take on an accommodating, sensitised and impartial role. As a result, a disparity between the teacher image and teacher identity will be revealed. Using Jaeggi's framework will illuminate this gap as having an alienating effect on the ways educators identify with and commit to their roles in the new dispensation. While the state of alienation for the Religion Studies teacher appears more explicit under the apartheid regime, this chapter will show that it remains within the South African democratic context. The Religion Studies teachers will be shown as being a special case of 'double' alienation in that their roles are disrupted by the state's imposed policies, as a result of which they cannot teach with commitment – that is, in line with their religious orientations.

Whereas the second chapter will discuss the Religion Studies teachers roles by looking at what they 'ought' to be, the third chapter will turn our attention to the educators' lives and individual identities. It will discuss the findings of eleven teachers who taught Religion Studies in high schools in Cape Town, South Africa. The chapter will focus on the educators' life trajectories, and how their processes of meaning making in their personal lives have played an influential role in their professional development as teachers. Their life trajectories will reveal that they are complex individuals with complex identities. It is important to understand that this chapter will not discuss the teachers' personal dimension of alienation, since the focus of this study is to explore the teachers' experiences of alienation in their professional roles. Furthermore, working within the limited scope of this dissertation, this chapter

will pay particular attention to the teachers' religious identities. Indeed, teachers have multiple identities – such as being gendered, having various political opinions, and sexual orientation – that shape their professional development. However, as limiting as it may be, focusing on their religious identities will serve as a vehicle to help shed light on how educators negotiate their personal dispositions with their professional identities as Religion Studies teachers. The chapter will, therefore, demonstrate the significance of discussing the teachers' life trajectories as not only yielding new insights into how they build meaningful lives, but that this approach also proves that teachers do not teach in a vacuum.

The teachers' life trajectories discussed in the third chapter will form the basis for presenting and discussing their experiences of meaning making and alienation in their professional roles. This final chapter will use Jaeggi's framework to discuss the eleven teachers' professional experiences of alienation in advancing the National Policy on Religion and Education. The teachers' experiences will expose the complexities of their 'double' alienation. The chapter will analyse what the teachers are expected to do according to the National Policy on Religion and Education and Religion Studies Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document, and what they are actually doing. While these policies emphasise the importance of training educators to promote religious diversity in post-apartheid South Africa, this sample however indicates that the eleven teachers were not trained for Religion Studies as an academic discipline. This is a limitation of the study as the sample presents only one kind of Religion Studies teacher – that is, one who has little or no training in Religion Studies. Bearing in mind this limitation, this chapter will nevertheless present important findings that problematise the educators' expected roles and their enacted roles in teaching Religion Studies. It will not only discuss the

complexities of the teachers' 'double' alienation, but also how they overcame this state to a certain extent. This will include a discussion on the educators' understanding of their roles and methodology in teaching Religion Studies. It will be revealed that the educators overcame their 'double' alienated state by teaching in line with their religious orientations. This method of incorporating their religious identities into their pedagogy will be shown as being open enough to approach the aims of the subject, and to approach diversity that is not from the national policy's perspective of a secular distant methodology, but rather one that opens their own religious traditions to new ones. This will demonstrate that the national policy's promotion of a secular distant approach to teaching about religious diversity cannot be sustained in South African schools. While the teachers' personally informed approach advances the national policy, the chapter will also examine the limitations of their methodology, and how it disrupts and undermines the crux of the national policy and curriculum of exposing learners to diverse religious traditions in South Africa and the world.

Religion Studies teachers remain in a state of alienation because the post-apartheid government's top-down education strategy fails to recognise the teachers' interpretations and personal identities. The teachers were indeed able to alleviate their 'double' alienation to some extent by integrating their religious identities into their teaching methods. Nonetheless, as I will demonstrate, they remained caught in a state of alienation in the process of adhering to an educational strategy that foregrounded drastic role changes in the formulation of the National Policy on Religion and Education. The latter implored Religion Studies educators to assume a standardised role that focused on their duties and responsibilities of promoting a multi-religious approach in an impartial manner, while failing to recognise the diverse personal orientations of the teachers and the contexts in which they work.



## **Chapter One: Conceptualising Alienation**

This chapter will clarify the concept of alienation to lay the groundwork for exploring the gap between what the post-apartheid National Policy on Religion and Education expects from the teachers and their readiness for teaching Religion Studies. By conceptualising a clear understanding of alienation it will be possible to evaluate the relevance of it in relation to how certain role players like teachers struggle to identify with, and implement the state policy's aim to transform the educational landscape of South Africa.

The concept of alienation has been widely interpreted as a profound aspect of human existence, and instrumental in understanding meaninglessness, indifference, and powerlessness that point to the condition of discontent in human social relations. The early intellectual roots of the modern conceptualisation of alienation originate in both classical philosophy and Christian theology. Various theoretical frameworks of alienation became more prominent and fully developed in modern Western philosophical scholarship (Williams 2006, 89). This chapter will begin with reviewing the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Søren Kierkegaard, and Martin Heidegger who arguably made significant contributions towards understanding modern Western philosophical foundations of alienation. This will be followed by a discussion on how the philosophical debates of the concept were taken up and developed in Religious Studies scholarship. We will employ these two areas of scholarship in a dialogical conversation in order to illuminate further insights into the concept of alienation itself. It will become clear that these contributions were incorporated in new ways of addressing contemporary issues relating to problems of meaning, power, and self-realisation. Rahel Jaeggi's

(2014) recent work *Alienation* makes a key contribution to this intellectual legacy by providing a renewed framework of critically analysing an individual's social role in terms of how s/he succeeds or fails to appropriate and identify with it. It will be evident that despite Jaeggi's framework within a Western, European context, her analysis is relevant to interpreting the experiences of Religion Studies teachers within the post-colonial context of South Africa.

### **Modern Philosophical Foundations of Alienation**

One of the intellectual roots of alienation can be found in the scholarship of the Swiss-French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). His works *A Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality* (1755) and *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (1762) were influential in understanding alienation as a socio-psychological phenomenon that points to the individual no longer enjoying his or her freedom inherent in human nature due to the establishment and expansion of civil society. *The Social Contract* picks up where his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* left off in defining the natural state of human beings as free and self-sufficient. Rousseau argued that human beings went from this natural state of autonomy to the slavery of the modern condition that takes the form of an implicit agreement to be party to a contract that allows the state to place constraints on the individual's freedom (Rousseau 2002 [1762], 156, 163-4). The freedom that human beings enjoy in the state of nature is essentially surrendered in the transition into civil society. This transition was characterised by Rousseau as a disfigurement of the individual's freedom and human nature (Rousseau 2002 [1762], 81). While this loss of natural freedom is alienation in a negative sense, it fundamentally remains a *transformation* of the individual. Alienation is also positive as the individual is

transformed into becoming a more refined human being who possesses reason, which is part of his or her essential self and can only be realised in civil society. Alienation for Rousseau was, then, a double-edged sword in that while it disfigures the individual's original human nature it subsequently transforms the individual in such a way that his or her nature is restored to a higher level that is more rich and true.

The idea of looking at the dual effect of alienation is continued in the works of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1779-1831). In his work *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel's approach to alienation takes on a more inward turn in terms of focusing on how consciousness sees itself as a subject and the world as the object. He viewed alienation as redefining the relationship of the self and the world. Alienation was initially regarded by Hegel as a negative phenomenon in terms of being a misappropriation of consciousness, since the self is understood as being separated from the objective world. This negative alienation can be overcome completely through dialectical (positive) alienation in which the latter is a continuous driving force for consciousness to develop and transform its own understanding of itself and its relation to the world. This process of transformation is achieved through negation in which consciousness's failures or limitations teach it something about what it is not. By learning from its failures, it prepares the grounds to overcome those limits in order to learn about its true, essential nature (Hegel 1977 [1807], 51; Rae 2012, 27). The value of alienation is not to allow the self to remain in a condition of estrangement or isolation, but rather to inspire consciousness to develop and realise itself through higher forms and manifestations in such a way to gain a better understanding of itself and the world. For Hegel, alienation is overcome in the increasing recognition of the unity of relations in terms of the inclusion of the individual consciousness with Universal consciousness (that is, the collective or social

whole). Therefore, like Rousseau, Hegel highlighted alienation as helping individuals to become more refined and realise their true essential nature through integration in the social whole.

However, the idea of perceiving alienation as both a negative and positive phenomenon became irrelevant after the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883) gained popularity in Western scholarship. Marx rejected Hegel's, and essentially Rousseau's, concept of positive alienation by arguing that the nature of the term can only be understood as having a dehumanizing, and therefore negative, effect. His approach takes on an outward turn in terms of finding a more practical understanding of human essence than Hegel's theoretical consciousness. By looking at consciousness as concrete and not a mere abstraction from material reality, Marx developed his theory of alienation in his work *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. He argued that alienation did not come from ideas, as Hegel claimed, but rather from the material conditions of capitalist industrial society. Marx affirmed that people are bound to become alienated from themselves and from each other under capitalist conditions in which the individual as a labourer loses control over his or her life because s/he has lost control over his or her work in terms of the process of production, the products produced, and his or her relationships with other labourers (Marx 2007 [1844], 69-80). As a result, the labourer ceases to be an autonomous being, and becomes alienated from his 'species-being' or human nature, which, like Rousseau, Marx understood to be free, creative and a productive activity (Marx 2007 [1844], 74-76). Here, Marx interestingly continued with Rousseau's and Hegel's idea that the human being is alienated from an ideal essence – that is, freedom, creativity, and productivity. Nevertheless, all major institutional domains in a capitalist society, such as the state and religion, were for Marx marked by a condition of alienation as

these served to legitimate the existing social order, and exacerbated the alienation of the labourer from his or her essential nature. In the introduction to his previous work *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), organised religion is the 'opium of the people'; it creates illusory fantasies, a false consciousness, that does not allow the poor or property-less workers to realise and exercise their true nature. Religion, then, serves as a way to control and prevent individuals from realising the oppressive and harsh conditions of life. Marx concluded that human beings could only progress towards self-actualisation and overcome alienation with the removal of industrialised capitalism and consistent socialisation of humanity through the introduction of a communist society. Alienation, for Marx, is a social product that can be overcome through a change in the existing social order. Similar to Rousseau, Marx's understanding of the term is, therefore, shown to be a socio-psychological process that produces inherent feelings of powerlessness, isolation, self-estrangement, and meaninglessness for the modern individual (Williamson and Cullingford 1997, 266).

As opposed to Hegel's dialectical alienation and Marx's socio-economic alienation, the Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), and German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) introduced different conceptions of the term. Both thinkers brought the focus back onto the human being as a single individual self, and explored his or her sense of being lost in the world – that is, self-alienation. Kierkegaard and Heidegger concurred with Hegel's and Marx's arguments that alienation appears in relation to human nature. They regarded alienation as a result of the general human condition. Human beings are essentially alienated by nature, and are therefore unable to understand their existence in the world. Yet, both thinkers diverge from Hegel's and Marx's thoughts in their arguments on the individual's struggle to achieve an authentic state of being in

everyday life. Authenticity is a state of *becoming* for them in which “the self has no predetermined ‘essence’ to be realised; rather it must determine and create itself” (Sayers 2011, 6). Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger rejected Hegel’s argument that individuals can reach self-realisation in and through their social roles, and believed that, in actual fact, they can lose themselves in such roles (Sayers 2011, 6).

Despite Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s comparable concepts of self-alienation, their approaches to the term diverged as they provided two different understandings of what the individual is alienated from. Søren Kierkegaard did not explicitly write on a theory of alienation in his works *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), but his contribution is noteworthy in understanding the concept. Kierkegaard rejected Hegel’s and Marx’s arguments that the self is alienated due to not being properly amalgamated within the collective or social whole. In fact, he highlighted that a deeper form of alienation is experienced in the collective whole since the individual’s uniqueness in its singularity is suppressed by having to conform to the demands of social structure. Kierkegaard provided a theological approach to alienation as the modern (Christian) individual’s separation from God. He claimed that the modern self can only reach its true being when it became one with God (Kierkegaard 2008 [1849], 31). He introduced the notion of despair as illuminating the devastating experience of the individual’s alienation from God, as well as the agonising struggle in becoming an authentic self (Kierkegaard 2008 [1849], 14; Puusalu 2012, 44). Kierkegaard argued that the individual self could only overcome this alienated state through faith, which he regarded as also being essential to human nature (Kierkegaard 1994 [1843], 23). Faith is the absolute relation to God that transcends the individual’s relation to society; it is mystical, ungraspable by reason, and facilitates a higher selfhood that is only made possible by God

(Kierkegaard 1994 [1843], 14). Yet, Kierkegaard highlighted that the unity found in the realm of faith, so as to become an authentic self, is a rather difficult and personal task. The individual has to make a decision to make the leap to faith in solitude to recreate the unity with God and be alienated from the social, or to engage with earthly matters, including the collective whole, and attempt to suffocate all awareness of his or her condition of despair (Puusalu 2012, 49). Overall, Kierkegaard's understanding of alienation as despair is shown to be a socio-psychological process. Though the individual experiences alienation from God, s/he can overcome this state through religion by making the leap of faith to become one with God.

In contrast to Kierkegaard's theological concept of alienation, Martin Heidegger provided a non-theistic perspective (Puusalu 2012, 52). His viewpoint indicated that life has no antecedent purpose or meaning, and it is therefore the individual's responsibility to determine his or her own purpose and meaning in life. In *Being and Time* (1927), he provided an ontological framework to understanding alienation as enacting a possibility of being that is not an authentic understanding of being. Heidegger introduced the concept of *Dasein* that refers to the individual as a self-conscious being that understands itself in terms of its existence, particularly in how it acts on the world (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 32-33). Despite *Dasein* knowing itself, Heidegger believed that it did not truly comprehend how its mind understands itself. Accordingly, Heidegger affirmed that *Dasein* as it appears in everyday life is inauthentic, and is therefore the normal mode of human existence (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 68-9, 78). *Dasein* is inauthentic due to its domination by other people, the social realm of the "they" (*das Man*) (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 164, 166-7). By losing itself into the "they", *Dasein* forgets the urge for pure individuality (or authenticity) and relinquishes its responsibility for its own life (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 165-7,

312-3). What Heidegger suggested here was that the modern individual “has forgotten or thrown aside his [or her] ability to think”, and is instead “seduced by public opinion”; resulting in s/he no longer concerned with his or her own being (Puusulu 2012 61). According to Heidegger, *Dasein* can overcome alienation ontologically, but emphasised that this was not an easy task to carry out. Similar to Kierkegaard, becoming authentic was only possible to achieve in solitude, to break away from social existence, ‘the They’ (Sayers 2011, 7). However, the philosopher affirmed that the individual’s unity was with him- or herself, and not with a higher force like Kierkegaard argued. Heidegger’s conceptualisation of the term, therefore, reveals that alienation is inherent in life itself, and for that reason the discussion of the term is indistinguishable from man’s being (Puusalu 2012, 57). While the socio-psychological and theological explanations of the term are significant, Heidegger’s ontological approach is quite compelling as it exposes a deeper form of alienation in the modern individual’s own modes of self-understanding and concern for being. Alienation occurs in *both* the directions of becoming an authentic and inauthentic individual: by making oneself and the world ‘one’s own’, in one’s own self-understanding, to achieve authenticity one loses human contact in doing so; whereas by becoming inauthentic the individual loses him- or herself in the social group. Heidegger’s concept of alienation, then, reveals a tension in the conditions of existence in terms of the social nature of human beings standing in contrast to a need for individuation and authenticity.

