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Race, Identity & Private Schools:

The Racialised Rules and Consequences of Language Use in Welkom

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

ANTHROPOLOGY

AT

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

14 March 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

To my parents and brothers,

Thank you for your unwavering support, love and guidance. Your input is most valuable.

To my friends, Writing Group and family

Thank you for encouraging and seeing me through this journey!

To my supervisor

I appreciate your time, advise and candour. You made the road easier.

To the participants of this study,

THANK YOU! Your voices brought this paper to life.

And to Khanyi

Thank you for trusting God, and trusting self!

We Made It !!

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Social Sciences

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Date: 14 March 2022

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ABSTRACT:

The experience of black students in private schools is not homogenous. While their day to day lives are concerned with school and the people inside them, their realities also include interactions and encounters happening outside the school.

Socioeconomic status expectations, the way in which students use language and modes of transportation have a potential to complicate the progression of student's days, their experience of spaces and their perceptions of selves. This research report asks how, if at all, does the racialised and racially tense backdrop of Welkom influence the social experience of being a black student in a private school.

Through language, I explore the relationship between language use and place, and how this influences the performance of identity. I also look at how racialised socioeconomic expectations, structured by race, find their expression in the experience of students.

From this report's findings, I argue that the discordant experience of being a black private school student, even beyond the gates, has a substantially stressful impact on students. It permeates their exploration of identities, shapes their perception of self, and profoundly influences their experience of places.

An intimate look at participants' experiences of school and town, and an exploration of how sociocultural factors structured and reinforced by race, support the argument that the tensions of an inharmonious environment make the development and performance of identity taxing and uncomfortable for students.

This report also shows the fragility of historic racial categorisations through language use, while highlighting racialisation's bruising results through participants' experiences.

INTRODUCTION:

Discussions about racism in private schools have been reported numerously over time. There are a sea of claims and reports from students and parents in elite schools in Gauteng about the treatment of black students. This research study is rooted in a similar interest.

The experience of black students in private schools is not homogenous. While their day to day lives are concerned with school and the people inside them, their realities also include interactions and encounters happening outside the school.
Socioeconomic status expectations, the way in which students use language and modes of transportation have a potential to complicate the progression of student's days, their experience of spaces and their perceptions of self. This research report asks how, if at all, does the racialised and racially tense backdrop of Welkom influence the social experience of being a black student in a private school.

The context of Welkom makes the core of this study less about the treatment of students at school but rather, the general experience of being affiliated to the school. Through the riveting accounts from participants, this study looks at the lived realities of Community in Christ Private School students. The report argues that the discordant experience of being a black private school student has a substantially stressful impact on students.

The study will unpack this argument across seven chapters. Having situated ourselves into the context, norms and structure of Welkom in chapter one, chapter two will plunge us into the experience of students in the town of Welkom. Chapter three follows with a discussion about the complexities of town and the weight of a private school uniform. Chapters four and five unpack Bourdieu's concept of habitus, making a connection to language, identity and the individual's role in the reproduction of societal norms.

The sixth chapter of this paper journeys the reader on an alternative perspective, illuminating the place and position of race. This chapter unpacks a different reality to that of many participants of this paper. The contrast it provides draws us into how race filters into experiences, and how these experiences profoundly influence our experience of reality.

The final chapter wraps up with an exploration of the stubborn, unpleasant moment South Africa finds itself in – between democracy and racism.

CHAPTER ONE:

Welcome to Welkom

1.

It is October 21st and we are driving to the golden, dusty city of Welkom, nestled at the foot of the Free State province. From Johannesburg, the drive is approximately three hours and a playlist long. Roughly 260Kms in distance.

The drive is not scenic. It is long patches of cultivation, agriculture and crop. And smaller patches of life. On the left, the earth stretches far and wide, to the point where eyes stop trying to interpret the distance. And on the right, virtually identical. Sometimes, scattered across the goldfields are cattle and their homes. Reminders of life and what land can do. Most times, grass morphs into trees and shrubs then back into grass again.

Welkom is the second largest city in the province. Bloemfontein, the city of roses, is the first. Developing into what is now a multi-industrial hub, Welkom is one of the youngest towns in South Africa (Lejweleputswa District Municipality, 2020).
The Lejweleputswa District Municipality thrives off its rich mining and farming sectors. It is a major producer of maize and sunflowers (Lejweleputswa District Municipality, 2017).
Welkom's economic sector is dominated by the mining industry (Lejweleputswa District Municipality, 2020).

1.1.1 Aims

This research report is interested in the social realities of students from private schools. It explores the experience of a discordant social world for black students in a private school in Welkom.

The experience of black students in private schools is not homogenous. While their day to day lives are concerned with school and the school community, their realities also include interactions and encounters happening outside the school.
Socioeconomic status expectations and students' language use have a potential to complicate the progression of student's days, their experience of spaces and their perceptions of selves.

This research report asks how, if at all, does the racialised and racially tense environment of Welkom influence the social experience of being a black student in a private school.
I will explore the relationship between language use and place, and how this influences the performance of identity. I will also look at how racialised socioeconomic expectations, structured by race, find their expression in the experience of students.

From this report's findings, I argue that the discordant experience of being a black private school student, even beyond the gates, has a substantially stressful impact on students. It permeates their exploration of identities, shapes their perception of self, and profoundly influences their experience of places.

The aim of this study is to provide a layer to discussions about the experience of private school for black students, especially in Welkom. [1]The study encourages an exploration of the multiple identities students negotiate in an inharmonious world. As a former private school student from a small, unequal and disproportionately resourced town myself, I aim to divulge the social experience of being a student in the school. The favour, social status and attention the uniform draws to the student, on the one hand, and the rejection by public school peers, isolation and conflict felt by the student on the other.

1.1.2 Methodology

This research is strategically based in Welkom. This is because Welkom only has two private schools, continues to be widely racialised, and – for me - is a familiar point of departure.

The study follows a qualitative research design through semi-structured interviews, auto-ethnography and group interviews. I was fortunate enough to recruit over twenty participants having posted an invitation flyer across my social medias. The snowball method generated a rich participant network to work beside. From the interested participants, only twelve were interviewed. The recruitment and consent form process took relatively long because some participants had to make arrangements to print, sign, scan and email back their consent forms. I believe this process, along with scheduling, deflated the interest of others, mostly the teachers and members of staff.

Safety concerns over COVID-19 ensured all interviews occurred either on Zoom or Teams. Interviewees had the option to show their face, which most did. This made conversations easier and more personable. All the names of participants have been changed. The name of the school has also been changed and identifiers, such as uniform, have been purposefully misrepresented.

Interviews were all semi-structured and were a significant part of collecting data. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a guided, yet casual conversation around the reality of being a student from a

[1] This research report acknowledges various works including the important work by Hunter (2019) in his discussions on how black learners in previously white and elite schools are forced to assimilate to dominantly white cultural practices. While it is situated within national discourses about racism in schools, my project is much more narrowly conceived.

private school. During the scheduling and exchanging of consent forms, many participants found it difficult to create time for interviews. However, the twelve people I worked with provided rich, helpful and insightful information for this project. Online interviews proved extremely helpful because I was able to record and re-visit interviews at a later time, allowing me to be more invested in the conversation during interviews.

The group interview comprised of three former eight-three [2]students from Community in Christ Private School (ComChrist), two females and one male. Because these are former classmates, showing faces forfeited anonymity, however confidentiality was maintained. Interviewees' excitement to reconnect and listen in on each other's experiences created a charged, safe and thought-provoking environment. The fourth volunteer from the eight-three class was interviewed in a one-on-one interview.

I included autoethnography because my familiarity of Welkom and the school gave me an added advantage. My relationship with Welkom and familiarity with interviewees made the task of ethnographic writing much easier however, challenging because I had to change my lens from that of resident to ethnographic researcher. Of the twelve interviewees, I only knew six personally; four eight-three alumnae, and two grade mates. The other six colleagues were familiar faces attracted by the snowballing effect. In total, I interviewed three male and nine female alumnae. Of the twelve, four lived in the school's boarding house throughout their time at ComChrist.

I believe the demographic of my research largely influenced the data because my research is weighted on the women's experiences. I have however included excerpts and comments from the males to add contrast and depth.

While previously a white English medium school, ComChrist now accommodates black learners from Welkom and beyond provincial and national borders. The student body is comprised of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial people. Individual interviews include nine black alumna, two white and one Muslim-Indian. Classification of race, quoted from participants themselves, aligned with those constructed by the apartheid regime – but these are quickly challenged and made fickle, as will be seen throughout the paper.

Because ComChrist is a school with a relatively small student body, it was expected that participants and myself would either recognize or know one another. Initially it was difficult finding a balance

[2] A grade eight 2011 register class.

between the role of the researcher and ex-schoolmate, however the prepared interview questions provided grounding and created a finite structure.

1.2 History of Welkom

Welkom was founded by chairperson of *Anglo American Corporation* Sir Ernest Oppenheimer in April 1947. It was born as a mining town when a piece of gold was found on a farm in St.Helena (Jacobs, 2011). Under the influence and vision of Oppenheimer, Anglo American Corporation prompted the planning and mapping out of what is now Welkom. Its potential to become a gold-field attracted Oppenheimer to its fields of green and gold.

The city is the hub of the Free State's gold and uranium mines. It is also a production plant for processing mineral ore, steel and lumber. It continues to harmoniously blend its mining, residential and industrial activities (Jacobs, 2011).

Matjhabeng, Welkom's colloquial name, is a home to a multiracial, multicultural and multi-ethnic community. *Matjhabeng*, a Sesotho name now adopted by the local municipality, translates to "where nations meet". It is rumoured that the name came as a result of the influx of workers migrating to the town in pursuit of employment during apartheid South Africa.

1.2.1 Welkom Today

Residents of Welkom too eagerly share stories about what Welkom was like in the past and their hope for its future. The older generations relive the 'mine days'; when mines were active and made the ground dance. They reminisce over the joys of R10 grocery baskets, and the bitterness of racial tensions. Today, service delivery, a shortage of jobs and 'hustle' culture are the topics of the day. In the December Festive season, twenty-somethings plan and prepare for the annual New Year Phakisa Racetrack Event, where national and local music artists congregate in celebration.

Sometimes, memories about the 18:00-to-06:00 Cansa Relay Walks are overheard. This was an annual fundraising, outreach event held on the *Welkom Technical High School's* sports fields. Schools, businesses, people and groups would pitch tents and walk around the massive, oval fields all through the night. There would be music, food stalls, donation stalls, and various representatives of different outreach programmes.

Welkom continues to strive in development. Once impactful for its mining industry and its revolutionary traffic circle system, Welkom continues to be a society that battles with a rife, unequal,

racial past. This research report finds interest in how racism and racialization are materialised in the experience of the city and unintentionally reproduced by the community, impacting students.

Democratic, post-apartheid South Africa is still trying to break away from the effects of the structurally violent past. The struggle against systemic racism, the expense of structural racism, and the cost of socialised racism and racialization spill into the experience of everyday life. My study is centred on the experience of the social world for black students in private schools. I argue that the racialised social world of Welkom profoundly influences the all-round experience of being a black student in one of two private schools. This section will explore the ways racism is reproduced and normalized, and how it finds its expression in Welkom and Community in Christ Private School (henceforth ComChrist).

1.3 Allocation of Space in Welkom

Welkom is small and intimate, reportedly 167, 6km^2 in size. For context, it is not completely ambitious for a motivated individual to walk from town to Thabong or any residential areas outlining town.

The central business district (CBD) of Welkom expands everyday. Goldfields Mall, built in 2010, sits in the centre, across the police station and opposite the court. The library, former government department offices, and the theatre line the CBD. A park sits in the middle of the CBD, a short walk from the taxi rank, the banks, and the mall.

Welkom has one CBD. Town begins where the vast location (referred to as *Lekeishini*) of Thabong ends. The intentional use of the word *town,* even by residents¸ may speak to there being a single central business district, albeit surrounded by shopping complexes across residential areas.

Contextualizing the intimacy its quaint size affords, Moses[3] explains that, "You could literally leave your house and see five people you know within a minute of locking your gate". One can easily become acquainted with familiar faces in the malls, the banks, and the sixteen restaurant/take-away establishments in town. Because the city is relatively small, schools and businesses in the CBD are close to one another in proximity.

There are 65 ordinary schools in Welkom, and 6 ABET [4]institutions. Of the 65, two are private IEB (International Examinations Board) schools. Of the 63 public and model C DBE (Department of Basic Education) [5]schools, 26 are in Thabong, 6 in the CBD, and the rest across different residential areas.

[3] Participant 9: Interviewed 26 August 2021. 2015 Matriculant and boarder.
[4] Adult basic education and training
[5] The IEB is an independent board whose focus is preparation for university. It is overseen by Umalusi.

The two private schools are English medium. The public schools are English or Afrikaans medium. ComChrist is located in the CBD.

1.3.1 Town and Thabong

Jan Hofmeyer Street in Welkom is no longer a White-Only residential area in post-apartheid South Africa, but remains overtly racialised. Today, it is home to the higher class and wealthier residents of Welkom.

For perspective on its exclusivity, in 1982, a house in Jan Hofmeyer cost R175 000. In 2021, a house ranges from R 1 600 000 to R 2 190 000 (Property24). Interestingly, the value has not kept up with inflation.

Residential areas in town are homes to higher earning community members. Apartheid spatial planning and reliable access to resources, structured by race, provide some of the reasons why these areas continue to be perceived as affluent. Living in town is made convenient by its proximity to stores, schools, bank branches and government offices.

A few circles from town is Thabong. This is the *lekeishini*[6] of Welkom. Locals navigate it by the use of zones, extensions and streets which separate different sections. The one-way, pot-holed streets leading to Thabong filter into untarred, sandy roads with RDP[7] houses, informal settlements, and unkempt parks on either side. The schools in Thabong are under-resourced. Students are taught in classrooms with broken windows, vandalized walls and damaged furniture. The schools are easily accessible, especially for students and staff who walk.[8]

Bronville is a moment's drive from Thabong. It is where the majority of Welkom's Afrikaans speaking coloured community live. Bronville, like Thabong, is the result of a boundary bubble created from apartheid spatial planning rules.
Racial ideas structured where people lived under apartheid and they continue to be reproduced even today. Apartheid spatial planning still largely influences where people choose to live.

1.4 Race and the Racialised

It was so in the process of classification

that allowed the apartheid Population Registration Act to allocate individuals

[6] Location.
[7] Reconstruction and Development Programme housing structures established in 1994.
[8] There are footpaths and short-cuts which make walks to school fairly shorter for students who walk.

to race groups, and it is so now. (Posel, 1999 as cited by Maré, 2001: 75)

In *Racial Formations,* Omi and Winant propose that individuals learn combinations and versions of racial classification. People learn about their own racial identities through interaction (Omi, Winant, 1995: 13). This knowledge is not always obvious or consciously inculcated, but it is often adopted and given meaning through interaction (Omi and Winant, 1995). Stuart Hall described this as:

> A recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that condition… We are all in that sense, ethnically located and our identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are.
>
> (Hall 1992a: 258, as quoted by McKinney, 2007:8)

According to Gerhard Maré, race thinking refers to the manner in which we make sense of social relations and the ways we perceive our own group memberships and those of others (2001: 77). Maré says this is what bears influence on how people create identities and boundaries of 'us' and 'them' (2001: 77).

