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2019

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Bonwa, Sonia (2019) Whose 'K-Word' is it anyway:understanding the discourses used to justify and/ or repudiate the use of the word 'kaffir' in social media interactions, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/28539>

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Whose "k-word" is it anyway! : Understanding the discourses used to justify and/or repudiate the use of the word "kaffir" in social media interactions.

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2019

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Social& Psychological Research

DECLARATION

I, _____Sonia Mbowa ____, declare that this research report titled **whose "k-word" is it anyway! : Understanding the discourses used to justify and/or repudiate the use of the word "kaffir" in social media interactions** is my own unaided work. It has been submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Social and Psychological Research), to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before, for any other degree or for examination to any other university. All sources have been correctly referenced using the APA format of referencing.

Signature **Date**

_____ _____

Dedications

To the memory of Professor Claire Penn. A mentor I had hoped to author several papers with. She left a great void!

To Mmane Kgadi: “my memory loves you; it asks about you all the time”. I know you would celebrate me. It has been eight years yet not a day goes by that we do not long for you. We miss you; we miss your joyous presence!

To Mohau le Phenyo: I love you!

Acknowledgements

To the Holy Trinity who is never confused.

The National Research Foundation and the Wits Financial Aid & Scholarships Office are acknowledged for funding towards completing this Masters.

Many thanks to my supervisor: Professor Kevin Whitehead, for agreeing to supervise this project even when my original ideas were crazy. Thank you for the unlimited consultation hours, for always giving rich and thorough feedback, for replying to long emails and for honouring all my requests for supporting documents& letters -Thank you again and again Kevin!

I specially thank my parents for giving me the gift of education. My achievements are equally theirs. Thank you to the rest of my family and friends, for the prayers, for the encouragement, and for rooting for me.

To Eliya with love: I hope I finally convince you that language does not merely describe but also creates that which it seeks to describe. Thank you for being my light big brother, for continuing to show up when I felt ugly on the inside. You know all the dark sides!

To Thandokazi Maseti and Sharon Msiza, thank you for carrying me through the most. You know the tears, the rants and the complaints that this journey brought. Thandokazi, truly you love me!

And lastly to all the people at Wits-HCRU and the 2017 MA-SPR class, y'all are amazing!

May life treat all of you kindly with endless blessings.

Enkosi! Kealeboga! Nakhensa!

Abstract

The word "kaffir" has particular histories and meanings in South Africa and has previously led to civil proceedings. In the current study I sought to understand the discourses and discursive strategies used by social media interlocutors to justify and/or repudiate the use of the word and to situate it as (un)acceptable. The study was interested in illuminating the unmediated manner in which social media interactions occur rather than the explanations that people give for the use of the word after it has been used. *Twitter* and public *Facebook* pages and groups were searched for posts that comprised the word "kaffir" in its variant spellings, including the euphemized "k-word". The data was analyzed using discourse analysis. The findings from the study indicate that the discussions around the use of the word "kaffir" generally suggest that it is problematized depending on certain contextual factors like the racial category and age of the persons using the word. The discussions that follow after the initial post about the word "kaffir" highlight South Africa's continuous struggle with race and accusations of racism and "reverse racism"; disagreements over the nature of racism were recurrent in the exchanges. Interlocutors relied on two competing discourses – the Contextualist discourse and the Universalist discourse to justify and/or challenge the (un)acceptability of using the word and to justify and/or challenge attempts to re-appropriate it as a positive self-identifier. The Contextualist discourse was used to argue that factors like age, race and context determine the (un)acceptability of the word. The Universalist discourse was used to justify the use of the word as acceptable and also to challenge it as unacceptable. Proponents of the Universalist discourse argued for the word "kaffir" to be made available to all people, irrespective of their race on the basis that the word was never racist at its inception. On the contrary, opponents argued that the word was racist at inception and therefore any continued used perpetuates racial stereotypes.

KEYWORDS: **"KAFFIR", RACIAL SLURS, SOCIAL MEDIA, LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE**

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Chapter 1

1.1. Introduction and Rationale

In its twenty fourth year of democracy, South Africa continues to grapple with disputes of race, racial identity and racist hate speech. Like many democratically governed countries in the world, South Africa battles between allowing individuals to enjoy their right to freedom of speech while also having to ensure and protect the right to human dignity so that others are not racially slurred in the name of freedom of speech (Botha & Govindjee, 2016). According to Botha and Govindjee (2016), a substantial number of hate speech cases in South Africa involve the use of inter-personal racial slurs, one of which is the use of the word "kaffir"[1]. Legally, the word "kaffir" has been outlawed as hate speech (Cresswell, Whitehead, & Durrheim, 2014; Williams, 2015) and its use has led to numerous prosecutions in the post-apartheid South African courts, for example, Old Mutual V Finca and SATAWU (2005), State v Swanepoel (2007), Prinsloo v State (2010) and Kente v Deventer (2014). Although the current study does not have the legalities of hate speech as its main focus, it is impossible to write about the word "kaffir" in any context without touching on its legal or constitutional implications in South Africa. In March of 2018, Vicki Momberg became the first person to be jailed for racism, particularly for her derogatory use of the word "kaffir". Momberg is said to have used the word more than forty eight (48) times towards several black people, including police officers (Shange, 2018; South African Human Rights Commission , 2018). Although the Momberg incident took place offline, a video of her using the word was widely shared on social media with many people debating the offensiveness and acceptability of the word. According to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the year 2016 highlighted an apparent increase in racist statements on social media (SAHRC, 2018). One such social

[1] The word has a variety of spellings "cafar" caffer, caf(f)ir, caffre(e), cafre, kaffer, kaffre (Baderoon, 2009) and is in most cases euphemised as "the k-word". In this report, the version "kaffir" is adopted for consistency. However, in the re-production of texts from the data excerpts, the spelling of the word is reproduced as originally written by the interlocutors.

media statement which triggered upheaval was posted by Matthew Theunissen in May 2016. Theunissen updated a *Facebook* status to complain about the then Minister of Sports' decision to ban the country's sport federations from bidding to host international events because they had failed to meet racial transformation goals. In the status, Theunissen referred to government officials as "kaffirs" and "black fucking cunts" (Feltham, 2016; Mtyala, 2016). Consequently, The SAHRC ordered Theunissen to apologize and to engage in community service as penalty for his remarks. The Commission also ordered him to abstain from using social media for twelve months (SAHRC, 2016). Matthew Theunissen's case is just one example, according to the Citizen Research Centre (CRC) the word "kaffir" (in its variant spellings) was used 15 415 times on public social media in South Africa (CRC, 2017) in the year 2016.

In the subsequent years, there have been other cases involving the use of the word which have led to public uproar. For example, in 2018, videos of Adam Catzavelos and Kessie Nair using the word "kaffir" against black people went viral on social media and The South African Human Rights Commission probed both men after several members of the public and political parties lodged complaints against them. These cases show that the use of the word "kaffir" on the internet has or may have potential real life consequences. What these consequences in turn suggest is the fact that there is a general problematization of the use of the word "kaffir" by both legal institutions and ordinary people in everyday social settings. Some have written letters to the editor and opinion pieces to explain why the use of the word "kaffir" can be problematic, for instance, Khumalo (2016), Brown (2018) and Kassiem (2018). However, apart from such letters and opinion pieces Baderoon (2009, 2012) and Aradt (2018) seem to be the only authors providing contemporary academic work on the word "kaffir". There seems to be a general scarcity of research around the discourses surrounding its use, especially on social media. Social media platforms play a key role in shaping contemporary social relations and can act as channels of distributing racialised discourses by alienating ethno-cultural minorities and as a result, they should not simply be thought of as neutral channels of communication (Farkas, Schou, & Neumayer, 2018).

Following from the discussion provided above, this study was invested in illuminating how ordinary members of society use social media interactions to tease out factors which make the use the word "kaffir" (un)acceptable. The broad aim of the research project was to understand the kinds of discourses that are drawn upon to justify and/ or repudiate the use of the word "kaffir".

This research report consists of four (4) chapters. In the remainder of chapter 1, the aim and research questions for the study are provided. Chapter 2 offers an expanded account on the history of the use of the word "kaffir" in South Africa. It also critically engages with what other researchers have reported on the topics of racial slurs and social media, highlighting methodology and empirical findings. Chapter 3 outlines the procedures followed for sampling the data, acknowledging both the advantages and the limitations of extracting social media data for research purposes. The study is informed by a discursive framework and is attentive to how language and discourse create reality and meaning and uses Discourse Analysis (DA) as a method of data analysis. Chapter 3 continues with a detailed outline of this method. In chapter 4 the data excerpts are analysed and findings are discussed against the backdrop of some of the literature delivered in the previous chapters.

1.2. Research Aim and Research Questions

Following from prosecution of the cases mentioned above, it is clear that outlawing the use of the word "kaffir" has not discouraged people from using it, particularly on social media platforms. As such, the aim of the current study is to understand how social media interlocutors discursively navigate the use of the word "kaffir" and how they situate it as (un)acceptable. The study asks two central questions as follows;

1) When is the use of the word "kaffir" considered (un)acceptable by social media interlocutors?

2) What discourses do social media interlocutors draw upon to justify and/or repudiate the use of the word "kaffir"?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this Chapter, I discuss central literature that contextualizes my research and forms the basis of the study. In the first part of the chapter, I sketch in brevity the history of the word "kaffir" in South Africa; attending to how it was originally coined and eventually challenged as a disparaging term. The second part of the chapter offers a discussion on language and discourse and how they anchor societal interactions. The third part offers a critical review of previous studies that have been done on different types of slurs, revealing controversies and highlighting knowledge gaps. I point out both strengths and weaknesses in methodology and arguments made by previous researchers before mapping out what the current study will comprise.

2.1. The History of the Word "Kaffir" in South Africa: A Chronological Account

Baderoon (2012) describes the word "kaffir" as the most notorious word in South African history. The word "kaffir" was derived from the Islamic term *kafir* which means unbeliever or one who hides and rejects the truth of Allah (Arndt, 2018, Baderoon, 2009). During the Arab trade in the 15th and 16th centuries in South Africa, believers of the Islamic faith would characterise all persons who did not believe in Allah as *kafirs*. However, the different colonial groups; the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English racialized the word and used it to refer to the native black people of Southern Africa (Arndt, 2018; Baderoon, 2009; Hughes, 2006). They racialized the term by connecting it explicitly to the black skin colour (Arndt, 2018). According to Baderoon (2009), there was an ontological function to the way these colonial settlers used the term "kaffir"; they named "kaffir" what they thought ought to remain separate from them, what they considered "Other". Therefore, "kaffir" fell at the extreme end of the spectrum of words which distinguished the European colonists from the African natives (Baderoon, 2009). Arndt (2018) further offers an account of how in their writings, the Portuguese in particular would describe that the key characteristic of "kaffirs" was that they were black and as a result, by the end of the 16th century, the term had become synonymous with black skin colour. In the centuries to

come, other European commentators would also agree that skin colour served as an important marker of the "kaffir" race. The word "kaffir" was overtly used in statistical and official documents within state institutions. It was also used within the scientific world, within the media and in ordinary conversations (Hughes, 2006) to describe black people. Arndt (2018) notes the parallels between black economic disempowerment and the use of the word "kaffir" and argues that the word should be viewed as a valuable historical record of the establishment of white supremacy in Southern Africa. When European settlers began to compete with the Xhosa nation for land and other resources in the late 18th century, they also began to imbue the term "kaffir" with decidedly negative meanings like being savage, subhuman and inferior to the Caucasian race. During these wars for resources, characterising the natives as treacherous, thieving, indolent and merciless savages allowed the settlers to justify the dispossession of the indigenous population and to legitimise the imposition of white supremacy (Arndt, 2018).