This short review points out the complexities and multiple meanings of alienation as a concept within Western, European scholarship. Alienation has a variety of forms, including alienation from one’s own self, an individual alienated from his or her social community, or even from God. The philosophical discussion



reveals that alienation appears not to be a stable state – that is, it is an active process that occurs continuously. This dynamic and active nature of the concept is particularly shown in its positive and negative features as well as its abstract or inward (such as Hegel’s dialectical alienation) and concrete or outward forms (such as Marx’s socio-economic alienation). Furthermore, the scholarly discussion highlights a basic distinction of what the individual is alienated from. On the one hand, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx reveal that the individual is alienated from his or her original human essence. Here, they connected the concept of human existence with that of essence whereby pre-determined essence gives meaning and value to existence. Having an essence means that human beings can be placed within a larger collective whole (such as Hegel’s Universal consciousness). Individuals can, then, regress to a feeling of alienation from this collective whole, and therefore from their essential nature. On the other hand, Kierkegaard and Heidegger show that the individual is alienated from his or her own human existence. They pointed out that what is essential to human beings is not a fixed and given thing, but rather what they make of themselves, and who they become. While they did not reject the idea that there is a sense in which human beings do instantiate essence, they did, however, point to the manner of such instantiation – that is, the *way* of existing. Individuals can be alienated from this process of becoming and struggle to reach their own true being. Thus, whether it is understanding alienation in relation to human essence or human existence, these scholars show that the concept still highlights a disruption in a relation. Accordingly, alienation can be understood as an estrangement or rather disruption that transpires in the relation between an individual and that to which s/he is relating.

### **Alienation in Religious Studies**

The modern philosophical foundations of conceptualising alienation reveal that the phenomenon of alienation exists in various areas of reality that human beings experience. In particular, this scholarship continued the tradition of Cartesian dualism in terms of highlighting the reality of the human *subject* being alienated from him- or herself and from the world of *objects*. Robert Wuthnow points out that since alienation is regarded as the fundamental characteristic of the human condition, “the highest calling of scholarship became that of reuniting subject and object” (Wuthnow 1981, 18). Religious Studies scholarship, according to Wuthnow, reflected this development. Religion was measured against the development of alienation, particularly in relation to the debates on modernisation. Using Wuthnow’s insight, we will now turn to the works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Paul Tillich, Mircea Eliade, and Jonathan Z. Smith to identify how the ideas from the modern philosophical debates on the concept of alienation were taken up and developed within Religious Studies scholarship.

Influenced by Marx’s concept of socio-economic alienation, French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) contributed towards understanding the socio-psychological process of the term through the notion of anomie. Like Marx, Durkheim regarded that the modern individual was insufficiently integrated into society. In his work *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim introduced the theory of anomie in his study of suicide and social solidarity within industrial capitalist societies. He argued that anomie, as one result of suicide, developed from a breakdown of the social standards necessary for moral guidance and regulation (Durkheim 2005 [1897], 214). With the weakening of the social bonds between an individual and his or her community, common values and meanings were no longer recognised or understood, and new moral values and meanings, therefore, did not develop. Like Rousseau,

Durkheim adopted a Hobbesian view of the nature of human beings as possessing unrestrained self-interests and desires (Durkheim 2005 [1897], 208). He believed that forces exterior to human beings could only restrain their nature (Durkheim 2005 [1897], 209). This external force was characterised as a collective conscience; the moderating role of the moral consciousness of society that established a common social bond, and an authority that each individual respected (Durkheim 2005 [1897], 209-211). The disruption of this social bond reduced the controlling influence of the collective conscience over the individual's desires and interests. In contrast to Marx's claim that alienation involved over-regulation whereby the individual was no longer in control over his or her own life, Durkheim argued instead that it was detachment and isolation of the individual from society. As a result, the individual was unable to feel part of the collective whole in such a way that suicidal acts were made possible.

Durkheim considered the role of institutions capable of overcoming the state of anomie in industrial society (Baum 2006, 131). In his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), he affirmed that religion could assist modern individuals to overcome their alienated state. Working from a study of totemic religion among Australian aborigines, Durkheim argued that religion binds members of society (Durkheim 1995 [1912], 41-42, 44). He defined religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim 1995 [1912], 44). He saw the primary function of religion as integrating individuals into groups and regulating their behaviour by generating and imposing morals and values on these groups of individuals, thereby connecting them to the symbolic order and social structure. Religion was a shield against the state of anomie (alienation) since it promoted social

integration through repetition of (ritual) acts with the moral community. Durkheim regarded religion as a force that overcame alienation as it held society together rather than being a product of alienation that oppressed people as Marx saw it.

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) did not extensively employ the term “alienation”, but like Marx and Durkheim he regarded the condition of human beings within modern capitalist society as deeply alienating (Koch 2005, 2). Weber contributed towards understanding alienation through his notions of disenchantment, rationality, and bureaucracy. His works diverged from Marx and Durkheim in that he focused on the effects of religious action and inaction. Furthermore, Weber rejected any attempts to reduce religion to its essence. Instead of examining religion as a kind of misapprehension (the “opium of the people”) as Marx had argued or as social cohesion according to Durkheim, Weber’s analysis focused on how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life – such as the economy. This analysis is particularly reflected in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5). Weber argued that since religion facilitated human beings to pursue goals and interests, it became one of the key factors that contributed towards the spread of modern capitalism. He claimed that capitalism first developed in the Western world and its expansion was very closely linked with European religious patterns (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 16-19). Weber viewed religion as a positive instrument of capitalism since it created meaning for a strong work ethic (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 40). He regarded Protestantism in particular as establishing a strong work ethic, because it promoted the accumulation of income and worldly goods through hard work and asceticism in order to develop disciplined mastery of the self within everyday life for the afterlife (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 40, 111, 115-116; Pals 2006, 162). This Protestant ethic was shaped by the belief in predestination,

which described that not everyone could be saved, and that only a specific number of individuals will avoid damnation based on God's predetermined will (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 65). Consequently, religious leaders promoted financial success as an unofficial sign of being amongst the saved (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 67-69, 84). This characterised the labourer as proving his or her predestination rather than realising and exercising his or her inherent nature as in Marx.

However, Weber argued that the religious principles informing the 'spirit' of capitalism diminished over time. He described this process as the disenchantment of the world, which refers to the world becoming less mystical and more intentionally organised through reason (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 61, 97). As a result, religion lost its social significance as institutions and laws no longer depended on religion for their legitimation. This disenchantment process indicated a shift to a rational pursuit of accumulating wealth, and explaining existence in which people developed more efficient and calculated ways to pursue their own interests (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 125). Rather than viewing the development of rationality as an essential characteristic of human nature like Marx and Durkheim did, Weber instead believed that rationalisation made modern individuals into disenchanted 'cogs in the machine'; thereby trapping them in the 'iron cage' of rationality, which he regarded as a central feature of modernity (Weber 2001 [1904-5], 123). In this iron cage, bureaucracy forced individuals to function in a society with rigid rules and norms. While bureaucracy is rational and efficient, it also suppressed creativity, was dehumanising and caused disenchantment due to its alien authority structures. The iron cage epitomises modern individuals' alienation as it showed that they simply moved mechanically, obeying the rigid rules and norms, and never truly connected with each other. Weber did not provide answers to the question of how modern individuals can

overcome the alienating effects of the iron cage. He offered a rather bleak view of the modern individual in an inescapable alienated condition. But what is clear in Weber's scholarship is that religion can be regarded as a coping mechanism. Religion can help individuals to psychologically deal with the alienating effects of the iron cage, but is not a force that can overcome this state as Durkheim saw it.

While Marx, Durkheim and Weber characterised alienation as a socio-psychological phenomenon, German-American theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich (1886-1965) revealed how alienation can take a different form. In *Systematic Theology Volume II: Existence and the Christ* (1957), Tillich argued that alienation was the separation of the modern (Christian) individual from God. He looked to Heidegger for his concern for being and developed an ontological approach to perceiving God as the "Ground of Being", as the basis of existence (Tillich 1957, 44). Accordingly, alienation is the separation from the ultimate source of being and meaning. Tillich argued that the individual's separation from God spilled over into other dimensions of alienation, including alienation from one's self, one's world, and from others (Tillich 1957, 44, 46). He highlighted that alienation was marked in three ways: unbelief, hubris, and concupiscence. Due to one's alienated state, one turns away from God (unbelief), tries to elevate oneself to be God (hubris), and in order to do so, develops an insatiable appetite for objects in finitude (concupiscence) – such as the unlimited desire for knowledge and power (Tillich 1957, 47, 49-50, 52-3). These three forms of alienation separate the individual from what is good and leads him or her into a life of sin, which Tillich defined as the "personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs" (Tillich 1957, 46). Following Kierkegaard, Tillich highlighted that being in the state of sin (alienation) leads to despair. This pain of despair is described by Tillich as "the agony of being responsible for the loss of the

meaning of one's existence and of being unable to recover it" (Tillich 1957, 75). Despite alienation being a natural part of one's existence, the theologian believed that one could still overcome this state by seeking reconciliation with God. However, this reconciliation must come from the side of God as the self can only pursue alienating forms of reconciliation due to its finite existence incapable of rectifying the power of estrangement over the self. With the individual accepting the saving grace of the infinite God, s/he can find his or her authentic being. Tillich's concept of alienation correlates with the analyses of Kierkegaard and Heidegger in that the dilemma of human existence is due to an essential alienated nature. Furthermore, he showed that non-theistic conceptions of alienation could inform theological notions of the term by contributing towards understanding the effects of modern secular society, including the human pursuit of (material) interests, as exacerbating the individual's experience of being alienated from God. Tillich's theological concept of alienation can also inform non-theistic notions through his criticism of social relations whereby the personal (religious) experience of separation and alienation can create conditions of meaninglessness, despair, and anxiety in society. Tillich's theological concept of alienation, therefore, contributes towards understanding the disparity between one's actual condition (existence) and one's essential nature.

Whilst Tillich saw God as the ground of all being, Romanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) replaced it with the sacred. Like Durkheim, Weber and Tillich, Eliade provided a critique of the modern individual, and particularly focused on his or her disenchantment. He framed alienation around the notions of the sacred and profane. In *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957), Eliade argued that the essence of religion emerges from the experiences of the sacred and the profane. These experiences are two modes of being

in the world in which the sacred is that of order, being, and absolute reality, whereas the profane represents absolute non-being and chaos (Eliade 1959 [1957], 14, 63-64). Eliade regarded the modern individual as being greatly impoverished and disconnected from his or her roots of existence (Eliade 1959 [1957], 178-9). The modern individual is described as a non-religious person who has degenerated to quantifying everything from a materialistic perspective; thereby losing the meaning of the sacred (Eliade 1959 [1957], 203). Eliade picked up the concept of the sacred from German theologian Rudolf Otto who defined it in *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) as a frightening and irrational religious experience of the numinous (a wholly other). For Eliade, the sacred “is the opposite of the profane” because it manifests itself and, therefore, shows itself as “something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our [natural profane] world” (Eliade 1959 [1957], 10-11). The sacred is also “saturated with being” and appears to be a source of power, significance, and value (Eliade 1959 [1957], 12-13). However, Eliade pointed out that the sacred could only manifest itself to the religious individual, or *homo religiosus*, and this manifestation is what he called *hierophany* (Eliade 1959 [1957], 11, 13). The existence of *homo religiosus* is described as being “open to the world; in living, religious man is never alone, part of the world lives in him” (Eliade 1959 [1957], 166). This openness to the world allows the religious individual “to know himself in knowing the world” (Eliade 1959 [1957], 167). By losing the sacred, then, the modern non-religious individual lost his or her true sense of being within the world. He, therefore, called for the recovery of the sacred, the recovery of *homo religiosus*, in order for modern individuals to (re)gain their sense of human relevancy, worth in and of the world. Similar to Durkheim and Tillich, Eliade saw religion as helping modern individuals to overcome their alienated state in society as it brought order and finality



to their lives.

Although the U.S. historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith does not explicitly employ the concept of alienation, his critique of Eliade's notions of the sacred and *homo religiosus* can be regarded as contributing towards understanding how alienation can take a different form. While Eliade asserted that the sacred was the irreducible essence of *homo religiosus* and, in general, the ground of all being, Smith completely rejects this claim that a stable ground of being exists from which to interpret the world (Sun 2007, 192, 194). In *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Smith instead argues that *homo religiosus* is first and foremost *homo faber* in that human beings are the ones who decide on what is sacred and what counts as religion (Smith 1982, 89). That is, Smith views human beings as free, creative, self-reliant, and resourceful individuals who actively construct the world in which they live and make sense of it (Sun 2007, 202). For Smith, religion is a mode of human creativity, and is therefore "solely the creation of the scholar's study" (Smith 1982, xi). Allan Sun points out that instead of adopting Eliade's conceptualisation of religion as searching and grasping the deeper hidden meanings beneath objects external to the individual scholar, Smith proposes understanding the notion from within the individual's relation to it (Sun 2007, 197, 200). In his work *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (1978), Smith highlights that this relation has a fundamental disjuncture. His assertion "map is not territory – but maps are all we possess" identifies a disjuncture between map (thought) and territory (the world or reality it aims to represent) (Smith 1978, 309). He defines this disjuncture through his notion of incongruity that illustrates the human condition as an irreconcilable gap between the ideal (how things ought to be) and the real (the way things are in actuality). Smith's understanding of ritual, for example, illustrates his

notion of incongruity. Since it is usually impossible for human beings to control everything that happens in the course of their lives, Smith believes that ritual resolves this problem as it “represents the creation of a controlled environment” in which the processes of ordinary life can be perfectly performed (Smith 1982, 63). That is, ritual is the acting out of how things ideally ought to be, and clarifies things that do not make sense in the actuality of ordinary life (Sun 2007, 200). For Smith, religion no longer provides the means of escaping the incongruous elements of reality in order to connect with a perfect transcendent grounding as the sacred was for Eliade. Alternatively, religion is fundamentally a rational exercise that is capable of engaging with disorder and inconsistencies, and provides a means of attempting to reconcile these incongruities through religious behaviours such as ritual. Smith’s concept of incongruity, then, contributes towards understanding alienation as the display of inconsistencies between the real and the ideal that permeates our everyday lives. While disjuncture and incongruity confirm that human beings are alienated from the world, it simultaneously also ‘gives rise to thought’ that provides individuals some means of overcoming this alienated state. Thus, for Smith, it is not religion per se that helps human beings overcome the alienating effects of disjuncture and incongruity, but rather the individuals’ practice of rational thinking that empower them to freely carve the contours of their own existence within the boundaries of the chaotic human condition.

