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UNIVERSITY OF THE
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WHOSE SCHOOL IS IT ANYWAY: NARRATIVES OF SCHOOLING IN A POST-APARTHEID TOWNSHIP SCHOOL

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2025

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Human and Community Development

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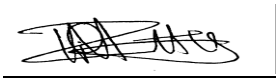
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Phethile Zitha

July 2025

Dedication

Lokhu kunikezelwa labo abaphambili, o Labase, oManci, oMphazima, oJeffrery qha! I am because you were, ngiyabonga.

To my mother, this one is for you.

Finally, this work is dedicated to all the children and young people who courageously navigate and make life in discarded places.

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I have been deeply blessed with a community of women who embody love in its most powerful and generous form. Their care extends beyond just me as an individual, they have also shown genuine interest in, and support for, the work I do. Their presence has been both grounding and inspiring, a testament to the strength and solidarity that women can offer one another.

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Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a background that lays a contextual foundation for the research topic. By situating the study within the South African context, it explores significant historical moments and explores the ways in which their lasting impact continues to shape the present.

This research project seeks to offer a lens for understanding the persistent and complex patterns of South Africa's racist past, which continue to impact and shape Black youth's sense of identity and the nuanced relationships that are informed by a history of spatial and educational apartheid. In doing so, this research takes seriously Winters' (2016) argument that the possibility of a just world requires a sharp capacity to remember, to take note and look at the insult, the pain, and the losses of the past and present. It is this capacity to sit with these past and continuing losses that opens the possibility for hope. Furthermore, unless historical traumatic experiences are acknowledged, they will "...constantly attempt to re-inscribe themselves (often in masked form) in the present…" (http://www.apartheidarchive.org.za/site/). Public education in South Africa remains deeply tied to racialised geography, with segregated communities and schools reinforcing and exacerbating historical inequalities. There is extensive research and publicity around the injustices that continue to plague South Africa; however, the ways in which these are linked to the past are less clearly understood. Hook (2014) notes that often these kinds of re-inscriptions or repetitions are insidious, subtle, and appear incidental. However, they are ever-present as remnants of apartheid's key objective to perpetuate white supremacy.

Two primary means through which this key objective of apartheid was carried out were through the control of geography, that is, the organisation and control of space and place. Secondly, through the provision of quality education for White South Africans, at the exclusion of Black South Africans. Durrheim (2005) points to how the continued existence of 'settler' and 'native' towns is (re)represented through apartheid's spatial planning that produced suburbs and townships. Thus, the enduring legacy of apartheid continues today, with townships located on the margins or periphery of the city and remaining in the margins in terms of economic opportunities. Durrheim's (2005) argument is that racial attitudes of the past are re-inscribed by spatial practices, and he therefore suggests that for psychological transformation to happen, there has to be a "transformation of the spatial practices and ultimately of the spaces of

privilege and disadvantage that continue to characterize the landscape of the new South Africa" (p. 457). Alexander (2005), in a symposium on non-racialism and education, similarly notes the continued legacy of spatial apartheid, and added that building new schools in townships or locations reproduces the racial pattern that was inherited from apartheid.

Under apartheid, schools for Black learners were underfunded, overcrowded and often located in neglected, underserved areas. Policies like the Bantu Education Act (1953) were specifically designed to ensure that the education of Black South Africans would serve the purpose of preparing them for subordinate roles within society. In 1953, the then South African minister of native affairs, Dr Verwoerd, arguing for Bantu Education, stated that

> "Racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to Natives…They cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of frustrated people who, as a result of the education they received, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled immediately" (Sparks, 1990, p. 196).

Bantu education was designed to reinforce the oppressive, racist ideas against Black people. Furthermore, the intention of the education system was to centre White learners and stifle the development of Black learners in several ways. Firstly, by limiting Black people's ambition and aspirations through low-level job reservations, which in turn sets a limit on their earning capacity. This, in turn, limited their economic and social power as evidenced by the appalling living conditions to which the majority of Black people were subjected. Secondly, their sense of self and dignity were undermined through an education system that alienated Black learners from their culture. As described by Ratele (2019, p. 176), an education that leaves individuals "estranged from the deepest yearnings of the self, an education that internally divides identity, leading to the constant, disorienting sensation of an individual living as if she were looking at herself from the outside". Anti-Black apartheid education had a real impact on the material conditions of Black South Africans as well as their psychological well-being. In this way, schools became key institutions for reinforcing the state's control and policies.

The legacy of colonialism and later apartheid is clearly visible in our schooling system today. Over 30 years into democratic South Africa, despite various interventions to transform township schools, the perpetually high levels of drop out, overpopulated classrooms, poor infrastructure, and high levels of violence that are often synonymous with township schools, continue to shape the experiences of learners, teachers, and parents. It is the persistence and

continuation of these seemingly incidental or unintentional forms of discrimination that shape the experiences of learners, teachers, and parents in post-apartheid South African schools (Hook, 2013). A focus on township schools, as microcosms of South African society or perhaps even the global south, offers an opportunity to explore the ways in which coloniality manifests itself today. For instance, the impact of apartheid laws on township schools has impacted the quality of education, the provision of adequate facilities, pedagogy, and the development of learners' competencies. As a consequent, many young people leave school ill-equipped to compete fairly in the job market, making it difficult for them to break the cycle and clutches of poverty and thereby perpetuating and reproducing these inequalities into the future.

Msimang (2013, p. 1) writes that institutional racism in our education system is "confidence-killing and soul-destroying". She echoes Ramphele's (2001) concerns about the continuing legacy of inferiority and superiority complexes and adds that all too often, schools still breed White superiority and Black inferiority. The language of instruction is often not the learners' home languages, and there is a lack of representation of people and concepts in texts and curricula that reflect the learners' diverse histories and cultures (wa Thiong'o, 1986). These, often invisible experiences of dehumanisation, impact on the learners' identity construction, especially since identity formation is a key developmental task for young people. Erikson (1968) situating identity development within a social setting, argues that society is crucial in identity development in that the young person comes to terms with herself and her society.

The legacy of South Africa's past is evident in the intersections of education and geography. Township schools have remained homogeneously Black, under-resourced and often poor, while former model C schools (previously White only) and private schools in more affluent areas are racially diverse. Reflecting on this deep interconnection between education and geography, Alexander (2005) underscores that the issue extends beyond the missed opportunity of building new schools that are accessible to all race groups. What Alexander (2005) warns against is the danger of perpetuating the complex patterns of our problematic, racially oppressive past through the very structures designed to redress inequality. Failure to address these deeper issues means that old ideas, patterns, and attitudes will continue to be transmitted, as they have been, and inform the contemporary neoliberal education system of democratic South Africa.

1.2 A brief history of the township

South African townships are one of the remaining legacy features of apartheid laws and policies. Dobsonville is one such township community that is situated in the South-west

Township (Soweto), in Johannesburg, South Africa. Like many townships formed during apartheid, many of the first residents of Dobsonville were forcibly removed from their homes in Roodepoort[1] (known as Juliwe then) during the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was the title of three acts of the Parliament of South Africa enacted under the apartheid government of South Africa. The acts assigned racial groups to different residential and business sections in urban areas in a system of urban apartheid, with the intention to create self-affirming spaces for White South Africans only. The period of 1956–1967 marked the complete destruction of Juliwe residents' living spaces, which included homes, churches, and schools, and along with these, the destruction of family and community identities. The history of Juliwe tracks far back, much earlier than the period of the 1956–1967 removals. In a TV interview, in a short documentary with Inolofatseng Lekaba (2021), Mr Kgatitswe Raborife, a community historian from Dobsonville who, in the 1950s was a child living in Juliwe, talks about the long history of Juliwe. He argues that Juliwe was likely a concentration camp for Black people during the Anglo-Boer War between 1901 to 1902. The geographic location of the area (Juliwe), particularly its proximity to the railway line, is significant. Mr Raborife notes that the native African concentration camps were often strategically placed near railway lines to ensure that the residents could keep watch over the potential bombing of the lines. This placement reflects the harsh realities of colonial control.

Furthermore, he points out that the long, painful history of dispossession and neglect is carried in the name Juliwe, which comes from the Xhosa language, one of South Africa's official languages, and it means 'thrown away' or 'cast away'. This is telling of a people who have been systematically dispossessed and discarded through colonial conquest, violence, and later, the oppressive apartheid laws. Laws that were designed to make way for industrial expansion and urban development further marginalised Black communities, perpetuating exclusion and suffering. The name Juliwe, therefore, serves as a painful marker of a history that continues to haunt the present, a history of displacement and abandonment.

The school where the research was conducted is situated across from a hostel, a significant site in the context of South Africa's socio-economic and political landscape. Hostels were originally built under the apartheid government as temporary housing for Black migrant labourers who had come from rural areas to work in the mining sector in the city. In addition, Vosloo (2020) notes that they were established to control and exploit Black migrant labour and

[1] A suburban area that was assigned as a Whites-only residential area during apartheid.

were characterised by harsh living conditions that have had long-lasting effects and social challenges in post-apartheid South Africa (Vosloo, 2020). Like other hostels in other townships, this hostel is located on the outskirts of Dobsonville. This geographic placement isolated the hostels' residents from their nearby township communities, contributing to a sense of marginalisation (Vosloo, 2020). This isolation often led to tensions with township residents, who viewed hostel dwellers as outsiders or a source of instability. Initially intended for male labourers, many hostels later became family homes, which resulted in overcrowding and increased competition for resources and services, further escalating tensions between hostel and township communities. These historical tensions persist today, with many residents of Dobsonville, including the learner participants in this study, attributing various social issues, such as violence and violent crime, to the presence of the hostels.

1.3 A brief history of schooling in South Africa

Learning does not happen in a vacuum; it occurs in a social context that is influenced by historical processes and current socio-political and economic structures. School contexts matter and, of significant importance, as noted by Weber (2008, p. 9), "…is the social and historical milieu, nationally and internationally, in which they [schools] develop, stagnate or regress". In the South African context, these histories and contemporary social structures are racialised. Challenging the idea that education was established upon the arrival of European settlers, Seroto (2011) states that educational practices were in existence among the San, Khoi, and Bantu-speaking people of Southern Africa long before the arrival of the Europeans in the Cape. He further argues that the process of knowledge transmission was integrated with social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life. As noted by Meek and Meek (2008), all surviving societies require that children learn so that they can grow up to be active members of the society. However, it is important to note and distinguish this kind of learning and socialisation from the contemporary notion of institutionalised learning within a schooling system, and the ways in which colonisation imposed particular forms of schooling.

In 1658, Pieter van Stael, the brother-in-law of the first Dutch commander of the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck, established a school referred to as 'slave lodge school'. This school had many characteristics that have come to characterise South Africa's history and experience. The school enrolled slave children, and its main aim was to teach the children Dutch and the Christian religion, forcing the slave children to take on new identities and forsake their own languages, cultural practices and histories. However, this school did not last long, rejected by

the children who escaped from it and fled to the mountains surrounding the Cape. The relevance of this early schooling history is that it represents and speaks to the theme of domination and resistance, and the role education played in enforcing this oppressive ideology. Furthermore, highlighting how inequalities, power, and privilege are perpetuated in and through schooling is vital in understanding South African education today (Finn & Steyn, 2017).

This theme of domination and oppression continued with the establishment of missionary schools. Before 1953, many Black learners attended schools that were set up and run by missionaries. These schools, although less well-resourced than white schools, provided the same curricula and quality teaching (Majeke, 1952). However, the primary aim and mission of these schools was to Christianise and civilise the indigenous Africans, often at the cost of alienating Africans from their own experiences and potentially dehumanising them and eroding their identity or sense of self. Majeke (1952) asserts that the missionary schools ensured the continuance of white domination in South Africa. He further states, pointing to the economically and politically motivated rationale of missionary schools, that, in the second half of the 19th century, the Cape governor at the time, Sir George Grey, subsidised missionary institutions of learning so that they might provide industrial training and elementary education for fitting the 'Bantu' youth into the new economy as docile labourers.

The introduction of the Bantu Education Act (no.47) of 1953 came with tighter governmental control over these mission schools. Bantu Education was meant to replace the missionary schools, while continuing and deepening the colonial project in relation to the demands of a rapidly industrialising economy. The basis of the system was to overtly advance principles of racial inferiority / superiority. Bantu Education infantilised Black people, and this, in turn, limited learners' vision of their place in the broader South African society (Hartshorne, 1992). In the 1960s there was an increase in the number of schools for Black learners, but the curriculum was designed to prepare learners for menial jobs. Black township schools had inferior facilities, textbooks, and teachers, and the learners were not taught to be critically independent, creative thinkers. Instead, they were encouraged and taught to remain committed servants of their employers when they enter the labour market as adults (Lebeloane, 2006). The 1976 Soweto uprising by young people marks the overt resistance to and rejection of oppressive education and resembles the earlier resistance of the slave children.

Another expression of resistance was the establishment of the People's Education Movement, which was influenced by Freire (1972) and Biko's (1978) philosophies (Finn & Steyn, 2000). The focus on the role of education as a tool for liberation in Freire's (1972) work resonated with many anti-apartheid activists in South Africa. Freire (1972) criticised the banking model of education, which views learners as passive recipients of educational input; instead, he advocated for a kind of education that engaged learners as active participants who co-create knowledge and are thus active in their own liberation. Moreover, Freire (1972) believed that in order to achieve liberation, people need to develop a critical consciousness of the socio-political and economic influences or factors that shape their lives. The emphasis of education and consciousness raising as a tool for liberation aligned with the Black Consciousness movement and the work of Biko (1978), which centred consciousness raising work and affirmed black identity, which included all racially oppressed groups. The People's Education movement recognised difference not as a means to divide and control, but rather as a means to foster unity in a common struggle towards freedom (Finn & Steyn, 2000).

The post-democracy regime has made some investments to transform schooling, from increased public spending on education to policy changes. There has been a significant increase in the spending of South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) on education between 2014 to 2019/20. However, previous and current austerity measures, resulting in cuts of R315, from R23 420 to R23 105 per learner (which is an even greater loss in the context of inflation across this same period), seem to suggest that education is not a priority for the South African government (Equal Education & Equal Education Law Centre, 2024; Section 27, 2024). This reduction has an impact on the quality of education and may result in a reduction of teaching staff in a context of a high learner-teacher ratio and overcrowding in classrooms. In a statement, following the 2024 budget speech by the Minister of Finance, Equal Education and Equal Education Law Centre (2024) assert that while education is the biggest national spending item, the R324,5 billion budget for 2024/25 is not enough to relieve the schooling crisis. Furthermore, they bemoan the significant reduction in school infrastructure spending, which has been reduced to R14,95 billion. Equal Education and Equal Education Law Centre (2024) argue that this amount is not enough to tackle the overcrowding issue in schools, where the national average learner-educator ratio is 30.9:1, and to provide 70 043 classrooms needed in 8133 schools.

With regards to policy transformation, the South African Schools Act, 1996, was promulgated to provide a uniform system for the organisation, governance, and funding of schools. More

recently, the Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act 32 of 2024 has been introduced as the most significant reform to the South African legal framework for basic education since 1994 (Veriava, 2024). One of the key amendments in the Act includes the strengthening of the existing ban on corporal punishment in schools to ensure stronger enforcement and clear accountability measures. These Acts aim to redress past injustices in education provision and create safe and conducive learning environments, as well as uphold the rights of learners, parents and teachers. However, this seems to be a difficult and often elusive goal, and, while there have been some gains made, like general improvement in physical infrastructure (albeit mainly in urban schools) and ensuring compulsory primary schooling, the state of education in township schools remains of relatively inferior quality.

Furthermore, township schools have been the space where various forms of oppression have been passed down from one generation to the next. This often occurs through curricula and pedagogy, but also in other subtle, covert ways. For instance, teachers' and, more broadly, society's expectations of learners can limit the kinds of aspirations encouraged in the classroom. Dominant narratives continue to dehumanise learners, teachers, and the wider township school community. These subtleties also exist in which languages are valued in the classroom, highlighting the elevated status of the English language over the multilingual reality of social life beyond the classroom (Alexander, 2005; wa Thiong'o, 1986). These examples provide further evidence to illustrate how coloniality and structural racism continue to exist today. While these subtle messages continue to inform particular ways of being, there are also multiple disruptions and resistances that cannot be ignored. Learners and teachers, in different ways, continuously create spaces of resistance in the schooling environment, exercising their agency and imagining alternatives.

It is important to take seriously the impact of decades of inequalities across the schooling system in South Africa (Alexander, 2013). In addition to this, one needs to understand deeply the impact of the intergenerational transmission of the trauma experienced through the structural violence and injustice of colonialism and apartheid, as well as the current dynamics of everyday structural violence and persistent inequalities in South Africa. Evidently, the psycho-social impact of the violent apartheid system, as well as the effects of "psychologically violent classrooms" (wa Thiong'o, 1986, p.9) through a politicised education system that sought to perpetuate racial inferiority, requires urgent attention.

1.4 Aims of the study

The aim of the research was to understand the nuanced interactions that maintain, reproduce, and aid the perpetuation of coloniality, and the ways in which this transmission is resisted, in the space of a township school. The study examined the narratives and experiences of learners, teachers, and parents in a township school in Dobsonville, Soweto, with the primary focus on the learners' narratives. Furthermore, the research sought to understand the impact of dominant narratives that position learners in particular ways and impact on their schooling experiences. By doing so, the study aimed to highlight the complexities of youth identities, as well as relational patterns and power dynamics between teachers, learners, and parents in post-apartheid township South Africa.

Moreover, the research adopted what Weis and Fine (2012, p. 173) refer to as the "dual lens of critical bifocality", aiming to collect not only stories of "wounds but also resilience and resistance". The study aimed to go beyond focusing on individual lives or experiences, rather contextualising these lives within the policies, structures, and everyday social practices and relationships that create, sustain, and resist these experiences. In this way, the research highlights how these nuanced interactions unfold within "unhygienic" (Manganyi, 1973, p. 10) spaces, within a history of oppression, power, and structural violence (Sandwick et al., 2018). Consequently, by understanding the narratives that reproduce injustice and trauma, the research offers an opportunity for these to be challenged by all stakeholders: learners, parents, and teachers. Considering the research aims, the following research questions were formulated:

1.4.1 Research questions

- What are the narratives of schooling and identity in a township school?
    - How do the dominant narratives of oppressive social systems (coloniality and apartheid) inform the ways in which young people construct their identity?
    - How do place, space, and social interactions shape the development of learners' sense of self?
    - How are the dominant narratives of coloniality and structural racism represented in the relational patterns between learners, teachers, and parents?
    - In what ways are these dominant narratives disrupted and resisted in the narratives of learners?

1.5. Anticipated contribution to the body of knowledge

This research adds value to the body of knowledge by offering a nuanced exploration of how colonial and apartheid legacies continue to influence identity formation, educational experiences, and interpersonal relationships in post-apartheid South Africa. By focusing on the complex relationship between historical trauma and the present psycho-social experiences of youth in township schools, the research opens avenues for understanding how trauma manifests in everyday life. It further highlights the dual role of education as simultaneously a tool of oppression and a means of liberation, through "…the continual questioning, disalienation and refusal to be bound by past oppression" Burman (2019, p. 164). This demonstrates how education offers possibilities for change and hope. Additionally, it contributes to the global conversation on how the legacies of colonialism manifest in urban spaces, particularly in the Global South, offering comparative insights for other post-colonial contexts.

Furthermore, the research adds to the existing work on identity development, specifically in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, as it highlights how systemic racism, segregation, and educational inequalities affect the processes of identity formation among Black South African youth. The project contributes to a broader understanding of firstly, how oppressive social systems shape the self-concept and social identity of young people in educational spaces; and secondly, how place, space and social interactions shape the development of youth's sense of self in a racially divided society. It also explores how marginalised communities resist systemic oppression through everyday actions. The research extends the understanding of resilience not as mere survival, but as active resistance to injustice. Finally, the study urges critical reflection among relevant policymakers, educators, and social scientists who are working to decolonise and transform the education system to be more inclusive, equitable and affirming of all its learners.

1.6 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 has outlined the introduction and background of the study, including the aims, research questions, its potential contribution to the body of knowledge, as well as the overall structure of the research. The following two chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, offer a theoretical framework and literature review that help to situate the study within bodies of knowledge and current engagements on matters of coloniality, education, youth identity, place and place identity, trauma, and violence. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach adopted for the study. This is a qualitative study that employed both Narrative methodology and Youth

Participatory Action research (YPAR). This combined data collection approach, along with the narrative and thematic method of analysis, has allowed for a deep and nuanced understanding of how everyday living and relations articulate history in big and/or small ways. It also highlights the ways in which the exterior or external factors impact people's interiority and vice versa. Moreover, the participants' stories offer insights and nuanced understandings of the different historical forces of coloniality and apartheid and the ways in which young people engage these in the present and in their imaginations for the future.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide analyses and discussions of the data. Chapter 5 focuses on a specific violent incident that occurred at the school during the participant recruitment process for the teachers focus group. This event, framed as an enactment (Bowman et al., 2015), is used to explore the context in which schooling takes place and the context in which the narratives emerge. Essentially, this chapter sets the stage and provides the necessary context for Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 presents analyses of young people's psycho-social identity development, highlighting the continuous influence of the social contexts in which individuals find themselves. Finally, Chapter 7 delves into the interpersonal relationships revealed by the data, examining how these relationships can either foster a supportive, safe, and humanising environment or, conversely, contribute to experiences of shame and unhealthy dynamics that can stunt and/or hinder personal growth.

The last chapter, Chapter 8, provides some conclusions and details how the research aims were fulfilled through engaging with the research questions that were set out. This chapter also explores the limitations of the study and suggests recommendations for possible future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the study's theoretical framework, which integrates a range of theoretical concepts to understand youth identity in the South African context with its colonial, racist past marked by persistent inequalities. The framework builds on Weis and Fine's (2012) concept of dual lens of critical bifocality, which is a dual lens of analysis that examines both the power structures that shape societies and the lived experiences of individuals. This dual lens allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how coloniality manifests at both societal and individual levels, providing insight into how systems of oppression are experienced, internalised and resisted in everyday life. Furthermore, this framework incorporates concepts and insights through theorising schooling and social inequality, narrative identities, intergenerational narratives, and healing.

2.1 Dual lens of critical bifocality

Weis and Fine (2012) argue for a social theory and analysis that appreciates the symbiotic relationship between individual lives (and/or social problems) and structures. They emphasise the importance of critically engaging with narratives, while simultaneously holding a focus on the context in which these stories are told. Moreover, Weis and Fine (2012) advocate for critical scholarship that "connects the dots across … presumed binaries and refuses to reproduce representations of individuals as autonomous, self-contained units dangling freely and able to pursue their life choices unencumbered by constraint" (Weis & Fine 2012, p. 175). Instead, they call for an approach that acknowledges how individual lives are shaped by, and actively interact with, the broader structures and systems in which they exist.

To achieve this kind of scholarship, Weis and Fine (2012, p. 175) advocate for the dual lens of critical bifocality, which they define as "a dedicated theoretical and methodological commitment to a bifocal design documenting at once the linkages and capillaries of structural arrangements and the discursive and lived-out practices by which privileged and marginalized youth and adults make sense of their circumstances". Implied in this concept is the required engagement with the historical patterns of oppression and dispossession and the lives of ordinary people/lived experience. Furthermore, the ways in which these "(historical) circuits of dispossession…" inform the present psycho-socio-political landscape and are taken up by societies (Fine & Ruglis, 2008, p. 33). In a way, using this lens requires us to see how long histories of oppressive structures 'hail' individuals into specific identities and consequently into particular lives (Althusser, 1971). At the same time, it also requires us to maintain our sight

on both historical and current resistances, refusals and reimagining that challenge these oppressive structures. In a similar vein, Bradbury (2020) underscores the importance of acknowledging the enduring grip of the past while at the same time recognising its role in orienting us towards the imagined and not yet realised future. As she argues, "the question of change entails the challenge of how to live ethically in the present, in relationship with others, creating collective future histories that will be conceptually and politically transformative." (Bradbury, 2020, p. 170). In this way, both resistance and transformation become possible through narratives that are situated in dialogue about the past and the present.

2.2 Traumatic histories in the present

2.2.1 Coloniality

The concept of coloniality allows for a historical reading of power structures and the ways in which these structures have produced injustices that have enduring effects on current social realities. Scholars such as Quijano (2000), Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argue for a systemic and historical analysis of the continued (re)production of injustice and mass human suffering. Furthermore, as noted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), coloniality is a useful analytical tool that enables one to analyse not only the continuities and reproduction of injustice but also the realities of the lived experiences of the continued (and normalised) dehumanisation of colonised people.

Coloniality as defined by Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243),

> "… survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day."

Coloniality is expressed and experienced differently in different countries and by different people/generations who have survived colonialism. South Africa's history is complex, complicated by the specific political formation of apartheid and the socioeconomic structures of racial capital. As Christie (2020) argues, the country's violent history of colonialism is not amenable to easy labelling. More (2017, p. 7), engaging Fanon's work, argues that Fanon's description of the colonial condition was similar to the South African apartheid condition. He asserts "every feature of the British and Dutch colonial system bled into the Union of South Africa and ultimately became the apartheid system". Likewise, on reflecting on the continuities

of the patterns of power over time, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) notes the conditions under colonialism, describing the world of the colonised as filled with violence, disease, and death. These hellish war-like realities are reflected in the recorded high rape statistics. In the first quarter of 2025, the South African Police Service (SAPS) documented 13 452 reported sexual offences. Hunger, violence, inadequate housing and healthcare, and persistently high murder rates; SAPS reported 5727 cases in the first quarter of 2025. These reflect the challenges that have persisted from colonial times, through apartheid, and into the present era of (post)-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, these are reminiscent of what wa Thiong'o (2023) termed "normalized abnormalities", which refer to false and damaging yet accepted and taken for granted ideas and practices that are naturalised and go unquestioned.

In advocating for a historical reading of apartheid conditions, Manganyi (1973, p. 49) asserts, "[i]t remains fundamentally true to insist on a fresh recognition of the historical fact of colonialism since this historical exigency may make certain currently less understood realities about being black in the world understandable." This kind of historical reading of oppressive structures through the lens of coloniality allows for the kind of scholarship advocated for by Weis and Fine (2012, p. 175) that critically engages "linkages and capillaries of structural arrangements" that have shaped epistemologies, laws, and policies and in turn, everyday lived experiences. By examining these interconnections, one can highlight the often unseen and taken-for-granted dehumanising experiences that are a result of systemic inequality. In addition, coloniality demands thinking about or engaging with the realities and experiences of the oppressed, dispossessed, and dehumanised and their reduction into non-beings or the 'damned' (Fanon, 1961; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Fanon (1959, p. 128) argues that these dehumanising experiences of "endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future" are reflective of the ways in which colonised people live lives that are "… a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death". This sentiment is echoed by Manganyi (1973) in his writing on Black life under apartheid South Africa, where Black people have had to find ways of negotiating with death in their day-to-day life. Maldonado-Torre (2007, p. 255) adds that,

> "killability and rapeability are inscribed into the images of the colonial bodies… they are part of their essence… The 'essence' of Blackness… is part of a larger context of meaning in which the non-ethics of war gradually becomes a constitutive part of an alleged normal world".

This points out how Blackness, under (post)colonialism, is not just a racial identity but one that is deeply marked by vulnerability to violence. Fanon (1959), Manganyi (1973), and Maldonado-Torre (2007) highlight the profound material and psychological toll of coloniality, where being Black means one has to constantly engage with the ever-present grip of (violent) death. While this grip of death may from time to time loosen its grip, it never completely lets go and serves as a constant reminder that Black people are the 'damned'. Consequently, the trauma of continuous construction of Black people as disposable and rendering their lives precarious (Butler, 2004) is passed down from one generation to the next, shaping their sense of self and of self-worth, their relationship to systems of power and how they navigate the world. However, ka Canham (2024, p. 1298) argues that Black people's "dance with death" informs their deeper appreciation of life and, in this way, death and life are not seen as binaries but as inextricably intertwined.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this precariousness is not only about the threat of physical violence but reflects sociopolitical and economic structures that systemically expose particular people to heightened risks of harm, exclusion and structural violence. Moreover, it is also the pervasive sense of insecurity that structures the daily lives of Black people generation after generation (Butler, 2004). The social precarity experienced by Black people in South African townships is both a contemporary issue and a historical continuum that stretches back through generations. The constant negotiation with life and death is not merely about surviving current conditions; rather it is also about living with the weight of history, where past violence, exclusion, and inequality continue to shape the present conditions. In this way, Butler's (2004) concept of precarity provides a critical lens through which one can see and understand how coloniality continues to shape the lives of Black people. Musila (2023) notes that for post-colonial people with long histories of marginalisation, this precarity becomes a ubiquitous and normalised condition of life. Furthermore, this sense of precarity is marked by what Peterson (2019, p. 346) calls "Black spectrality", which represents a state where Black people's life is overshadowed by the enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid.

> "[T]he lived experiences of black people… seems to be marked by the, seemingly, intractable co-existence of asymmetrical and racialized power relations, exploitative social conditions and subjection and that generate fraught and incongruent senses of self, sociality, temporalities and visions." (Peterson, 2019, p. 346)

The significance of taking South Africa's historical specificity seriously is that one can begin to think, in helpful ways, about the enduring injustices that remain long after the end of both colonialism and apartheid. Moreover, highlighting the logic of coloniality in contemporary South Africa foregrounds the enduring inequalities and injustices as well as the interconnection between historical and present injustices, such as the logic of coloniality behind apartheid South Africa's spatial planning, which still has an impact on township schools, as these schools remain under-resourced. In addition, it draws attention to the colonial legacies that influence current political, cultural and economic structures, which continue to oppress and marginalise certain groups. Moreover, it calls us to be sceptical, to question, and to challenge the taken-for-granted contemporary expressions of coloniality that continue to distort the visibility and the ways of being in the world of certain groups of people or, in the context of this study, young Black people in the township. In so doing, focusing on coloniality allows for reimagining more human ways of being for all.

Writing during the apartheid era, Manganyi (1973) turned his attention to the mental health problems that resulted from colonisation and apartheid. He notes that these oppressive structures produced "unhygienic" environments within which Africans live, school and work (Manganyi, 1973). He emphasised that the well-documented and known effects of structural racism leave the individual with no real sense of "freedom in security" (Manganyi, 1973, p. 44). Manganyi (1973, p. 44) describes this as an individual's freedom "… to constitute his lived space on the basis of the open appeal of time. An individual has potential. Time appeals to this potential to be realised freely. Such potential may only be realised in freedom-in-security (a dialectic)". Schools promise this kind of freedom, where youth imagine and prepare for these potential futures. However, all too often this promise is undermined by the lack of security, expressed through overcrowded classrooms, violence, lack of resources, etc. In this way, schooling only offers the promise of freedom without real security, for instance, without the security of the material conditions necessary to ensure the promise is realised.

The lack of security distorts people's sense of agency, including their capacity for "initiative and achievement" (Manganyi, 1973, p. 44), in so doing, limiting their potential for personal growth, nourishment, and self-fulfilment and, in turn, perpetuating cycles of deprivation and inequality. Moreover, this insecurity hampers both Black people's emotional and physical development as well as the possibilities for true freedom and a meaningful existence (Manganyi, 1973).

Much has changed in South Africa since 1973; the country is under democratic rule, and apartheid policies and laws have been abolished. In addition, over the years, there have been attempts at redress and transform, as evidenced through the policies of broad-based Black economic empowerment and affirmative action. Similarly, at a social level, some of the efforts at redress include but are not limited to, provision of various social grants, the provision of social housing, as well as increased expenditure in previously disadvantaged schools. Spending on basic education has increased by 3.4% during the 2023/2024 period, translating to up to R23 105 per learner per year (Section 27, 2024). Yet so much has remained the same and, some may argue, even worsened in terms of the deplorable living conditions of many poor Black people, and particularly, the inequalities inherent in the education system (Hayes, 2011). It can be argued that many of Manganyi's observations can be transposed to our current time, as much of what he described persists today in South Africa and has enduring effects on the lives of people, as well as in how people come to think of themselves and others. As shown in Peterson's reflections on the 2015 university students' protest in South Africa:

> "In addition to the systemic daily of poverty, inequality and injustice, young blacks have to, as a matter of banal routine, negotiate... belonging and mobility because of the constant surveillance, profiling, stoppages, searches, interrogations and other forms of visceral violence that they are subjected to." (Peterson, 2019, p. 360)

2.2.2 Colonial trauma

Colonial trauma as a concept allows one to take seriously and critically engage with the impact and effect of these continuities and enduring threads of colonialism. Much has been written about the rupture brought on by colonialism on the colonised country's developmental path, as well as on the colonised individual's psychology (Biko, 1978; Fanon, 1959; Manganyi, 1973; wa Thiong'o, 1986). Evans-Campbell (2008, p. 335) describes colonial trauma as active political violence, which includes "… historical and contemporary events that reflect colonial practices to colonise, subjugate, and perpetrate ethnocide and genocide". In agreement, Mitchelle et al. (2019) add that implied in the concept of colonial trauma is the political nature, produced by political systems, as well as the collective impact of the trauma that colonised communities endure. This definition of colonial trauma holds all the many ways colonialism has not only impacted individuals but also communities. Secondly, the concept appreciates the persistent systematic intrusions of coloniality that often leave communities oppressed and with limited opportunities to make a living (Mitchele et al., 2019). This latter point lays emphasis on the idea that trauma is insidious and, as Segalo (2020, p. 2) articulates, "…is a sedimentary

layer of human experience", challenging the idea that trauma is marked by one big event or moment.

2.2.3 Violence

The violent nature of colonialism is well documented by various scholars. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1965, p. 23) asserts that "colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence." He goes on to state that this violence, which is mainly physical violence, is what produced and maintained colonial relations and laid the ground for the violent restructuring, in different ways, of the psyches of both the colonised and coloniser. For the colonised, the interrelated cumulative nature of this violence evoked feelings of alienation, rage and a sense of being damned. Fanon (1965) argues that these intense feelings need an outlet and that every society must have a channel or an outlet where energy accumulated in the form of aggression can be released. He contends that this release will often manifest in a violent form, which he argues is a necessary form of resistance and ultimately the destruction of a dehumanising, oppressive system (Fanon, 1965). In a similar vein, ka Canham (2018, 2024) describes rage as a form of refusal, a bold "no" to a system that renders one 'damned'. Seen as a response to the violence of coloniality, ka Canham (2018) argues that rage operates at the intersection of the subjective and systemic, signifying a state in which individuals can no longer withstand the weight of oppression. Thus rage becomes a catalyst for decolonising minds and for the inspiration of courageous behaviour (ka Canham, 2018).

In thinking about colonial violence as not only being an experience of a moment in history but as a continuing occurrence, Parashar and Schulz (2021, p. 873) argue "… that it is not possible to understand contemporary violence without its antecedents, without accounting for colonial continuities and historical legacies." They further emphasise that history in this sense means "the past that lives and the past with which most people still live…" rather than a moment fixed in a particular past time (Parashar & Schulz, 2021, p. 873). Understanding contemporary eruptions of violent incidents, including vigilantism, increasing rates of gender-based violence and femicide, the many cases of violence in schools, high rates of murder, muggings, and house break-ins, allows for a more complex, textured, and contextualised reading. In agreement, Bowman (2021, p. 4) argues that "the study of violence is therefore significantly compromised without deep historical analysis", which, when conducted, will provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the current manifestations of violence in South Africa. Similarly, this kind of textured reading enables the "… fresh recognition of the historical fact of colonialism…" that Manganyi (1973, p. 49) called for. Moreover, it ensures that the binary thinking, which holds

the strong divide between colonial and post-colonial violence, is challenged, while also taking seriously the fact that the machinery perpetuating violence is continuously evolving (Mbembe, 2001).

2.3 Schooling and social (in)equality

"Education cannot be studied in a vacuum; it must be located within the broader context of linked political, social, and economic changes. In South Africa each of these aspects of social life are violently demarcated by ethnicity or race" (Hlatshwayo, 2000, p. 1). This statement highlights the importance of seriously considering socio-political and economic factors to understand education in a society. Furthermore, it calls attention to the relationship between power and education, as well as how the latter is used to validate and maintain the dominance (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Alexander (1990) notes that schools generally reflect what is happening in society at large, and he further adds that the economic and political crises of a ruling party are reproduced in the educational arena.

Harber and Mncube (2011) suggest that schooling in South Africa is contradictory. While it has the potential to have a positive impact, socially, economically, politically, and psychologically for learners, in our society, it also reproduces horrendous social injustices, which formed part of the historical foundations of the education system. Fine and Weis (2003, p. 3) in agreement state that:

> "Schools are profoundly contradictory spaces. They can be repressive and toxic, and they can challenge social injustices… Schools typically reproduce the brutal social stratifications but occasionally create wisdom with youth and by youth that enables and even encourages challenge to social arrangements. Most schools serve as contexts that narrowly constrict identities of youth, but an important exception is that some schools wedge open opportunities for new selves to emerge."