Indeed words are not only used to describe people and phenomena but can equally be used to enact social identities and relations (Crymble, 2010). Rather than purely describe human differences, words and language are in fact often used to inscribe these differences (Crymble, 2010). Language is often used as a manipulative tool to suggest that there are differences in the moral and mental capacities of different ethnic groups (Crymble, 2010). As such, the term "kaffir" and the racialising discourses it carried throughout the centuries allowed colonialists to promote skin colour and language as markers of distinct racial identities in a region where natives had historically elevated brotherly amalgamations above skin colour and language barriers (Arndt, 2018). This once again shows the lengths to which the colonialists went to undermine the native way of life in order to impose white supremacy and colonialism.

While it is not clear when black people started recognizing the term "kaffir" as a slur, Baderoon (2009) asserts that even during the colonial period, there was resistance to its use, particularly when it was used by white people. During the last years of apartheid, in 1992, there was a call to rename a town called

"Kafferrivier" in the Free State province. Some proponents of the name change argued that the term had very negative connotations and that the change would demonstrate an effort at reconciliation by the inhabitants of the town. As Mtose (2011) writes, in South Africa most black people view the use of racial slurs as an on-going form of racism. In post-apartheid South Africa, the use of the word "kaffir" by white people has been resisted through song, for instance, Arthur Mofokate's "don't call me kaffir" (Baderoon, 2012; Khumalo, 2016), through opinion pieces, for example, Khumalo (2016) and through lawsuits as revealed earlier. Slurs carry an immense burden of history (Hill, 2008), therefore, knowledge of the history of the word "kaffir" as a racial slur is useful because it opens up insights into how the word took on different meanings over the centuries and why it is considered hate speech under post-apartheid South African law Acts.

De Klerk (2011, p.40) posits that due to a history of racist discrimination and current heightened awareness of constitutional values, racist terminology is regarded as the most offensive and inflammatory language that can be used in the new South Africa. In the year 2000, the South African Parliament enacted the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) in efforts to regulate racist and hate speech in the country. The PEPUDA was enacted to give effect to South Africa's obligations to the terms of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination to which the country is a signatory (Botha & Govindjee, 2016). According to The PEDUDA, words amount to hate speech if they are communicated, published, advocated or propagated based on prohibited grounds including race, gender, ethnic or social origin and colour (Botha & Govindjee, 2016). The Act further states that if the words are objectively considered to be hurtful, harmful, to incite harm or to propagate hatred, they amount to hate speech irrespective of the intentions of the person who uses them. This Act is in accordance with the Constitution of The Republic of South Africa of 1996 which protects the right to dignity of persons. As a transformative human rights and anti-discriminatory statute, The PEPUDA is aimed at regulating the use of racial, racist or hate speech and to provide a means grounded in law to overcome the harm caused both to its victims and the broader

societal good (Botha & Govindjee, 2016). While it is clear that many judges have condemned the use of the word "kaffir" in accordance with The PEPUDA, ordinary people may hold different views regarding the use of the word. As such it becomes necessary to investigate how ordinary interlocutors may defend the (un)acceptability of its use. This investigation is not necessarily meant to provide a comparison between views of the courts and those of the public but to offer insight to how ordinary people converse about the use of the word given that it has real life consequences.

2.2. Language and Discourse

Language is a powerful force in human interactions; to interact with each other and partake in everyday social activities, people need language (Dondson, 2014). Nonetheless, language is never a neutral form of communication. What we do with language has material consequences. Language is instrumental in establishing categories of change, relations of inequality and the social norms by which we live our lives (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). Language also makes possible the construction and circulation of discourses (Durrheim et al., 2011; Fairclough, 2013). According to Mills (1997) all talk and texts which have meaning and have effects in the world count as discourse. A discourse is not a mere collection of statements but groupings of texts which mean something within particular social contexts. In other words, discourses can be defined as circulating sets of shared meanings that do things in the world. People use discourses to perform actions, for example, they can use them to construct objects and identities, argue points, resist, complain about and question certain practices (Durrheim *et al.*, 2011; Gee, 2014). According to Durrheim et al. (2011), this shared meaning is what makes interaction possible. People interact against a backdrop of shared knowledge. It can thus be argued that people communicate or talk to others with the taken for granted assumption that the listeners have a shared understanding of what they are talking about. Based on this shared knowledge assumption, they can then expect that others will respond and interact with them. This expectation of a response also highlights the fact that the use of language is always dialogical. When people speak or write, they always have a

listener or reader in mind whom they hope to influence or impact in some way (Fairclough, 2013). It is in this way that language has the power to shape and channel people's social lives and interactions.

Dondson (2014) argues that the influence of language on human interactions can be indicated by how people use and recognize the impact of using certain words. According to Durrheim et al. (2011) the meanings contained in particular words are collective historical productions that help people make sense of the world. As such, the words people use matter because they are filled with meaning and sometimes they have stereotypes and/or connotations attached to them. Durrheim et al. (2011) further suggest that every time a word with racial connotations is used, racial stereotypes are (re)produced- whether intentionally or unintentionally. Language and word choice allow for meaning making and for people to position themselves and others in specific ways (Durrheim *et al.*, 2011). For example, people can position themselves and others racially. Racial positioning, according to Durrheim et al. (2011) can be done overtly or subtly through the use of derogatory speech. Discourses condition how people think about and interact with others. They foster a medium through which the racial order crystallizes in everyday interaction (Embrick & Hendrick, 2013).The study of racial slurs, therefore, can allow us to see racial positioning in action. Indeed Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) advise that the study of language must illuminate social practises and I hope to do that with the current research. By investigating a word that is undeniably loaded with historical racial connotations, I hope to also contribute to the broader understanding of racialized interactions in South Africa.

2.3. The Use of Slurs

Slurs, as defined by Croom (2013) and Bianchi (2014) are labels and terms that are employed to derogate particular groups of people and their members on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. They can therefore be a threat to people's identities (Motley & Craig-Henderson, 2007). They represent negative attitudes about groups and are uttered with the intent to offend the target group. Slurs have been historically used towards various minority groups as a means

of maintaining barriers against assimilation into the dominant group (Hoffman, Wallach, Graham, & Sanchez, 2009). According to Croom (2008, 2013), racial slurs can be understood as racist language in that their very goal is to derogate people based on which racial group they belong to. Similarly, Hasanuzzaman, Dias and Way (2017, p.926) write that "racism is often expressed through negative and inaccurate stereotypes with one-word epithets, phrases, metaphors and juxtapositions that convey hateful intents". Members of minority groups who have been victims of racial slurring often report that slurs are hurtful and humiliating (Hill, 2008). The use of racial slurs is therefore one of the ways in which the action orientated nature of language can be observed. By this I am referring to the idea that language can perform actions. For example, from the performative linguistic ideology, slurs are understood to "cut" and to "wound" their targets (Hill, 2008).

According to Galinsky et al. (2013) the derogatory use of slurs is one of the key weapons through which an oppressive group oppresses its target group. This is because slurs express contempt and scorn, and, as carriers of stigma, they represent mechanisms of social control that can reinforce a group's disempowered state (Galinsky et al., 2013). Slurring does not occur in a social, political or economic vacuum. Rather, "it is a salient aspect of a broader pattern of discrimination, marginalization, and mistreatment, so that often times where a group resists oppression, it is also resisting slurring" (Rahman, 2015, p.71).There is general agreement among scholars that slurs are importantly connected to social norms that play a central role in the subordination of the targeted group (Herbert, 2015). According to Hoffman, Wallach, Graham, and Sanchez (2009), the use of slurs is often a precursor to violence against the target group. De Kerk (2011) asserts that there is a strong link between slurs, power, attitudes and social inferences. The use of slur labels, by both the labelled and the labelling group can therefore shed light on how social hierarchies are constructed, maintained and revised (Galisnky et al., 2013). Slurs provide a means for expressing political phenomenon. They are used to render particular groups of people as inferior, animalistic and subhuman (De Kerk, 2011; Rahman, 2015). According to Rahman (2015), slurs are always coupled with ideologies; which makes their use even more harmful since they

are never neutral. Embrick and Hendricks (2013) contend that racial slurs sustain racial antagonism, and consequently (re)produce an unjust racial order. They mark status differentials among racial groups and can function as political instruments of power in that they legitimize hierarchal arrangements of race when acted upon. Nevertheless, scholars have contradicting views about the offensiveness, meanings and equality of racial slurs. Some scholars believe that the derogatory content of slurs is contained in their literal meanings - it is expressed in every utterance. Conversely, other scholars believe that the derogatory content is conveyed in context and in how the slur is used (Bianchi, 2014). Scholars like Embrick and Hendricks (2013), Dondson (2014) and Jeshion (2013) are of the impression that slurs can never lose their derogatory meaning because they are inseparable from their baptismal history; they can never be removed from the context in which they were originally produced. Accordingly, these scholars argue that the usage of words that were originally coined as slurs will always reinforce stereotypes about their target group.

On the contrary, the likes of Galinsky et al. (2013) and Croom (2014) argue that slurs can be appropriated and transformed; they are not static but are modulated in history and can lose their original meanings, depending primarily on who uses them and the context in which they are used. Bianchi (2014, p.37) writes that "groups may appropriate their own slurs for non- derogatory purposes, in order to demarcate the group, and to show a sense of intimacy and solidarity". Essentially, those who self-label themselves with racial slurs attempt to capture the label for themselves and to deny others the use of it (Galinsky et al., 2013). Indeed a lot of researchers have found that most proponents of re-appropriation make it known that the word is not available to the dominant group/ the group that coined the slur. For instance, in their study of the reactions African Americans and Africans in diaspora have towards the word "nigger/a" Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) found that African Americans participants attached greater significance to the in-group or out-group status of people using the word. The participants reported that they saw a difference in the meaning of the term when used by black people (in-group members) and when used by white people (out-group members). They expressed that

they found white people's use to be objectionable. Furthermore, they expressed that white people's use of the word suggested attempts to be black. Moreover, they thought that white people did not know how to use the word in the right context and that the history of the word simply did not allow for use by white people. Galinskiy et al. (2013) argues that re-appropriating and self-labelling with slurs is a form of power. Projects of re-appropriation are centred on the implicit idea that target group members ought to have control over slurs that have historically been used against them. Re-appropriation is a form of social protest that is explicitly discursive and is aimed at undermining the ideologies associated with the slur (Herbert, 2015). "Whereas other kinds of protests use language as a tool in speeches, songs, or literature to achieve their goal, re-appropriation focuses on changing the linguistic role of the slur. This relies on changing the discursive conventions connected to the slur and potentially subverting the social norms associated with it" (Herbert, 2015, p.1). The LGBTQIA+ community's uptake of the terms gay, dyke and queer are examples of such re-appropriation (Bianchi, 2014). Likewise, some feminists have also seemingly embraced the word "slut" to create awareness for rape culture through the annual "SlutWalk" campaigns throughout the world (Noe, 2015).

The enormous amount of research done on the appropriation of the word "nigger/a" by African Africans further confirms the possibility of slurs losing their derogatory meanings when used within the African American community (Adegbembo & MacQuarrie, 2017; Galinsky *et al.*, 2013). According to Fogle (2013), the use of the word "nigger/a" can be a linguistic tool utilized to increase personal and racial esteem. However, even within in-groups there are sometimes disagreements about the necessity and appropriateness of re-appropriation (Dondson, 2014). For example, according to Coates (2013) and Dondson (2014) in as much as the word "nigger/a" has generally been accepted by African American hip hop artists and younger generations in America, the older generations of African Americans, most of whom actually experienced blatant racial discrimination, do not welcome the uptake of the word by any Black or African American individual. As such, it is clear that re-appropriation is a complex phenomenon.