There appears to be a profound relationship between religion and alienation. The various scholars discussed show that the concept of religion is often defined and discussed in relation to the reality of alienation. Notably, religion is analysed in terms of how it responds to malaise and discontent in society. The authors largely portrayed religion as a positive force in people’s lives. That is, religion is not viewed as a barrier

to human self-understanding. Furthermore, the scholars highlighted the various roles that religions play when confronted with alienation. Some scholars emphasised that it serves as a remedy to overcome alienation, while others viewed it as a coping mechanism. Some also saw religion as a driving force for individuals to actively engage with their alienating condition. In contrast to religion as a positive force, alienation is viewed as a negative phenomenon. Yet, this does not necessarily suggest that the concept itself is one-dimensional in nature as Jonathan Z. Smith points out. The alienating effects of disjuncture and incongruity provide the opportunity for individuals to exercise their creative and resourceful nature in making sense of the world in which they live. What also stands out amongst these thinkers are the two divisions of thought on the concept. On the one hand, scholars like Tillich concurred with the Kierkegaardian view that alienation is total in which human beings are alienated by nature, and therefore cannot produce their own cure to overcome this condition. On the other hand, those like Durkheim and Eliade concurred with the Hegelian and Marxist view of alienation as being partial, and can eventually be overcome. Thus, whether it is understanding alienation as a total or partial phenomenon, these scholars continued the modern philosophical tradition of marking a basic distinction of what the individual is alienated from: either human essence or human existence. Moreover, despite the scholars displaying different perspectives on alienation most of them share an orientation that the concept highlights a disruption in a relation. This disruption is characterised as a separation or disconnection between an individual and that to which s/he is relating.

### **A Contemporary Re-Evaluation of Alienation**

The discussion on the conceptualisation of alienation in Religious Studies scholarship

demonstrated that it was valuable for scholars to understand what caused a mismatch between the human subject and the world of objects. Until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, this concept also proved to be valuable for many scholars in various social scientific fields, including sociology, political studies, theology, and psychology. It was a useful tool to examine and explain the societal changes that took place under modernity and the effect these developments had on the individual. Furthermore, the concept raised fundamental questions, namely on the meaning of human nature and the human condition. Consequently, during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a boom in scholarly interest in the concept. However, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholarly interest in alienation waned in general and Religious Studies discipline in particular, and was generally recognised, in Melvin Seeman's words, as an "unfashionable has been" (Seeman 1983, 171). A few years later another scholar Walter R. Heinz confirmed this disinterest by highlighting that "there seems to be much evidence for a fading romance with alienation in the social sciences" (Heinz 1991, 213). Iain Williamson and Cedric Cullingford explained that the reasons for the demise of alienation theory "rested on a combination of semantic confusion, questionable validity and reliability as a measurable construct and lack of conceptual credibility" (Williamson and Cullingford 1997, 263). Jaanika Puusalu confirms a few years later that the concept of alienation was viewed as antiquated due to "the extreme fragmentation that the concept has undergone through its development" (Puusalu 2012, 5, 82). Yet, Williamson and Cullingford pointed out that despite alienation being regarded as an inadequate concept, "it is too powerful an aspect of human socio-political and social-psychological experience to be bypassed" (Williamson and Cullingford 1997, 273). Furthermore, Chris Yuill argues that even though the scholarly interest in the concept has diminished, this does not mean that individuals in society no longer experience

problems of meaning, social isolation, and self-realisation (Yuill 2011, 109, 115). Accordingly, there has recently been a renewed interest amongst Western scholars in the concept of alienation to understand contemporary issues relating to discontent in human social relations. Rahel Jaeggi's (2014) recent book *Alienation* arguably makes a key contribution to re-establishing alienation as a significant and relevant concept for social criticism. Jaeggi's analysis of alienation will be defined and discussed as a framework for diagnosing the alienated state of the Religious Studies teacher within the contemporary South African context.

Jaeggi argues that alienation can be defined as a "relation of relationlessness" – namely, it is a disturbance in the relation of *appropriating* one's sense of self and the world (Jaeggi 2014, 1, 3). She rejects the traditional view that the concept of alienation must be dependent on a notion of a human essence. By this understanding she diverges, on the one hand, from Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx who argued that the human being is alienated from an ideal essence, and on the other hand, from Kierkegaard and Heidegger who contended that individuals have an essential alienated nature. By severing the link to these problematic essentialist accounts of human nature, Jaeggi is able to reconstruct the concept of alienation to be more relevant to the contemporary context by conceptualising it as the individual's failure in appropriating and identifying with his or her social role.

According to Jaeggi, the self is undeniably social and roles are constitutive for building one's own identity. Since the individual does not have a true essential self, his or her identity is realised through him or her participating in the world and with others through relationships, actions, and commitments. She claims that "[w]hat is *alienating*...is not roles per se but the impossibility of adequately articulating oneself *in them*" (Jaeggi 2014, 68). Jaeggi later emphasises that the "problem is not *that* we

play roles, but *how* we play them' (Jaeggi 2014, 92). When roles lead to a feeling of alienation, it comes as a result of "deficiencies in the roles themselves and deficiencies in the way they are appropriated" (Jaeggi 2014, 92). Here, Jaeggi's approach to social roles becomes more concrete, and despite rejecting Marx's essentialist perspective, she certainly builds on his concept of alienation as manifesting externally in ideological and social structures. For both Marx and Jaeggi, it is the individuals' own activities in the matter of the social institutions and relations they have created, which have become an alienating power. Jaeggi departs from Marx's account of alienation in her analysis of the realisation of subjectivity. While Marx regarded alienation as being 'outside of oneself' whereby alienated labour produces a system of domination that stands outside of the worker and is a structure that the individual did not create, Jaeggi views alienation as also including something that the self has made – that is, self-alienation (Jaeggi 2014, 12, 28). Alienation has an internal and external effect on the individual's self. It stems from a disruption of various processes of appropriation that impedes on the individual's ability to successfully affirm his or her own sense of identity and belonging in the world.

The central pillar of understanding Jaeggi's concept of alienation is her account of 'appropriation'. Jaeggi contends that appropriation involves establishing practical relations between the self and the world, while simultaneously having oneself and the world at one's command (Jaeggi 2014, 38). Appropriation is, therefore, a term of empowerment and ownership in which to appropriate something means that one is able to identify with it by making it 'one's own'. This suggests that when an individual appropriates something it does not remain external to him or her, but becomes a part of him or her. Rather than being a passive object, the individual is an *active* subject in the world who "puts her individual mark on it, inserts her own

ends and qualities into it” (Jaeggi 2014, 38). This practical feature in Jaeggi’s account of appropriation builds on Heidegger’s existentialist understanding of ‘being-in-the-world’ that refers to individuals having a more practical understanding of the world in order to provide it with meaning. She also builds on Hegel’s notion of self-appropriation that identified human subjectivity as fluid, adaptable, and strives to divest an object of its foreign nature in order to make it the subject’s own. However, Jaeggi departs from Hegel by arguing that overcoming alienation does not consist of re-appropriation or recovering an original subject-object relation. Rather, it involves the subject making the world ‘its own’ in a way that first establishes a mutual relationship between the individual and the world. Hence, Jaeggi develops a more concrete outlook to the abstract ideas of Hegel by modifying his notion of appropriation as not emphasising what the subject strives to be, but rather on how it determines what it is (Jaeggi 2014, 55). She reinforces the idea that alienation can be regarded as having an internal and external effect on the subject. It illuminates the interruption of an appropriative relation; a disturbance in the individual’s ability to exercise power over his or her actions, subjectivity, and making a meaningful mark in the world.

Following her account of the concept of appropriation, Jaeggi identifies the various dimensions of alienation that can be experienced in our everyday life. A first dimension is described as “the feeling of powerlessness or of loss of control over one’s own life” – that is, individuals do not recognise that they can influence situations by actively taking decisions (Jaeggi 2014, 51). In a second dimension, alienation is defined as “a fixed pattern of behaviour imposed on individuals by social roles”, which is the inability to express oneself properly in social roles (Jaeggi 2014, 68). A third dimension is characterised as the lack of access to oneself whereby a

feeling of alienation can mean “not being able to identify with oneself or with what one wants and does...and not really to belong to our own life” (Jaeggi 2014, 99). Finally, complete indifference to the world is another form of alienation, because when one withdraws from the world one loses one’s relation to it (Jaeggi 2014, 130). These dimensions of alienation show that the abstract nature of the concept provides a useful tool for critically analysing the ways in which the processes of appropriation can be interrupted in everyday life.

Jaeggi’s framework suggests that alienation is not simply a negative condition. Alienation should not be regarded as an absence of relation, but rather a ‘deficient’ relation. The various forms of alienation that the scholar discussed indicate that the concept is not static and one-dimensional. Instead, it has a dynamic and active nature that helps to engage with and understand problems of meaning, power, and self-realisation that individuals experience in contemporary societies. Furthermore, Jaeggi illuminates that the processes of alienation entail encountering the ‘external’ as well as the ‘internal’. In other words, our lives can become alien to us *and* we can become alien to ourselves. Granted that Jaeggi’s account of alienation focuses on the individual, she is still able to develop criteria that can be used for a critical diagnosis of society. This is particularly evident in her shift of perspective from a ‘what’ of the living conditions to understanding the ‘how’ of the processes of life in contemporary societies.

However, Jaeggi’s assumptions and conclusions rely heavily on a specific context particularly since she invokes and builds on the works of Western, European scholars such as Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger. This raises the question of whether her assumptions can be mapped onto non-European and more specifically post-colonial, socio-historical contexts, South Africa being a particular interesting case. It is worth



noting that Jaeggi's concept of alienation illuminates the processes of appropriation (namely, ownership of a social role) as opposed to racial alienation, which is foregrounded in Frantz Fanon's work.<sup>7</sup> Her account rarely discusses racial alienation, and can therefore be problematic when applied within the post-colonial, social context of South Africa that is permeated with racial tensions. Nevertheless, while Jaeggi's framework is based within the Western, European context, it would be shown in this study that it is pertinent to diagnose the alienated role of Religion Studies teachers in relation to the National Policy on Religion and Education. The South African context is a unique case. Despite the post-apartheid state promoting social transformation, there has been no change in the state's structural imposition on the role of the Religion Studies teacher. While under the apartheid rule Christian nationalism was imposed upon the Religious Education teacher, certain aspects of that are mirrored in the post-apartheid context. The educator's role is once again subjugated to pressure, albeit now an inclusive and pluralist curriculum. Thus, Jaeggi's concise and comprehensive overview of alienation allows for understanding the lack of critical response to forms of legitimate domination, and more specifically calls for a renewed enquiry into a post-colonial state that is increasingly becoming more exposed to secular forces and identities.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has laid the groundwork for evaluating the significance of the concept of alienation in exploring the gap between what the post-apartheid National Policy on

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on Franz Fanon's account on racial alienation see his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon provides pertinent insights into race as a form of alienation, and argued that race is a social relation. His critical analysis of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, which focuses on recognition and non-recognition, is particularly important to understanding his approach to race and alienation.

Religion Education expects from the teachers, and their readiness for teaching Religion Studies. While modern Western philosophical debates in general and Religious Studies scholarship in particular presented multiple frameworks of alienation, there was a consensus on defining a basic distinction of what the individual is alienated from: either human essence or human existence. Furthermore, many of the scholars agreed that the concept highlights a disruption in a relation, which was characterised as a separation or disconnection between an individual and that to which s/he is relating.

The contributions by these two areas of scholarship were incorporated in new ways of addressing contemporary issues relating to problems of meaning, power, and self-realisation. Rahel Jaeggi made a key contribution to this intellectual legacy by providing a renewed framework that severs the link from an essentialist picture of human nature, and instead focuses on critically analysing an individual's social role in terms of how s/he succeeds or fails to identify with and 'own' it. Jaeggi reveals that alienation is not a purely negative phenomenon. It should be conceptualised as a 'deficient' relation rather than an absence of relation. While Jaeggi's framework is based within a Western, European context her analysis draws attention to the processes of empowerment and ownership of an individual's social role that is relevant to providing a renewed enquiry into interpreting the experiences of Religion Studies teachers within the changing context of South Africa.

The next chapter will analyse South Africa's education policies within the apartheid and post-apartheid contexts in terms of how these formulate dominant images of a teacher in general and a Religion Studies educator in particular. Various South African scholars highlight the problematic nature of the post-apartheid policy images of the teacher since these demand a drastic role change without addressing the

teacher's interpretation and personal identities. Consequently, a disparity between the teacher image and teacher identity will be revealed. Jaeggi's framework will be used to illuminate this gap as having an alienating effect on the ways the educator identifies with and commits to his or her role in the new dispensation.

## **Chapter Two: What Religion Studies Teachers ‘Ought’ To Be: The Policy-Imagined Roles From Apartheid to Post-Apartheid**

In the first chapter, the concept of alienation was reviewed to lay the groundwork for exploring the alienating effect of the National Policy on Religion and Education on Religious Studies teachers. Modern philosophical debates and Religious Studies scholarship reveal that alienation refers to a disruption in a relation. Rahel Jaeggi provides a renewed framework that entails analysing an individual’s social role with regards to how s/he succeeds or fails to appropriate and identify with it. Bearing this in mind, we now proceed to examine how South Africa’s education policies can contribute towards the experience of alienation for the Religion Studies teacher. This first requires exploring what the dominant images of a teacher are in the country by reviewing government policies and scholarly discussions regarding the model(s) of an ideal teacher. We need to look at these state policies and scholarly debates in order to later interpret the experiences of Religion Studies teachers that were interviewed for this research. By exploring what teachers ‘ought’ to be as opposed to what they are and do, one can understand how they can feel alienated from their positions.

For the second part of this chapter, Jaeggi’s framework will be applied to examine the policy images of the Religious Studies teacher in the apartheid and post-apartheid contexts. It is important to analyse these two different contexts to understand that the policy-imagined role of the Religion Studies teacher in the democratic context has its roots in the history of apartheid education. As Natalya Lebedeva aptly points out, “[e]liminating the remnants of...authoritarian pedagogy is the major problem for social reforms which aim at democratizing and humanizing the whole society” (Lebedeva 1993, 98). She argues that analysing authoritarian regimes

can serve as a reference point to trace and examine the progress and the problems of democratisation when moving away from authoritarianism (Lebedeva 1993, 98). Using Lebedeva's insight, this chapter will examine the authoritarian policy-imagined role of the Religious Education teacher in apartheid as a key prerequisite to discuss the progress and problems in the democratisation of the Religion Studies teacher's role in the 'new' South Africa. The chapter will argue that the post-apartheid National Policy on Religion and Education promotes a secular distant approach to teaching about religious diversity. It demands educators to assume an impartial, sensitised, and accommodating role that will be shown as failing to recognise the diverse personal orientations of the teachers and the contexts in which they work. It will become evident that despite these two different contexts, Jaeggi's framework helps show that the Religion Studies teachers remain caught in a state of alienation in the process of adhering to the South African government's education strategy. The educators experience a 'double' alienation in that their roles are disrupted by the state's imposed policies, and they cannot teach with commitment – that is, in line with their own religious orientations.