In this way, education or schooling can be conceived as a possible area of liberation, where teaching and learning offer an open field of possible opportunities for identity construction, for re-imagining ways of relating, and education as a site for social change. However, it is important to hold that at times, perhaps often, education or schooling in South Africa has and continues to not only highlight inequality but further entrench it. In addition, the ongoing failure by the Department of Basic Education to provide quality education to the majority of learners in public schools has contributed to a range of problems, despite the Department's

success at ensuring an increase in the number of those learners who can access school. Vally (2020) argues that these problems, which are created by this failure, include the privatisation of education, as parents seek alternatives to an education system that is perceived as inadequate. Secondly, schools end up resorting to the use of corporal punishment, or they increase the use of it as a result of the pressure they experience due to the limited or lack of resources. These acts of corporal punishment are often reminiscent of those used during apartheid in the country (Vally, 2020).

Bradbury (2012), reflecting on stories from the Apartheid Archive, as well as work from artists and social scientists at the 3rd Apartheid Archive Conference, anticipated that education would be the one space where there is often an association with terms such as future, wish, and hope. However, she found that many of these recollected stories told of education as a place where dreams and dreaming were discouraged and where hopes of young people were eroded daily. According to the Human Sciences Research Council, Education Policy Consortium (South Africa) (2005, p. 142), "For many, education cannot compensate for much deeper economic and social inequalities, it (education) is not a ladder out of poverty, it simply confirms one's status in life." In this context, as argued by Bourdieu (1977), education, particularly in township schools, does not serve as a means of upward mobility but rather reinforces and deepens the habits of learners. Bourdieu (1977, p. 86) defines habitus as "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class". Consequently, instead of providing a pathway out of poverty, education in these contexts serves to perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage and maintain social hierarchies. It acts as a form of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2021), presenting the promise of education and a brighter future, which, due to the multiple challenges facing township schools and the country's ailing economy, has remained unattainable to many young people, as seen in the high numbers of youth unemployment.

While we account for and acknowledge the force and power of education and/or schools to reproduce horrendous social injustices of the past, we also need to see, firstly, the limitations of power and, secondly, the resistance and push back of communities (including learners, parents and teachers) historically and in current times. This highlights the paradox of education as both co-opting and validating dominance while also inspiring and enabling resistance to domination, nurturing agency and new imaginings often in ways that are not overtly political. Multiple forms of resistance have persisted throughout the history of schooling in South Africa. An education report drawn up by the then government in 1869 reports "there is a considerable

repugnance on the part of the heathen kaffirs to send their children to school", suggesting that it was not only the children who were resistant but parents too (as cited in Molteno 1983, p. 33). Similarly, teachers, parents and learners resisted the anti-Black apartheid education. These resistances to colonial and apartheid ideologies also found expression in classrooms, through teachers' defiance; teachers who strayed from the state-approved syllabus and preferred to do the work advocated by Freire (1972), the work of conscientisation. An example of this is captured in Mbongeni Ngema's Musical, Sarafina (Singh, 1992). The musical shares the story of a group of high school learners' struggle against apartheid and its violence in and outside the classroom. In this musical, we see how a fearless history teacher, Miss Mary Masombuka (played by Whoopi Goldberg in the film version), goes against the oppressive curriculum set out by the state and instead offers lessons that conscientize and support her students to resist.

A post-apartheid example of the resistance to the spatial and educational inequality is the movement of children, from townships, into former model C schools located in the suburban areas of South Africa, often in defiance of the Department of Education's and schools' feeder zone policy, which uses distance-based criteria to regulate school admissions (de Kadt et al., 2014).

2.3.1 Institutional culture and space

To disrupt this painful and grossly unjust reproduction, Rose (2011) suggests that we need to begin questioning what education is in relation to what it could be and to hold this critique alongside an emancipatory intention. Similarly, in advocating for emancipatory education, Freire (2004) suggests that there is a need for an education that challenges the current realities, which will then enable individuals to actively participate in transforming their conditions. He asserts: "We have to apply ourselves to creating a context in which people can question the fatalistic perceptions of the circumstances where they find themselves so that we can fulfil our role as participants in history" (Freire, 2004, p. 5).

For this kind of emancipatory education to be possible, the school's culture must support and facilitate this goal. Steyn and Van Zyl (2001, p. 9) define institutional culture as "the sum total of values, attitudes, styles of interaction and the way of life of the institution, known by only those who study and work in the institutions through their lived experiences". This suggests that the institution plays a significant role in shaping the experiences and identities of learners and teachers. In addition, Ballard (2004, p. 51) adds that "one's sense of space and sense of self are mutually constitutive". In other words, not only do individuals shape their own

environment, but the environment also shapes, challenges, and constrains them. This implies that the institutional culture and physical space of a school can have a profound impact on the individuals within it, influencing their sense of identity and shaping their learning and developmental experiences. Together, these ideas suggest that schools are not just a passive backdrop for learning but actively shape the lives of learners and teachers.

Echoing Lefebvre's (1991) seminal work on social space, Foster (2005, p. 498) argues that "various kinds of spaces either enable or constrain particular action". Indeed, Lefebvre (1991) and Foster (2005) both highlight the dynamic relationship between the physical environment and human action. In this way, spaces can either facilitate or hinder certain actions, influencing the possibilities and limitations of people's actions. Furthermore, this concept of social space is particularly insightful, as it suggests that space is not just a passive environment for human activity, but an active participant that shapes and is shaped by social relations (Lefebvre, 1991). By "permitting fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others", social space exerts a subtle yet powerful influence on our behaviour, norms, and cultural practices (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73).

Lefebvre (1991) asserts that space is not a neutral, objective, detached material reality, but rather is a socially produced entity that is shaped by social practices, power dynamics, and economic forces in capitalist societies. He introduces the concept of "social space" as a dynamic product that is all at once conceived, perceived and lived (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 86). In addition, the production of space can be contested and transformed over time. Differential spaces, often seen as sites of resistance, and counter spaces, intentionally created for marginalised voices and alternative social practices, offer opportunities for challenge and change. Lefebvre's theory (1991, p. 80) enables a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond engaging with the question of what is within the school space but will also uncover "the social relationships embedded in it", recognising that all the components of the school space are interconnected. Additionally, it will highlight the ways in which social spaces overlap, interpenetrate one another and exist as continuities despite appearing separate and bounded (Lefebvre, 1991).

Thinking of spaces as social, active, and dynamic recognises the significant impact spaces have on individuals and their experiences. Manganyi points to Goffman's work (1961) on people's responses to the environment and space they inhabit, more specifically to the environmental provision and practices, for example, routines, rules, uniform specifications, etc. He notes that

the materiality of space, including its design, layout, and provisions, can shape individuals' behaviours, interactions, and even their sense of self (Manganyi, 1981). In highlighting the psycho-socio-political influences in architectural practice, Manganyi (1981) notes that spaces or architectural practice are very often a reflection of a society's perception, belief, and attitude towards people. In other words, buildings are not inanimate objects but they do something, they have an impact. This is because they are externalisations of people's thinking and ideas. As Bennette (2010) argues, the world cannot be neatly separated into life and inanimate matter. This perspective suggests that objects, including architectural structures, are not mere backdrops to human life but are dynamic entities. They are both shaped by and, in turn, shape the sociopolitical and psychological landscapes in which they exist. Moreover, when spaces are designed to enforce rigid uniformity or homogeneity, they can have a dehumanising effect on individuals. By stifling individuality, uniqueness, and self-expression, such spaces can suppress people's agency and autonomy (Manganyi, 1981). This can lead to a sense of disempowerment, as individuals are forced to conform to predetermined norms and expectations.

2.3.2 Power dynamics

In thinking about the significance of schools in societies, Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of power will be used to consider how schooling is often used to validate and maintain subjugation. Foucault (1977) theorises on the everyday functioning and effects of the relations of power and the forms of knowledge on individuals, as well as how individuals are regulated and subjected. Schools can be seen to be operating in the same way, in that the routine and routine ways of thinking are internalised by learners, teachers, and parents, and this hinders individuals' capacity to explore and construct their identities. These subtle, unseen hindrances often lead to the foreclosure of certain ideas or constructions of identity; thereby turning individuals into what Foucault (1977, p. 135) termed "docile bodies".

These forms of control are now diffused through social relationships, for instance, in the power dynamics between teachers, learners and parents. However, it is important to note here that these relationships are dynamic and co-constructed and often there is space for negotiation and resistance. In addition, Deacon (2006) notes that physical punishment began to move away from being public and physically violent, to a more private and psychologically persuasive form. Subjects who, in the past, were punished and tortured for transgressions were now trained and corrected with the aim of creating subjects for the future. While this is true not only of schools but of the wider society, in South Africa, both subtle and overt forms of discipline co-

exist. Although it is illegal, schools still utilise corporal punishment, and we read in the headlines about corporal punishment stories and police violence against protesting community members. For example, the televised killing of Andries Tatane by police during a service delivery protest in 2011 in the Free State province highlights contemporary forms of violent 'punishment' (Ferreira, 2011).

2.4 Intergenerational narratives

"What does it mean to be caught in a web of history, to be part of a traumatic past over which we have no control?" (Frie, 2014, p. 2). We are born into history and culture, and it is through our family, as well as other social institutions such as schools, that we are connected to these larger dimensions of experience. Social institutions provide us with narratives, stories that enable us to make sense of what we see and that implicitly shape what we know and remember at any moment in time. These narratives are an integral part of who we are and yet are not consciously organised. They remain largely unconscious, a compass by which our lives are pre-reflectively organised (Freeman, 2004).

Moreover, these stories are passed down through generations, forming the essence of cultural identity. That which is inherited from preceding generations is passed on to future generations (Andrews 2002a). Hoffman's (2004) idea of the force of an internalised past is important here. She is interested in understanding how knowledge of the holocaust is passed on to the 2nd (and 3rd) generation children of Holocaust survivors. She found indirect knowledge, both spoken but more often, unspoken, was transmitted to the children from the parents; this knowledge is affective, it holds spoken and unspoken stories of these horrendous events. Although the children did not live through the trauma of the holocaust, they carried knowledge of it. Hoffman (2004, p. 66) notes, "…indeed the second generation has inherited not experience but its shadows", and this makes up the "narrative unconscious" (Freeman, 2004, p. 289).

> "Narrative unconscious, therefore, refers not so much to that which has been dynamically repressed as to that which has been lived but which remains unthought and hence untold, i.e., to those culturally rooted aspects of one's history that have not yet become part of one's story." (Freeman, 2004, p. 289)

Freeman (2004) elaborates that the term 'unconscious' is not used psychoanalytically; rather, it is:

> "more in a cultural sense, having to do with those largely unrecognized… aspects of our own histories that have been bequeathed to us by virtue of our status as historical beings of a specific sort… Hence the idea of the narrative unconscious, which we become aware of precisely during those moments when our own historical and cultural situatedness comes into view." (Freeman, 2004, p. 296)

Holmes (2016) notes that cultural trauma has multigenerational contributions and is often silenced, which makes it difficult for communities' experiences to be acknowledged and for the trauma to be fully processed and addressed. According to Alexander et al. (2004, p. 1), "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways". This trauma is carried and transmitted across generations, in subtle ways, through the everyday interactions, particularly between the younger people and teachers or parents who lived through the oppressive conditions of apartheid as young people. Gobodo-Madikizela (2016) elaborates further and adds that trauma is often transmitted through told and untold stories, through the unnamed, unarticulated fears, as well as through the psychological wounds that remain unknown or acknowledged. This further emphasises that trauma is not only an individual psychological experience but also a collective condition that also affects and disrupts social institutions such as schools, other public institutions, and communities.

Adebayo (2022) characterises the transmission of trauma as an inheritance of loss marked by grief and melancholia, which shapes young people's sense of identity and belonging. This highlights the deep connection between the past and the lived experiences of Black South Africans. In addition, Bradbury (2020, p. 157) importantly notes that this trauma is carried or expressed in the present day through "patterns of systemic racism and material inequalities", thereby suggesting that the traumatic histories are "entangled in the living surfaces of experience, creating 'holding' patterns of repetitive trauma". Consequently, it suggests both a transmission and a repetition of trauma. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Gobodo-Madikizela (2016) agrees with the above sentiment and states that the current generation of marginalised South Africans is experiencing its own trauma due to daily humiliations stemming from growing inequality. These daily experiences include subtle yet destructive systematic acts of violence, such as structural poverty that denies people access to quality education, responsive policing, and health care. Additionally, these systematic acts of violence also include the ever-increasing number of cases involving the abuse and murder of women

and children. These acts undermine the dignity of individuals, compromise their psychological and spiritual integrity (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016). This kind of insidious trauma includes both the spectacular acts of violence that often make news, as well as the subtle, invisible, and often normalised acts of violence that constantly degrade and humiliate people (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016; Segalo, 2020).

2.5 Cultural assets

However, while some of what may be transmitted may be shadows that haunt the next generation (Hoffman, 2004; Peterson, 2019), it is important to note that cultural assets are also carried and passed on. Cabral (1973) suggests that culture is an important part of the history of a community, or a person, and it is central in identity development (Erikson, 1968; Hammack, 2008; McLean, 2008). Therefore, it is essential for one to understand the history of a people if one is to fully understand the everyday life or culture of a community, which, as suggested by Cabral (1973), is a product of its history. In addition, Cabral (1973, p. 42) notes the difference between history and culture, as the former

> "… allows us to know the nature and the extent of the imbalances and conflicts (economic, political and social) which characterise the evolution of a society; culture allows us to know the dynamic synthesis which has been developed and established by social conscience to resolve these conflicts at each stage of evolution, in the search for survival and progress".

In this way, for Cabral (1973), culture is not static; it is a dynamic, ongoing process of creation and transformation, continuously shaped by historical, social, and economic forces. Moreover, culture is resistance, as it is inextricably linked to the material realities of society, evolving in response to the conditions. Andrews (2002a, p. 121) notes:

> "Stories pass between generations; they are the stuff of cultural identity… It is through these stories that individuals, as members of a generation, locate themselves in the historical process, and in so doing, create a framework which optimizes the possibility of realizing their own ability to effect real change."

Just as the history of violence experienced during colonialism and apartheid continues to haunt many communities today, so too could the students' resistance of the 1976 uprising be seen as a catalyst for the student uprising of 2015–2016.

Schools, as microcosms of the community and social institutions, are important sites for understanding these interactions, as well as interrupting them to create sites for hope and reimagining a different society. Therefore, in thinking about youth identities and the interaction between the various stakeholders within the school community, it is important to acknowledge the multiple sources that give rise to identities and inform the context of these interactions. This is especially significant when one considers the dynamic intergenerational interplay that should not be understood as one-way, or top-down from teacher/parent/community to learner, but rather as a dynamic interplay where cultural assets are shared. It is in this interplay, as argued by Bradbury (2020, p. 19), that "intergenerational knowledge should make it possible for both the past and the future to inform the present".

Furthermore, these cultural assets, including intergenerational knowledge, in turn, help to mediate and resist some burdensome identities and allow individuals to navigate through harsh social conditions. This echoes hooks' (1989, p. 20) sentiments about spaces in the margins as "… much more than sites of deprivation… but as spaces of resistance". In this way, townships are seen as spaces where both young and old people are constantly negotiating and renegotiating their identities as they struggle to make sense of their world (Mama, 1995). The concern, though, has been and continues to be the intergenerational disagreements that possibly obscure these available assets and knowledge (Ndebele, 2017). This concern raises an important question about whether generations can find ways that assist them in taking part in intergenerational conversations (Bradbury, 2020).

2.6 Youth developmental theory and narratives of youth identity

While young people may be expected to typically follow a universal developmental trajectory, in terms of physiological changes, the manner in which the changes are interpreted by the members of a society varies tremendously (Dehne & Riedner, 2001). Furthermore, the meaning and interpretations attached to these physiological changes will introduce particular psycho-social preoccupations and particular understandings of the self. In addition, young people may also be expected to cope with multiple social challenges that have historical patterns. It is mainly this intertwining of identity development with the social milieu, i.e. when a young person comes to terms with herself and her society, that Erikson's (1980) theory suggests results in identity formation. In this way, his theory provides a key shift in how identity is thought about, because of the widening of the developmental frame to theorise the individual in society.

Erikson's theory proposed a lifespan development model of eight psychosocial stages, and each stage is associated with a "crisis" with either successful or unsuccessful outcomes. He explains that the term crisis is not used to show danger but "…a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential" (Erikson, 1968, p. 96). He theorises human development from the point of view of internal and external conflicts, which the individual negotiates, struggles with, and comes out of each stage/crisis with an increased sense of self and a capacity to succeed. Erikson (1968) focuses on adolescence and youth as the developmental period where the primary task is a search for identity, and he called this developmental conflict/stage "identity versus role confusion".

Erikson (1968) regarded the period of adolescence as significant, as it is the space of transitioning from childhood to adulthood and a space where identity development, the process of conceptualising oneself and reconciling one's internal world with the external world, occurs. This arbitrary notion of adolescence is contextual and holds different meanings in different cultural contexts, placing societal or cultural expectations on pubescent youth. Erikson (1968) asserts that young people's search for identity is not only about "who am I?" but also "who am I in this environment/culture or where do I fit, in my culture?" (Erikson, 1968). In this way, the culture and/or community becomes important in the sense that identity development is both personal and communal.

Syed and Fish (2018) argue that Erikson brought a cultural perspective and temporality to his theorising on identity development in that he considered the individual within her social environment. Erikson's theory thus intertwines identity development with the socio-cultural forces, including intersections of life history and historical eras. McAdams (1985) extends the theory in narrative terms. He asserts that the resolution of Erikson's (1963) questions "who am I? and who am I in this environment/society?" occurs through the process of constructing and internalising a life story. While Erikson's theory introduces the notion of the individual in society, it is limited in interrogating the norms and values of society. The limitation of the theory, as argued by Andrews (2002b), is that it offers psychological legitimacy to the status quo through its lack of critical assessment of the social milieu and/or its cultural elements. So perhaps the questions "who am I?" and "who am I in this environment?" run the risk of limiting individual agency through subscribing to dominant social norms.

However, narrative seems to offer or allow for the possibility of agency and the opportunity to challenge the status quo. Fay (1996, p. 192) asserts that, "only when a person can experience

the present moment as connected to the past and as pointing to the future, can that person act". This suggests that agency is possible when an individual can create a life story through weaving the past, present and future. Through narrating one's story, albeit sometimes because of certain dominant oppressive narratives, one can make meaning and act in the world more deliberately.

Furthermore, narrative perspectives note the significance of time and cultural aspects of the self. Narrative identity is defined as "a person's internalised and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 97). Cieslik and Verkuyten (2006) and Garraway (2021) describe identities as the stories individuals and communities tell about themselves and others which then particularly position or place them in society. However, "the stories that are available to tell are not unrestricted… historical, social and political patterns limit and shape the possible group narratives or the available narrative space through which groups can manage and negotiate their multiple identities" (Cieslik & Verkuyten, 2006, p. 79). In this way, the social norms and culture provide a kind of repository of available story options, which can often be burdensome and oppressive to individuals who do not conform to the easily available dominant cultural themes (Adler & McAdams, 2007). Cultural narratives about national history, ethnicity, religion, and politics shape the personal stories people live by and equally personal stories can sustain or change culture (Hammack, 2008; McLean, 2008). As McAdams (1985) notes, identity is truly psychosocial.

Personal narratives pull together the reconstructed past, the perceived present and the anticipated future, and are dynamic and change over time. Just like Erikson (1968), Adler and McAdams (2007) highlight adolescence as a crucial period. They argue that from adolescence, "people put their narrated experiences together into broader and more temporally extended life stories or narrative identities" (Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 97). Moreover, narrative identities are worked on throughout the rest of their life, such that identity is a process "of becoming and being… it belongs to the future as much as to the past" (Hall, 1999, p. 225). Identities are, therefore, flexible and multidimensional and are defined not only in terms of historical conditions and cultural traditions but also by current conditions. Identity is in this way fluid and constantly becoming, in ways that offer a sense of belonging and sense of security in an ever-changing society (Bauman, 2000).

For Hall (2000), identity develops in relation to others as well as through the differences one recognises between oneself and others. Moreover, Hall (2000) emphasises the process of

identification rather than the fixed condition implied in the term identity. In this way, he defines identification as "a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption" (Hall, 2000, p. 3). In addition, he takes it further by introducing the idea of power and how power impacts and plays itself out in the process of identification. There is no identity or group that stands alone, but identity is always constructed in conjunction with others. Hall (2000, p. 17) notes that "… [identities] emerge within the play of specific modalities of power and thus are the product of the marking of difference and exclusion…". In this way, identity is based on excluding or silencing something and creating a violent power structure between the two resultant poles, for example, Black and White person, or teacher and learner (Hall, 2000).

In addition, these different identities come with different sets of expectations, different labels or stereotypes, differing combinations of rights and responsibilities, which all result in the unequal distribution of power (Gouldner, 1957). Ultimately, this process results in dominant and subordinate identities or as Appiah (2018, p. 11) put it, "burdensome identities whose price is that other people treat you with disrespect". Hall (2000), following Althusser (1971), offers that "identity" is the meeting point between social positions wherein one is called or "hailed" into place as a social subject, through symbolic representations, and the processes that produce individual subjectivities. Althusser (1971) referred to this as a process of "interpellation", and he argued that it is inescapable. It allows us to understand how, even when the social positions one is called to are structured by relationships of inequality and oppression, they will be experienced as 'natural', a part of who one is, and will often be unquestioned. As Appiah (2018) amusingly recalls a joke to highlight the point that identities matter to individuals, of a man who said to a psychiatrist "Doctor, my brother's crazy- he thinks he's a chicken" the Doctor responds "well, why don't you bring him in?" the man retorts "Oh, I would, but we need him out there, laying eggs." His assertion is that "social identities may be founded in error, but they give us contours, comity, values, a sense of purpose and meaning. We need those eggs" (Appiah 2018, p. 32). Highlighting Hall's (2000, p. 1) point that much of the continued fascination with the concept of identity is from the fact that it is a concept "under erasure…an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all".

Interpellation allows not only for the understanding of how people are called into their social identities and positions but also how they may potentially resist these socially constructed relationships of power that restrict and oppress them. As Hall (1997, p. 10) argues, "representations sometimes call our very identities into question. We struggle over them

because they matter, and these are contests from which serious consequences can flow. They define what is 'normal', who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded." Thus, in thinking about youth identities and their social environment, which includes, for instance, their interaction with the various stakeholders within the school community, it is important to acknowledge the multiple sources that give rise to identities and inform the context of these interactions (Freeman, 2010). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) note the assumed importance of categorical identification, and they consider the formalised, codified systems of categorisation developed by powerful, authoritative institutions, such as the state, schools, and families, to mention a few. As a result, these institutions hold significant power in defining identities. However, it is important to note that their power does not go unchallenged and is often resisted. It is the in-between, the interaction between individual and social or as Hall (2000) puts it, the meeting point, a dynamic space where a process of internalisation happens at the same time as there is a negotiation, resistance, and re-imagination. Hence, identity is not merely ascribed but is co-constructed, negotiated and sometimes resisted.

Andrews (2002b, p. 1) argues that master narratives offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be the normal experience, as well as a way of understanding "not only the stories of others, but crucially of ourselves as well. For ultimately, the power of master narratives derives from their internalisation." In addition, their impact is experienced mostly by those whose experiences do not fit the assumed normative experience, those who have been in the margins, those whose stories and whose lives have been silenced. When this happens, individuals whose individual narrative goes against the master narrative may experience disharmony, resulting in the knowledge that they do not fit in or belong. Therefore, Andrews (2002b) notes that the individual is left to seek meaning outside of what is available. It is in this process that one becomes aware of the untold stories, counter narratives which offer new and alternative ways of living.

Andrews (2002b, p. 2) notes that "[c]ounter-narratives exist in relation to master narratives, but they are not necessarily dichotomous entities… they can often be read 'under the covers' of master narratives." Counter-narratives reflect resistance to complete internalisation and offer interruption to the master narratives. Freeman (2004, p. 298) argues that counter-narratives are those "culturally rooted aspects of one's history that have not yet become part of one's story" and that these rich untold stories potentially offer us new and different ways of making meaning and imagining our lives. Therefore, each counter-narrative highlights the power of individuals to challenge restrictive master narratives. In this way, counter-narratives also exemplify what

Bradbury (2020, p. 160) refers to as a "backward-looking hope". This kind of hope emphasises the importance of acknowledging and integrating the past into the current condition. It is not about an idealised past or a longing for the 'good old days'. Instead, it pulls aspects of one's history and brings them into conversation with the present. This kind of hope enables one to engage with history in ways that assist one to navigate and reimagine the present (Bradbury, 2020). In essence, counter-narratives and Bradbury's (2020) hope challenge the status quo, promote change and transformation.

2.7 Care: Beholding the fragments

FitzGerald's (2022) work on care ethics offers a frame for how this conversation can be entered into and navigated. Her work positions a care ethic alongside violence, particularly Fanon's theorising of violence. FitzGerald (2022) asserts that a care response is what is needed in the face of violence to help move from brokenness to repair, from a fragmented sense to wholeness. She goes on to argue that care ethics is both a productive and critical project, in that it critiques and disrupts the relations of power that impede well-being while also actively responding and offering repair where there has been destruction.

Additionally, FitzGerald (2022, p. 13) posits that care has a moral demand, she asserts that "care demands that we do more than critique and disrupt" instead, care requires a constant response "to need, minimizing harm, and fostering nurturing relations for all, orients us continually to traumas and how we can repair them, or at least lessen their effects." In this way, care must be what follows violence, as an ongoing, unending project that demands an attentive, reflective, and compassionate witnessing (FitzGerald, 2022; Weingarten, 2003).

Implicit in care ethics is the understanding that attentive witnessing must precede any reparative response or action. This reflective, attentive, non-interventionist care is akin to the idea of beholding (Fujimura, 2020), which speaks of an attentive gaze *on* something or someone. This attentive gaze offers a compassionate witnessing, a sort of taking in of the observed. Beholding as a first response allows for an acknowledging, and a registering of fractures and ruptures, of the fragments caused by violence, including the cracks created by colonial trauma in communities, families and individuals. Rather than seeking quick fixes that hide or make the cracks invisible, embracing and sitting with them creates the possibility for hope and transformative repair (Winters, 2016). This study takes this approach, it attends in this way, by leaning into the pain and the cracks, allowing space for exploration, examination and reflection.

This transformative care mentioned above can be likened to the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery called Kintsugi. As a philosophy, it treats damage or breakage and repair as an important part of the history of an object, rather than something that needs to be hidden (Fujimura, 2020). The Kintsugi master takes the time to contemplate the broken pieces, eventually repairing the fragments with a golden-coloured glue that highlights or accentuates the cracks and thus simultaneously tells the story of the breakage while transforming the fractures into something beautiful (Fujimura, 2020; Keulemans, 2016). This Japanese philosophy encourages a slowing down and a reframing that places value in the fractures and the broken pieces, rather than trying to make it right.

Furthermore, this ethic of care advocates for the time and space needed to carefully tend to the fragments in ways that preserve and highlight their beauty even in times of destruction. It also reflects a kind of generational dialogue, where the painful legacy of the past, including its rupture and fragments, is acknowledged and processed through the sharing of stories, wisdom, and ways of making life. By embracing these fragments and highlighting the cracks, both the younger and older generations can learn from and build upon each other's experiences and wisdom, ultimately transforming them into something beautiful.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This section will cover key bodies of empirical research relevant to this study, namely violence, schooling and social inequality, and youth identities. In doing so, it will contextualise the focus of this research project and underscore the significance and need of the study.

3.1 Violence

South Africa is listed as one of the most violent countries in the world according to the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). Violence is a deeply emotive concept, given its disruptive and destructive impact on individuals and communities. Although violence has been a consistent feature in the human story, it has proven challenging to come up with a simple label or definition. As Bowman (2021) notes, what constitutes violence has transformed over time, and its manifestations differ across societies. This suggests that perceptions of violence, or that which makes an act violent, are fluid and are continually influenced by time and context. Furthermore, it is important to note that violence finds expression both as a physical offence, through systemic and/or structural forms (Kilby, 2023), as well as symbolic (Bourdieu, 1991). Thinking about violence as multifaceted allows for an understanding and an analysis that recognises that all forms of violence are not isolated but are interconnected. They shape and reinforce one another, creating a complex web of interactions and influences. Bowman (2015) emphasises that this interconnectedness means that addressing one form of violence often requires addressing others simultaneously. Hamby and Grych (2013, p. 22) describe this phenomenon as a "web of violence", where different types of violence, like physical, emotional, and structural, are interwoven, impacting individuals and communities in various ways.

Lamb and Snodgrass (2013) argue that South Africa's persistent structural inequalities, which are rooted in the apartheid legacy, as well as the country's violent historical trajectory and ongoing socio-economic challenges, continue to expose young people, particularly Black youth, to multiple forms of violence. These challenges include widespread poverty, unemployment, and especially the inadequate and unequal education system that fails the majority of Black children. As a result, young people often grow up in environments where family, community, and gang-related violence are common. These conditions contribute to the widespread normalisation of violence, embedding it so deeply into everyday life that it begins to feel inescapable. The normalisation of violence occurs when repeated exposure renders violent acts unremarkable—when they no longer evoke shock or outrage. Over time,

communities become desensitised, accepting violence as a routine part of social interaction rather than recognising it as harmful or abnormal. In this process, violence becomes insidious, often operating beneath the surface and evading recognition. As Galtung (1990, p. 294) warns, this occurs "when violence is no longer seen as violence, when it masquerades as socially acceptable or even socially encouraged behaviour". In such cases, violence is not only normalised but also legitimised, making it all the more difficult to confront or dismantle, as it becomes dangerously entrenched within the social and cultural fabric of everyday life.

Moreover, Lamb and Snodgrass (2013) assert that the normalisation of violence is not solely the result of direct, visible acts of aggression, but is also rooted in persistent, underlying forms of structural or institutional violence. These systemic harms, though less visible, are equally destructive and include the chronic failure of service delivery, unequal access to basic resources, and enduring racial and economic inequalities. Such conditions create an environment of sustained deprivation and marginalisation, which not only exacerbates social tensions but also reinforces patterns of overt violence. In this way, structural violence becomes a silent force that legitimises and sustains more visible forms of violence, entrenching them within the everyday experiences of affected communities.

The normalisation of violence plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural norms and belief systems, which in turn condone, reinforce, or even justify violent behaviour, thus deepening and perpetuating the cycle (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013). As these cultural frameworks evolve to accommodate and legitimise violence, they create a feedback loop in which violence becomes both a product and a producer of social norms. When violence is perceived as a valid means of asserting power, resolving disputes, or maintaining social order—especially within patriarchal or hierarchical systems, it becomes embedded in the collective consciousness. These culturally sanctioned attitudes not only normalise violent practices but also allow them to be transmitted across generations, making the cycle of violence more deeply rooted, invisible and increasingly resistant to change or intervention.

Lamb and Snodgrass' (2013) research with 19 young adults in South Africa explored how normalisation of violence is reflected in the young people's worldview and their personal stories. Their findings highlight the profound ways in which the normalisation of violence can shape young people's worldviews, influence how they relate to others, and impact their developing sense of identity and self-worth. When violence becomes an accepted or expected part of daily life, it not only distorts perceptions of safety and justice but also undermines the

emotional and psychological foundations necessary for healthy interpersonal relationships and positive self-concept.

In addition, the narratives from their participants revealed a recurring theme of anger and powerlessness among them, often stemming from the behaviour and treatment they received from immediate or extended family members, and other adults, as well as from a broader lack of support within their communities. Participants described feeling hurt, neglected, or dismissed, and expressed how these emotions manifested in different ways. Some responded with outward reactivity, such as shouting or engaging in physical fights, while others internalised their anger, suppressing it in ways that often led to emotional distress or self-harm (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013).

Furthermore, this combination of unresolved anger and a profound sense of powerlessness, particularly among youth with unstable or compromised family circumstances, emerges as a potential breeding ground for further violence. As this study demonstrates, such a label disproportionately applies to a large segment of young Black South Africans today, who face systemic disadvantage and marginalisation. When these feelings are left unaddressed, they not only perpetuate cycles of destructive conflict within the homes and at school but also increase the risk of youth becoming entangled in criminal or gang-related activity, especially in the absence of stable, positive adult role models to offer guidance, support, and a sense of hope.

Exposure to violence in its many forms is pervasive across South Africa, with particularly high prevalence in under-resourced areas such as townships. Children and youth are especially vulnerable, as they are frequently exposed to violence in multiple settings, including the home, schools, and the wider community. This exposure can take the form of direct victimisation or indirect experiences, such as witnessing violent acts. According to Donenberg et al. (2020), approximately 70% of South African children are exposed to physical violence in some capacity, whether as victims themselves or as witnesses. Such high levels of exposure not only have immediate psychological and emotional consequences but also contribute to the long-term normalisation of violence as a routine aspect of life.

Recently, there has been an increase in media reports of violence in South African high schools. Reports highlight the increase in school violence, not only between learners but also between learners and teachers. From the widely publicised news reports of a 17 year old male learner who fatally stabbed a maths teacher at a high school in the North West (Tshehle, 2018), and a grade 8 female learner, from the Northern Cape, who was fatally stabbed by a another female

learner (Shange, 2019), to the everyday, often unreported violence in townships schools, it appears that school violence seems to be escalating. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) conducted a study on the nature, causes and effects of school violence in a South African High school, and they found that schools, particularly schools in townships, are regularly prey to gangsterism. In addition, Makhaye and colleagues (2025) found that the accessibility of drugs and alcohol, the lack of security in schools, lack of stable leadership are among other risk factors for violence in schools. Furthermore, the ever-increasing number of unemployment, elevated levels of poverty, and the general legacy of violence have created a context where schools are targeted by crime. Incidents include robberies, sexual assaults on teachers and learners being raped. Additionally, learners physically assaulting, sometimes stabbing or shooting, other learners and teachers.

Highlighting this alarming trend of violence in schools, Sibanda (2024) conducted a content analysis of online newspaper articles and social media news. The study found that institutions such as schools are experiencing a surge of violent incidents, sometimes resulting in a loss of life. Recent years have seen very disturbing reports of violent attacks in schools, involving teachers and learners. These attacks occur between learners and, at times, from teachers toward learners or vice versa. Stats SA (2021) reports that there has been a rise in the surge of violence in primary and high schools. In 2022, the City Press reported on a number of fatal stabbings of learners from different schools across the country by other learners (Sobuwa, 2022). Similarly, there has been an increase in reporting of violent attacks on teachers by learners (Govender, 2024; Tshwete, 2023; Zeeman, 2024). Given this concerning trend, it is, therefore, important for schools to "reflect on what violence might mean as a starting point to ending it" (Bhana, 2021, p. 10). This reflection on the meaning of the manifestations of violence is important to ensure that all forms of violence, subtle and overt, are recognised, named, and addressed. Bhana (2021, p. 10) further emphasises that violence is often "normalised and tolerated because it is not recognised as an act against the dignity of a person". Therefore, recognising the multifaceted nature and far-reaching impact of violence is an important and necessary step for schools toward creating learning environments that uphold the safety, dignity and well-being of all learners.

Violence in schools is not only prevalent, but it is also gendered. Boys and girls often face distinct forms of violence which are influenced, maintained and reinforced by gender norms and inequalities (Nkomo, 2024). For instance, while boy learners may encounter physical confrontation, girl learners are frequently subjected to sexual harassment. As Mayeza et al.

(2021, p. 2) assert that "gender violence continues to shape the school landscape and has [a] serious impact on girls' experience of schooling". Moreover, this type of violence is stigmatised, and female learners often get blamed for the violation they endured (Kaufman et al., 2019). Mayeza et al.'s (2021) study was conducted in a township school in Durban, South Africa. The research examined how girls relate to certain spaces within the school environment and how these spaces enable or constrain gendered power relations that marginalise girls. The findings indicate that the persistence of violence in the school, despite interventions, is due to the school's failure to engage with the gendered meanings that learners attach to the violence they experience at school (Mayeza et al., 2021). Ngidi and Moletsane (2018; 2019) found that there are several different spaces within schools that girl learners experience as unsafe. They identified school toilets as one of the key spaces where violations against girls by boys occur. Similarly, Mayeza et al.'s (2021) study found that violence was not confined to a particular space within the school, but that violent acts happened in any spaces within the school that were not supervised by teachers. Therefore, Ngidi and Moletsane (2018) and Mayeza et al. (2021) highlight the importance of exploring and thoroughly engaging with the ways learners use space in the school to analyse how gendered violence manifests in schools.

Exploring further the impact of violence in a South African township school, Mguzulwa's (2025) research on youth violence in South African township schools found that constant exposure to violence not only foster insecurity in the school environment but also desensitises young people to violence. Most concerning is how this contributes to a generation of young people who may lack empathy, may disregard the value of life and see it as expendable. While Mguzulwa's (2025) research highlights the impact of exposure to violence on young people, Makhaye et al. (2025) explore the effects of violence on teachers, revealing how it compromises school safety, as well as the teaching and learning environment. Makhaye et al. (2025) found that teachers who are in violent schools often have high levels of stress and other mental health challenges. This stress can manifest in various ways, including depression and burnout, which can significantly affect their ability to teach effectively. Additionally, the constant threat and exposure to violence, coupled with the lack of adequate security measures, creates a pervasive sense of insecurity among teachers. This insecurity further undermines the educational environment, leaving teachers feeling unsafe and as if they do not matter. Makhaye et al. (2025) recommend that teachers should be trained on different and positive ways of managing and preventing challenging behaviours. However, in research exploring the reflections of three South African high school teachers' experiences of teaching in violent

schools, Kgari-Masondo et al. (2025) recommend that the focus of intervention should be on values; moreover, that these values need to be embedded in the curriculum and culture of the school to eradicate violence.