In South Africa there also have been incidences that suggest that racial slurs are not necessarily acceptable simply because they have been used by one in-group member on or against another in-group member. In 2008, Dr Irvin Khoza, the chairperson of Orlando Pirates Football Club told a fellow Black person to "stop thinking like a kaffir" (Seekoei, 2008). Consequently, The South African Human Rights Commission ordered him to apologise for using the word and threatened that The Commission would take him to court if he did apologise. Furthermore, in the matter between *Lucas and Peterson (2016),* the Northern Cape division of the High Court of South African ruled that Lucas was guilty for using the word "hotnots" to refer to people of the Khoi community even though she also identifies as Khoi. In the ruling, the judge writes that "some words are derogatory and hurtful irrespective of whether they are uttered by a person of the same ethnic group or nationality" (Lucas v. Peterson, 2016, p.12). On the contrary, in a case between *Modikwa Mining Personnel Services V Ramaepadi* (2012), the ruling judge made comments that "when a person who is not an African calls an African person a "kaffir", such conduct constitutes racial abuse" (p.8) consequently making an exception for cases where both the perpetrator and the victim are Black/African. These cases highlight that there may be multiple factors that play a role in determining the acceptability of who can use racial slurs and in what context they can use them.

As suggested previously, the very aim of re-appropriation is to undermine the ideologies that the slurring group wished to perpetuate against the slurred group. However, some scholars argue that re-appropriation attempts only grant slurs legitimacy and desensitize people to their usage. hooks (1989), for example, suggests that instead of being a positive phenomenon, the re-appropriation of slurs like "nigger/a" by black people, may well be a manifestation and validation of the ideologies of white supremacy. Similarly, some women's rights activists argue that the attempts to re-appropriate the word "slut" only serves to reinforce the culture of misogyny (Herbert, 2015; Noe, 2015). In addition, some scholars like Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) and Hill (2008) suggest that the re-appropriation of slurs potentially makes them available to undesired parties like the oppressive group. For example, the

re-appropriation of "nigger/a" has reportedly led to white supremacists insisting on their right to also use the word (Motley & Craig-Henderson, 2007). Furthermore, Motley and Craig-Henderson (2007) indicate that the re-appropriation of "nigger/a" has led to the commodification of the word with some non-black individuals using it to appear progressive.

Researchers have also disagreed on the equality of slurs used against different groups. Some have argued that slurs are hurtful even if they are directed at dominant groups thereby suggesting that all slurs are equally offensive. For example, Wray (2006) contends that the terms "nigger/a" and "white trash" have performed much of the same symbolic violence on their victims. Wray (2006) argues that conflating whiteness with power obscures the social dynamics which stigmatize poor white people as "white trash". According to Wray (2006), poor white people have historically suffered comparable plight to blacks and therefore should not be seen as automatically possessing power because they are white. On the other hand, Embrick and Henricks (2013) assert that in a racialized society, white people are afforded sanctuary from slurs and stereotypes that have historically justified the mistreatment of other groups. They maintain that slurs applied to whites by non-whites do not carry the same meanings and outcomes because slurs against white people are highly unlikely to affect their lives in the same way that they affect the lives of marginalized groups. In harmony with Embrick and Henricks (2013), Herbert (2015, p.) argues that although the term "whitey" is a pejorative and targets white people on the basis of their racial group membership, it doesn't connect up with a long standing practice of systematic dehumanization, marginalization, and exclusion from participation in social spaces (p. 133).

Bax (2018) analysed how the word cracker is euphemized as "the C-word" to discursively construct the phenomenon of "reverse racism" and argues that paralleling racial slurs used for black people against terms used for white people creates an illusory affinity between the two groups' experiences of racial abuse. According to Bax (2018), the juxtaposition with anti-black racism makes perceived prejudice against white people seem more legitimate and more real and ultimately promotes an "equivalency

effect between societal racism against black people and negative attitudes toward whites" (p.128). Bax (2018) further argues that this can "contribute to the perception that white people are collectively disadvantaged on racial grounds and even systematically targeted for violence as a group" (p.128). Bax (2018) asserts that attempts at equating the pejoratives used against black people and white people ignore the differences in political power between the two groups globally.

An innumerable number of studies have been conducted on the use of slur words, many of which have been in the discipline of linguistics and primarily centre on the structures, phonology and semantics of the words themselves (Dondson, 2014). Blakemore (2015), Croom (2011, 2013) and Jeshion (2013) are some of the authors who have written with such a focus in linguistics. However, the next section specifically focuses on studies that document how people defend or challenge the acceptability of the use of slurs with a level of focus on discourse. Such studies include those conducted by Hill (2008), Hübinette (2013), Dondson (2014) and Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017). A review of each study is given below.

Hill (2008) monitored an online message board that was run for public discussions regarding the renaming of a mountain called "Squaw Peak" in Arizona, USA. In addition to the comments on message board which were written anonymously, Hill also paid attention to the signed letters to the editor and opinion pieces regarding the name change. The term "squaw" is a pejorative used to refer to Native American women and has been contested as a slur for more than a hundred and fifty years (Hill, 2008). According to Hill (2008), proponents of the name change accused those who were against it of being racists using the logic that since the word is a racial slur, any person insisting on its use promotes racism. This resulted in some opponents of the name change beginning their defences with discursive disclaimers like" I am not racist but…" or "I mean no disrespect but…" Hill (2008, p.65) argues that the main reason why people refuse to acknowledge the word "squaw" as a racial slur is that they view

accusations of racism as an attack to their personal characters; since being racist is associated with being backward, uneducated and marginal.

However, charges of racism did not only come from the proponents of the name change. Some of the opponents accused those in favour of the name change as "Overly sensitive and racist Indians" and "Overly sensitive white hating racists". These commenters felt that Native Americans were prejudiced against white people and that this prejudice manifested itself through the demands for the name change. Indeed Hill (2008) found that the majority of the comments turned into Native American vs. White American brawls with each side feeling that the other was playing "the race card". Native Americans were accused of "reverse racism" and whites were portrayed as victims of a new political order that threatened white wellbeing and sought to attack white virtue. Furthermore, white people suggested that if everyone were colour-blind then the word "squaw" would not matter because it would be understood as a non-racial term. Colour-blindness would essentially allow both Native and White Americans use of the word without accusations of racism.

According to Hill (2008), the majority of those who defended the use the word made use of the following defences –

1) That the word was not offensive in its original language and therefore it cannot at any point be offensive.
2) That the word is part of history and tradition and ceasing to use it would lead to erasure of those histories.
3) That those who wanted to label the word as an offensive slur were only doing so to appear politically correct.
4) That those wanted to who use the word had a right to do so in a democratic country.

Hill states that the first two defences listed above reflect orientation to the discourse of baptismal ideology which views the meanings of words as fixed from when they were first used. Opponents of the

name who used the third defence argued that the Arizona State had more important issues to fix than appease Native Americans through a controversial name change, the prioritization of the name change was therefore seen a strategy to score votes by those in government. In the fourth defence, the discourse of "rights" was used to reason that since America is a democratic country, individuals had a right to freedom of speech which allowed them to call the mountain whatever name they thought fit. Hill (2008) concludes by arguing it is the above discourses and defences that will ensure that the word "squaw" will remain in circulation despite concerns that it is wounding and humiliating to Native Americans. This according to Hill (2008) is proof that slurs do not disappear but shift into new environments and find new forms of active circulation.

Hübinette, (2013) analysed different contexts where academics, statesmen and ordinary people in Sweden defended the use of colonial and racial epithets despite public outcries that they were offensive. The specific words that Hübinette's study focused on were "Oriental", "neger" and various expressions associated with anti-Semitism like "Himmler" and "Swastika". According to Hübinette (2013), in all his contexts of analysis, predominantly white Swedes defended the use of these words by claiming that Sweden is a non-racist society and therefore any use of these words in a contemporary Swedish setting cannot be denigrating. Hübinette (2013) argues that this defence is part of an on-going, everyday Swedish discourse that seeks to locate the country as post-racial and anti-racist. The discourse is common in state institutions and among media personalities and politicians. Hübinette (2013) reports that proponents of the words also argue that since those who use the words have no intentions to be hurtful, it was unjustifiable for anyone to feel offended by their use. These proponents thus elevated intention as a maker of acceptability when using such controversial words. Following his analysis, Hübinette argues that such proponents are blind to how their unrelenting use of the words contributes to the normalization and naturalization of everyday racism and the denigration of minorities because they rarely take the histories and perspectives of minorities who were victims of racial slurring into account.

For the third study under review, Dondson (2014) employed a transformative-emancipatory mixed methods approach to explore the relation between African-Americans' linguistic ideologies, racial identity attitudes, and use of the "n-word". These included the use of a web-based survey and individual interviews with USA philosopher and public intellectual Dr. Cornel West and hip-hop artist and actor Common. Among other things, the survey questionnaire asked participants (who identified as African American/Black) if they thought it was acceptable for the word "nigga" to be used within the African American community and if they themselves (the participants) had ever used it. Furthermore, Dondson examined if participants' beliefs about appropriateness for the word "nigga" were influenced by the racial background of the speaker and by public/private settings in which the speaker was using the word. Dondson (2014) probed the different linguistic ideologies that may be used to justify or reject the use of the "n-word" and found that proponents of the word often argued that the word is context dependent and can be reshaped into different meanings. In contrast, those who were against the use of the word depended on the baptismal ideology which proposes that words have a singular meaning which can be traced back to when they were first used. The main difference between Dondson's study and the current study is that the current study aimed to directly look at how the contextual and/or universal (un)acceptability of the word "kaffir" is debated in actual interactional settings, instead of relying on asking people to produce post hoc reflections or descriptions of their interactional behaviour. A critique of Dondson's methodology in this regard would be that sensitive topics such as race pose methodological dilemmas in which respondents often provide researchers with publicly correct answers to reflect socially acceptable norms (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). On the contrary, it can be argued that analyses of online discussions allow researchers to explore everyday conversations on matters of public controversy where interlocutors may be less concerned about social desirability (Jowett, 2015).

In the last study, Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017) conducted their research with the aim of discovering how individuals respond to the use of the term "nigger/a" within a Canadian context. They mined their data from comments posted on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation website

(http://www.cbc.ca) regarding the removal of the word “nigger/a” from place names in Canada. They used Foucaldian Discourse Analysis to investigate the discourses and power relations surrounding the use of the term. Their findings revealed two emergent discourses; namely the acknowledgement discourse where the term “nigger/a” is perceived as racialized, and the denial discourse where it is understood as non-racialized. Under the acknowledgement discourse, the interlocutors stressed the history of the term “nigger/a”, acknowledged it as sensitive or mentioned factors that determined its use as unacceptable. In particular, interlocutors who acknowledged the term as racialised showed an awareness and understanding of “nigger/a” as a word historically used to define black people as morally and intellectually inferior and lacking in power and argued that the word is still able to carry similar meanings in the present-day. As such, they viewed the use of the word as symptomatic of racism and argued that even when used to describe a place and not directly to belittle black people, it was still wrong. Under the denial discourse, interlocutors suggested that the history of the word should be forgotten and labelled those who were offended by its use as unnecessarily emotional. It is also under the denial discourse that commenters argued that those were concerned with the removal of slurs must "tell that to Canadian aboriginals who use 'settler', 'colonial', etc., pejoratively” (p.22). According to Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017), this reasoning highlighted accusations of “reverse racism” and the discourse of equivalency where words like settler are compared to the word “nigger/a” in order to position white people as victims of racism. Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017) conclude that the acknowledgment discourse and the denial discourse demonstrate that the complex and complicated nature of the word “nigger/a” makes it difficult for society to come to a consensus about its meaning and use.