### **The Idealised Teacher in South Africa**

Education policies define and regulate the professional roles, duties and conduct of the teacher. Jonathan Jansen highlights that every education policy document formulate "powerful images of the idealised teacher" that demand drastic role changes for the teacher without addressing him or her directly (Jansen 2003, 119). As such, while South African teachers are expected to implement education policies, they are often excluded in their formulation (Seetal 2006, 145). Suren Seetal points out that they are required to change themselves and what they do in order to meet the

specifications formulated by policy makers who neither know the teachers nor the contexts in which they work (Seetal 2006, 145). This top-down education strategy prevailed in both the apartheid and democratic South African contexts in which the teacher was charged with the responsibility for realising the ideals of the state.

Under apartheid education policy, the teacher was expected to be an obedient civil servant who ensured loyalty to the state and who knew the contents of a syllabus (Chisholm 1999b, 121; Jansen 2003, 121). Lebedeva points out that authoritarian pedagogy deprives people of “the right to choose their own position, to make decisions on their own, [and] to think critical in terms” (Lebedeva 1993, 97). This is evident in how the apartheid system of racial segregation highlighted and regulated the teacher’s racial identity as being central to determining his or her role, duties, and responsibilities (Carrim 2003, 311). On the one hand, white teachers, who were the minority group of the country’s total workforce, were involved in policy making at the state level for both black and white schools, and were relatively autonomous in their positions (Chisholm 1999, 115). Black teachers, on the other hand, had to simply be ‘compliant’ technicians who were not expected to have expert content knowledge of their subjects (Msibi and Mchunu 2013, 21, 22). They were controlled followers who were prevented from being “creative, imaginative and lead curriculum development and design” (Mseleku 2003). White teachers were assured a ‘professional’ status by the apartheid government in which they “worked under privileged schooling conditions, were always qualified and [their work] drew better salaries, and benefits, than ‘black’ teachers” (Carrim 2001, 46). In contrast, the bureaucratic and authoritarian control of black teachers was palpable since they were “un/underqualified, were subjected to appalling work conditions, were not paid the same as their ‘white’ counterparts”, were “deprofessionalised, controlled and

repressed by the apartheid regime” (Carrim 2001, 46, 49). The role of the teacher was, therefore, to maintain the status quo of domination and subordination of black people.

Within the post-apartheid context, the role and identity of the teacher was redefined when the new government instituted a regime that promoted democracy, equality and non-discrimination in South African society. The new policy images attempted to create greater autonomy and freedom for the educator (Jansen 2003, 121). Every teacher was now regarded as developing into a curriculum leader, and being a key contributor to educational transformation in the country (Mseleku 2003; Msila 2007, 151). The policy documents attempted to provide a holistic view of the effective teacher in terms of regarding him or her as being more than a content transmitter. The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) policy identified seven roles for teachers to assume so as to achieve practical, foundational and reflexive competences. For one, they are expected to be mediators of learning who demonstrate a sound knowledge of content and thorough preparation; are sensitive to the diverse needs of learners; establish learning environments that are “appropriately contextualised and inspirational”; and who communicate effectively in a manner that shows “recognition of and respect for the differences of others” (NSE 2000, 13). Teachers ought to understand, interpret, and design learning programmes and materials. They should be able to perform as leaders, administrators and managers in a manner that is democratic, support learners and colleagues, and demonstrate “responsiveness to changing circumstances and needs” (NSE 2000, 13). Furthermore, teachers are supposed to be scholars, researchers and lifelong learners who pursue reflective study and research in order to achieve personal and professional growth. They are expected to perform pastoral roles, and be community developers and citizens. This entails practising and promoting the constitution and democratic values

in schools and society; having “a critical, committed and ethical attitude”; and developing a supportive and empowering environment for learners, fellow educators, parents and “other key persons and organisations” in their communities” (NSE 2000, 14). Moreover, teachers should be able to understand and interpret “the purposes, methods, and effects of assessment” in order to provide “helpful feedback to learners”, and on a broader level improve the teaching and learning process (NSE 2000, 14). Finally, teachers are expected to be specialists in different approaches to teaching and learning which are suitable to the learners and the context as well as have sound knowledge, values, principles, skills, methods, and procedures that are relevant to the learning area, subject, discipline, phase of study, or occupational or professional practice. Overall, these seven roles envisage the educator as fostering a new culture of teaching that is no longer autocratic and authoritarian, but creative, critical, highly skilled, and nurturing values that are attuned to the democratisation of South African society.

South African teachers are not only expected to be competent in fulfilling the prescribed seven roles, but should also be committed to their positions of establishing an open and inclusive educational environment that promotes democratic values, citizenship, and a culture of human rights. The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2001, 20) highlights that teachers’ “competence is meaningless if there is no commitment alongside it”. Accordingly, teachers ought to be role models for their students and their communities (MVED 2001, 21). With policymakers expecting teachers to be both competent in and committed to their positions, this suggests that they are both the subjects and the agents of change (Seetal 2006, 145). Thus, the policy documents set ambitious goals to professionalising the teacher in assuming a new role as “a self-directed, well-informed and highly skilled professional with a



strong sense of ethics and accountability, who is constantly reflecting on and developing [his or] her practice” (Harley et al. 2000, 292).

Various South African educationists have highlighted the problematic nature of these new policy images for the teacher. Linda Chisholm argues that the teachers’ new roles actually entailed being merely “the producers of human capital for an increasingly competitive global market, rather than citizens concerned with democratization of society in all its forms” (Chisholm 1999, 119, 125). She explains that in addition to the context of global trends, the role of the teacher is shaped and hampered by the South African government’s adoption of a structural adjustment programme<sup>8</sup> called GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy) in 1996 (Chisholm 1999, 119). GEAR promoted massive social change without any expansion to the education budget. For Chisholm, the democratisation of the teacher’s role was converted to a “mechanism of control rather than empowerment as originally conceptualised” (Chisholm 1999, 123). She reveals how teachers are caught between the reforms of local state initiatives and changes taking place on a global level. While Chisholm clearly points out that the role of teachers have been reduced to serving the economic interests of the state, one can deduce that her key conception of an ideal teacher is one who is not bureaucratically controlled, and an empowered citizen who understands and promotes democratic values. They are participants in, as well as key contributors of, the process of democratisation. What we learn from Chisholm is that the teacher’s role cannot solely be determined by broader state initiatives and global trends, but should also be relevant to the educator’s personal and school contexts.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information regarding the impact and consequences of structural adjustment policies on the role of teachers in South Africa see Linda Chisholm, Crain Soudien, Salim Vally, and Dave Gilmour. 1999. “Teachers and Structural Adjustment in South Africa.” *Educational Policy* 13, 3: 386-401.

While Chisholm argues that the state's economic agenda idealises teachers as producers of human capital, Nazir Carrim contends that educators are conceptualised as “subjects, rather than agents of change...[in which they] are positioned more as ‘reproducers’ of the state’s agenda and as implementers, rather than formulators, of policies” (Carrim 2003, 318). Carrim highlights the problematic nature of education policies conceptualising teachers’ roles as being instrumental and ‘reproductive’ in the creation of a democratic society (Carrim 2003, 314). He draws attention to the irony of the policies’ intention to re-professionalise the teachers as actually resulting in their positions being increasingly proletarianised, “bureaucratically controlled, and the multiplicity of their actual identities...not being recognised” (Carrim 2003, 318-9). Here, he reveals that the state’s top-down education approach can leave teachers feeling disempowered and demoralised (Carrim 2003, 319). Carrim’s model of an ideal teacher is being an agent of change who ‘owns’ the transformation of education in the country. This includes the educator having a sense of “professional autonomy and decision-making powers”, and to inform and formulate policies (Carrim 2003, 319). Most importantly, Carrim believes that teachers’ roles should be conceptualised as being more than professionals and/or workers. Their positions should be recognised as including a multiplicity of identities – such as being ‘raced’, gendered, and (non)religious (Carrim 2003, 306). Carrim is, then, helpful towards understanding that the new policy images tend to homogenise the role of teachers, which often ignore the context of their actual experiences and how they make sense of their positions.

In agreement with Carrim, Jonathan Jansen discusses how education policies construct a homogenous role of the teacher that often results in a disjuncture between teacher image (what is expected by the policy) and the realities of the practitioners’

experiences and actions (Jansen 2003, 118). Jansen argues that the policy-imagined roles of teachers make demands that often conflict with their personal identities as practitioners (Jansen 2003, 118). He explains that initially, in the democratic ideal, teachers were regarded as liberators who would be knowledge-producers of liberatory content, would take charge of their own classrooms, and empower learners (Jansen 2003, 121). However, teachers shifted from being liberators to ‘soft’ facilitators as the government changed the education policies to promote a more learner-centred approach. Teachers no longer became a dominant force in the classroom, and instead assumed “an invisible position on the margins of the classroom” (Jansen 2003, 122). They were expected to facilitate a learning process that encouraged learners to take charge of their own learning, design their own materials, and invent their own learning opportunities. He claims that the state policy images failed to understand the nuanced forms of teachers’ personal identities (Jansen 2003, 126). Jansen, therefore, proposes that teachers should be perceived as professional, emotional, and political actors. As professional actors, teachers ought to understand their capacity to implement policy (Jansen 2003, 120). Being emotional actors mean the ways in which teachers understand and respond to the “emotional demands” made on them by a new policy in the context of stresses and pressures, particularly in the school setting. Finally, as political actors, teachers should understand their authority to act on or withhold action, based on their personal backgrounds, value commitments, and professional interests, in response to policy reform (Jansen 2003, 120). While Jansen’s model conceptualises educators as multiple actors within their profession, he acknowledges that teachers cannot solely drive policy strategy. What he advocates is to “create dialogues of meaning...between policy, politics, and practice” (Jansen 2003, 128). Jansen’s model, therefore, makes one understand that even though

teachers are without a doubt framed by policy images, a dialogue still needs to be established between educators and state policymakers in order for teachers to be provided with a space of negotiating their positions in the process of educational reform.

This short review shows that there are multiple models proposed of what a South African teacher ought to be in the new dispensation. Without exception, the scholars reveal a mismatch between the expected role of the teacher and the reality of being in the profession. While the policies assume a sameness amongst teachers, the scholars show that this is a reductionist approach, particularly in terms of neglecting their personal backgrounds and school contexts. Despite the change from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one, the various scholars highlight the irony that the policy image of teachers as being agents of change is actually overshadowed by the state's top-down education strategy. Their autonomy is limited in the classroom – an approach that was in fact favoured by the apartheid government. This mismatch demonstrates that the new policies fail to be more realistic about the changes required to improve the education system in the country. More specifically, this gap disrupts the teachers' understanding of what it means to teach in general and what it means to be an educator in particular.

### **The Alienating Policy-Imagined Roles of the Religion Studies Teacher**

Examining the disruption of teachers' roles go hand-in-hand with understanding the extent to which they are committed to their roles. If educators are not free to be committed to their roles as agents of change then this leads to alienation. In the case of Religion Studies teachers, they experience a 'double' alienation. While Mathematics teachers, for example, can be alienated from their positions due to the

state imposing its educational strategies on them, they can still teach with commitment in the belief that what they are teaching is 'true' and relevant. This is not the same for Religion Studies teachers. Their roles are disrupted by the state's imposed policies and curriculum, as a result of which they cannot teach with commitment – that is, in line with their religious persuasions. Furthermore, the subject Religion Studies appears to be more vulnerable to external influence of ideological control than other disciplines such as Mathematics. This means that Religion Studies educators are subjected to these external influences, which has a major impact on the way they can teach with commitment. However, the nature of their 'double' alienation can be complex. For example, black Christian educators may be committed to teaching Christianity in apartheid South Africa, but be deeply alienated by its racial and denomination inequality. Alternatively, the same teachers may support racial equality in democratic South Africa, but be alienated by a secular, and multi-cultural approach to Religion Studies. This example demonstrates the dual forms of alienation as being a complex process of a mismatch between the *expected* role of the teachers and the *reality* of being in the profession. With Religion Studies teachers being a special case of 'double' alienation, we can now turn to discussing how they remain in a state of alienation despite the changes in the policy-imagined roles in the apartheid and post-apartheid contexts.

According to Jansen, while policy images formulate powerful idealised model(s) of a teacher, these demand a drastic role change without addressing the practitioner directly (Jansen 2003, 119). This gap between the teacher image and teacher identity results in the alienation of educators from their positions. This is evident in the apartheid system whereby educators were expected to embrace and

promote a Christian national ethos (Chidester 2003, 264). Religious Education<sup>9</sup> educators were expected to be ‘devout teachers’ who ensured the indoctrination of Calvinistic Christian values and condemnation of adherents of other religions, including non-Calvinists and non-white Christians (Chidester 2003, 264-5). This approach understandably did not embrace the reality of the teachers’ diverse identities and backgrounds in the country. Instead, educators were mandated to establish uniformity from the perspective of a single faith, despite the faith only reflecting a part of South Africa’s population. They were expected to reinforce segregation based on racial, religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic signs of difference (Chidester 2006, 65). Religious Education teachers became instruments for the apartheid government to use as a ‘divide and rule’ in order to reinforce their racial segregation laws.

Under the apartheid regime, the Religious Education (hereafter RE) teachers were evidently in a state of alienation. Their roles were not ‘their own’ as it was conveyed to them from the outside – that is, from the apartheid state. Jaeggi contends that the “gaze of the other...makes us into a thing, an object...into something fixed”, and that “acts of fixing the other turn into pure, one-sided subjugation” (Jaeggi 2014, 82, 84). This reflects the experience of RE educators in which they had endured various degrees of subjugation based on their race, religion, ethnicity, culture, and language. White, Afrikaans speaking Christian teachers found themselves in a more privileged position than those who were non-white, English speaking, and/or non-Christian. Despite the former having a more privileged status, the RE educators’ roles remained fixed because their only function was to instil a Christian national ethos and

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<sup>9</sup> The term ‘Religious Education’ is used to refer to the confessional nature of the subject promoted under apartheid. However, in the democratic dispensation, ‘Religion Education’ and ‘Religion Studies’ replaced ‘Religious Education’ in order to promote a study of various religions for democratic citizens rather than nurturing a religious consciousness.

maintain divisions between individuals who were different from each other. This left little, if any, room for RE teachers to interpret their roles as ‘their own’ because they were limited in the possibilities for shaping their roles and the space to do it in. Rather, they had to act within the rigidified form of ‘devout teachers’, and within this constraint were unable to appropriate their roles as their own expressions of individualities.