The literature discussed above underscores the critical need to understand and examine both the root causes of violence and the diverse forms it takes within society. Such understanding is essential for recognising and effectively addressing violence, particularly in educational contexts, to reduce its harmful impact on both learners and teachers. The alarming statistics, media reports, and empirical research collectively highlight the profound effects of violence on learners' psychological well-being and their ability to meet academic expectations. By acknowledging and recognising the multiple manifestations of violence, schools can begin to develop comprehensive systems and implement proactive measures aimed at fostering a safe and secure teaching and learning environment (Bhana, 2021). These measures can include equipping teachers with training in effective and positive behaviour management strategies (Makhaye, 2025), which not only promotes classroom safety but also cultivates a culture of respect, dignity, and emotional well-being within the school community.

3.1.1 Use of corporal punishment

Corporal punishment continues to be utilised as a measure of discipline in schools throughout the world, including in countries where it has been banned despite the lack of evidence that it is an effective tool for learning or as a deterrent for bad behaviour among learners (Gershoff, 2017). In South Africa, Stats SA (2021) and numerous research studies confirm the persistent use of corporal punishment in schools despite the laws against it (Juan et al., 2018; Sibanda, 2024; Sikhakhane et al., 2018). Drawing on research conducted in South African schools of different socio-economic status, Hunter and Morrell (2020) note that in some schools, corporal punishment continues with the approval of parents and even learners themselves. Often, parents and learners believe that corporal punishment is an act of correction and care from the teachers and is necessary to correct behaviour. Corporal punishment is often used to deter perceived learner misbehaviour. However, research has shown that this method is not only ineffective but also has harmful and long-lasting effects on learners (Duarte et al., 2023). Additionally, studies by Heeks et al. (2020) and Duarte et al. (2023) found that in the United States of America, mostly Black and boy learners were at the highest risk for school corporal punishment. This finding is consistent with a study conducted with 3743 grade 8 learners from 24 public high schools in Tshwane, a city in South Africa. The aim of this study was to

understand the prevalence and factors associated with learners' experiences of corporal punishment at school (Mahlangu et al., 2021). The findings of this study revealed that boys were perceived by teachers as trouble-makers and, as such, put them at a high risk for corporal punishment. Similarly, a study conducted by Andrews et al. (2019) sought to understand Black girls' experiences of the school culture and environment in a school in the USA. In line with the aforementioned findings, the study revealed that the learner participants believed adults, both at school and at home, thought that Black learners required more stringent control and stricter discipline than their peers (Andrews et al., 2019). These negative assumptions or expectations are attributed to developmentally appropriate and expected behaviour from adolescent boys and girls. Moreover, the impact of these negative assumptions and disparities in the administration of corporal punishment is concerning because it affects the learners' sense of self and may negatively impact their behaviour and mental well-being (Gershoff, 2017).

Makhasane and Chikoko's (2016) qualitative study, conducted with two schools in South Africa, examined the use of corporal punishment. The study found that while some members of the schooling community viewed corporal punishment as a form of violence and deemed unacceptable, others regarded it as an acceptable and necessary disciplinary measure. Highlighting this divide within many schools, in fact, within general society on this matter. Mayisela (2020) notes that the majority of the South African teachers grew up in harsh conditions where corporal punishment was an acceptable form of discipline. As a result, many of the teachers appear to be caught in a collective repetitive bind, rooted in their own experiences of punitive and authoritarian schooling, in which they re-enact these disciplinary practices and inadvertently reproduce the same conditions. This repetitive bind, together with the lack of strong leadership, as argued by Makhasane and Chikoko (2016), contributes to the schools' failure to eliminate the use of corporal punishment.

Mayisela (2020, p. 25) argues that "corporal punishment is relational", suggesting that it is not merely a disciplinary tool but that it is reflective, is shaped and reinforces the social and power dynamics between the learners and teachers; moreover, that knowledge and power remain in the hands of the teacher, which, in turn, fosters domination and discourages collaboration. Additionally, she argues that there is an interpsychic dimension of corporal punishment, where emotions such as anger, fear, and shame are unconsciously transmitted to the learner. While this emotional release or discharge may provide some relief for the teacher, this is only temporary, and it has long-lasting dire consequences on the learner's sense of self, belonging, and self-esteem (Mayisela, 2020).

Gershoff (2017) summarises available literature on the use and prevalence of corporal punishment in schools around the world. In addition, her summary explores the outcomes linked to corporal punishment as well as the interventions aimed at reducing and eradicating the use of corporal punishment globally. Gershoff (2017) argues that countries that persist with the use of corporal punishment will bear the economic cost. She uses a study conducted in India, which found that there is a cost to the country of children and teenagers dropping out of school as a result of the continued use of corporal punishment. The researchers Gershoff (2017) cited calculated that the cost to India of children dropping out of school would be estimated between $1.5 billion and $7.4 billion. This is a huge amount lost that otherwise would have benefited the country. Further, Gershoff (2017) argues that the cost on the global scale of continued use of corporal punishment, despite it being banned in some countries, is shocking. Gershoff's (2017) findings highlight how widespread the impact and effects of continued use of corporal punishment are, showing that its impact extends beyond the individual to affect broader societal outcomes, including economics implications.

In response to concerns among teachers about the lack of discipline in schools due to the ban on corporal punishment in schools in Zimbabwe, Magwa and Mayisela (2024) explored the alternative strategies to corporal punishment at a primary school. Magwa and Mayisela (2024) assert that the quality of the relationship between teachers and learners is an important foundation for effective discipline. These positive interactions between learners and teachers help to create a safe and supportive learning environment, which, in turn, aids in preventing behavioural problems in the classroom setting. Furthermore, the study notes guidance and counselling, behaviour modification strategies, and parental involvement as alternative strategies for corporal punishment (Magwa & Mayisela, 2024)

3.1.2 Trauma

Given the widespread exposure to violence in South African townships, it is essential to critically examine the impact of such violence on learners' overall well-being, particularly their psychosocial health and academic performance. Violence, especially when experienced repeatedly or in early childhood, is often internalised as trauma, which can have lasting and far-reaching consequences. As Scorgie et al. (2017) note, the effects of trauma frequently manifest in the classroom as learning difficulties, behavioural problems, and challenges with emotional regulation. These symptoms not only hinder learners' academic success but also disrupt their ability to form healthy relationships and engage meaningfully with the educational

environment. Understanding these impacts is vital for creating responsive and supportive school systems that can better address the complex needs of learners growing up in violence-affected communities.

Singh's (2024) longitudinal study in India, on the impact of childhood trauma on adult mental health, emphasised the importance of centring children's psychosocial well-being, especially when they are exposed to traumatising events, to ensure their academic success. This study highlighted the link between academic potential and performance, and exposure to trauma in children. It concluded that children who are traumatised are not able to reach their full academic potential (Singh, 2024). In agreement, Kaminer (2020) argues that the persistent exposure to violence experienced by many South African children results in a range of psychological and cognitive effects. One significant consequence is the development of hypervigilance, where children or young people remain in a constant state of alertness, excessively focused on monitoring their environment for potential threats, even in seemingly safe spaces such as schools and classrooms. This heightened state of vigilance, while initially a survival mechanism, interferes with the brain's capacity to engage in learning. As a result, affected learners often struggle with concentration, memory retention, and overall cognitive performance in academic tasks. These difficulties further compound the challenges faced by children growing up in violence-prone communities, placing them at a continued disadvantage in their educational journeys (Kaminer, 2020).

A qualitative study conducted to explore and document the forms of interpersonal violence experienced by adolescent boys and girls living in Hillbrow found that young people are often left in precarious positions. In these contexts, young girls experience home as an unsafe and threatening space. Both girls and boys witness domestic violence, pointing to generations of trauma experience (Scorgie et al., 2017). Over time, violence becomes normalised, leading to repeated cycles of symbolic and physical violence. This cycle reinforces harmful social norms and expectations that continue across generations. However, Sui et al. (2021), in their study on the effects of violence across different contexts, including home, school, community, and political victimisation, on South African adolescents, found that community violence or victimisation was a stronger predictor of maladaptive psychological outcomes than violence at home. Given the high levels of violent crime in South Africa, many young people may feel that they are constantly at risk of being robbed, attacked or caught in a gang-related crossfire. As a result, this ongoing exposure may lead to a sense of powerlessness over their environment, contributing to persistent feelings of fear and a heightened sense of vigilance (Sui et al., 2021).

Interestingly, and in a manner similar to the effects of community victimisation, Sui et al. (2021) found that indirect political victimisation, such as hearing about apartheid-era violence and the suffering endured by others, elicited feelings of anxiety and hopelessness among young people. This finding underscores the enduring psychological impact of South Africa's violent past, suggesting that the legacy of apartheid continues to shape the emotional lives of a generation born after its official end. As Fortuna et al. (2021, p. 2) explain, intergenerational trauma refers to "the impact of traumatic experiences, not only on one generation but on subsequent generations". This concept highlights how the historical trauma associated with systemic violence and oppression can be transmitted across generations, influencing the mental health, identity, and sense of safety in young people who did not directly experience the events themselves. It suggests that collective memory and inherited narratives of suffering continue to play a powerful role in shaping youth experiences in contemporary South Africa.

Scorgie et al. (2017) challenge the idea that post-traumatic stress symptoms are unavoidable for people who have experienced violence. Their research reveals a more complex emotional and psychological terrain. Rather than the young people being seen as only victims, the findings suggest that young people expressed feelings of pride and love for their community, together with narratives and experiences of violence, fear, and insecurity. These findings complicate and challenge a simplistic understanding of trauma by showing that negative experiences can coexist with positive emotional attachments and a strong sense of identity and belonging. This was echoed by Bamwine et al. (2024), whose research findings suggest that traumatic experiences, as reported by young people, were also used by young people for positive development, suggesting that experiences of loss or violence can be used or serve as an opportunity to encourage young people to focus on their personal development (Bamwine et al., 2024).

This ability to hold the negative experience together with positive emotional responses about one's future and community points to young people's "capacity for resilience and strength in an environment that would appear to offer little more than hopelessness and despair" (Scorgie et al., 2017, p. 63). Rather than viewing these environments as entirely devoid of hope, Scorgie et al. (2017) urge the recognition of the forms of creativity, resistance, and emotional richness that can flourish in the margins. Moreover, it highlights the human capacity to not only endure but also to thrive and make a life even under violent conditions. This insight has significant implications for how policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals engage with communities affected by violence. Instead of framing them solely through a lens of trauma and

deficit, there is a need to support and build upon the existing strengths, narratives, and resources that young people themselves identify and embody.

3.2 Schooling and social (in)equality

The South African education system continues to grapple with the inequalities entrenched by apartheid policies, which often lead to poor academic performance (De Clercq, 2020). McKeever (2017) asserts that despite the end of apartheid and its racially discriminatory education policies, educational differences have continued to perpetuate and sustain inequality over the years. In addition, due to the apartheid segregationist policies, many Black children reside in townships and rural areas, where many of the schools still bear the scars of the past and remain racially segregated (Mnguni & McKay, 2022). Mnguni and McKay's (2022) study, which examined parents' school choice and commuting patterns in a community in the Free State, South Africa, found that learners of all races were enrolling in the former White schools, later known as model C schools, across all three schools in the study. In contrast, township schools remained racially homogenous, with only Black learners enrolled (de Kadt et al., 2014, 2019; Mnguni & McKay, 2022).

Amnesty International (2020), in their article on the unequal education in South Africa, echoes this reality, stating that a student's experience of schooling is heavily influenced by the colour of their skin, where they were born. In 2024, a qualitative study was conducted to examine how principals experience these lasting effects of apartheid-era segregationist policies in primary schools located in the Western Cape province (Christian & Stambach, 2024). The principals in the study highlighted that the legacies of apartheid continue to pose challenges to their administrations, with overcrowding being one of the most pressing issues. This overcrowding often leads to a range of related problems, including poor class management and difficulties for educators in maintaining students' attention during teaching time (Christian & Stambach, 2024). In addition, in these situations, teachers spend most of their time dealing with discipline and other social issues (Adewumi & Adu, 2019). Kubeka et al. (2021) argue that there are long-term effects of an unequal education on the life chances of Black learners in under-resourced schools. Poor quality education received by learners in these schools diminishes their future life chances for upward mobility. Thus, Kubeka et al. (2021, p. 394) assert that the unequal education system "feeds into and perpetuates an unequal labour market".

de Kadt et al. (2014, 2019) highlight the resistance against this inequality through school choice and the willingness of parents and learners to travel out of their community for school. Using data from the birth-to-twenty cohort study of 1428 participants to estimate school choice and travel to school, de Kadt et al. (2014; 2019) found that fewer than 20% of children attended the school closest to home and that 60% attend school outside the area in which they live. Parents choose to place their children in historically advantaged schools, also known as the former model C schools, because these schools are often better resourced and perceived to offer good quality education. This movement of children highlights the ongoing struggle against the remnants of apartheid.

In a study exploring the psychosocial challenges of adolescent learners in South Africa, Khumalo (2024) found that the young people from the selected public high schools experienced negative behaviours from educators, through teachers shaming and speaking ill of learners. In addition, Khumalo (2024) asserts that this negative treatment from the teachers could have harmful effects on the learners' confidence, sense of belonging, as well as academic performance. In addition to these emotional challenges experienced within the school setting, Khumalo (2024) also highlights structural barriers faced by learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many of these young people reported commuting challenges, which were attributed to the long distance between home and school and a lack of transport money. Khumalo (2024) notes that this challenge not only places a physical strain on learners from the long walk but also exposes learners to persistent safety risks, particularly in communities plagued by high levels of crime. The daily exposure to danger compounds the young people's challenges, making it hard for them to focus on their learning and thrive academically. These findings together underscore the interconnected nature of psychosocial, economic, and environmental factors in shaping the educational experiences of South African youth.

Despite historical and current structural inequalities, townships also offer a rich source of community, often vibrant with spiritual, social, and emotional connection and support (Theron, 2016). Moreover, while young people question the gains of democracy, they still hold hopes for a different future, a future with them as agents of change or simply one with possibilities for mobility (Lundgren & Scheckle, 2019). Lundgren and Scheckle (2019, p. 58) comment that, through young people's reflections on and images of their place and location in their study, which included images of shacks, toilets, flowers, and family members, "it was clear that the past, the present and the future is intertwined. The youth positioned themselves… with hope for the future though they felt marginalised". Furthermore, Mampane and Bouwer (2011) argue

that often learners perceive township schools as important for what they will make of their future. Furthermore, townships, as products of apartheid's spatial planning, foster a strong sense of community and hope for the future. This complex interplay between structural disadvantage and community solidarity offers important insight into how young people navigate their educational and living environments with both awareness of their limitations and aspirations for change.

3.2.1 Institutional culture and space

As institutional spaces, schools have an express purpose to shape, affect, and constrain or inspire learners, teachers, and the community. The positive progressive possibilities for education are popularly emphasised, but the institutional culture and ethos in township schools is one that all too often constrains the life chances of young people and invisibly penetrates the way young people see themselves and their environment, resulting in the production of skewed perceptions of themselves and their racial identities (Kohli, 2008). Spark et al. (2019, p. 193) assert that "space is not an inert container of social activity, it actively holds up sociality, ways of being, understanding and belonging".

The environment in which teaching and learning occur plays a crucial role in shaping learners, teachers' and parents' experiences, including educational outcomes. Studies have shown that the environment where teaching and learning happen matters (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010; Nyakundi, 2012). Convertino (2015) carried out a socio-spatial analysis of youth identities within the context of school choice reform in the United States. The study revealed that cultural ideals embedded in traditional schools are not neutral; instead, they create socio-spatial dynamics that often differentiate and subsequently exclude certain learners. These dynamics tend to privilege certain learners who align with the dominant cultural and educational norms, while those who do not fit with the norms are excluded. Thus, schools can be hierarchical, reproducing and reaffirming existing inequalities. Convertino (2015) highlights the importance of engaging and examining schools' cultural ideas that inadvertently perpetuate divisions that privilege some and exclude others.

Christian and Stambach (2024) note that the physical, social and cultural aspects of the environment matter, particularly for those in disadvantaged areas. This is because a working environment that is safe and clean motivates educators, while a neglected working environment has a demotivating effect, both for learners and teachers. Kapp and his colleagues (2014) explored the meaning young people attributed to their learning contexts and the ways in which

they negotiated the structural constraints. The research was conducted with 62 first-year university students who grew up in townships and attended township schools (Kapp et al., 2014). The study found that the young people described their learning environments as dysfunctional and negative both for learners and teachers, with failing infrastructure, limited resources and most interestingly, the underutilisation of other resources such as libraries and computer rooms. In this context, the youth participants negotiated their way through these unconducive learning environments by making key strategic choices, such as decisions about where to sit in class, missing class to focus on studying at home without any distractions, and developing supportive peer relations, that led to successfully matriculating (Kapp et al., 2014).

These findings underscore the importance of the learning environment, highlighting two key aspects. Firstly, both the physical and socio-cultural aspects play an important role in shaping the experiences of learners. Secondly, the findings suggest that it is crucial for schools to critically examine and address the cultural ideas that marginalise other learners. By doing so, they can create more inclusive, nurturing environments that encourage curiosity and allow learners to explore their world and their identities. Similarly, Omweri (2024) asserts that institutional environments and school culture, among other factors, contribute to students' failure or success. A research study in Kenya examined the relationship between core competencies, institutional culture, resource utilisation and academic performance in education. The findings suggest a significant correlation between these factors, indicating they are interconnected and collectively affect educational outcomes. Importantly, Omweri (2024) emphasised the important role institutional culture plays in contributing to learners' success or failure.

While the institutional culture in township schools often constrains the life chances of young people, creating skewed perceptions of their identities, supportive and safe school environments hold the potential to counteract these negative effects by providing protective factors and promoting resilience among learners. As Mampane and Bouwer (2011) argue, such environments can serve as important buffers that provide protective factors and promote resilience for learners. However, even in the context where safe and supportive schooling is lacking, it is important to move beyond a deficit-based, potentially pathologising focus. Instead, there is a need to foreground the agency of learners and explore how they actively navigate their challenging environments (Kapp et al., 2014). In this way, research can explore and better understand how learners from township schools successfully navigate challenging environments and create spaces of safety and belonging for themselves. Furthermore, by

foregrounding young people's agency in how they navigate their learning environment, one can gain a more nuanced understanding of the impact of environmental factors. As evidenced in the study by Kapp et al. (2014), which found that while the participants described their neighbourhoods as violent, often leaving them feeling unsafe and disrupting their study plans, many also spoke about a strong sense of belonging in relation to their home environments.

In a qualitative exploratory study, Khumalo and Pretorius (2025) investigated how South African adolescents perceive the impact of home and school environments on their psychosocial development. The study aimed to explore learners' subjective understandings of the social systems, realities and social institutions that influence their everyday lives. Drawing on the experiences of 22 Grade 10 to 12 learners from two public high schools, the researchers sought to uncover how young people make sense of the systems that shape their developmental needs.

Thematic analysis revealed several significant stressors within the school context, including a lack of sufficient funding from government, incidents of physical violence directed at teachers, insufficient learning resources, and rising tensions between learners and educators. These conditions were reported to negatively affect not only the learners' development but also the teachers' morale and motivation, thereby undermining the overall learning environment (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2025). Furthermore, participants demonstrated a clear awareness of structural inequalities, particularly the lack of access to quality teaching materials and reliable internet connectivity, factors that are increasingly essential for academic success and personal development in the digital age.

In addition to school-based challenges, the study highlighted the adverse effects of community-level issues, such as high crime rates and the prevalence of drug use and sales in the participants' neighbourhoods. These external environmental stressors further contributed to the psychosocial difficulties experienced by the adolescents, compounding the pressures they already face in educational settings (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2025). This study offers valuable insight into the complex interplay between structural conditions and adolescent development in the South African context. By centring the voices of young people, it provides a nuanced understanding of how socio-economic, educational, and community-level challenges intersect to shape young people's psychosocial well-being. It underscores the urgent need for more responsive and contextually grounded interventions that address both the systemic barriers within schools and the broader socio-environmental conditions impacting youth development.

3.3 Youth identity

Critiquing the idea that development is a linear, stage-like and universal process, Burman (2016) and De Lannoy and Langa (2021) emphasise the importance of taking contextual factors seriously in understanding youth development. This approach allows for a more nuanced and contextual understanding of youth that recognises differences shaped by racial, class, gender, and other social categories.

Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) reflect on the impact and danger of a 'blind' educational system that is ignorant of the diversity of learners in terms of psychosocial-historical background, which is inclusive of race, class, and gender. They argue that, often, a blind educational system may result in an assimilationist approach where learners are expected to take on and adapt to the existing character of the school, whose historical design may not have had the learners' best interest at heart. wa Thiong'o (1986) and Alexander (2010) warn that continuation of this kind of education system leads to the continued sense of alienation experienced by learners as well as the (re)production of inequality. Learners, teachers and, by extension, parents who find themselves in these kinds of "unhygienic" environments (Manganyi, 1973) that continue to reproduce hegemonic identities may struggle to shake off the shackles of apartheid and coloniality. These shackles include both the structural effects seen through the persistent inequalities as well as the unseen, subtle, insidious psychological effects.

Looking at Black girls' experiences of school culture, Andrews et al. (2019) note that for many Black female learners, school is a toxic and traumatising space that sends mixed messages about who and what is valued. Their findings also indicate that Black girls are often hypersexualised by the adults in the school (Andrews et al., 2019). This manifests in different ways and contributes to the toxic culture and school environment that often leaves the learners feeling objectified and devalued. Andrews et al. (2019, p. 2565) argue that schools should be places that affirm and encourage all learners to practice "identity agency and simply be while learning".

Furthermore, this emphasise on the importance of the context on youth identity is particularly relevant when considering the relationship between place, identity, and self-concept. As Brown (2009) argues, understanding identity requires consideration of place, and vice versa. Similarly, Sundstrom (2003) and Stud (2014) emphasise the essential role of place and space in shaping self-concept. Sundstrom (2003, p. 90) further notes, "in our inhabitation of places, there is a looping effect between our identification of places and our identities", suggesting that our

experiences and perceptions of place are inextricably linked with our sense of self. In a study exploring what South African township youth deemed important in their everyday lives in shaping their identity, Lundgren and Scheckle (2019) found that although the young participants did not have the experience of living under the apartheid rule, they were aware of and troubled by the persistent inequalities in their lived experiences and the incongruent message of being 'born free'. These serious reflections suggest that the ghosts of the past dispensation are not past; they continue to haunt young people through the persistent inequalities that suffocate them. However, despite this, young people continue to dream and reimagine a different future for themselves. Highlighting that young people exercise their agency in ways that enable them to humanise themselves (Canham and Langa 2017).

Speaking to the agency of young people, a qualitative study by Naidoo (2021), conducted with post-school youth from a township in Johannesburg, South Africa, explored their perspectives on schooling experience and aspirations for the future. The study found that despite challenging their awareness of both the historical and current structural constraints, these young people were neither disgruntled nor disengaged from the pursuit of quality education. On the contrary, they expressed aspiration for a better life and for educational opportunities that would enable them to access decent work and upward social mobility (Naidoo, 2021). Appadurai (2004) and Moensted (2021) frame aspirations as intertwined with one's social context; they are socially embedded rather than being just an individual's choice. In this way, Moensted (2021) highlights how young people's identity and belonging within a community influence their aspirations. Furthermore, as Naidoo (2021, p. 22) notes, "the capacity to aspire is nurtured by real-world conjectures and refutations as they are formed in interaction in social life". In this way, the young people's aspiration for education and a better future is a result of their awareness of the structural constraints and perhaps a desire for transformation.

3.3.1 Care relationships

With regards to the role played by teachers, a case study of five teachers at a South African former model C school was conducted to explore how learner-teacher relationships are formed and grow over time (Soldaat, 2019). The findings highlight how teachers define their role beyond their professional responsibility, but also through the different roles they play with their learners. Central to these roles teachers play is the emotional investment teachers make by providing care, support, and compassion beyond the boundaries of the classroom (Soldaat, 2019).

Soldaat's (2019) study highlighted that the emotional labour involved in teaching significantly contributed to the teacher's commitment and job satisfaction. Emotional labour, in this context, refers to the ongoing effort teachers invest in managing their emotions and responding sensitively to the emotional needs of their learners. This emotional engagement reinforces their sense of purpose and professional identity, leading to higher levels of personal fulfilment and dedication to their role. In addition, the care taken and expressed by teachers through the different roles they play enhanced both the teaching and learning experience. Rabin (2008) asserts that care lies at the heart of good teaching and further adds that care, seen as a moral stance, leads to action. Soldaat (2019) found that there were three roles that teachers commonly take on with their learners, and these are the roles of coach, counsellor, or parental figure. These roles enable teachers to engage with learners on a deeper and supportive level, fostering empathy, emotional insight, and mutual respect. Moreover, by creating this kind of environment, Soldaat (1999) argues that teachers can reduce emotional distance and create a more inclusive and supportive classroom climate and ultimately strengthen the relational foundation necessary for effective learning.

Furthermore, the teacher-learner relationship plays a critical role not only in academic success but also in supporting broader aspects of a learner's personal, emotional, and social development. This relational dynamic is particularly significant in contexts where learners face systemic inequalities or social marginalisation. For example, a study conducted by Andrews et al. (2019) in the United States of America examined the schooling experiences of Black girls and highlighted the profound influence that teacher–learner relationships can have on student well-being and identity formation. In this study, participants described certain female teachers as offering care that extended far beyond traditional academic support. These teachers were seen not just as educators but also as nurturing figures who provided emotional safety, guidance, and affirmation, as well as fostering relationships that mirrored familial bonds. This sense of care was deeply meaningful to the learners and played an important role in how they navigated the educational environment.

Importantly, the research found that such acts of care served as a protective factor against the dehumanising experiences the girls often encountered in their schools, experiences that included racial bias, stereotyping, and exclusion. By demonstrating consistent emotional support and advocacy, these teachers helped students maintain a sense of dignity, self-worth, and belonging, despite the often-hostile institutional context. The teacher-learner relationship, therefore, functioned as a form of resistance against marginalisation, enabling learners to feel

seen, valued, and empowered. This underscores the importance of a pedagogy where emotional connection and care are central to the educational process. It also highlights the capacity of teacher-learner relationships to influence not just academic outcomes but also identity development, psychological resilience, and the learner's overall experience of school as a social space.

Similarly, in inner city schools in New York, Dodson and Luttrell (2011) found that young people's narratives often offered defiance to current stigmatised images of urban youth, parents, and teachers in under-resourced schools. They found that the children's stories account for and praise the work carried out, particularly by the adult women in their lives, including that of their teachers. Such acknowledgements and appreciations of care, as Dodson and Luttrell (2011) point out, are often contradictory to current public narratives that question and undermine the social value of teachers and often hold particularly unkind views of poor working-class parents, especially mothers. These narratives, in Dodson and Lutrell's (2011) study, are very important because they show the power and agency young people have in challenging the force of dominant narratives that surround them.

Looking at the South African context, a study was conducted with 544 grade 9 and 10 South African learners to investigate the reasons for academic boredom in English and mathematics, in order to assess their effect on learners' experience of life satisfaction via learner burnout and engagement. This study found that a strained relationship between teachers and learners predicted boredom in the particular class, which, in turn, resulted in an increase in learner burnout and a decrease in learner engagement (Bekker et al., 2023). In addition, an analysis of these grade 9 and 10 learners' profiles of burnout and their level of engagement in their English and Mathematics classes revealed that positive relationships between teachers and learners are essential across all profiles to reduce boredom and increase engagement (Bekker et al., 2024). Consequently, suggesting that a good teacher-learner relationship improves learner-engagement, which in turn improves learners' well-being (Bekker et al., 2023). Similarly, Magwa (2018) argues that teachers who nurture student relationships are expected to promote a sense of belonging in the classroom, which often leads to less problematic behaviour and an increase in prosocial behaviour

In a study exploring the role of South African township schools in fostering resilience among learners, Mampane and Bouwer (2011) found that teachers and senior staff did not perceive their roles as limited to the transmission of knowledge and skills. Instead, they emphasised the

importance of building meaningful relationships and emotional connections with learners. This finding challenges the dominant, narrow, and potentially damaging narrative that portrays teachers in township schools as disconnected or apathetic. It highlights the everyday acts of care and commitment that are often overlooked in broader public and policy discourses. In addition, highlighting the crucial role played by teachers in creating a supportive environment, especially given the numerous challenges that township schools face. Furthermore, the findings in this study call for a broader understanding and appreciation of the role of teachers who work in under-resourced schools.

Drawing from the framework of social justice education, Finn and Steyn (2018) emphasise that a truly just education cannot be the responsibility of schools alone; instead, it must be a collective effort involving a broad spectrum of community stakeholders. This includes not only the school's internal structures, such as governing bodies, the school management teams, teachers, and support staff, but also learners themselves, parents, local community members, religious leaders, public servants, and representatives of non-governmental organisations. Such a collaborative approach recognises that education is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, and that meaningful change requires the active participation of all those who influence and are influenced by the schooling process.

Crucially, Finn and Steyn (2018) argue that justice-oriented education holds the potential to disrupt entrenched systems of inequality by creating space for both learners and educators to challenge and resist the reproduction of oppressive ideologies. Through critical engagement, reflection, and the co-construction of new forms of knowledge, education becomes a site where dominant narratives can be questioned and alternative, more inclusive understandings of the world can emerge. This process does not merely involve the transfer of information but rather invites participants to imagine and work toward a more just and equitable future. As Davids (2018, p. 2) eloquently articulates, this vision of education is one that seeks to "(re)evoke that which already resides in all of us, and that which we might yet to become". In other words, education rooted in social justice is both reflective and aspirational, in that it honours the lived experiences and innate potential of every individual, while also fostering growth, transformation, and the pursuit of collective liberation. This approach repositions the classroom as a space not only for learning, but for healing, resistance, and the reimagining of society itself.

These studies collectively highlight the importance of contextual factors when engaging with the complex dimensions that shape youth development and identity (Burman, 2016; De Lannoy & Langa, 2021). They show that understanding the socio-cultural, economic, and political environments in which young people live is essential for fostering meaningful and equitable educational experiences. A one-size-fits-all approach fails to account for the diverse realities of learners, and as such, a more nuanced and responsive approach enables the developmental needs of young people to be engaged with and addressed effectively.

In addition, the studies have shown that differences shaped by social categories such as race, class, and gender matter in the education system and, when ignored, they can often lead to an education system that is harmful to certain learners, is assimilationist in practice and perpetuates inequalities (Andrews et al., 2019; Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). Moreover, positive teacher-learner relationships and the role of care in fostering engagement and well-being, as well as the importance of teachers building a genuine connection with learners, are ways to support and sustain learners' success. Furthermore, they emphasise the role of schools and communities in creating an inclusive and just educational environment that challenges oppressive ideologies and supports the holistic development of learners.

In conclusion, this literature review aimed to explore how historical inequalities, structural barriers, and intergenerational legacies continue to shape the experiences and identities of young people in present-day South Africa. The body of literature reviewed reflects a strong emphasis on the persistent impact of poverty, social exclusion, and the lingering effects of apartheid-era systems on youth development and opportunity. These studies underscore how structural injustices remain deeply embedded in educational, economic, and social institutions, limiting the life chances of many young South Africans.

Despite this important focus, there is a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to centring the voices of young people themselves. Few studies have prioritised youth narratives as a primary source of insight or explored the value of intergenerational dialogue as a tool for meaning-making, healing, and transformation. This research sought to address that absence by foregrounding the perspectives of youth and exploring how their lived experiences are entangled with broader historical and structural realities.

By anchoring the study in the voices of young people and situating their experiences within the larger socio-political landscape, this research offers a more grounded and socially relevant understanding of youth in South Africa. In doing so, it not only contributes to the academic

conversation but also opens up possibilities for transformative engagement that recognises the agency of young people and the importance of intergenerational connection in challenging inequality and shaping a more just future.

Chapter 4: Methodology

> "For many of us, problematic as they are, narratives carry traces of human lives that we want to understand. All these areas of enquiry can help us describe, understand and even explain important aspects of the world."
> (Squire et al., 2013)

This chapter outlines the qualitative research design employed in the study, utilising Narrative Inquiry and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). The chapter explores the benefits and appropriateness of the design for addressing the research aims and questions. A detailed description of the participant recruitment process is provided, as well as a descriptive profile of the participants. The data collection method is explained, highlighting the use of photo elicitation as the initial layer of data collection, followed by individual interviews with learners and separate focus groups for learners, parents, and teachers. In addition, this chapter outlines the methods of data analysis, highlighting the use of both narrative and thematic analysis. Finally, the ethical considerations are discussed, alongside a reflexive statement to situate the researcher in the research process.

4.1 Methodological approach

Both YPAR and narrative inquiry research centre the lived experiences of young people and take seriously the knowledge and wisdom that young people hold about their experiences and their contexts. Furthermore, as research approaches, YPAR and narrative inquiry research position young people as active participants who co-create knowledge and act against social injustice. This research was conducted within a bigger existing YPAR project called Youth of the South (YOTS), based in Forte High School in Dobsonville. YOTS is a psycho-social youth initiative that holds weekly meetings with its members, who are learners in the school, to discuss and explore various issues affecting youth. As members of this youth organisation that employs PAR methods, the research participants played an active role in planning the action-oriented impact of this research project within their school community (Caraballo et al., 2017). Most importantly, both these approaches allowed for some distance for the young people to reflect on their normalised, taken-for-granted lived experiences and recognise aspects that can be transformed (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Lozenski et al., 2013).

4.1.1 Youth Participatory Action Research

This study followed a qualitative approach and employed narrative inquiry and YPAR as its research design. Participatory action research is a process of research, education and action that

makes a clear commitment to working with historically exploited and oppressed members of a community in a collaborative effort to bring about social transformation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra et al., 2016). YPAR is both theoretically grounded in and designed with youth and other community members, for racial, gendered, sexual, and economic justice (Fine, 2009). Given that identity formation is a key developmental task in young people, often accompanied by an innate sense of curiosity about themselves and the world around them (Erikson, 1956), YPAR taps into this inherent curiosity as a powerful tool for engagement and change (Mirra et al., 2016).

Young people have often been thought about and theorised in very problematic ways, especially young black youth in townships. Often, deficit discourses focus on what young people lack, and this gaze through the lens of lack results in young people being treated in ways that are not affirming and strip them of their humanity. Therefore, YPAR is a powerful approach that acknowledges the full humanity of young people by assuming that knowledge and wisdom, albeit not legitimised, are generated in those who experience marginalisation (Fine, 2009). In addition, this form of research allows the researcher to see the world through different eyes as suggested by this quote from Cahill et al. (2008, p. 90): "Participatory action research… is [a] process of 'opening' our own eyes and seeing the world through 'different eyes', coupled with a desire to open others' eyes". In this way, YPAR creates and deepens one's awareness of social conditions that impact one's freedom (Freire, 1970). In addition, YPAR enables young people to recognise that the conditions of injustice do not happen organically but are designed. Therefore, opening the opportunity to challenge, take action, and effect change (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

Furthermore, YPAR allowed for personal experiences as well as oral histories passed down through generations (from parents and teachers to learners) in a community to be valued as valid data and theory (Mirra et al., 2016). In addition, these stories, which include stories of oppression, also carry "multigenerational wisdom, desire and tactics of resistance" (Fine, 2009, p. 3). While schools as institutions have historically betrayed township communities, and perhaps in many similar and different ways still do, young people and their elders (parents and teachers) hold critical wisdom, desires and stories of resistance. YPAR is, therefore, a form of resistance or, as Cammarota and Fine (2008, p. 2) call it, "a formal resistance that leads to transformation-systemic and institutional change to promote social justice".

4.1.2 Narrative inquiry

YPAR work merges well with narrative inquiry in that both these approaches share dynamic understandings of human life and both are committed to transformation. As highlighted by Cammarota and Fine (2008), the transformative (and therapeutic) potential of narrative inquiry can potentially lead to social change. Narrative research has become more popular in social research over the past few decades (Andrews et al., 2008) because it provides an opportunity to read data differently and at times opens up contradictory layers of meaning, thus allowing the researcher to understand more about individual and social change (Andrews et al., 2008). This method allowed the researcher to explore how the stories of learners, teachers, and parents are structured, how they work, who produces them and the ways they are produced. Looking at which stories are produced, which are contested, and which are silenced, gives insight into different aspects of the history of coloniality and apartheid, and the ways in which people interact with these histories in the present.