Natural, ordinary and common sense are qualities within which racial ideology exhibits itself (Omi, Winant, 1994: 12). Ideologies have become reproduced and embedded across societies. Their influences are expressed in the significance of a racial identity even today. This is because along with sex and gender, race is one of the first things a racialised mind will draw conclusions about (Omi, Winant, 1994). These authors say people use race to provide clues about the people they encounter. They propose that when we cannot conveniently racially categorize people, it is difficult to fully engage them (Omi, Winant, 1994:12). Essentially, Omi and Winant suggest, "without a racial identity, one is in danger of having no identity"(1992: 12). Race is used as a marker; a trait people use to make assumptions about an individual.

Race and race thinking have become organising principles of identity (Maré, 2001). In a context like South Africa, or Welkom, the privileges and oppressions of race are ingrained in the society. Mark Hunter claims that in South Africa, prestige remains associated with configurations of whiteness and while these dynamics prevail, so will racialization (Hunter, 2019: 198).

Classification and oppression from apartheid forced the separation of people into a structured inequality (Maré, 2001: 81). For decades, racialised communities were constructed by the apartheid state through deliberate proximity and separation of people through acts such as Group Areas, Pass Laws, Separate Amenities and so forth (Maré, 2001). These systems ensured the spatialization of race and its reproduction in society and social structure.

> This meant [and continues to mean] that not only were people living in 'own' areas but that many other spatially related activities were shaped by such allocation. Who is seen on which streets and in

> which dwellings and in which regions at which times of day or night; who utilises which transport routes; who frequents which recreational facilities and so on, still largely confirms a certain colour coding. The visual social landscape was racialised, and will continue to be so for a very long time to come despite fairly rapid spatial realignment on the basis of class, and rapid urbanisation.
>
> (Maré, 2001: 85)

Social experiences are heavily influenced by the social identities we assume. According to Maré(2001) social identity is the way people and groups distinguish themselves and others in social relations. The systematic establishment and significance of similarity and difference are reproduced during social interaction (Jenkins 1996, as cited by Maré 2001:77). Therefore, identities are expressed in everyday life.

Racialization shapes and reinforces the idea of significance in similarity and difference. It creates and allocates people across boundaries (Maré, 2001: 77). According to Maré, stories about the influence of racialization help us make sense of the social world. These stories explain how race continues to recreate itself in social structures and its influence within institutions. Stories tell us about a society where race is a fundamental building block (Maré, 2001: 78).

Apartheid Welkom was a mine of structural violence, exclusion and oppression. Stories of Thabong, both past and present, illuminate the challenges of residents who lack access to resources. However, these stories contrast the prevailing negative perceptions of Thabong. They challenge ideas of abject poverty, desolation and rejection. Acknowledging circumstance, they paint pictures of an intimate and generous community.

Race has an extreme shaping power in Welkom. According to Maré(2001), race categorizes and qualifies people. In a racialised society, Maré proposes that it is impossible to speak or behave except from a position that is already understood (by the self and others) as 'raced'. This author says that people have become so attuned to a racialised world that we unconsciously carry ideas of race with us. Social worlds are heavily laden with racialization; a constant reminder of the ways in which structured inequalities can be perpetuated, even under democracy.In Welkom, we see the effects in how areas continue to be racialised. For instance, Community in Christ Private School, the focus of this study, is often called "skolo sa makgowa". [9]This means it has been reproduced that it is a school that has belonged, continues to belong, and is primarily *for* white people.

Attendance here can challenge definitions of race because when students are assumed to come from a wealthy class background, their race is effectively overlooked. They do not affect the school's

[9] *A school for white people; a school belonging to white people*

identity as “skolo sa makgowa”. Infact, they become part of the “makgowa[10]” the school belongs to or is for.

1.4.1 Racialization in Welkom

Language, specifically English and Afrikaans, play an important role in shaping the experience of Welkom. The ‘right’ English accent, from a black child, has the potential to attract favour from approving adults, or tension from peers. In Welkom, Afrikaans and English are the languages of economic inclusion, therefore the kind of English an individual speaks can influence their social experience significantly.

Carolyn McKinney (2007) explores language’s role in the identity construction of young people in desegregated schools in South Africa. Her interest is in how learners recognize and hierarchize varieties of English, attaching prestige to *white* sounding English. The valuing of English varieties, says McKinney(2007), creates tensions for black learners who, “speak like a white person” and those who don’t. “Coconut[11]” and “snob” are derogatory labels used to describe students who apparently “speak like a white person.”

Her article encourages consideration of the racialization of language and how this translates in the experience of school. Her argument strengthens this report’s view that the social experience of black students in private schools continues to be negatively impacted by an inharmonious world created by reproductions of racialised thinking.

While it has no natural or biological validity, over time race has become a key principle of social organization and identity formation (Omi, Winant 1995, as cited by McKinney, 2007:7). It is a real and influential social construct (McKinney, 2007:7). Hunter brings to our attention the inescapable link between race and class, explaining that especially during apartheid, “to be black was to be poor” (2019: 199). According to Omi and Winant, race is a variable constantly shaped by societal factors (1994: 11). It is reinforced and made significant by how people understand it and how it affects interaction (McKinney, 2007: 7). According to Omi and Winant, racial categories find meaning in how their historical contexts continue to be reproduced in social relations (1994:11). They are formed, transformed, destroyed and reformed through racial formation (Omi and Winant, 1994:11). Racial formation is when social, economic and political forces, “determine the content and importance of

[10] White people; Caucasians
[11] A derogatory term implying one is brown physically but behaves/speaks like a white person.

racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning" (Omi, Winant, 1994: 12). This is seen in how different individuals experience the world in different ways.

Ideologies about race and racialism subject people to a fixed, oppressive racialised order. Race's construction as political and imagined allows us to see its fragility. It forces us to consider the various social and cultural identities that define the person beyond their race. This is why racialization's impact cannot simply be disregarded.

Racialization in South Africa can be traced in how racial categories, "had devastating effects for people, many of which persist in the present" (McKinney, 2007: 7). McKinney aligns herself with Hall in saying that positioning processes in society produce dominant identities of whiteness and subordinate identities of blackness (2007:8). "White is seen as a 'pure' category which still bears considerable weight and a considerable shaping power in society" (Omi, Winant, 1994: 11). Maré's paper questions the 'Illusion of Ordinariness' in asking how, "notions of race inform the structuring of identity…in which some aspects are generally shared while others display the variety that reflects personal components of individual identity" (2001:76). He asks:

> What are the social contexts within which social identities are constructed, confirmed and maintained? What is the process (or processes) through which "an image of similarity, which is the defining characteristic of collective identities is symbolically constructed?" (Jenkins 1996: 127, as quoted by Maré, 2001: 76).

In this chapter I have introduced the landscape of the research. Understanding Welkom's racial tensions and the role of language helps in situating ourselves within the environment. The purpose of this chapter has been to create a foundational framework on which to build our argument, namely that the inharmonious context that is Welkom profoundly influences the day to day lives of black students in private schools.

In the next chapter, I unpack the social experience of students in ComChrist. I look at the effects of labels like "snob" and how they problematize racial categories in showing the complexities of race (McKinney, 2007: 19). I look at how the experiences of students destabilise racial categories and how racial categories continue to be reproduced in the everydayness of students' lives.

The report will then discuss the experiences of school and town for ComChrist students. These chapters will explore the encounters and interactions that had a bearing on participants' day-to-day lives. I look at belonging, discrimination and exclusion – and later, the fragility of racial ideologies.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Social Experience of Students in Town

Chapter One was an introduction into the manifestation of the unresolved tensions of apartheid in Welkom. The place and weight of a racial identity is expressed in how racial ideology continues to dictate how people negotiate space.
It is brought to life by the cheerful *Goeie Middag* [12]in hospitals, pharmacies, bakeries, restaurants, shops and school offices. It is experienced in the signage that speaks to a single populace. It is captured in the microaggressions masked with a giggle. It is perpetuated by the laughs and shrugs that fail to address it immediately.

In this chapter, I will explore the social experience of being a black student and the influence it imposes on identity. Through the perspectives and experiences of my research participants, this chapter discusses the experience of Welkom for students in ComChrist. It unpacks the social limitations belonging or association to a private school encompasses for black students in this context. Acknowledging the weight of uniform, this chapter analyses the relationship between place, identity and belonging by exploring the reception of ComChrist students by public school peers and residents of Welkom. I then discuss the manner in which these interactions reflexively shape identity and social standing.

The discussions in this chapter will reinforce the finding that an inharmonious environment influences different facets of a black student's social experience to a great extent. The questions and discussions around identity and lived experience emphasise the argument that the discordant experience of students, even beyond the gate, has a substantial impact on them.

2.1 Uniform Rules

I think we downplay how confusing it could be for a child. That back and forth thing of having to remember :

You have to be grateful

You have to be grateful

You have to be grateful

Okay, cool cool cool. I have to be grateful, cool cool cool.

But at the same time it made it really difficult to talk about the struggles of being a black child that's there…

- (DIKELEDI TSAME 2021)[13]

[12] Good Afternoon in Afrikaans
[13] Participant 3: Interviewed 6 August 2021. Matriculated 2013. Day Scholar.

Rules around the wearing of uniforms on and off school grounds were straightforward: be neat. For girls this meant that the front skirt length should be a four finger distance from one's bended knee[14]. The Four-Finger rule failed to consider different body shapes because girls with fuller hips, behinds and thighs were constantly punished for their rear skirt length. What was visibly four fingers above the knee at the front was several fingers more at the back.

An ironed, white shirt with an embroided badge is always to be tucked into a pleated, white, maroon and black checkered skirt. White folded socks, not rolled. Black, preferably polished, school shoes. During winter, ties are to be worn with a school blazer. Skirts may be worn with black stockings, not sheer; or, girls' maroon school trousers. Hair must always be tied neatly and out of the face. Fringes should rest a finger above the eyebrows. No drastic hair colour change, only one shade darker or lighter than one's own hair allowed. No afros. No thick braids. No curly extensions or braids. No bald head. No make-up, only skin tone foundation. Not more than two earrings, one on each ear, on the lowest hole in the earlobe. Nails should not be visible over fingertips and, only clear nail polish allowed.

For the boys this meant ironed, grey school trousers. A black belt with a width of not more than 5 centimetres and an ironed, tucked-in white school shirt. Blazers should always be worn with ties. School jerseys are not to be rolled up at the sleeves. No dreads or long hair. No braids or cornrows. Hair should be level all around one's head therefore no stylish haircuts. No bald head. Beards are to be shaven with an exception for the Muslim-Indian community. No earrings.

When in Physical Education (P.E) attire, only black, white or navy blue tennis shoes allowed. Tattoos and body piercings are to be completely covered by school uniform.

In public, uniform was to be neat. Students were expected to be presentable in town. Shirts were to remain tucked-in and hair out of the face. The school insisted that students are neat in town because they encouraged students' pride in being a ComChrist student. Teachers and staff would often say that a student's appearance and conduct are a reflection of the school.

The school ensured students knew that its reputation was in their hands. In town, students in uniform were to only speak English. If students were caught by staff speaking a different language, they would be punished the following day. Students were not to be disorderly or disobedient in public; if found out, they would be disciplined. Students from the boarding house were to always wear their P.E

[14] The Four Finger skirt length rule was conducted each term to verify that girls' skirts were the correct and appropriate length.

[15]shirts or full school uniform when in town. On school grounds, the expectation was neatness, punctuality and English.
Students would contest uniform and conduct rules in direct and indirect ways. Direct contestation of school uniform would perhaps be a student wearing the incorrect, yet stylish, sports shoe with their P.E uniform. Walking in and off the school premises with an untucked shirt or loose hair; or perhaps, speaking any language but English while in school uniform.

Indirect contestation could look like various entangled things. It could be going to school with a cleanly shaven bald head because of a cultural or traditional practice upheld in one's family[16]. It could be being caught with an unintentionally untucked shirt. Or, it could be wearing a skirt whose seam sits four fingers above the knee in the front, and several fingers more at the back.

If rules were not upheld, students would either attend a Friday afternoon detention session or receive a Demerit slip. A demerit slip is a paper report detailing a student's transgression. To ensure that parents are aware of the offence, they would be required to sign the slip, then students would return slips to the teacher the following day. A certain number of demerits would result in a disciplinary hearing, which could be followed by suspension or expulsion.

2.1.1 My Uniform and Me

In Chapter One, I explored the numerous ways in which Welkom, the place, and Welkom, the community, reproduce, re-enact and refurbish racialised ideals and racism. Understanding the community allows us to better explore the experience of ComChrist students.

As emphasized, there are only two private schools in the city of Welkom. One sits in a quiet residential area. The other is more central, in town, adjacent to a police station and the mall.

> "I felt safe at school. Like, inside the school because it sometimes felt like you were not supposed to be anywhere but in the *safe* space that was our school. But, only because being in public in uniform felt..."

The experience of town in uniform has been described, by different participants, as *unpleasant, uncomfortable* and *complicated.* Dikeledi, a 2013 alumnae, continues:

> "It almost felt like… no, it did feel like bana ba ComChrist [17]weren't supposed to be there [in town]. Like, it's better if you just stayed at school, do your extra-curriculars; do that whole routine, hopefully

[15] Physical Education
[16] Some students would shave their heads after a death in the family. Without a guardian's letter to explain the change in hairstyle, this would be a punishable violation of the uniform code.
[17] Students from ComChrist

> be fetched on the premises just so that you don't have to go through that whole thing of meeting people from other schools. I don't know, maybe ke [18]because of the lack of private schools in Welkom."

Dikeledi's recollection of being in town is mirrored by many participants. Her face displays the discomfort she once felt as a result of being associated to the school as a black child. Assumptions tied to the uniform and badge translated into students being harassed, bullied or rejected by peers from other schools. Having to negotiate what safety is and how it can be accessed in an activity as simple as walking to the taxi rank, became an intentional act of mapping out how to navigate town, physically and behaviourally.

A walk through town could unfold in one of many ways. Lufuno[19], a 2015 alumna, describes her daily walk home from school as unsettling because of how peers would arbitrarily ask her for money and reference her uniform. She talks about some of the comments she encountered, like *'all education is the same'* and that expensive fees are a waste of money. Unkind and unfounded comments that often disrupted her commute.

Sometimes, a walk through town was easy. Security officers, bank tellers, shop owners and adults in town would take an immediate liking to students in uniform. "Le bua Sekgowa *feela*[20]?" and, "how much are your fees?" casually being snuck into conversations, coupled with a comment on good conduct.

Lufuno paints a picture of how the assumption of wealth made her experience uncomfortable. "Do you understand that we'd be bullied for coins because apparently *re na le tjhelete* [21]?". Lufuno draws us to the socioeconomic expectation attached to her schooling and the expectation it had on her identity. Her association to the school made her experience of town uncomfortable because of the expectation placed on her. When she did not or could not meet the expectations, Lufuno says she would be ridiculed while they[22] go about their day.

Dipuo[23] is a former boarding house student. In this excerpt, she shows how racialised ideals are expressed even in language.