The studies reviewed throughout this chapter are important and contribute invaluable lessons to the debates about the nature of racial slurring and racism. Notably, the studies were from different countries (highlighting a myriad of histories and contextual factors) and were concerned with different slurs. They also highlighted a myriad of methodologies for investigating the use of slurs. The current study is to

some extent methodologically comparable to those conducted by Hill (2008) and Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017) in that it uses data from online platforms where interlocutors debate the use of a slur in interactional settings instead of reporting post hoc reflections and thoughts on the uses of the slur. Furthermore, the current study also focuses on the discourses used to justify and/ or repudiate the use of this slur. This method points out that the debate around the use of slurs is not only important for scholars and courts of law but it is also treated as a matter of concern by ordinary participants in everyday interactional settings. Borrowing from the assertion Whitehead (2009) makes about racial categories, I also argue that since people can use racial slurs as a basis for racial hierarchy and social action, it is important to investigate mechanisms through which slurs and the common sense knowledge associated with their (un)acceptability are (re)produced in interaction. It is through everyday discourses, as critical race scholars have shown, that racist structures are reinforced and legitimated (Bonilla-Silva, 2001).

2.4. Social Media and Race

Globally, the media as an institution has always played a significant role in shaping the discussions around race and racism. In apartheid South Africa, media houses were chiefly owned by white people (Sibango, 2016). As a result, the content and ideologies reflected what was going on in society; racial stereotyping was rife, white superiority was normalized and advocated for while other races were written about and represented in sub-humanizing ways (Durrheim, Quayle, Whitehead, & Kriel, 2005; Tomaselli, 1997). In post-apartheid South Africa, there are still complaints being lodged agaisnt the media for being racist and disseminating stereotypes about black people (Sibango, 2016). As such, one cannot deny the role played by media in racializing socities. Indeed media technologies and texts can be used to perpetuate stereotypes, exploitation and racial discrimination thus providing a space for the advancement of discourses that are harmful to certain groups of people. (Stadler, 2011). Sibango (2016) asserts that media discourses are worthy of scholarly attention because they have implications for how

individuals interpret events and similarly, individual discourses such as online commentary have consequences for social structures and cannot be dismissed as having limited significance.

With the advancement of the internet, social media has become a part of everyday life in many societies and race continues to be a perpetual feature in social media spaces. Social media refers to a "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0 and allow for the co-creation, modification and exchange of user-generated content (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5) p.5). Examples of such applications also known as social networking sites (SNSs) include *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube*. Social media and the Internet have profoundly changed the way people converse about political and societal issues (Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012). The collaborative nature of social media platforms make them an ideal setting for discourses because they function as sites for the contestations of meaning. They provide a space for social phenomena to be constructed through language and for discourses to be (re)produced and resisted through discussion and debate. (Jowett, 2015, p.287). Allan (2007) suggests that social media sites like *Facebook* and *Twitter* also largely allow for uncensored expressions and allow citizens to debate pressing societal issues. Kavada (2015) emphasizes that social media platforms provide a space where communication can surpass transmission, that is, communication becomes more than producers providing consumers with information as tends to happen in mass media. On social media there is room for communication to become conversational; allowing people to collectively experience and enact their world. On social media platforms, the line between producer and consumer is thinned out. It thus becomes easy to observe how people collaborate and interact to make and remake a meaningful world on such internet sites.

Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman (2000, p.5), argue that "race finds its way into cyberspace because people do not leave their knowledge, values and experiences about race 'outside' when they logon to the internet". They assert that everyday life and everyday life conversations penetrate their way into the

internet and there is no clear separation between cyberspace and 'real life'. In a similar vein, as far as back 1998, Steve Jones argued that life on the internet did not exist in isolation from life in the 'real' world; as such, studying internet relations was one way of studying social relations. Likewise, Khanyile (2016) states that the intricacies and complexities of social life are entrenched and archived within social media platforms and as such, social media is the research hub of the future. Race, racism and hate speech play out in interesting and sometimes disturbing ways on these digital spaces (Farkas et al., 2018). Social Networking Sites can act as channels of distributing racist discourses by alienating minority groups, they should thus not be thought of as neutral platforms of communication (Farkas et al., 2018). Sibango (2016) attests to this by stating that while the discourses circulated on social media can mirror those circulated in traditional media and political spheres, social media relatively allows for a more heightened use of insults and name-calling against particular groups. Social media racism in South Africa has been a cause of concern for the South African Human Rights Commission. According to Kekana (2017), race-related complaints consistently represent the largest proportion of alleged violation of the right to equality received by the commission.

Chapter 3: Methodology

From the review of the above literature, it can be gathered that events taking place on social media platforms are worthy of investigation because social media is part of everyday life in many societies. I begin this chapter by restating the aim of this research report and highlighting the research questions that it aims to address. This is followed by a description of how the data was sampled; highlighting the ethical considerations that had to be adhered to and therefore the limitations of using data of this nature. Finally an expanded account that attends to Discourse Analysis as a methodology is offered.

3.1. Aim:

To understand the contextualization of the word "kaffir" as (un)acceptable and to understand the discourses drawn upon to justify and/ or repudiate its use.

3.2. Research Questions:

1) When is the use of the word "kaffir" considered (un)acceptable by social media interlocutors?

2) What discourses do social media interlocutors draw upon to justify and/or repudiate the use of the word "kaffir"?

3.3. Data and Sampling Procedure

The data corpus for this study consists of *Twitter* and *Facebook* posts comprising the word "kaffir" and its variant spellings. The word "kaffir" and it variant spellings (including the euphemized "k-word" as outlined earlier) were entered as search terms on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. From the search results yielded by this procedure, the posts were read to assess relevance to the South African context. Posts that made reference to uses of the search terms that were not related to race (e.g., references to the plant "kaffir lime" or "kaffir leaves") were excluded. Furthermore, only initial posts that were mainly in English were included for final analysis in this report. Once a post was deemed relevant, its subsequent replies or comments were read and screenshots of the dialogue were taken. For posts that had a lot of replies such that it was impractical to analyse each and every one of them, only the first reply which developed into a thread was screen grabbed. There was no time frame limit for posts; all posts were included as long as they were relevant, irrespective of when they were made. However, because of the phenomenon of trending, the majority of posts discussed high profile recent cases, resulting in posts from 2016 to 2018 constituting the majority of the data collected. A sampling to redundancy strategy was employed. This means new interactions were sampled concurrently with initial analyses of the data until it became clear that the sampling was no longer yielding novel findings (Whitehead, 2010). In the end, a total of 43 *Facebook* posts were collected in addition to a total of 20 *tweets*. Because the focal interest of the study lay in understanding the interactional strategies interlocutors resort to when justifying and/ or repudiating the use of the word "kaffir", only excerpts that were dialogical were analysed. Indeed Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner (2012) state that for most scholars interested in researching social media

platforms, threads with responses become preferable because they allow insights into the development of the discourses as they unfold.

Since it would be practically impossible to examine posts from all the existing social media platforms, *Facebook* and *Twitter* were a reasonable starting point based on their popularity. A fair number of South Africans have access to them and consequently it can be argued that they are part of the South African society. Around the year 2014, South Africa's internet consumption stood at 61.1% of the citizens (Carew, 2014). Carew (2014) reports that in 2013 South Africa had 9.4 million and 5.5 million *Facebook* and *Twitter* users respectively. Bosch (2017) reports that *Twitter* is the third most popular social networking site in South Africa (subsequent to *Facebook* and *YouTube*) with approximately 6.6 million users. Despite having fewer subscribers than *Facebook*, Carew (2014) argues that *Twitter* offers a platform for more intensive engagement.

Although this data collection strategy inevitably excluded people who do not have *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts, these statistics indicate that South Africa has fair access to social media platforms, making online research of this nature defensible. That being said, Whitehead (2010) notes that it is important to comprehend that the central concern for many qualitative researchers is not to show the frequent and wide use of interactional practices but rather, to demonstrate the possibility of their use in some kind of interactional context. Qualitative research holds dear to theoretical interpretation rather than quantifiable conclusions, as with quantitative research. Qualitative research aims to decipher complex ideological, discursive and subliminal messages engraved in texts. Therefore what really matters in the current research is that people are talking about the use of the word "kaffir" on social media, meaning at minimum it is relevant in society (Khanyile, 2016).

Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester and Reed (2015) argue that online communities are interesting in and of themselves and should not be seen as substitutions for researching offline communities using methods of data collection such as interviews and focus group discussions. Whitehead (2010) states that post-

apartheid research that has examined racial topics has generally made use of textual and interview methodologies, "while few studies have directly examined the situated use of racial categories in ordinary interactions" (p.3). This current project is therefore another way of studying the situated use of racial categories in ordinary interactions.

Kumwenda (2016) states that social media in general and *Facebook* in particular have allowed the South African public to enter debates that were beforehand "only occupied by journalists, academics, analysts and commentators" (p.7). Social media platforms allow for the dissemination of alternative frames or views that are not presented in mainstream media (Sibango, 2016, p. 41). Social media platforms such as *Facebook* offer a more interactive, dynamic and immediate platform than television and radio (Farkas et al., 2018). Television and radio programs are scheduled and often have predetermined questions. In contrast, social media sites generally have very little gatekeeping and allow ordinary people to set their own agendas and to engage directly with political discourses through re-distribution, negotiation and contestation (Farkas et al., 2018; Kumwenda, 2016).

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The social media platforms used for the current study are publicly available such that one could have access to them without necessarily having login credentials; they are also accessible through a simple Google search. It can therefore be argued that the public availability of the data means that any potential risk of harm to interlocutors as a result of using the data for research purposes is no greater than the potential risks associated with any other use (Dominguez-Whitehead, Whitehead& Bowman, 2017). Moreover, Fiesler and Proferes (2018) report that as of 2014, *Twitter's* privacy policy mentions that academics may use *Twitter* data for research purposes. However, since many internet users rarely read or fully understand the terms and conditions of the sites and apps they use (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018), the public availability of social media dialogues therefore does not imply that interlocutors automatically consent to them being used for research or that there are no ethical considerations to pay

attention to when using the dialogues as research data (Jowett, 2015; Kaufman & Whitehead, 2016). As pointed out by Fiesler and Proferes (2018), public reactions to research ethics controversies suggest that individuals have opinions about how researchers should study and use online data. The results of Fiesler and Proferes' 2018 study on "Participant" Perceptions of *Twitter* Research Ethics suggests that a majority of *Twitter* users believe that researchers should not be able to use Twitter data without permission. Nonetheless, Fiesler and Proferes (2018) also admit that participant views on this issue are greatly contextual, depending on how the research is conducted and disseminated, who does the research and what the research topic is. Similarly, a study by Beninger et al. (2014) found that internet users have different privacy expectations regarding different social media platforms, with *Twitter* expected to be less private than *Facebook*. However, since it was impractical to obtain consent from the interlocutors, to try and maintain privacy and anonymity in the current study, profile pictures were blocked out and pseudonyms were used in all reproductions of the texts. Furthermore, in order to maintain privacy, the Facebook searches were restricted to only include posts that were made to public groups and pages. Even though these posts were in the public domain, I have opted to provide the participants' with as much anonymity as possible by not revealing the groups the posts came from and by replacing the participants' names with pseudonyms.