Bradbury (2017, p. 15) argues that "narrative methodologies… enable us to attend to the ways in which the grand narratives of history and socio-political life articulate with/in and through individual, personal lives or psychological realities". This allows us to see how interiority is impacted by the exterior, how everyday life/living and relations articulate history in big and/or small ways. Through the telling of stories, complexities and layers of meaning can be represented; therefore, narrative inquiry will allow the learners, parents, and teachers to share stories of their past and present and stories of imagined futures. This approach simultaneously offers insights for the researcher (Bradbury, 2017) and opens up new possibilities of being and relating with others, for the participant(s), because she states:

> "Through the distance across which the stories of our past must be read, we may be able to incorporate new versions of ourselves for acting in the present toward the future ...but in recognizing that the past need not have been what it was, we are better able to generate options for how to live now and the kinds of futures that may be possible." (Bradbury, 2012, p. 346)

Re-imagining the future is especially important, particularly for marginalised communities who continue to be dehumanised by oppressive structures. Moreover, as Canham and Langa (2017) note, narratives allow for a simultaneous recognition of the ways in which particular people are dehumanised, as well as the ways in which the same people challenge, resist, and humanise themselves. Narrative methodology offers the possibility for the surfacing and

recognition of complexity in the experiences of learners, parents, and teachers, and simultaneously, allows for the interrogation of the social conditions that continuously impact people's experiences and meaning making. As highlighted by Canham and Langa (2017, p. 6), "the narrative approach… is therefore a project about psychology in society".

4.1.3 Photovoice

However, Bradbury (2017), in agreement with Squire (2008), alerts us to the limitations of narrative methodologies. She notes the production of a 'gap', often in research interviews between life and the story told; the imposition of the idea of a 'good' narrative, as well as the possibility of missed patterns of connection that are often undetectable in talk. Consequently, supplementary visual techniques may allow these missed patterns, unseen, or silenced aspects of lives to be seen and heard (Bradbury, 2017; Fontaine & Luttrell, 2015; Kessi, 2018; Lico & Luttrell, 2011). In understanding and exploring the narratives of learners, teachers, and parents, capturing the more silent or unseen parts of their lives is important in holding the many layers of their stories in the construction of the learners' identities and the ways in which disruptions and resistances are represented. Bradbury (2017, p. 33) argues that "… visual, data collection methods involve co-researchers in documenting and reflecting on their worlds, enabling them to narrate lives that may be difficult to both tell and hear".

Kessi (2018) further notes the power and importance of photovoice not only as a way of documenting experiences but also as a way of engaging co-researchers in social activities that have the potential of interrupting relations of power. Photo elicitation as the first layer of data collection will allow participants to use photographs to guide their stories as they become experts in the telling of their narratives (Langa, 2008). Furthermore, Photovoice allowed the participants to capture and document their experiences in and around their schooling context (Kessi, 2018). Furthermore, narrative and participatory visual methods will assist in exploring narratives of schooling and identity as well as the relational patterns between learners, parents, and teachers.

4.2 Data collection

The approach to data collection employed was an adaption of Luttrell et al.'s (2012, p. 6) "collaborative seeing and hearing", which employs a combination of methods. Using this approach gave the young people autonomy in the research project in that they were able to choose the pictures that they wanted to share with the researcher and later with the rest of the youth participants in the focus group (Lutrell et al., 2012). Moreover, this approach allowed

the researcher to see the learners' ways of seeing, and it offered a way of seeing with and hearing each other among the learners during the learner focus groups (Fontaine & Luttrell, 2015; Lico & Luttrell, 2011). Furthermore, there were multiple opportunities for learners to produce and make meaning of their own and each other's self-representations or narratives, through multiple audience sittings (Lico & Luttrell, 2011), initially, between the learners and the researcher during the individual interviews and then between the learners themselves and the researcher during the focus groups.

4.2.1 Participants

Lico and Luttrell (2011, p. 681) argue that,

> "to appreciate what is seen (and not seen) in these representations, young people and adult researchers and educators must take the time and effort to consider and preserve multi-layered interpretations and the exercise of multiple voices as young people and adults interact and respond to each other".

The study was conducted in a township high school in Dobsonville, Soweto. The participants included 13 grade 10–12 learners. The learners were purposefully selected from YOTS. While the primary focus of the study was on the experiences of learners, five parents and four teachers were recruited to provide supplementary data. Separate parent and teacher focus groups were conducted.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 outline the steps followed in recruiting all the participants.

Table 1

Learner Recruitment Process

Step 1	An open invitation was extended to the learners through YOTS, and the call explained what the research was about.
Step 2	The interested learners were contacted, and a meeting was held where the research study, aims, and process were explained. Participants were given the study information sheet, as well as consent forms for them and their parents to sign.
Step 3	All 10 participants were invited to a photography workshop, which was facilitated by Ms Nom'Ay Matola, a visual artist and multimedia designer. Only six attended, and the four participants who could not attend in person had access to the recorded session.
Step 4	A few months after the individual interviews and the learner focus group, while the researcher was recruiting teachers for a focus group, a violent incident occurred in the school involving a learner and a teacher. This incident prompted a second focus group with the learner participants. Some participants had already matriculated, so four new participants were recruited to participate in the focus group.

Table 2

Teacher Recruitment Process

Step 1	An invitation to participate in the focus group was sent to the teachers' WhatsApp group.
Step 2	Due to a low response to the initial invitation, the researcher visited the school in person to speak with teachers and recruit participants for the focus group. It was during this visit that a violent incident took place, with the researcher arriving shortly after it had occurred. Six teachers expressed interest in participating, and their details were collected before they were formally invited to join the focus group.

Table 3

Parent Recruitment Process

Step 1	A call was sent out through the YOTS for parents interested in participating in the study.
Step 2	After a violent incident, parents organised themselves into groups and volunteered to provide extra security in the mornings and afternoons. The researcher visited the school one morning to invite parents to participate in the study. During this visit, five parents were recruited, and their contact details were collected. They were subsequently invited to join a parent focus group.

Tables 4 and 5 present a profile of the participants who participated in the study.

Table 4

Learner Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Grade	Year recruited	Interview	Focus group 1	Focus group 2
1. Sindi	Female	Gr12	2022	X	X	
2. Kholo	Female	Gr12	2022	X	X	
3. Khumo	Male	Gr12	2022	X	X	
4. Isaac	Male	Gr12	2022	X	X	
5. Zenande	Female	Gr10	2022	X	X	
6. Mpendulo	Female	Gr12	2022	X	X	
7. Mandisa	Female	Gr11	2022	X	X	
8. Thato	Female	Gr10	2022	X	X	
9. Taylor	Male	Gr 12	2023			X
10. Samkelo	Male	Gr12	2023			X
11. Nolo	Female	Gr 10	2023			X
12. Mpho	Female	Gr 10	2023			X
13. Khotso	Male	Gr11	2022	X	X	X

Table 5

Teacher and Parent Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Role	Gender
Mr Moloi	Parent	Male
Ms Ngoane	Parent	Female
Ms Thipa	Parent	Female
Mr Tlhalefo	Parent	Male
Ms Zondo	Parent	Female
Ms Makhanya	Teacher	Female
Ms Nkululeko	Teacher	Female
Mr Mahlangu	Teacher	Male
Ms Phutheho	Teacher	Female

4.2.2 Phases of data collection

The data were collected through a two-phase approach. The following description gives a brief overview of the two phases, the participants involved, and the method or process that was used. Phase 1 involved individual interviews and focus groups with learners, while separate focus groups with parents and teachers occurred during the second phase.

During the teacher focus group recruitment stage, which was phase 2 of the study, a violent incident occurred between a learner, the learner's family members and two teachers within the school. This incident happened on the day the researcher was scheduled to meet with the teachers to recruit them for participation in the focus group. Earlier that morning, a grade 11 learner was accused by his peers of stealing their bags, and this escalated into a fight between him and one of his accusers. A male teacher, who was also a member of the school's disciplinary committee, intervened and managed to stop the fight. The teacher then accompanied both learners to the office, where disciplinary action was administered. Subsequently, the accused learner contacted his older brother and complained to him about the incident. Later the same morning, the brother arrived at the school accompanied by several young men. They proceeded directly to the teacher's class and attacked the teacher with golf sticks. This violent incident left the teachers, learners, and parents deeply unsettled and raised serious concerns about the lack of safety and security in the school. However, discussions with teachers and learners revealed that such incidents were not perceived as unusual.

Considering the heightened tension and the charged atmosphere that followed, a decision was made to conduct a third focus group with the learners. This focus group was conducted after the separate focus group sessions with teachers and parents.

Phase 1: Learners

The first phase involved the learners. The learner participants were invited to attend a photography workshop; this workshop was recorded and shared with participants who were not able to attend in person. The aim of the workshop was to equip the participants with basic important skills and the ethics of taking photographs. The recording of the workshop and other teaching aids were also made available to the YOTS group for any of their members who are keen on photography.

Following the workshop, learners were asked to take up to ten photographs that represent, illustrate, or capture something of their experience in the schooling context. A week later, the researcher conducted individual interviews with the participants. Only one participant had taken ten photographs, while most presented between five and six. Although some of the participants seemed almost guarded and hesitant to show their pictures, the photo-documentation process provided an opportunity for the young people to tell their own stories from their own perspective. This, Langa (2008) argues, allows the learners to educate the researcher about the photographs taken and can often be experienced as gratifying for the learners. In addition, it allowed the learners to actively re-create meanings and use the photographs as a guide to tell their stories (Langa, 2008).

Individual narrative interviews were conducted with the learners to elicit the stories and meaning behind the photographs. These were guided by the photos that the learners chose to share. A set of questions had been developed merely as a guideline rather than a set interview schedule (see attached Appendix A), focusing particularly on schooling experiences. This approach of using the photographs to guide the narratives allowed the learners to exercise their agency and gave them the opportunity to be in control of what version of their story they shared and how the story was told. In addition, the learners were encouraged to use any language(s) they were comfortable with. Participants code-switched between English and seSotho, seTswana, and IsiZulu.

Following the individual interviews with the learners, a focus group was held with the participants. The learners were asked to select about three to five pictures for the focus group.

These pictures were used to elicit conversations about the ways in which identities are constructed and negotiated, and the nuanced ways in which patterns of oppression and resistance manifest in their everyday lives. A follow-up focus group was held to allow for a return to points that were significant. In addition, this not only afforded the learners power over their material to expand on the stories shared (Squire, 2008) but also gave the learners the opportunity to offer their interpretations and analyses. During this session, participants engaged in collective reflection and challenged each other on complex matters. Furthermore, it was in the context of this second focus group that the group deeply explored the theme of relationships, particularly the dynamics between learners and teachers. The reintroduction of the learners' images in the learner focus group allowed learners the opportunity to collaboratively discuss themes across all their images. In addition, the learners used this time to think and plan how to disseminate the findings. The learners decided that they would use their stories of positive contact with teachers to celebrate teachers who dared to care in otherwise dehumanising contexts, by creating a poster that would showcase these stories of positive encounters. The learners have taken this idea to the bigger YOTS group, and they will continue to work on this plan within the YOTS project.

Several months later, following the violent attack on the teachers, as mentioned above, the researcher decided to invite learner participants to a final focus group. In this focus group, participants were asked to share their thoughts and responses to the violent incident.

Phase 2: Parents and teachers

During this phase, focus groups were held separately with parents and teachers. A set of guideline questions (Appendix B) was used to elicit conversation and discussion about their views of young people's experiences of schooling. As expected, the discussions included parents' and teachers' recollections of their own stories and experiences, both present and past, of schooling.

4.3 Data analysis

All the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim, including nuances of tone and non-verbal gestures. All the participants would code-switch between their mother tongue and English, so translations into English were made in those instances. Different translation techniques were used to ensure that the meaning was preserved. For instance, where appropriate and possible, word-for-word translations were used, and at times, reformulating

was employed to ensure that the meaning of the narrative was preserved and conveyed in the English translation. This was especially helpful when participants used an expression or idiom that could not be directly translated into English (Molina & Albir, 2002). Data were analysed using both narrative and thematic analysis to allow for analysis that focuses on how the story is being told as well as on what is being said. With regards to the photographs, only photographs of places and items/objects were used. This allowed the researcher to look at the place through the learners' eyes (Lico & Lutrell, 2011). Furthermore, the use of the pictures as prompts allowed participants to both share their experiences as well as share the meaning they attach to the pictures and their analysis (Langa, 2008). In this way, the analysis of the pictures was a collaborative effort between the researcher and participants. The analysis chapters are organised thematically; however, the data is drawn from different data sources and analysed through narrative analysis in Chapter 5 and thematic analysis for Chapters 6 and 7.

Although the violent incident happened toward the end of the research process, it is presented first for analysis purposes. This helps to contextualise and understand the data collected earlier. Additionally, the narrative analysis in Chapter 5 prioritises this violent incident. However, it is important to note that the other two analysis chapters also contain narratives that highlight the significance of this experience. The data are organised against the three overarching theoretical themes: violence, place and identity, and relationships. Furthermore, data in these chapters are drawn from all data collection points across the research process.

4.3.1 Narrative analysis

Phoenix (2008) advocates for a psycho-social kind of narrative analysis, which seeks to seriously consider both individual and social processes. In this way, analysis paid attention to the process of sense-making, including what was said and how it was said, as well as the narrative context, which includes the interviewer/interviewee relationship and wider socio-cultural context. According to Gubrium (2006), understanding how people use culture to make sense of and represent their lives and others' lives enables expanded thinking and understanding of how individuals construct their identities.

A narrative analysis is presented in Chapter 5, which examines the violent incident that occurred at the school during the second phase of data collection. This incident was symptomatic of a broader culture of violence that has become normalised within the school context. In order to better understand the socio-cultural environment from which learner narratives emerge, this chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the accounts shared by learners

regarding this particular incident, supported by additional reflections from teachers and parents. These narratives provide essential context for the broader themes explored in this study.

Chapter 5 uses this incident, which was recounted by the participants during the focus group, as a particular incident narrative (PIN) (Wengraf, 2008). Wengraf (2010, p. 547) defines a PIN as an "account of a particular experience that a person [in this case, a group of people] has lived through". This PIN has unearthed rich personal and shared narratives of experiences of violence both in and outside of the school. Furthermore, it has highlighted the nuanced context within which the young people live and experience school. The analysis of the PIN focused on the following elements of the narrative: firstly, the form of the story, which includes the disjointed, disorganised and incomplete way the story was told by the learners and teachers and tone. Secondly, and most interestingly, the ways in which the told narrative(s) carried multiple untold stories. Lastly, the narrator's vantage point, which speaks to their social identity, positionality, and their relationship to the researcher, impacted what was narrated and how it was narrated.

Following the analysis of the PIN, the second section of Chapter 5 uses two narrative tools, as suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 207): "broadening and burrowing". The first tool, broadening, involves looking for the broader context of the story, including the social, historical, or cultural milieus. This approach helps to situate the incident within the larger context of the community and the context of South Africa's dynamics. In addition, through this lens, the narratives are not understood in isolation, but as part of a wider, interconnected system of factors that shape and are shaped by the event. The second tool, burrowing, focuses on providing an in-depth analysis of the event itself, paying attention to specific details and nuances of the incident. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the event's immediate impact and the personal experiences associated with it. By using these narrative analysis tools, Chapter 5 contextualises the data analysis presented in Chapters 6 and 7 within structures, polices, and everyday social practices that influence and sustain these experiences.

4.3.2 Thematic analysis

Riessman (2008) describes thematic analysis as concentrating on the content of the story. Themes and patterns were identified and developed based on their significance to the research questions and aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis allowed for the exploration of crucial thematic threads, including those that had already been explored through

the process of reviewing theory and literature around youth identity and schooling experiences within the South African context (Hayes, 1997). In addition to focusing on the content of the story, the analysis took into account the broader theoretical framework and the contextual factors, including socio-economic and political influences, as well as ongoing structural injustices (Alexander, 2013; Squire, 2008). Simultaneously, utilising ka Canham's (2023, p. 7) concept of "looking askance"—a critical and inquisitive approach to analysis, that moves beyond surface-level observations to uncover deeper psycho-social issues.

An in-depth analysis was conducted by the researcher through repeated reading and re-reading of the transcript, with a focus on identifying "repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This phase of the study captures the reflexive and processual nature of the stage of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). To deepen engagement with the data, the researcher also listened to the recording while reviewing the transcript, paying attention to the tone of voice, as well as what was said through pauses, laughter, and emphasis. Codes were generated, with the language of the codes kept as close as possible to the participants' own words to ensure that their experiences were accurately captured, and the richness of the data was preserved. Some themes were named exactly as they appeared in the data, while others were named based on shared commonalities. Each theme was thoroughly examined, and connections between themes were identified. By the end of the analysis, distinct, identifiable themes were generated (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Additionally, the overarching master theme names, which were organised into the three analysis chapters, were informed by theory, while the sub-themes were generated and named as they appeared in the data, as mentioned earlier. The themes tell a story of a place, creating a context where learners, teachers, and parents interact, while also negotiating and exploring their identities. The thematic analysis is presented in Chapter 6, delves into the themes of place and identity, and future identities, and Chapter 7 examines the theme of relationships and the kind of environment these relationships foster and (re)create.

Throughout the three analysis chapters, the learners' narratives are analysed and explored alongside the teachers' and parents' narratives, fostering an intergenerational dialogue that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the context, schooling experiences, and patterns of relationships. This approach also uncovers narrative threads that span across generations. By integrating these diverse perspectives, the analysis enables the articulation of multiple voices and layered interpretations that are often missed or unheard. Moreover, it provides rich stories that reflect both the current and historical context of the school and the surrounding community, offering deeper insights into the lived experiences of all involved.

4.3.3 Visual analysis

This study does not undertake a formal visual analysis of the photographs. Instead, as mentioned earlier, the images taken by the learners are utilised within a photovoice framework, which serves primarily as prompts to facilitate storytelling and reflection by the participants. In this way, the emphasis is not on analysing the visual content of the photographs themselves, but on the narratives and meanings that emerge from the participants' discussions of their images. The photographs act as tools to access lived experiences, memories, and perceptions, supporting a co-constructed understanding of their community and identity. As Langa (2008) emphasises, visual analysis involves more than simply describing images; rather, as he argues, it requires one to pay close attention to the social context, personal meaning, and the manner in which images are presented. The analysis thus focused on the stories and themes that emerged from these photo-elicited narratives and discussions. The selected and presented photographs are cited alongside the thematic findings, not as objects of aesthetic or for visual analysis, but as windows into the participants' perspectives and lived realities. In addition, these images function as visual anchors for the themes that emerged during the analysis, helping to ground abstract concepts in the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants.

4.4 Data quality

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four essential criteria that guide the evaluation of a study's quality: credibility, transferability, and confirmability, which serve as foundational principles for establishing the integrity of the research process and the authenticity of its findings. By addressing these dimensions, the researcher aims to demonstrate that the study is methodologically sound, ethically conducted, and grounded in the experiences and perspectives of participants, rather than influenced by researcher bias or external pressures. These criteria ensure that the study is both meaningful and trustworthy within its context.

4.4.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the interpretation, reconstruction, and presentation of the research findings accurately reflect and align with the participants' lived experiences, while remaining faithful to the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was enhanced through the use of multiple data collection methods and data sources, which allowed for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the participants'

perspectives. Additionally, preliminary findings were shared with participants, enabling them to validate the interpretations, offer feedback, and engage in further dialogue. This process not only fostered participant involvement but also encouraged deeper reflection and additional insights. Most importantly, these strategies contributed to minimising researcher bias, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the findings. The final analysis is thus a genuine representation of the participants' voices, grounded in their social realities and shaped by their personal experiences.

4.4.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings of a study may be transferred to other contexts, settings or groups. This is achieved through the provision of sufficient and descriptive detail that allows readers to evaluate the extent to which the findings can be transferable to other places or times (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Chapter 1 of the study provided a detailed description of the context of this study, including the South African township context. This contextual information, together with the description of the research process, the rich description of the participants' responses and the analysis, has made transferability easier to assess (Treharne & Riggs, 2015).

4.4.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants' responses and experiences, rather than being influenced by the researcher's personal biases, assumptions, or interests. It ensures that the data and interpretations are grounded in evidence provided by the participants themselves (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). In this study, confirmability was supported through the use of direct quotations from participants during the analysis, allowing their voices to remain central in the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, as previously noted, participants were invited to a feedback session where preliminary findings were presented and discussed. This provided an opportunity for participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations and to offer additional insights or clarifications. These practices helped to strengthen the objectivity of the analysis and ensured that the findings authentically represented the participants' perspectives.

Together, these strategies, credibility, transferability, and confirmability, have contributed to the overall rigour and quality of the data, ensuring that the findings are both credible and grounded in the authentic voices and lived experiences of the participants.

4.5 Self-reflexivity

Reflexivity is a process of introspection on one's positionality and the ways in which this has impacted the process of research. As a "journey of learning" (Palaganas et al., 2017, p. 426), reflexivity is a continuous process of interrogating the many ways in which one's identity, values, history, education, and biases have impacted and influenced the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017). This section will cover my reflections throughout the research process.

The ability and commitment to hold complexity even during times of despair are required to honour the lives of those we work with. This is difficult but even more important during moments of "hyper visible despair" (Canham & Langa, 2017, p. 8). This 'ability to hold complexity' is important in thinking about the kind of work one does with individuals in a community and, more importantly, with children and young people. In an attempt to 'hold complexity', I begin this section on the ethics of research with a reflection on my position. My clinical experience as a psychologist is a position that I was cognisant of throughout the research process. Engaging with the young people in eliciting their stories for research, rather than unpacking their unconscious experiences for therapeutic purposes, required constant reflection on my part. Furthermore, holding onto my capacity to contain difficult feelings, manage conflict and allow for collaborative learning and sharing were skills I pulled from, particularly during focus group discussions.

A big part of my interest in this research project is influenced by my own narrative and experience as a former learner in a township school. It is this experience that makes this project more than just an academic piece, but a personal project. The stories shared by the participants reflect my parents', mine, and my classmates', as well as my teachers' own schooling experiences. So, in many ways, this project is an expression of speaking back to the oppressive past and an attempt at interrupting dehumanising practices in township schools that have continued for generations. The hope is that the voices of the young people (the participants) can be heard by other township scholars through the multiple platforms that the YOTS team will use to share the findings. In this way, sparking and encouraging conversations among other learners, teachers, and parents, conversations that interrupt oppressive, violent patterns and dynamics in schools.

Salmon and Riessman (2008) and Squire (2008) argue that the listener is an important partner in the meaning-making and construction of the narrative. Furthermore, there has been a shift from thinking about narratives as an expression of an individual's subjectivity to understanding

that all narratives are co-constructed (Tietel, 2000). It is for this reason that the identity of the hearer matters for what is and is not said, what is and is not explained, as well as how the story is narrated. My gender, age, race, education level, and perceived history matter. In a caution from Manganyi, in an interview with Ngwenya (2003), about reflexive practice, particularly in relation to his biographical work, he quotes Sartre, "… you have to overcome your own prejudices, you must write against yourself...". Manganyi goes on to explain "… what I was trying to say is that it is important to understand yourself, your own curiosity about the life you are writing about, what prejudices you might hold and so on so that you do not contaminate the narrative of the other person's life with your own burdens" (Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003, p. 429).

My position is a complicated one; in many ways, my personal past experiences as a learner in a township school in Dobsonville mean that I have similar or shared experiences with some of the participants. In addition, my existing relationship and connection with the participants through Youth of the South might have impacted the narratives shared by the participants. While it is possible that the young people might have filtered what they shared, our relationship and history, shaped by the PAR principles and values that inform YOTS, may have also enabled a sense of trust and safety. This, in turn, might have created a research environment that allowed them to share more openly and authentically. However, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges inherent in YPAR, particularly the ethical considerations related to participants' protection. I had to carefully navigate the delicate balance between creating space for authentic participation, as encouraged by YPAR, and fulfilling my ethical responsibility to protect participants from potential emotional, social, and physical harm during data collection, analysis, and dissemination. This tension was a constant and critical part of the research process.

Furthermore, as I reflect on my positionality, it is important for me to reflect on my position as an insider in terms of my identity markers. Being a Black woman who grew up in Dobsonville is significant in terms of what I found easy to see and hear, but equally, it meant that I needed to be aware of the ways in which my history, my connection to the place and my own schooling experiences, may have closed certain narratives, or contaminated the participants' narratives, as previously mentioned. However, I also believe that my insider-outsider position has enriched my analysis as it enabled me to reflect from both these perspectives.

Equally, I am also aware of my outsider status as I am not a full-time Dobsonville resident, I am older than the learners, and I am not a member of the school community in the same ways that the learners, teachers, and parents are. As an outsider-insider, it can be easy to fall into the trap of simplifying and flattening people's experiences. Dondon and Luttrell (2011) talk about the ways in which working-class and middle-class individuals are often pitted against each other and positioned to compete. It was important for me to be and remain conscious of my middle-class position, fragile as it might be, in terms of what it enabled me to see and hear, and how to see and hear. However, it was also my position as an outsider that has allowed me to have sight of certain things that perhaps those positioned as insiders may not have full sight of. This includes, but is not limited to, all the normalised taken-for-granted rules, structures, and systems in the school, ways of relating, and expectations placed both on the young people and adults, as well as the expectations both learners and teachers have on the school. An example of this was the normalised, taken-for-granted, and largely unseen aspect of how the school functions, which was the school's and teachers' *laissez-faire* attitude toward routine and time. This often resulted in a lack of structure and a general sense that no one assumed clear ownership or responsibility for the running and organisation of the school.

4.6 Ethical considerations

The following section outlines the ethical considerations that guided the research project to ensure responsible research practices and the protection of the participants' rights and dignity. The necessary permission was sought and granted from both the school and the department of education (Appendices C & D). Participation was on a voluntary basis; all the participants were informed through a written letter, and an initial meeting was held where further clarifications about the study were made. It was during this meeting that participants had the opportunity to ask questions and express any concerns they had with regard to their participation. All the appropriate informed consent and assent forms for all the learner participants and their guardians (for those under 18 years) were obtained (Appendix E). All participants were informed that they could withdraw at any stage of the project. Any information that could have led to the identification of participants has been altered to ensure their anonymity; as such, no personal identifying information for the participants was used in the research report and any potential publications. Additionally, participants signed a consent form granting permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded (Appendix F). All information is kept confidential on a password-protected computer. Confidentiality was ensured during the individual interviews, and it was addressed with all the participants in the focus group. Participants were requested to

keep what was said in the focus group discussions confidential, and they all signed a non-disclosure statement (Appendix G). Furthermore, the participants were encouraged to only share what they felt comfortable sharing in both their stories and photographs.

Importantly, debriefing and counselling services were offered through the local clinic, as well as through the Master of Educational Psychology Students, who were doing their practical training at the school during the time of the interviews (Appendix H). This was offered to all participants and reiterated at the end of each interview or focus group engagement for participants who shared painful experiences. Finally, it is important to state that ethical clearance was obtained through the Non-Medical Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand, to ensure that ethical standards were adhered to for this research project, especially since research interviews were conducted with children (Appendix I).

Chapter 5: Violence in Cast-away Spaces

"Some of the most destructive acts of violence to the human soul are the subtle, systematic acts that undermine the dignity and sense of worth of individuals, the insidious acts of violence that destroy their psychological and spiritual integrity… The post-apartheid generation is living through its own traumas of a life of humiliation" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016, p. 114)

This chapter explores a violent incident that occurred at the school while the researcher was collecting data for the research project. The narrative accounts are drawn from different focus groups held with learners, teachers, and parents providing first-hand perspectives on the impact of such violence within the school environment. The incident, analysed as a PIN, explores the ways in which young people make sense of and navigate violent encounters and violence in and out of school. Moreover, this incident is used as a springboard for a broader analysis and discussion of violence as a critical and recurring theme. The incident is conceptualised as an 'enactment', a term adapted from Bowman et al. (2015), and used in this analysis to represent not only the ways in which the violence unfolds (Bowman, 2021) but also as a form of communication revealing the experiences of marginalised individuals that often go unnoticed.

The chapter begins by presenting accounts of the violent incident analysed as a PIN, followed by a contextual analysis exploring the everyday experiences of violence faced by learners and educators. The second section of the chapter employs Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) analytical framework of "broadening", connecting the narratives of the specific incident to the historical, social, and cultural scene of the narratives; and "burrowing", to focus on specific details of the narratives, for example, the told and untold stories, present contradictions and ambiguities, and the impact these have on the participants. Furthermore, narratives are analysed within a broader socio-historical context, demonstrating how this violent incident reflects and is part of a web of violence in the wider community (Hamby & Grych, 2013).

5.1 Particular incident narrative: The violent enactment

The narratives in this section are drawn from the two different focus groups of teachers and learners, which were conducted following the violent incident. Interestingly, there were different accounts about the incident as told by the learners and teachers.

The violent incident that took place in the school was narrated in different ways by the participants. In the focus group with the teachers and in the focus group with the learners, this incident was recounted to the researcher. However, only the two learners' accounts will be the focus of this analysis. These accounts or narratives will each be analysed as a PIN, offering a

nuanced understanding of the context of violence and highlighting several elements. Firstly, the narrative structure involves or examines the organisation and presentation of the narrative and the way the story is told to the audience, as well as the narrator's tone and level of involvement. This category looks particularly at the way the narrator's perspective shapes the story and influences the audience's understanding. Attention is paid to the gap between the told story and the lived experience as the form of narration communicates sense-making beyond the specifics of 'what happened'. Secondly, the untold stories in the narratives. Lastly, the narrator's point of view speaks to their social identity, positionality, relationship to the researcher, and the impact on what was narrated and how it was narrated.

We begin with the narratives of two learners, Taylor and Nolo, who tell the story of what happened. This account goes beyond simply providing a clear description of the event and the precipitating factors. It also sheds light on other often-overlooked narratives that reflect the history of the area where the school is situated, the everyday experiences of violence, including corporal punishment in schools. In addition, it speaks to the ongoing crisis of youth unemployment in South Africa, which will be further explored in the chapter.

Taylor:	*…there was actually a fight, but I'm not sure whether it was a fight or an argument between them. So, they were fighting, it was like a story from the classroom, actually. It started from the classroom with the argument between the teacher and a learner. Then, after the learner went outside called his friends. Yeah, the guy, called Peter, called his brother, ja. So maybe his brother came with friends. Yeah, basically, the story started to escalate at that point.*
Nolo:	*Can I add?*
Researcher:	*Yeah, sure*.
Nolo:	*I was there at school, actually, what happened is that we were going for home language, and then there was an assembly before the first period. Then, after assembly, the boys were taking our bags from the class, stealing them actually, because they were saying they have to take the bags… but there is this other guy who is doing grade 12 who saw them. Then that guy said, "Let us go, and I will show you the people who took your bags." Then we went there, and then those guys started fighting, saying, "Why you would tell them that we are the ones who are taking their bag?"*
Researcher:	*Who said let us go and show you?*
Nolo:	*A learner.*
Researcher:	*So, now the dude was fighting with the guy.*
Nolo:	*Yes, then the teacher came in and tried to reprimand them. Then they started their fighting, the boys who steal bags said, "Sir, stop pulling us, this boy is taking us for granted, uyasijwale [undermining us]" like that. Then the teacher continued to pull them, trying to stop them. Things like that, then after like few minutes, uSir, oh, before they went there, the teacher came in between them so they could stop fighting… so when he tried to fight, the teacher slapped him.*
Khotso:	*He slapped him!*
Nolo:	*Then after that uSir dragged him to the office, then after a few minutes, he let them go. Then that is when that guy phoned his relatives from the hostel, I don't know whether it was his friends or his family, then they came in the classroom.*

Researcher: *In your classroom?*
Nolo: *Yes, we were in the classroom*
Taylor: *Yes, they came through the gate.*
Nolo: *They came in having some golf sticks, pangas, and sticks. They came in, and we tried closing the classrooms, but they went to look for the teacher who beat that guy. When they got there, they beat up uSir, of course, we were not in that classroom. On their way out, or no, while they were beating uSir, there was a female teacher who tried to reprimand them, they beat her up as well. On their way out, they met up with another Sir and he asked them, "How did you enter by the school?". Then they hit him as well, with the golf sticks and stones. As the other teachers came out, shocked at the scenario that was taking place, those boys took some bricks and threw them at the teacher's cars. We were in class, and we could see the whole thing like we could see everything that was happening. They stone[d] the cars and then they left, they jumped through the gate. Yho! It was very traumatising.*

5.1.1 Narrative structure

The narrative was chaotic, involving multiple players. In a way, one could say that all the different school community stakeholders were implicated, including learners, male and female teachers, and unemployed young adults from the community. Both Taylor's and Nolo's telling of the story was hard to follow, and the researcher had to clarify some details a few times. The narrative lacked some important details, which would make the story clearer and easy to follow. This lack of detail, coupled with the here-and-now type of recall and first-person manner of speaking in which Nolo retells the story, illustrates or highlights urgency and a sense of anxiety about the volatile situation, where any held assumptions about safety in the school were shattered. In addition, the anxiety was coupled or even exacerbated by the distinct perception or realisation that the young men involved in the incident could not be dissuaded from using violence. Moreover, in that moment, there appeared to be no space for thinking, as seen in the inability to deescalate the situation regardless of the attempts made by the two teachers. Nolo recounts how both attempts to diffuse the situation were met with aggression. This incident likely left the teachers and young people, in particular, feeling deeply unsettled and anxious about their own safety.

Furthermore, in his retelling, Taylor's tone lacked emotion, and he seemed quite removed from the situation, suggestive of a sense of detachment from the incident. His detachment, together with the lack of detail in his narrative, further indicates that this incident may have been experienced as traumatic. This aligns with other studies that have found that people who experienced trauma have less organised trauma narratives or recollections (Crespo & Fernandez-Lansac, 2016; Filkuková et al., 2016; Scheeringa et al., 2017). In addition, in a context where violence is pervasive both in the school and outside the school, distancing and

being detached may be a necessary tool for survival. In this way, Taylor's detachment and Nolo's sense of urgency and sense of anxiety in the telling of the story may be communicating to the researcher, who is positioned as an outsider, something about the regularity of similar kinds of violent occurrences in the school.

5.1.2 Untold Narratives

Nolo and Taylor's narratives had certain aspects or details that were left unsaid; this could be for multiple reasons, including the assumption that the researcher knows what the participants are talking about (Kim, 2016). The untold detail or aspect of the story is equally important in the analysis of the told story. Josselson (2004, p. 13) notes "a told story conceals an untold one", highlighting the fact that there are multiple other stories and perspectives that have not been told. Moreover, Pheonix (2021), recalling Mills (1959), states that personal stories or troubles are works of history and are located in place and time. She further notes that these narratives are about the individual and the social spaces they occupy, as well as the societies they live in. As stated above, this account helps to provide the context within which the incident occurred. Furthermore, it is both about the individuals and about a place, and they are current as much as they are products of history.

This PIN holds a hidden layer or untold narrative of the story and history of the hostel that is located opposite the school. In retelling what happened, Nolo makes mention of the hostel when she said "*... that is when that guy phoned his relatives from hostel… then they came in the classroom".* This untold story of the hostel is a story about a place (the hostel) within a place (Dobsonville), whose own history is tied to that of other townships and hostels across South Africa. As mentioned in Chapter 1, hostels were initially created during apartheid to control and exploit Black migrant labour, often characterised by harsh living conditions and social problems such as violence and poverty (Vosloo, 2020). The legacy of these hostels continues to fuel tensions with the surrounding communities, as depicted in this PIN.

The history told by these accounts alludes to and resonates with the story of the displacement of the early residents of Dobsonville as described in Chapter 1. A place whose story is carried in its name, Juliwe, 'cast-away' place. A story or history of a place whose people have been dispossessed or cast away by colonial conquests, violence and later apartheid laws such as the Group Areas Act. This act sought to make room for industries and city 'development' by pushing Black South Africans into underdeveloped areas with limited access to resources. This legacy of spatial and economic marginalisation is still visible today. Like many other

townships, Dobsonville continues to be populated only by Black people and is geographically located in the periphery or margins, far away from the city or business hub. The forced segregation of communities during apartheid has left many townships with inadequate infrastructure, limited access to resources, and persistent economic challenges, leading to high levels of youth unemployment and social issues, continuing the legacy of a cast-away, neglected place.

The second untold or hidden story is that of a violent and strained relationship between hostel residents and township dwellers, highlighting the deep-rooted legacy of dispossession and neglect, showing how the past continues to shape current-day challenges in the community. Further, it highlights and captures the contradiction of education in that the learners in school hold the promise of education in providing mobility and opportunities, whilst for the young, unemployed men in the hostel, schooling seems to have confirmed and bound them to their social and economic position. Leaving them feeling frustrated with little prospects of a different future.

Interestingly, the symbolic meaning of objects in the narrative highlights themes of privilege and marginalisation. The use of a golf club as a weapon is particularly striking, as golf is a sport typically associated with the wealthy, corporate elites, and an exclusive lifestyle. Moreover, golf courses require huge amounts of land, an especially charged issue in a country where land ownership remains a deeply contested and emotional topic. The second image in the narrative is of cars; cars represent mobility and movement. However, the idea of mobility and movement is not so for the unemployed young people implicated in the narrative. For these young men, the lack of economic opportunities means that they remain outside of any opportunities that may transform their lives and offer a chance to break out of the cycle or the clutches of poverty. The unemployed, possibly disillusioned and desperate young men, living in a crammed hostel, wielding golf clubs as weapons, and stoning cars become a powerful metaphor. It reflects how symbols of privilege can be transformed into instruments of violence when inequality deepens. Furthermore, this underscores how systemic disparities can create volatile and dangerous conditions for those on the margins of society. In a way, this challenges narrow conceptions of clear perpetrator and clear victim binaries by highlighting how the young men identified as perpetrators in this incident are, in many ways, also victims of a broken system that has failed them for years. These young men, once eager and bright-eyed children, like Taylor, had dreams and hopes for their future but now find themselves discarded and in despair.