> "…we didn't have a choice, we had to wear something that shows we're from the school. Most times, I didn't even want to go to town because other kids would look at you and start speaking vernac[24] as if

[18] Maybe it's…
[19] Participant 5: Interviewed 20 August 2021. Matriculated in 2015.
[20] Do you *only* speak English?
[21] Apparently we have money
[22] Disapproving peers from other schools; usually public
[23] Participant 4: Interviewed 19 August 2021. Matriculated in 2015. A boarding house student originally from North West.
[24] Vernacular

you can't understand what they're saying. And every time we went to town, we'd be called snobs. Every single time. Right up to matric. We didn't even have to say anything and we'd be told *re ntsha sekgowa ka dinko*[25]. The girls were the worst. It really wasn't cute."

The notion of "ho ntsha sekgowa ka dinko" essentially means fluency in English. It is often used with a derogatory intention to embarrass or humiliate the speaker. It emphasizes that the speaker sounds like an English first language speaker while implying that they should not. It suggests that a speaker's knowledge of English translates to an inability to speak vernacular in the same manner, with the same command. The literal meaning of the phrase is speaking or expelling English from one's nose – like something that belongs to you and easily flows out. It implies that the speaker has a firm and controlled grasp of the language. However, this phrase also speaks to the accent in which the English language is spoken. The infamous "hong hong hong" [26]remark made by Willie Madisha in parliament to Naledi Pandor in 2017 exemplifies this judgemental attitude.

Similar to Dipuo's experience is Dikeledi's memory of her daily commute home. Her recollection of a trip to the taxi rank illuminates the role of identity in her own navigation of a discordant world. She brings to our attention the conflict and tensions of managing multiple identities in an activity as simple as taking a taxi home.

> It genuinely felt like you weren't supposed to be there.
>
> It was better if I was walking with my friends, honestly. Alone? You'd get looks like 'HOW are YOU walking back home?' and 'o batlang ka taxing o kena ComChrist? ' (what are you doing in a taxi; you're in ComChrist).
>
> I took a taxi home all of high school and I still couldn't get used to being in one ka uniform because you'd hear people laughing here (*she gestures behind her right ear*). And, they'd laugh really loudly…and you just wouldn't know… like, are they laughing at me?
>
> It didn't feel like I belonged out there. But it didn't feel like I really belonged at school either.
>
> Interview with Dikeledi 2021

The identities we grapple with here are: the developing identity of Dikeledi, her racialised identity and her expected identity as a wealthy student from ComChrist, similar to Lufuno's experience. The pressures and expectancy to meet expectations frustrated her reality. Town became unpleasant because peers would find creative ways to exclude ComChrist students based on arbitrary conditions.

[25] To speak English fluently

[26] In 2017, Willie Madisha made this comment to Naledi Pandor, referencing her accent and delivery of English during a heated parliamentary proceeding.

2.1.2 Policies and Policing Uniform

Uniform policies are often faced with mixed feelings of approval and disproval (Reed, 2011 : 4). There are varying reasons for the approval of uniform policies. They are believed to create better, less distracting learning environments and, they promote equity on school grounds (Reed, 2011). While uniform policies make great considerations for life in the safety and security of the school premises, they seldom make considerations for life outside.

For many black and especially female students, being in and around town after school, in uniform, became a daunting experience. "You can't miss our uniform. Hape [27]Welkom is small, we all know each other's uniforms." (Dikeledi)

The experience of town is significant as it provides a clearer image of the kinds of tensions weathered as a young teenager. A walk through town, or the mall, was an inevitable activity for most students. Day scholars would walk to town for various reasons. Most times the walk was part of their commute home. Boarding House students would frequent town for essential errand runs and for the occasional take away.

From the short excerpts above, it is clear that town was an unfavourable environment for a black private school student. Peers attending public schools would either make remarks about money, education, or make inferences related to language ability. Town and the feelings that would arise in that space speak to an extremely important part of the social experience of being a black elite student in Welkom.

In her paper detailing 'The Influence of a Mandatory School Uniform Policy', Sharon Pate (1999) begins by expressing the importance of clothing as a tool people use to gather information about one another. She asserts that there is a need to belong which is made accessible through clothing – especially for school children (Pate, 1999: 2). A school uniform should signify to school officials, parents and the community an environment where achievement, order and safety are priorities (Holloman, 1995 as cited by Pate, 1999: 2). The belief that is held is that a school uniform creates a distance from distracting identities and instead encourages students to base their identities on their school performance (Pate, 1999).

[27] Also

In the context of Welkom, Lufuno illuminates how the school environment encouraged and preferred one identity – the elite school child that speaks English well and behaves ideally [28]– over the representation of the more complex and therefore more complete identity of pupils. An identity inclusive of a more rounded perception of self that considers background and community.

School uniforms serves as a secondary means of claiming belonging to the school community, the first being paying to be part of the community through school fees. The badge, an identifier of the community one belongs to, becomes an important symbol of distinction. A mark of recognition. Alisson Happel (2013) writes about the manner in which uniforms tend to contribute to class distinctions, "since they signify the economic resources and aspirations of the [parent/guardian]" (Happel, 2013: 3). Happel's assertion of the ways in which the wearing of uniform contributes to class distinctions is brought to life by accounts shared by Dikeledi, Dipuo and especially Lufuno.

Uniform identification, especially in a town as compact as Welkom, is inescapable. Therefore, the projections of wealth and the suggestions of being a snob were and are often a reality of students. Happel's theory is realized by the experience of many of the alumnae who graciously shared their stories. Michael[29], a member of the Muslim-Indian community in Welkom – a gated community which, in Michael's words, "prefers to keep to themselves" - also expressed a level of discomfort in walking through town in uniform. "We'd take off our blazers and ties because at least as guys, if you're in an unmarked white shirt and grey pants – no one really knows where you're from."

He laughs and I wonder if there is a connection between escaping identification and liberty. The experience of the girls makes me consider it a possibility.

Michael's experience differed significantly from the experiences of the black students. He did not recall being bullied, abused or picked on for being in uniform. Instead, he shares, "I just wanted to feel free in town because we were so easily recognized and people knew how to report us to the school. Everyone knew who to call at ComChrist." Michael saying *everyone knew who to call* relates to the distance between the school and the mall and the relationships between staff and people working in the mall and around town.

The intriguing part of Michael's reflection is the intentionality behind not wanting to be associated to the school. That association was sometimes too heavy to bear or, just tedious and unwelcome.

[28] In his book, Hunter accounts for this in expressing that schools today sell symbolic attributes; that the schooling market today allows certain groups to buy prestige which is closely associated with configurations of whiteness (Hunter, 2019: 198)

[29] Participant 2: Interviewed 4 August 2021. Matriculated 2014. Day scholar.

His mention of freedom and not wanting recognition in relation to possibly being reported for misconduct or misbehaving in town amplifies the kinds of expectations that came with being in uniform.

Asante[30] weaves together the experience of uniform in town by showing how ComChrist students would be treated by their own teachers when 'found', and by peers and students from public schools. The following excerpt also shows how language continues to reproduce the racialization of the speaker:

> The ComChrist community and the Welkom community played a huge role in our perception of what that school was. You couldn't even walk to Woolworths without looking proper nkare ke hoseng[31]. And we always had to speak English because '*you're in uniform*, *why you speaking that foreign language'* (she mimics comments from teachers). We'd even get looks from people and other kids like, "ba jwalo hampe ba ComChrist; ba nahana ba betere" because re dula re kgumsha[32]. And like, aa mahn[33]. We were bullied hle. Bullied at school, in school and by Welkom.
>
> Interview with Asante 2021

School uniforms are an important variable in the multiple and conflicting identities black private students wrestle through. The uniform first inscribes an identity of its own onto the student – that they attend ComChrist. The uniform itself has requirements of conduct and appearance. The uniform, now a symbol in the context of town, invites socioeconomic assumptions and conclusions found in the experience of Lufuno where she recalls being harassed for "R2s and R5s". The uniform also invites comments and thinking that reveals how quickly black students are racialised because of their affiliation to the school.

While it received an unpleasant reception from students from other schools, the ComChrist uniform had unique benefits in town. Adults and elderly people were tolerant and pleasant to students. They imagined them as well-behaved and good. They trusted them enough not to follow them in shops and would instead ask them a question or two about the school.

Chapter three looks at the experience of students at school. It illuminates the difference between the expectation of ComChrist School by residents of Welkom, and students' experience of it.

[30] Participant 6: 8.3 Group Interview 20 August 2021. Matriculated 2015. Day Scholar.
[31] Like it is still morning
[32] "They are like that, students from ComChrist; they think they are better" because we are always speaking English
[33] No, man

CHAPTER THREE:

The Social Experience of Students at School

I find it sad that they did that to us without even knowing us. We were thirteen year olds in grade eight. We were fresh to the high school. They literally looked at our names and decided 'yah, these people – just by the sounds of their names – don't deserve to be put in a top position'. Because I ***genuinely*** *refuse to believe that the other grade eight students beat our grade seven marks. And they'd always say it's because of surnames and I'm like, you're lying because my friend ke[34] Lerato Serithi and I'm Asante Molefe and she's in eight-two. M comes before S, so you're lying. That's not what it is.*

And a lot of eight-threes were prefects in the primary.

So, how do we go from being leaders in the primary school to rejects in the high school?

(Group Interview with Asante, Tŝimologo[35] and Tsebo Johnson)[36]

I remember my first day in grade eight. The day I was allocated a register classroom[37]. I had just returned to Welkom and had missed the first week of grade 8. I was not new to the school but I was new to the high school. Eight-three was seated in class, being taught Economic and Management Sciences (EMS).

I am not sure when I noticed, but I know it was not an immediate realization. All I saw were familiar faces trying to memorize the difference between debits and credits. I was just excitement to finally be back at school, back with my friends.

Very soon, murmurs and generalizations about eight-three began. Teachers, staff and pupils had finally caught on that there is a grade eight register class that comprised only of black students. Eight-three was not less important than 8.1 or 8.2; however, once it became racialised, an imagined hierarchy evolved. Teachers and pupils normalized the view that eight-three was troublesome before most of us could establish our identities in the high school. Teachers would quickly become hostile and unpleasant, often saying that we would be better off in Thabong. Peers in other classes often made jokes, structured by race, about the potential of a low academic class average. And eight-three eventually modelled a similar behaviour to that which had been given to us. Outspoken and intolerant of discrimination or hostility. Rebellious in the face of prejudice. And while academically strong in other areas, poor in our performance of math.

[34] My friend is Lerato…
[35] Participant 7 : 8.3 Group Interview 20 August 2021. Matriculated in 2015. Boarding house student.
[36] Participant 8: 8.3 Group Interview 20 August 2021. Matriculated in 2015. Day Scholar.
[37] An administrative class where students' attendance and personal documents are handled and recorded.

This section continues with an excerpt from a group interview with Tŝimologo, Asante and Tsebo. The excerpt is a record of how the conversation unfolded when Tŝimologo eagerly asked to respond first to a question I had asked: How was your experience of school as a student in eight-three. The chapter later discusses how identity is influenced in interaction, and the ineffectivity of contact-theory as a transformative tool to combat racism.

3.1 Eight-Three

Tŝimologo, a wide-smiled, brown-eyed, jovial, Botswana-born ComChrist alumna, details her experience. Her account encompasses some of the troubles and trials of being sorted into the only ever fully black register class the school had ever had (up to 2015 when we left). Tŝimologo's account journeyed her former classmates through hilarious memories, moments that would only be responded to with a sigh, and at times, grave silences. Her experience touches on racialization, the conflicts of identity and the power of acceptance and feelings of belonging. The experience of these four[38] colleagues provides a picture of how contact alone could never be an adequate way to resolve racial conflict. Instead contact creates a breeding ground for racial ideologies to reinforce themselves and to be acted upon.

In her gold and black cornrows, a fitted, black, cotton turtleneck and an infectious smile, Tŝimologo laughs into the camera as she finds the words to begin her recollection of what it felt like to be a student in the infamous grade eight-three class of 2011 at Community in Christ Private School. This excerpt is comprised of direct quotes from Tŝimologo's reflection.

Tŝimologo: Yhoooo! (*she lists on her fingers)*

> We were the dumb class. We were the black class – as if there weren't black students in other classes (*she rolls her eyes).* We were the slow class. Eight-one and eight-two got better teachers. It's like we were the rejects of grade eight and I didn't understand it. I'm like, we're all paying the same school fees. We're all wearing the same uniform. We're all clearly smart enough to be in grade eight. So, why are we the rejects of this whole group? We wrote entrance [exams] [39]and we all passed it that's why we're all here. So, why are we treated…*(the laughs and added comments from colleagues drown her out).*

[38] Moses (Participant 9) is the fourth 8.3 colleague. He requested a one-on-one interview because he could not attend the group interview.

[39] Admission tests weighing academic abilities of students against the standard of the school

I hated it and I had a huge problem with it because I think the way we were treated is also a big reason that stifled my progress in math. *(laughs and adds, "bona*[40] *we even use words like 'stifled' now" while our colleagues agree with her Math comment.)*

My attitude towards math, coming out of eight-three, was ruined because of the way we were treated as a class. We were treated as rejects. Even our peers would treat us like, 'ah, you guys can't perform as great as us. And yes, maybe it would be a teasing thing amongst us black friends, but it went past "it's a joke" to being serious now. It was like, 'you guys are in eight-three, rona we're better; you guys are…LOL[41], heh, heh; do you guys even focus…?' And it's like, are we all not passing? Are we not all in grade eight? It made you even feel like going to break you are at a certain level and everyone else in grade eight is here *(she portrays an imbalance with her hands).* And now you have to fight for your stance even at break. You have to fight for your stance as an academic.

Because of that, I used to think, one: math was not my thing. [Be]cause everyone was telling me we are slow as a class; we are a dumb class. So already when I'm struggling – if everybody else is giving me that energy, plus the staff - if I'm struggling I didn't see it as, 'I just need to spend more time' or 'this is just a tricky section'. I saw it as, 'they are right. I'm dumb when it comes to math. I'm not a math student'.

When Tŝimologo says this, Tsebo and Asante talk about being thirteen and impressionable. They briefly discuss being young and feeling unwanted and how it influenced their experience of school altogether.

I[42] look back and I'm mad at the teachers that they let that happen among staff. They let that run among staff. They're supposed to be teaching us to be good students but even amongst you, you're treating us as 'less than'. Already the attitude of allocating us teachers is already less than. We complain about a teacher and it's not taken seriously because we're from eight-three and we don't know what we're saying. And it's like…that's not what that is, this is just a terrible teacher. Like, there's nothing to hide, this is just a bad teacher…

And funny thing is, you know after we moved to grade ten – I'm now skipping ahead but, - that attitude followed us. Because we then got jumbled up, and people got mad they got put in the same classes as an eight-three student or a nine-three student. And I'm like, 'why you pressed[43], brah?' *(laughter).* 'I was like, relax.' It's like now they have leprosy [be]cause they're in class with us. Like, it's just eight-three; it's not that deep.

[40] "look we even use…"
[41] Us … "laugh out loud" pronounced Lol
[42] Tŝimologo continues
[43] Upset

The colleagues momentarily reminisce on how being in classes with students formerly in eight-one and eight-two was challenging. They mention that the labels attached to eight-three followed them into different grades as individuals, further complicating the conflicted experience of school.