In contrast, the RE educators who were oppressed based on being non-white, English speaking, and/or non-Christians experienced a more profound sense of alienation. Here, they performed roles that denigrated their personal identities. As Jaeggi explains, roles can be artificial in the sense that they are performed “mechanical[ly], and seems to be separable from the actor[s]” (Jaeggi 2014, 90). By ‘playing’ a role, this “presupposes a doubling of the self that creates distance within the self” (Jaeggi 2014, 91). Accordingly, the roles of non-white, English speaking, and/or non-Christian RE teachers under the apartheid system were ‘artificial’, because they embodied both external and internal forms of alienation. Externally, their positions reflected how their lives were alien to them in terms of performing roles that (re)affirmed their ‘second-class citizen’ status. On the other hand, their roles revealed how they became alien to themselves with regards to performing and internalising an identity that negated their sense of an individual self. Thus, RE educators experienced powerlessness under the apartheid system as they were mandated to strengthen the citizenship of one race and religion over others, while simultaneously denigrating their self-identities.

With the end of apartheid and the dawn of democracy, this context demanded educators to assume new roles that necessitated the reclaiming and transforming space and the sense of self within that space. While the content of education changed, the

structure of the top-down education strategy remained the same. Whereas education under the apartheid regime promoted teacher conservatism and compliance, the new educational policies encouraged teacher autonomy and professional discretion (Harley et al. 2000, 288). With regard to Religion Studies, the National Policy on Religion and Education demands a high level of knowledge and proficiency from teachers. They are regarded as citizens of South Africa who should understand, practise, and promote the values embodied in the Constitution. In particular, they are bound to uphold the constitution that promotes the freedom of and from religion, and are required to adopt an inclusive, multi-religious approach to teaching religion (Jarvis 2009, 161-2). The national policy mandates teachers to accommodate the diverse reality of learners in an ‘impartial manner’ regardless of their own personal orientations (NPRE 2003, par. 35). It calls for professionalism in the form of training, commitment, and enthusiasm in the teaching of religion (NPRE 2003, par 35). The policy also requires teachers to be sensitised, and to ensure that individuals and/or groups are protected from religious discrimination or coercion (NPRE 2003, par 34). Religion Studies teachers are expected to focus on teaching instead of preaching, since religious instruction and nurture (the teaching of a particular belief or faith) is “the responsibility of the home, the family, and the religious community” (NPRE 2003, 39, 55). This suggests that Religion Studies educators are no longer allowed to promote any particular religion whatsoever. Instead, they are required to teach *about* the multiplicity of religions as a social phenomenon.

The national policy assumes that Religion Studies (hereafter RS) teachers are able to engage meaningfully within a context of religious diversity. Even though the policy promotes the reality of diversity in the country, this does not necessarily mean that it will make diverse experiences accessible to RS teachers. Considering that this



new policy was introduced to teachers who had received training in the context of segregation and who had little, if any, contact with multiple religious traditions, this raises the question of how RS educators are able to identify with their roles as teaching about religious diversity apart from their own religious orientations.

Indeed, RS teachers are provided opportunities to interact with and learn about others from diverse backgrounds. However, this can still be an alienating experience for them. The national policy does not address the teachers' interpretations and personal identities. Its demand for educators to adopt a multi-religious methodology in an impartial manner suggests a secular distant approach to teaching Religion Studies. A secular approach is demonstrated in the policy promoting a homogenous role of an 'impartial' teacher – that is, an educator who has a neutral and accommodating attitude towards religious traditions regardless of his or her own personal orientation. A distant, impartial approach is illustrated in the policy mandating educators to bracket their personal beliefs to teach about religion as a phenomenon in society. With the policy overwhelmingly demanding educators to teach *about* religion and not *of* religion, this implied that it did not expect teachers to promote their own religious identities and/or interests. Within these constraints, teachers are not recognised as complex individuals who have complex identities. As such, RS educators are unable to appropriate their roles as their own expressions of individualities, which can hinder the ways they explore their own personal development within the contentious domain of the study of religion. This demonstrates that RS teachers are not free to teach with commitment – that is, in line with their religious persuasions. It is, however, important to note that this does not suggest that RS teachers cannot appropriate their roles because they have not initiated it or it is 'outside' of them. As Jaeggi points out, one can be present and not be

alienated in a situation “without completely being in control of it (or of ourselves in it)” (Jaeggi 2014, 63). Instead, what is implied is that RS teachers can be alienated from their positions because the policy does not address the complexities of their identities behind their role and function as teachers.

The role of RS educators can also be regarded as ‘soft’ facilitators who disappear in a classroom plan (Jansen 2003, 122). The national policy appears to envisage teachers as no longer being dominant forces in the classroom. Instead, learners and learning is the key focus in implementing the new policy. Here, the policy seems to prioritise the learner and their experiences. This, however, is not to imply that RS educators should solely drive policy strategy in order to have an unalienated status. Rather, what should be emphasised is the fact that there is a lack of dialogue and negotiation between the policy image of the teacher and the educator as practitioner. This can inhibit the process of RS teachers exploring the understandings that they hold of themselves in relation to the national policy-image.

As in the apartheid regime, the RS educators’ roles are not ‘their own’ because it is conveyed to them from the outside (that is, the post-apartheid, democratic government). The teachers are fixed into another role – a role that reinforces the democratic and human rights culture of the country. While this can broaden, transform and redefine the educators’ interests, it is nevertheless a fixed role that makes educators into objects for the democratic government to use in order to put forward their political agenda of creating ‘unity in diversity’. This can result in teachers simply focusing on the main similarities of religions that contribute towards establishing and maintaining social cohesion. This corresponds with David Chidester’s argument that the demands of public pedagogy in South Africa can force the national policy’s programme into emphasising the main similarities of all religious

traditions “in forming personal identity, transmitting moral values, and facilitating mutual recognition in a shared society” (Chidester 2008, 291). In this process, the critical and creative thinking about the diversity of “religious identities and the negotiation of religious differences might be subsumed in the artificial manufacture of consensus” (Chidester 2008, 291). Chidester’s argument makes one understand that the role of RS educators can be regarded as being ‘mechanical’ and ‘performed’, because the focus is more on the state’s broader project of nation-building in establishing ‘unity in diversity’, and less on providing opportunities for RS educators to explore the understandings that they hold of themselves in relation to the national policy-image. Here, the national policy has not provided teachers with the understanding that their roles are something that they can or must lead. This can result in the experience of powerlessness for the RS teachers as they may not recognise that they can influence situations inside and outside the classroom by actively taking the lead and making decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Although the RS teachers’ alienated state appears more explicit under the apartheid system, it remains within the South African democratic context. They are not, as Carrim aptly says, ‘owning’ the transformation of education in the country, but are rather subjects of it (Carrim 2003, 319). Indeed, RS teachers are the final filters of the national policy. However, the fact that little attention is given to how their personal identities and school contexts translate the meaning of the subject in various ways further confirms that they are subjects instead of agents of change. This can hinder the ways in which teachers forge their sense of belonging in the new dispensation.

Jaeggi's framework helped to show how the national policy itself sets ambitious goals for the teachers that may be more debilitating (alienating) than transformative. With her framework emphasising the importance of scrutinising alienation on an individual level, it proved to be useful in drawing the focus on the teachers as individuals in relation to the institutional national policy. It illuminated how RS educators as individuals can get 'lost' in the system if there is no continuous dialogue and negotiation between them and the state institution. While the national policy can be recognised as being more inclusive in nature as it attempts to build a socially cohesive nation out of a fractured past, it is also shown to have an alienating effect on the RS teachers. Here, the educators experience a 'double' alienation. Their roles are disrupted by the state's imposed policy that maintains a secular distant approach to teaching Religion Studies, and they cannot teach with commitment – that is, in line with their religious orientations.

The next chapter will explore the lived experiences of the teachers in their profession. It will discuss the methodology and findings of interviews with eleven teachers who taught Religion Studies in high schools in Cape Town, South Africa. The chapter will focus on their life trajectories, and how their processes of meaning making in their personal lives shaped their professional development as teachers.

### **Chapter Three: Building Meaningful Lives: The Teachers' Biographies**

The second chapter revealed that the South African state's top-down education approach reflected in its policy images of the teacher in general and the Religion Studies educator in particular fails to recognise the realities of the profession. A gap emerged as teachers' voices were suppressed by the government's top-down education strategy. The concept of alienation, or rather Jaeggi's framework on alienation, was employed to illuminate this gap; an alienating effect on educators in the new dispensation. Jaeggi's account of alienation focuses on the nature of disruption and what effect(s) it has on an individual's engagement with and sense of identity in performing a social role. It demonstrated that Religion Studies teachers experience a 'double' alienation since their roles are not only disrupted by the state's imposed policy that promotes a secular distant approach, but they also cannot teach with commitment – that is, in line with their religious orientations. Therefore, despite being teachers in a 'new' South Africa that embraces diversity and inclusivity, the Religion Studies educators remain caught in a state of alienation when adhering to the government's education strategy.

Whereas the second chapter dealt with understanding the Religion Studies teachers' roles by looking at what they 'ought' to be, we now turn our attention to exploring the teachers' lives and individual identities. This chapter will discuss the methodology and findings of interviews with eleven teachers who taught Religion Studies in high schools in Cape Town, South Africa. It will look at their life trajectories in which we will observe insights into their professional development by focusing on their religious orientations, and by extension, their identities. The teachers' life trajectories will reveal how they do not teach in a vacuum. It is

important to understand that this chapter will not discuss the teachers' experiences of alienation within their religious identities. While looking at the teachers' personal dimension of alienation is fruitful for further research, this study focuses on exploring the teachers' experiences of alienation in their professional roles. The main aim of this chapter is, ultimately, to demonstrate that the teachers' life trajectories point to them being complex individuals with complex identities.

### **Methodology and Sample of the Study**

One-on-one interviews with eleven teachers who taught Religion Studies were conducted at nine public and independent high schools in the Cape Town region.<sup>10</sup> A case study approach was used to provide a detailed contextual analysis to gain a sense of these educators' lived experiences of and thoughts about their roles in teaching Religion Studies. While the sample drawn from the nine high schools was limited to the Cape Town region, and therefore cannot be taken to represent a broader South African demographic, it nonetheless offers a detailed perspective into understanding both the personal and professional lives of South African teachers. Although the study might arguably be susceptible to a form of sampling bias, a focus on the teachers from one individual to the next avoids making generalised assumptions that teachers' lived experiences are all the same. This is a significant theoretical contribution from Jaeggi's account of alienation in that her work demonstrates how the concept of alienation must be scrutinised on an individual level.

Most of the teachers had several years of experience in the profession, and had received training under the apartheid education system. Two were younger and qualified as teachers in the mid to late 2000s, and had taught for a few years. At the

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<sup>10</sup> The interviews were conducted during August 2015 at four public and five independent high schools.

time of the interview, one educator who had been teaching for nine years did not have a teaching diploma or degree, but his Master of Science degree as well as teaching experience at a tertiary level was regarded as meeting the qualifications for the profession. The majority of the teachers were trained at a local public university in the Western Cape, with the exception of one teacher obtaining his degree at an Islamic seminary. Moreover, while one teacher obtained her degree from a university in the North-West province, another received his degree from a university in Scotland. None of the educators were trained for Religion Studies as an academic discipline. Those who had academic qualifications in religion were only related to their particular faith backgrounds. Of the participants interviewed five were women and six were men.

The majority of the teachers taught in English-medium and co-educational schools, with an exception of four teachers who taught in dual-medium (English and Afrikaans) schools, and one at a school only established for girls. Five teachers taught at schools that were categorised as having a religious character: two were Catholic (one public and one independent), another two independent schools were Christian, and one independent school was Islamic. Three teachers taught at two public high schools that promoted a Christian ethos despite the state categorising these schools as secular institutions. Even though these schools have a religious character, they still promoted an inclusive environment to accommodate the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of their staff members and learners.

### **Exploring the Teachers' Individual Identities**

What we learnt from the South African state policies' top-down education approach is that teachers are expected to assume a standardised role that focused more on their duties and responsibilities, than recognising them as individuals with diverse personal

orientations. This approach fails to realise the significance in understanding that the teachers' roles in implementing the curriculum are influenced by their personal orientations and backgrounds. As Jonathan Jansen aptly points out, teachers translate the curriculum "into different meanings based on *who they are* and also *where they are* in a specific school locale" (Jansen 2004, 67). In the following, we will unpack the Religion Studies teachers' religious orientations, and by extension their identities, to gain insights into their individual experiences that shaped their professional development.

Religion was a fundamental feature in the teachers' identities. For the majority of the educators, it was an important part of their upbringing within their homes and communities. One teacher recalled his great grandfather being a respected Methodist minister who inspired him to get involved in his church. He had then joined the church's youth group, and eventually became one of the main leaders in the youth ministry. One of his roles as a youth leader was teaching Sunday school. Later in his life as a young adult, he had also decided to join the "mission station", an evangelical project to establish more Methodist churches and, more importantly, to found youth ministries within these establishments in South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

A number of the teachers also spoke about being exposed to more than one religion when growing up in their homes and/or communities. One educator was born and raised in the Transkei in a household that embraced both Christianity (Dutch Reformed) and African Religions (Xhosa tradition). This combination is particularly reflected in his belief in and observance of his family's ancestors as well as his belief in Jesus Christ as a role model for love and compassion towards humanity. Another teacher described his family and community as being a mixture of Christians and

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<sup>11</sup> Teacher C, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 03 August 2015.



Muslims. He regarded the community that he grew up in as very accommodating and its members always being helpful towards one another. He gave an example of his Christian neighbours generously helping him (a Muslim) when he had asked for them to share certain food items, such as sugar or a potato.

In addition to being exposed to religion(s) in their homes and/or communities, some of the teachers were introduced to other religious traditions at school. Two educators spoke about attending Catholic schools during their formative years. One of them explained that his parents' conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism led to him being raised in a staunch and strict religious environment, which included attending a Catholic school that reinforced this religious upbringing. At home, he recalled that his mother "used to 'nail' us [the teacher and his five siblings] for not going to church".<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, at the Catholic school he defined his "introduction to religion...and Catholicism" as entailing being "beaten up by the nuns" in which they "would smack you across the classroom with a stick".<sup>13</sup> In contrast, another teacher revealed a different experience with Catholicism. While she was raised as a Dutch Reformed Christian, attending a Catholic school exposed her to another Christian denomination that she eventually welcomed as part of her religious identity.

While religion is evidently a defining feature in the majority of the educators' upbringing, they also identified with categories of race, culture, and language. The teacher who was raised in a household that embraced Christianity and African Religions proudly spoke about his Xhosa heritage. He highlighted that his surname often raised many questions amongst his peers, as it did not represent him being a black Xhosa speaking person. He explained with great admiration that during the

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<sup>12</sup> Teacher A, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 03 August 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Teacher A, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 03 August 2015.

‘dompas’ system<sup>14</sup> under apartheid, his grandfather anglicised his Xhosa surname in order to improve his chances in finding work. In doing so, the teacher regarded his grandfather as “a genius”, and rejoiced in saying that this “is how we beat the system”.<sup>15</sup> His Xhosa heritage clearly had an enduring effect as it inspired him later in his life to complete a Master’s degree in African Languages at the University of Stellenbosch. Furthermore, when he had started teaching at the high school he had been with for more than thirty years, he established isiXhosa as a subject and became the Head of Department of that subject at the school. His story, therefore, reflects that his religious, racial, cultural and linguistic background evidently leaving lasting impressions in his life, including in his teaching career, as he drew great strength and character from them.