Padayachee (2016) states that in South Africa particularly, university ethics boards still need to provide clearer guadiance about the use of data generated from social media platforms. In the absence of guidelines relating specifically to South Africa, my use of these data excerpts follows the British Psychological Society's (BPS, 2013) ethical guidelines. Under the privacy section of the guidelines (p.7-8), an argument is made that it is justifiable to use online data where there is likely no expectation for privacy or where the scientific and social value of the research justify unconsented use. In accordance with the findings of Beninger et al. (2014), I contend that there are minimal privacy expectations on *Twitter* and public *Facebook* groups by users and this additionally justifies the use of the data.

3.5. Limitations of the Data

Choosing the data for this study came with the hindrance of having to exclude posts that were not written in English. While I translated some comments to English, the potential loss of rich meanings that can only be conveyed in vernacular languages cannot be ignored because the choice of people to write in vernacular is not trivial. An extensive documentation of translation dilemmas can be found in Temple and Young (2004). One of the most obvious limitations of using data of this nature is that one inescapably excludes the views of those who do not have *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts. However, as noted prior, the central concern for this type of qualitative research does not lay in showing frequent and widely shared views but rather the possibility of use in any interactional context (Whitehead, 2010).

Notably, social media platforms have community standards by which subscribers must abide to avoid their posts be taken down or their accounts deleted (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018), as such, there is a possibility that many posts comprising of the term "kaffir" are taken down, thus reducing the prospect of finding posts/tweets that used the word in a disparaging manner. This in turn may not allow us to observe the full range of ways in which interlocutors can use the word and defend its (un) acceptability.

3.6. Analytic Approach

The current study is rooted in a discursive framework hence the data was analysed using discourse analysis as outlined by Parker (1992). Analysis within this methodological tradition is interested in exploring language and the ways in which it constructs social life (Makhanya, 2010). Discourse analysis seeks to highlight ways of talking and meaning making which have come to be taken for granted. It also interrogates "how versions of events, things and people are constructed in an occasioned manner to accomplish social actions" (Durrheim *et al.*, 2011, p. 95). These social actions may, for example, include complaining, slurring and arguing. Discourse analysis also allows for the analysis of positioning; that is, the ways in which speakers or writers locate themselves and others in relation to what they are speaking or writing about. The analysis of positioning is beneficial because it highlights

how individuals speak about themselves and others while (re) producing and circulating discourses in the face of racial slurs. An essential part of this analytic approach is attending to the matters that interlocutors themselves make relevant. Accordingly, the aim was not to determine whether people are prejudiced or racist but to scrutinize how they attend to the issue at hand (Durrheim *et al.*, 2015). As revealed by Durrheim et al. (2011, p. 95) , the discursive approach does not study what people say and do in order to determine whether they are prejudiced or not. Neither does the approach aim to conclude on whether a discourse true or false or judge whether it is racist or not. Rather, prejudice, truth claims and racism are highlighted as attended to in text by the interlocutors themselves.

Evans (2016) argues that social media platforms are innately interactive and participation is mainly for the goal of having discursive relationships with others. Discourses are produced in interaction and as such it is essential to have an understanding of how interactions happen. Researchers who study the production of discourses are interested in interrogating the ways in which micro-level interactional and textual practises constitute social worlds. They are also interested in interrogating how everyday communicative and representational practises are structured by the larger social order (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011).

In making use of the discourse analysis steps suggested by Parker (1992) , I identified and described the subjects and objects that were discussed by interlocutors. I also pointed out on the terms used to describe the discourses and where the discourses originate from. Furthermore, I described how the discourses have been taken for granted and show how they are reproduced or challenged. These steps are not exhaustive of Parker's guidelines, nonetheless, they were the most relevent to the nature of the study.

Chapter 4: Data Findings and Discussion

In this chapter I show how interlocutors rely on two competing discourses- the Contextualist and Universalist discourses to pronounce the (un) acceptability of the word "kaffir". The Universalist discourse proposes that the meaning of a word is determined, essentially and for all times and places (i.e., universally) thereafter, at the moment of the word's inception or first usage. In contrast, the Contexualist discourse proposes that words are always evolving and that the meaning of a word is determined by context-specific developments. I identify the discourses of "whites under threat", "reverse racism" and "equivalency" as sub-discourses under the two main discourses. I show how interlocutors manage the debates around whether the word "kaffir" is a racist term or not and how they relate the use of the word to broader discussions about race and racial disputes. Furthermore, I make salient the way interlocutors accept or reject "kaffir" as a positive self-identity.

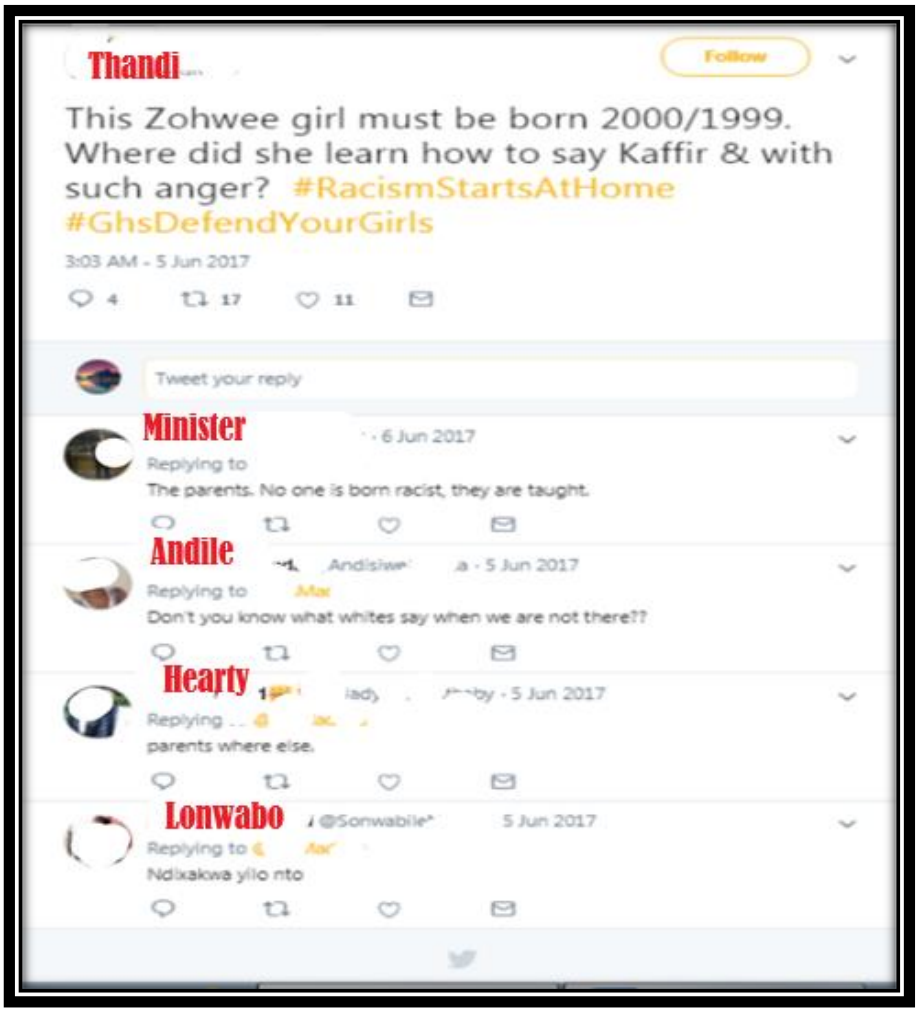
4.1. Contextualizing and Universalizing the (un)acceptability of the word "Kaffir"

The data excerpts illustrate how interlocutors conceptualize the specific contextual factors which make the use of "kaffir" (un)acceptable. Interlocutors highlight geographical and linguistic origins, historical meanings and racial categories as relevant factors in designating (un) acceptable use. What makes this conceptualization noteworthy is the fact that often times, in court rulings, judges have specified who can say and who cannot say the word "kaffir" and under what context. For example in *Old Mutual V Finca and SATAWU (2005), State v Swanepoel (2007), Prinsloo v State (2010), Kente v van Deventer (2014)* as noted prior. This indicates that the discourses in the course of arguing for/or against acceptability are available not only to judges and other institutional representatives but also to people on social media. Indeed when writing about the legal status of slurs, Hill (2008) states that the linguistic ideologies that rationalize their repetition and/or rejection are not only identified in conversations between ordinary people but also in the discourses of the government and the law. However, it can be argued that the

backing of the institutions they represent enable judges to legally codify these discourses or to make other types of binding rules about their application. Conversely, it is difficult to regulate the interactional settings inhabited by people on social media or other areas of everyday life, meaning that the majority of the regulation of such settings is carried out by the interlocutors themselves rather than by binding institutional rules. Interlocutors find a way to codify these uses even though they do not have the backing of institutions; thereby confirming the recognition by Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2008) that online spaces such as social media platforms now represent new public spaces where key aspects of civil society are played out.

The interlocutors use the Contextualist and Universalist discourses to justify and/ or repudiate the (un)acceptability of the use of the word "kaffir". The Universalist discourse proposes that the meaning of a word is determined, essentially and for all times and places (i.e., universally) thereafter, at the moment of its inception or first usage. The Universalist discourse is similar to what Hill (2008) identifies as the "baptismal ideology". For proponents of the Universalist discourse, if a word was never a racist slur when it was first coined, it will never be a racist slur at any point. And, if it was a slur at its inception, it can never lose its status as a slur thus making all instances of its use racist and unacceptable. In contrast, the Contexualist discourse notes the context-specific developments and meanings of words, and the ways in which their usage can change across times and place; such that it is possible for a word that was historically considered a slur to lose its slurring nature and be used in a non-derogatory manner. Proponents of the Contextualist discourse therefore treat the (un) acceptability of slurs as dependent on context, including the categories of persons using them. For example, in excerpt 1 below, the interlocutors treat the use of the word "kaffir" as unequivocally unacceptable because it was uttered by a young white person born after 1994- the context of a democratic South Africa.

Excerpt 1



The interlocutors in this excerpt orient to the Contexualist discourse by marking age and race as factors that determine the unacceptability of using the word "kaffir" in a democratic South Africa. They discuss the use of the word "kaffir" by a white high school learner[2] . The learner's presumed year of birth (and age thereof) is made relevant in the original tweet by Thandi who assumes that the "girl" was born in 2000 or 1999. Emphasising these years is strategic in that the years are post the 1994 democracy. This highlights the taken for granted expectation for children born after 1994, the so called "born-frees" (Maseti, 2018) to be free of racist dispositions and as such to not use the word "kaffir". Thandi raises concern about where the pupil learned to say "kaffir", especially "with such anger" signifying that it is

[2] The learner in question was from Pietermaritzburg Girl's high school - a predominantly white and previous so called model C/ whites' only school. She called her black classmates "kaffirs" because they could not pronounce her name correctly. The hashtags #RacismAtPMBGHS and #GhsDefendYourGirls trended soon after the story broke the internet (Teke, 2017).

not only the use of the word that is concerning but the emotions that are attached to it and its use as well. Thandi's question seems to be a pointedly rhetorical one. As attested by Minister and Hearty in the second and fourth comments, the obvious answer to Thandi's question is that the pupil learnt the use of the term from someone older than her, thus suggesting that the racism that was characteristic of generations that lived under apartheid rule is being passed on to younger generations. By asking "don't you know what whites say when we are not there??" Andile also suggests that these are the kinds of words white people utter when they are in their private spaces, when they are no black people around.