> It was so annoying, yho. That thing was problematic. I look back and I'm like, 'you guys [the school and peers] were problematic'.
> I really feel that a lot of students in eight-three had the potential to be academically better performing students. But because of the environment we were in and how we were treated by peers and teachers, you already just limited yourself. You couldn't think past being a 50[%] student or a 60 [%] student [be]cause, 'surely I'm in eight-three and that's all I'm capable of doing'.

She goes on to explain that being placed in a grade 10 math class with a good teacher disrupted what she had believed about herself as a math student.

> I told my parents I'm doing Math Lit and they were like, 'you're crazy'. And I was like 'no. I'm doing math lit. I'm dumb'.
> And you know then, they[the school] did that separation thing of top classes and a low class[44] and I was like, 'I'm going to the low class. I already know what's happening.' I already prepared myself that that was happening and I don't know where, I don't know how, I still think today it was an error but an error that worked to my favour that I was in Mrs.Holt's [45]class. Because then for the first time I was in an environment where they were treating me as, 'you *have* to and you *can* perform better.' Not you can't. And for the first time I realized I'm actually good at math, it was just the environment we were in. And imagine how many people could have passed math and gotten into like medicine or whatever if you were just treated like you *can* do math.

Asante and Tsebo add their experiences about the extent to which their perceptions about math inhibited their university ambitions. Asante shares that her math marks created tension at home because she had aspirations of becoming a medical doctor and her parents expected it of her. Low academic marks furthered the tension of discordance as relationships between students and parents also became conflicted because, "You can't tell your mom it's a teacher's fault"(Asante). They reflect on the regret and pain of having to reroute their life plans to fit their 'inability' to do math.

The conversation goes onto a tangent about an eight-three student, who in the first few weeks of grade eight was removed from eight-three and placed into a different class. The explanation the student had provided was that her father requested a 'better class' for her. Asante, Tsebo and

[44] Math and English classes were separated into 3, grade-based classes.
[45] Pseudonym for the top, 80%-100% Math class teacher.

Tŝimologo reflect on the parent's appeal and how it reinforced the beliefs the school community held about eight-three, that they were an ill-mannered and slow class.

They also briefly touch on having to use their friends' books, from other grade eight math classes, for preparation during tests and exams.

In his reflection, Tsebo Johnson (TJ) talks about the toxicity that existed when with friends. Tsebo explains that while he was in grade eight-three, because he constantly spoke English and played many sports, he realized that the white students and teachers liked him better as an individual. The toxicity he speaks about lies in how he witnessed the way in which his lone performance of 'black' was welcomed and received differently than it was when with eight-three classmates. He explains that while the racist remarks would come in at random times during lunch break times, it would happen less than when he is in a classroom with colleagues.

On the relationship eight-three students had with one another, and the way students from this class were received by the broader school community, Tŝimologo says:

> I felt like we were a family…We were a family and I loved it. Even when people said discriminatory things to us, we held each other down...

(Asante reflects on an incident where the Deputy Head of the school called eight-three aside and told the girls not to want to be remembered as "little bitches" [46])

> I[47] remember that day and I remember walking away with the group feeling like, one, 'how dare she say that about us!' and two, 'what is she even talking about?' Because people don't like us, we only attend to each other. So what is she talking about? Who are we mistreating if we only chill with each other?
>
> And then aside and receiving it as just Tŝimologo, just me. I felt so misunderstood. I was so angry. I remember crying about it because I was like, 'in what world would anybody think I'm rude or can be called a bitch. Like, I'm so nice with everyone, even people who are misrepresenting me or saying my name wrong. I'm so nice to everyone… I started thinking that there were people who were just jealous of our connection or our harmony as a group because I just didn't understand.

Asante corroborates Tŝimologo's sentiments. She talks about the way eight-three students were treated as outcasts by peers and the school, and how this exclusion made eight-three students insulate within themselves and rebel against the school community.

[46] In the first term of grade eight, the girls from eight-three were called out of an assembly by the deputy head of the school. It was in reference to behaviour and attitude towards teachers, and language use in class. She had told the girls not to want to be remembered as "little bitches".

[47] Tŝimologo

In closing, our former colleagues reminisce on the good and the bad that came as a result of being part of eight three. Tsebo Johnson, Asante and Tŝimologo share final memories about their appreciation of the relationships between classmates, and the frustrations of moving beyond the eight-three identity past grade eight.

Tŝimologo concludes the conversation with a reflection on how her interactions with teachers and students influenced her performance of identity:

> I've always felt the need to prove myself in other settings and to other people. Because I wanted to prove myself to other people in eight-one and eight-two that, 'I can fit in there. I can be that smart even though I'm from here and you want to reject me.' It would come out in very little things. Like, I wouldn't be very quick to call out racist acts or whatever because I wanted to show them that, 'I can fit in with your friend group if I wanted to. You can count me as part of a friend because I can if I want to. Don't cancel me out.'
>
> In terms of hair and how black girls were always called out for afros and what have you… I was telling a friend the other day that for the longest time I was scared to grow out an afro [at school] because of the way I saw black girls treated. Not that I didn't think afros were pretty. I felt they were. But because they were called out so much and they always went through so much, I conditioned myself that it won't look good on me. And I can't do it because then I'm not going to fit into where I'm trying to prove I can if I want to.
>
> So I just never did it…
>
> I only got comfortable with my hair now in varsity. Imagine! How many years later? And not even in first year… I only became comfortable with it in third year. So, that's how it affected me… ya.
>
> And in terms of trying to fit in with white people and that, 'I can if I want to, don't cancel me out just [be]cause I'm black. I can act this way; I can like these things.' I found myself very quick to force myself to like certain things or disregard certain things so that people can see that 'I **can** be in these circles if I want to. Don't disregard me. I'm going to show you that I can.' And obviously as a result I let quite big things slip which was not okay. Now that I look back, I'm like, 'yho! I let people disrespect me like that?' But then I didn't see it. Then I was like, 'I'm just showing these people that even me I can.' Like, it wasn't a problem. […] but the moment you stand up for Asante, or Khanyi or whoever - people are minusing your points. There's not even any points but they're minusing your worth. […] Now I can't express that I'm your friend because I won't be given any opportunities… (shakes her head) yho the double life we lived at that early age!
>
> There was no need for us to live like this as kids.
>
> \- Tŝimologo, 2021

Her final words linger and there is a momentary silence.

Identity research investigates the complex relationship between social structure and human agency (Norton, 2010). Looking at identity allows researchers to explore the actions and investments of

human agents, while accounting for race, class, gender and other structural issues. Identity research also seeks a better understanding of how power functions in a society. (Norton, 2010: 352). Looking at power enables us to appreciate how it influences identity construction.

Tŝimologo's identity conflictions arose from the imagined communities and possibilities language and belonging create. Acceptance matters when it dictates opportunity and inclusion. For Tŝimologo, it became important to show white students and staff that she too belongs in the imagined community she had associated them to; the privileges she had seen them enjoy. Her desire to be included, according to Norton, is because of the range of possibilities and opportunities she had imagined and the favour she had seen that community enjoy. Her interest created an imagined identity which she invested in – *'I can'* - because of her perception of what might result from joining that community.

The group interview comes to a close with our former eight-three colleagues reflecting on this idea of a 'double-life'. They discuss the negative impact it had on friendships and relationships with other students. They also discuss the impact it had on their own perceptions of self, with Tŝimologo showing how it influenced her relationship with her hair.

The interview gave a glimpse of the frictional experience of these private school students. The interview also revealed the different layers that affect the social experience of private school for black students. First it touched on the relationships between peers, staff and parents and how this affected their experience of being students. It showed how their identities were constantly in a state of flux and reinvention prompted by a need to belong. Lastly, it showed the conflict of navigating one's identity in an exclusionary environment. As I discuss below, their experience personifies contact theory's ineffectiveness.

3.2 Place, Belonging, Identity

Dixon and Durrheim (2004) examine the shaping power of place and feelings of belonging. Belonging is intensely personal as it relates to one's experiences, relationships and memories (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004). Belonging is therefore a group response, "inflected to its core by political struggles over space and place" (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004: 459). To feel at home requires the feeling of security in a place, and feeling welcome and accepted. Dixon and Durrheim explain that feeling comfortable in a place can lead to an interest in the adoption of cultures and norms of the people in that environment or community.

Place identity is defined as being, "forged around a deep-seated familiarity with the environment, a sense of bodily, sensuous, social and autobiographic 'insidedness' that arises as a result of individual's

habituation to their physical surroundings" (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 457). The concept of being "in place" focuses our attention on how individuals tend to construct a sense of self through their intentional activity of attributing place meanings and value (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 457). This is evidenced by how ComChrist staff placed great value on being a high-ranking private school; how school officials imbue the uniform with meaning and significance; and, how the broader community of Welkom reproduces these ideals. The imagined significance of the physical environment of the school inflates the value of the space to become one where goals of self-coherence, self-worth and self-expression can be pursued (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 458). These authors bring our attention to the meaningfulness of place to social actors, although those meanings are not always homogenous.

Instead of treating material environments as backgrounds to social life, spaces are used by agents as, "landscapes of meaning within which individuals and groups establish rich social and psychological connections" and, if I may add, elevated social standing (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 458).
However, the consequence of these actions is summed up in the conflict Dikeledi highlights, that "*Okay, cool cool cool. I have to be grateful, cool cool cool. But at the same time it made it really difficult to talk about the struggles of being a black child that's there…"*

When one is removed from the assumed safety of place, or from the environment which constructed and supports a certain identity and behaviour of self, the displacement has an ability to undermine the individual's 'insidedness' (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 459). The disruption requires a reconfiguration of identity. The different social environments students engage make reconfiguration a norm.

However, what happens if this 'insidedness' is conditional or removed in the place of safety? What if belonging is completely absent outside the place of safety because of a uniform? What happens if the place influences the rejection of the current identity and assumes or imposes another? If the place has the potential to shape interaction between groups, does the place not have the potential to reinforce the oppression of unwanted identities or identities that do not conform or meet the expectation of the place?

A place is a platform for interaction. According to these authors it,

> maintains systems of ethnic and racial classification. [Places] normalize practices of division; they preserve sectional interest and distributive inequalities; they justify discriminatory ways of appropriating and regulating social space (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 459).

This is evidenced by how Lufuno makes the point that students from the school would regard themselves as superior because of the ingrained belief that they were in fact superior [48](we will discuss this in the next chapter). While being devalued in the school, Lufuno says she became conditioned to devalue students from other schools and people from Thabong, "*yet most of us took a taxi from Thabong just to get to school. Then we're told not to laugh like we're in a shebeen in Thabong, or if we want to speak Sotho, we should go to a school in Thabong*[49]".

3.2.1 Interaction and Place

Contact Theory suggests that under optimal conditions, contact between antagonistic social groups will reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations (Erasmus, 2010: 388). Dixon and Durrheim (2004), in their work on desegregation and the transformation of space, specifically critique the solution that contact theory proposes to overcome racial prejudice. They argue that desegregation in South Africa is an important consideration in the understanding of transformation of space. It is also an important determinant of attitudes and behaviours that find their expression through contact (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 455). That said, they oppose the suggestion that "regular interaction between groups tends to reduce prejudice" and that making contact is a precondition for a more tolerant society (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 455).

From the present study and through first-hand experience of Welkom, it is safe to agree with this critique. Regular contact between students from ComChrist and the broader community of Welkom seemingly continues to leave students feeling marginalized. Moreover, regular contact between black students and staff – which is currently made up of a majority of white teachers and two black teachers[50], has not changed the nature in which teachers treat and respond to black students.

For transformation, Dixon and Durrheim suggest that interaction between the different groups of people should be cooperative, institutionally supported, and focused towards the achievement of common goals (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 455).

Regular contact in Welkom is inevitable and frequent because of its quaint size and diverse population. It is intimate and small enough for people to constantly come into contact with one another. In the case of Community in Christ Private School, there is constant interaction between

[48] Students from ComChrist
[49] Thabong is Welkom's location. Students in many schools in Thabong are not required to converse in English outside of the classroom or beyond the gates.
[50] In 2015, the school only had two black teachers. The Sesotho teacher and an EMS teacher. The rest of the teaching staff was white.

teachers and the diverse pool of students yet not much tolerance or respect, as explained above. To this point, Dixon and Durrheim express the view that success can only be achieved if there is a mutuality and not "superficial, instrumental or hierarchical exchanges" (2004: 456). The kind of contact that is in direct opposition to the kind the participants of this study experienced at school, in town and with teachers.

Superficial acceptance and tolerance of desegregation breeds alternative forms of segregation (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 456). Instead of reconciliation, these alternative models of segregation are seen through "individual and collective preferences about where to live, where to shop, where to work, and where to send children to school" (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 456). "The rise of gated communities", the ones Michael talks about when expressing how his own Muslim-Indian community prefers to '*keep to themselves',* all model these alternative forms of racialization (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 456). However, the possibility of new challenges should be taken under consideration as, "even when such optimal conditions are present, desegregation may invoke concerns over the loss of group distinctiveness, producing anxiety, tension and reassertion of intergroup boundaries" (Dixon, Durrheim 2004: 456). The environment of contact and the places of contact are instrumental in the ways in which they either enable or constrain interaction (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 457). In treating the environment as a behavioural setting that inhibits or encourages interaction, researchers overlook the symbolic meaning environments come to have. They say that researchers have failed to,

> acknowledge how people invest everyday environments with richly symbolic, aesthetic, moral, and above all, identity-relevant meanings. By implication, they have disregarded how processes of desegregation, in altering the human geography of everyday relations, may be construed as undermining both the character of places and the forms of human subjectivity they sustain.
>
> (Dixon, Durrheim, 2004: 457)

3.2.2 Contact Theory

Two decades of life have shown the various ways in which I am constantly socialised into race even before I am able to introduce my name. The communities I have been raised in and the schools I attended reinforced this identification with race. Sometimes with subtlety, often not. It took a few years to come to the realization that my Black presented itself as something bigger than my identity. My Black was louder than my woman. My Black held more weight than my age. My Black was often seen before I was. Its apparent obviousness in visibility was enough for my Black to always assume centre stage, and somehow my experiences remained anchored to it. A determinant of experience, even in this democratic South Africa. As a student inside the premises of ComChrist, my Black was undeniable. However, a walk through town in my ComChrist uniform would expose the conflicts of what being Black is.

The context of Welkom provides an environment where racialised ideals are constantly reinforced and reinvented through interracial relations. Zimitri Erasmus, in 'Contact Theory: Too Timid for "Race" and Racism', argues that contact theory is not a transformative antiracist strategy. Instead, Erasmus emphasizes that contact theory ignores the lived realities of individuals in hypothesizing that mere contact is enough to transform the degree to which race influences the everyday lives of South African citizens.

Her position is that contact theory ignores the effects of a racialised world on individual lives. Erasmus argues that among its other limitations, contact theory approaches race as given, homogenous and stable instead of as a social, political and imagined construct (2010: 387). The major flaw in a predefined construct of race is that it looks past current contemporary intersections of race and class, reclassifying middle class and wealthy black South Africans as 'culturally white' (Erasmus, 2010: 390). In the context of schools, this classification is brought to life by labels such as 'snob' or 'coconut'. To ignore the various ways race is refigured is to make it objectively visible.