When viewed from a broader perspective, this example of an educator’s multiple identities points to the intricate and complex nature of how teachers’ forge their sense of belonging in the world. Amongst the multiplicity of identities, religion remained a prominent category of identity for the educators as it had an enduring

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<sup>14</sup> During apartheid, the 1952 pass law system was colloquially called by black South Africans as the ‘dompas’ system, which translates to “the stupid pass” (Breckenridge 2005, 83). This system was enforced to regulate and control the movements of black South African adults by requiring them to carry passbooks when travelling outside of their designated areas. These passbooks were similar to internal passports that contained personal identification details of the bearers as well as documented their “rights’ to live, work, and/or reside in certain areas” (Saint 2012, 118). For a broad history on the pass law system in South Africa see Lily Saint, “Reading subjects: passbooks, literature and apartheid,” *Social Dynamics* 38, 1 (2012): 117-133. Saint provides an interesting analysis on how passbooks narrated South Africans’ everyday lives. For a more detailed discussion on the blueprint for the pass law system and its failure see Keith Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid,” *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005): 83-108. Breckenridge discusses the bureaucratic nature of the pass system under the apartheid regime with a particular focus on its collapse under Hendrik Verwoerd’s administration. He argues that the pass law system was an unprecedented effort by the apartheid state, which was the first to introduce a system of national biometric identification in the country.

<sup>15</sup> Teacher D, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 13 August 2015.

effect in their development into adulthood, and particularly within their professional development as teachers. For many of the educators, religion remained at the heart of their family households. One teacher explained that she and her two brothers were raised Anglican. While both of her brothers converted to Catholicism when they married, she remained a practicing member at her local Anglican church. She would also pray with her father at home when he could no longer attend church due to Alzheimer's disease. Despite her father's deteriorating condition, she was amazed and admired that he could still recite every word of the 'Our Father' during their prayer sessions. Most of the other educators continued to practice the religions that they were raised in. However, two educators converted to another Christian denomination that was more charismatic in nature. Both felt that the religions they were raised in during their formative years became too limited for them when they matured. One of these teachers was ordained as a reverend in a Pentecostal church, and expressed that he would confess Jesus Christ as his "saviour and redeemer" on a daily basis.<sup>16</sup> Evangelising was not only something he needed to do at his church and surrounding community, but also at home. It was, therefore, customary for him to have "primary family sessions" with his wife and children to foster their commitment to God and Jesus Christ in their lives.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, the teacher whose parents' conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism led to him being raised in a staunch and strict religious environment stated that he and his wife were not religious people. Yes, they had raised their children as Catholics. Despite his Catholic upbringing being a negative experience, Catholicism evidently had an enduring effect in his life as he introduced and nurtured the religious tradition to his children. He and his wife encouraged their children to

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<sup>16</sup> Teacher G, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 18 August 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Teacher G, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 18 August 2015.

participate in the rites of passage of Catholicism. Another significant part of this teacher's narrative is that he had described using his Catholic background for his "own ends".<sup>18</sup> During the time of his studies in the early 1980s in Scotland, he explained that the job opportunities for teachers in the country were scarce. Consequently, he completed a Catholic teaching certificate to increase his chances in applying for teaching positions in both Catholic and non-Catholic schools in the country. At the time, "if you didn't have it [a Catholic teaching certificate] and [were] not a Catholic, you couldn't teach at a Catholic school".<sup>19</sup> This example clearly demonstrates the teacher's instrumentalisation of religion in furthering and achieving his professional and economic ends. His story, therefore, presents a unique case amongst the teachers that were interviewed in that despite religion no longer being central to his personal identity, it continued to play a vital role in his children's upbringing as well as in his professional career as a teacher.

Whilst religion remained central to many of the teachers' family households, it also inspired some to assume leadership roles in their religious communities, and further their academic studies in religion. One educator explained that during her childhood she was not raised in a religious household, but later in her life converted to the Baptist church. Being a Baptist introduced her to leading a disciplined life as she described her church as being "very conservative in [its] thinking" and demanded strict adherence to their rules. As a Sunday school teacher in her church, she became more inquisitive about Christianity in general and her denomination in particular. This inspired her to pursue a Bachelor of Theology degree and with Honours at North-West University as well as a Master in Theology degree at the University of

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<sup>18</sup> Teacher A, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 03 August 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Teacher A, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 03 August 2015.

Stellenbosch. However, studying for her Master's degree challenged her beliefs as a Baptist,

When I started my Masters...they asked me a lot of questions that I couldn't answer. We [are] only ten in a class so...most of them are pastors except for the two. They just did their Honours. ...And I found out that they don't all maybe believe [that] the Bible was literally written, and that confused me a bit. Because as a Baptist that's the way things (pause). ...And there's no way that, for example, homosexual people can ever go to heaven. They cannot have a relationship with God. That challenged my thinking...

Being a Baptist was a source of inspiration for the teacher, but henceforth became a point of contention. The quote above expressed her conservative view of denouncing homosexuality. However, her coursework that focused on gender topics and issues opened her eyes to "how damaging it can be" to condemn and ostracise people who were regarded as having different sexual orientations and gender expressions that did not conform to religious 'norms'.<sup>20</sup> Her curriculum changed her way of thinking about discipline in her church, and its members' conservative views that had an adverse effect on people inside and outside of the church. While being a Christian remained a fundamental part of her life, at the time of the interview she no longer affiliated herself with the Baptist church. Her separation from the church was particularly revealed in her changed views on homosexuality and religion as expressed in her statement, "if you are gay, or whatever, [you] can have a relationship with God".<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, she highlighted that teaching Religion Studies changed her conservative way of thinking, "it open[ed] the way I think. I'm not so closed minded anymore".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Teacher E, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 17 August 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Teacher E, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 17 August 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Teacher E, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 17 August 2015.

In contrast, another educator presented his Muslim identity as a more enduring source of inspiration for his studies, and his career as a teacher. After he had matriculated, he received a bursary to study at the University of the Western Cape. However, he did not complete the degree programme since he had decided to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree specialising in Islamic Studies and Arabic at an Islamic seminary. It took six years for him to complete the degree programme, and he graduated with the title of *Maulana*.<sup>23</sup> His studies at an Islamic seminary were in fact the reason for deciding to become a teacher, as he regarded it “as the ideal platform for teaching”.<sup>24</sup> He then changed his work shift from being a full-time radio host during the week to working part-time over weekends in order to teach at an Islamic high school.

Not only was religion a source of inspiration and brought meaning to the teacher’s life and work, but fellow members in his religious community also reinforced his identity as a Muslim. He enjoyed listening to the oral history of Islam and the unique Muslim identity formation in Cape Town that an Imam shared with him. One of the stories that the Imam told him was about Muslims living during the apartheid era. He explained that when a magistrate in court needed a witness, a Muslim man who wore a fez would be randomly selected from the street since “they were looked at as these...people that took the moral high ground”.<sup>25</sup> Such stories that were shared by the Imam had reinforced the teacher’s pride in identifying as a Muslim in South Africa. Another teacher shared a similar sentiment about fellow members in her church bringing meaning to her life. For her, the Dutch Reformed Church was a religious community of “like-minded people to a greater extent. They

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<sup>23</sup> The title of *Maulana* is given to a learned person – that is, an individual who has completed a course of studies on Islamic education at the tertiary level.

<sup>24</sup> Teacher H, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 20 August 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Teacher H, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 20 August 2015.

speak my language; that is where I feel like I belong”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the communal dimension of religion as reflected in these two teachers’ narratives point to the significance of religious communities in reinforcing social solidarity, and the educators’ sense of identity.

When the teachers described their adult religious identities and the influence it had in their lives, it became clear that within their professional development as educators their devotions to their religions were (re)affirmed. One teacher described her profession as a calling from God. Another educator, the *Maulana*, highlighted the significance of practicing the five daily prayers in his life, and particularly in leading the prayers at the independent Islamic school where he taught. Another educator described the independent Christian school that he taught in as his “ministry” in which he could live out and practice his beliefs. However, he also admitted that while the school was not a place for him to preach to his learners, he hoped that being a role model of a devout believer would have a significant influence in their lives. Another educator shared a similar sentiment about not overtly preaching to his students. Despite working in a secular public school, he highlighted that the school strengthens his identity as a Christian. He would say a prayer whenever the school gathered for assembly meetings. Furthermore, he taught his learners moral values that were often drawn from his religious tradition. Many of his students resided in poverty-stricken and crime-ridden communities, so he motivated his learners to live by what he regarded as the most significant commandment: “love your neighbour as yourself”.<sup>27</sup> This value was particularly important to him as he wanted his students to value themselves and others, and to not look up to individuals in their community, such as drug dealers, who only valued money and material possessions. However, he admitted

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<sup>26</sup> Teacher B, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 04 August 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Teacher J, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 27 August 2015.

that even though he taught Christian values he made a concerted effort to “not make it obvious”, and to “present it as normal positive values” to his students.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, the educator who was an ordained reverend sought to overtly evangelise at his school. Every Monday morning the school had assembly meetings that served as a platform for the teacher to preach. He also established a Christian society at the school. Despite the school that he had worked in was categorised as a secular state institution, this did not dissuade the teacher from evangelising in the school as expressed in his statement, “I’m speaking Jesus, I’m talking Jesus, I’m fighting for Jesus. And I will continue to do it at this school whether who is coming up against me. If the department [of education] comes up against me I don’t care”.<sup>29</sup>

These examples show how religion crossed the boundaries between the teachers’ personal and professional lives. Religion clearly served as a motivating force in their lives as it played an influential role in their careers as teachers. Certain cases, in particular, reveal that the reason for deciding to become a teacher was motivated by religion. Being a teacher is, therefore, part of their identities, and another domain in which they can reaffirm their religious commitments. This evidently demonstrates that teachers are deeply religious individuals who do not teach in a vacuum as their processes of meaning making is not left at the classroom door.

Indeed, the teachers’ narratives portray religion as the ground on which they built their sense of self, belonging, and making a meaningful mark in the world. Their responses, however, also reveal the struggles and conflicts they faced as religious individuals. Many shared their stories of not being accepted by their family members, religious communities, and/or broader society. One teacher explained that her estranged relationship with her two brothers started after they had converted from

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<sup>28</sup> Teacher J, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 27 August 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Teacher G, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 18 August 2015.



Anglicanism to Catholicism when they had married. Her brothers would often criticise her and her daughter for being Anglican, and stated that they were not in “the right church”.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, she felt deeply offended when her brothers refused to take communion at the same Anglican church that she and their late mother attended. One of her brothers explained that the reason for refusing to take communion was that “their [Anglican] priest and our [Catholic] priest” did not have the same training.<sup>31</sup> Despite her acknowledging certain differences between the two denominations she said that her brothers refused to recognise that they were all Christians at the end of the day. Her brothers’ disparaging remarks on her religious affiliation led to her breaking off her relationship with them.

Two other educators expressed their struggles within their own religious communities. One recalled an occasion in which two prophetesses abruptly interrupted him while he was giving a sermon at his church by starting a sermon of their own. He explicitly regarded this as a discriminatory act against him, because they had criticised his style of preaching. The second recognised how the discriminatory actions of members in her church towards those who did not conform to their doctrines were detrimental. As a result, despite still being documented as a member of her church, she no longer affiliated with the congregation.

While some educators highlighted their struggles and conflicts within their families and religious communities, others emphasised the difficulties they encountered when expressing themselves as religious individuals in a diverse society. One teacher commented that he always wore a large necklace with a cross that symbolised his faith and, most importantly, his identity. However, by wearing the cross people avoided him on the street because they assumed that he was a member of

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<sup>30</sup> Teacher F, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 18 August 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Teacher F, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 18 August 2015.

Jehovah's Witness Church, and that he would preach to them. Those who had confronted him on the street often made disparaging remarks to him. In a similar sentiment, another teacher commented that certain people from his own community assumed that he was a member of the proselytising *Tabligh Jamaat* movement (that urges Muslims to return to the fundamentals of Sunni Islam) because he had a beard. He described this stereotype as “tear[ing] me apart from the community or has [rather] placed me in a certain label or certain bracket” as he was viewed as a fundamentalist “that’s out to kill them”.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, he highlighted that as a *Maulana* he had been side-lined and taken for granted in his community. He gave the example of him hosting educational classes for his community, but members refused to pay a small fee and accused him of wanting to make a profit from Islam. One of the reasons, he explained, for this treatment was the history of his community exhibiting a general attitude which he called “anti-knowledge”. Those who taught the Qur’an to the community were not learned individuals, and never charged people for their knowledge since they already had paying jobs. Eventually these individuals were regarded as Imams, and therefore became leaders in their communities who were respected and honoured by the people. With this history, his community remained ignorant about individuals like him who were religious leaders and scholars who dedicated their lives to learning about Islam on a tertiary level and pursued a career in it. His community’s “anti-intellectual” culture, therefore, made him feel “as if there’s no value attached to the teaching of religion or education”.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to expressing their discontent with their struggles and conflicts as religious individuals, the educators shared the ways in which they dealt with not being accepted and/or conflicted identities. Interestingly, many of them wanted to get more

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<sup>32</sup> Teacher H, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 20 August 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Teacher H, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 20 August 2015.

involved in their schools, communities, and the broader public. One teacher asserted that as a reverend he found strength in God and Jesus Christ in continuing to evangelise and preach at his school, his church and surrounding community. Another teacher who was ostracised for wearing a cross around his neck found it empowering in wearing the symbol, and believed that he was responsible for educating people on this symbol and how he identified with it. In a similar sentiment, the Muslim teacher used his position of a radio host as a platform to educate his community, and broader public about Islam and Islamic education. In doing so, he was able to fight against his community's "anti-intellectual" culture by promoting the value of knowledge that led to values like humility, understanding, compassion, mercy and tolerance.<sup>34</sup> These examples show the teachers reclaiming their processes of meaning making in terms of continuing to forge their own sense of belonging, and making a meaningful mark in their schools, communities and broader public.

## **Conclusion**

The teachers' biographies reveal their experiences of living with diversity. It shows that they are complex individuals with complex identities. The majority of them found meaning in religion, and made concerted efforts in reinforcing it in their everyday lives. This was especially reflected in religion having an influential role in their professional development as teachers. Being educators was another arena for them to express themselves as devout religious individuals. Within their professional careers, their personal devotions to their religious traditions were reaffirmed and served as a means to soldier on in their struggles and conflicts of being devout religious individuals living in a (religiously) diverse society. Here, some of the teachers strived

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<sup>34</sup> Teacher H, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 20 August 2015.

to empower themselves, in being what Seetal calls agents of change, by being committed role models to their learners, schools, communities and broader society (Seetal 2006, 145). The teachers' life trajectories demonstrate that they did not teach in a vacuum as their processes of meaning making was not left at the classroom door. Therefore, the significance of discussing the teachers' personal narratives lies in not only revealing how they built meaningful lives, but that it also serves as a reference point in the next chapter to discuss the educators' experiences of meaning making and alienation in their professional roles of teaching Religion Studies.