The use of the hashtag "#RacismStartsAtHome" further signifies that Thandi has recognized the learner's use of the word as an act of racism that was taught at home. It becomes clear that the interlocutors deem the learner's use as unacceptable because had someone at home not taught her how to be racist, she would not use the word "kaffir". Her use therefore is treated as evidence of on-going, but historically rooted racism particularly in the white community. The idea of racism being taught to children in the white community is echoed again in the next excerpt where the Mqobi treats it as inconceivable for 4 year olds to be racist unless they are taught.

Excerpt 2



By rhetorically asking the white community why "kaffir" still in their vocabulary, Mqobi highlights a taken for granted expectation that the word should have been done away with and stopped being in circulation, particularly amongst this specific group. The continued use therefore marks it as unacceptable and as something which white people need to account for, as indicated by the words "someone needs to explain to me what is happening in the white community". In the subsequent response, Amo suggests that the word is still in their vocabulary because "some whites never wanted to reconcile". White people's unwillingness to reconcile is thus taken as an explanation for why they have continued to use the word "kaffir". Furthermore, Amo echoes the idea of white racism as being a communal and deliberate occurrence by claiming that "Racism is taught at their homes". Amo's accusation that white people "even insult us in our absence" is similar to Andile's suggestion (Excerpt 1: "don't you know what whites say when we are not there??") that when in their private spaces, white people utter racist remarks. By accusing white people of refusing to reconcile and of teaching racism in their homes, Amo also treats white people's use of "kaffir" as unacceptable racism.

While the unacceptability of the use of "kaffir" was unequivocal in these two excerpts, the interlocutors in excerpt 3 debate the understanding and (un) acceptability of the word "kaffir" as a racist utterance and /or a symptom of racism.

Excerpt 3

In this excerpt Lesego had posted a picture of Vicki Momberg during her sentencing. As noted previously, Vicki Momberg became the first person to be jailed for racism, particularly for disparagingly using the word "kaffir" 48 times towards several black people, including police officers (Shange, 2018; South African Human Rights Commission , 2018).

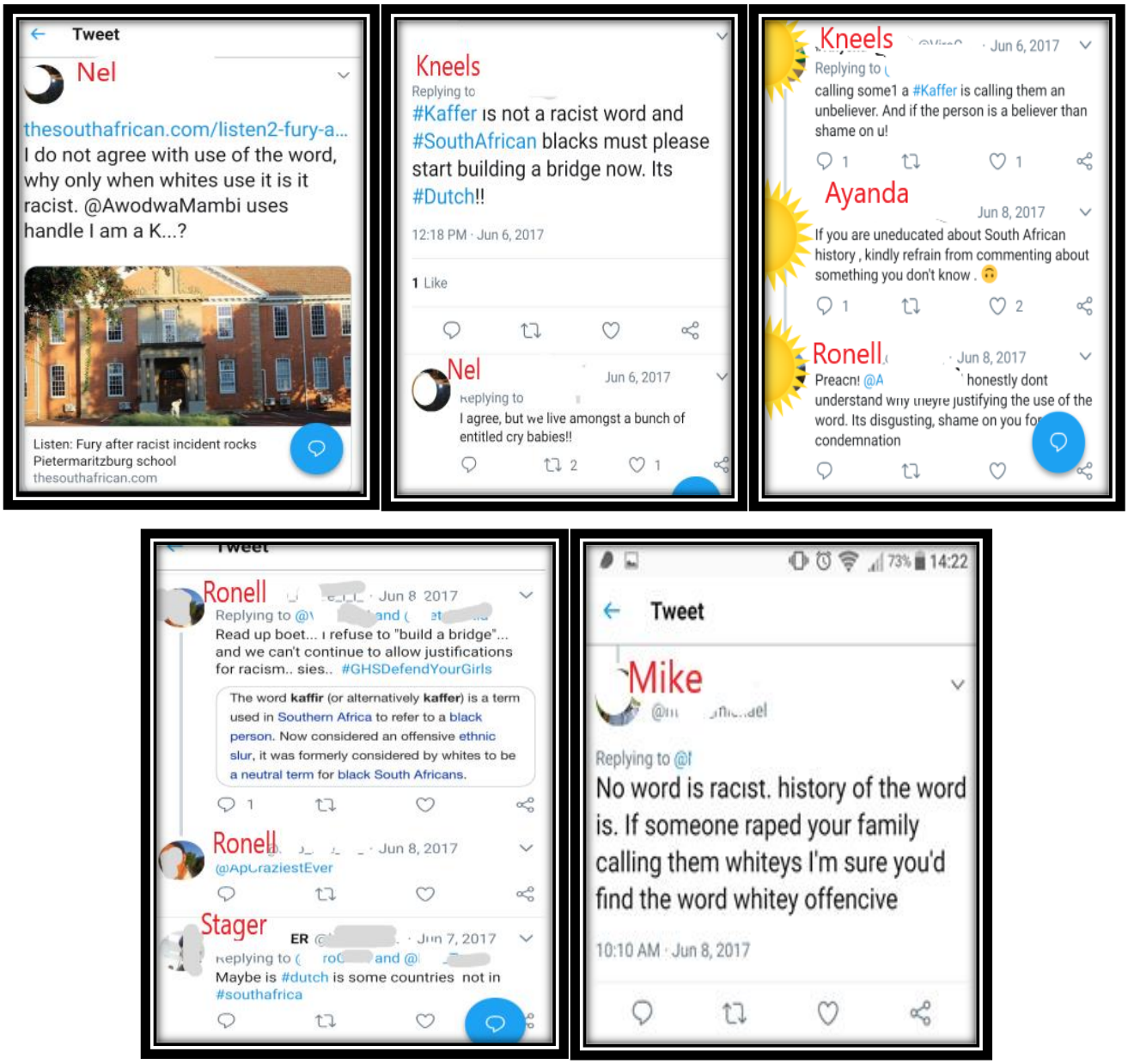


The statement "Racists beware! You can't go around calling people the k-word" serves to categorize those who call people "the k-word" as racists thus Lesego also effectively labels Momberg as a racist. Lesego conceptualizes the use of the word "kaffir" as unacceptable and as something people cannot go around saying because it is racist. However, this tweet receives several responses that challenge the assertion that using the word automatically makes one a racist. For example, Xaba challenges it by rhetorically asking whether a person becomes racist simply by referring to another person as a "kaffir". In stating that "it seems like one is only Racist when calls a "K" word", Xaba is subtly accusing Lesego of having a narrow definition of what constitutes racism and is proposing that being racist cannot be limited to just the use of the word "kaffir" but should be seen as including a broader scope of actions than just the extreme/obvious one of using this word. Pleading lack of knowledge about the meaning of "kafir" followed by the request for assistance- "I don't know guys please help me" serves to legitimize him as someone who seeks enlightenment as opposed to being argumentative. By providing answers as opposed to a counter argument Dani treats Xaba's question and request as genuine rather than rhetorical.

Whereas Xaba took up Lesego's reference to "kaffir" as the "K-word" in his first sentence, he subsequently changes and refers to it as *Kafir*. As such, Dani responds by giving the Islamic meaning of the word *kafir* - "a rejection of Allah". However, he still cautions that "the word is not used in this context and that it is rather "used to define a certain race". In this way he acknowledges both the racialised and non-racialised versions of the word. Dani's response "You don't become racist, you're born racist" serves to support Xaba's proposal that it should take more than using the word "kaffir" for one to be declared as racist. Nonetheless, in pointing the contextual differences in the use of the word, Dani orients to the contextualist discourse. While Lesego declared the word as unacceptable (because it is racist), Xaba and Dani respectively orient to the views that the meaning and the context determine its (un)acceptability.

Unlike in Excerpt 2 where Lesego denounced the use of the "k-word" as a racist utterance, in Excerpt 3 below, Nel complains about the use of the word only being denounced as racist (and therefore unacceptable) when used by a particular race.

Excerpt 4



Nel anticipates that his views may be received as controversial and thus states in advance that he does "not agree with the use of the word". By constructing himself as one who does not agree with the use of the word, Nel affords himself legitimacy to carry on with his complaint. He pursues the argument that the use of the word should not only be racist when used by white people. This essentially orients to the Universalist view that the word should either be racist no matter who uses it or it should not be racist at all. Similarly, Kneels orients to the Universalist discourse by claiming the word as "not racist at all" since it is of Dutch origin. Declaring that it is "not a racist word at all" suggests that the word's meaning

and its status as a non-racist word was inscribed, essentially and for all times and places at its inception. This inevitably undermines all contextual factors that could mark it as racist. Asserting that "#Kaffer is not a racist word" and specifically naming "#SouthAfrican blacks" (as opposed to any other race) as the group that "must please start building a bridge now" allows Kneels to make a claim about the racial context of South Africa and to construct black South Africans as divisive thereby treating them as perpetrators of racial divisions. The appeal for black people to build bridges is however treated as evident of "justifications for racism" by Ronell.

In the ensuing interaction, Kneels' claim that "Calling some1 a #kaffer is calling them an unbeliever" is treated by Ayanda as a sign of being uneducated and lacking knowledge specifically about South African history. Similarly, Ronell tells him to "Read up", effectively treating his claims as evident of lack of knowledge and lack of reading. By invoking South African history, Ayanda highlights the conditions that would make the use of the word unacceptable in South Africa and thus orients to the Contextualist discourse. Likewise, Ronnel and Stager draw upon variations of the Contextualist discourse to argue for the offensiveness and unacceptability of the term "kaffir". For instance, Ronell produces a definition of the term which also makes reference to Southern African history. Notably, this definition highlights the difference in the offensiveness of the word with respect to time. By noting that the former use by white people was neutral but also emphasizing that it is "now considered an offensive ethnic slur", it is suggested that the word evolved, thus undermining the Universalist notion that the meanings of words are determined, essentially and for all times and places at their inception. In the same vein, Stager argues that the word may be considered Dutch in some countries but not in South Africa thus also orienting to the argument that slur words are context specific. On the other hand, Mike takes a different approach in marking the word as unacceptable by proposing that it is not the word in of itself but the history associated with it that renders it racist. This explanation leans towards the Contextualist discourse in that it recognizes historical events as what determine whether or not certain words are racist and/or racialised.

Excerpt 5

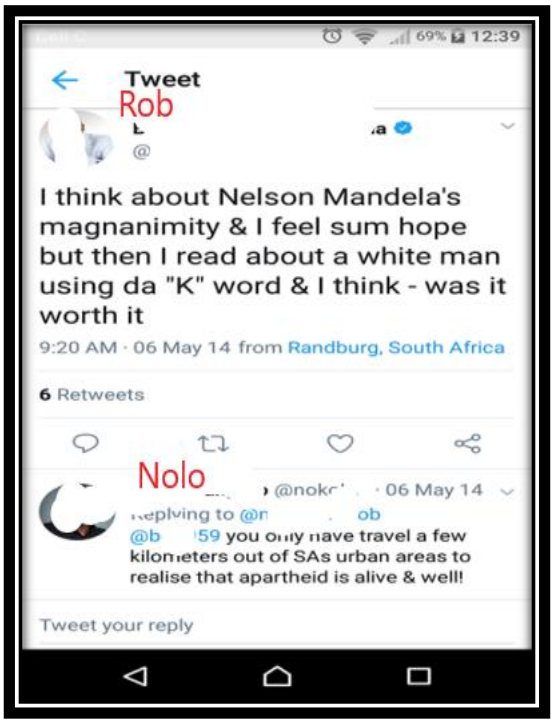


Both Nick and Slow make use of "the discourse of whites under threat" (Verwey & Quayle, 2012, p. 560) to complain and suggest that it was not necessary for the Equality court to make a ruling that marks the use of the word "kaffir" as unlawful. Since protection is needed by people in danger, by asking what protection is offered to them when they are called "cracker" or "vanilla", it becomes evident that Nick is constructing white people as being under threat. Nick draws parallels between the words "kaffir" and "cracker" as a means to claim that white people can be derogated based on their race.