For this reason, Erasmus sees contact theory as primarily concerned with improving racialised intergroup relations without fully exploring or discussing the influence, impact and effects of a world structured around race. Interracial contact often triggers conflict. Contact is not seen as a space of learning and transformation, it instead reveals the fragility of race, the influence of racialization and "shows that racism(s) have become normalized, often rendering them ingrained and hidden" (Erasmus, 2010: 389).

The lived realities and participant accounts that I have presented echo the critique made by Erasmus. Contact theory does no more than document what interracial relations look like and could become, instead of focusing on what interracial contact feels like by listening to the experiences of people. The current study looks at the nature in which racialised ideals find their expression in the social lives of black students through assumptions that private school students come from wealthy families. The empirical data included in this section exposes the fragility of the racial construction of Black and the ways in which its changing meanings influence the navigation of life in Welkom. The research illuminates the limitations of contact theory as a resolution. Ultimately, because racism itself is not static, homogenous or unchanging, there can be no single strategy against, what Erasmus, borrowing from Paul Gilroy, terms, "the stubborn mutations of race" (Gilroy 2004, as cited by Erasmus 2010: 389; 2010: 395).

The critiques on contact theory by Erasmus, Dixon and Durrheim reveal its inability to remedy the impact of racial ideology and a racialised world. Their considerations show the extent to which a

personal exploration of an individual's life could reveal the manner in which race affects their reality. Material environments serve as more than mere spaces for activities. These environments are deeply embedded with ideas and beliefs which influence the negotiations of self, navigation of relationships and the navigation of self between spaces.

Drawing insight from Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, the next chapter will discuss the relationship between place and self. It will draw on the empirical data reported in the above sections.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Habitus & Identity

"Have you noticed like, when you walk into a shop, the guards or somebody follows you around? Sometimes to help you out but most times to make sure you're not up to funny things? We were never ever followed in shops when we were in uniform, bro. Even as a group of black girls, or if it's us and gents [51]from school. We could walk in laughing and rowdy and we would still be left alone and trusted. Mara e re bana ba [52]one of the other schools walk in – scenes[53]." (Interview with Lufuno).

Habitus, Pierre Bourdieu's most famous concept, posits that all knowledge, even objective knowledge, is produced and reproduced in the course of everyday social interaction (1972). Habitus can be used to investigate the ways in which the socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority in their daily interaction (Reay, 2004: 436). In this chapter, we look at the relationship between place and identity.

A theoretical perspective built around this concept provides us with a way of critically interpreting everyday human interaction. It asks questions which investigate how well adapted individuals are in the contexts in which they find themselves: How do personal histories shape people's responses to the present? What subjective abilities do people bring to the fore and how are these manifested? How are structural effects identified in small scale interactions? And, what do non-verbal behavioural cues mean? Even questions of language use are explored (Reay, 2004: 437).

A focus on habitus provides a method for investigating the practices of social actors as well as the objective structures which bring their experience into being. The use of habitus as a tool allows researchers to consider a broader view of social worlds and social experience. Bourdieu's method focuses on the individual's active engagement in creating their own social world and, it examines the way in which the structure of those worlds are predefined by broader relations such as race, gender and class (Reay, 2004: 439).

Bourdieu was interested in conceptualizing a theory of practice that took into consideration, "the ambiguities, equivocations, and indeterminacy of life as it is actually lived" (1972: 174). Central to Bourdieu's theory is that *normal* is only *normal* because it has been produced and reproduced that way. Even objective knowledge is relative, not universal, and is created out of a set of pre-existing

[51] guys
[52] But if a student from…
[53] Slang inferring it would be problematic for peers from other schools

and specific social histories, conditions and relations. The concept of habitus says that although *normal* exists as a standard, it exists differently to every social actor because even objective knowledge is not absolute.

With Community in Christ students, a focus on habitus would require an exploration of the ways in which perceptions of 'snob or saint[54] are (re)produced in town. It would question how these reproductions are shaped by encounters and interactions with approving adults, disapproving peers, and ComChrist students themselves.

> "…in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday's man; it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed, and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves. Consequently we are led to take no account of him, any more than we take account of his legitimate demands" (Bourdieu 1972, cited in Reay 2004: 34)

The idea that we all give in to the impulses of 'yesterday's man' assumes people rely on knowledge that was acquired and learnt. However, it is imperative to recognize that some responses and thoughts are not truths at all, they are passed down standards. Bourdieu believes that people are profoundly constrained by social 'rules' that they are not even consciously aware of. Rules which immediately dictate behaviour - what to do and not to do; things to say and not to say – in relation to an imminent reality which is conceived as an absolute possibility (Reay, 2004: 35).

Bourdieu says that the cultural schemes installed by the habitus, "are laid down in the earliest stages of life as basic dispositions, or orientations" and therefore become maps of the social worlds. This happens through generated thoughts, "perceptions, expressions and actions limited by the historically and socially existing conditions under which they are produced" (Bourdieu, 1972: 175, as cited by Reay, 2004). Bourdieu stresses that social strategies and tactics performed by individuals are reproductions of initial social conditionings which social actors administer by the generative schemes learnt through the cultures they inhabit (Bourdieu 1972, as cited by Reay, 2004).

However, because what is *normal* amounts to a different standard for different people, *normal* remains subjective. Michael's experience of normal differs greatly from Dikeledi's. Normal is dependent on strategies and tactics individuals employ in their negotiation of social spaces.

[54] Well-behaved

Bourdieu was concerned with the decisions reinforcing behaviour in different environments. He was interested in how theoretical ideas and social conditions position a social actor's performance of identity in space (Spiegel 2005 : 174)

The concept of habitus considers the, "thoughts, all perceptions and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others" (Bourdieu 1972, quoted in Spiegel, 2005: 174). This provokes a consideration of how racialised norms and social norms are reproduced in Welkom through the residents of Welkom. How a condition, such as Welkom only having two private schools, reinforces the exclusivity of private schools and the families of attending students. The assumption of wealth then creates an identity of Black that is likened to proximity to whiteness because of, '*sekolo sa makgowa*'[55]. How rules about conduct and language - created conditions set as school rules - make space for the imagination that private school students are saints in uniform or English speaking snobs. How the students themselves, in upholding these rules, reproduce these conditions. And how the field is reactivated every morning through encounter and interaction.

Studying a field, or place, allows for a better understanding of its own objective knowledges, and their production. In the field of Welkom, an awareness of the embeddedness of racialization and socioeconomic disproportion would be a primary condition to note. In Bourdieu's view, "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment…produce habitus" (Bourdieu, quoted by Spiegel, 2005: 176).

In my view, the theory of habitus has the potential to situate individuals participating in familiar or new environments. Habitus prepares the individual on how to approach, manage and negotiate spaces. Strategy-making norms enable students to cope with predictable and unforeseen situations (Spiegel, 2005). For black students from ComChrist, they are able to walk to town mentally prepared to receive whatever reception will result from the interactions of that day. They are able to anticipate the comments in taxi ranks, shops and classrooms. And by occupying those spaces, they are able to better prepare for the following day.

4.1. Limitation of Habitus: Agency

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has received much criticism due to the limitations it presents. Diane Reay (2004) writes about some of these in her work which explores some considerations that Bourdieu overlooked. While cognisant of the motivation behind the concept of habitus, which is to uncover the rooted structures dictating different social worlds that come together to make up the

[55] School for white people; school belonging to white people

social universe, Reay explores how this model ignores self-reflexivity and agency in social actors (2004:431). The individual's conduct and performance; their reactions to situations and environments; and, their personality and identities are factors of human agency.

The body does not only participate in the social world, Reay argues, the body is also an active creator of the social world (2004: 432). This is the role of human agency. A body is socialised because it is part of the social world. It makes decisions and actively co-creates reality. According to Reay, by simply existing, the person or student adopts and learns different structures and conditions in the fields they interact with. These fields, or environments, have influence over the individual and are influenced by them too.

In Reay's view, perceptions about eight-three as troublesome are therefore not primarily conditioned by the class being a fully black register class. And, perceptions about eight-three being 'a slow class' are not conditioned by their racial identities. These perceptions are reinforced by how members of eight-three behave as social agents, and how the school reinforced their position by allocating 'a terrible teacher' to them. Habitus therefore becomes activated in a field. People, through human agency, activate the environments they occupy. The student's arrival at the taxi rank, the shop or in the classroom initiates the reproduction of standardized objective knowledges.

This also shows that habitus is changeable and a different response and practice can change the state of the field (Reay, 2004:432). Therefore, should either the student or a member of the Welkom community choose to respond differently from what is perceived as normal in a situation, that response has the ability to activate the field in a completely different and transformative way. Reay (2004) argues that habitus is not solely composed of mental attitudes and perceptions, it is embodied. Habitus finds its expression in the ways people relate to one another. It is seen through the durable ways of, "standing, speaking, walking, feeling, thinking, and gesturing," making the habitus an inscription in the body of the biological individual (Reay, 2004 :433).

4.1.1 Habitus and Identity

According to Reay, by not accounting for human agency, the concept of habitus assumes that individuals are predisposed to certain ways of behaving and thinking (2004:433). Reay argues that the assumption that behaviour will unfold in a set way due to circumstances and systems of dispositions makes the concept vague and indeterminant. She proposes that it is flawed because it expects people to behave in very specific ways consistently. It does not make room for individual thinking (Reay, 2004). Reay says that for Bourdieu, behaviour is dictated by a response to a field, not human agency.

Considering the idea of yesterday's man, Bourdieu's work asks for a recognition that individuals are led by past and present social structures which are activated by their presence (Reay, 2004: 434). Habitus, according to Reay, is more than the activity happening inside the field. Habitus is the product of an individual actively participating in an environment (Reay, 2004: 434).
Interactions sometimes contain more than what is captured within the interaction itself (Bourdieu 1990b, p.81, as cited by Reay, 2004: 434). The way that Dikeledi recalls being discussed for using a taxi unveils this. What was not said but implied is that the speaker's perception of Dikeledi's socioeconomic status did not align with Dikeledi's actions. Therefore, while habitus is a reflection of the social position in which it was constructed, it carries the genesis of new creative responses that have a capability of transcending the social conditions in which it was produced – thus showing its transformative nature (Reay, 2004: 435).

The theory of habitus accommodates a range of possibilities. Norms can either be replicated through fields which reproduce specific dispositions, or they can be transformed (Reay, 2004: 435). When habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, it may result in the generation of change and transformation (Reay, 2004).

The field structures the habitus. The field is then given meaning through the contact between the student and the school. "Habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a fish in water: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Reay, 2004 :436). There is clearly a discordance between the field of ComChrist and the dispositions or habitus that black students bring to it, thus generating another set of meanings for those students.

Reay (2004) draws on various critiques, which echo a single sentiment – that habitus overemphasizes the unconscious and neglects human agency. These authors argue that the concept ignores the "inner conversations" people have with themselves, rejecting the role of human agency and choice (Reay, 2004: 437). She says that Bourdieu's theory only considers self-reflexivity during unpredictable moments when a field provokes introspection (Reay, 2004). Citing Sayer (2004), Reay strongly suggests that it is imperative for habitus to include 'dialogues with oneself' (2004: 438). Allowing its transformative power relies on understanding the ways the social agent is part of the reason why some fields become reactivated in certain ways.

The last section of this chapter will structure itself around identity. It will discuss the facets of the construction of identity, and explore reasons why discrimination impacts this process.

4.2 The Role of Identity

The construction of a personal identity is the primary task of adolescence (van Doeselaar, McLean, Meeus, Denissen, Klimstra, 2019). It is a critical period which brings adolescents to the understanding that social groups and membership influence the flow of life (Spiegler, Wolfer, Hewstone, 2019: 1924).

While identity formation is a lifelong process, constantly negotiated and challenged by external processes, it becomes increasingly salient during adolescence (Erikson 1968 as cited by van Doeselaar et al. 2019). This salience is triggered by biological changes like puberty, cognitive development, and participation in the social world (van Doeselaar et al., 2019: 819). It is during this time that new cognitive capacities and capabilities come into play, enabling young people to explore multiple social identities in practice (Spiegler, Wolfer, Hewstone, 2019: 1924). While background, community, encounters and interactions influence identity, so do the choices and decisions of the individual. According to these scholars, this is how adolescents become engaged in defining themselves. They do so through occupation, ethnicity, sexuality and social standing (van Doeselaar et al., 2019).

In participating in their curation of personality, adolescents partake in a progressive continuity between that which they have come to know during childhood, and that which they anticipate to become in the future (van Doeselaar et al., 2019: 819). This process occurs within several socio-cultural domains with varied degrees of support and resistance. The multiple identities adolescents adopt make them adjustable in multicultural settings (Spiegler, Wolfer, Hewstone, 2019: 1924). Their identities are constantly in flux because they react to how their performance is received.

4.2.1 Threats to Identity

Discrimination and exclusion are painful realities of black students from ComChrist. This study illuminates how this exclusion comes from the experience of school and association to the school. It tells a story of misidentification and rejection, and calls for an awareness to the different variables acting in a space.

Challenges to the value of one's identity, in an unwelcoming environment, can be detrimental and affect a student's academic success (Baysu, Phalet, Brown, 2011). While some people and groups are able to struggle through unfavourable conditions, others are not.

Baysu, Phalet and Brown make the claim that an individual's social identity is threatened when it is devalued or comes under comparison (Baysu, Phalet, Brown, 2011: 124). According to these scholars, discrimination has the potential to threaten an individual's identity because it is synonymous to rejection. An upset or change in how students perceive themselves can shape their academic success, and their feelings towards school or a walk through town. Eight-three's swift exposure to racism and rejection affected their relationship with education (math), their relationships with peers, parents and staff, and their experience of high school thereafter. As their experience illustrates, there is a lasting impact that stays with individuals who have had early experiences of discrimination. Micro-aggressions, comments and other overt displays of racism or racialization disrupt the process of identity construction.

Baysu and colleagues prompt a consideration of the identity strategies students would adopt (Baysu, Phalet, Brown, 2011:127). These strategies are commitments of attachment to a group conceived by cumulative experiences. For example, we can see how the shared experience and outlook of being a student from eight-three began the process, for these students, of creating a space of belonging for themselves. Because these students with their English and privilege, were not the *right* kind of black, they could not align themselves with peers attending public schools because they were mocked and stereotyped by them. At the same time, because they were sorted into a class with only black people, they could not align themselves with the rest of the grade. They found themselves targeted and ostracized.

4.2.2 A moment in Thoko's shoes: Conflicting Identities

Thoko's[56] family genealogy traces back to Lesotho but she was born in South Africa. Thoko's family lives in a small town, approximately a 35 minute drive from the school and adjacent to Welkom. In this section, we explore Thoko's unpleasant reality beyond the school and her uniform.

"I wouldn't even leave the house, hle" begins Thoko. She shares the story of what her daily life looked like while she was still in high school. "You know how small Welkom is, but Odendaalsrus (OD) is so much smaller. Everyone literally knows everyone or knows of each other. And because most OD kids

[56] Participant 10: Interviewed 3 September 2021. Matriculated 2014. Day scholar.

went to the schools that were in the area, everyone knew me and the school I went to – plus uniform akere.[57]"

Thoko's experience of being mistreated and excluded went beyond being recognized by the uniform she would wear on weekdays between 07:00 and 16:00. Her experience transcended these hours because she had come to be treated as an outcast by peers in her community. Thoko says it is because, "apparently ke ya ikgantsha". The word she uses to describe how she was perceived is one that is usually thrown at private school students. Its root word *kganya* means light, or something that has been or is lit. However, in the context in which it was used to describe Thoko, it can carry a variety of negative connotations. To *ikgantsha* is to see oneself in a superior manner. It is to value oneself above others. The implication of being associated to this word is that one becomes disliked – off an assumed and given identity.