5.1.3 Point of View

Interestingly, there were different accounts about the incident as told by the participants. In the same way, the varied perspectives are influenced by each participant's respective position, their unique experiences and the knowledge that comes with their positionality. The learners' narratives highlight the challenging and sometimes hostile interactions between learners and teachers both inside and outside the classrooms. Taylor attributes the violent confrontation to an earlier interaction in class between the learner and the teacher,

Taylor: *It started from the classroom with an argument between the teacher and a learner. Then, after the learner went outside called his friends...*

Although Taylor's account of the incident is disputed by Nolo, given her first-hand account of the incident, Taylor's narrative speaks of possible experiences of strained and hostile teacher-learner interactions. Both Taylor's and Nolo's accounts highlight how interactions between learners and teachers often escalate to a violent enactment. This is supported by the recent increase in reportage, from various news outlets, of violent attacks on teachers by learners (Govender, 2024; Tshwete, 2023; Zeeman, 2024). Most interestingly, their point of view gives insight into the possible pathways of violent enactments (Bowman, 2021). Both the accounts from the learners suggest that there was a trigger prior to the violent enactment. There seems to have been an experience of, or a perceived act of, public violent humiliation of the learner accused of stealing bags by the teacher, who possibly understood and framed his actions as disciplinary and corrective. Nolo and Taylor express this, albeit triggered differently,

Nolo: T*he teacher came in between them so they could stop fighting… so when he tried to fight, the teacher slapped him... Then, after that, uSir dragged him to the office.*

Taylor: *I am not sure whether it was a fight or an argument between them… It started from the classroom with the argument between the teacher and a learner. Then, after the learner went outside called his friends. Yeah, basically, the story started to escalate at that point.*

Whether the encounter between the learner and the teacher began in the classroom or at the moment recounted by Nolo, what remains certain is that a public altercation took place. This altercation either involved a verbal argument or physical confrontation, such as the learner being slapped and dragged to the office by the teacher, in full view of the class or the broader school community. It is this 'initial' public act of violence that appears to have escalated into a more eruptive and violent enactment. The trigger then seems to lie in the learner's experience of public humiliation, more specifically in the teacher's public display of power that seemed to render the learner feeling powerless and possibly humiliated. This is significant because it

underscores how the perceived experience of public shaming or public disciplinary violence can serve as a catalyst for further violent conflict, especially in conditions where learners already feel marginalised, alienated, and positioned within uneven but shifting power relations.

While this analysis only focused on the two learners' narratives, a similar kind of meaning making style or pattern was seen with one of the teachers who recounted the incident. Similar to Taylor and Nolo, Ms Phutheho's recall lacked important details which would give a clear chronological account of what happened. Furthermore, while their tone was expressed differently, for instance, as either a sense of concerned resignation from Ms Phutheho or complete detachment from Taylor, their tone and narrative structure highlight the many difficulties learners and teachers face, including inadequate infrastructure and systems that support a conducive learning and teaching environment. Moreover, it is important to note that all too often it is these structural challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, high teacher-learner ratios, to mention a few, that fuel, exacerbate the strained and conflictual relationships between learners and teachers.

The multiple varied perspective or positions allows for a layered and textured reading and analysis, in ways that challenge very simplistic causal lines and binary categorisations of clear victim and clear perpetrator. Instead, it allows one to 'look askance' into the psychosocial layers of schooling, often obscured by institutional power through policies or structural violations that often shape teachers' frustrations, what has often been characterised as parents' seeming apathy and learners' defiance.

Additionally, these varied accounts have offered varied and multiple untold stories and, as such, function as decolonial acts of visibility and offer alternative perspectives to dominant narratives that may attribute the incident to issues such as ill-discipline or inadequate classroom management (Vally, 2020). By examining the narratives, one has gained a clear perspective (sight) of the different vantage points into the often overlooked, mundane or normalised everyday experiences that occur in schools. Thus, centring or focusing the gaze on those who are often dismissed, unseen and/or misrecognised and thus enabling the recognition of the learners' and teachers' "self-knowledge and interiority" (ka Canham, 2024, p. 7).

The violent enactment at the school represents both structural and symbolic violence, which extends beyond the violence of apartheid to its earlier predecessor, colonialism, and the social-political order it established. As argued by Manganyi (1973), recognising the historical reality of the violence of colonialism, apartheid and indeed coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007;

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) is crucial for understanding certain contemporary experiences for Black people. In doing so, one recognises that this historical framework continues to reorganise the psyches of South Africans in varying ways (Fritzgerald, 2022). While this reorganisation constitutes its own violence, it is especially brutal for the marginalised who experience the trauma of this assault and its continuous psychosocial aftereffects.

5.2 Normalised violence

The following section will further broaden and contextualise the stories emerging from the focus groups with learners, teachers, and parents on this violent incident (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Through broadening, the following section will give an analysis of the narratives that offer a nuanced, intergenerational lens and understanding of the schooling atmosphere and the multiple forms of violence that learners, parents and teachers navigate, in so doing, offering (in)sight into the stakeholders' sense and experience of the space. Furthermore, this section will highlight in(sight) into the often overlooked or normalised instances of violence and will demonstrate how violence is a complex and ongoing process embedded in societal structures, rather than an isolated event. The analysis will show underlying power dynamics and social hierarchies within the school community, particularly in terms of who was perceived as the victim in this event and in need of protection and care. Moreover, the analysis in this section will highlight the ways in which learners, teachers, and parents offer resistance and respond to structural violence in ways that aim to regenerate and restore humanity among all participants (including those identified as perpetrators) affected by the violence.

5.2.1 Everyday violent encounters

A response from a teacher, Ms Cele, at the school, a few hours following the violent enactment incident, seems to confirm that these violent disruptions or eruptions are common. She exclaims:

Ms Cele: *Oh, we are used to this; this is nothing new here.*

It appears that Ms Cele is suggesting that the disruption is a common occurrence at the school, and that this particular incident was not an isolated one. Her matter-of-fact tone may be suggestive of a sense of resignation and normalisation of violence and disruptions at the school. The fact that Ms Cele appears to take the disruption in her stride, by saying "*Oh, we are used to this*", implies that the school community has become desensitised to the violence and

disruption. This normalisation of violence is also reflected or seen in the community, where the high levels of violence and violent crimes are on the rise. Furthermore, this increased occurrence was alluded to by Ms Ngoane, a parent who, following the violent incident at the school, has been volunteering to assist the security guards at the school entrance. She notes:

Ms Ngoane: *There is a whole lot that is happening here in the school.*

Ms Ngoane continued to recount an incident that happened between a learner and a staff member. Her account is particularly revealing as it highlights everyday 'minor' violent eruptions that may not make news or be known to the community, but make up conditions, the social milieu where life happens for the young people. She recounts an incident where a learner wanted to fight with one of the female security guards. She narrates:

Ms Ngoane: *Because there was a child who wanted to fight with this lady who is a guard here, and he even carried stones to beat her... So, you see, there is a whole lot that is happening here at school… so that we don't go back in the struggle because if we can do so, it will not be good."*

Ms Ngoane's experience as a volunteer in the school has given her a unique perspective on these issues, which may not be immediately apparent to outsiders or even to the school community, as they may have grown accustomed to these types of interactions or occurrences. Moreover, her narrative affirms Ms Cele's assertion, which suggests that these experiences may be taken for granted and seen as the norm. Furthermore, in talking about the current violence in the school, Ms Ngoane seems to allude to the struggles of the country's violent past and warns against a repetition of this. Much has been documented about the violence of the education system of the apartheid government on Black children, teachers and parents (Tomlin, 2016). Ms Ngoane advocates for collaboration between parents and teachers to bring these issues to the forefront and work toward creating a safer and more supportive learning environment.

5.2.2 School rituals: Stealing as "taking bags"

During the focus group discussion with the teachers, Ms Phutheho, describing what led to the incident states "*I think this boy is in grade 11, but I heard that he was suspected of taking a teacher's bag or something like that, he is a naughty boy*" Ms Phutheho agrees with Nolo's account above suggest that the violent incident was sparked by the theft of a bag(s). The act of stealing bags seems to be something that often happens, as seen in this focus group discussion with the learners:

Ayanda: *They are taking our bags, and they want us to use Kings bags.*
Researcher: *So, they want you to use these other bags.*
Nolo: *Yeah, Kings. It is safe.*
Researcher: *Like, how long has thing [been] happening?*
Nolo: *Yes, from like grade 8 when we arrived.*
Samkelo: *It is like a school ritual.*
Researcher: *Okay, so it's like a tradition.*
Nolo: *Yeah, but it's like it's not only here, they [are also] doing it in the other schools.*
Researcher: *Taking bags?*
Ayanda: *Yes, they [the school] don't care about it; according to them, it is our fault.*
Nolo: *They will say, "Why are [you] using an expensive bag, why don't you look after it?".*
Samkelo: *Like, they actually know, like, what is actually happening with our bags, so instead of them creating a safe space. They just chose to criticise you, the one with the bag. Like, why did you come with a certain bag? Like, what do you expect me to come with? Like, it's a bag. I came to school like, why should you bring this bag?*

"School ritual" is an intriguing way to phrase or frame the theft of bags. Rituals are usually acts or behaviours performed regularly and in a particular way, contributing to social cohesion. Rituals may include rites of passage, rituals which mark personal transitions, rituals to communicate with ancestors, etc. (Olupona, 2014). McLaren (1986) defines ritual as a symbolic action, playing an important role in the transmission and reinforcement of societal ideologies and power structures. However, McLaren (1993) also notes that rituals are not only a reflection of society but are active in shaping and creating these structures. Engaged in this way, the phrase "school ritual" speaks of a symbolic action taken by a group of learners, who appear to be both reflecting and actively constructing social reality.

As Nolo has pointed out, the "school ritual" of bag stealing is not exclusive to this particular school, and it is also a longstanding issue. Ms Nkululeko, a teacher at the school, recalls her own high school experience as a student at the school and mentions that she experienced this in her childhood as well:

Ms Nkululeko: *So that was, that would be the issue. They would call their friends, just like they do now. They call their friends to come to the school, take your bags because you have nice bags.*

Framing the "school ritual" of stealing bags as an enactment allows us to question, scrutinise and interrogate this everyday occurrence or culture at the school. This enactment, seen as important communication or information, helps in thinking about and understanding something about the human experience (Tomlinson, 2020). In this way, seeing the act as symbolic or as a representation of a deeper and broader social issue, especially since it has been recurring over time, in different places, allows for a deeper analysis. In addition, Henry (2009) suggests that it is important to understand that the different manifestations of violence are interrelated and permeate society, and so it is no surprise that similar kinds of enactment will be seen in other

schools and other institutions in society. It is, therefore, important to firstly appreciate that there is a common thread that links various manifestations of violence. Secondly, that in conducting analysis one must "look askance", with a curious sight, a view that seeks to question the accepted ordinary (ka Canham, 2023, p. 7): What is this violent action/enactment telling us? What is its history? Why is it emerging now, in this way?

In addressing these questions, Phillips (1988, p. 17), drawing on Winnicott's (1967) insights into delinquency and antisocial tendency, argues that when one steals, the act may not be about the thing or object that is stolen. Instead, they are communicating that they are stealing "in symbolic form only what once belonged to them by right" and has been taken away from them. Seen in this way, together with the interesting use of the word 'take' instead of 'steal' by both the teachers and the learners "… take your bags…" from Ms Nkululeko and Ms Phutheho and "they are taking our bags" from Ayanda, and Nolo's recount "*... the boys were taking our bags from the class, stealing them actually, because they were saying they have to take the bags*…". Nolo, similar to Ms Nkululeko, Ms Phutheho, and Ayanda, uses the word "take" and then corrects her statement and clarifies by saying "*stealing them [bags] actually*". Perhaps the use of the word 'take' allows the participants to create a neutral perspective, which creates a distancing or detachment from what might be viewed as an aggressive violation, which often evokes feelings of victimhood. Moreover, apart from the neutralising effect, perhaps this kind of framing allows for space to look askance, to explore and engage with the symbolic meaning of the act.

The 'ritual' of taking bags may serve as a poignant reminder of feelings of loss and exclusion. This community's socio-economic losses include the violent dispossession and displacement experienced by the original residents of this township, as well as the ongoing economic exclusion that persists in democratic South Africa, highlighted by persistently high unemployment rates. This sentiment is encapsulated in Ayanda's remark: "*They are taking our bags, and they want us to use Kings bags*." Ayanda elaborates that a 'Kings bag' is a cheaper brand, representing a safer but less desirable option. This ritualistic demand to use a Kings bag is reflective of the constraints imposed by apartheid laws and neoliberal policies that continue to limit individuals' access to a fulfilling life. Such a ritual serves as a reminder and as an act of resistance that allows for the losses and ruptures of the past and present to be carefully looked at, to be beheld. In this way, the school ritual of taking bags symbolically expresses a struggle against these socio-economic injustices and a desire for recognition and dignity.

5.2.3 Sanctioned violence: Corporal punishment

In their retelling, Ms Phutheho and Nolo highlight the issue of corporal punishment and its continued use despite it being outlawed in South Africa since the early 1990s. Although not directly stated, it was clear to the researcher that Ms Phutheho used the term discipline to refer to corporal punishment when she said, "*…this boy is in grade 11… he is a naughty boy and so one of the teachers who is in the disciplinary committee called him to the office and he disciplined him."* This was verified by Nolo, who recalled that *"…uSir tried to pull this boy, but this boy was trying to resist and fight. So, the teacher slapped him…*". Stats SA (2021) and numerous research studies confirm the persistent use of corporal punishment in schools despite the laws against it (Sibanda, 2024; Juan et al., 2018; Sikhakhane et al., 2018).

Additionally, Ms Phutheho's account brings to the foreground the experience(s) related to issues of discipline and corporal punishment from teachers' perspectives. It highlights challenges around issues of discipline that schools and teachers face. This challenge was elaborated on by Ms Phutheho:

Ms Phutheho*:* *Discipline. Discipline is a problem because we cannot beat anybody. Corporal punishment is not allowed. With the numbers that we have, it is difficult sometimes to discipline people, learners in your class. So, once they start getting disruptive, it's either they have to go outside, which they're not allowed to. You cannot leave, as well. You cannot. When you can ask them to raise their hands, sometimes they don't want to, like this. Sometimes you find that you want to discipline a person, and they can disrespect you in the class. And now everybody thinks that now Ma'am is a joke; she cannot even discipline us.*

And echoed by Ms Makhanya and Ms Nkululeko

Ms Makhanya*:* *And also, not having options to discipline them because they took away corporal punishment, and they don't give us other alternatives, maybe say try this one. Because when you say, "Okay, kneel on the floor here". No, you are humiliating the child. "Take the child out". No, it's dangerous outside. What if the child goes to another class? You know, all those things that you are denying the child education, but what about all those other kids in the classroom that this child is disrupting?*

Ms Nkululeko*:* *But what do you do? Because even the parents, they are not as involved as they should be. Because if we try to, maybe we say, we are punishing them, maybe because the discipline now, it speaks to those issues of performance, because we are suffering, and even the performance is going to suffer, and no one is supporting us when it comes to that discipline.*

Ms Phutheho's response speaks of the frustration teachers seem to experience in the classroom. This response highlights a number of issues, namely the belief that corporal punishment leads to discipline and that without corporal punishment, the classroom becomes unmanageable.

Secondly, the teacher notes the different ways in which they have been disempowered in terms of fostering discipline. She goes on to list all the different discipline measures they are not allowed to utilise for various reasons. Lastly, she highlights the challenges that are neglected or unaccounted for by the banning of corporal punishment, such as overcrowded classrooms, which add to the challenges of discipline. Similarly, Ms Makhanya adds to the list of all the different measures of discipline that have been taken away from them and the impact this has had on teaching and learning. In agreement with the teachers' sentiments, a parent, Mr Moloi, notes, "… *But today, our kids are so ill-disciplined because [there are] no measures of discipline in our schools, you know*…". Mr Moloi seems to make very clear the connection between the lack of corporal punishment measures to the ill-discipline among learners.

These accounts highlight and question the concept of discipline, particularly reflecting teachers' and parents' perspectives on the evolving philosophy surrounding corporal punishment and discipline. The above accounts seem to suggest that the abolition of corporal punishment, along with other disciplinary measures previously available to teachers, has left educators feeling powerless in managing student behaviour, which impacts teaching and learning. This sense of inadequacy, feelings of helplessness and frustration echo findings from several related studies across the country (Mayisela, 2021; Mestry & Khumalo, 2012).

However, some parents and teachers seem to have ambivalent feelings and thoughts about corporal punishment, its value and effectiveness in instilling discipline. This sense of ambivalence is articulated by these two parents:

Ms Thipa:	*As for us, they used to oppress us.*
Researcher:	*How? In what way?*
Ms Thipa:	*They used to punish us, and they used to beat us. I mean, they used to slap us, you know, at home, they used to discipline us.*
Mr Moloi:	*It was not nice. They used to beat us with a cane, with a pipe, [an] electric pipe, they used to beat us with some sticks from this tree of which was not right. Sometimes you could have marks. That one was abuse. We were abused. We were abused, but we were abused, and we were not even aware. We were abused in the name of discipline. Well, it was punishment. So, unfortunately right now there is no, there's no discipline. There's no punishment in schools. That's why we are having problems, drug problems, in our schools. We have a problem of ill-disciplined kids.*

Both parents seem to lament the kind of physical beating they were subjected to as children, and they frame this as abuse and oppression. In fact, Mr Moloi repeats "*we were abused*" three times and adds "… *in the name of discipline. Well, it was punishment*…", emphasising the violent maltreatment they were subjected to. However, he swiftly transitions from recounting

his traumatic experience with corporal punishment to commenting on the present situation, where such practices have been banned in schools. His comment, "*Well, it was punishment. So, unfortunately, right now there is no, there's no discipline. There's no punishment in schools…*" seems to exhibit cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Mr Moloi, along with other parents and teachers who exhibited similar ambivalence, seem to have internalised, on the one hand, the belief that corporal punishment is the only effective disciplinary method, and on the other hand, they recognise the harm and damage caused by such practices. In his recounting, the school teacher Mr Mahlangu comments on the destructive nature of the practice:

Mr Mahlangu: *There would be a squad of teachers who would be punishing all those who didn't get, who get less than 80%, a squad of teachers at the end of the term. Every month-end. So, it was like that, so some of our fellow learners, they drop out, drop out, because it was difficult for them, because there was no expanded opportunity, psychological, or whatever…*

This was echoed by another parent, Ms Zondo, who recalled:

Ms Zondo: *There were children who left school. I still remember that I was doing form 3. Yeah, I was doing form 3 yeah, there was a guy who left school.*
Researcher: *Because of…*
Ms Zondo: *Because of corporal punishment. And unfortunately, teachers, some teachers were cruel. They could beat you with a slap, coming from home angry about this, and they would take out their anger on you…*

Both the teachers and parents are keenly aware of the negative and destructive impact of corporal punishment, yet they rationalise its use as necessary for fostering and maintaining discipline. This is seen in Mr Mahlangu's comments, when he was reflecting on his experience of teaching in rural KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, where corporal punishment is utilised and its use is supported by parents. "*So, in the rural areas, they were so obedient. I taught in KZN [KwaZulu-Natal], and at home. I can go with the matric, like the group we have there, to maybe Durban, they're listening to you because we punish learners there. Even the parents will come to school and emphasise on us beating them.*" This normalisation and naturalisation of corporal punishment as both a disciplinary method and a societal value has been entrenched in social life for many years. Consequently, the abuse experienced and described by both parents and teachers is viewed not only as a normal aspect of life but also as a crucial practice that leads to perceived positive outcomes. This shared rationalisation has been internalised and passed down through generations, as expressed by a parent, Ms Thipe, in her comment:

Ms Thipe: *There was a time when I beat my child, and when she gets to the clinic, they wrote a letter and say she must get me arrested. But what I was doing, I was trying to discipline her with love… as for my own children, I discipline them…*

> *because my father as well used to beat me. And I was the only daughter amongst sons, but he used to beat me*.

In a way, both parents and teachers communicate the challenge of being at the hinge of change, having witnessed the tragic impacts of corporal punishment while also carrying the historical narratives that once supported its use (Hoffman, 2004). They embody a tension between their complex personal past experiences of abusive corporal punishment and the evolving insights of the present time. This creates a complex space for both teachers and parents, who often seem to feel debilitated by this dual influence, navigating between outdated values and the need for more just approaches. Moreover, while corporal punishment is banned inside schools, the context is pervasively violent, and both adults and children are subject to extreme forms of physical violence or threats of it.

hooks (2001, p. 87) notes, "the underlying values of a culture and its ethics shape and inform the way we speak and act." In the same way, the concept of discipline as it emerged in the narratives is reflective of the underlying values of the culture in South Africa. This is a culture of domination that relies heavily on practices that perpetuate fear and ensure obedience (Foucault, 1977; hooks, 2001). While the ideology surrounding discipline has evolved over time, particularly within the educational system, reflecting some shifts in societal values, it still holds a significant place in South African schools. Moreover, though the practice of corporal punishment was and still is widespread across communities, cutting across race, class and religious affiliation, it took on a distinct form in Black township schools. This form echoes the country's history of violent policing and control, often more aggressive and intolerant of Black people and Black children. The narratives above and those in the following chapters reflect this intolerance and illustrate how discipline is employed as a punishment for behaviours considered unacceptable, ranging from the normal pushing of boundaries to anticipated initial failures or setbacks that accompany the learning and mastery process of new material. These practices reveal the underlying values and ethics that shape the township communities and schools. Moreover, these disciplinary practices mirror the historical and current violent policing of Black bodies, as often seen during service delivery protests as well as during the many student uprising protests in higher education institutions across the country. The dehumanisation of Black people under apartheid, economic deprivation, and the violent policing of Black communities has created a cycle of violence that persists even after the end of colonialism and apartheid.

This notion of sanctioned violence as discipline aimed at encouraging positive behaviour has historical roots dating back to pre-colonial times and extending through the (post)apartheid era (Mayisela, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). During these periods, punishment was employed to maintain order, instil obedience, and exert control, reinforcing hierarchical power dynamics while normalising violence as a means of managing behaviour and resolving conflicts (Foucault, 1977). Mayisela (2020, p. 10) argues that this history highlights "an intergenerationally racially based normalisation of violence towards black people". This practice of corporal punishment has and continues, as reflected in the narratives from both parents and teachers, to strip people of their dignity, power, and agency, reinforcing the cycle of subjectification that continues to impact communities today (Mbembe, 2001), as reflected in the recounting of this violent enactment incident. In addition, this practice tends to lead to the internalisation of aggressive responses toward others, which reinforces and repeats the cycle of violence.

The permitted violence cloaked as corporal punishment was clearly experienced as abuse, as portrayed in the narrative, and potentially as traumatising. This form of trauma often remains unseen, invisible, and unacknowledged (Holmes, 2016). The physical and psychological impact of corporal punishment is well documented (Hunter and Morrel, 2020; Mahlangu et al., 2021; Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). The responses from the focus groups with parents and teachers have shown that, at an individual psychological level, there is a disconnect, with one's own recollected experience and a knowingness that comes from the experience, which seems to happen when maltreatment, abuse and violations are sanctioned or permitted and seen as an important way of life. This disconnect, which can also be understood as trauma, can lead to a mistrust first of one's own sensations, thoughts, and ideas, leading to a mistrust of one's own knowledge and wisdom. Or as Manganyi (2019, p. 38) clearly articulated, "In Black communities… through the artificial and unnatural predominance of the sociological schema, the individual schema has become traumatised and ceases to be a point of view, of telling the world who one is."

In conclusion, the narratives in this chapter reflect the current lived experiences of young people, whilst they are also intertwined with the history of the township. Moreover, the different stories and varied perspectives analysed in this chapter were shaped by each participant's positionality, unique lived experiences, and situated knowledge, and they offered a nuanced understanding of the school environment from different vantage points, as well as a glimpse of the school's hidden social dynamics. These varied perspectives offered rich

contextual information that has helped to situate and make sense of the violent enactment, whilst also allowing for deep (in)sights into the participants' personal everyday experiences. As stated by Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2), narratives express the "fundamental structure of human experience". By foregrounding these narratives, the analysis has brought into sharp focus the normalised, everyday forms of violence embedded in everyday school life.

The impact of the country's violent history has been catastrophic, with its losses still being felt and tallied to this day. This loss is far-reaching and permeates every aspect of individuals' lives, affecting both the social and psychological worlds. Indeed, the colonial logic has survived; coloniality is seen through the normalisation of violence and the continuation of the unhygienic, hellish conditions that persist and continue to produce and legitimise the hellish, violent war-like conditions for the young people. As Fanon's work (1959) shows, the psychological and the socio-political realms are intertwined, underscoring the profound and lasting effects of this violent past on individuals and communities. This chapter has highlighted the context within which the narratives from the following chapters emerge and has offered psycho-socio-historical background information that enhances and deepens the analysis of the following chapters (Mishler, 1986).

Chapter 6: Place and Identity

> Narratives are constructions of those who develop them, often highlighting that which is critical to people, often enabling them to assert their own volition. (Garraway, 2021, p. 108)

This chapter is structured around two central themes: *identity and place*, and *future self*. The first theme, *identity and place*, highlights the dynamic interplay between place and identity. It explores how the young participants navigate and interact with their environment and the ways in which this interaction impacts their identity. The second theme, *future self*, focuses on how young people envision their futures. This theme explores their hopes, aspirations, and fears or uncertainties about what lies ahead, particularly in terms of their career, education, and personal lives. The narratives gathered from the young people offer rich insights into how their current sense of self influences their projections of the future, and how these projections are shaped by both societal influences and intergenerational dialogues.

The data analysed in this chapter primarily come from narratives shared by youth participants, supplemented by insights from focus groups with parents and teachers. By incorporating these intergenerational perspectives, the analysis seeks to establish a dialogue between the voices of young people and those of the adults who influence their lives. This approach is especially relevant where patterns of identity formation appear to repeat or evolve across generations, highlighting the interconnection between individual identity development and societal expectations.

6.1 Place and identity

6.1.1 Reproduction of sites of struggle: Cast-away, damned spaces, and selves

Mpendulo's narrative of her journey to school echoes the historical violence and injustices suffered by the community. In addition, while her narrative is mainly about her experience of walking to school, it is also about the place and the township space.



Figure 1
Route to School by Mpendulo

Mpendulo: *Okay, so first off…Like I took the pictures of the environment you walk in when you come to school, you know. So, sometimes… like when you wake up and then you think of "Yoh! Bazong'bamba inkunzi la ngidlula khona [they are going to mug me, on the route I will be using]" you know, because it's not safe and then umzali [parent]…not all parents can afford transport money, so we have to wake up in the morning and then walk. Because sometimes we attend morning classes that start at seven a.m. It's early, so we have to leave home around six. It's dangerous, especially in winter, since it's darker during 06:00. Walking in a place like this, during 06:00 a.m. in the morning… It's like passage nyana [like] so… so, it's a shortcut, there's no other way, you know. As you walk, le wena [and you] you feel like, "Yoh! Hotswanetsi ke phakise [I must walk fast]" and then you hurry up. Even though you are early, you are scared of people abazok'bamba inkunzi [who will mug you]. Ufike esikolweni [you get to school], you're already tired because you were running, and then you can't even focus.*

Mpendulo's narrative, whilst deeply personal, in many ways, tells the story of many South African youth. While telling her own story, she also clearly tells a South African story of structural violence, wilful neglect, and a historical crisis of lack of service delivery by municipalities in township communities. Her pictures (Figures 1a & b) capture a common sight in township areas of empty spaces, barren land that turns into dumping sites that often become known as hotspots for crime. Secondly, her narrative hints at the lived impact of the lack of gainful employment and unemployment on families and the limits this places on parents in terms of what they can and cannot do for their children. Mpendulo tells a story of the continued normalisations of these abnormalities (wa Thiong'o, 2019). In addition, she tells a story of the oppressive system in South Africa that has seen townships remain "Blacks only" spaces that seem to echo the pain of the first residents of Juliwe, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Her account of waking up in the early hours of the morning and risking her life to reach school can be compared to the Juliwe residents who were forced to protect the railway line during the Anglo-

Boer War. These two examples are not obviously similar; however, both situations reflect how systems of power use coercion to justify potentially dangerous actions as acts of service to society or for the greater good, whether for personal benefit or the benefit of others too. In a similar way, schooling is framed as one of the few paths out of poverty and toward better opportunities. In South Africa, young people are compelled by the law of the country to attend school, despite various life-threatening risks that many young people around the country face and have to navigate (Singh, 2024).

During a discussion in the learner focus group, Khotso, Taylor, and Nolo shared similar sentiments with Mpendulo. They talked about the danger they faced as they journeyed to and from school:

Taylor:	*Yes, it was a hectic time.*
Researcher:	*So, how were you coming to school?*
Khotso*:*	*We were scared most of the [time]. Sometimes we would nyonyoba [stealthily make our way] to school.*
Taylor:	*Sometimes we would feel that we can skip school.*
Nolo:	*There was this other time from our area, there is this side of the hostel, they [people] would be like "If you are wearing school uniform, you rather go back, and you must never come this side." And I am like, "yoh!" and I went back and some continued on that route and I was like, "You guys are stupid" and I went back the other way. I took the longest way ever to go to school.*
Taylor:	*We also ended up bringing weapons to school*
Researcher:	*For protection?*
Taylor:	*People were always armed with something just in case you come across a situation that would need you to protect yourself.*
Samkelo:	*Even pepper sprays. Yeah, we were finding ways to protect ourselves, like if I encounter this, then I have a plan.*

Just like Mpendulo, the young people talk about the dangerous and scary journey to school that is filled with threats of violent attacks on them. They share how they often must, craftily at times, devise ways of ensuring their safety from walking at a fast pace, taking a different, often longer route to school, to finding ways of being unnoticed, and carrying weapons as a way of protecting themselves against fatal attacks. During the focus group discussion, Zinhle shared how her mother arranged that her brother should fetch her from school because of her brother's experience with navigating the hostel, which is known as one of the hotspots. She adds, "*My brother has always been escaping from the hostel. They are aware of him… we know, and he knows that one mistake, he will be stabbed. Luckily, he is a fast runner…*" The young people are keenly aware of the threat to their lives, and their journey to and from school is filled with fear and anxiety. The young people highlight their daily task of navigating what often feels like a life and death situation, or, differently put, a life of dying. The young people's daily task of

navigating death corresponds starkly with Fanon's (1965, p. 128) description that the colonised person or the damned "perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness, but as a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death" that they luckily escape.

However, there are many young people who are not able to escape death, as seen in various news reports during the year of 2024 raging from the death of 11 young school children dying from food poisoning within one month in 2024, the fatal stabbing of a grade 11 learner, Lerato Nchabeng outside his school in Protea North Soweto, allegedly for his cap, and the 2023 rape and murder of a matriculant learner who was on her way home after a study session (News24, 2023; Soweto Urban, 2024; Timeslive, 2024). Writing during the apartheid era, Manganyi (1973, p. 64) poignantly points out, "the fact of the matter is that we [Black people] live suicide and are too involved in living to contemplate it". These '(in)visible' living-death everyday experiences unfold in unexpected spaces like schools, which are typically imagined to be spaces of opportunity for a better life and future. Yet it is within these very spaces that such futures are threatened. This threat of violence or death is not only encountered in the moments when they embark on their journey to school, but can also be understood as always present and acting on them. In other words, it is the high cost of choosing to live, to imagine differently and dare to dream of a different future.

Township communities and township schools, as products of the South African society, reflect how the persistent complex patterns of the racist past manifest themselves in the present day. In addition, the above narratives clearly articulate and capture what these ruptures and continuities of the past look like in young people's everyday experiences and the ways in which these show up and impact them while journeying to school and on their actual schooling and classroom experience. The narratives, although deeply painful and shocking, are an account of their everyday schooling experience. In addition, they illustrate the ways in which the injustices and systemic inequalities have been so cemented in township schooling communities that they are accepted, despite the profound impact they have on the well-being of young people. This normalised abnormality is a testament to how apartheid's legacy continues to shape people's lives. It also underscores the reproduction of spaces where violence and fear persist. Thirty years after the end of apartheid, these spaces remain sites of struggle and resistance, where the scars of the past continue to influence the present and shape the future.

The wilful neglect of township schools is evident in the poor school infrastructure, characterised by large impersonal, mechanical rows of classrooms with bare walls, windows located high up so that learners do not have an outside view, a lack of sports or extramural activity facilities, poor toilet plumbing, and narrow, dark, dingy corridors. These conditions perpetuate feelings of shame and further illustrate the ways in which the dignity of learners and teachers is compromised, as is illustrated in Isaac's narrative below.



Figure 2
Play Area by Isaac

Isaac: *The space in the middle of the school is also used to play sports, mostly, but also, the girls would play some other games, like skipping. For sports, it's quite bad because it's an open space, everybody is there, and everybody would play soccer before the school day [ended]. Somebody would get hit by a ball straight in the face. It is funny, but at the same time hurtful because somebody cries and gets hurt in the face. Yeah, everybody is pretty sensitive about their faces*.

The narrative of a bare space in the middle of the school that is used arbitrarily for play is simultaneously humiliating and leaves them feeling exposed and shamed. Levinas's (1978) concept of the face allows for a deeper reflection on the experience shared by Isaac. For Levinas (1978), the face represents an ethical encounter, in that it (the face) is more than just a physical presence; rather, it is what connects us to the other, and it represents the vulnerability and needs of the other (Levinas, 1978). It is this encounter that adds an ethical dimension or an ethical demand to one's relations and responsibilities to others. In this story, as narrated by Isaac, being 'hit in the face' indicates unmet needs and a painful, humiliating assault that comes with this failure. In addition, this incident highlights a moral failure by the institution tasked with the ethical responsibility for learners' well-being. Furthermore, this story could highlight a parallel process where the face of the learner could represent the school or even the community. Seen in this way, the school community can be seen as a symbolic representation and embodiment of both the collective suffering of years of neglect and humiliation and a collective humanity that calls for recognition and ethical responsibility. Levinas (1978) argues that this face of the

learner, of the collective, compels a response from those who witness their suffering. Isaac further elaborates:

Isaac: *What's required is a space whereby people would just stand, take pictures if necessary and just have [a] good time, rather than to stand there uncomfortably. You'd stand there and enjoy your time, then, unexpectedly, a ball hits you in the face, and you end up crying; then everybody else would laugh at you.*

Even as the learners try to recreate and reimagine the space, they are met with shame and humiliation and are 'hit in the face' by the reality of the misrecognition of their humanity or being rendered invisible. Moreover, the hit from the ball symbolises not just a lack of response but violent contempt toward the needs and vulnerability as represented by the face. This violent contempt, which is felt and experienced as humiliating, reflects a denial and a refusal of the learners' humanity and the ethical demand that would arise from the recognition. Furthermore, Isaac shares how the space has the potential to meet the learners' needs, to be useful, affirming, and meaningful for the learners, should it have been designed or utilised with the learners' face-their humanity in mind. In addition,

Researcher: *So, there's no soccer field? There's no netball field?*
Isaac: *They [soccer and netball fields] are there, but we've been caged in the school, so we can't access them.*

Isaac painfully describes what comes across as an intentional, punitive withholding of recreational spaces, which is reminiscent of the punitive and limiting apartheid restrictions. His narrative points to the interplay between the poor school infrastructure and the impact on social relations and psychological well-being. The enduring legacy of the country's racist past continues to manifest in township schools. This is evident in the poor infrastructure, lack of sports or extracurricular activity facilities, and more subtle relational patterns. These factors significantly shape young Black people's understanding of their identities and relationships within the school environment. As noted by Sundström (2003) and Stud (2014), both place and space are vital contributors to the development of self-concept. Isaac's account poignantly illustrates the intentional, punitive denial of recreational spaces, mirroring the restrictive, dehumanising spatial policies of apartheid. His narrative reveals the intricate relationship between inadequate school infrastructure and its broader effects on identity exploration and expression, social interactions and psychological well-being (Sundström, 2003).

Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) and Foster's (2005) theories of space, Isaac's experience underscores that the school environment is not neutral; rather, it is a socially constructed space that shapes and regulates action. His account provides an affective lens, suggesting that the

absurd and disruptive experiences he describes are not isolated incidents, but part of the ongoing, daily lived experience of the school, continuously influencing the identities of those involved. Isaac highlights the emotional toll of being in a "cast-away" space, where the lack of resources and pervasive neglect create conditions that are both humiliating and isolating. This barren environment, devoid of both material and emotional support, exposes learners to potential physical injury and psychological harm. By depicting the school as a space marked by deprivation and abandonment, Isaac reveals the relational patterns that mirror the dehumanising logic of apartheid, where Black youth are positioned as inherently unruly, inferior, and dangerous, requiring control and restriction. In this way, his narrative aligns with Lefebvre's (1991) concept that space is a product of power relations. Through this spatial deprivation, the school system perpetuates an ongoing cycle of marginalisation and emotional harm. The absence of meaningful, safe spaces within the school mirrors broader societal patterns of violence and exclusion, reinforcing oppressive structures both in education and society at large.