This discourse of equivalency serves to equate white people's use of the word "kaffir" with insults against white people by other races. By accusing Human Rights of doing nothing when "the blacks call white PIGS", Slow parallels being called "kaffir" to being called pig and further advances the discourse of equivalency that was invoked by Nick.

Slow also claims that there is rape and murder of the "minority" (a group to which he belongs indicated by the use of "our"). The use of the word minority further serves to illustrate their status as those needing protection. This claim allows him to position being called a "kaffir" as more trivial and therefore more acceptable than being raped and murdered. The claim that the word "kaffir" is a word "no whites use" further functions to construct white people as victims of racism while denying that they are perpetrators.

Excerpt 6



While the previous two excerpts made a case for the use of the word "kaffir" by white people, in this excerpt, Rob problematizes white people's usage of the word and treats it as unacceptable. In problematizing the use of the word by a white man, Rob, is making the word unavailable to white

people. Rob does not provide the context in which the said white man used the word and neither does he explicitly say why a white man is not supposed to use the word, rather, he is compelling the reader to supply this common sense knowledge and makes them complicit in reproducing understandings of what white people are not supposed to do (Whitehead, 2009).Rob invokes a discourse of history – "Nelson Mandela's magnanimity" specifically in the face of the oppression he and his people faced during apartheid to intensify his complaint. This discourse of history serves to highlight the contextual markers that make it unacceptable for white people to use the word. Rob therefore makes evident the taken for granted expectation that Nelson Mandela's magnanimity would lead to white people ceasing the use of the word. Similarly, given that apartheid was a racist style of governance, Nolo's claim about apartheid being "alive and well" outside SA's urban areas serves to suggest that there is still racism in these areas. This continued racism is therefore what allows white people to continue using the word "kaffir". In this case, Nolo localizes the use of the word "kaffir" in the apartheid era and accordingly marks it as a manifestation of racism. In this way, both Rob and Nolo make use of the Contextualist discourse to make the word "kaffir" unavailable to white people thus marking any instance of their usage of the word as unacceptable racism.

Excerpt 7



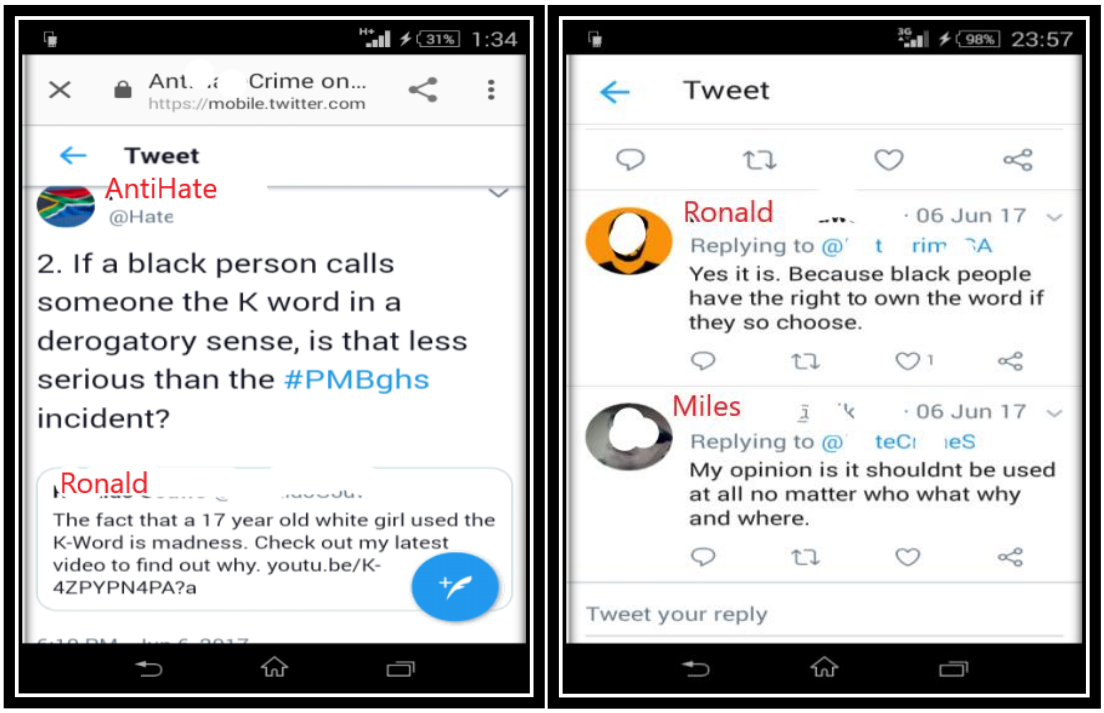
Eugene poses a question about the necessity of jailing people for the use of certain words following Vickie Momberg's sentencing. In responding that "perhaps we should jail people for saying moffie, fword k word any word which causes offense", Shaun is sarcastically using the discourse of equivalency to declare "moffie" and "f word" as equivalent to and as being as equally offensive as the word "kaffir". This is similar to how Nick in excerpt 5 equated "kaffir" to "cracker" and "vanilla". Similarly, in the

next comment, Vincent echoes that "pink pig" (a term black people have commonly been accused of using against white people- see excerpt 5 for example) is also offensive.

Tau declares the unacceptability of the word "kaffir" by vowing that should anyone call him "kaffir", it would be their funeral, that is, he would kill someone (hence they will have a funeral) for calling him "kaffir". Tau further marks the word as unacceptable by pronouncing the use of the word to be a racist act deserving a minimum of 10 years in jail. Equally, Ofilwe advocates for a jail term for those using the word, particularly against black people because only black people can feel and understand how humiliating the use of the word is in 2018. Ofilwe deems "people who still feel jail term is too harsh" to be non-black because by default, black people understand the pain of the word, suggesting therefore that black people would have no problem with incarceration as a suitable penance for using the word "kaffir". By highlighting the year 2018, Ofilwe draws upon the taken for granted expectation that by then, the word should have been done away with. This further highlights the unacceptability of its use.

In the last comment, Fearless mockingly suggests that whites and non-whites are not exactly equal by claiming that only white people can freely be insulted without any consequences but once they in turn insult others, they get jailed. The discourse of whites under threat is used to make these claims and construct white people as victims as opposed to perpetrators of racism. This is similar to the complaints by Nick and Slow in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 8

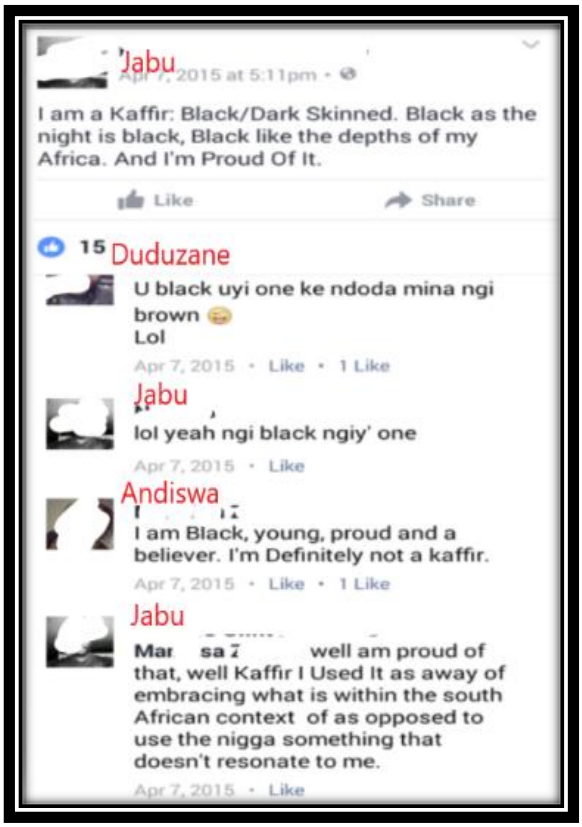


In this excerpt Ronald problematizes the use of the word "kaffir" by a 17 year old white girl[3], however, it their uptake of Ronald's tweet, AntiHate treats the use of the word by black people as equally problematic by rhetorically asking if it's any less serious when used by a black person. AntiHate also implies that it is possible for black people to use the word in a derogatory sense thus orienting to the Universalist discourse which states the meaning of words to be universal. In contrast, by stating that "black people have the right to own the word if they so choose" Ronald claims that slurs can be owned by particular groups of people and this ownership effectively makes the use by that particular group non-derogatory and acceptable. This claim alludes to the notion of re-appropriation. The notion that slurs can be re-appropriated is Contextualist because it recognizes slurs and the stigmas they carry as socially constructed and consequently as always evolving (Galinsky et al., 2003).

The following two excerpts also show how interlocutors negotiate the possibility and (un)acceptability of re-appropriating the word "kaffir" as a positive identity.

[3] see footnote 2 above

Excerpt 9

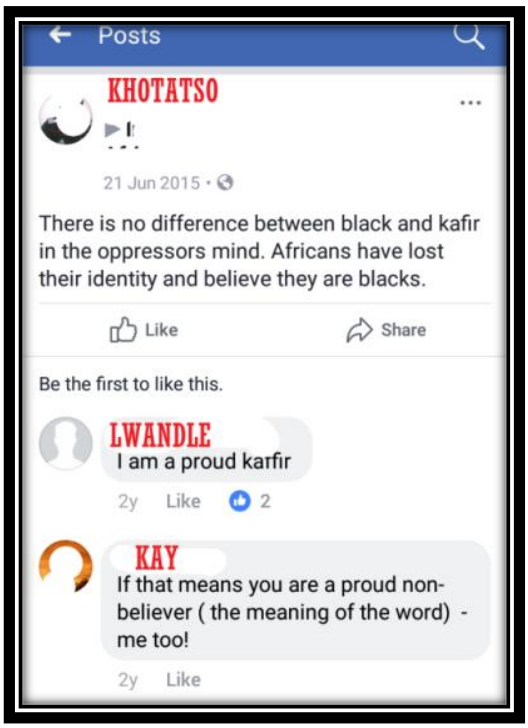


Jabu re-appropriates "kaffir" by equating it to being "Black/Dark skinned" and further announcing his pride regarding the identity. On the other hand, by stating that she is "Black, young, proud and a believer" but "definitely not a kaffir", Andiswa seeks to reject Jabu's application to use the word "kaffir" as a positive self-identifier. Andiswa's reference to being a believer serves to distinguish the version of the word that Jabu used from the Islamic one which means unbeliever.

In the subsequent response to Andiswa, Jabu equates the word "kaffir" to "nigga" by declaring that he "used it as a way of embracing what is within the south African context" since "nigga" is something that doesn't resonate with him. Jabu therefore contexualizes the meaning of the word "kaffir" to South Africa and suggests its meaning to be specific to the country. Since the term "nigga" has largely been re-appropriated in the USA, positioning "kaffir" on equal footing with "nigga" further illustrates that Jabu treats the word "kaffir" as acceptable for re-appropriation purposes.