Thoko, having foregrounded the treatment she would receive from her community even away from the loud identifier that is her school uniform, expresses how difficult it was being in two spaces which constantly excluded her.

> "Even ka weekend or whenever, when I would walk home from the tuckshop and greet a group of whoever wherever, they would keep quiet. So I eventually stopped greeting. Kampane ba re ka ikgantsha [58]heh. I mean, what must I say when I have nothing to say? And what must I do when I greet and I'm ignored? Aa hle[59]".

And her frustration is palpable. Her annoyance and upset resurface. "And being at that school wasn't even worth all that drama because ba ne ba sa re kgathalle [60]"

4.3 Social Interaction

Social interaction, according to sociocultural thought, is an important catalyst for internal development processes (Scott, Palincsar, 2013: 2). In this section, we explore how interaction influences the construction of identity.

According to these authors of *The Historical Roots of Sociocultural Theory*, these developmental processes, are triggered by a student's absorption and adaption of their interactions and encounters in different environments (Scott, Palincsar, 2013). The results of these processes are expressed in the thinking and behaviour of students. Scott and Palincsar propose that cognitive development in

[57] Plus uniform, right
[58] Rather they call me conceited, then
[59] No man
[60] they [teachers] didn't even care about us

children is the result of social activity because encounters stretch the range of learning. Reality is an active field that creates situations of learning.

The experiences of my research participants paint a picture of how interaction influences development. Considering the environment of town or school as fields, we can see how they become sites where objective knowledge is constantly being reproduced (Reay, 2004). In town, the multiple identities that students grow into assist them in weighing how to behave and interact with the people in the community of Welkom. With peers attending public schools, Dikeledi and Lufuno's stories reveal that avoidance was an attractive response – especially when walking through town alone. Using the school as the field for the eight-three colleagues' experiences, we see how rejection created responses of rebellion (e.g. not wanting to swim) and self-deprecation (from math marks and deteriorating relationships). Sociocultural theory would propose that the ways these interactions unfold influence the development of students, and their construction of identity.

Sociocultural theory of identity formation would provide an explanation of why Tŝimologo avoided an afro until she reached her third year of university. It would account for why Michael wanted to walk through town unidentifiably, drawing attention to how his encounters are transformed by the identity he brings to a field. It could account for why the participants of eight-three say that their experience of school beyond eight-three, was shaped by their association to eight-three. In all these experiences, Scott and Palincsar would point out that the learnt responses, attitudes and perceptions of the students are influenced by the interactions and encounters they have had. The field is where identity is refined, tested, challenged and expressed. Scott and Palincsar cite Piaget (1955) where he says that a child's experience, encompassed by manipulating and changing their world, equips them with knowledge about relations with people, objects and self (Scott and Palincsar, 2013:4).

These authors point out the importance of the creation of spaces that promote an intersection and exploration of identities by teachers and adults (Scott and Palincsar, 2013). The primary discourses that bear influence on the student are the behaviours and thoughts governing social and informal interaction at home or in communities. The secondary discourses are the thoughts and behaviours that influence how students interact with school and formal settings. These authors call for a third discourse where these two meet because of the potential for transformation.

A commitment to transformation requires a commitment to unlearning. However, unlearning requires an exploration of how objective knowledges become standards. To disrupt the reproduction of norms is to recharge an activated field through a transformative response.

Access to multiple identities can prove helpful and beneficial in organizing and responding to environments. The skill and ability to effortlessly switch between identities accommodates the conflicting and swift demands of the social world (Goclowska and Crisp, 2014). By becoming members of culturally and socially distinct groups simultaneously, individuals adopt a cognitive ability to assume identities that are either expected or required (Goclowska and Crisp, 2014)

In their paper detailing how dual identity processes are able to encourage creativity, Crisp and Goclowska (2014) comment on fundamental creative processes that are seemingly easily mastered by people with dual identities. They say that they, "have an ability to quickly and effortlessly switch between cognitive strategies and semantic categories" making it a natural tool of the everyday to juggle two seemingly different personas with different outlooks and demands (Goclowska and Crisp, 2014: 2). Multiple identities provide students with the option of a different outcome.

Their vast bank of perception, influenced by how they experience different social settings, enables the creativity to effortlessly draw from the multiple straws available to them (Goclowska and Crisp, 2014). It finds expression in the display of social interaction.

This chapter brought together the role of place in the experience of the social world for students in eight-three at ComChrist. It highlighted the role of the individual and how their participation in a field is part and parcel of the reproduction of persistent norms. It also showed how students' actions could be at odds with what the field apparently dictates and potentially challenge or transform the ways the field prescribes norms of belief and behaviour. Through Thoko's account, I also looked at identity and the ways it is negotiated and at times threatened.

The following chapter looks at language and names. We explore the value of names, the role of language in identity, and the racialization of African languages.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Language

5.1 Kenya

During my first year of high school, my name, Khanyisile was taken away from me. Someone had decided that it would no longer belong to me. Confiscated in jest. An ongoing gag I had not been consulted on. A persistent joke that still lacks humour. My name, Khanyisile, had been replaced with a palatable substitute. An accommodative alternative. A name that rolled off the tongue and required less effort? Apparently, much friendlier to the lips. Familiar. Easy.
Kenya.

The name a student teacher dubbed fitting for me: Kenya. An easier name to handle. One she felt suited me better than my own. Khanyisile, my family's prophetic light[61], became a staff member's Kenya. The bright future, hope and enlightenment that *Khanyisile* foretold was dimmed and traded. No longer was I a beacon or symbol. I became a kid named Kenya. Kenya in 8.3.
How fitting.

Only she used this name. No one else adopted it. Not my classmates who would constantly hear it in a classroom. Not my netball teammates who would hear it during practices and games. Not even the older boys who found humour in everything.
Only she used this name.

Only my name changed. She would try with everyone else, but never with me. I wonder whether my light-hearted character gave her the impression that I could take it. I wonder whether my awkward thirteen-year-old laugh in response beckoned and normalized this name.
I wonder if I made her think it was okay.

"Kenya" she would say in a giggle, and still expect a response. She would broadcast this name, this secret, to the entire school. In the safety of eight-three, it almost felt okay. However, not beyond that boundary. In every interaction, she would invite Kenya and deny me the space. Persistently.
Offensively.
Inconsiderately.

[61] English translation of *Khanyisile:* a dawn of light; a place of light; illumination

5.1.1 The Value of Names

Language use has a profound way of indexing perceptions of cultural differences. This in itself reveals the crucial dimension of language in the practices of identification. This chapter explores names and the role of language in identity and behaviour by exploring ComChrist language expectations.

"I don't like the fact that people say, 'argh it's so hard'. TRY! You don't know it's hard until you try," (Tšimologo). Growing up in Botswana, Tšimologo explains that she had never been required to teach anyone how to pronounce her name because she was always around people who knew how to say it. About ComChrist primary school, [62]she says:

> You get there, you're young, you're in a new environment and you tell people.
> I think I was the most patient with telling people how to pronounce my name. I corrected peers but I didn't correct staff *[why?]*. I didn't really know how to correct elders. I have never had to do it. I don't think I've ever been in a position to correct an elder, and back then I was like 13 – who am I to correct an elder? Even if it's about my name. I don't how to do it
> So I thought let me just leave it. I'm just gonna[63] leave them. I know they're talking about me, and I know they'll spell it right on my documents so I'll just let it be.

She explains that with peers, she found it easier because she viewed them as age mates.

> "Honestly. You get tired of saying " not 'SHE-mologo', 'TSHI-mologo.'" You get tired of saying, 'that's not how you say my name. So you just leave it because you're forced to accept it."

The topic of names erupted into considerably long discussions across interviews. Participants spoke about who had named them; the meaning and significance of their names; and their feelings towards their names. Names and their pronunciation are important in identification. The intentionality participants took in explaining their names' roots and symbolic meanings emphasised their significance.

During the group interview, Tšimologo mentioned the process of correcting the pronunciation of her name. She says how correcting an elder is not easy, and instead avoided it altogether. Many of the black students interviewed echoed this. The common theme was that they felt it is disrespectful to correct an adult, especially more than once.

[62] Tšimologo attended ComChrist primary and high school.
[63] Going to

Tsebo Johnson (TJ) joined ComChrist when he was in grade 6. During his entire high schooling career, he used his initial TJ. He explains that he did not like how people pronounced his name. So, to avoid the tension and awkwardness of constant correction, he asked to be called TJ. He continues:

> Growing up I didn't realize how powerful a name was and how you identify with your name. I think I realized late? So I would allow people to butcher[64] my name, you know?
> Your name has a lot of power and people treat you the way you treat your name. So if you allow people to disrespect your name, people find it easier to just disrespect you and walk all over you. Even though we[65] used to play around with our names, we knew what we're doing. We knew how to do it and who we are and how our names belonged to us.
> We used to allow so much disrespect from our Caucasian peers. Yho. [*Asante adds, 'le [66]the teachers'; TJ responds*] Yeah… teachers would just butcher your name then giggle and laugh after saying your name. It was like you're looking me in my eye and telling me 'Fuck You'. *(he laughs and apologizes)*. But like, you're looking me in my eye and disrespecting me. You even tell them, rather call me TJ, but they'd decide 'nah', and disrespect you. (Interview with Tsebo Johnson)

Names proved extremely meaningful across interviews. Participants' attachment to their names was expressed through their protective nature and defence of them. It became evident that respecting participants' identities included their names. Respect encourages confidence in one's identity, which impacts one's outward behaviour. This section reveals that a respected identity is crucial in the experience of the social world.

5.2 Language and Names

Names are an important facet of identity. During interviews, black participants would often switch to vernacular when speaking about their names. It translated as an attempt to fully situate me into the meaning and cultural background of their names.
Names anchor how people identify with themselves.

Through language, individuals negotiate a sense of self across spaces. Language use grants or denies access into social networking (Norton, 2010: 351). Bonny Norton's research looks at the subtle and overt forms of discrimination students encounter because of language. Her work provokes an interrogation of silence as resistance. Silence as a response to 'snob' and 'the dumb class' can be resistance. However, resistance does not soften the reality.

[64] Mispronounce
[65] Tj clarified that 'we' implies black people
[66] Even the teachers.

Language plays a fundamental role in the construction of youth identities because of how it is hierarchized (McKinney, 2007). The colonial order and apartheid system used language as a classification tool to devalue African languages and their speakers (Pennycook, 2010: 63). Pennycook asserts that it is impossible to dissociate language descriptions from the colonial imperative to order, control and subdue (2010: 63). Language therefore becomes an object that divides and defines colonized people. According to Pennycook, it is important to acknowledge how language operates in an uneven world and how it relates to global inequalities of poverty, health and education (2010: 65).

Language is more than a linguistic system, it is a social practice which shapes experience and organizes interaction (Norton, 2010: 351). Drawing on Foucault, Norton suggests that power in society may sometimes appear invisible because of how it seamlessly naturalizes practices, like indifference to pronunciation (2010: 352). She says understanding that categories and hierarchies were produced for specific reasons in specific contexts helps us see their influence and fragility. Perceptions and policing of language only reproduce the ideas of oppressive power structures.

Prevailing practices in schools have a profound ability to create subordinate identities which limit students from acquiring powerful identities (Norton, 2010:361). Norton writes:

> if we agree that diverse identity positions offer learners a range of positions from which to speak, listen read or write, the challenge [for educators] is to explore which identity positions offer the greatest opportunity for social engagement and interaction. Conversely, if there are identity positions that silence students, then teachers need to investigate and address marginalizing classroom practices (Norton, 2010: 362).

Young people today have more opportunities and space to experiment with their identities. They have more freedom to perform these identities in ways that differ from previous generations (McKinney, 2007: 21). This freedom is however disrupted by the interactions young people have in different environments which either encourage or discourage certain performances of identity. How individuals experience the social world has a shaping power, especially on impressionable youth.

5.2.1 Language and Behaviour

People readily form impressions of one another during social interactions and linguistic behaviour is one of the fundamental means by which such impressions are formed. (Dragojevic, Giles, Watson, 2012). McKinney proposes that language and linguistic behaviour constitute, “a series of acts of identity in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles” (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985, as cited by McKinney, 2007: 12).

Language is inherently performative and contextual (Dragojevic, Giles, Watson, 2012). These authors would say that this is seen by how peers hierarchize English performance of ComChrist black students (through delivery, pronunciation and vocabulary) and associate it to wealth.

Variabilities are sometimes indicators of individual difference, and other times, reflections of systemic, social or contextual difference in language use (Dragojevic et al., 2012). Use of particular languages, accents and dialects have the ability to convey significant social information about the speaker, like their geographic background. Language can be used as a pointer of identity.

Language also invites stereotypes based on perception (Dragojevic et al., 2012). Language use, like English in Welkom, is a platform for inferences on identity. Social stereotyping of speakers, based on their language use, has significant consequences, like discrimination. For ComChrist students, it became an 'Othering' tool between themselves and their peers[67].

Linguistic indices, like accents, are processed automatically and noticed immediately. Dragojevic and colleagues say that this processing happens because people use them to manage conceptual schemas which explain the source and meaning of linguistic differences (2012: 2). These schemas become ideologies which link the speaker to social and personal identities. Ideologies are therefore a means of explaining the relationship between language and social life (Dragojevic, et al., 2012). They provide clues so people can readily form impressions of speakers, and prepare appropriate responses.

Thoughts and constructed rules around language frame and influence most aspects of language use (McGroarty, 2010). They influence how people act individually and in groups, as well as their expectations and decisions. Language ideologies are therefore defined as abstract dimensions of understanding, beliefs and expectations influencing a speaker's choices (McGroarty, 2010: 2). Ideologies become embedded when they are accepted, circulated and normalised by people.

Even though language ideologies are an outcome of historical social practices, sometimes they appear to be simple 'facts'. So English (FAL) [68]speakers at ComChrist might well believe that English is 'naturally' better equipped to share academic concepts or that Sesotho is only suitable for shebeens. [69]What later becomes commons sense about languages were once ideas; planted, repeated and spread. These beliefs are reproduced and preserved regardless of their (in)accuracy (McGroarty, 2010).

[67] Public school peers
[68] First Additional Language
[6969] Taverns; informal drinking places

Language ideologies exist to differentiate people and groups. They suggest, and then cement, a perception of what is acceptable, admirable and appropriate. For a speaker, McGroarty says this shapes the encrypted knowledge language encompasses (2010: 6). While ideologies were constructed in the interest of colonial order, judgments occur in homogenous social groups as well (McGroarty, 2010: 7). This is seen in how South African vernaculars spoken by ComChrist students were constantly weighed against their command of English.

5.2.2 Linguistic Performance and Identity

Linguistic performance and identity have an undeniable connection because language is central to the construction of and socialization into identities. McKinney describes identity as, "multiple, fluid and in process, but also anchored in particular ways through investment and desire" (2007:12).