In highlighting the psycho-socio-political influences in architectural practice, Manganyi (1981) notes that spaces or architectural practice are very often a reflection of a society's perception, belief, and attitude toward people. In other words, buildings are not inanimate objects; they do something, they have an impact. As Bennette (2010) argues, the world cannot be neatly separated into life and inanimate matter. This perspective suggests that objects, including architectural structures, are not mere backdrops to human life but are dynamic entities. They are both shaped by and, in turn, shape the sociopolitical and psychological landscapes in which they exist. As evidenced in this analysis, the design, layout, and intended use of buildings reflect societal values while simultaneously influencing and shaping the psycho-socio-cultural and political realities of those who inhabit these spaces. Moreover, the narratives shared above offer valuable insights into the complex relationship between the kinds of experiences and identities that school spaces facilitate or restrict. This underscores the importance of considering the material conditions and the materiality of spaces and places, and the profound impact they have on individuals.

Zenande's story further expands on Isaac's narrative of how learners are 'caged' in her more explicit narrative of being shut out of certain parts of the school. She describes how she is pushed out and unwanted. More than being restricted or kept out, her experience reflects a more aggressive alienation from the space by those in authority. This alienation goes beyond

limiting learners from recreational spaces but moves to depriving them of administrative and learning support.

Zenande: *The offices. I don't like that space. Every time mengingena lapha, kuna lo ma'am lo ohlezi angitshika [I go there, there is this mama that always shouts at me], athi "Yabona lapha kubhaliwe [she says, Look there, it is written], 'NO KIDS ALLOWED'! Ufunani ngapha? [What do you want here?]". So, every time I go there, I would just turn around and knock on the teacher's window to talk to her because they would shout at me if I go in. So, ukuya e offisini kunokuba yi mission nje [going to the office becomes a mission].*

Zenande describes an inaccessible office space, which serves as a barrier or block to accessing teacher support. The big sign 'NO KIDS ALLOWED!' is a clear and obvious message that also gets reinforced by a staff member in the office block. Zenande also tells of her determination and insistence on accessing the teacher for support. Although very exhausted and disheartened by the rigid rules and harsh treatment from the office staff member, Zenande seems determined to reach the teacher, and in doing so, she is set up to break the rules and reinforce the narrative of rebellious and unruly behaviour.

Isaac's and Zenande's reflections highlight the contemporary dehumanising ideas or practices that leave young people feeling "caged" away from facilities that would offer them multiple opportunities of interacting with each other and, in turn, multiple ways of self-exploration and expression in healthy and safe ways. Isaac's use of the word "caged" is emotive and powerfully telling of a logic that sees young people as unruly, dangerous and destructive. It highlights the many neglected (in)visible shackles and cages that continue to restrict and constrain Black youth in township high schools. This, together with the experience of risking it all to get to school as told by Mpendulo, Taylor, Khotso, Nolo, and Zinhle, highlights how the young people constantly navigate being made to feel unseen, invisible, and less human and continuously "dance with death" (ka Canham, 2023, p. 1298).

The spatial dimensions of young people's lives impact on their feelings of belonging, ownership, and alienation. Ratele (2019, p. 176) notes that township education leaves individuals "estranged from the deepest yearnings of the self, an education that internally divides identity, leading to the constant, disorienting sensation of an individual living as if she were looking at herself from the outside". Mpendulo's narrative illustrates her awareness of the way those in power have predetermined what is possible for her, despite her aspirations and her efforts for academic achievement. On the one hand, she has a desire to live a meaningful life and sees education as potentially providing these meaningful possibilities, but on the other

hand, she is confronted by the structural limitations of the kind of education available to her. Similarly, Isaac and Zenande's stories show this awareness that gives rise to both hope and resignation in the same way that their experiences demonstrate both determination and shame. Their narratives illustrate their capacity to look at themselves from the outside, even as they lament very personal experiences of the way in which the space and those in power in the space obstruct their development and sense of self.

The experiences of Mpendulo, Isaac, and Zenande reflect Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness in a contemporary South African context, where the township schooling system plays a crucial role in shaping their sense of self. Ratele's (2019, p. 176) description of township education as leading to individuals feeling "estranged from the deepest yearnings of the self" speaks directly to Du Bois's (1903) idea of the internal division of identity. The young people are aware of the structural limitations imposed upon them, particularly through the education system, which is not designed to nurture their full potential. At the same time, they aspire for personal and academic achievement, as will be seen in the following chapters. It is fair to assume that their desire for a meaningful life contrast with the limitations imposed by their environment and the socio-political structures around them. Ratele's (2019, p. 176) assertion "… an education… leading to constant, disorienting sensation of an individual living as if she were looking at herself from the outside" captures Du Bois's (1903) idea of being forced to see oneself through the eyes of an oppressive society, and the tension that this creates between self-perception and the gaze of the other. The following chapter will show how young people seem to experience both hope and disheartenment, determination and shame, dual emotions that result from this internal division, where they recognise their aspirations while simultaneously acknowledging the systemic barriers that limit their opportunities.

The "second sight" that allows these young people to find hope and meaning despite the obstacles suggests that while double consciousness creates a fractured identity, it also provides a form of heightened awareness, the ability to critically engage with one's circumstances and see beyond immediate limitations, which can lead to resilience and the pursuit of personal agency. This mirrors Du Bois's (1903) view that although double consciousness can be painful and alienating, it also offers an opportunity for greater insight into both one's own self and the structures of power that shape one's existence.

Thus, the young people seem to be navigating and negotiating the complexity of living in a world that constantly undermines their potential and their humanity, while they simultaneously

express a desire for identity and agency. Furthermore, the young people's lived experience, as argued by ka Canham (2023), involves them constantly navigating life with a consciousness of death, which in turn informs a deeper appreciation of their aspiration, resilience and need for care amidst violence and violent structures.

Khotso took pictures of his primary school only, and his schooling narratives were about his experiences in primary school. It had been over 3 years since he graduated from primary school. However, there was a strong sense that his experiences in primary school were very significant and meaningful for him as compared to his experience in High school. His pictures, as seen in Figures 3a and b, reflect the school's premises and beautiful gardens, clean corridors, and what looks like well-maintained building infrastructure.

Khotso reflects:



Figure 3
Primary School Garden by Khotso

Researcher:	*Okay, and what was it like hoba ko[to be here at] St primary school for you?*
Khotso*:*	*Yeah, it was nice, very nice. Yeah, because skolo se se nale [this school has]discipline.*
Researcher:	*Yeah, okay. As compared to, if o sheba [looking at] your experience with St Angeles le ko Forte, is it completely different, even just ka[for] the strictness and discipline?*
Khotso:	*Very different.*
Researcher:	*In what way?*
Khotso:	*You know, as a child, when you see the school principal, you would run off to class. So in my primary school, it was like that. It's the same thing with the teachers. But in high school, when you see a teacher, it's like, okay. Yah.* There*, they attend assembly every day. In other schools, like ko high school, it's only*

on Fridays. Here [pointing to the primary school picture], we had an order when we were leaving assembly. I think it started from grade 7. The grade 7s go back to class first, and we had to walk on the left side.

Researcher: *Oh. Okay.*

Khotso: *So, in high school… everyone goes wherever they want to. Here [pointing to the primary school picture], it was very strict. I had to adjust from the way ne gole kateng [it was]. From grade 8, khana ke bona gore mo ho so le so le so [I saw that here it is like this and that], so I had to adjust. Here, we do things different[ly].*

The stark contrast between Khotso's primary school and high school experiences goes beyond aesthetics, delving into issues of discipline, school expectations of learners, routine, and overall management. He reflects on how his primary school experience was marked by structure, routine, and predictability, while high school has felt more relaxed in terms of discipline, with unclear expectations for learners. As a result, he has had to adjust to this new, less structured environment. It seems that Khotso's primary school experience was deeply meaningful for him, and the transition to high school may have been experienced as a loss. In addition to the differences in discipline and structure, Khotso highlights the lack of connection and peer relationship-building in high school, suggesting that the supportive social environment he experienced in primary school is not as readily available in high school. He reflects:

Khotso: *Yeah, … So, us guys and girls from my class, we'd sit there [pointing behind the classrooms, we would face that way and talk as boys and girls]. It's a shady area, no sun there, yah. In high school, you come in, you go to class and relax.*

Researcher: *There's no sitting outside or chilling together like that, yeah.*

Khotso: *Here? No, there is no. When you arrived, you can't come in and sit in class; they lock the classrooms, so when we arrive, we would put our bags outside the classroom, and it was nice, they did not steal bags like in high school. You leave your bag, and when you come back, you find the books on the table, and your bag is gone.*

Similarly, Thato reflects on the social environment of schooling and the ways in which it allows or disallows identity expression.

Thato: *It is just my experience of me and of my peers in how school is for us when you are not in class, because I feel like break time or after school is one of the best times for us to experience who we truly are outside academics… but this is one of the memories that we can have with each other and get to know each other as peers and who we really are. Because, in class, I think we do not see each other the way we are, the way we truly are, because we keep quiet, the teacher is teaching. It is a lot of things, but…*

For Thato, the classroom setting does not allow for identity exploration and expression. She adds that in the classroom, the learners are expected to sit quietly and listen to what the teacher is teaching. This kind of setup as she sees it, speaks to the banking model of education, which positions teachers as experts who are there to deposit knowledge into quiet, passive learners,

who come in empty, without knowledge, and without identities (Freire, 1970). In this way, the classroom is experienced as a space that alienates one from self, others, as well as knowledge acquisition (wa Thiong'o, 1986). It is outside the classroom that the young people can find true opportunity to relate, know and see each other, and in that find true expression.

Isaac reflects on a powerful humanising experience he had with other young people in school, who are part of the YOTS, a youth organisation operating in the school.

Isaac: *... but some of the people I've met, they've taught me that even though you might say or look like you're barely human, there are some things that you can learn in order to gain humanity. They'd put you [in] a positive state; you don't need to look like a cold person who normally doesn't care about many things. They taught me to care, they taught me how to love and somehow brought more joy in[to] my life. They took me far, in places I've never known. I usually don't go out, so they just say, "Let's go. Don't worry about this. Don't worry about that".*

For both Thato and Isaac, the space for true self-expression and identity exploration is found in social interactions and relationships beyond the classroom walls. This aligns with the narratives shared in Chapter 8, which highlight the profound impact that encounters with others have on shaping one's identity. Through Isaac's involvement with YOTS, he describes a profoundly transformative experience that has allowed him to explore and access different parts of himself. He shares that by interacting with others in the group, he has come to "*gain humanity*", suggesting that his sense of self was realised relationally through his connection and relationship with others, and he was able to truly become who he is. The interactions in the group have provided a space where Isaac can challenge existing limiting perceptions about who he is while also critically examining and questioning old identities that previously constrained him. This process of self-exploration has opened up possibilities for reimagining himself, offering new ways of being and existing in the world. In this way, the experience has become a space of liberation, where Isaac is encouraged to think beyond the confines of old identities and envision a broader and more expanded sense of self.

For the participants, schooling is deeply intertwined with how they perceive and understand themselves in relation to the world around them. They view school not merely as a place for academic learning or preparation for future employment, but as a space for self-development, identity exploration and self-expression, effectively preparing them for life itself. This highlights the idea that individual identity is not isolated, private or even a fixed entity but rather dynamic and is formed in place, in various social spaces and through social interactions (Brown, 2009).

6.2 Future self

6.2.1 Uncertainty

Isaac: *It makes me think a lot about life, especially after high school.*
Researcher: *Life after high school?*
Isaac: *Yeah, because when you get to think about it, "Am I [going to] employed or unemployed?" "Is this gonna happen?" "Is that gonna happen?"*
Researcher: *So, what are some of those worries you have about life after high school?*
Isaac: *Ahh well, uhh – Uhh… finding the right job, if I do get employed.*

Isaac expresses common concerns about life after high school, particularly the anxiety surrounding the uncertainty of the future. While it is typical for learners nearing the end of their high school journey to feel anxious about what lies ahead, the growing concern about youth unemployment in South Africa and globally has intensified this anxiety. Isaac worries about finding employment and whether that job will align with his personal goals and skills. Similarly, Sindi exhibits a similar sense of uncertainty and apprehension regarding her future. Sindi reflects:

Sindi: *Well, I don't know what the future holds for me, but whatever thing etlang tseleng yaka [comes my way], I'll just grab it with my two hands*
Researcher: *But what do you want? What do you wish for?*
Sindi: *To be honest, I want to go study further. I want to go to university, do my teaching course. If not, do my journalism course and just succeed in life. That's what I want to do. I just wish and I just hope hore [that] next year, keye varsity…kelo bala [I go to varsity… and study]; just make my parents proud, and all those around me proud. That's what I want*
Researcher: *What would make that not happen? You say you "wish" and you "hope"*
Sindi: *Akere[Is in it]… that's why I said I don't know what the future holds for me because aretsi [we don't know]… Aketsi,[I don't know], but I do believe gore ketlo kena ko [I will get to] varsity [university]. I do believe ketlo kena [I will get in], but…*

Sindi's hesitation in expressing her dreams initially suggests that her worries about whether her aspirations will be realised overshadow her ability to freely articulate them. When asked again about her future, she responds with "to be honest", indicating that her usual response may not truly reflect her desires and that a significant part of her is unsure whether she will be able to achieve her dream of going to university. Her wish, *"...I just wish and hope hore [that] next year I go to varsity*" underscores the uncertainty she faces about the future. This uncertainty is based on the high numbers of qualifying high school graduates, who, over the years, are not able to enrol at public universities due to a lack of space or a lack of funding.

Khotso: *I'm not really sure because I wanted to be a doctor, but I'll see.*
Researcher: *Ha ore doctor, ore [when you say doctor, do you mean] medical doctor?*
Khotso: *Yes*
Researcher: *Okay. But why are you not sure now?*

Khotso: *Eish…skolo [school]*
Researcher: *Yeah [laughs] What do you mean Khotso? Ke bao, bao gethile top 25 [You were selected as the top 25 at school].*
Khotso: *Skolo se thata yoh [School is hard], mara tswantse re pushe [but we have to pus] Those are the things you want…*

Khotso's response mirrors this hesitation. He begins by stating, "*I am not really sure because I wanted to be a doctor, but I'll see*", expressing this aspiration in the past tense "wanted", suggesting that his ambition to become a medical doctor may not be attainable. He cites the difficulty of school as a major barrier, and despite being among the school's top 25 learners, Khotso expresses a lack of confidence in his ability to succeed. This reflects how the pressures and uncertainties of the future, along with the challenges faced in their educational environments, which include constant experiences of misrecognition, missed opportunities for creating experiences of mastery, are shaping the ways in which Khotso views and discusses his aspirations.

As a result, Isaac, Sindi, and Khotso's responses illustrate how aspirations are intertwined with a person's context, demonstrating that they are deeply socially embedded as opposed to being solely individual goals (Moensted, 2021). These aspirations are not created in isolation or in a vacuum, but there are broader social, cultural, and material conditions that shape young people's aspirations, including the challenges they face within their communities and the limitations of the education system. Furthermore, the participants' aspirations are underscored by uncertainty, which is reflective of their awareness of the precariousness of life. This awareness is informed by the structural limitations they face in their environment, including the pressures of poverty, underfunded education, etc. The potential cruelty of these aspirations becomes apparent when considering that these young people may hold onto hopes and dreams, which now become burdensome, that might be unattainable due to the deeply entrenched issues within their communities and, more so, the education system (Berlant, 2011).

These participants' aspirations offer a lens to understand how the participants navigate and negotiate their futures within the constraints of their environments and reflect the complex interaction between hope, desire, and the realities of social existence.

6.2.2 Anticipated future self: Dreaming and imagining big

Kholo: *It was career day, and you know, eskoleni [school], you don't get to know most of the people. On this day, these people batlele konna [came to me] and they were like, "Can we just take a picture with you, because we all want to be lawyers", and I was like, "Okay! Fine. If we both have the same dreams, the same goal, why not?" Then we spoke about the future, how we're gonna work*

together. We were planning ukuthi [that] uhm…we're gonna go to a certain university then, you know, all those dreams gore[that] "Ke batla go bereka le wena [I want to work with you]" and all that. So, I feel like it was a nice moment to know that… people have the same goal as you… yah.

Kholo and her peers have engaged in collective dreaming about their future selves and shared career aspirations. This collective dreaming seems to play a crucial role in strengthening their identity exploration and purpose-building. By sharing aspirations and envisioning their futures together, they create a sense of connection and mutual support, which may help to clarify their individual goals and desires. This shared dreaming not only fosters a deeper understanding of who they are but also provides the motivation and direction needed to shape their identities and navigate their paths toward meaningful futures. In this way, dreaming together becomes a powerful tool for self-discovery and the development of a purposeful life.

Furthermore, Kholo seems to have a clear and strong sense of who she wants to be and where she wants to go in life. Her vision for the future is captured in the powerful image (Figure 4) of herself dressed up as an advocate during career day at school, symbolising her aspirations and the person she aims to become.



Figure 4
'Future me' Kholo Dressed up as a Lawyer

She reflects:

Kholo: *And then, this was me… in my outfit. Uhm…. this was in the morning when I took the picture, and to be honest, I cried when I looked at myself in the mirror. I was like, "Yah, I wanna get here. I want to", and I feel like this picture… I had it framed and then. I had it framed, and every time I looked at it in my room, I felt that I should do better, to get to where I want to be. So, this picture really represents my future and how I'm going to get there, as a person… Yah, so… this is me in my best clothes – Yes! This is me.*

This vivid image not only reinforces her sense of purpose but also serves as a catalyst, encouraging her to reflect on her present actions. Furthermore, it encourages Kholo to think

intentionally about the steps she must take now to move closer to her desired future, demonstrating the connection between her long-term goals and the concrete actions needed in the present to bring them to fruition. In this way, her aspirations, visions and reimagination about herself and her future become a powerful force that facilitates her transformation. In this way, aspirations, particularly in the context of neglected, damned spaces like a township school, are often seen as crucial for young people for navigating the future and achieving social mobility. However, it is important to remember, as Moensted (2021) states, that aspirations are not merely individual attributes but are deeply embedded in social contexts and are shaped by the structural inequalities and norms that define what is attainable.

6.2.3 Being and becoming

Thato: *With me, I think I am a very complicated person, and I do not think I see myself as one thing. I do not see myself as one thing because I have so many goals I want to achieve in life and all those goals have come from the person I am and how I grew up, my history of growing up... yes I do want to become a business woman because I am a person who believes in feminism and I think it is high time we women take up space in peoples… I want to maybe open a construction company. I think that everyone will be amazed when I mention to them that I own, I want people to be amazed… I want them to ask me, "How did you get [into] the industry?". So, I always want to leave people with a question mark in everything I do because I think a lot of people tend to judge me because of the way they see me, you know, and a most common thing that people see in me is that your mind is more than your age. And that is one thing I like about myself, because you can never predict me. Today I might tell you that I want to become a model, which is something I also want to become, but when you meet me in five years and you see me maybe in the political party, like you say you want to become a model, and I also tell you I am a model and a politician. So, I want to become a lot of things in life.*

But one of my main goals I want to become is actually [to] become an independent individual. So, whether that independency comes from me making my own money from home does not matter because I feel like title ruins everything. The minute I say I want to become a chartered accountant, I have already put a title to that, and now I will focus on that only. But when I say I want to become an independent individual, every opportunity that comes, that makes me independent, I will take it, but the minute I say I want to become a chartered accountant, I only look at factors that affect chartered accounting. So yes.

Thato begins by describing herself as complicated, rejecting the notion of a fixed or permanent identity. She emphasises that her goals are not singular but multifaceted, shaped by her personal history and childhood experiences. Her understanding of herself is fluid, recognising that her aspirations and desires evolve over time. In addition, Thato seems to be aware that her identity is an evolving story that holds both her past and imagined future, which, in turn, positions her in particular ways in society (Adler & McAdams, 2007; Cieslik & Verkuyten, 2006). While she seems to be exploring the different options and possibilities, she does so with the society (other) in mind, as reflected in her statement, "*I always want to leave people with a question*

mark". Thato's exploration of different career paths, including her interest in construction, reflects her desire to step outside conventional boundaries and defy expectations. She seems to value unpredictability, enjoying the freedom to explore diverse avenues and experiment with her identity in spaces that might be considered unconventional or unlikely. Through her refusal to be confined to a single identity or path, Thato demonstrates a commitment to autonomy and self-expression. She resists being boxed into a narrow definition of who she is, opting instead to embrace the complexity and fluidity of her identity (Andrews et al., 2019).

This mindset allows her to continually reimagine herself and her future, making space for personal growth and exploration outside the limitations often imposed by social expectations. Like Thato, Zenande expresses a desire to explore multiple career paths, reflecting a wide range of interests and a sense of fluidity in her vision for the future, suggesting that she sees herself not as bound to one path but as someone capable of embracing various possibilities. She notes:

Zenande:	*My big dream is to get myself a future*.
Researcher:	*What does that future look like?*
Zenande:	*I want to finish school, go to varsity and get a job. I want to build my mom a house. The first thing I want to do with my first salary. I don't want to buy a car, I want to build her a house because that's been her dream for a long time*.
Researcher:	*To have a house?*
Zenande:	*Yah, to have a house. I want to be many things, though.*
Researcher:	*No. Yeah. Tell me all of those things*.
Zenande:	*I want to be an orthodontist. I want to work in the forensic team. I want [to] be an anthropologist. I want to be many things. Yeah, and I wanna be an author, I want to write a story.*

Zenande's choice of words, "*my dream is to get myself a future"*, carries a sense of urgency and agency, implying that without taking active steps, her future remains uncertain. She sees her future as something she must create, emphasising personal responsibility in shaping what lies ahead. Zenande also highlights the interconnectedness of her aspirations with those of her mother, noting that part of her dream is to buy her mother a house, fulfilling a goal passed down through generations. This illustrates how aspirations can be intergenerational, where personal goals are intertwined with family histories and desires as well as the social context.

Through "getting" her future, as Zenande describes it, she envisions a life that would enable her to explore the multiple possibilities in terms of career paths, and most importantly to her, provide her with the means to build her mother a house, to create a home, a place of belonging for herself and for her mother. As seen here, aspirations stretch far beyond career goals but also express being and a longing to belong. This echoes Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 202), who quotes Probyn's (1996) assertion that "individuals are caught within wanting to belong and wanting

to become", which reflects that identity is constructed through this process of being and becoming as well as belonging and longing to belong. Zenande's aspirations, thus, intertwine her personal ambitions with familial ties and the broader sense of identity rooted in belonging and connection.

Mpendulo shifts aspirations beyond career goals to thinking about aspirations for a kind of lifestyle, a way of living. She comments:

Mpendulo:	*Uh, the things I aspire for…SOFT LIFE sis P. Soft life! Soft life is what… is on my mind right now. Gore [that] I have to do something that makes me happy and is also going to bring me that soft life. I mean, you can't have a soft life if you do not have happiness… you are gonna have a depressed soft life, what's the use?*
Researcher:	*[Giggles] It's not so soft*
Mpendulo:	*No, it's not so soft, you know. So, you have to have a soft, happy life. Do something that you enjoy, that's gonna bring you that… you know… You know when you wake up in the morning, sis P, gore, "Yoh! I'm gonna do this" and at the end of the month you get paid, you know… Ah, bheka [look], you get paid for doing something you love, you get paid for being happy basically, you know. So, yah.*

Mpendulo centres happiness as key to living a soft life. The term "soft life" is a phrase popularly used in social media, originating in the Nigerian influencer community and has since spread globally. It refers to a lifestyle that prioritises comfort, relaxation, and personal well-being over traditional markers of success (Travers, 2024). Mpendulo's aspirations for a soft life, understood as composed of her "embodied and emotional longing for belonging and a meaningful future for 'people like me'", speak volumes (Moensted, 2021, p. 10). It represents a desire to live a life that humanises and acknowledges her struggles and her triumphs, for both her and for her community. In this way, Mpendulo seeks a life that resists the taken-for-granted or normalised ideas that are often purported to be the 'keys to success' and yet become the obstacles (Berlant, 2011).

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that identity is fundamentally psychosocial; it is a dynamic interplay between young people's sense of self, their internal world, and the place they inhabit. The school environment is a socially constructed space that informs and regulates the behaviour of both young people and adults. Young people often have to navigate and cope with the emotional and mental strain that comes with living in 'cast-away', under-serviced spaces like townships, which are marred by chronic neglect and a lack of resources. This environment is resource-deprived, often producing feelings of humiliation and isolation. In addition, the alienating experiences described by the young people in this chapter are not

isolated, one-off experiences they are reflective of the day-to-day lived experiences of young Black youth in township schools. By understanding the profound impact of their social context, the young people have managed to navigate the challenges of their space while envisioning and imaging a future where they can express their aspirations freely.

Identity is relational and profoundly shaped by encounters with one's social context. In addition, this dynamic interaction is key to how young people come to understand themselves, act and make sense of their actions. Moreover, this chapter has highlighted how young people navigate and confront the legacies of apartheid that persist within societal systems and institutions, through their aspirations and holding the future in the present. The young people spoke clearly and coherently about their future selves, almost suggesting that this, imagining and envisioning their future self, was one thing they had power and control over and could exercise their agency, fully and freely

Chapter 7: Relationships: As 'Holding Environment' or 'Holding Cells'

This chapter examines the theme of relationality and the impact it has on the learners as it emerged from the individual learner interviews and the teachers focus group. Relationships are understood as an environment that can either enable one to thrive or stifle growth and exploration. Winnicott's (1965) concept of the "Holding environment" will be used to understand and think about this theme. The first section of the chapter explores the ways in which the intergenerational relationships between learners and teachers stifle and limit identity exploration and expression, as well as personal growth. This is seen through what is perceived as care(less) actions, which include 1) teachers abandoning a lesson due to heightened emotions, 2) shaming learners' misunderstandings, and 3) misrecognition where teachers hold limited and rigid views about the learners. The chapter highlights that these care(less) actions are not merely a reflection of the individual teacher's actions or inactions. Rather, they reflect a pervasive context of care(less)ness, deeply rooted in the colonial and apartheid legacy.

The second sections of the chapter highlight the ways in which the act of caring not only involves creating an emotional bond and providing support that helps young people navigate the difficulties imposed by oppressive structures but also relates to broader social struggles, where care is a form of counteraction or resistance to existing power structures. Seen in this way, relationships defy the power relations set up and inherent in the roles of the teacher-learner relationship. These intergenerational relationships become places where human beings meet and create humanising experiences for each other. In turn, the relationship becomes a "holding environment" that supports young people in exploring their identities, navigating transitions, learning, and growth in dehumanising conditions.

7.1 Relationships as 'holding cells' or 'holding environments'

7.1.1 Unbearable conditions, care(less) encounters

This section explores the narratives that highlight conditions in the teacher-learner relationship that seem to arrest or confine and stunt thinking, feeling, and expression, as well as moments of connection.

Reflecting on a challenging relationship with a teacher, Kholo shares:

Kholo: *Grade 11. I had this history, male teacher [gasps], and I think that sir made my life yoh, ha-ah, like yoh, I didn't even wanna go to school. It's like wabona mo [you see here], I'm fine. Because I was that person. History is a subject*

whereby I know I do well, but ka ntate ole [with that Sir], he would come to class and then asa ruti [not teach]. Once we'd make little noise, he would go out, and I would always fail history. E dula ele [My mark was always] level one, like yoh… I was so pissed gore, I know I can do this. I could write seven pages ya essay and still get level one, but I feel like he… yoh… like I feel like… yah… skolo neseng bora [school used to bore me then] at that time because every time I go…ha ke bona fela [when I see] the subject 'history', it's like yoh, kelo bona ntate o [I am going to be with this teacher], I don't feel like going to school, because I know gore even if I go there, I'm still gonna get level one, from term one until term four, so yah, he made my subject and my life (pause) nje wuu [just]"

Kholo reflects on how unbearable these encounters with this particular teacher were, to the point where she even considered skipping school. From her perspective, the teacher lacked effective classroom management and would often become agitated, abandoning lessons and leaving the class at the slightest provocation, even from typical expected boundary-pushing teenage behaviour. The teacher's inability to manage the classroom, which could also be reflective of poor relational skills, and the inability to regulate his own emotions, resulted in what can be understood as a care(less) act, further evident in his approach to grading. For instance, when Kholo questioned the teacher about her history test marks, his response mirrored his emotional volatility and lack of care, highlighting how his actions extended to affect the learners' academic experiences. His inability to manage both the classroom dynamics and his emotional reactions created a harmful learning environment, reflecting a broader neglect in providing the support and care necessary for the learners' growth.

Khotso, Mandisa, and Khumo's narratives below, respectively, reflect similar experiences of emotionally charged or emotionally disconnected encounters with the teacher in the classroom, highlighting numerous care(less) actions:

Khotso: *Mam' wa CAT. This teacher would come to class in a mood (inaudible) when happy, we must all be happy. When she is angry, then it becomes something else in class"*

Mandisa: *Yah, ka pure maths. That teacher was like "Nna, ka half past, I don't care. I don't know it" then she would skip the syllabus and say "Nah, you'll do that yourself". I would be like "Hay, I'm going to fail here". She didn't care, she was forever on her phone waya waya so I was like ahh…*

Khumo: *It was grade 10. Yowe! Maths, and I failed yah, because of that teacher. Like she would not teach, like when she gets to class, she will hand out a worksheet and then stand by the door and say [that] we must complete the activity. As soon as we are done with the activity, she leaves, and then when we see her the next day, we won't do any corrections, it's almost as if she does not like teaching, ja*.

In each case, the teacher's emotional responses or lack of emotional engagement created an environment where the learners felt unsupported, anxious about their academic performance and disconnected from the teacher and their schoolwork. These emotionally charged

encounters, whether through the teacher's heightened reactions or detachment, used in this instance as a defence against overwhelming feelings or heightened stress, demonstrated a lack of care and consideration for the learners' needs, both emotionally and academically. The learners' stories underscore how these care(less) actions, ranging from the unpredictable emotional outbursts to neglectful behaviour, resulted in negative impacts on their sense of psychological safety, self-esteem, or confidence in their cognitive abilities and the ability to thrive in the classroom. Through these shared experiences, the narratives collectively reveal how the absence of care in the teacher-student relationship can shape both the emotional climate and academic outcomes for the learners.

Interestingly, Khumo offers a different perspective on the seemingly care(less) atmosphere, he reflects:

Khumo: *Like dealing with difficult, challenging learners, Yah like eish. It's tough. Nabo, like, even now, we have them. Yah, so eish, they have a hard time with them. And you find this person in a problem, and they are not getting the right marks to pass. So the teachers have to push him so that he can get decent marks yah, like… improve.*

Khumo recognises that teachers face their own challenges in managing difficult or disruptive behaviour from learners. He points out that teachers must juggle the task of handling classroom misbehaviour while also trying to teach and ensure academic success for the learners. This, according to Khumo, presents a long-standing challenge, as maintaining control of the class and fostering a productive learning environment can be overwhelming, especially when learners' behaviour is particularly challenging. In this light, Khumo's perspective suggests that while the teacher's actions might appear care(less), there may be underlying complexities faced by teachers in managing a classroom. Khumo's nuanced view offers a second gaze, a perspective that centres and locates these narratives within the broader context.

Therefore, it is essential to consider these relational dynamics within their contexts. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the historical challenge of overcrowded classrooms, along with other issues, continues to be a serious challenge with a real negative impact on learners and teachers. As reflected by teachers in the focus group:

Mr Mahlangu: *Unfortunately, because of the number of learners in class, they discourage you.*
Ms Makhanya: *Even with the Bantu education, those were the challenges of… apartheid*
Researcher: *Big class numbers?*
Ms Makhanya: *Big numbers, 75, 70 in class, which [is a] disadvantage [for] the children in class in terms of education.*
Mr Mahlangu: *Mam, we need teachers to think outside of the box.*

Ms Nkululeko: *Yes, there is a lot of things they can do. Try this… but don't come and stress children because… yes, I would like them to think out of the box.*

And earlier in the discussion, Ms Phutheho commented:

Ms Phutheho: *With the numbers that we have, it is difficult sometimes to discipline people, learners in your class. So, once they start getting disruptive, it's either they have to go outside, which they're not allowed to. You cannot leave, as well…*

To quantify what is meant by big numbers or overcrowding in classrooms is a challenge, given that the number will vary depending on the country and the educational contexts, as well as the number of learners an individual teacher is accustomed to teaching (Zaman et al., 2023). Thus, even within a country such as South Africa, with the huge disparities between township schools vs former model C schools, rural public school vs urban city public schools, as well as public schools and private schools, the number that constitutes overcrowding is an elusive one.

Nonetheless, even with the possible variations in terms of the exact parameters of a large classroom, there is consensus that once the learners in a classroom exceed whatever agreed-upon parameters (30 in South Africa), the learning process is disrupted. This is articulated by teachers during a focus group discussion. In this discussion, Mr Mahlangu reflects on the overcrowding and the negative effect this has on the teacher's ability and capacity to care for learners. Meanwhile, Ms Phutheho highlights the challenge of managing and balancing discipline with instructional time. Ms Makhanya comments on the historical context of this challenge, reminding the group that this is not a recent issue but one that traces back to apartheid. In addition, she notes the negative impact this has on education.

The care(less) ethic is not merely a reflection of individual actions or inactions. Rather, there seems to be a pervasive atmosphere of care(less)ness, deeply rooted in the apartheid legacy. This historical legacy is reflected in the neglected infrastructure of township public schools, where overcrowded classrooms and limited resources contribute to strained relational dynamics. This broader context of historical inequality and systemic neglect underscores how the care(less) atmosphere is not solely a result of an individual teacher's actions but is embedded in and manifested through the structural challenges that continue to shape the educational experiences for both learners and teachers in these schools.

7.1.2 Looking through unseeing eyes: Misrecognition

This care(less)ness, including the structural failures mentioned earlier, shows up and interferes in various ways with the teacher-learner interactions or relationship. At times, this disruption causes irreparable damage to the teacher-learner relationship, particularly when teachers

misrecognise learners. There is a prevailing stereotype or dominant narrative about young people, especially Black young people in township schools, which seems to be easily available for teachers to pull from when learners present with challenging behaviour or acting out of character.

Kholo reflects on some of the frustrating ideas and narratives that teachers hold about them as a group of learners in the general subject stream, which includes subjects like history, geography, tourism, and maths literacy, in contrast to the sciences and maths stream. She reflects:

Kholo: *Okay, so, first things first, there's this concept ya bana ba "General" [kids who are on the general stream] le bana ba science [and the science stream], they're not the same. They do not behave the same, and I got to actually analyse that, gore… teachers, there's nothing like that. You know when teachers say, "Yoh, bana ba science bae tswere sintle [science stream kids are well behaved]. Bana ba general, lema tlhanya, le rata ho rasa, le tletsi tletsi. [the general stream kids, you are crazy, you are loud, and are all over/busy/everywhere]". I analysed that; I took my time to take a research ya ko skolong gore [at school about], "Are we really like that?" but it's not the case. I feel like there are some 'general' learners, baleng gore [who are] they are well… like, they're well centred, they're well reserved. Teachers see us… mostly, as like are bana ba general, are [we are not] right…*

Kholo's reflection suggests that there is a long-standing and prevailing negative generalisation and stereotype of learners who are enrolled in the general stream subjects. She says that teachers perceive these learners as restless, unruly, rowdy, and generally ill-disciplined. This seems to be a label that has persisted for years, as Kholo notes, it's been "*an issue for the past years… most people say teachers think we are rough and all that*". The persistent and repeated use of the derogatory stereotype reinforces it and continues to inflict damage on successive generations of learners.

Thato and Isaac share personal narratives that highlight how teachers' gaze or perceptions of them were influenced by a care(less) ethic or ideology. Their stories reflect how the teachers' views of them were shaped by assumptions and biases, leading to misrecognition. They reflect, respectively:

Thato: *Okay. My maths teacher, so things are a bit complicated between me and my maths teacher because she taught me in grade eight, and she knew me as a person who always excels in everything they do in maths… This is grade ten, now. She says, "Grade 8, you were excelling academically", and I did not answer her; I just left. And I think that was rude of me, but I would have really appreciated [it] if she had asked me what is the reason for you doing this, because she did not even ask me. She just said "Thato come here" and she was like "I do not know if it is boys or it is stage, but your marks are decreasing, I do not like that" and I just left and I know she was not done talking to me, but I just left because I felt like she did not want to hear me out. But if she had*

actually asked me by then, maybe I would have been able to communicate with her. So, now even when a teacher is like, "Lerato, your marks are decreasing, what is wrong?" It is very hard for me to tell them because I feel like they do not care because of the way she talked to me… term two was also an adjustment for me, but in term two, I was going through a lot of personal issues. So, I felt if she had asked me, 'Thato are you okay at home? Are you okay personally? Even though it is not a thing of home, are you okay? Because sometimes our emotions and our mental health affect the way we think at school."