Excerpt 10

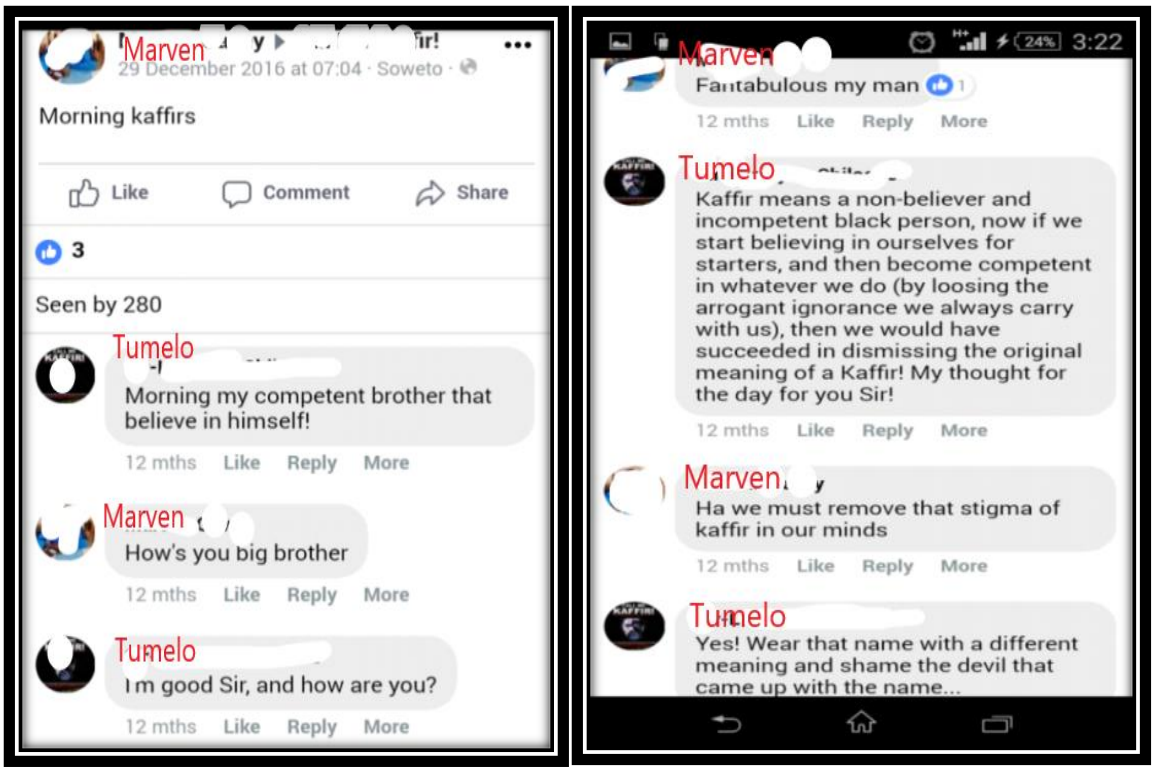
While in the previous excerpt Jabu equated "kaffir" to black and claims both as identities, in this excerpt, Khotatso also equates "kaffir" to black but rejects both as positive identities.



Khotatso rejects both "black" and "kafir" as identities specifically because "there is no difference between black and kafir in the oppressors mind". This rejection by Khotatso mirrors hooks' (1989) argument that black people's efforts to identify with slurs are a manifestation and validation of the ideologies of white supremacy instead. However, Lwandle's response - "I am a proud karfir" is a rejection to Khotatso's claims that identifying with the terms "black" and "kaffir" signals loss of one's identity. Lwandle claims "kaffir" as an identity as opposed to a label that is to be frowned upon, highlighting therefore that the contestation between Khotatso and Lwandle is about the acceptability of using the word "kaffir" as a positive identifier. Nonetheless, Kay's ensuing comment evidences that Lwandle's assertion of being "a proud karfir" has been understood as ambiguous. Kay asserts that she is only prepared to claim this identity if it means a "proud non-believer". By insisting that the word means non-believer even though she has showed awareness that it could be used in other ways, Kay is

orienting to the Universalist discourse and rejects its use as a racial identity, whether positive or negative. The next excerpt however shows an acceptance of "kaffir" as a positive identity.

Excerpt 11



Excerpt 11 begins with a deliberate use of the word "kaffirs" in the greeting by Marven. The greeting is well received by Tumelo who reciprocates it and continues to acknowledge Marven as a competent brother. Following the exchange of salutations, Tumelo delivers a definition of the word "kaffir" that draws upon both the Islamic meaning and the racialised meaning ("non-believer" and "incompetent black person"). By granting both meanings of the word and encouraging black people (a group he evidences/ locates himself as belonging to through the uses of "us" and "we") to start believing in themselves, to become competent and to lose their "arrogant ignorance" in order to dismiss "the original meaning of a kaffir", Tumelo suggests that the meanings of words are malleable and thus undermines the Universalizing discourse. At the same time he alludes to the re-appropriation of the word "kaffir"- as indicated by his specific appeal for the word to be worn with a different meaning and to be used to

"shame the devil" that came up with it. The devil that came with the name in this case refers to white people. It is therefore in the context of making the word unavailable to whiteness that Tumelo deems its use to be acceptable. Similarly, Marven declares that the word "kaffir" is a stigmatizing label by stating that "we must remove the stigma of kaffir in our minds" but he also proposes that it can be something other than a stigma (evident in how he used the word in the opening post).

4.2. Conclusions

The word "kaffir" has particular histories and meanings in South Africa and its use has led to several civil prosecutions. It has also been resisted in various platforms like music and letters to the editor thus highlighting a general problematization both constitutionally and in every day social settings. This study aimed to answer the following questions regarding the use of the word "kaffir";

1) When is the use of the word "kaffir" considered (un)acceptable by social media interlocutors?

2) What discourses do social media interlocutors draw upon to justify and/or repudiate the use of the word "kaffir"?

The discourses used by interlocutors in the current study aligned with topics other researchers have previously written about, for example, the baptismal ideology of words (Hill, 2008), the equality of different slurs (Bax 2018; Galinsky et al., 2013& Wray 2006) and the re-appropriation of slurs (Bianchia, 2014; Croom, 2014& Galinsky et al., 2013).

The data revealed that interlocutors rely on two competing discourses – the Contextualist discourse and the Universalist discourse to justify and/or repudiate the acceptability of the use of the word "kaffir".

The Universalist discourse proposes that the meaning of a word is determined, essentially and for all times and places (i.e., universally) at the moment of its inception/first usage. In contrast, the Contexualist discourse proposes that words are always evolving and that the meaning of a word is determined by context-specific developments. Interlocutors who oriented to the Universalist discourse relied heavily on histories and supposed histories of the word "kaffir" to justify and/ or to challenge (un) acceptable use. For example, they would reason that the word has Dutch (Excerpt 4) and Islamic

(Excerpt 3) origins which were not tied to race in anyway and therefore its use was universally acceptable (Excerpt 4). On the contrary, others argued that the word had racial connotations from its inception thus making its use universally unacceptable. These findings were similar to those made by Hill (2008) and Dondson(2012) who found that participants use the baptismal ideology to argue for and/or against the use of the words "squaw" and "nigga" respectively. The baptismal ideology also posits that the meanings of words are determined at their inception.

The interlocutors who oriented to the Contextualist discourse highlighted the history of apartheid and colonialism in South African, (Excerpt 6), age (Excerpts 1 and 2) and race (Excerpts 1, 2, 6 and 8) as important determinants of the (un)acceptability for the use of the word "kaffir".

Indeed Hill (2008) shows that people link talk about slurs to talk about race and racism. The same is true about the interlocutors in the current study. Interlocutors used the word "kaffir" to conceptualize and complain about racism and other inequalities and to construct racial identities. The core of their debates became about determining whether or not the use of the word constitutes racism. Similar to how knowledge of slavery and the history of the word "nigger/a" allowed the participants in Motley and Craig-Henderson's (2007) study to declare the use of the word as questionable, knowledge about the history and on-going legacy of racist laws in South Africa allowed interlocutors to raise concerns about racism and to qualify and reject the use of the word "kaffir" as unacceptable.

This revealed that interlocutor conceptualizations of the (un)acceptability of the use of the word "kaffir" heavily hinges on whiteness. Some interlocutors argued that the use of the word "kaffir" was unacceptable when used by white people because it signalled lack of repentance from historical racial discrimination (Excerpt 6). Furthermore, others claimed that white people teach the word to their children and consequently continue perpetuating racism (excerpt 1 and 2). Some claimed that white people cannot understand the pain and humiliation that the word carries (Excerpt 7). As such, interlocutors argued that the word "kaffir" should not be made available for use by white people.

But perhaps this reliance on whiteness is unsurprising because according to Baderron (2009) and Arndt (2018), in South Africa, the word was racialised by white colonialists who connected it to the black skin. What this suggests then is that not only can a slur never be removed from its original context, but it can also never be removed or taken away from those who coined it.

While Embrick and Hendrick (2013) use the Universalist discourse to show that racial slurs are racist and will never change their meanings and therefore should not be used by anyone, in the current study, proponents of white people using the word "kaffir" used the same discourse to argue that the baptismal meaning of the word is not racial therefore it should be acceptable for all persons to use the word irrespective of their race (Excerpt 4).

Interlocutors also used the discourse of equivalency (Hill, 2007) and the discourse of "whites under threat" (Verwey & Quayle, 2012) to justify white people's use of the word "kaffir". In the discourse of equivalency, interlocutors insisted that the slurs used on white people are equal to the slurs white people use against other races. This is in contrast to both Embrick and Hendrick (2013) and Bax (2018) who argue that the racial privileges that whiteness has enjoyed in different parts of the world over the centuries means that racial slurs directed towards white people are unlikely to affect their life chances in the same way as those directed towards non-white people.

In the discourse of "whites under threat", interlocutors argued that white people are in fact victims of worse crimes like rape and murder (Excerpt 5) or that black people were deliberately holding the country back and perpetrating racial divisions by complaining about the use of a word which is not racist to begin with (Excerpt 4). Taking the subject positions of victims allowed these interlocutors to simultaneously position others (black people in particular) as threatening, violent and a danger to white wellbeing.

Debates about the use of the word "kaffir" are similar to those about the use of "nigger/a" in the USA. Interlocutors also tied the word "kaffir" to identity and debated its re-appropriation as a positive descriptor- an occurance that parrallels Adegbembo and MacQuarrie (2017) findings. Some interlocutors proposed that white people's use of the word constitutes racism while black people's use validates their right to name themselves. Some interlocutors made explicit suggestions that there should be attempts to take the word "kaffir" away from white people in particular (Excerpt 10) and to rather continue its usage as a term of endearment amongst black people. This is indeed what re-appropriation projects aim to do according to Bianchi (2014), Croom (2014) and Herbert (2015). However, In accordance to how hooks (1989) problematizes the re-appropriation of "nigger/a", other interlocutors, like Jabu in excerpt 10 problematized the re-appropriation of the words "kaffir" and "black" as a manifestation and validation of the ideologies of white supremacy instead of positive identities.

By way of conclusion, it is clear that the word "kaffir" finds its way not only into courtrooms but into everyday conversations in South Africa. People have particular understandings about its use due to its past as influenced by the country's history of race and racism. Although analysing the use of the word "kaffir" may not represent an exhaustive account of the entire range of possible racial conflicts that exist in the country, it can contribute significantly to existing bodies of research detailing the discourses around the use of racial slurs. It also emphasises the intrinsic links between language, discourse and interaction. But more than being about a politically and historically loaded word, this research highlights patterns of race relations and demonstrates the on-going significance of race in post-apartheid South Africa. It attests to the prevalence of tensions and paradoxes regarding racialism and non-racialism that have remained after 1994. Taking into consideration the role that the media plays in creating racialised societies, future research studies could look into how the mass/print media writes about the word "kaffir" and the potential discourses that they uphold when writing about this word or reporting on its use.

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