Here, we apply a poststructuralist framework of identity. This lens allows us to recognize that identity is fluid and expressed through language in a fluctuating sociohistorical, socioeconomic and socio-political environment. Poststructuralism reminds us that people are adept to change. They are, "diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space" (Norton, 2013: 2). People are either subject to or subjects of a set of relationships. Subjectivity and identity therefore appear highly relational. Because people cannot stand outside of the social world, they are, "always an integral and constitutive part of it" (Norton, 2013: 2).

Language becomes a tool that helps us organize and understand the relationship between the social world and the individual. It helps us understand why Dipuo avoided speaking vernacular in public - because of the reprimanding and constant disciplining that resulted from the boarding house. It becomes the reason why ComChrist students are ostracized and rejected by disapproving peers. Language provides the tools we use to construct ourselves and each other (Norton, 2013).

To participate in the social world, people interact using language. They draw on, and respond to fluctuating linguistic contexts and requirements. Individuals are constantly taking positions on their performance of identity through language, across environments (McKinney, 2007).

Language has become symbolic of national, social, cultural, political and economic identities (Dragojevic et al., 2012). It has the potential to ground various identities, conceptualizing linguistic differences as universal truths, biological or socially constructed.

Language issues continue to trouble speakers because language influences sense of self and identity (Fandrych, 2009). In racially inharmonious societies like South Africa, and small towns like Welkom, language use profoundly influences the experience of life.

For ComChrist students, it was not only their performance and delivery of English that created distance and tension with peers. Their peers can speak English too. It was the perceived voluntary and deliberate choice to continue speaking English beyond the gates of ComChrist. The choice to speak English over vernaculars, with friends, in the absence of white people. This influenced and reinforced perceptions of ComChrist students as "snobbish", wealthy or culturally white.

McGroarty (2010) advises we remember that language use is continuously shaped by past and present experience. A speaker's involvement in everyday life activities is their contribution to the construction of language ideologies (McGroarty, 2010:8). These ideologies are major determinants of social and cultural identities because of their influence on the navigation of the everyday. These are what the habitus prescribes as perceptions and actions from historical and socially existing conditions (Reay, 2004). The contribution individuals bring to interactions, according to McGroarty and Bourdieu's habitus, have an ability to reproduce the prevailing norms.

Unequal power relations, according to McKinney(2007), have substantial control over the extent of positioning that occurs during interaction. Power relations are a crucial consideration in the exploration of how interaction impacts identity. They not only exist in institutions; institutions create, maintain, challenge, reproduce and reconstruct them (McGroarty, 2010: 4).

ComChrist is an English medium school. It offers Afrikaans and Sesotho as language subjects. Language rules were a common complaint during interviews. The school enforced that students are only to speak English at school. However, many participants felt that their African languages were shunned while Afrikaans was not. In one interview, I was told that teachers called it *practice* when students spoke Afrikaans, and encouraged them. However, Sesotho would not be tolerated – even when addressing an elder. This illustrates the ways in which linguistic wars are also political and cultural. Socially, language has the incredible ability to subordinate, exclude and disadvantage groups who do not meet the 'standard' (McGroarty, 2010: 9).

5.3 Gratitude vs Experience

Educators are critical to the procurement of knowledge. Their responsibility to teach, impart wisdom and essentially cultivate individuals is tremendously important. They are architects that educate about the ways of society, social life and the development of thinking (Ikromova, 2020:123). They prepare students for life outside of the familiar environment that is school. A teacher's conduct and personhood are a crucial consideration in the experience of school for students because of the time they spend together, and the relational dynamic between them.

Dikeledi, a 2013 matriculant, shares her feelings about her relationships with teachers at the school. Her reflection illuminates the experience of many participants' described rapport with teachers.

> I always felt like just a student. Just a student. Some teachers would have genuine conversations where they'd actually laugh and stuff, but only with the white kids. Mainly with the white kids. For us, the teachers were just there. They did have their favourites but ah…the rest of us? For the most part I felt like we are just assisting with being at that school. Just filling space. Re tlatsa [70]register list. Coz you had to be some super extraordinary something to be black and recognized. You had to be a super what what for a teacher to know your name. Or to be as patient with you. There was never full acceptance hle

Dikeledi compares her relationship with teachers to white students. She makes the simple example of genuine conversation and laughter, criteria she identifies as essential in relationships. Dikeledi expresses that recognition was determined by academic or sporting excellence for black students.

> But with the white kids? Even with the bad ones they'd have full convos. In class, if a white kid says 'ma'am,this is too much homework', the teacher would listen. No black child had that confidence hle. To say, "you're giving us too much homework?" Not in the classes I was in.

Dikeledi shares that while she did not ask for less homework, eventually some of her black classmates did. She explains that teachers would respond unkindly and with a kind of racialised, passive aggression with comments like," '*don't come to this school if you don't want to* work', or '*then go to a school in Thabong'.* but when it's boKimberley, ke [71]'*Okay, instead of reading up to chapter three, just read chapter one' ".* She laughs and continues,

> …because we saw the reception the white kids would get, we'd ask them to speak for us too. We'd get a spokesperson and have them tell teachers that 'aa, [72]this is too much homework hleng'.

I ask Dikeledi what could have improved her high school experience to which she says:

> We needed more black teachers or something because it was unfair for two teachers to be responsible for like 200 black kids in the high school. But also now that I'm working and understand work culture, *iJob iJob,* hle. They don't have the luxury of being activists for us all the time, either…Haai. We just needed more people that understood us. And would stand up for us, you know? (Interview with Dikeledi)

[70] We fill up the register list
[7171] It's
[72] No, this is too much homework, guys

Dikeledi proposes that perhaps the presence of teachers that she could have conversations and laugh with would have improved her experience. She says that black teachers that would have understood and defended her might have relieved her from feeling like, "just a student".

Dipuo, a 2014 matriculant and former boarding house student, invites me on a journey that retraces her general experience of school. While school was okay, she says, as she matured in age, it became,

> difficult to pretend that certain things are okay or that you don't see what's happening. The racism was hidden. Fake smiles and giggles would try hide it but the things happening in the high school just weren't for us. It shouldn't have been that difficult. It was never meant to uplift us. It was never meant to celebrate us. (Interview with Dipuo)

Her claim brings me back to the discussions around Heritage Day and Afrikaans evening[73]. Dipuo's feelings that "the things happening…weren't for us. It was never meant to celebrate us" quickly answers the question of who 'us' is. From the interviews, 'us' is the students whose names were mispronounced, whose languages were labelled foreign, and whose racial identity was seen before they were.

5.3.1 Go To A School in Thabong!

Gary Howard's (2006) *We can't teach what we don't know* tackles issues of diversity in school and the responsibility of teachers. He asserts that teachers must situate themselves and become comfortable with the diverse identities and cultures of their students.

> "diversity is not a choice but our responses to it certainly are. And to date, all indicators point to the fact that our responses have not been adequate to deal with the full range of issues presented by the complexities of teaching in a multicultural nation" (Howard, 2006: 4).

The expression "go to a school in Thabong" came frequently during interviews. Many participants recalled having been told variations of the above sentiment; sometimes as a question, *'why don't you go to a school in Thabong',* or a command, *'SPEAK English! This isn't a school in Thabong'.* During my interview with Moses, he mentions never having heard a teacher say, "Hey! Go speak that Afrikaans in Orania. They go ahead and join the conversation" he says.

Howard(2006) provokes the critical consideration of value. He boldly claims that not many educators value all children. He paints a picture using his own experience with a teacher he met at a diversity workshop he had hosted:

[73] The school did not celebrate Heritage Day. It celebrated Afrikaans evening (an event where students taking Afrikaans FAL would perform songs and plays in Afrikaans) but did not host Sesotho Evenings.

> After the workshop, a white teacher who had taught at the 'good' high school for 20 years came up to me with a puzzled look on her face and asked, 'What I want to know is why are they sending these kids to our school?" I asked, "you mean the Hispanic kids?" she nodded, and I said, "Hispanic kids are coming to your high school because they live here; they are part of your community" (Howard, 2006: 3).

This exchange and the comments from ComChrist staff have a similar theme. The rejection exhibited to students by both groups of teachers, directly or not, is premised on students being perceived as not belonging to the schools. In the context of Welkom, students being told to *go to Thabong* could be traced to their racial identity because Thabong was spatially designed and made separate as a home to black people. There are no white people living in Thabong or attending Thabong schools. Furthermore, the conditions under which these expressions are spoken, often unpleasant or threatening, hinge on the rejection being racially based.

Howard(2006) proposes that white educators realign assumptions and perceptions related to "the racial marker that we carry, namely whiteness". He says there is a need to acknowledge the past, instead of to ignore it. "[W]e need to face how we have been shaped by myths of superiority and begin to sort out our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours relative to race and other dimensions of human diversity" (2006: 6). Howard asserts that students will not overcome the negative implications associated to race and racialism if teachers do not, "unravel the remnants of dominance that still linger in our minds, hearts and habits" (Howards, 2006:6).

Howard says that it is unrealistic, however, to expect that white educators will behave in ways that are inconsistent with their own life experiences. "Too often we expect white teachers to be what they have not learned to be, namely culturally competent professionals" (Howard, 2006: 6). He proposes that transformational work is necessary for teachers. From Howard's research, our initial emphasis on the ineffectivity of contact theory is reinforced.

5.3.2 Caught in the act

Community in Christ is an English medium school with a zero tolerance for other languages at school. Speaking vernacular during break, changing of periods or before school, was punishable. Students would be reprimanded, given demerits, or sent to a Friday detention session.
Every single participant had a language related story to share. In reflection, many participants admitted that it was not a scary situation, but inconvenient and unfortunate. It was inconvenient because being caught came with the promise of punishment. And, it was unfortunate because teachers would say racially offensive comments about students' languages, and reference Thabong.

Language is extremely racialised at ComChrist. African languages were demeaned and prohibited. Students' languages were disregarded and called *foreign* by staff. Dragojevic and colleagues express that the racialization of language is seen in how non-native English speakers continue to be classified as incomprehensible (Dragojevic et al., 2012: 7). They call this linguistic racism, and say the policing of language is indicative of a covert racism which provides a subtle hierarchizing measure for social groups. In Welkom, the hierarchy favours Afrikaans and English.

This reproduces separation ideologies of 'us' and 'them' between different language speakers, ascribing socially desirable qualities to English and Afrikaans speakers, and homogenizing non-speakers as *foreign* (Dragojevic et al., 2012). Language can become weaponized into a tool of exclusion. For non-English and Afrikaans speakers from ComChrist, it excluded them from experiencing high school in a fulfilling way. Linguistic exclusion is detrimental because language is how people access the social world (Dragojevic et al, 2012: 8). The racialization of language further complicated the experience of ComChrist students.

5.4 A Place to discuss race

Conversations around race are often silenced and avoided (Maré, 2001: 88). When race is discussed, it is treated as an immutable and frozen identity. Maré suggests that in submitting to the power race is given, we submit to the effects of racism and racialism (2001:88).

The topic of race was always avoided at ComChrist. Participants shared that their complaints about racism were often disregarded and ignored. Complaints about racist speech or behaviour were neither dealt with nor discussed.

This report has emphasized the undeniable place of race in space and mobility. We have also shown how the racialization of language is a tool of exclusion. For ComChrist students, their home languages excluded them from their school community; and English excluded them from their peers in Welkom. What we see is how racialised thinking becomes naturalized into social life (Maré, 2001: 89). Apartheid's oppressive systems continue to present struggles which are still embedded in citizens today (Maré, 2001: 89).

There are everyday practices that are categorically racist but continually reproduced. In the article 'Racism in the Structure of Everyday Worlds', Salter, Adams and Perez (2018) explore how structures influenced by race find their expression in the social and psychological everyday lives of black people. They assert that racism, "is also systemic, existing in the advantages and disadvantages imprinted in

cultural artifacts, ideological discourse, and institutional realities that work together with individual biases" (Salter, Adams and Perez, 2018: 150).

They propose the passivity and decrease in overt racism tricks people into thinking it is less extreme in modern society (Salter, Adams and Perez, 2018). However, racial prejudice thrives in its elusiveness and subtlety. The quiet, hidden and sometimes intangible discrimination people experience has lasting consequences. Trivializing biases obscures the institutional, cultural and systemic processes that reproduce and maintain them.

Apartheid left a legacy of ruin on perceptions of African people and their languages. It encouraged the devaluation of African languages (Dragojevic, et al. 2012: 8). Asante's experience of being told not to use, "that foreign language" when she spoke Sesotho; and, Tšimologo's avoidance of being grouped with the students that constantly spoke other vernaculars, evidence this. Their experiences illustrates how the colonial and apartheid past continue to be enacted at the school.

5.4.1 *Bathong!*

Community in Christ boarding house [74]rules required that students speak English at all times. Students were expected to speak English only, even throughout the weekend. During my interview with Dipuo, she detailed what her life as a boarder [75]entailed.

> "We weren't allowed to speak vernac in the boarding house. I don't know why, but the teachers probably felt like we're talking about them or plotting something, I guess. But they didn't want us to speak vernac because they couldn't understand our conversations. We had to speak English 24/7 and it was tiring… the [English] bundles [76]finish by 17:00…" Dipuo

Dipuo's reflection displays how language becomes a site of control. It became threatening for teachers not to have access to what students are saying because they would no longer have control over the distribution of knowledge and information. Being excluded from the chain of conversation endangered their authority and power.

"*This is my home away from home. How can I not speak my language?"(Dipuo)*

Boarding house teachers' policing of language exposed inconsistencies congruent with experiences of day-scholars. Dipuo shares that duty teachers would shout at them for having conversation in vernacular, even with other duty teachers, but they themselves would converse in Afrikaans with students.

[74] School Residence
[75] A student living in the boarding house
[76] A play on the concept of cellphone data bundles. She implies her English runs out like data bundles.

> The white duty teachers would reprimand the black duty teachers infront of us like we're all kids. Like, they aren't on the same level. Like, they aren't doing the same. And it would be like, you're literally contradicting yourself. You're saying I must do one thing but wena[77] you do the opposite"

Teachers' preferential treatment of language weighed on Dipuo, and many other participants' relationships with their home languages. Participants used strong imagery to describe what speaking vernacular began to feel like. Dipuo said she first began to feel like it is illegal because of the reception and punishment. However, says it quickly became evident that teachers not only felt excluded, but genuinely disliked their[78] languages.

She illustrates this using *Bathong* as an example. *Bathong* is from Sesotho and is often used by speakers as an exclamatory word. It is a reactive word. An interjection. Often, it comes as a slip of the tongue. It is not easily translatable, especially because it is highly contextual. It is as malleable in speech as *hey!* Its literal meaning does not necessarily disqualify it from its conversational functions. Situationally, it can be translated into "with people" or "around people".

Speakers of multilingual backgrounds let the different languages colour their speech. This is because languages have the creative ability to spill into one another (Lo Bianco, 2010: 143). Multilingualism affords speakers the freedom to alternate between languages (Kamwangamalu, 2010). Speakers in multilingual communities do not keep their languages separate, they blend their knowledge of the communication forms available to them (Lo Bianco, 2010: 143). This could potentially be why Dipuo absentmindedly reacted with a *bathong* in the classroom. Language is performative and a central part in the expression of individuals' social identities (Lo Bianco, 2010: 148).