Isaac: *The first term, when I thought I had a favourite teacher, he was a geography teacher. There was a day whereby, for the first time, I got wrongs in my class workbook, and then he offended me. At first, he just said nasty words… I couldn't respond back because they said we should respect the teachers. We just hold back all the words we have because we can't say them. And then I kept quiet the first time, which was strike one. Strike two, he said, "You're really focused on the girls outside"… And then he just said, "You're focused on girls, you think about girls a lot", and I was like, okay, I'll be quiet. That's when he said it. He said, "Your problem is that you're so focused on that girl who won't even benefit you anything in the future", which was very unfair and hurtful by the way… And then after the period, all my classmates came in like, "What was that for?" "Why was the teacher pulling strings on you so deeply that they hit the personal part of yourself?". I said, "I don't know… Maybe it's this. Maybe it's that". From then on, I have never talked to the teacher. I don't even look at him. I don't know why, but it's like looking at a man who just disrespects a younger man. At that very moment, it was hurtful... But yeah, I've never talked in class ever since.*

Both Thato and Isaac reflect on their relationships with their teachers. Thato mentions that she has known her teacher since grade 8, while Isaac describes the teacher as someone who, until that point, had been his "*favourite teacher*." Both Thato and Isaac experienced a period of academic challenges, where their results dropped significantly from what they had previously achieved. This decline in their academic performance prompted a reaction from their teacher, which seemed to create a rupture in their relationship.

In both narratives, the teachers responded with certainty, without taking a curious, careful, or exploratory stance. They both assumed that the cause of Thato and Isaac's academic decline was linked to distractions, such as romantic relationships or other social demands, particularly in Thato's case. Thato and Isaac's responses, even in the moment with the teachers, indicate that these encounters were experienced as hurtful, demeaning, and limiting to their self-image and sense of identity. The misrecognition from both teachers reflected negative limiting images which left the learners feeling limited, constrained, and almost locked-in, locking them into a false or distorted sense of self, preventing them from being seen for who they truly are and what they were experiencing (Taylor, 2021).

Furthermore, misrecognition, which arises from care(less) contexts marked by ongoing structural failures, disrupts teacher-learner interactions and relationships. These disruptions can lead to irreparable damage, especially when teachers fail to recognise how these care(less) and

"unhygienic" environments affect both themselves and their learners, as well as their interactions.

7.1.3 Shaming and name calling

The structural conditions and neoliberal capitalist ideologies create environments that profoundly influence the interactions between learners and teachers. Many teachers, who share similar high school experiences with their learners, are under immense pressure to perform within challenging conditions, such as poor infrastructure and limited teaching resources. In their attempts to meet the expectations imposed by the system, expectations that are often disconnected from their lived realities, teachers may draw upon the very structures that dehumanise, seeking to elicit positive responses from learners.

The learner participants noted that, in many cases, teachers resorted to practices, such as shaming and name calling as a means of discouraging negative behaviour and encouraging positive academic results. These approaches, although aimed at achieving desirable outcomes, can further perpetuate the emotional and psychological strain on learners. The following extracts from Mpendulo, Zenande, and Sindi describe the encounters between themselves and their teachers:

Mpendulo: *An example, my maths teacher… mawungaya kuye [when you go to her], like just a random learner nje…uyokuthuka [she will swear at you]. So how do you go to a person ngokuthi [and tell them] I don't understand this particular subject, whereas umuntu uzok'thuka [the person will swear at you], ak'bize [and call you], you know, like, "Udom"[you are stupid] and all of that, you know… The teacher, he is the one [who] calls learners "domkops [stupid]"*

Zenande: *Ohh yeah, so this teacher, benginga bhalanga iquestion ye [I had not finished writing the questions] assignment and then she told us to stop, sibeke amabholpen phansi [put our pens down]. So, bengingay' bekanga bese wangithuka [I did not put mine down, and she started swearing at me]. She was busy saying that I'm rubbish, I won't get anywhere in life and stuff. That was really painful and… Ukung'thuka kwakhe kungiphule intliziyo [her swearing at me, broke my heart].*

Sindi: *So, mina no mam' [me and my teacher], we had our ups and downs, you know. Her shouting at me, telling me that I'm lazy, uhh… Like now, currently, in grade twelve… because she's the only person eke kopaneng leyena [who teaches me], telling me that I'm lazy… There was this time I was sick, I didn't come to school for almost a week, and my class teacher knew, the principal knew, but she didn't know. She didn't know ukuthi angikho eskoleni [that I was off sick] and all that. So, she was telling me that I'm always absent at school and at the same time I am not passing… [sighs]… things were just, you know… they were hard because… nasa understandi gore goetsagalang [she did not understand what was happening], not that I was failing the subject, but she wanted me to do more than what I was doing. She wanted me to do more so… nna I was… hay,*

> *hang'rate mam ona [she does not like me] because everytime wang'chika [she always shouts at me], habatle ho mamela gore ke reng [she does not want to hear me out], so, it was difficult for me to, you know… ukuthi ngizwane naye [to get along with her].*

Mpendulo recounts how her math teacher becomes irritable with learners who struggle to grasp concepts, and this frustration is often expressed in a hostile and belittling manner. The teacher's use of the term "domkop", an Afrikaans phrase that loosely translates to "stupid head", deeply impacts the learners, creating a sense of shame and humiliation. Similarly, Zenande and Sindi share their own painful experiences with teachers who resort to name-calling and shaming as tactics to force compliance or encourage better performance, as seen in Sindi's case. Both Mpendulo, Zenande, and Sindi codeswitch, indicating that these encounters were significant and deeply felt. These encounters with belittling and shame have a profound emotional impact on the learners, leaving them feeling demoralised and alienated. In their positions of power, teachers use these tactics to coerce learners to comply (Foucault, 1977). The participants describe how this type of treatment creates a hostile environment where exploration, creativity and growth are stifled. As a consequent, it impacts their sense of self, self-esteem, and freedom of expression, and creates "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977, p. 135).

As an antidote, Mpendulo uses the plant as a metaphor for the kind of encounter required for young people to thrive.

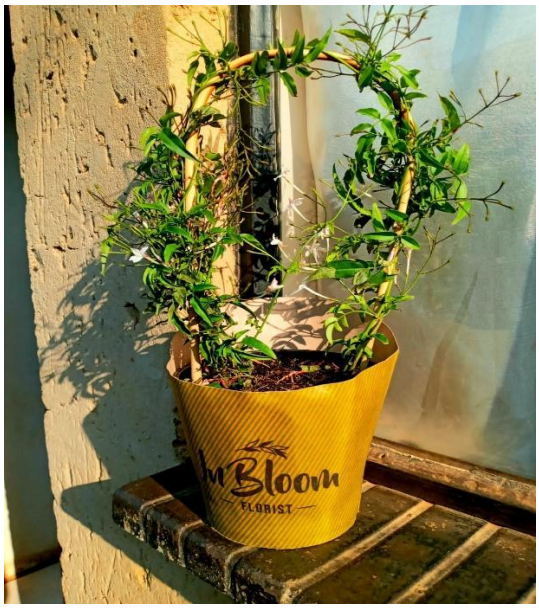


Figure 5
Learner is a Plant by Mpendulo

Mpendulo notes:

Mpendulo: *A learner is like any other plant; you have to grow it.*
Researcher: *Ah, cool. So that's the picture of the plant?*
Mpendulo: *Yes, that picture of the plant. You have to grow the plant for it to look pleasing to you, you know. For it to look nice, you have to nurture it and give it attention each and every time, then it will produce great results for you. So if you don't give that plant attention… it will not… grow in the same way you want it to grow, and then it won't give you the product you were expecting, you know… As the teachers, they find the learners in their normal positions, they have to help them grow, they have to water them and teach them on a daily basis so that they can produce great results, just as plants*.

Mpendulo's metaphor illustrates the kind of environment required for the teacher-learner interaction. hooks (1994, p. 205) describes it as "a place that is life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership". In this partnership, the learner's needs are acknowledged and embraced, allowing for exploration and the development of their identity. Moreover, the metaphor highlights the nurturing and attentive care role played by the teacher, which echoes Mr Mahlangu's comment about the significance and importance of love in the teacher-learner interaction. Love, in this instance, can be seen and understood as both an active force that is generative and allows for learners' and teachers' growth and development (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994) and as that which allows the learners to survive or live through the otherwise destructive conditions (Macharia, 2015).

7.1.4 The unseen ones

Mpendulo: *Even in school, they don't give much attention to learners; they give attention to some, you know. Obviously, uyangena esikolweni [you enter school], you're tired, so you sleep. You didn't gain anything from that morning class, whereas you put your life in danger… You didn't learn anything from it because number one, you were tired, number two, they didn't even give you attention, you know. They give attention to particular learners that they know gore "Ha mo [with this one] I get my level seven right here".*
Researcher: *Oh! So, the focus is on the ones ba performing high, well?*
Mpendulo: *Yes, yes, but it's not… let me say most teachers, but not all*
Researcher: *Not all, yah.*
Mpendulo: *Yes, yes, because some give attention to learners, yes, they give attention to everyone… … And then obviously we cross night (at school), and still, they don't give you that much attention, even ku cross-night so we are just, uzele la [you came for], the whole night… uhleli wena [you are sitting], like they don't give you much attention. They just walk around, baye kulaba abaclever [they go to the clever ones], "Hi! Do you understand"?*

Mpendulo's reflection begins with her recounting the challenges of her early morning journey to school, where she faces the danger of travelling through a dangerously violent area to attend an extra lesson (Figure 1a and b in Chapter 6). Despite her efforts to navigate the risks, waking

up early, leaving the house while it's still dark, and trying to avoid being mugged, she feels that her efforts are in vain as she continues to be overlooked by the teacher. Although physically present in class, she feels invisible to the teacher. She observes, "*...they [teachers] didn't even give you attention, you know. They give attention to particular learners that they know gore [that], Ha mo [with this one], I get my level seven right here.*" Mpendulo recognises the disparities and favouritism in how the teacher allocates attention, noting that the teacher seems to focus primarily on learners with grades above 70%. This was also confirmed by Mandisa during her individual interview, she stated, "*Yah, because they started noticing me as the top ten ya ko grade eleven*". To emphasise her point, Mpendulo tells a story of attending cross nights organised by the school. These are overnight extra lessons or study sessions organised by the school, usually during exam season, to offer extra tuition support for the grade 12 group. She notes that the same dynamic of favouritism in terms of how a teacher allocates her attention plays out during these overnight study sessions.

Mpendulo highlights her daily task of navigating what often feels like a life and death situation, or, differently put, a life of dying. It is these (in)visible normalised living-death everyday experiences, which then impact on the young people's experiences and identity construction. This threat of violence or death is not only encountered in the moments when she embarks on her journey to school, but also acts on her in more symbolic ways, particularly within her classroom. There, the teacher's erasure of her presence becomes another manifestation of this ever-present threat. In this context, choosing to live, to imagine something different, and to dream of a better future -by choosing to complete matric- comes at a significant cost and requires serious footwork to master the dance with death (ka Canham, 2023).

Mpendulo's reflections were echoed by a parent during the parent focus group, as Mr Tlhalefo recounted his experience as a learner:

Mr Tlhalefo:	*What I noticed is that some teachers had favouritism. I did Maths and Physics. They took me out of the Maths and Physics stream. I told them, "You know what, you can see I am a math person, and now you took me out and sent me (inaudible) and I do not want the general stream". I told them I will take extra morning classes where I can improve Maths and Physics, but they did not allow me. This is where I lost hope, and I wanted to be a doctor.*
Researcher:	*Oh. Sorry to hear that*
Mr Tlhalefo:	*I did Geography, History… I then went on to become a thug, a thief [tsotsi]. I went to jail for 10 years.*
Researcher:	*10 years?*
Mr Tlhalefo:	*10 years in there, I went to school.*
Researcher:	*Inside prison?*
Mr Tlhalefo:	*I'm a qualified teacher.*

Researcher: *Ah, nice*
Mr Tlhalefo: *But I'm old now, I'm on pension. Yeah, so that's what I experienced at school. Favouritism is not wanted. This thing ruined my future…*

Although Mpendulo and Mr Tlhalefo's narratives speak of experiences that are almost 40 years apart, there is a shared classroom experience of feeling neglected, unseen, discouraged, and disconnected. The impact of this sense of alienation from one's own yearnings and learning development goals often has devastating and damaging effects, as seen with Mr Tlhalefo. He talks of favouritism as a big problem in schools, almost suggesting that teachers had learners they preferred and possibly gave a lot of their attention and focus to at the detriment of other learners in class. He expressed that his preferences and future career dreams were dismissed and ignored, killing his hope and dreams. This sentiment mirrors Msimang's (2013) observations about the impact of institutional racism in the education system on people. She notes that contrary to how education is framed as key to success, it is often "confidence-killing and soul-destroying" (Msimang 2013, p. 1).

Mr Tlhalefo makes a direct connection between the problem he articulates as favouritism to feelings of discouragement and hopelessness, which, according to him, led him to become a criminal. Mpendulo and Mr Tlhalefo highlight the ways in which systemic oppression, economic exclusion, and structural inequality have manifested in the schools and affected relationships between learners and teachers across multiple generations. Consequently, leaving one feeling frustrated and discontent with a sense of a truncated future. Moreover, both Mr Tlhalefo and Mpendulo's narratives show that they felt or experienced themselves as powerless and not in control over, firstly, the threat that lurks outside the classroom, as recounted by Mpendulo and the threat which, during Mr Tlhalefo's schooling years, was strongly felt through the presence of the apartheid government police force in the townships. Secondly, the lack of power and control in the classroom with the teacher on the factors that shape their life opportunities.

The teachers' perspectives, taken from the teacher focus group discussion, offer a different view that enables a reading that contextualises the shared experience above. In a discussion about the importance of love and care in the profession of teaching, they noted:

Mr Mahlangu: *So, maybe because I have the love for the kids, I will always try to make sure I do my work.*
Researcher: *Yes, sure.*
Mr Mahlangu: *Unfortunately, because of the number of learners in class, they discourage you.*
Researcher: *To express that love.*

Mr Mahlangu: *That love to all of them. You end up being favouring because there are learners who are good there, and there is this one there. Then you decided bring your book because you know it, she writes neatly, she answers everything, and they do what you want. That's one other thing, yes.*

Ms Phutheho: *And another problem with big numbers is you may find that you give attention to the problematic learner, or the smart one, but there is someone here in the middle who needs you more… but you don't notice them because they're quieter.*

The longstanding issue of overcrowding remains one of the enduring legacies of apartheid, continuing to shape the educational landscape in democratic South Africa. Teachers reflect candidly on the structural challenges they face. While Mr Mahlangu emphasises that love plays a crucial role in teaching, it is this love that allows him to persist in his work despite the many obstacles. However, he acknowledges that the large class sizes present a significant barrier to fully expressing and demonstrating that love. Alongside Ms Phutheho, they discuss how favouritism often emerges in the classroom. Due to the difficulty of managing large groups, teachers tend to gravitate toward learners who comply and achieve good grades, seeking an easier outlet for their attention. Beyond overcrowding, there is also the pressure of competitive grading of teachers and schools within the local education district office, as well as the national office, where teachers are evaluated based on their learners' performance, measured by the number of grade 12 learners passing the subject and earning distinctions. This performance management marker is blind to the many challenges that teachers and learners face.

Furthermore, there is a sense from the teachers that the Department of Education officials do not care about anything but the bottom line, the grade 12 pass rate. In this way, teachers themselves are erased and invisibilised and seen only as tools to produce the numbers. This was reflected in the exchange between the teachers:

Ms Nkululeko: *Even the department does not support us.*

Mr Mahlangu: *Don't forget the department their main focus- we are they're foot soldiers, and the very important thing is that they want results only, but other challenges…*

Ms Nkululeko: *Just want results, but they want them from teachers, but they don't give the teachers the support.*

Ms Makhanya: *They don't. They just want us to hold, to account.*

Ms Phutheho: *All they ask is, "What did you do to make the child submit? You must do something. They will go and spy and say, "If the child doesn't submit, go to their house and fetch them"*

Ms Nkululeko: *It's like go fetch the assignment, and then this one [the child] will come tomorrow.*

Ms Phutheho: *So, the child is literally a statistic to the government.*

Mr Mahlangu: *Don't forget there's competition among districts now.*

Mr Makhanya: *Yes. So Forte's matric results [are] a major contributor to the results of the district. So, that's why they came yesterday, because they knew if Forte [was] not attending…*

Ms Nkululeko: *It's going to affect the results overall.*

Mr Mahlangu: *Yes. But you will hear there'll be a meeting. I think you'll be called in a meeting where you'll be told by [the] end of this month.*

Ms Nkululeko: *You should be done with this matter because exams are starting.*

Mr Mahlangu: *Done. You must be done.*

Ms Phutheho: *To hell with the fact that there was an issue.*

Ms Makhanya: *At the core of a teacher's life. Learners were affected, psychologically and other ways to have, "Are you ready, or you're not ready. We don't care, go to class". We want results.*

This exchange between the teachers occurred shortly after the violent incident discussed in Chapter 5, during which they reflected on the lack of care and slow response from the education district officials. Like the learners, the teachers express frustration with how district officials focus solely on grade 12 results and pass rates. In this system, teachers are viewed as mere tools to produce these numbers, while learners are reduced to mere "statistics," as Ms Phutheho points out. According to the teachers, the education district office overlooks the needs and overall experiences of both teachers and learners. This capitalistic-driven education system dehumanises both groups, prioritising values such as competitiveness and the bottom line, no matter the cost. These values contribute to experiences of alienation and misrecognition within the school.

7.1.5 Dreaming for self and other in precarious conditions

Researcher: *Dreams! Tell me what your dreams are?*

Khumo: *Wow…like mina, I want to be a lot of different things. Truly, truly, I want to start my own business… start multiple businesses so that I can help… The aim is to help those people who really need help, like those people who live on [the] streets, yah, that's the aim. So, like… I want to start a business that will give me an income, yah, have multiple businesses. Then, ngibuilde [I will build] like I… just like… icampsite, for the homeless. Free food, house nje like yabona [you see], … Mara like, to change like, their life, yah — ngenze [to do] something out of that thing.*

Researcher: *Mm, okay. Is there a reason why that is important to you?*

Khumo: *Yah eish, like you sometimes… I feel like… their life is really hard because they have to beg every time. Sometimes they don't have something to eat the whole day. So, mina,, I can't last even like, more than seventeen hours without eating, somang'cabangela bona [then I think about them]? Yoh, it hurts me so much. Even on rainy days like, it's hard, very hard.*

Khotso: *I want to be a billionaire …I want to make billions. I want to be able to help other people who are suffering. Make a difference in the community. Be able to help where I can.*

Researcher: *Yeah. Why is that important for wena [you], you think?*

Khotso: *Because I've seen how poor people live so, I wouldn't wish that on my enemy. That's really bad…Like yoh, especially on the kids, they're not able to fulfil their dreams because they can't get [a] proper education, they don't have in*

> *shelter. Some don't have shelter, some go to sleep basaja [hungry]. So, yeah. It's really painful.*

In thinking about their future aspirations and dreams, both Khumo and Khotso talk about accumulating wealth, but interestingly, not for their own benefit or consumption, but for the benefit of those who are living in abject poverty. Their responses highlight the dire conditions under which many children and families in township areas live. Both Khumo and Khotso seem to be keenly aware of, or at least can imagine, the kind of emotional and social impact such conditions of poverty could have on a person, especially on more vulnerable groups like children, as highlighted by Khotso. In addition, the emotions felt in both Khotso's and Khumo's responses are captured by their closing comments, "*it's hard, very hard*" and "*it's really painful*".

Khumo's and Khotso's aspirations and dreams are not only shaped by their own personal desires for success and wealth but strongly informed by their awareness of inequality and poverty and its destructive and violent impact on others. This social awareness seems to show that both Khotso and Khumo have a recognition of the systemic and structural challenges that many people, and most concerning to them, children in townships face. While they too face similar difficult conditions, they seem to be aware that others are struggling even more. Moreover, their dreams seem to be motivated by a broader social consciousness and ethical responsibility rather than a narrow, individualistic pursuit of wealth. This is contrary to and challenges the ideas that young people are apolitical and approach the world with a sense of entitlement. These ideas, as expressed by Mr Mahlangu, a teacher, "...*so, at the school level learners don't understand mostly, the political*…" and another teacher, Ms Makhanya, "*but there's nothing to stand for. There's nothing to stand for because everything is now given to them. Everything is easier, right? So now they are taking it for granted*…" On the contrary, Khumo's and Khotso's responses show that they are highly aware of their social context and the systemic inequalities that affect their communities. Furthermore, this highlights the intergenerational gap or misunderstanding between the older and younger generations. The learners' responses highlight their affective experiences, which seem to be invisible to the older generations, of witnessing and, at times, directly being affected by the increasing inequalities and harsh social conditions faced by many in the township. Bradbury (2024, p. 45), reflecting on Peterson's (2019) work, notes that Peterson "calls on the older generation to be 'moved' by witnessing the struggles of the youth and to bring the past into 'ethical dialogue' with the present".

Furthermore, the emotional weight carried by Khumo's and Khotso's words, "*it's hard*" and "*it's really painful*", goes beyond mere awareness and a recognition of the conditions produced by inequality. These responses reflect a deep empathy that seems to suggest that their awareness of poverty is not abstract or distant; rather, they seem to be deeply affected by the realities of poverty and are both emotionally connected and personally motivated to act. Both Khumo's and Khotso's imagined solutions to the challenges of poverty are to acquire personal wealth, which may reflect disillusionment with systemic political solutions and an implied critique and lack of faith in the South African government and its institutions. It is as if they believe that real change and transformation can only come from individual social mobility and generosity by those with personal wealth.

Moreover, it is in their relation and engagement with others who are affected by poverty that these young people are challenged to rethink their identity and their place in the world. It is in this encounter with and awareness of the other that their ethical responsibility is born (Levinas, 1978). The expression of their dreams for the future can be understood as rooted in a desire to alleviate the suffering they witness, suggesting an ethical responsibility or pull that goes beyond sympathy towards action and imagined ways of being in the world.

Isaac's account below provides a reflection on how he, in negotiation with his peers, explores parts of himself where he is almost 'hailed' into a role of being a supportive mediator for others:

Isaac: *I mostly concentrate on people who are sad in the circles, even though if I don't know that person, I would go out of my way to help that person to emotionally be okay. And if they get better, that's just my bit, my part… because there are many learners that go through things and one moment you'd find a person socialising with their friends and then two days later or a moment later they're alone, they need to think and then when you ask them what's going on, they just say "Life is this" "Life is that" "Sometimes I wish I could kill myself" And then I said… that sometimes life, it's full of good and bad vibes because you might say you're depressed only to find out that situation is something you overthink on your own, in your mind. You compete with the person who's not even aware that you're competing with them because at school, the social life, especially the recent one, are clothes, shoes, phones, and other gadgets, and people would have more of those, and then you would look at them or like I wish I had that I wish I had that, you know. The jewellery, to be specific, because the jewellery part, it kills us the most. People would come with different types of jewellery, and it's worth R50 000. "I got it from a plug", one of those words they said. So, I say if you want to kill yourself… just because you saw somebody else who's better than you, which is not great, because I believe that there's no such thing as a life that's better than yours. That's what I believe.*

Isaac, like Khumo and Khotso, reflected on his heightened sense of awareness of others and the psychosocial challenges that he is often drawn to or notices when someone seems to be going through a difficult time. His reflection reveals deep insights into the emotional and social

challenges young people face, particularly in relation to identity, the pressures of societal expectations and mental health. He shares that many young people face difficult and overwhelming challenges that may even leave them feeling suicidal. His efforts to provide perspective and a listening ear, while limited, signify the scaffolding role he plays in supporting his peers through difficult emotional moments. His presence and support in these moments are vital in helping his peers feel heard and valued, especially when they may be feeling alienated and disconnected. In this interaction, Isaac explores a different part of himself with another person and, in turn, creates a humanising experience not only for the other but also for himself.

In addition, Isaac's actions suggest a non-conforming stance, as he resists the materialistic culture he observes around him. His refusal to be "killed" by the pressures of a consumerist, capitalist society represents a form of resistance. In offering emotional support and resisting the dehumanising aspects of consumerism, Isaac critiques the materialistic values that dominate contemporary culture, positioning himself as someone who values human connection over the pursuit of symbols of status.

Isaac's reflection also touches on some of the broader social pressures that young people navigate while negotiating their identities, their sense of belonging and relationships. The socially constructed nature of these pressures includes the pressure to be seen to own expensive material items like jewellery worth R50 000, branded clothing, phones, etc. Manganyi (2019) argues that ideally, human relationships with objects should be guided by the object's use and its aesthetic value. However, when people are "deprived of dignity and self-respect and are…unable to activate the spiritual core of their selfhood… a veritable distortion of being -in-the -world with objects relationship arises" (Manganyi, 2019, p. 42). It is important to note that Manganyi (2019) further emphasises that this socially pathological situation emerges entirely beyond the control of the individuals. Thus, for the young people, material goods are no longer just practical tools or sources of aesthetic enjoyment; instead, they have become symbols of compensatory dignity in a world where their intrinsic self-worth has been consistently undermined. Importantly, this distortion is not merely a personal or individual failing but is socially constructed through years of colonial and apartheid history, as well as the contemporary neoliberal framework that creates the extreme inequalities of global society. The pressure to own material items, such as clothing or gadgets, informed by the dominant culture of materialism and capitalism, is a big part of the social environment that Isaac and his peers are navigating as they form their identities.

This psychosocial architecture adds complexity and undue stress to young people's process of identity development. Further, suggesting that the mental health problems, noted by Isaac, reflect a social matter and not an individual, private one. The mental health problems Isaac observes among his peers point to a societal pathology, one that is rooted in historical and systemic injustices. Moreover, this pathological relationship between people and objects is indicative of a society where, as Manganyi (2021, p. 43) writes, people "no longer decide on the nature of the dialogue" with objects; instead, "objects were doing the deciding". This shift or distortion is reflective of the long-standing injustices that continue to shape the lives of young people today. The mental health issues Isaac highlights are not isolated or individual but are deeply connected to the societal forces that shape their experiences.

7.2 'Holding environment': the relational space

The following narratives highlight the positive experiences learners had with their teachers, indicating that the teacher-learner relationship extends beyond the conventional roles implied by the terms "teacher" and "learner".

7.2.1 (Other) than a teacher

a) (Mediator) than a teacher

Thato begins by sharing her first day of high school experience:



Figure 6
Container Classroom by Thato

Thato: *I remember my first time at school, it was in grade eight. And I got to school and I see all these big people I am like "okay, this is high school" and my English teacher she said to me "welcome to high school", I was like "okay ma'am" and she was like "I came to you because I see that you seem very uncomfortable, what is wrong?" and I am like "I am not used to so many big*

people here, they are all so tall I am so short", and she is like "come with me" and I follow her and she shows me around the school, she shows me my new class.

Researcher: *Hmm, okay.*

Thato: *And I am like okay, and I was like wow, it was my first time seeing a class that is actually a container, and I said, "this is going to be my class", she was like "yes". She is like 'what you see is not what you are going to get' and it did not click until it was my second day and I was inside the class, now I see that it is actually so nice, as small as it is you are forced to communicate with each other, now we know each other, when someone is absent, we can tell, you know it was a nice experience. So, I grew to build a relationship more with her, and I will forever be grateful [to] her for making me comfortable, because [until] this day, I believe I am more confident because of her. And she said, "Not everyone you see here is as big as you see them because you know you might be big but have a small mind or a small heart. So do not predict things just because you see them." And from that day, I was comfortable and I have always had that mind-set in high school, no matter how tall you are, your internal speak more than your external. So, I am very grateful [for] her.*

Thato reflects positively on her encounter with her teacher; she recalls an experience of her first day of high school. As a Grade 8 learner, Thato felt small and out of place among the older and taller learners, marking a significant and unsettling shift from her previous year, where she had been one of the older and more prominent learners in Grade 7. She remembers that her English teacher noticed her discomfort and recognised that she was struggling in this new environment. The teacher reached out to her, offering to show her around the school in an effort to help Thato feel more familiar with her surroundings.

Thato's first encounter illustrates that the teacher was attuned to her environment, including the physical and emotional cues of the learners. By observing Thato's body language and recognising her emotional state, the teacher was able to respond thoughtfully, providing support and making the experience more manageable. This intervention created a sense of safety for Thato and made her feel seen. Moreover, by mediating the experience, the teacher helped make the new, unfamiliar and potentially overwhelming experience more manageable and less intimidating for Thato, allowing her to feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar situation, enabling her to better regulate herself and build the confidence to engage with her environment.

Thato goes on to describe her disbelief and shock at having to learn in an environment that she imagines is not conducive to learning. In her narrative, she questions what value she could gain from learning in a small container. She is quickly challenged by the teacher's mediation and reframing. The teacher's reframe, "*what you see is not what you will get*", almost prompts Thato and the rest of the class to be curious, offering some kind of template or guidance and a reassurance that there will be more to this experience. In this way, the teacher serves as a

mediator who scaffolds Thato's unfamiliar high school experience and creates an invitation to explore what else is possible from the experience, and makes the experience more accessible and less overwhelming. Furthermore, Thato goes on to describe how this mediated experience by the teacher evolved into a positive relationship, which has had a positive impact on her sense of self and how she carries herself in her environment, as elaborated on in the previous chapter. This underscores the critical and caring role that teachers play, particularly in learning environments that are uncomfortable or not conducive to learning (Restler & Lutrell, 2018). In such contexts, teachers function as emotional buffers, mitigating the stress and anxiety experienced by learners and helping to safeguard their well-being within the school setting.

Zenande shares a tender moment between her and her Life Orientation (LO) teacher:

Zenande: *Oh, and I've learnt from my teacher to open up kakhulu [a lot], especially to my teachers. I remember 2012, something happened… when I was young. Yes. So, I've started to tell people because every time I would be like "It's my fault"… so I was like "Yimi! Yimi engimenze so [It's me, I made him do it]… uMam' wami we LO [my LO teacher] taught me ukuthi [that] it wasn't my fault, none of it was my fault. So yah… I've learnt ukuthi kwezinye izinto[that with some things] I should stop blaming myself... iRelationship yethu [our relationship] became close to a point where I could share ezinye izinto naye yabo, ngim'cele ukuthi angi [other things you see, ask her to give me] advise... I couldn't talk to my mom; she was always at work.*

She begins by reflecting on the valuable lesson she learned from her teacher, which is the importance of being able to "open up" to her teachers. She then shares a deeply painful experience from when she was about six years old. She suggests that, for a long time, she never spoke about the incident with anyone because she blamed herself. However, she reveals that one of the key lessons her LO teacher taught her was that the incident was not her fault. This realisation gave her the freedom to share her experience with others and to become more open, not only with her LO teacher but also with other teachers. She emphasises that this encounter with her teacher helped build a closer, trusting relationship, where she now feels safe to talk about anything and seek advice or counsel from her. She ends off with an interesting note, almost suggesting that ordinarily this counsel or advice would have been sought from her mother, but that this was not possible since her mother was often at work.

Zenande's account highlights the violence and violations that young people often experience from an early age, frequently within their homes and by individuals they know. She also speaks to the trauma caused by this violation, which resulted in self-blame, feelings of shame, and difficulties with trust. However, through the teacher's care, attunement and ability to create a holding environment, as well as the teacher's input and mediation, Zenande was able to

challenge her inaccurate thoughts, such as self-blame and her general mistrust of others. This encounter is particularly significant as it also highlights the absence of a mediating 'other' in Zenande's life outside of the school context.

b) (Encourager/ Motivator) than a teacher

Sindi highlights the role of the motivator that her class teacher plays for her and her classmates:

> *"… Okay… Well, I met with my LO [Life Orientation] teacher this year, which is… uhm… she's my class teacher, my LO teacher and… well… She's a good person to be honest because ware thusa [she helps us] as teacher warona [our teacher]. She motivates us, she tells us gore bophelo bojwang [about life, how it is], so us being with her, it's… it's really nice because… she always motivates us, telling us to push, telling us to never give up. It's never easy, so we just have to work hard in order for us to succeed so, she always tells us that… even though gole thatha jwang [no matter how hard it is], she always tells us gore [to] keep pushing– yah."*

Sindi describes the role her teacher plays as helpful in that she motivates them and shares insights about life, and encourages them to keep going despite the challenges they face. The teacher is experienced in understanding the challenges and difficulties faced by learners, expressing her socio-cultural proximity to the learners in strong emotional understanding and closeness (Hargreaves, 2001). While understanding the context and challenging conditions that the learners face, this teacher nonetheless offers what Yosso (2005, p. 77) calls "aspirational capital".

Echoing Sindi, Kholo reflects:

Kholo: *Okay… So okay, uhm… This was my first experience with them, the two teachers, on awards day and you know they encourage me gore, "You're gonna get there. You are going to get there. You are going to get that award. You are going to be on that stage, nawe ubemuhle [you will be beautiful]" and, and, and… So, basically, they advised me, they showed me indlela, ukuthi [the way how] you must do this*

Kholo's reflection highlights the positive and affirming nature of her first encounter with these teachers during an awards ceremony for the previous year's matric group. She recalls how the teachers encouraged her and provided guidance on achieving her goals and ensuring a successful matric year. It is perhaps the teachers' proximity to the conditions, their understanding of the context and the persisting challenging conditions faced by learners that make their motivational talk credible. As pointed out in Mr Mahlangu's recollection, "*I remember this learner, she was doing matric… there were 89 grade 12 [students] in that class… this learner, she would read and finish a book before. But her mother was poor, but I motivated her... she is a doctor now*". Mr Mahlangu's motivational talk is purposeful and rooted in his understanding of the learner's economic situation, as well as the challenges she faces as a

learner in an under-resourced school with overcrowded classrooms. In this way, the role of motivator is both informed and intentional. By encouraging learners to hold on to hope and pursue their dreams for the future, despite the persistent violence and continuously difficult conditions, teachers help foster a culture of possibility, reimagination, and a vision for a future beyond the learners' current circumstances (Yosso, 2005). It is as if the teachers are heeding Freire's (1997, p. 106) call that "we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite". Furthermore, it seems that these particular teachers fulfil this role not only with the learners they directly teach or are familiar with but also appear to be consistently tuned in and attuned to the varied needs of all learners, responding to those needs at different times.

Some parents also noted their own childhood experiences with teachers who encouraged them and how those encounters, including how the lessons learned from these teachers, have stayed with them well into their adulthood. Ms Ngoane lit up while reflecting on the unforgettable and impactful experiences she had with her teacher, Ms Mlomo. With reverence and discernible appreciation, Ms Ngoane remarked:

Ms Ngoane: *M. Mlomo, …me and her were very close… she used to encourage me that I want you to do a good thing. That is, if you still want to be a doctor or work in the bank, she knew me very well… Because there was a time when I met her in town and she said to me, "You know what? I missed you so much"… and I met up with her, she is grown up now, and she never forgets me, and even me too, I will never forget her.*

Mr Moloi shares a similar experience of being encouraged and motivated by his teacher and music coach, Mr Mdluli. He expressed:

Mr Moloi: *Yeah, as for me, the teacher that, you know, I always reflect and see. Is there any good teacher in my time, and I find no one except Mr Mdluli. He used to encourage us. Like, as I said, he could talk to us as [a] young man… he would just talk to us.*

Mr Moloi emphasises the importance of having an available male adult to talk to as a young man. While Mr Moloi does not provide specific details about the conversations, he highlights the significance of discussing everyday life experiences. This sentiment is echoed by Kgotso, who shared, "…*we just hang out, he [teacher] will come to class and we will just talk, and it would be nice… anything, like life. We talk about life*." These reflections underscore the powerful impact of what might often be overlooked and seen as insignificant, which is the simple act of being present for informal conversations, where both learner and teacher can connect as individuals beyond the formal power dynamics that typically define their roles. For

the learners, the teachers are engaged with as individuals rather than as an authority figure. This allows for a sense of connection and a humanising experience, helping the learner feel seen, valued and understood beyond their academic role.

In a context where young people frequently have to navigate challenges on their own, having an available adult to talk to about both everyday and more complex life experiences provides a valuable opportunity for guidance. This adult presence acts as a form of mediation, offering a scaffolding that helps learners make sense of their experiences, gain perspective, and navigate life.

c) (Parent) than teacher

The parental role of teachers in the relational encounter between learners and teachers was a prominent one. Learners reflected on how teachers were like family to them. Mpendulo and Kholo, while reflecting on their relationship with their teachers, respectively expressed:

Mpendulo: *"I'm also thankful for my Geography teacher because… that woman is my mother, she is my everything… you know, so hence I say, in school, I found family… in teachers, so that's the… greatest experience I had of school."*

Kholo: *Oh, and these two teachers, they are my inspiration, my teachers, my fathers and yah, I respect them very much because bang file [they gave me] like, life lessons that I think I'm gonna carry them out until, yah.*

And about another teacher

> *I would always tell her (teacher), "Okay, … ha ke nale wena [when I am with you], I feel like I'm with my grandma because I feel that motherly love… she plays a different role in my life, so yah…That is my mother.*

Both Mpendulo and Kholo fondly acknowledge the special, inspirational and parental roles their teachers played during their schooling, highlighting how their teachers' care, guidance and teachings not only created a sense of safety and a strong connection but also provided academic encouragement, emotional support and life guidance beyond the classroom. These reflections highlight Soldaat's (2019) assertion that the parental role is reflective of the care ethic that is inherent in the teaching profession, where teachers, as caregivers, foster supportive relationships with their learners. The role of a parent is not only from learners' experience or perspective, but also the teachers themselves identify with that role, and this has been found to enhance teachers' attitudes toward and satisfaction in their profession (Soldaat, 2019). Furthermore, Soldaat (2019), in her study, found that teachers often saw themselves as parental figures to their learners. This was reflected in an interview with Thato, who recounted:

Thato: *My Business Studies teacher likes to say, "I am your mother, I am not your teacher, guys." So I actually see that there are teachers who are passionate [about] their jobs, there are teachers who are not only in the class to teach… but they are also there for you emotionally, they are there to support you.*

Thato's reflection speaks to the emotional connection and investment that seems to be an integral part of the caring nature of the teaching profession (Soldaat, 2019). In agreement, Restler and Lutrell (2018) argue that care is a critical aspect in education and in society, and that it is often the unseen and unvalued practices of care as employed by teachers and learners that are important in supporting learning and development in young people.