## **Chapter Four: Teaching Religion Studies: A Meaningful and Alienated Role**

So far, this study has been predicated on the idea that the concept of alienation, or rather Rahel Jaeggi's framework on alienation, is relevant to explore the gap between what the National Policy on Religion and Education expects from the teachers, and their readiness for teaching Religion Studies. As noted, Jaeggi makes a key contribution to re-establishing the concept of alienation since her framework severs the link from an essentialist picture of human nature, and instead focuses on analysing an individual's social role in terms of how s/he succeeds or fails to identify with and 'own' it. Her account of alienation illuminates the nature of disruption and what effect(s) it has on an individual's engagement with and sense of identity in performing a social role.

Using Jaeggi's framework illuminated the South African state's imposed education policies as disrupting the teachers' roles. The government's top-down education approach reflected in its policy images of the Religion Studies educator failed to recognise the teachers' interpretations and personal identities. This was particularly reflected in the National Policy on Religion and Education promoting a secular distant approach that demanded educators to have a neutral and accommodating attitude to teaching about religious diversity regardless of their own personal orientations. Here, a gap emerged as the teachers' voices were suppressed by the government's top-down education strategy. Within this context, the Religion Studies teachers evidently experienced a 'double' alienation since their roles were not only disrupted by the state's imposed policies, but they also could not teach with commitment – that is, in line with their own religious orientations.

The third chapter explored the lives and individual identities of the eleven educators in Cape Town, South Africa. By exploring the teachers' life trajectories, it became clear that religion played a significant role in their professional careers. Their personal devotions to their religious traditions were reaffirmed in their careers, and served as a means to soldier on in their struggles and conflicts of being devout religious individuals living in a (religiously) diverse society. Their life trajectories pointed out that they did not teach in a vacuum. The teachers' life trajectories, therefore, formed the premises for presenting and discussing in the fourth and final chapter the educators' experiences of meaning making and alienation in their professional roles of teaching Religion Studies.

This chapter will use Jaeggi's framework to discuss the eleven teachers' professional experiences of alienation in advancing the National Policy on Religion and Education. The teachers' experiences will expose the complexities of their 'double' alienation. The chapter will analyse what the teachers are expected to do according to the National Policy on Religion and Education and Religion Studies Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document, and what they are actually doing. Even though these policies stress the significance of training educators to promote religious diversity in the 'new' South Africa, the sample indicates that the eleven teachers were not trained for Religions Studies as an academic discipline. Despite those who have academic qualifications in religion, it only related to their particular faith backgrounds. This points to a limitation of the study as the sample exhibits only one kind of Religion Studies teacher – namely, one who has little or no training in Religion Studies. In light of this limitation, the findings from the interviews provided pertinent insights into the complexities of their 'double' alienation, and how they overcame it. This chapter will include a discussion on the

educators' understanding of their roles and methodologies in teaching Religion Studies. It will also be revealed that the educators overcame their 'double' alienated state by teaching in line with their religious orientations. This method of incorporating their religious identities into their pedagogy will be shown as being open enough to approach the aims of the subject, and to approach diversity that is not from the national policy's perspective of a secular distant methodology, but rather one that opens their own religious traditions to new ones. This will demonstrate that the national policy's promotion of a secular distant approach to teaching about religious diversity cannot be sustained in South African schools. While the teachers' personally informed approach advances the aims of the national policy, the chapter will also examine the limitations of this methodology. The study will conclude in this chapter that despite the Religion Studies teachers alleviating their 'double' alienation by integrating their religious identities into their teaching methods, they still nonetheless remained in a state of alienation due to the post-apartheid state's top-down education strategy.

### **The Teachers' Experiences of Alienation in Advancing Religion Studies**

The teachers' interpretations of their roles laid bare a gap with the national policy's expectation of them to take on an impartial role. Their responses revealed that this gap disrupted their roles and their processes of meaning making as Religion Studies (hereafter RS) teachers, and resulted in feelings of discontent in their profession. Their responses also showed that they were, indeed, experiencing a 'double' alienation. In particular, their feelings of discontent exposed the complexities of their 'double' alienated state.

One indicator of the teachers' discontent was that they had struggled to remain professionally competent in their positions due to the lack of suitable or sustained training in and resources for Religion Studies. Many of them confidently recalled receiving continuous training for other subjects that they taught, such as Mathematics, and Technology, but said that this was not the case with Religion Studies. Moreover, with the exception of four teachers receiving religious education in their training as educators, the majority of them had minimal exposure to religion education in their formal training. Some only received training for the subject with the introduction of the new CAPS curriculum, while others attended workshops hosted by the Religious Studies Department at the University of Cape Town. Although these workshops were deemed highly valuable, the teachers maintained that they still struggled to understand some of the subject's content. While many were comfortable teaching on the three Abrahamic religions, they were completely lost when they had to cover religious traditions such as African Religions, Hinduism and Taoism. In addition to receiving minimal training, many believed that they had struggled to understand and teach the content due to inadequate resources. All of them stated that they strictly followed the guidelines of the Religion Studies CAPS document and the accompanying prescribed textbook *Shuters Top Class Religion Studies*. Both document and textbook are based on the National Policy on Religion and Education, and provide a detailed guide on implementing the national policy's aims for the subject. It provides detailed explanations on what topics to cover every week in each term, how to start a Religion Studies lesson, how to evaluate a lesson, and what to prepare for assignments, tests, and examination papers. The teachers particularly highlighted the textbook as the only resource material that was prescribed for Religion Studies lessons. Despite the CAPS curriculum and accompanied prescribed



textbook being content driven, some of the teachers believed that both fell short in this. Not only was the curriculum and textbook regarded as providing insufficient information on the various religions, but the teachers also made it clear that they were provided with scant supplementary information and recommendations on what resources to use to expand their knowledge on the subject matter. They sought assistance from their colleagues and/or had to find other resources on their own, such as YouTube videos and textbooks from the previous (outcomes-based) curriculum. Yet, once they had access to other resources they often opted to provide more detailed explanations on the Abrahamic religions while briefly touching on Eastern and/or African Religions, since the information on the former was more accessible to them than the latter. With the lack of training and resources, some educators confirmed that their religious backgrounds, namely, teaching Sunday school at their churches, contributed towards their understanding of the subject and its content. Despite the textbook being an inadequate teaching material for them, they stated that they still used it as *the* central resource in their lessons since the examination papers were based on it.

The teachers' struggle to remain professionally competent in their positions due to a lack of suitable training and resources, therefore, point to a reality of alienation in the form of powerlessness for them. As Jaeggi explains, "the feeling of powerlessness or of loss of control" means that individuals do not recognise that they can influence situations by actively taking decisions (Jaeggi 2014, 51). This is evident in the teachers being mere content transmitters or rather technicians of the subject since their own knowledge base was restricted within the confines of the curriculum and textbook. Here, the teachers' autonomy was limited in their classrooms as they had little room to deviate from the prescribed content in order for every learner to be

on the same level when writing their examinations. Being a technician whose autonomy was restricted pointed to another dimension of alienation. They were unable to identify with what they wanted and did as teachers (Jaeggi 2014, 99). That is, the educators focused more on understanding the subject's content and strictly following the curriculum, and less on exploring the understandings that they hold of themselves in relation to both of the subject and curriculum. In view of this, their training appears to have neglected the significance of critically reflecting on their roles as entailing the reclaiming and transformation of space and sense of self within that space.

In addition to the lack of suitable training and resources, another indicator of discontent for the teachers was that the government had not shared the same level of interest and investment in promoting Religion Studies. Some commented that the government focused more on investing in subjects like Mathematics, Science, and Technology than Religion Studies. This was evident in a teacher's comment that while she had received continuous training for Mathematics by receiving financial support from the government to enrol in short courses at the College of Cape Town, this was not the case for Religion Studies. Other educators highlighted that Religion Studies was not a "popular" and "growing" subject in the Western Cape. On the one hand, some believed that Religion Studies was not perceived as a valuable subject because the learners, parents, and other teachers often confused it for the confessional subject of Biblical Studies. On the other hand, some teachers stated that many high schools in fact did not know about the subject because the government did not actively promote it. As such, we may deduce that the RS teachers experienced a sense of powerlessness, because they were unable to affect the actions of the Department of Basic Education in terms of promoting and providing support for the subject.

Another indicator of discontent for some of the teachers was the bureaucratic nature of the curriculum. One educator stated that teachers were “compelled to strictly follow those guidelines” of the CAPS curriculum as well as another educator emphasising that they had to “follow [the] CAPS to the ‘t’.”<sup>35</sup> With the curriculum and prescribed textbook providing detailed guidelines on what the teachers needed to cover every week in each term, the educators recognised that they did not have a role in formulating the syllabus of the subject at their schools. While some were satisfied with this, others found it impeding upon their autonomy in the classroom. One educator even commented that she had been in the profession for forty years and still regarded the previous (apartheid) curriculum as being less bureaucratic than the present one. Her discontent with the curriculum documents was unmistakable in her statement,

I didn't know things were now becoming so prescribed...and then there were all these documents. And then you had to make your way through the document, and make your way through the tasks. Nightmarish! Nightmarish! I spent more time studying the documents because I thought that's what I had to do to find my way around. But actually now I would say, you know, in the old days when we taught you had a syllabus. You didn't have to swallow the syllabus.

This statement epitomises some of the teachers who had experienced the tensions of bureaucracy and the desire to remain professionally competent. We can observe the struggle that certain educators experienced with state dominance, organisation, and authority over their autonomy and individuality. However, this is not to suggest that teacher professionalism and bureaucracy are two entirely separate and contradictory

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<sup>35</sup> Teacher J, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 27 August 2015; Teacher K, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 31 August 2015.

frames of reference. Although there was a struggle for RS teachers to achieve autonomy and control over their work, this did not necessarily mean that they were alienated in this sense. As Jaeggi points out, one can be present and not be alienated in a situation “without completely being in control of it (or of ourselves in it)” (Jaeggi 2014, 63). Instead, what is suggested is that the RS teachers’ discontent with being bureaucratically controlled did not address the realities of their profession. In other words, the educators encountered difficulties in being content transmitters given their minimal training and resources. Yet, as contradictory as it sounds, these teachers still experienced alienation through feeling a sense of powerlessness in terms of not viewing their roles as something that they can or must *lead*. As suggested in the teachers’ comments of being “compelled to strictly follow those [curriculum] guidelines” and “follow [the] CAPS to the ‘t’”, they were compliant technicians and not curriculum leaders as the national policies had envisaged.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, a standardised textbook can certainly empower teachers by giving needed curriculum support, especially those who are less experienced and less qualified, but this was not always the case with the educators that were interviewed. The regulation of the textbook’s content became a disempowering process for some because it was deemed more as a rigid curriculum and substitute for knowledge, experience and teaching expertise than a teaching *tool* to be adapted in the classroom context. Therefore, being bureaucratically controlled and having no active role in formulating the syllabus at their schools clearly reaffirmed the teachers’ roles as being mere technicians of the subject and curriculum. Certainly, their having no critical involvement in curriculum design and being technicians in the implementation of Religion Studies corroborates with Nazir Carrim’s argument that educators are conceptualised as “subjects, rather

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<sup>36</sup> Teacher J, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 27 August 2015; Teacher K, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 31 August 2015.

than agents of change...[and that they] are positioned more as ‘reproducers’ of the state’s agenda and as implementers, rather than formulators, of policies” (Carrim 2003, 318). As such, the RS teachers’ roles being bureaucratically controlled further demonstrated the debilitating effect of the state’s top-down education strategy on the educators.

While the bureaucratic nature of the curriculum was an indicator of discontent for some RS teachers, for others it was the expectation of educators who have varied experiences to assume a sameness throughout the changes in the broader curriculum. On the one hand, despite the new CAPS curriculum reinforcing teachers to welcome the idea of being key contributors to educational transformation in the country, the educators who were interviewed, however, did not exactly see themselves as experts in the dynamics of change. They had battled with becoming *skilled* change agents in a new democratic dispensation. Again, this was clearly reflected in their discontent over the lack of suitable training and resources in Religion Studies. On the other hand, their responses revealed that it was problematic and challenging for them as devout religious individuals to take on the fixed, homogenous, and imposed role of an impartial teacher (that is, teaching without religious commitment) during curriculum changes. Many of them highlighted that being devout religious individuals formed a significant part of their personal identities, and careers as teachers. Jaeggi explains that being in a fixed role means that one is unable to express oneself properly in his or her role (Jaeggi 2014, 68). As such, the teachers would understandably struggle to teach without commitment, as they perceived their careers as another arena for them to reaffirm their religious commitments.

It is clear that the indicators of discontent for the RS teachers pointed to a reality of alienation as they had experienced problems of meaning and empowerment

in their profession. Employing Jaeggi's framework illuminated the complexities in their professional experiences of alienation. Some teachers felt a sense of powerlessness with their lack of sustained training and suitable resources, and the bureaucratic nature of the curriculum. Some were also not able to identify with what they wanted and did as teachers since the reality of their profession saw them as technicians with limited autonomy. Other educators struggled to identify with the imposed, fixed and homogenous role of an impartial teacher. This demonstrates the complexity in the gap between the *expected* role of a RS teacher and the *reality* of being in the profession. It also reveals that the teachers' voices were suppressed by the state's top-down education strategy that impeded on the ways in which they forged their sense of belonging in the new dispensation. Once again, the teachers were clearly subjects instead of agents of change. The teachers' alienated state is, therefore, a noteworthy example that demonstrates how educators in a 'new' South Africa that embraces diversity and inclusivity can get 'lost' in a democratic education system.

### **Overcoming A 'Double' Alienated State**

Based on the comments and remarks made by the RS teachers on their professional experiences of alienation, we thought that feelings of isolation and indifference could arise and grow amongst them. Their responses, however, revealed that they overcame their 'double' alienation by teaching with commitment – that is, in line with their religious orientations. While a number of them explicitly stated that they were determined not to promote religious commitment, they admitted to using certain themes and ideas from their religious traditions to teach the content material. Many of the teachers pointed out the difficulty for the learners in fully grasping the concepts. By incorporating their religious identities into their teaching methods, this provided

the teachers and their learners a space to engage with the critical terms of Religion Studies, such as myth, ritual, and symbol. The educators taught religion as tangible lived experiences to develop critical thinking about the self and the other. One teacher said that him being a Muslim provided a frame of reference when explaining the concept of ritual and the ritual performance in festive days. In a lesson, he had first explained the naming rituals and festival of sacrifice (*Eid-al-Adha*) performed in Islam, and thereafter discussed more rituals and festivals in other religious traditions. When the teachers had used their religious identities as a reference point in explaining certain concepts, they realised that their learners gained a better understanding and engaged more with the subject, with their fellow classmates, and their teachers. For example, an educator stated that being a Christian aided her explanation of the concept of ritual. She shared with her learners her experience of performing the ritual of baptism as a ceremony of purification and initiation in Christianity. This method of sharing her personal experiences proved to be more effective for her as she discovered that her learners understood and remembered the concepts like ritual better, and more importantly, were able to relate to the subject matter. For another teacher, being a Christian helped him to discuss the doctrines on life and death. He first explained to his learners that he as a Christian believed in the afterlife in which his conduct during his life will determine whether his soul would be punished or rewarded. This opened the discussion for him to introduce his learners to alternative doctrines on life and death in other religious traditions, such as the belief in *karma* and reincarnation in Hinduism and Buddhism respectively. Altogether, these examples reveal that the teachers' use of their religious identities as a teaching method facilitated the process of meaning making for them and their learners. They were able to teach about religion

as a tangible lived experience, which made the subject relevant to their learners and to themselves.