Multilingualism is a benefit that grants speakers access in different interactions (Norton, Toohey, 2011: 417). In South Africa, access is heightened by the hierarchizing and perceptions of language. However, language is valued against its speaker. Language is worth what those who speak it are worth (McKinney, 2007). Norton and Toohey cite Bourdieu and eloquently describe how language becomes entangled in the social and political practices which ascribes the value of the language to its speaker (2011: 147).

Earlier in this report, I stated that students and peers from public schools could also speak English, however their English was not valued as much (by the people in Welkom) as a student in ComChrist uniform. The uniform became a tool that assisted in the measuring of value. Participants shared that outside of uniform, treatment by white residents of Welkom was predictably unpleasant. This brings

[77] you
[78] Dipuo's (African languages)

recognition to the changeable value of people, and language's function across environments. Also, the way in which the value of language depends on the context in which it is being used, and other markers of status – such as uniform.

The accent, delivery and fluency of English anchor the value (and tensions) ascribed to black students from ComChrist. A 'snobbish' English which excludes students from peers in the social spaces of Welkom, does not exempt them from the treatment they experience in ComChrist.

Black youth are aware of perceptions surrounding identity, the influence of language use and 'brands' of English (Norton and Toohey, 2011: 425). The accusation of chasing proximity to whiteness excluded ComChrist alumnae from their peers, and resulted in a conflict of identity. The rejection from peers in Welkom, and staff at school, created a tense, and discordant world.

Black students were constantly negotiating the tensions of displacement and rejection. Language and appearance bred an inharmonious experience. At school, they were reminded that they did not belong because of their language and race and that they should *go to Thabong.* In town, their language and uniform resulted in their rejection. The unpleasant interactions across space created a hostile reality for students.

The next chapter shows an alternate reality. It emphasizes the place of race in the experience of language through the experience of Aurora[79].

[79] Participant 11: Interviewed 5 September 2021. Matriculated in 2014.

CHAPTER SIX:

I Felt Welcome at the School

Participants' experiences differed in detail and content. While there were similarities, they were personal and subjective. This report has mainly discussed the perspectives and experiences of black and brown students from the school. This chapter looks at Aurora Phillips' school experience, a white ComChrist alumnae.

Aurora is the 2014 head girl of ComChrist. She is from Welkom, and lives in the previously discussed Jan Hofmeyer area.[80] The excerpt below discusses Aurora's experience of ComChrist. It speaks to race, language, relationship and belonging. In what follows, we explore Aurora's experience of school, the teachers and town.

Having had a few minutes to greet one another and catch up, Aurora and I come to the question of race and my study's topic. She explains that her interest in this research was to hear about my perspective as I am interested in hers. She explains that she has not personally experienced racism, but has seen racism many times in Welkom. She says:

> because it happens so often to be honest, I can't pinpoint an exact moment, uhm, when someone has said something. But in those cases it's more *behind doors* racism. And like, if you try to correct them, it just lands up being a fight. But obviously I will say something; I won't let something like that slide. But uhm, like in terms of like at school? Like something that I've seen?... I'm tryna [81]think…

Aurora's "behind doors racism" expression reflects the microaggressive, "*go to Thabong"* racism experienced by her peers. Aurora admits to not having experienced any kind of exclusion or rejection by both teachers and peers. She asks about my experiences and later admits that it is difficult to situate herself because:

> it's hard for me as a white person because obviously, uhm, I've never been in like a black person's shoes. So I don't know. And like, at school, I wasn't in an African person's shoes. So, I think if I was, I would've like seen the racism and experienced it more? Like, maybe I'm just blind to it? I think… I just… I don't know. I think the hair situation. I would say that, at school, there was a bit of racism there in terms of like how you guys could have your hair, right?

I quickly picked up that it was uncomfortable for Aurora to say 'black person'. She would switch from "African person" to "Black person". This reinforced the need to create channels of speaking about

[80] See chapter one
[81] Trying to

race and its influences. It made me consider how ComChrist ignored racism complaints and how that avoidance is expressed through timidness related to race discussions.

We talk about 'hair meetings' called by staff where the high school girls were reminded about the ComChrist hair rules. During our discussion, Aurora twice reacts with the phrase, "I was so blind to this". I ask her why, and she explains:

> I think it's because like, I wasn't a victim of it. And I mean, even so, then I should still see it in my peers but I think like, because my class, you know my class that I was in. It was basically all white people … Like, even at break, I was usually with white people. I would chill with black people but, I don't know. I think I wasn't surrounded by it. And that's like the whole messed up thing, I know it's off topic but even when you go to university, and I'm sure you've seen it yourself, the races stick to each other – even in university. It's bad. I had my black friends when I was at school as well, but I think I was mostly surrounded by white people from the beginning of the day to the end.
> I think because you're the victim of it, that's why your experience is completely different".

Generally, people do not find things they are not looking for. Aurora's admission that she was blind to the racism of the school could be hinged on her not being exposed to it. This could be premised on the reality that Aurora did not experience it. Her honesty made me question whether black participants recalled and recorded racism more frequently, and in more detail, because of personal experiences. I wonder whether frequent exposure heightened sensitivity to racism, resulting in the difference in reaction and responses to questions about race. Her mention of 'races sticking together' is also an important consideration. Contact is not enough to transform perspective. To change what stands, an intricate understanding of racism's influence is required.

As we close, I ask Aurora about her general feelings about the school. She says she is proud to be an alumna:

> I'm not proud of the school necessarily because it's private. I'm proud of the school… Well, at the time I was proud of the school because of the culture; because of the people; like, it felt like family…Ja. It was family away from home. I mean, everyone has a different experience but my personal experience – I had a good relationship with the teachers and with my peers. I think it was just the vibe. And the feeling of being welcome. I felt welcome at the school

I weigh the substantial difference in experience for Aurora and the other participants. Her selection of words illuminate the comfort and acceptance she felt as a student. She mentions her relationships with teachers and that she felt welcome at the school. Racism and racialisation did not affect her experience of school.

Having discussed the effects of racialization, the final chapter deliberates over the stubborn moment South Africa is seemingly stuck in and tools to assist teachers from breaking free from it.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

The Negative Moment

Dormant antagonisms and unresolved crises continue to find their expression in the everyday experience of life. These are the structural issues faced by families in Thabong battling water cuts and the impending doom of unscheduled loadsheddings. The passive microagressions in language comments; and a school's celebration of an Afrikaans Evening but making no provision for a Sesotho Evening, or Heritage Day.

Achille Mbembe defines the negative moment as a time characterised by the continuous emergence of new antagonisms while the old remain unresolved (Mbembe, 2015: 2).

Mbembe's bearing is that there are no longer, "settlers or natives. There are only citizens", and it is everyone's responsibility to work towards breaking away from the grasp of this moment (2015: 3). He says it is not enough for the white population to lazily fight against inequality yet, "walk in our midst with whiteness' old clothes" while blackness fractures (Mbembe, 2015: 2).

It requires intentionality and agency from every individual to actively participate in breaking from the negative moment. Intentionality in demythologizing whiteness and exploring how it shapes everyday mundanity and, intentionality in highlighting histories that belittle the effects of apartheid (Mbembe, 2015: 2). Structural violence and inequality issues must be exposed for transformation.

> We are therefore calling for the demythologization of whiteness because democracy in South Africa will either be built on the ruins of those versions of whiteness that produced Rhodes or it will fail…Those versions of whiteness that produced men like Rhodes must be *recalled and de-commissioned* if we have to put history to rest, free ourselves from our own entrapment in white mythologies and open a future for all here and now. (Mbembe, 2015 : 4)

Mbembe argues that South Africa must invest in the decolonization of spaces, and the pedagogy of education (2015:4). Having explored the different ways space is not neutral, being transformative social agents would be beneficial, especially in a country, "in which 70% of the land is still firmly in the hands of the 13% of the population" (2015: 5).

Mbembe says black students and staff must create spaces where they can confidently claim, "this is my home. I am not an outsider here. I do not have to beg or to apologize to be here. I belong here" (Mbembe, 2015:5). By decolonizing spaces and disrupting racial ideology, access will be available, and expose that when it comes to belonging:

> It has nothing to do with the liberal notion of 'tolerance'.

> It has nothing to do with me having to assimilate into a culture that is not mine as a precondition of my participating in the public life of the institution.
> It has all to do with ownership of a space that is a public, common good
>
> Mbembe, 2015 : 5.

7.1 Accommodating needs

Geneva Gay explains the need for culturally responsive teachers and teaching would improve and benefit the ethnically diverse student population in schools currently (2002: 106). While her research is based in the Americas, Gay provides helpful insight that is beneficial in the context of South African schools still finding their footing with desegregation.

Gay asserts that an extensive body of information on subject matter and student population make for a rich learning environment. “Too many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach ethnically diverse students” and the result of this is an uncomfortable, distressing four years of school - experienced during the critical, developmental stages of an adolescent’s life (Gay, 2002: 106).

An experienced educator recognizes that their own behaviour has insurmountable influence on their students (Ikromova, 2020). Teachers must recognize how their own livelihoods impact their teaching and engagement with students. Pedagogical skills including: communication, diligence, foresight, professional independence, self-management, methods of interaction and collaboration and rapid comprehension of sensory information (reading the room), are important considerations that must be assessed and instilled in teachers (Ikromova, 2020: 123). These skills, as Gay highlights, are vital in ensuring that learning environments are suitable for a multi-ethnic, multiracial student body.

CONCLUSION:

This research exposes how the identities of black students in private schools are constantly in flux. Through interaction and encounters, the social world submits students to perpetual negotiations of how to behave and which self to present across space.

Chapter one discussed the complexities race and racialization have engrained into the social world. We looked at the consequences of English varieties and their influence in schools. We explored the shaping power of language and its relationship to wealth and status, and racism and the mechanics of how race structures society in Welkom.

Chapters two and three provided an in depth look at the experiences of town and school and the kinds of interactions and encounters happening there. The conflict between lived experience and external forces complicated the realities and developing identities of ComChrist students. This is seen through the imagined communities and imagined identities students would inhibit to 'peacefully' access town and navigate school. Through a critique of contact theory, we looked at the fragility of race and the ineffectivity of passive action against racism.

In the next two chapters, we explored social interaction and the influences of fields on identity. These chapters reinforced the extent to which interactions in the social world influence social reality. They also detailed the role and perceptions of language in the experience of the everyday.

Having explored Aurora's experience, the paper concludes with an analysis of South Africa's racial disposition. An awareness of how race structures experience was discussed, and the dissimilarity between student's scholarly experiences.

It is crucial to consider the whole identity of students in school because this is where children spend most of their time. How they are perceived and treated can either assist them in their navigation of the social world, or further shrink their self-perceptions. This research has shown me the importance of communicating the experience of how race is experienced. It has also shown me that individuals are all partly responsible in (re)producing norms. For transformation and release from the negative moment, students must be valued as individuals so that they too can see and feel their own value. Charging a space in a new way makes transformation inevitable.

The aim of this report was to discuss and expose the inharmonious reality of being a black private school student in Welkom. Through the channel of language and identity, it highlighted the influence of race and racialisation, the discordance of social class location, and the reality of being a black student in a private school.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Individual Participation Information Sheet



The Racialised Rules and Consequences of Language Use in Welkom.

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study.
My name is Khanyisile Maphalala and I am a Master's Scholar at the University of the Witwatersrand. Under the supervision of Professor Eric Worby, I have chosen to explore the influences of language practices and staff representation in Welkom's private schools.

As part of my research, I am interested in engaging with past pupils from the years 2012-2019.
My interest in the above years is rooted in significant changes and adjustments of students and staff at the school during this period.

Your participation and contribution to this discussion would be greatly appreciated and welcome. It will provide context and nuances into the understanding of language practices and cultural practices of private schools – as experienced by black, former private school scholars.

Interviews will be semi-structured and informal to encourage a natural flow of conversation. They will be held telephonically or virtually – suiting your needs.
Interviews will last a maximum of 45 minutes.
Your identity will be kept anonymous and confidential throughout the research period.

If you are interested or know of someone that might be, please don't hesitate to contact me.
Should you require clarity about my research, please contact myself or my supervisor.
Participation is completely voluntary.
Participation can be revoked at any time.

Thank you for considering taking part in my research project.

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HREC committee
Shaun Schoeman
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Counselling Service
080 045 6789

Appendix 2: Individual Consent Form

Race, Identity and Private Schools:
The Racialised Rules and Consequences of Language Use in Welkom.
Researcher: Khanyisile Maphalala



Research Participant Consent Form

I agree to participate in *Khanyisile Maphalala's* research project.

I confirm that the research has been thoroughly explained to me. I confirm that I understand my role as a research participant.

I agree to the following
(Please circle the relevant option)

I agree that my participation is voluntary	YES	NO
I agree that interview may be audio/video recorded	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in their final research report.	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO

....
Name of participant Signature of participant

.....
Date

....
Name of Consent seeker Signature of consent seeker

.....
Date

Appendix 3: Group Participant Information Sheet



Race, Identity and Private Schools: The Racialised Rules and Consequences of Language Use in Welkom.

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study.
My name is Khanyisile Maphalala and I am a Master's Scholar at the University of the Witwatersrand. Under the supervision of Professor Eric Worby, I have chosen to explore the influences of language practices and staff representation in Welkom's private schools.

As part of my research, I am interested in engaging with past pupils from 2015 matric year/ 2011 grade 8 year, specifically from 8.3.
I have chosen this group of alumna because I am interested in exploring the detailed and unique culture of "8.3" and the experience of being a student in this class/associated to this class.

Your participation and contribution to this discussion would be greatly appreciated and welcome. It will provide context and nuances into the understanding of language practices and cultural practices of private schools - as experienced by black, former private school scholars.

The interview will be conversational and informal. You will form part of a group of five participants. Interviews will be held virtually or telephonically.
Identity will be kept confidential, only known to other group discussion members. Identity will be anonymous in the paper.
This interview/discussion will be between 45-60 minutes.

If you are interested or know of someone that might be, please don't hesitate to contact me.
Should you require clarity about my research, please contact myself or my supervisor.
Participation is completely voluntary.
Participation can be revoked at any time.
Should you prefer a one-on-one interview, that can be duly arranged.

Thank you for considering taking part in my research project.

Contact details:

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Supervisor
Professor Eric Worby

eric.worby@wits.ac.za

Counselling Service

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Appendix 4 : Group Consent Form

Race, Identity and Private Schools:
The Racialised Rules and Consequences of Language Use in Welkom.
Researcher: Khanyisile Maphalala



Group Interview Participant Consent Form

I ……..agree to participate in *Khanyisile Maphalala's* research project.

I confirm that the research has been thoroughly explained to me. I confirm that I understand my role as a research participant.

I agree to the following
(Please circle the relevant option)

I agree that my participation is voluntary	YES	NO
I agree that interview may be audio/video recorded	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in their final research report.	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO
I agree to form part of a focus group discussion with an alias	YES	NO
I agree that I will keep the identities and aliases of other participants confidential and anonymous.	YES	NO

…….
Name of participant

…….
Signature of participant

…….
Date

…….
Name of Consent seeker

…….
Signature of consent seeker

…….
Date