The practice of care, activated in this role of teacher as a parent, holds particular significance when it is located, or rather seen, in its specific context. In township schools, which reflect current forms of racial inequality, young people's material circumstances, social interactions, and psychological well-being are deeply impacted. Thus, care in this context is not a private, moral act or even a professional requirement, but a crucial political and social act of resistance that interacts with issues of power, injustice, and inequality (Restler & Lutrell, 2018). In this sense, care does not mitigate inequality; rather, it takes on a similar function as Macharia's (2015, p. 72) love, it becomes "the condition through which inequality is lived".

In the same way as the activation of the parental role should be contextualised or situated, equally too should the told narratives. Josselson (2004, p. 13) asserts, "a told story conceals an untold one". The told narratives of teachers as parents highlight the absence of parental figures, as noted by Zenande's comment, "*I couldn't talk to my mom; she was always at work*". This comment was preceded by her recounting a transformative lesson she learnt from her teacher about opening up and not blaming herself for the sexual violation she experienced when she was a child. Zenande seems to contrast the presence and availability of her teacher with the absence of her mother. In a similar fashion, Sindi remarked:

Sindi: *Because at home… I live with my grandmother, so… she doesn't do much, you know… she doesn't do much. Hangke ang…ang motivate [she never motivates me] "Sindi do this" ha-ah, but when I get to school, that's where it comes; do this... you're good at this, … don't ever let yourself down.*

This contrast by both Zenande and Sindi highlights an expectation or even an assumption that, ordinarily, the role of parent as played by the teacher would have been sought or received from a parental figure. Parents, who are often assumed or expected to play this role, are often unavailable and unable, or both, to offer this kind of emotional support due to several factors, such as long working hours, vulnerable and precarious work that does not offer paid leave and

is blind to the parental roles of its workers (Koseoglu Ornek et al., 2022). As such, young people are left to their own devices to figure life out and work through some of life's challenges. The absence of parental roles and involvement in the data is perhaps reflective of the untold stories of the challenges of parenting in neoliberal contexts. These contexts make it impossible for parents to be available and render care to their children. As such, schools and teachers become important forms of community for the young people. Moreover, these serve as a counternarrative that suggests that school is more than a learning institution, but is experienced as a place of support, guidance and care and feels more like 'home'.

7.2.2 Intimate peer connections ma(r)king space

The following section explores the ways in which intimate peer connections and encounters transform not only the space within which they happen but also have a powerful and transformative impact on the young people. Thato reflecting on her friendship and the dynamic interplay between the friendship and space, comments:

Thato: *It is a tree, there are no seats, there is nothing. It is literally a tree and grass. So I am like this natural place, how do we make it so comfortable and safe, you know that when I want my friends, I will get them here. You know it is a place where it is very exciting to go to. And even when you are alone and you are waiting for them, you will not even feel like you are alone because all the memories that we have shared there, we just sit there, and it is you and the memories, and you wait for them. So, when one of us is not at school, it is incomplete, you know. We will not even sit there when one of us is not at school, because it feels different because they are not there. Yes, each person is comfortable with this factor, so we will know that this one sit[s] here, no, you are taking my seat. So, it is something that, it is a place where I will never forget.*

Thato appears to be struck by her and her friends' ability in creating collective memories of intimate relations, connectedness and belonging in an otherwise barren space. In this instance, Thando and her friends, through their friendship, have been able to re-imagine and re-create the 'empty' space into a safe and nurturing space. The tree space has become part of a 'holding environment'. She attributes the safety of the space to their relationships and shared memories in the space. In this way, the closeness and safety of the relationship have (re)made and transformed the tree space. The space has become enlivened; it has become an exciting place where Thato and her friends look forward to going. In addition, the space also seems to function as a transitional space where any of her friends, herself included, can go and be alone whilst waiting for each other and not feel lonely or isolated. Moreover, the space is truly made by the relationship because she notes, "*So, when one of us is not at school, it is incomplete… we will not even sit there when one of us is not at school because it feels different*." This suggests that it is the relationship that creates how the space is experienced. Conversely, the space has a

significant effect or role on the friendship as it presents a safe space for Thato and her friends to know each other, create memories, and build connections. The tree as a marker in physical space has become much more than a location. It is a symbol of connection, belonging and collective identity of the friendship. It is part of the narrative of what makes the friendship, a part of the friendship's identity, shaping and being shaped by the relationships it holds.

Similarly, highlighting another space in the school and its significance in the sense of belonging and connectedness that learners may experience, Thato and Zenande both reflect on the library space.



Figure 7
The Library by Zenande

Thato: *As well as the library, this year the library I have grew so close to the library, it is where we attend YOTS[2], at first I would go to the library only to just see mam TP4 but now I go there regularly and it is a place that I will always remember because I have shared my experiences there, I have learnt to see that okay this person is not actually like this, I have learnt to be comfortable with my fellow school mates and they are not even my friends… So, it is a place whereby I do not even feel uncomfortable when we are together and we are not in the library because I have already grown close to you, I have a relationship with you, now I am comfortable. And that is how I want it to be in every day when I go to school. Like YOTS actually help us to get to know each other as a school, and it forms unity with school children… So, the library, I feel, is my safe space.*

Zenande: *My favourite place is the library… because… also the meeting ye YOTS. Yeah. Because of imeeting ye YOTS. Ngithanda ukuya lapho [I love going there]. Noma ngikhapha umngani wami [even when I accompany my friend], we change class ngama [for] home language, siye e (we come to the) library. Sinokuhlala iskathi, bathi "Yey! Iya e*

[2] Youth of the South (YOTS) is a psycho-social youth organisation located in a South African township that meets weekly to connect and discuss various issues that affect youth.

> *klassini, U ma'am!" ngithi, "Eish, ngikhohliwe" [We sit for a long time, then they will say "go to your class" and I will respond, "Eish, I forgot"].*

Both Thato and Zenande suggest that their fondness for the library space is due to their membership and participation in the YOTS group. For Thato, the connection to the space started before joining YOTS, when she would visit the library to meet with Ms Phutheho, whom she refers to as her favourite teacher. She notes that the library is a space she will never forget because of the shared experiences she has had in the library. She elaborates on these relational experiences and recounts that her initial perceptions and prejudgements of others have been challenged. This experience has helped her to be more open and comfortable with building relationships and connecting with others outside her immediate friend group. In this way, the relational dynamics, including the preexisting set up forms of perceiving the other and thereby engaging with them, are challenged, questioned and transformed. Furthermore, as Lefebvre (1991) noted, these social relations are located in and shaped by the physical space. The learners "as social beings (who)… produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world" will use spatial elements in a relational manner to produce social relations as well as social space (Lefebvre 1991, p. 68). The social relationships that are nurtured and strengthened in the library space create a sense of belonging and safety, ultimately transforming the library space into a safe and supportive space. Also important to note, as reflected by Thato, and echoing Lefebvre's (1991) point, that while these connections and relationships may have been initiated in the context of the YOTS group meetings in the library space, they are not confined to the space; they extend beyond it, continuing and evolving outside of their spatial origin.

Zenande cites the library as her favourite space. She recounts that she spends a lot of her time in the library, not only for the weekly YOTS meetings but also in between her classes and often 'forgets' to go to her next class. In taking seriously the material conditions of the space (Manganyi, 1981 & Benette, 2010), it is worth noting that although the library appears to be dysfunctional, in that it is neglected, poorly resourced and operating more as a classroom used to store books rather than a typical library, it stands out in comparison to most other classrooms in the school. The library space is likely the brightest in terms of natural light, and more energising with its colourfully painted walls. Furthermore, the learners seem to decentre the lack of resources and foreground the power of the space in terms of what it allows and opens not only for the individuals but for the relationships in the space. The learners seem to have an affirming and positive experience of the space.

These narratives invite us to consider the work of Manganyi (1981) and Bennette (2010) on the importance of recognising the materiality of space in terms of what it communicates to people and, more importantly, in this case, the ways in which people transact and engage with each other and with the space. In this way, the library space carries its own vital force that seems to open possibilities for different kinds of selves and relationships to emerge, deepen, and find expression. Furthermore, thinking of the library space as a "heterotopia" (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24) which is an alternative space that exists outside of the ordinary and yet still tied to the structure within which it exists, allows for an understanding or reading of the library space as a site that challenges dominant narratives or social norms around how young people should relate (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). Isaac, reflecting on his experience at YOTS, expressed, "… *we get to learn about many things like… well, some of them are complicated… The YOTS taught me to care, they taught me how to love and somehow brought more joy in my life. They took me far, in places I've never known.*" The library, as a relational space where YOTS conducts its activities, becomes a site of resistance and transformation, as Thato reflected on how it challenged her preconceived ideas about her peers and peer relationships. The library, defined both by its physical appearance and by what happens within it, stands apart from the rest of the school, both in terms of the general drab and poorly maintained physical infrastructure and in the controlling, dominant, restrictive ideologies. Instead, used as a relational space, it offers humanising ways of relating and being and disrupts limiting forms of thinking.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored relationality and the ways in which relationships can create an environment for identity exploration and expression and influence young people's sense of self. The relationship can either create a 'Holding' environment or a 'hold' environment. The latter refers to an environment that reflects a care(less) ethic, which goes beyond individual actions, but is reflective of a pervasive atmosphere rooted in the apartheid legacy of systemic inequality and neglect. This is seen in the neglected infrastructure of township schools, where overcrowded classrooms and limited resources strain relationships between learners, parents and teachers. Thus, the care(less) atmosphere is not caused by individuals, but is deeply embedded in the structural challenges that continue to shape the educational experiences of learners, teachers, and parents.

In contrast, a 'holding environment' enables self-expression, play, and the exploration of identities, facilitating a healing of past trauma's including intergenerational traumas and supporting young people through transitions and personal growth. In this kind of "holding"

environment, relationships defy power relations inherent in roles as well as relations that go beyond these roles. These are intergenerational relations, where humans meet beyond their roles and titles as learner or teacher. Similarly, peer relationships reflect and seem to create this kind of environment, as seen from the shared narratives. Intimate connections and shared memories in spaces that are generally neglected and rundown contribute to a sense of belonging and connectedness. Learners create safe spaces and transform spaces through their relationships. Additionally, these transformed spaces within the school challenge dominant narratives and offer humanising ways of relating. In this way, as a “holding” environment, these relationships not only shape individual growth but also contribute to broader collective change, fostering hope and offering opportunities for resistance against oppressive structures.

Most importantly, central to this 'Holding' environment is the ethic and practice of care. In this context, care is framed as a political and social act of resistance, particularly in township schools where inequality and material deprivation significantly impact students’ lives. In this way, care becomes a form of resistance against existing power structures, confronting and challenging systemic issues like power imbalances and injustice. The act of caring not only involves creating an emotional bond and providing support that helps young people navigate the difficulties imposed by oppressive structures, but also relates to broader social struggles, where care is a form of resistance to existing care-less power structures. Thus, care becomes a method of addressing and persisting through inequality; it becomes a way of “living” through inequality. Care becomes a way for young people and teachers to navigate and sustain relationships in dehumanising conditions. This ethic of care is not only a response to the present or current conditions but also a way of imagining alternative futures.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

"It is difficult to think creatively and productively about collective possibilities for change in the mire of despair." (Bradbury, 2020, p. 159)

This concluding chapter draws the findings of this research together by firstly outlining the theoretical framework and how it shaped the analysis. Secondly, it highlights the key findings from Chapters 5, 6, and 7 to articulate the ways in which the study contributes to deepening our understandings of schooling and young people's psychosocial lives in this context. This is followed by an exploration of the limitations, as well as recommendations of the study.

8.1 Concluding remarks

This research study employed a theoretical framework that appreciates the symbiotic relationship between individual lives and structures (Weis & Fine, 2012). This framework has allowed for an analysis that not only uncovers the deep roots of coloniality but also brings into focus the pervasive, sometimes invisible, ways in which these oppressive structures of power continue to shape, affect and interact with individuals' daily lives (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Weis & Fine, 2012). South Africa has enjoyed its political freedom for over 30 years; however, this freedom has not translated into economic or material transformation for many Black people or into personal freedoms for young people. This theoretical approach has allowed for a deeper understanding of how coloniality persists and is contested in a township school in Soweto in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The persistent conditions and continuities of the past were clearly illustrated in Chapter 5. Using narrative analysis tools in Chapter 5, individual narratives are broadened and expanded by connecting them to the historical and socio-cultural background. This chapter examined a violent incident that occurred during the data collection phase of the study. Framed as an enactment, the incident was understood as a form of communication that revealed and highlighted a condition of coloniality that wa Thiong'o (2023) terms "normalised abnormalities" and the "unhygienic conditions" within which people live (Manganyi, 1973, p. 10). These conditions, marked by violence and socio-economic challenges, serve as a reflection of the systemic and structural issues that persist (post)apartheid, within township communities. The analysis brings into sharp focus the normalised, everyday forms of violence embedded in everyday school life and the cost these have on the learners. These are further elaborated on under the subheading violence and corporal punishment as sanctioned violence, and cast-away spaces. The following section pulls concluding remarks from Chapters 6 and 7, and these

narratives direct attention forward to the future by engaging with the unfolding events of the present that are actively shaping history. Moreover, the narratives not only reflect the current conditions but also reflect the kind of future influenced by these current conditions (Peterson, 2019) or what it may be (im)possible to imagine. This shift in attention creates an opportunity to reimagine the future, encouraging a way of seeing, that disrupts the idea of a linear fixed passage of time as past, present and future, but rather one that is dynamically fluid, where past is always present as was the present in the past, in the same way as the future is always in the present.

8.1.1 Violence and corporal punishment as sanctioned violence

Narratives about corporal punishment echoed the country's history of violent policing and control of Black bodies. The use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool often results in learners feeling humiliated and shamed. This form of permitted violence, despite its use being banned in post-apartheid South Africa, is often perpetuated in township schools. This was echoed and reflected by parents and teachers who recalled their own schooling experiences. However, despite the older generations' painful recollection of their own childhood experiences and acknowledgement of the pain and trauma caused by the use of corporal punishment, there appears to be some ambivalence regarding its perceived benefit and effectiveness in ensuring and maintaining discipline among learners. This ambivalence reflects a complex and challenging position faced by parents and teachers who find themselves at the hinge of change, having witnessed the tragic impacts of corporal punishment yet still carrying the historical narratives that once justified its use.

In a similar vein, the violent enactments in chapter five function both as reminders of past injustices and as forms of resistance. The enactment of the ritual of stealing bags at the school, for instance, symbolically serves as a powerful reminder of this community's violent dispossession, ongoing economic exclusion, and alienation, reflected in dangerously high levels of youth unemployment. At the same time, this act represents a deep yearning for recognition and dignity. These enactments, as ghosts of the past, create a space to reflect, acknowledge, and behold past and present losses and ruptures caused by violence. Furthermore, by attentively engaging with these cracks and ruptures and by confronting the brokenness, the possibility for transformation and hope can arise (Winters, 2016). This kind of engagement involves acknowledging these cracks and ruptures of the past as they present in the present moment. Doing so allows one to disrupt the ripples of the rupture and the

transmission of the cracks. In a sense, it provides a break from and with the past (Prager, 2016) and thus enables one to humanise and look beyond the wreckage to find a human being.

8.1.2 Cast-away spaces

In this context, contemplating the brokenness first requires that we take seriously the genesis of townships and township schools. Townships are not neutral spaces; rather, they were the deliberate externalisations of a racist apartheid system, constructed with the express purpose of enforcing spatial, social and educational segregation. Historically, townships, as residential spaces, and township schools, as learning institutions, were designed to serve as tools of oppression, systemically denying Black learners access to quality education and opportunities. Decades into democracy, the (post)apartheid government has not managed to transform the spatial dynamics; many townships and township schools continue to reflect the logic and architecture of apartheid. The difficulty in shifting this might be reflective of how apartheid was more than a political and economic structure, but at the heart of it, apartheid was an intentional psychological project or warfare that targeted every aspect of life and aimed at eroding Black people's humanity.

The under-resourced, overcrowded classrooms of township schools speak not only of ongoing neglect but also to a deeper failure to disrupt the ideologies of racial inferiority upon which township schools were founded. For many young people, this brokenness is lived daily, through the acceptance and use of dilapidated overcrowded classrooms, in the punitive and harsh disciplinary measures, as well as in learners' interactions with demoralised, overworked, overstretched and, as a consequent, at times, care(less) teachers. These unhygienic conditions create a profound sense of alienation for learners, parents, and teachers. These findings raise a fundamental question captured in the title of the study, Whose school is it anyway? The school, under these conditions, becomes a space where people pass through as opposed to a place they feel they can invest in. There is a sense that no one takes full ownership of the school. Alienation in this sense is a structural condition produced by many years of neglect and inequality. Furthermore, it reflects a logic of coloniality which produced spaces that were never intended for life, for meaningful living and the flourishing of township communities. Instead, township communities and schools were created to service and meet the needs of the small White minority. This shows quite clearly, Weis and Fine's (2012, p. 33) argument about the importance of holding "… interlocking circuits of dispossession and privilege…" to better understand persisting and current inequalities.

8.1.3 Intergenerational relationships

It is important to understand that these losses and ruptures are deeply ingrained, impacting every aspect of learners', teachers' and parents' lives and influencing both their social and psychological realities. Furthermore, these ruptures are evident in the interactions between adults and children, particularly through the adults' unrealistic expectations for young Black people to think and behave in ways misaligned with their developmental stage. Teachers and at times, parents misattribute age-appropriate defiance, limit testing or academic struggles or dips to hypersexuality. An example of this is seen in the young people's narratives, where they talk about normal experiences of shifts in their priorities as part of their normal cognitive and emotional development, or even when they are going through a challenging time in their personal lives, in these instances teachers would accuse them of being overly focused on romantic relationships at the expense of their academic responsibilities. These kinds of responses or accusations from adults often overlook the normal developmental reasons behind changes in behaviour and academic performance in young people. Furthermore, they impose shame on age-appropriate curiosity and place undue pressure on young people to behave more like adults. In addition, they highlight the unrealistic expectations that adults have of young Black people. These expectations are passed down from one generation to the next and find expression in the school setting, through the lack of structured extracurricular or recreational activities; the enforcement of unreasonable school rules, such as the prohibition of learners from entering the office block; the closure of sports fields, and the denial of age-appropriate opportunities for engagement and expression. As Mayisela (2020, p. 10) noted, these "intergenerationally racially based [expectations and the] normalisation of [symbolic] violence" against young people, particularly in township schools, strips them of their childhood and adolescence. Young people are expected to demand less and grow up too quickly, an expectation shaped by the broader societal demands on adults to survive within what is, effectively, a life marked by precarity and dying. Moreover, these expectations are reflective of collective trauma that is "passed on intergenerationally in subtle ways through stories or silences, through unarticulated fears and the psychological scars that are often left unacknowledged" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016, p. 3). This clearly highlights the ways in which the socio-political and psychological are inextricably linked (Biko, 1978; Fanon,1959).

Moreover, in this context, young people perceive their identity as dynamic, shaped through social interactions, with relationships playing a central role in forming their sense of self. The historical legacy of inequality and the systemic neglect of township public schools, as

previously mentioned, impacts the interactions between learners and teachers. These relationships, happening in place and in a context of historical and current inequality, are both made by and make the space. Intergenerational relationships reflect the broader, pervasive context of care(lessness) deeply rooted in the logic and legacy of apartheid and are seen as a condition of coloniality. This often shows up in seemingly careless actions from teachers, ranging from unpredictable emotional outbursts to neglectful behaviour. This negatively impacts young people's sense of psychological safety, self-esteem, and level of confidence in their cognitive abilities and the ability to thrive in and beyond the classroom. These actions emanate from unhygienic conditions and should not be seen as reflective of individual teachers' deficits. Instead, these actions should be seen as manifestations of the historical and current structural challenges that continue to impact teachers and learners across generations.

An important point to consider is that the teachers themselves were learners under very similar conditions that the current learners face. They carry with them the lived experience of being a learner under a broken, alienating, and dehumanising education system. Furthermore, these teachers carry the tension of holding and navigating these schooling experiences against the social expectation to uphold the schooling institution whilst ensuring the learners' wellbeing. In this way, teachers hold a complicated and possibly conflicted position of having struggled through the broken education system as young people and now being expected to work within the very system. Even as people employed by and expected to uphold the education system, teachers are not exempt from the careless atmosphere and its expression. Teachers in the research spoke of the risks and dangers they face, as well as the ways in which they feel unseen by the Department of Basic Education.

8.1.4 Care: Role of the teacher

In a different light, the choice to be teachers and teach may be seen as a strong act of resistance and a desire to transform the education system. As seen in the care relationships between learners and teachers, where teachers seem to put Freire's (1997, p. 106) call to "… maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite" into action. In a context that discourages and kills the dreams of young people, and where young people frequently have to navigate both normal and abnormal conditions of life on their own, having a present, available caring adult provides an opportunity for guidance. Teachers encourage learners to dream and maintain hope even when current life-killing conditions threaten to overwhelm them. The role(s) played by teachers may reflect a care ethic that is activated within and outside

of the classroom, a critical yet often unseen and unvalued aspect of education (Restler & Lutrell, 2018).

It is important to emphasise again here that this care shown by teachers is not a private moral act or a professional duty. When care is activated in careless, dehumanising conditions, it becomes an important act of political resistance. Care in this way, does not eradicate the dehumanising conditions, rather as noted earlier in Chapter 6, care, in this context, assumes a similar function to Macharia's (2015, p. 72) concept of love; it becomes "the condition through which inequality is lived" and serves to disrupts oppressive power relations, injustice, and inequality, thereby mitigating these conditions (Restler & Lutrell, 2018). In this way, the care relationships between learners and teachers create a 'holding' environment that not only shapes individual growth but may also contribute to broader collective change, fostering resilience and offering opportunities for resistance against oppressive structures. This is reflective of one of the ways in which teachers behold the brokenness and wreckage of the system in ways that begin the process of repair and, in turn, humanise the learners and themselves.

8.1.5 Identity: Daring to dream as resistance

Young people's narratives have brought to light the multiple ways in which the prevailing inequalities impact their identity development, as well as their relationships. For participants, schooling is viewed as more than just a place for academic preparation; for many of them, it is a space for identity exploration and self-expression, and a space that helps them navigate life. Their aspirations, deeply influenced by the difficult living conditions of their community, go beyond personal career goals, underscoring that one's aspirations are intertwined with one's context. Yet these aspirations are often marred by uncertainty, reflecting the young people's awareness of the precariousness of life due to structural limitations such as poverty and underfunded education. This echoes Bradbury's (2020) reflections on the ways in which young people's individual strivings for mobility and a better future are both encouraged and frustrated by inherited dehumanising frameworks. Moreover, aspirations and strivings become risky undertakings for young people, particularly when the structural conditions are marred by historical and systemic neglect, violence, and exclusion. As illustrated by stories about dangerous journeys to school, the act of pursuing an education, often framed as a hopeful investment for the future, comes at a great cost. In such contexts, the cost of dreaming is potentially fatal, highlighting the precarity of aspirations when they collide with the harsh realities of young people's contexts.

Similarly, learners' awareness of the ruptures and brokenness as displayed through the systemic neglect of the spaces they occupy enables them to transform the spaces, which are generally neglected and rundown, into safe spaces. As seen in the narratives, learners resist these soul-destroying conditions and instead use these very unhygienic conditions to create beautiful experiences, through fostering relationships that transform the space into holding, caring environments that allow or enable identity exploration and expression. The connections and memories created in these peer connections foster a sense of belonging and connectedness. Moreover, these transformed spaces within the school challenge dominant narratives and offer humanising ways of relating by seeing the face of the other (Levinas, 2016) and being moved by the other's pain and suffering. Moreover, young people in the study courageously dared to journey on dangerous terrain both figuratively and literally as they continue to resist these dehumanising conditions by insisting on humanising one another.

The narratives have clearly illustrated that young people are navigating and negotiating the complexity of living in a world that constantly undermines their potential and their humanity, at the same time as they express a desire for identity and agency. Furthermore, young people's lived experiences involve them constantly navigating life with a consciousness of death (ka Canham, 2024). These '(in)visible' living-death everyday experiences unfold in spaces like schools, on their journey to and from school, and at home. These threats of violence or death are ever present, and acting on them, such that living and the choice to dream, to imagine a different future, is often risky and outrageously courageous. Even small acts, such as a comforting or encouraging word from a teacher, learners pulling their chairs and huddling around a teacher in the container classroom to counter the sound of the rain landing on the zinc, the learners' insistence on keeping their school shoes pristinely clean and shiny, or connections or friendships that transform barren spaces into spaces of love, represent active resistance.

8.2 Limitations of the study

This research intended to use photo-voice as a way of allowing the learners to share their narratives. During the recruitment phase, the participants had all indicated that they had access to cell phones with cameras and would be able to take photos that capture something of their experiences of schooling. However, during the initial interviews, a few participants seemed reluctant to share their pictures and expressed that their phones were of old technology and, therefore, had poor picture quality. Some reported that they had low storage space and had lost the pictures they had taken, and one participant reported that her phone was stolen right before

our meeting. Given the influence of social media and the strong culture of capturing experiences and moments, as well as the developmentally appropriate heightened importance of appearance in teens, the concern about the quality of pictures makes sense. Therefore, in future, perhaps using disposable cameras or digital cameras would be most effective.

Secondly, there was a limited diversity in the learner participants as the participants were recruited from a youth organisation operating in the school (YOTS). The learners who are members of YOTS are a particular kind of learner who are active and interested in social issues and political matters that affect young people. This group may not be completely representative of the school community. Similarly, due to logistical challenges and work commitments, parents who were keen to participate could not make the focus groups. The focus group was made up of parents who, following the violent incident, volunteered to guard the learners during the morning and in the afternoon. As such, this small, very specific group was not representative of the school parent community. In addition, the focus group set up for parents and teachers had limitations in that some parents and teachers may have been uncomfortable sharing personal experiences in the group, and this may have limited the depth of engagement. In particular, the younger teachers may have been uncomfortable sharing certain experiences or divergent and possibly unpopular views in the group as a sign of respect for the more senior staff, who were their teachers a few years back.

8.3 Recommendations for further research

- This study sought to centre and foreground the lived experiences and narratives of learners within the township schooling context, while also incorporating the perspectives of parents and teachers. By giving primacy to learners' voices, the research aimed to illuminate how young people make sense of their schooling experiences, including the challenges, contradictions, and moments of resistance they encounter. However, the inclusion of parents' and teachers' narratives was limited, and future research could build on this foundation by adopting a participatory research approach that includes a wider range of participants across all three groups—learners, parents, and teachers. Such an approach would allow for the collection of intergenerational narratives, offering deeper insight into how experiences of township education are remembered, internalised, and transmitted across generations.

  In particular, narrative research focused specifically on parents and teachers could generate valuable data about their own schooling journeys, how those experiences

inform their current perceptions of education, and how they engage with learners in the present.

- Furthermore, this study was limited to learners in Grades 10 to 12. Including learners in Grades 8 and 9 in future research would offer a more comprehensive and developmentally nuanced view of learners' schooling experiences. These earlier years of high school may reveal different patterns of engagement, identity formation, and adaptation to the schooling system, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the adolescent experience within township schools. Broadening the participant pool across grade levels could also help identify emerging psychosocial challenges and sources of resilience at various stages of the schooling journey.

- Teachers occupy a complicated and potentially conflicted position of having struggled through the broken education system that potentially failed them as learners and now work within the very system and are expected to uphold the failing schooling institution whilst ensuring the learners' well-being. This dual role—of survivor and custodian—places considerable emotional, ethical, and professional strain on teachers, and may contribute to feelings of disillusionment, burnout, or resignation. It also raises important questions about how teachers navigate their identities and responsibilities within a system they may simultaneously critique and uphold. The emotional labour of maintaining hope, authority, and care in a space of persistent institutional failure is substantial, and yet it remains underexplored in current educational research. This dynamic needs further exploration and could inform future research, particularly through qualitative and participatory research methods that can capture the lived experiences, tensions, and coping strategies of teachers. Understanding these complexities more fully could inform future policy, teacher training, and support frameworks, ensuring that educators are not only held accountable but are also genuinely supported in their efforts to contribute meaningfully to learners' development within a challenging system.

- Furthermore, the findings hinted at the experience of being publicly humiliated and shamed as a possible pathway to violent enactment. Further research studies could focus on exploring and understanding the pathways to violent enactment in the school context. This highlights the importance of recognising the relational and emotional dimensions of school-based violence. Rather than viewing such behaviours solely as

disciplinary or behavioural problems, it is important to understand the underlying emotional and contextual factors that shape them. Future research should therefore focus on unpacking these complex dynamics and examining how shame, exclusion, and the need for recognition may fuel violent responses, and how school environments might unintentionally reproduce these harmful cycles. Such research could provide valuable insight for developing more empathetic, trauma-informed, and relational approaches to discipline and learner support within schools.

Concluding comments

While the narratives told by the young people are stories about the present, they are also stories of the past, revealing the repetitive and enduring conditions of South Africa's dehumanising past, conditions that continue to bind communities in what seems like inescapable cycles of poverty. The young people's narratives are not only telling of personal stories of struggle and humiliation; they also speak of the deep-rooted structural barriers that perpetuate marginalisation over time and across generations. As I conclude this chapter, I draw on Peterson's (2019) call for the older generation to be moved, to bear witness to, and truly behold these current conditions in township schools, conditions marred by normalised abnormalities and their profound impact on young people. This kind of beholding requires more than a passive recollection of past oppression, but it is a kind of recollection or beholding that insists on a "refusal to be bound by past oppression" (Burman, 2018, p. 164). By turning attention to present-day cracks, fractures, and ruptures that continue to shape the history, the older generation can bring the past into a conversation with the present (Bradbury, 2020, 2024; Peterson, 2019). In doing so, one holds both the histories and experiences of teachers and parents, together with the hope of the young people. This opens the space for intergenerational conversations that produce the kinds of knowledge capable of connecting past experiences and future imaginations. Such knowledge has the power to inform, humanise, and ultimately transform the present.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Proposed interview schedule

Department of Psychology

School of Human & Community Development FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

Fax: (011) 717 4559

Proposed Questions for learners Interviews:

1. Can you tell me about the pictures you have taken and in particular those you have selected?
2. Can you tell me about your experience of high school so far?
    a. Pleasant experiences
    b. Challenging experiences
3. What do you think school is for?
4. What could make your school different/better or more interesting?
5. What did you miss about not being at school during the lockdown?
6. What are your aspirations?
7. Talk about experiences with your favorite teacher.
8. Talk about experiences with your least favorite or most challenging teacher.

Appendix B: Proposed questions (Parents and teachers focus groups)

Department of Psychology
School of Human & Community Development FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500
Fax: (011) 717 4559

Proposed Questions (Parents and Teachers Focus Group)

1. Can you please share some of your immediate responses to the pictures/stories?
2. Tell me about your high school years?
3. Can you think of a memory of an interaction with a teacher good or bad
4. Can you tell me about your schooling experience pre/post 94
    a. What kind of experiences stand out for you?
5. What do you think could make schooling better or more interesting?
6. Any memory of your favorite teacher?
7. Any memory of a challenging teacher?
8. What were your aspirations during school?
9. What aspirations do you have for your child?
10. What hopes do you have for your learners?

Appendix C: Permission letter from the school

Forte Secondary School

REG.NO : 700151◄05
ENQ : Mudavhl ML (rrlndp•I)
TEL : 010 Oll Jtll
EMAIL : 18884806(,ygdmhool,.gov.ZA
: 700l5l405@gdm.boob.gav.za

Nol Jo••• Mo•bl Drive
DOUSONVILLE
1863

Permission to conduct research at Forte High School

This letter serves to confirm that **Phethile Zitha,** has been granted permission to reach out to learners and teachers at Forte High School, as possible participants in her research study. The project has been explained to me and I understand that the youths' participation in this study is completely voluntary and that all details will be always kept confidential.

Permission valid from 1st term - 3rd term of school calendar 2021

Principal

RTMENT Op
251405 b.
2021 -02- 12 :::!

Appendix D: Permission from the Department of Education



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	11 February 2021
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2021– 30 September 2021 2021/24
Name of Researcher:	Zitha PM
Address of Researcher:	71 Parrot Street
	Bromhof
	Randburg
Telephone Number:	011 792 1244 / 071 454 5458
Email address:	pwaszitha@gmail.com
Research Topic:	"Whose school is it anyway": A collaborative study on the narratives of schooling in a post-apartheid township school
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	1 Secondary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg West

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

16/02/2021

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of COVID 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email or telephonically with the Principal.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

Mr Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 16/02/2021

2

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix E: **Consent and assent forms for participation**

Department of Psychology
School of Human & Community Development FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500
Fax: (011) 717 4559

I....., hereby confirm that I have been informed by Phethile Zitha about the study and I have read and understood the above written participant information sheet. I agree to participate in the study with the understanding that confidentiality will be upheld as far as possible but may be limited due to the nature of focus group.

……
Signature

…….
Date

In case of minor, Parent to also sign Consent Form below

I…… parent/guardian of....., give permission for my child to participate in the research study. I have read and understood the above written participant information sheet. In addition, I understand that confidentiality will be upheld as far as possible but may be limited due to the nature of the focus groups.

…….. …..……
Signature Date

Appendix F: **Assent/Consent form to be audio recorded**

I..... grant permission for this interview/focus group to be audio recorded. I understand that the content of the tapes will be transcribed for the purpose of further analysis and that my identity will be protected; access to tapes will be restricted and the tapes will be stored in a secure location.

Signed: ……

Date: ……

Parental Consent Form (Recording)

I ……, parent/guardian of ..... grant permission for this interview/focus group to be audio recorded. I understand that the content of the tapes will be transcribed for the purpose of further analysis and that my identity will be protected; access to tapes will be restricted and the tapes will be stored in a secure location.

Signed: ……

Date: ……

Appendix G: Non-disclosure statement

Department of Psychology
School of Human & Community Development FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500
Fax: (011) 717 4559

I_____agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session.

If you cannot agree to the above stipulation, please see the researcher(s) as you may be ineligible to participate in this study.

Appendix H: Parent consent Forms (Debriefing counselling)

Department of Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500
Fax: (011) 717 4559

Consent for debriefing counselling of Minors:

I/we consent that my adolescent/child under the age of 18, _____ (name of child) may be seen for debriefing session, should they need arise as a consequent of participating in the research. This form is in effect until _____(date) or until 12 months after the consent was given. Consent can be revoked at any time.

I affirm that I am the legal guardian of (name of child/adolescent) _____Date of Birth (child/adolescent)_____

Parent or Guardian's name (please print)

_____

Parent or Guardian's Signature _____

Date:_____

Appendix I: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Zitha

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H20/11/67**
PROJECT TITLE	Whose School is it Anyway: A collaborative study on the narratives of schooling in a post-apartheid township school
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms P Zitha
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	20 November 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Permission letters required before data collection can commence Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	09 February 2024

DATE 10 February 2020 **CHAIRPERSON** J. Knight (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor J Bradbury

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

Signature 26 / 02 / 2021 Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix J: Participant information sheet

Department of Psychology

School of Human & Community Development

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

Fax: (011) 717 4559

Title: WHOSE SCHOOL IS IT ANYWAY: NARRATIVES OF SCHOOLING IN A POST-APARTHEID TOWNSHIP SCHOOL

My name is Phethile Zitha, I am a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand, and I am interested in understanding experiences and stories of schooling in a township school, from learners, teachers, and parents. More so the impact of schooling on youth identity as well as on the relationship between learners, teachers, and parents. I would really appreciate it if you would share your experiences with me. Participation, will include:

1. Learners taking photographs of different places or objects, that represent their experiences at school. These will form part of the individual interviews as well as focus group discussions.
2. Separate focus group discussions for parents, learners and teachers.
3. Mixed focus group discussions for parents, learners and teachers.

Please note that with your consent, these sessions will be audio recorded. The recordings of our conversations will be kept securely locked up and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. Furthermore, your participation is voluntary, and you are not being forced to take part in the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone, but my supervisor. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. Please be advised that although I will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus

groups is such that guaranteeing confidentiality is limited. As a participant you will be requested to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we can stop and talk about it. There are also counsellors or therapists, whose contact details are listed below, who

are willing and able to talk with and/or assist you. Please note that a research report will be written up, should you wish to receive a summary of this report I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or questions about this research project, please contact me on the details listed below.

Many thanks,

Phethile Zitha (Researcher)
0714545458 (also available on WhatsApp)
pwaszitha@gmail.com

Prof. Jill Bradbury (Supervisor)
(011)7174515.
Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za

Debriefing Services (available at the school)
Hayley Haynes-Rolando
0828168540