The educators' methodologies of teaching in line with their religious orientations were open to approach diversity that was not from the national policy's perspective of a secular distant methodology, but rather one that opens their own religious traditions to new ones. This is evident in one teacher's statement that as a conservative Christian the shift from teaching about one religion in Biblical Studies to multiple religions in Religion Studies made her tolerant towards and engage with people who affiliated with non-Christian traditions as she gained a better understanding of various religions. Another indication of the teachers' methodologies being open to diversity was encouraging discussions on scrutinising the relationship of religious and secular worldviews. One teacher commented on the significance of his learners, who are local and foreign, to be exposed to the diverse reality of religious and secular orientations. He gave an example of a few Somalian Muslim learners in his class who were completely against the fact that he as a Muslim religious leader and scholar was teaching about Karl Marx's notion of religion being the opiate of the people. While the teacher admitted that these learners' outcry had upset him, he had realised that they previously resided in communities that were ravaged by civilian warfare due to sectarianism. He, therefore, felt that it was his responsibility as a teacher to inform them about the inclusive and accommodative nature of South African society in general and their community in particular. This example reveals that the teachers also advanced the national policy's expectation of not perceiving their roles as religious instructors who promote adherence to a particular religion. Altogether, the teachers showed that teaching with commitment can also include recognising and appreciating the diverse reality of South African society.



Teaching with commitment also provided the educators a space for interpersonal engagement with their learners. With the teachers sharing their religious narratives in the classroom, learners were able to engage with them and the subject, and in this process construct their own ways of understanding the world around them. The teachers encouraged their learners to talk about themselves, including their cultural and religious backgrounds, during lessons. A teacher gave an example of his Xhosa and Sotho learners who shared their experiences of their culture to the class, and that the boys in particular highlighted the significance of circumcision as a rite of passage for them. With the teachers and their learners sharing their personal experiences, the educators made the subject relevant to their learners and to themselves. Furthermore, they were able to educate the learner as a whole person by developing his or her critical and reflective skills when thinking about being an individual living in a diverse society. This promoted the national policy's and curriculum's aim for the subject in developing the learners holistically – that is, mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, ethically and spiritually. Therefore, the educators' methodology of teaching with commitment indicates that it advances the national policy's aim to create an open classroom environment that recognises and values the diverse experiences and perspectives of all learners.

The educators' methodology of teaching in line with their religious orientations was also open to advance another aim of the national policy and curriculum for the subject in promoting the cultivation of moral thinking that is founded on democratic values and a culture of human rights embodied in South Africa's Constitution. The teachers highlighted that the constitutional right to promote freedom *of* and *from* religion was particularly important for their learners to understand. One stressed the significance of teaching about this constitutional right by

providing an example of a learner in his class who openly professed to being an atheist. This was met with an uproar from the learner's fellow religious classmates. Despite the educator identifying himself as a devoted Christian, he felt that it was his responsibility as a teacher to inform his learners about the country's constitution protecting the rights of individuals and/or groups from religious discrimination and/or coercion. He added that they should not discriminate against the atheist learner as he had the right to believe in anything or nothing at all, just as much as they had the right to believe that there is a Supreme Being. Similarly, many believed that it was their role to be accommodating and sensitive towards the diverse reality of their learners. They affirmed that recognition of and respect for differences of learners were an important part of the process of being an accommodating and sensitised teacher. The teachers, once again, appreciated the significance of Religion Studies and their roles in establishing an open and inclusive (educational) environment that nurtures moral thinking within a democratic framework.

Indeed, the educators' methodologies of teaching with commitment saw the advancement of the national policy and curriculum, but not in a manner that they were expected to. They did not follow the policy imagined role of an 'impartial' teacher – namely, the demand for educators to be neutral and to accommodate religious diversity regardless of their personal orientations. The educators utilised their religious identities as a source of strength and meaningfulness to address their discontent. Here, the teachers were able to educate their learners on observing religion not only as something to be studied, but also as a palpable, living and breathing experience for people. Religion Studies is shown to have a socialising role that reinforces the national policy's promotion of "a spirit of openness" (NPRE 2003, par 14). Employing their religious identities as a teaching tool provided them with the

opportunity to critically reflect on their roles, particularly in terms of how it shaped the way they had internalised the content and material for Religion Studies. The teachers were able to appropriate their roles as their *own* expressions of individualities. They were, then, able to overcome their ‘double’ alienation to some extent since teaching in line with their religious orientations inspired them to meaningfully engage with their learners and the subject. This demonstrates that the study of religion in general and Religion Studies subject in particular are not domains to be taught in a disinterested and non-committal manner. The national policy’s promotion of a secular distant approach to teaching about religious diversity, therefore, cannot be sustained in South African schools.

However, there appears to be limitations to the educators’ personally informed approach to teaching Religion Studies. One educator, a reverend who taught at a secular public school, believed that while adhering to the curriculum was important, being a committed religious role model who nurtured his learners’ religious consciousness was the defining feature of a RS teacher. He stated that his role entailed cultivating respect for various religions, and to discuss the subject’s content in relation to the Bible. It was, therefore, his responsibility as well as the aim of the subject “to bring children to God”.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, another two teachers admitted that they had taught their religions more passionately and with more detailed explanations than other religious traditions. Their disinterest and minimal exposure to certain religious traditions like African Religions and Taoism led to them only teaching what was expected of them in the curriculum and textbook. This indicated the teachers’ lack of critical engagement with religious diversity promoted in the subject matter.

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<sup>37</sup> Teacher G, interviewed by Danika Driesen, 18 August 2015.

Interestingly, the teachers stated that they were aware of how their convictions influenced the way they taught about their own religion and other religious traditions.

With the examples revealing the teachers explicitly or implicitly promoting their religious beliefs in their classrooms, this showed them as disrupting their own roles as teachers, the national policy, and the curriculum. By relying too much on their religious identities as a teaching tool, these educators risk, what Jaeggi calls, internal alienation. In other words, the teachers' religious beliefs reduces their roles to focusing more on their own interests, and neglecting to critically engage with the needs and interests of their learners, who should be informed and exposed to various religions as required by the subject. Furthermore, their disinterest in teaching about other religious traditions than their own suggests them having an instrumentalist disposition. Jaeggi describes instrumentalism as pointing to a state of alienation in terms of "a disengagement that is not an expression of indifference or distance to the role's demands" but is rather "a specific deficiency in the kind of interest that results when one engages in behaviour...that is merely a means to an end" (Jaeggi 2014, 93). As such, having a disinterested approach to teaching about other religious traditions than their own limited the teachers' efficacy for overcoming their 'double' alienation, since their related interests seemed to have overshadowed the needs of their learners. Here, the educators experienced a more profound sense of alienation – that is, both external (imposed state policies) and internal (their own convictions disrupting their role and function as teachers) forms of alienation. Therefore, while teaching with commitment was beneficial for the teachers in advancing the national policy and curriculum, and overcoming their 'double' alienation to some extent, it also proved to be a limited and problematic approach as it undermined and disrupted the crux of the

national policy and the curriculum – namely, to expose learners to diverse religion in South Africa and the world.

### **Conclusion**

Applying Jaeggi's framework illuminated the complexities of the teachers 'double' alienation in advancing the National Policy on Religion and Education. The lack of sustained training and suitable resources, and the bureaucratic nature of the curriculum resulted in a sense of powerlessness for some. For others, being relegated as technicians with limited autonomy led to not identifying with what they wanted and did as teachers. Some educators also struggled to identify with the policies' imposed, fixed and homogenous role of an impartial teacher. However, the educators overcame their 'double' alienated state by teaching with commitment – that is, in line with their religious orientations. By incorporating their religious identities into their teaching methods, the educators did not follow the policy-imagine role of an 'impartial' teacher. They were able to interpret their roles as their 'own', and, in agreement with Jonathan Jansen, translated the curriculum based on who they are (Jansen 2004, 67). Once again, this showed that the RS teachers did not leave their personal experiences and identities by the classroom door. Accordingly, their personally informed approach served as an instrument of empowerment in creating, enhancing and sustaining them and their learners' educational experience. It was open enough to approach the aims of Religion Studies outlined by the national policy and curriculum. It was also open to approach diversity that was not from the national policy's perspective of a distant secular methodology, but rather one that opens their own religious traditions to new ones. The teachers' methodologies demonstrated that the study of religion in general and Religion Studies subject in particular are not

domains to be taught in a disinterested and non-committal manner. This proved that the national policy's promotion of a secular distant approach to teaching about religious diversity cannot be sustained in South African schools. However, teaching with commitment also came with its limitations such as some educators developing an instrumentalist disposition. This undermined and disrupted the crux of their roles, the national policy, and the curriculum – namely, to address religious diversity in South Africa and the world. Ultimately, despite the RS teachers alleviating their 'double' alienation to a certain extent by integrating their religious identities into their teaching methods, they still nonetheless remained in a state of alienation since the South African government's policies focus is more on teachers as reproducers of their structured educational agenda and less on the realities of the profession on a grassroots level.

## **Conclusion: ‘Mind the Gap’: Continuing the Study of Alienation in Religious Studies**

This study has demonstrated the significance of the concept of alienation in exploring the gap between what the post-apartheid South African National Policy on Religion and Education expects from the teachers, and their readiness for teaching Religion Studies. The first chapter revealed that while modern Western philosophical debates in general and Religious Studies scholarship in particular presented various frameworks of alienation, there remained a consensus on defining a basic distinction of what the individual is alienated from: either human essence or human existence. Many of the scholars agreed that the concept highlights a disruption in a relation, which was characterised as a separation or disconnection between an individual and that to which s/he is relating. Their contributions were incorporated in new ways of addressing contemporary issues relating to problems of meaning, power, and self-realisation that point to the condition of discontent of human social relations. Rahel Jaeggi made a key contribution to this intellectual legacy by providing a renewed framework to interpret alienation as a significant and relevant concept. Her framework severs the link from an essentialist picture of human nature, and instead focuses on critically analysing an individual's social role in terms of how s/he succeeds or fails to identify with and ‘own’ it. Jaeggi reveals that alienation is not a purely negative phenomenon. It should be conceptualised as a ‘deficient’ relation rather than merely being an absence of relation. While Jaeggi's framework was based within a Western, European context her analysis drew attention to the processes of empowerment and ownership of an individual's social role that was relevant to providing a renewed enquiry into interpreting the experiences of Religion Studies

teachers within the post-colonial, social context of South Africa.

In the second chapter, it was evident that while the state of alienation for Religion Studies teachers appeared more explicit under the apartheid regime, it continued in the democratic context of South Africa. Various South African scholars highlighted the problematic nature of the post-apartheid policy images of the teacher since these demanded a drastic role change without addressing the teachers' interpretations and personal identities. A gap was revealed as the teachers' voices were suppressed by the South African state's top-down education strategy. With this gap, Jaeggi's concept of alienation was helpful in illuminating the state's imposed policy that maintained a secular distant approach, which had a more debilitating than transformative effect on the ways in which the educators identified with and committed to their roles in the new dispensation. The Religion Studies teachers, therefore, experienced a 'double' alienation in that their roles were disrupted by the state's imposed policies, as a result in which they could not teach with commitment – that is, in line with their own religious orientations.

The third chapter discussed the lives and individual identities of the eleven educators in Cape Town, South Africa. It did not explore the teachers' personal dimension of alienation, because the focus of the study was on exploring the teachers' experiences of alienation in their professional roles. As limiting as it was focusing on the teachers' religious identities, their narratives still showed their struggles and successes of integrating their personal religious orientations with their teacher identities.

The teachers' life trajectories presented in the third chapter formed the premises for discussing and understanding the educators' experiences of meaning making and alienation in their professional roles of teaching Religion Studies in the



fourth and final chapter. This chapter employed Jaeggi's framework to discuss the eleven teachers' experience of 'double' alienation in advancing the National Policy on Religion and Education. Some experienced a sense of powerlessness due to a lack of sustained training and suitable resources, and the bureaucratic nature of the curriculum. For others, being instrumentalist technicians with limited autonomy led to not identifying with what they wanted and did as teachers. Some educators struggled to identify with the national policy's imposed, fixed and homogenous role of an impartial teacher. Yet, the teachers' overcame their 'double' alienation to some extent by teaching in line with their religious orientations. By utilising their religious identities as a teaching tool, this method proved to be open enough to approach the aims of the subject, and to approach diversity that was not from the national policy's perspective of a secular distant methodology, but rather one that is open to reconfiguring their own religious traditions. The national policy's promotion of a secular distant approach to teaching about religious diversity cannot therefore be sustained in South African schools. However, while the teachers' personally informed approach advances the national policy, there were also limitations and problems to this methodology – such as some educators developing an instrumentalist disposition. This disrupted and undermined the crux of the national policy and curriculum of exposing learners to diverse religious traditions in South Africa and the world. Ultimately, the study concluded that despite the RS teachers alleviating their 'double' alienation by integrating their religious identities into their teaching methods, they nonetheless remained in a state of alienation due to the post-apartheid state's top-down education strategy.

Indeed, the concept of alienation holds great scholarly importance for the study of religion in critically examining and understanding the discontent of human

social relations in post-colonial societies such as South Africa. It yields new insights into understanding how individuals negotiate their processes of meaning making within their social roles in relation to an organised system like the government. However, as noted, there are some limitations to this study – one particularly being the fact that the sample only presented teachers who had no training in Religion Studies as an academic discipline. This can be problematic as the data appeared to only present one kind of Religion Studies teacher. Further research can therefore address the question that if educators have academic qualifications in religion, would this make a difference to feelings of alienation or not? This will also provide feedback on whether or not Rahel Jaeggi's framework of alienation is still a relevant and useful analytical tool when looking at the interviews of teachers who have received training for Religion Studies. Another recommendation for future research is to explore the teachers' personal dimension of alienation, particularly within their religious identities. This can provide an opportunity to identify and unpack other categories that teachers identify with (such as being gendered and having various political opinions), which can deepen the complex nature of them building meaningful lives, and the struggles and conflict they may experience in this process. In doing so, the teachers' life trajectories can tell us more about the significance of their lives in light of the changing political, religious and educational landscape of South Africa. This study, therefore, provided the critical foundation for further research in understanding the unique struggles and successes of teachers in the transmission of (religious) knowledge in the classroom set against the backdrop of a post-colonial educational landscape that is employed as a tool for social transformation.

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